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The unruly image: memory and transmission in Argentina.

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PART 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduction to Part 1



Fig. 1. Soledad Sánchez Goldar. *Fotos lavadas* (Laundered Photos). 2005–2008,
<https://cualquieraarte.blogspot.com/2011/03/artistas-in-soledad-sanchez-goldar.html>.



Fig. 2. Soledad Sánchez Goldar. *Fotos lavadas* (*Laundered Photos*). 2005–2008, <https://cualquieraarte.blogspot.com/2011/03/artistas-in-soledad-sanchez-goldar.html>.

Laundered Photos

Between 2005 and 2008, Soledad Sánchez Goldar – a relative of detained-disappeared people – presented *Fotos lavadas* (*Laundered Photos*; figs. 1 and 2), a performance that consisted of washing photos from her family album in public. She did it dressed in white and inside a circle of salt in which she stood next to a handful of photos and a basin of water. The washed photos were given to the public. A first element of analysis places the delimitation between public and private spaces in tension. A second element focuses on the washing process (it disrupts time and space) to which the photos are subjected, and a third and final element is located in the act of “delivering” the photos to the public. The circle of salt seems to emulate the function of a boundary between what belongs to a personal mourning ritual and what is shared socially.¹² The first element – the porosity of public-private spaces – serves as a bridge to the third, referring to the act of “delivering” the photos. The conjunction of these two elements appears to be a key to thinking about acts of transmission. The transformation processes undergone by the image as it passes through water somehow evoke the avatar of

¹² The word “ritual” is used because it reproduces the author's idea, but also because the performance repeats this scene without variations in each public exhibition.

the images. Passing through water speaks to the traces that time leaves on an image. After washing, the photo appears clearer, more “clean” or “pure”, says Sánchez Goldar. What should a photograph be washed of? What is its dirtiness and impurity? What is its purity?

But washing leaves us with a process of deformation or erasure. Washing subjects the photo to a blurring process that seems to reverse the development process: upon this new bath of moisture on an image that had already been developed before, a second passage begins. The interplay between revealing and concealing seems to return the photo to its original instability. The image is always on the verge of disappearing. The drama of disappearance is once again revealed in the very process of its erasure: it is the trace of the crime.

The objective of the first part of this work is a critical overview of the concept of collective memory, its relationship with individual memory, with oblivion, and with the concept of the archive. The emergence of state terrorism in Argentina (1976–1983) is also addressed in relation to the first signs of resistance embodied in the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (hereinafter “Mothers”). Finally, the conditions of transmission linked to memory practices and the concept of image-space are incorporated.