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The unruly image: memory and transmission in Argentina.

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Citation

Saab, A. P. (2024, October 15). *The unruly image: memory and transmission in Argentina*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4094509>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

INTRODUCTION

Do not forget: many of your brothers fought so that you could sit here behind them. Don't go burying yourself, also know how to fight. Learn to learn and never unlearn it.

(Bertold Brecht, "Kriegsfibel" qtd. in Didi-Huberman, *Cuando las imágenes* 237)



Fig. 1. Adelina Dematti, the "Photographer Mother",
<https://www.cosecharoja.org/las-fotos-de-adelina-la-madre-que-documento-la-busqueda-de-su-hijo/>.
Accessed September 12, 2020.

Adelina's Gaze

Adelina's gaze is the memory of the world. UNESCO stated something similar when it declared Adelina's archive as "Documentary Heritage of the Memory of the World Register" in 2007. Adelina Dematti is "the mother photographer" (figs. 1 and 2). She was a teacher and Mother of the Plaza de Mayo. She died in 2016, but after the disappearance of her son in 1977, she dedicated her life to documenting state terrorism through a persistent and meticulous archival practice. She was one of the founders of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in the city of La Plata. She was the promoter of the Truth Trials that paved the way for the process of memory, truth, and justice. But before that, she was Carlos Esteban's mother. They say that Adelina did not let go of his camera. A woman loses her son and grabs a camera. She undertakes a fight, a journey, where she discovers all the dregs of the world. But

she records it. They say that her archive was “personal”. It contained letters, court files, photographs, newspaper clippings, and personal investigations into state terrorism in Argentina. In 2006, Adelina donated her work to the “Provincial Memory Archive” on the condition that it be disseminated through unrestricted access to all of her work.

Adelina’s camera was an appendage of her body. Her gaze knew how to learn the stealth and caution that the situation demanded to photograph in secret; it was the time of the Mothers’ first rounds. Her archival practice had consequences: her personal archive was legal evidence in the trials of the military. She published a book, *La marca de la infamia* (*The Mark of Infamy*; 2014), in which much of her previously stored material appeared. Relying on her investigations, she successfully denounced the doctors at the La Plata morgue who issued false death certificates for political prisoners working for the military.

For years, chaos ruled over the garage of her house, in which she accumulated thousands of papers with newspaper clippings, court files, photographs, and personal notes. However, her archive was never entirely “personal”. Adelina’s photos were never for herself. Her gaze became the “Mothers’ gaze”, and what she recorded is the gaze of the others. Her material was made up of mixtures, loans, and reconstructions that did not entirely belong to her and that finally formed a social view or rather, to paraphrase UNESCO, “the view of the world”.

During the football World Championship in Argentina, on Thursday, June 1, 1978, at 4:00 p.m., Dutch sports journalist Frits Barend conducted an impromptu interview that would change the lives of many people. Surprising and challenging the police surveillance in the area, he interviewed some middle-aged women who were walking in a circle around the Plaza de Mayo of Buenos Aires, a central and historical place in the Argentine capital. Many of them wore white headscarves. The authorities and passers-by called them crazy: *the madwomen of Plaza de Mayo*. Barend, discretely harassed by the police in the area, turned on the microphone for the women in white headscarves and viewers were able to clearly hear the phrase “you are our last hope”.¹ These images were secretly taken from the country and were spread throughout the world.

They were the first images in international media of the mothers of the detainees-disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship of 1976–83. As is widely known, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo became iconic in contemporary political history and one of the most

¹ La Política Online. “Entrevista a Madres de Plaza de Mayo en 1978”. YouTube, 24 Mar. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GfL-kSnrrY>. Accessed November 26, 2023.

extensively studied movements in debates in which the topics of memory, politics and justice converge.

What those journalists couldn't know is that, thanks to them, the Mothers would win one of a series of decisive battles against the military regime during the years of the dictatorship. It was a bitter duel over words and images, over what was said and not said. The Mothers' struggle against the official discourse included the persistent search for their detained and abducted relatives, the documentation of the circumstances, and the place and destiny of certain images.

As is known, it all began as an individual quest for missing relatives through the intricacies of state bureaucracy, which proved futile. However, it swiftly became a form of political resistance. The Mothers operated in an unprecedented space of politics, one that was created by them in the randomness of the struggle. This practice did not prevent the State from executing its systematic annihilation plan, but it succeeded in preventing it from being carried out in the secrecy required for its impunity. The narrative of the military government told the story of a country that had overcome the chaos, defeated terrorism, and finally achieved peace. It is known that a majority of the population firmly believed in this conspiracy and pacification narrative.

The Mothers in the square told something different: a story of systematic annihilation of political dissent, the story of a massacre. This not only led to government persecution but often elicited hostility from a significant portion of the population.

When the recent past of a nation becomes indigestible, the forms of memory are placed at the centre of the conflict that is inherent to politics. The way in which the past impacts the present is unavoidably linked to the forms of transmitting that past, and in the actors who carry out this transmission.

At stake are the memories of an intense struggle of the relatives to break the monologue of the State, the testimonies of survivors, the disturbing photographs of the victims, and the political legacy of past generations.

Objectives and Research Question

This work aims to explore and understand the visual memory practices in Argentina associated with state terrorism between 1977 and 2016, within the framework of its eventual role in a pedagogy of memory. The images selected as the visual repertoire of this research are understood as "significant materialities" from which modes of legibility are established, revealing the culture's tensions with the past (Pittaluga et al., *Figuraciones estéticas* 9). The

thesis explores the relevance of visual practices in the transmission of memory related to the recent past and questions the role of the political dimension in this transmission. These themes can be framed by the following questions: What are the contemporary conditions in Argentina that influence the transmission of social memory? What type of relationship between politics and memory do the selected images weave? How does this relationship influence the pedagogy of memory?

The underlying assumption of this thesis is that memory practices in Argentina are rooted in a visual matrix that has become central to the formation of a social memory about the dictatorship (Longoni, “Arte y Política”). My hypothesis is that the political dimension of these visual practices is a necessary condition for shaping collective experience in the present.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

The original aim of this thesis was to examine how the “Education and Memory” Programme, inaugurated in 2006, organized and presented educational materials about the recent past in the volume *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina* (*Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina*).² To this end, I selected a representative set of images linked to state terrorism in Argentina for comparative purposes. These images emerged within a framework of what is broadly referred to as memory practices. Examining them led me to investigate what aspects of these memory images transcend the testimonial and historical, posing challenges for their integration into a state *pedagogy of memory*. More generally, it led me to think about the differences between the social and political dynamics of a certain collective memory and the attempts to provide its significant materialities with a framework of institutional transmission.

The state’s commitment to a pedagogy of memory made it necessary to carry out a longer and more complex investigation that involved reviewing and rethinking social or

² This volume belongs to the Argentina Ministry of Education’s Collection *La enseñanza del pasado reciente en la escuela* (*Teaching Recent History in Schools*), distributed across three volumes: *Pesar Malvinas* (*Reflections on the Malvinas/Falklands*), *Pensar la dictadura*, and *Pensar la democracia* (*Reflections on Democracy*), 2013. Subsequently, the volume *Holocaustos y genocidios del siglo XX* (*Holocausts and Genocides of the 20th Century*; 2014; 2nd ed.), was published. Other works include *La Shoá en la pantalla* (*The Shoah on Screen*; 2006), *Holocaustos y genocidios del siglo XX* (*Holocausts and Genocides of the 20th Century*; 2006), and *Genocidio armenio. Preguntas, respuestas y propuestas para su enseñanza* (*Armenian Genocide: Questions, Answers, and Proposals for Teaching*; 2015). In a sense, this collection is a pedagogical treatise on memory, groundbreaking in its field, which encapsulates intersections between education, history, and memory that were unprecedented in the country up until then.

collective memory and its relationship with history. From this theoretical exploration, other themes emerged, such as the relation between trauma and narration, and between memory and oblivion. This review in the first part of the thesis outlines the current state of research on this topic. This thesis draws, as will be evident, on the extensive body of local research and works produced in the aftermath of the Southern Cone dictatorships.³ However, it is not the aim of this work to reconstruct their debates or to provide a balanced overview of this extensive local literature. Rather, I sought to develop a general concept that would encompass the various visual expressions of memory and explain both their vitality and the problems encountered in their incorporation into educational transmission. In this context, I found it necessary to review the most representative classical theoretical literature on collective or social memory.

The result is a perhaps overly extensive meditation that reflects both my own learning journey and my experience as a participant in some of the initiatives of the “Education and Memory” Programme. This first part of the thesis attempts to answer questions about the relation between individual and social memory, and what determines their contents, persistence, and directions. Except for the role of memory images in recent educational programmes in Argentina, the other themes addressed in this thesis are not novel in themselves. Many of them even suffer from a high degree of investigative saturation. This does not mean that they are resolved issues, not only because, strictly speaking, no social or cultural research topic can be, but also because their objects of study are continually transformed with each new perspective.

The first part of this thesis presents a survey of the authors whose works have been and continue to be used in Argentina to think about the intersection of memory and society. Many of these authors are European, as are many of the concepts that helped shape my reflections. However, the Argentine and Latin American authors I cite and rely on are also part of this transatlantic conversation, and they contribute to the field of study by applying this literature in timely and locally relevant ways. Theoretical concepts cannot be compartmentalized geographically; they are born in specific contexts but migrate and transform (Bal, *Travelling Concepts*). They follow the transnational patterns of a world that is extensively and sometimes fiercely globalised. To critically engage with them from a counter-hegemonic perspective from the “south” is a decolonizing gesture.

³ The texts by Roberto Pittaluga, Ignacio García, Nelly Richard, Gabriel Gatti, Elizabeth Jelin, Pilar Calveiro, Beatriz Sarlo, Marina Franco, Jorge Saab, Sandra Riaggio, Natalia Fortuny, Jordana Blejmar, Silvana Mandolessi, and many others richly inform and animate the substance of this research.

The relevance of this initial theoretical journey lies in having identified different modalities of a certain epochal *forgetting* of the political dimension in global cultural memory studies. Here, politics is understood not merely as the management of public affairs or as the logic of state or party power, but as a radical questioning or fundamental disagreement about what is common in a society. The practices of memory in Argentina have aspects that exceed the usual frameworks of memory studies in the European context. The political dimension involved in these practices represents, in my view, this excess.

There are many factors that contribute to this neglect and they are, of course, interrelated. Among them is the dominant interpretation of the end of the Cold War as the end of ideologies and even of history. Another factor is the discredit suffered by emancipatory projects and the enthronement of a certain type of liberal democracy as the unsurpassable horizon of the political. This goes hand in hand with the global acceptance of the capitalist mode of production as the only possible form of modernity. Contemporary cultural memory studies emerged in a conjuncture that privileges identity over political subjectivation. It is also an era that places the figure of the innocent victim – persecuted for their condition or ethnic, religious, or cultural belonging – at the centre of how we consider the past. The Holocaust, regarded as a radical crime without comparison and thus impossible to historicise or represent, has generated specific forms of institutionalised commemoration in the global West. Several authors have criticized the ritualized nature that this memory assumes to this day. For example, Michael Rothberg in *Multidirectional Memory* warns that isolating the memory of the Holocaust in its exceptionalism prevents it from being conceived in a broader context of collective memories. Similarly, Enzo Traverso, in works such as *La historia como campo de batalla (History as a Battlefield)* and *El pasado, instrucciones de uso (The Past, Instructions for Use)*, has repeatedly criticized the instrumentalization and depoliticization of these memories. A significant aspect of this exceptionalism is the obscuring of its relationship with colonial genocides.

The global trend towards the de-politicization of the past is obviously in conflict with the positions of those who justify the dictatorship or deny its crimes. However, it is also at odds with the genesis and historical dynamics of the struggles for memory in Argentina, whose forms and methods of expression were developed before commemorative fervour became widespread in the globalised West. On the other hand, the sanctification of the victim as such has not only helped to legitimise human rights organisations – which tactically appealed to this concept of “innocence” during their early mobilizations – but also the current proponents of a “complete memory”, who demand attention for the victims of “terrorism” by

referring to those who fell in the struggle against the guerrilla. We first observed the impact of this trend in Argentina during the 1980s, particularly with the humanitarian perspective regarding the victims and the early trials against the military juntas, where political commitment was subtly identified as the opposite of innocence.⁴ The most well-known expression of this desire to morally isolate the dictatorial past was, of course, the so-called “theory of the two demons”: a conception that reads the recent past as a history of undifferentiated and irrational violence, largely disconnected from the general population.⁵

Chapter 2, in the first part of the thesis, describes the context of the military dictatorship and the emergence of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo organization, and is primarily aimed at readers unfamiliar with the circumstances that led to the first public images related to the disappearance of persons. However, it should not be read as merely descriptive, but as an attempt to politically situate state repression by addressing its strategic objectives, its systematic nature, its prehistory, and its continuations during the post-dictatorial period.⁶

The brief reconstruction of the trajectory of the Mothers’ actions concerning the issue of disappearance is not merely informative either. It aims to highlight the eventful nature of the Mothers’ emergence; their practices of collective resistance cannot be deduced from the methods of defending human rights that had been practised up to that point.

The issue of the transmission of memory as a problematic legacy is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, which addresses the current conditions of this transmission. Among other things, this chapter discusses the relationship we currently establish with historical time. This is useful for understanding the context of depoliticization in liberal society and the conditions under which memory stagnates in monumentalization. Drawing on Reinhart Koselleck’s ideas on “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation”, François Hartog, for instance, coined the concepts of “regime of historicity” and “presentism”. For Hartog, while modernity had limited the “space of experience” in the way we imagine historical temporality, today it is the very idea of the future that is in crisis. Nowadays, this kind of perpetual present is less

⁴ “It was the institutional judicial space ... that established the prior criteria which later allowed for the classification of the world according to its codes. This way of signifying was transferred to other narratives beyond the judicial sphere. Innocence was used as a synonym for apoliticism. Its antonym, political commitment, was used as a synonym for the presumption of guilt” (Raggio 54).

⁵ It is also possible to study this ethical emphasis on memory in the debate started by Oscar del Barco with his 2007 novel *No matarás*.

⁶ Historiographical research (Águila, “La dictadura militar” 16) has highlighted the need to consider state violence during the dictatorship by examining periods that extend beyond a strictly chronological framework.

influenced by an idea of the future or a desire to transform the world than by nostalgia for a sort of “lost home” (van Alphen, “Nostalgic archiving”).

I found it pertinent to incorporate the views of the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa on social acceleration and its consequences. For Rosa, this acceleration, which goes hand in hand with relentless technological innovation, is a source of alienation that increasingly prevents things from affecting us. There is no doubt that the dizzying pace that this acceleration imposes on our lives is an obstacle to the transmission of memory. Our world not only seems to lack a future, but it also moves ever faster. In my view, the transmission of experiences requires a certain pause where narratives and images can affect us. I would suggest that this, what Rosa calls “resonance”, is precisely something that education – the school environment – should be able to offer.

The first part of this thesis culminates with an examination of several writings by Walter Benjamin on the political relationship between memory and history (Chapter 4). In the elusive concept of the “image-space” that Benjamin alludes to in his essay “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia”, I found a formula capable of encompassing different visual expressions that unite individual and social memory with political and aesthetic antagonism. The idea of a realm where politics, imagination, and memory converge allowed me to tie together the dispersed threads of this thesis. This image-space is an instance of the present that intervenes in the legacy of the past by reorganizing its images. At the same time, I found indications in Benjamin’s own reference to *organized pessimism* in the same essay and in Sara Ahmed’s feminist claim to the role of the *killjoy* to suggest that memory practices have continually challenged the very emotional management that political and economic power exerts over society.

The images produced by memory practices emerged within a semi-legal context, where many people, gathered in the search for detained or disappeared relatives, found opportunities for exchange and storytelling. These are images that the dictatorship censored, denied, and persecuted. Many of them were used to document claims for justice and were later presented as judicial evidence. In democracy, they were symbols associated with forms of social rebellion (at least until the early twenty-first century). The social and political impact achieved by the Mothers and human rights groups eventually inspired numerous artistic representations primarily referring to the disappearance of people. The photographic image, always linked to the paradoxes of memory, was at the centre of all these expressions. Many images from the family album became the visual substance of political audacities in the public space and later formed the basis of aesthetic transgressions. It is in this sense that I

speak of *unruly images*. Unruly in relation to the state's protocols of display, the protocols of representation, and the meanings promoted by political and media power. Together, they constitute, in my view, the intermittent and symptomatic expression of a systemic inconsistency. This work, therefore, explores various nuances of this mismatch and incompatibility.

Although the thesis is titled *The Unruly Image*, I have not worked with a univocal version of the signifier "image". It is evident that when dealing with visual materials of memory, the word "image" has a literal or immediate meaning as a graphic, photographic, filmic, or figurative expression or representation. Throughout the thesis, this immediate meaning is overlaid with others that refer to its metaphorical or metonymic possibilities, such as the idea or mental representation in a broad sense. The term allows, among other things, for the articulation of the intellectual with the sensory. The ambiguity of the word "image" partly lies in the close relationship between thought and imagination. The concept of image becomes more complex when we consider the meanings given to it by Didi-Huberman. For the French scholar, images confront us with time. As "survivals", they always transcend the sphere from which they emerged, carrying with them fragments of the past, and their reception in the present cannot be understood without tolerating anachronism (Didi-Huberman, *Ante el tiempo*).

A particular case of the use of the word "image" is that made by Walter Benjamin, for whom this term seems to designate not only concrete visual representations but also forms of historical understanding. In Benjamin, the image participates in its rhetorical senses (such as metaphor and allegory) but is more a methodological device than a particular object. This is the case with the *dialectical image*, which Benjamin never exhaustively defines anywhere and which I have chosen to consider as a device for thought and experience. The dialectical image can be understood as an alternative constellation in memory that reveals tensions, contradictions, and silenced historical movements. For Benjamin, through the procedure of montage – montage of quotes, montage of images – one can disarticulate the causal line that historical narration has determined in solidarity with the present (and the victors). Benjamin called this, as is known, "to brush [read] history against the grain" ("On the Concept" 392). Images can unfold different layers of time and make visible what chronological narration has obscured, thereby allowing for fleeting moments of illumination.

To productively involve the political dimension in the practices and images of memory, I have turned to the Argentinians Alejandra Oberti and Roberto Pittaluga (*Memorias en montaje*), and Luis Ignacio García (*Políticas de la memoria*), indebted among

others to Walter Benjamin and Didi-Huberman, as well as to the Algerian Jacques Rancière, whose distinction between *police* and *politics* (*Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*) has been very useful to me. Rancière's approach in *Disagreement* posits that politics truly occurs when, occasionally and rarely, the logic of equality interrupts that of domination. The appearance in the public space of a new social group, not counted among the parts that constitute the common, can only occur as the expression of a fundamental disagreement. For Rancière, art also happens as an interruption. What art interrupts is an aesthetic order, which Rancière refers to as the "distribution of the sensible" (*The Emancipated Spectator*). This order is understood as a perceptual a priori that arranges places of enunciation, modes of saying and doing, hierarchies of speakers, and the distribution of functions, among other things. It is within this perceptual order that domination is grounded. For Rancière, there is no political interruption that is not simultaneously an aesthetic disturbance, and vice versa. Art intervenes in the very conditions of perception, generating the possibility of a distance from the aesthetic and social order. Thus, the image can also be understood as a generator of dissent, from Rancière's perspective. This reasoning allowed me to better position the intertwining of aesthetics and politics in the images of memory.

In the second part of the work, three configurations of memory are identified and grouped into a set of images, organized not by strict chronology but by thematic issues, uses, and motivations. This cross-sectional approach is anchored by three significant dates: 1977, marking the emergence of the Mothers and Grandmothers movement (document-image); 1994, when HIJOS, the organization that brings together children of the disappeared, emerged (art-image); and 2006, commemorating 30 years since the military coup and the beginning of a series of government initiatives that profoundly changed the ways in which the educational transmission of these issues was addressed (school-image).

To distinguish the core aspects of these visual expressions, I have analyzed some representative examples: a selection of documentary photographs used by the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo since 1977 (the Grandmothers' Archive) and works by various artists, relatives of the disappeared, and independent artists (free circulation exhibitions). My goal was to understand the complex forms that memory takes in each of them. Finally, I addressed the educational treatment of the images in the design of a pedagogy of memory, which is understood as part of a broader idea of *citizenship*. For this section, I have used the booklet *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina* (*Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina*), designed by the "Educación y memoria" ("Education and Memory") team. In the second configuration, I have primarily

included images that involve the artistic reworking of document images, and in the third configuration, I have focused on images that have been used in the educational context to refer to the dictatorial period. The configurations are organized according to different logics and motivations, and partly according to their emergence in the Argentine historical-political scene.

Using a recursive and circular approach, the theoretical themes discussed in the first part reappear in the second part as a hermeneutics of images. This method involves a technique based on constant comparison that links images with each other, clarifying their aesthetic particularities through careful observation and making them interact, where possible, with the theoretical observations from the first part.⁷ This allowed me to isolate lines of continuity, intersections, and differences in the selected images underpinning their relevance for transmission. The visual materials (document-image, art-image, and school-image) are used here as units of analysis, relevant due to their prominent role as visual traces – always blurry and fragmentary – of social memory.

Although all the selected images have some relation to the aftermath of the dictatorship, this relation is not always direct or implicit. Chapter 5 focuses on the visual resources employed by the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo and the human rights movement since 1977. The images from the first configuration have a direct connection to the theme of disappearance. Many of them were created with the intention of documenting the victims' identity or proving the injustice committed. They are used with an awareness of the *indexical value* of photography as a sensitive trace of past presence, which inevitably raises the challenge of communicating the ineffable. This chapter primarily addresses the black-and-white ID photo that identifies the disappeared. The use of these images has changed over the years. In many cases, they have transitioned from informal documents concerning disappearance to symbols of a struggle for justice. Although this type of image is considered the symbolic anchor of pedagogies of memory, it is important to note that those which have become symbols of the struggles do not appear in the programme's selection.

As an exception, I have included images from the so-called “siluetazo” because they represents an artistic gesture that participates both as a document and as activism, and

⁷ The Constant Comparative Method (Glaser and Strauss) is a qualitative research tool that employs a systematic set of procedures to develop theory inductively derived. Although it is a method primarily used in social research, it has helped me regulate this strategy of back-and-forth between theoretical concepts and analysis of the material.

because they appear in the period corresponding to the development of the first configuration. The “siluetazo” was a significant artistic and political protest that took place during the final years of the military dictatorship. On September 21, 1983, artists and activists gathered in Buenos Aires to create and display life-sized silhouettes representing the thousands of disappeared people. The silhouettes were painted or drawn on paper and then pasted on walls and public spaces. The action of the “siluetazo” seems relevant as it is the first disassociation of the image from its familial connection. The identities of the disappeared are collectively assumed. The example of the “siluetazo” thus represents an excess or overflow beyond the bounds of the first configuration.

In the case of the second configuration (art-image), the central corpus consists of works produced by direct relatives of the detained-disappeared and also by independent artists (Chapter 6). These are freely accessible productions in various itinerant memory spaces and on the web. With some exceptions, these are well-disseminated and studied works. In this configuration, documentary and artistic elements are rearticulated but in an inverted manner. While in the first configuration images are grouped as evidence of extermination, in the second, constructed images reframe the original images aesthetically. Here, the trace, the document, and the relic of the past are not the goal but the basis for a reworking of the image. The photographic image is altered, drawing on what Fortuny has described as its “metaphorical quality” (*Memorias fotográficas* 12). In the works of the children of the disappeared, the central theme is absence, and many of their alterations are performed on photographs from family albums. The idea is not so much to exorcise this absence but to find ways to “inhabit it” (Blejmar, “Imagen-momia” 271), to coexist with this absence. In a sense, these are forms of desecration: the document is altered as a trace, and transformed into a metaphorical vehicle that retraces time. These are images that avoid synthesis and harmony to focus on a break or an unresolved contradiction, reframing the past as a rupture (López). They bring together the visual with the absent, the past with the present, the ineluctable with the political, and the prospective with the reminiscent. Thus, in photographic montage, for instance, what has been becomes re-presented to us as a field of tensions and possibilities.

Literary and filmic works do not strictly belong to the central corpus. They have an ancillary function with respect to Chapter 6. Their interest lies in showing two moments in the art of memory. One is characterised by proximity to the events and a will for revelation, and the other explores the mechanisms of memory itself.

The work that, in some ways, exceeds the boundaries of this configuration is the video installation *Pasajes I* (*Passages I*; 2012) by Sebastián Díaz Morales, a work whose thematic

connection to state violence and its aftermath is very tenuous. Its presence in this selection is due to the way this work produces a change in perspective by converting perpetual motion – the “lost steps” through the ruins of memory – into a possible metaphor for a present without prospects. There is a complex relationship between this endless march and the idea of dynamic stagnation, as proposed by Hartmut Rosa regarding forms of social acceleration.

The political aspects of montage and its relation to memory, in the tradition from Walter Benjamin to Didi-Huberman, discussed in the last chapter of the first part of the thesis and which in the local sphere were further developed by Ignacio García and Roberto Pittaluga, were very useful for the analysis of the works of Lucila Quieto, Gustavo Germano, and Gabriela Bettini. The idea of agency linked to the victims reappears in the treatment of Víctor Bastera’s photos and Benjamin’s concepts reappear in the analysis of RES’s work.

The third configuration (school-image), deployed in Chapter 7, draws from images regrouped on the state’s initiative in a context of formalizing a pedagogy of memory. The boundaries of this selection are established by one of the productions of the “Education and Memory” Programme. In this case, it involves educational materials distributed in secondary schools nationwide. This chapter also includes material that extends beyond the main selection, pushing its boundaries and overflowing into new areas. This concerns the images corresponding to the educational publication *Treinta ejercicios de memoria (Thirty Memory Exercises; 2005)*. The importance of this threshold lies in that it makes it possible to imagine an alternative use of memory images in the educational sphere.

Some works have been extensively studied locally for many years, while others are more recent. My general intention was to show how politics or a certain, perhaps melancholic,⁸ idea of the political, give these practices and memory images a singular character. If it is true, as Ana Longoni (“Arte y Política”) has written, that memory practices in Argentina are rooted in a visual matrix, it is also true that all these images, in turn, are rooted in a political one.

Human rights organisations, particularly those linked to the Mothers and Grandmothers movement, illegally asserted their voice in the public space. Their practices, both creative and desperate, effectively challenged the boundaries of what was “pertinent” in their time and situation. They not only transgressed military authority but also the

⁸ Among the many theoretical works that, despite their relevance to this thesis, have not been addressed are those by Idelbar Avelar and Christian Gundermann, which explore melancholic forms of resistance in literature and memory cinema, respectively. I believe that this thesis implicitly engages in a dialogue with them that undoubtedly needs to continue.

institutional frameworks of the time. They placed in the centre of the public sphere what was previously in its collateral zones. I argue that this disruption, which rendered contentious what was normal, politically marks the entire flow of images it generated.

In the case of the second configuration, this politicization manifests not only in the collective use of artistic invention – as in Lucila Quieto’s *Arqueología de la ausencia* (*Archaeology of Absence*) – but also in the deep structure of their compositions. Although each of them employs different visual resources, all establish a separation or distance between the figure and its meaning, between the word and its effect, which allows for play and reconfiguration. At the same time, they allude to a knowledge, always elusive, and ever fragile and fragmentary, concerning the mechanisms of domination and the nature of power.⁹

The memory of violence and its aesthetic expressions are always (potentially) conflictive. The social order defends itself from this by resorting to denialism, revisionism, or indifference. It also does so by deactivating its symbols through controlled incorporation, which implies recognition and consensus. In this case, the state promotes symbolic and localized recognition. Thus, it attempts to separate the memory of the dictatorship from the intersectional links that connected it to social and democratic struggles. There is an increasingly noticeable contradiction between the Argentine state’s commitments to the memory of past injustices and its indifference or impotence towards current violence. Elizabeth Jelin has repeatedly pointed out this paradox, arguing that it is necessary to attend to the structural causes of violence and link those memories with present issues (“Memoria y democracia”). Jelin offers as an example of this the politically sensitive connection that Ludmila da Silva Catela (“Poder Local y Violencia”) establishes between short memories, related to the last dictatorship, and long memories, referring, for instance, to the oppression of indigenous peoples or gender oppression.

In my view, the images constructed by the memory of the dictatorship only become “thinkable” in the present when they are interrogated from a horizon of profound disagreement. The main hypothesis of this work is, then, that all of these images, despite their differences, function in a singular image space without which they would lose their illuminating quality, their dialectical potential.

Finally, I propose that the “Educación y memoria” (“Education and Memory”) Programme, despite the novelty it represents, exposes its limits when dealing with the visual

⁹ Both the current resurgence of revisionist narratives in Argentina and the contemporary global forms of *necropolitics* (Mbembe) prove that this knowledge regarding power and domination is not confined to a single spatial-temporal coordinate.

heritage of memory (Chapter 7). These limits are evident both in the selection of the material and in how the images are used.

The Kirchners' administrations, between 2003 and 2015, drew on the energies released by the social explosion of 2001, which showed the ability of revolt to redefine the boundaries of the possible. This crystallised in a series of measures that had previously seemed unthinkable, such as the resumption of trials against the juntas and institutional support for human rights organizations. In the long run, however, these emancipatory energies were tempered and even neutralized. The interest of this period lies in that it was the most audacious governmental attempt to systematize, within the educational institution, a set of practices and images originally arising at the margins and in conflict with the Argentine state. The way these images were inserted (or not) into formal education shows the tensions between their potential for re-configuration and the government's will to restore state authority, that is, it shows the impetus of this project and, at the same time, its limits.

State pedagogy of memory reactivates the old tension between commemoration and recollection.¹⁰ The former relates to the controlled integration of the traumatic aftermath of the past into the symbolic structures of the state. It is a memory that crystallizes in monuments, anniversaries, rituals (or school textbooks), and, although it implies recognition of and for the victims, it also generally involves restoring linear causality and reassurance to time, imposing a false closure on past events. Thus, the state establishes a quarantine around latent or unfinished projects that inhabit the present. Recollection, on the other hand, works on those memories and resembles a puzzle where the final product lacks a closure of meaning. The works of recollection constitute a fragile and "contagious" memory where aesthetic invention, personal experiences, and collective action are politically articulated. An example of how this approach to dealing with traumatic legacies escapes the formalizing control of power is the way the anniversary of March 24, 1976, is commemorated in Argentina.¹¹

Memory-related works in Argentina have woven, outside the state, a complex visual network that connected personal perspectives with those of others, and individual experiences with the major issues that engaged us in the present. As a set of practices, a social mobilization and a flow of images, this space has preserved a distinct experience of

¹⁰ The difference has been a theme in the work of Daniel Bensaïd and Enzo Traverso (*Left-Wing Melancholia*) based on the ideas of Walter Benjamin (further developed through the work of Marcel Proust).

¹¹ On that day, the groups involved in the struggle for truth, justice, and memory converge in the central streets of every city along with a colourful array of noisy social movements.

mechanisms of domination that is difficult to integrate into official narratives. For years, the space of memory images in Argentina was the non-specific place where the state's fictions faltered. It is not a place of purity, but rather of images that elude each new reformulation of institutional consensus. In a profound sense, these are memories that always remain *outside* the law. In response to them, the present has continuously reconfigured itself.

When artists of memory alter archival images, they go beyond monuments and even historical narration. They transform "relics" of the past into optical devices to explore the present. They do not establish a *causal* relationship with the past, but rather political connections with time. This takes the form of a reorganization of inherited images. The past thus sheds its destined or fated necessity and recovers its character of contingency. A thorough integration of this series of images, arising from struggle and recollection, into formal education would imply reconfiguring the educational practice itself.

By using the Benjaminian term *Bildraum* (*image-space*), I aim to establish a conceptual framework for this extended singularity that is both encompassing and respectful of its complexity. Memory images are always threatened, not so much by forgetfulness but by the conditions of their transmission, from which they frequently need to be rescued. Critical examination is part of this rescue. The space of memory images then represented an intersection of perspectives and, as a whole, a *way of seeing* (Berger, *Ways of Seeing*), a consistently unsettling way of approaching the past, and a political way of dealing with its ruins. It is within this space that memory images recover their content of truth and open the present to its critical reconsideration.

Summary of the Chapters

This thesis is structured into two parts:

The first part is divided into four chapters. The first chapter addresses the state of the art and conceptual considerations regarding memory, focusing on the following themes: memory and narration, individual and collective memory, clandestine memories, memory and politics, memory and temporality, memory and forgetting, and memory and archives. The second chapter introduces the historical context of the emergence and development of state terrorism in Argentina. This is crucial because it is precisely in Argentina that the figure of the disappeared emerges, on one hand as a specific product of a particular repressive state technology, and on the other hand as a transnationalized figure of a recently recognized form of violence against human rights. This contextualisation is not limited to the period of the dictatorship itself but extends to the so-called "democratic transition" period, as struggles for

memory and the development of its narratives, iconographies, and political and aesthetic expressions, generally, have evolved in continuous tension with the state's attempts to put an end to the conflict. The third chapter addresses the conditions of the transmission of recent history and establishes the differences between memory practices and pedagogy of memory. The programme I will examine as a specific case of the educational embodiment of the memory of the dictatorship, for example, resulted from a temporary and novel alliance between the state and human rights organizations, particularly a sector of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. This alliance was forged in an exceptional political context. The fourth chapter presents a specific conceptualization of the image-space applied to the Argentine case. This chapter addresses the problematic aspects of this elusive concept developed by Walter Benjamin, and the advantages of using it to define a particular relationship between image, memory, and politics.

The second part consists of three chapters identifying three aesthetic configurations related to memory practices. These configurations are organized in each chapter according to their emergence in the Argentine historical-political scene, although their analysis reveals that their hybrid compositions and relationships transcend a strictly chronological order. Chapter 5 focuses on the expressive resources used by the Mothers and Grandmothers and the human rights movement to highlight state terror since 1977. This chapter also refers to the relationship between memory and image in the context of questioning the possibilities and difficulties of the "representation" of disappearance. Chapter 6 examines the work of HIJOS (1994) and other independent authors. Unlike the first configuration, these productions reframe old archival photographs in works that expose their condition of *artifice*. The period when these productions became widespread peaks in the late 1990s and extends well into the twenty-first century. They are characterised by their innovative use of family photographic archives, working on what Longoni ("Arte y Política") refers to as the photographic condition of memory practices in this generation. Representation and absence intertwine in a dynamic that owes much to the principle of montage, establishing new relationships between the intimate and the collective, the personal and the political. The works are politically framed by collectively representing, in various modalities, a persistent interference with the national reconciliation and pacification policies implemented by the state. Chapter 7 outlines the processes of crystallising a pedagogy of memory and the specific role of using images in the transmission of the past. Between 2005 and 2016, educational programmes systematized a set of pedagogical practices aimed at teaching the "history of the recent past". I aim to

demonstrate how the composition of the manuals reveals the necessary renunciations, adaptations, and exclusions on which an emerging pedagogy of memory was constructed.

Finally, the conclusions presented do not aim to close this inquiry but rather to open it up for reconsideration of the present from the perspective of the image-space discussed in the analysis, and from which, I believe, society can challenge the apparent fatality of domination.



Fig. 2. Photo of Adelina Dematti, <https://ar.radiocut.fm/audiocut/entrevista-a-maria-alaye-adelina-siempre-queria-tener-un-registro-todo-lo-pasaba/?replay=11>. Accessed December 12, 2022.