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The unruly image: memory and transmission in Argentina.

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CHAPTER 3: THE TRANSMISSION OF THE RECENT PAST

[The] attitude toward the past is one of rescue, which requires, more than recovery, salvation. "But from what can something that has been, be rescued?", Benjamin wondered. From a certain mode of transmission, he answered. It must be saved from conformism, from being trampled by the tradition of the victors, giving it renewed 'relevance' from the perspective of the critical historian, committed to a present in danger. But it must also be saved from being passed on intergenerationally as a legacy: rescuing what has been from a certain mode of transmission is also rescuing it from the modality that honours it as a 'legacy', as this is disastrous than its disappearance could be. (Pittaluga, "Ideas (preliminares)" 39; translated by Marisela Trevin)⁵²

Introduction

Assuming a legacy implies knowing it in depth in order to question it and create a new narrative. Collective memories need narrators, witnesses, and institutions that disseminate them. In his essay "The Storyteller", Walter Benjamin describes premodern transmission as the work of prodigious storytellers who defend, advise, and heal through their stories. There is the old storyteller who tells us about the past that we did not know; there is the dying man whose word, because it is the last, takes on greater authority; there is the sailor or the traveller who tells us of remote lands that we will never know. Each story contained a lesson or advice. This is how wisdom was passed on. He who narrates the past saves it, because remembering is a form of redemption and hence its relationship with justice. But oral storytelling is an art or a craft, an art that is passed on with the story that is told, and whoever listens learns to tell stories. All storytelling bears the marks of the storyteller, who leaves his marks on what is narrated as the potter leaves his fingerprints on his pots. For Benjamin, the propitious environment for storytelling was the age of craftsmen, where stories were listened to while working, in an uneventful time-environment that favoured distracted attention and

⁵² "[La] actitud ante el pasado es la del rescate, que exige, más que recuperación, salvación. ¿Pero de qué puede ser rescatado algo si no?, se preguntaba Benjamin. De un determinado modo de su transmisión, respondía. Salvarlo del conformismo, de ser atropellado por la tradición de los vencedores, dándole nueva 'actualidad' a partir de la mirada del historiador crítico, comprometido con un presente en peligro. Pero también debe ser salvado de su pasaje inter-generacional como herencia: rescatar lo que ha sido de un determinado modo de su transmisión es rescatarlo también de esa modalidad que lo honra como 'herencia', pues resulta más funesto de lo que podría ser su desaparición" (Pittaluga, "Ideas (preliminares)" 39).

memory. “It is as if only those who forget themselves favour the memory of what was narrated” (Oyarzún Robles 13). The sphere of reception, of listening, is that long period in which only time “happens”. In German, this time that is devoid of events is called *Langeweile*, and translating it as “boredom” does not do justice to the word.

When listening to a story we have two types of experience, one that is related to the story being told and one that refers to the act of storytelling itself. By listening to what we have not experienced, we expose ourselves to alterity and, by doing so, we constitute ourselves as subjects. In oral storytelling, the experience becomes common, or rather: the experience can only be an instance of what is common (Oyarzún Robles 13). The development of reproduction techniques, such as the printing press, essentially changed this form of transmission. Modernity and its urban vertigo multiplied individual experiences but led to a crisis in the transmission of lived wisdom. The modern subject is plagued by experiential shocks and is unable to give coherence to his past through his own story. For Benjamin this implied not only a crisis of the art of storytelling but even a crisis of experience as such. The trauma endured by the survivors of the Shoah has shown us a more radical version of this crisis. In the traumatized survivor, the event and its memory are separated by a chasm. It is often the case that the survivor of state violence cannot narratively take ownership of the event. What he lived through could not be processed because the victim did not have the symbolic frameworks needed to organize it as a narrative, that is, as an experience. The storyteller remains silent, and it is the social environment (the culture) that must attempt to tie up loose ends and connect the dots (van Alphen, “Second-Generation Testimony” 483). What we refer to as transmission is this effort in which justice is combined with solidarity. The memory of the event, according to Benjamin, must be rescued from the victors’ propaganda. For this reason, transmission will always be a political issue.

This chapter addresses the subjective conditions of the transmission of the past in the framework of Argentine collective memory. This refers to the framework of the time that contributes to or slows down, limits, or extends the political potential of the images of memory. In the Argentine case, social variables that influence the transmission of the recent past are identified, such as the type of subjectivity favoured by the dictatorship, the way in which we experience temporality in late modernity, the relationship between memory and politics, and the emotional fabric of memory. The final section refers to the conditions of transmission of the recent past in schools, and in a broader sense, to the processes of integration of memory into teaching school conventions. The latter acquire particular relevance. Not every transmission aspires to educate; there are spontaneous transmissions.

But among those that propose to educate, not all obey school transmission. The latter was one of the privileged objectives of the pedagogy of memory.

Transmission and its Conditions

Transmission and subjectivity

To take on a legacy is to appropriate it, to know it in such a way that we are in a position to infringe on it so as to build a new narrative. As Walter Benjamin (“Surrealism”) was well aware, the only way in which the past can represent something in the present is by a transmission that is open to the possibility of ambiguity, discontinuity, anachronism, and resignification: a critical memory.

The project of the dictatorship was officially called the National Reorganization Process. Extensive literature shows that it was not simply the work of disturbed or power-hungry individuals (regardless of the fact that this is what many of them were). It was not merely a project of the Armed Forces. It was not even an exclusively Argentinean project. It was a calculated project that had broad civil support (from the business sector, the church, and citizens), as well as international support (notably from the United States). This military intervention in national political life was also not new in Argentina. The 1976 coup in Argentina was not conceived as something radically alien to society (as may have been the case in Chile and Uruguay). Argentina has had a sad record of military governments since 1930. By 1976, the coup had not only been anticipated by the media; it was even hoped for by broad social sectors. Support for dictatorship cannot be said to have been the explicit and active consensus of the population, except perhaps in the days of the 1978 football World Cup and in the early days of the Malvinas War. But it can hardly be doubted that there was a solid tacit consensus during the first period, given the lack of support for Isabel Perón’s government and the sense of chaos that spread with the news of the armed confrontations. Although it is very difficult for historians to accurately measure the consensus achieved by the military junta in its different stages (given the concealment of intelligence files and the lack of plebiscites to consult the population), there is some agreement that the dictatorship was supported by significant sectors of the population and that its reorganisation process was based on previous authoritarian habits and traditions (Lvovich, “Dictadura y consenso”).

The current anti-communist rhetoric inherited from the Cold War and the electoral strength of parties that relativize the crimes of the recent past is, therefore, unsurprising. The objectives of the last dictatorship went beyond bringing to a halt or deactivating the people’s

opposition at that time. They sought to refound the country in a manner that would have very profound consequences for its social fabric and economic orientation. It was an intervention aimed at disciplining social behaviour and as such it can be considered an additional chapter to what Jean Franco has called the “cruel modernity” of Latin America.

As previously mentioned, the state operates in the domain of collective memory, and intervenes in the transmission of this memory and specifically in the dialectic that organizes the relationship between memory and forgetting. A militarized state operates in three ways: through the brutal elimination of the body that remembers and transmits (the elimination of the narrator), through the *production* of a new induced balance between forgetting and memory, and by promoting a kind of citizenship based on a morality of submission. We could refer on the one hand to a *necropolitics*, reserved for sectors where the opposition is strongest, and on the other hand to a *biopolitics*, targeting the rest of society, with a productive aim.

The tools in both cases, however, are different forms and degrees of intimidation. The effects of this political device based on state terror extended well beyond the dictatorship, that is to say, as “deferred terror”, as described by Pilar Calveiro (*Poder y desaparición*). Several recent studies have focused on describing the extent to which the regime of terror produces a specific type of subjectivity (Oberti and Pittaluga, *Memorias en montaje*). When the state manipulates the affective life of the population in its favour, it does so by enhancing fears, by creating a deliberately threatening atmosphere and offering itself at the same time as the remedy for that threat. It thus perfects a specific use of the remote biomedical metaphor that Roberto Esposito identified as the *pharmakon*, that is to say, the cure through the inoculation of the venom (127). The aim was to ensure that the population would forget the inheritance of previous social struggles, the memory of an “us” conceived as an affective constellation that transcends the individual, linking each person to their peers in opposition to the state. The objective was to consolidate a new memory that is more social than cultural, more inscribed on the body than on the consciousness, that is to say, more linked to trauma than to narration: *the memory of the infinite destructive possibilities of the state apparatus*. During the 1970s, when the theoretical basis for the militarization of society was laid out, the official media disseminated the well-known “National Security” doctrine that originated in the United States, based on the National Security Act of 1947. This doctrine became the foundation of the policy of militarization of Latin American societies in their defence against the “communist” enemy. The logical continuation of that military doctrine today is the *security discourse* that underpins the current infinite and abstract wars on terrorism, drug

trafficking or organised crime (W. Morales). The underlying idea is that we inhabit a world threatened by irrational but powerful enemies that lurk deep within the social fabric. It is a discourse that, with the complicity of journalists and the fictions of the cultural industry, promotes a specific type of citizen: a relatively powerless person, an atomised, solitary citizen who is constantly in need of police (and even military) protection (Zavala).⁵³ It can thus be said that the citizenship project forged in those years was based on the deliberate construction of a *terrified subjectivity* (Schmucler, “Usos políticos del miedo”).

This person could, perhaps, be described as an individual to whom fear “speaks”, a diffuse fear whose exact contours are unknown to him. The terrified individual is an involuntary transmitter of submission, an individual caught in the logic of the police that divides the world exclusively between “order” and “chaos”. They support the repression partly out of conviction and partly to feel that they are not a target. There is a kind of mechanism, a set of automatic reactions that are activated whenever the specific fabric of subjectivities and the social relations by which it is produced is affected by initiatives that threaten to modify it (Pittaluga, “Imágenes (d)e historia”).⁵⁴ We can say that these are background memories. The terrified subject is an individual who is prone to sympathize with the return to a dictatorial “normality”, where his visceral fear finds comfort. According to the logic of police states, the intimately intimidated person tends to identify the potential opponent, critic, or rebel as the “disrupter of order” and ultimately as a saboteur or criminal.⁵⁵

⁵³ The continuity between the National Security doctrine (of the Cold War) and the current security discourse has been convincingly demonstrated in a very recent book, *Drug Cartels Do Not Exist: Narcotrafficking in US and Mexican Culture*, by Oswaldo Zavala (2022).

⁵⁴ “Quisiera remarcar este punto, paradójico, pues la irrupción de las Fuerzas Armadas en la escena no solo es indicativa del creciente predominio y la apelación a la fuerza, sino que a la vez ese recurso es presentado como el paso necesario para dejar atrás una situación de violencia y crisis e iniciar una de normalidad y serenidad: en este tránsito de la violencia sin norma (aparente) a la normalidad de la violencia, la palabra que ancla los sentidos es orden ... Esa instalación de la represión en la escena pública actuó como factor de rutinización de la violencia estatal, de su exposición cotidiana como parte del paisaje urbano, como una muestra para el transitar diario, generando una habituación por la cual esa violencia dejaba de ser vista como anómala, y se burocratizaba y normalizaba mientras se subjetivaba como un saber no consciente sobre su continuada vigencia.” (“I would like to emphasize this point, which is paradoxical, since the appearance of the Armed Forces on the scene is not only indicative of the growing prevalence of an appeal to force, but at the same time that recourse is presented as the step required to leave behind a situation of violence and crisis and begin one of normality and serenity: in this transition from violence without (apparent) rules to the normality of violence, the word that anchors the senses is order ... That installation of repression in the public scene functioned as a factor of routinization of state violence, of its daily exhibition as part of the urban landscape, as a showing for daily circulation, resulting in a habituation whereby that violence was no longer seen as anomalous, and was bureaucratized and normalized while it was subjectivised as non-conscious knowledge of its continued duration”; Pittaluga, “Imágenes (d)e historia” 3–6).

⁵⁵ “Muchas personas, por lo demás respetables, creen que los izquierdistas, sean (sic) activistas tirabombas o idealistas transmundanos, merecen la pena de muerte. No exigen que eso se inscriba en el código penal pero sí

Intimidated people will invariably take the position of demanding greater vigilance or increased prison sentences. If the dictatorial regime engendered a kind of subjectivity of its own, a successful subjectivity that is consistent with this particular form of biopolitics, it would be that of the terrified individual. Its rhetorical imprint consists of a series of phrases that have acquired the status of clichés or commonplaces of social discourse (“stay out of it”, “things were better during the dictatorship; people were safer”, “human rights organizations are a racket”, etc.). During the first few years after the dictatorship, whenever a memory activist or a journalist asked a citizen for their opinion on Argentine state terrorism, they often replied with the well-known phrase: “They (the victims) must have done something”. This phrase, which was so commonly used at that time, is a clear expression of fear as social trauma: the victims of disappearance, or torture, or detention, had done “something” and that something was the cause of their misfortune. But what is that *something* and that *doing* in which the speaker is so relieved to have had no part? What is that something that is so vague, so indefinable, but that undoubtedly indicates guilt? This cliché expresses a kind of conventional wisdom that rewards people who refrain from getting involved, giving an opinion, or participating in public affairs. One of the well-known clichés of the Spanish dictatorship and post-dictatorship is the typical parental advice “no te signifiqués”, which means something like “don’t bring attention to yourself” or “don’t give your opinion in public”. This subjectivity (with its rhetorical reflections, its strategic silences, its *(a)political* behaviour) is a significant factor in the dilemmas and resistance to the transmission of the recent past.⁵⁶

aceptan la muerte violenta de izquierdistas con total ecuanimidad.” (“Many otherwise respectable people believe that leftists, be they (sic) bomb-throwing activists or transworldly idealists, deserve the death penalty. They do not demand that this be recorded in the criminal code, but they do accept the violent death of leftists with total equanimity”; Neilson 15).

⁵⁶ “(U)tilizo la expresión ‘estado de terror’ como una suerte de humor producido por el terrorismo de Estado, como una densidad del espacio social, una condición, un medium a través del cual se interpela a los sujetos a partir del núcleo primordial del dispositivo represivo (los campos de detención y desaparición de personas), un campo de fuerzas que orienta a los sujetos a seguir patrones de comportamiento admitidos a partir de esos puntos principales de ejercicio de la fuerza. Desde ellos, y a partir de su específica forma de implantación y actuación, el terror se irradia hacia el conjunto social, afectando de distintos modos las relaciones sociales, penetrando en, diseñando a y/o nutriéndose de materiales sociales y culturales que presentan receptividades disímiles (reflexiones, refracciones, internalizaciones, aceptaciones, etc.) y que se manifiestan en conductas divergentes. ... Se trata entonces de pensar las conexiones y articulaciones entre el “terror de Estado” como política represiva específica y sistemática, el “estado de terror” como médium así generado (que actúa como un dispositivo y entonces como una disposición), y las distintas formaciones subjetivas” (“I use the expression “state of terror” as a kind of mood produced by state terrorism, likes a density of social space, a condition, a medium through which individuals are interpellated from the essential core of the repressive system (the camps where people were detained and disappeared), a field of forces that guides individuals to follow patterns of behaviour that are accepted from those main points from which force is used. From them, and from their

Unlike German Nazism and Italian fascism, which on the one hand eliminated all opposition, but on the other hand promoted the organized involvement and activism of their supporters, the right-wing dictatorships of the Ibero-American world promoted “apoliticality” and the inhibition of citizens in the public space. The exaltation of democracy that occurred at all levels after the 1980s coincided with a notable tendency to undermine its true meaning, because this democracy deep down promotes political inhibition. A *post-political* and atomized society does not require authoritarian governments; it is sufficient to keep fuelling the security discourse. This is reinforced by a series of social attitudes that make up a kind of *aesthetics of depoliticization*.

The broken ties of solidarity established in collective forms of organization (trade unions, student unions, neighbourhood organisations or political parties), were replaced by the *production* of these new isolated, suspicious individuals, without any effective power to oppose what the state imposes on them. These isolated individuals, formed as such during the years of the dictatorship, avoid significant ties with their neighbours or co-workers, with whom they share a common fate and objective interests. Their loyalties are abstract and ideological (the nation, “Argentinity”, nationalism). In this way, these fearful and socially isolated lives are perfectly articulated with the type of subjectivity that is so familiar to us today in neoliberal economies. It is a society that rests on the technocratic power of experts, the fierce competition of individuals for scarce jobs, individual work performance as the only horizon of personal fulfilment, consumption as the exclusive horizon of experience, and the privatization and depoliticization of public space.

Transmission and temporality

The attempt to prevent the repetition of state terror, even in another form, in a new guise, with an increasingly profound knowledge of the facts of that terror, is probably futile. This is confirmed by the general resurgence in our era of new fascistoid sensibilities. Mere knowledge of the events of the past does not prevent the return of the violence of power. Memory in general, and collective memory in particular, requires moments and places of reflection, requires a halt that fosters transmission, commemoration, and the event of

specific form of implantation and action, terror radiates towards the social group, affecting social relations in different ways, penetrating, designing and/or feeding off of social and cultural materials with dissimilar receptivities (reflections, refractions, internalizations, acceptances, etc.) and that are manifested in divergent behaviours. ... It is thus necessary to think about the connections and links between “state terror” as a specific and systematic repressive policy, “state of terror” as the resulting *medium* (which functions as a device and thus as a disposition), and the different subjective formations”; Pittaluga, “Imágenes (d)e historia” 15).

retelling. However, the conditions for this halt are not abundant in the present. One of the authors who have most reflected on the opportunities and obstacles for a collective consciousness of the recent past is the Argentine essayist Héctor Schmucler (*La memoria*). Schmucler ponders the effective possibilities of memory in a present characterized by the experience of transience. I have referred in the first chapter to François Hartog's reflections on a new *regime of historicity* that characterises late modernity: the idea of an experience of time based on acceleration, the idea of a cancellation of the future and a *heritagization* of the past. Despite the centrality of memory during recent decades, the regime of historicity that characterizes our era, where the future no longer illuminates the past, conspires against a fluid relationship between the different categories into which we divide time: the past, the present, and the future. If the future can no longer be conceived as a project, the victims of history lose the potential to be redeemed. The events of their lives cannot stimulate us to change the world. In a present that is closed in on itself, that is conceived as the end of history, the victims become sacrificed victims. They are something like the price that has been paid for the stability of the present. On the other hand, our present is possessed by a constant increase in speed and transience that has led the sociologist Hartmut Rosa ("La 'resonancia'") to identify two apparently contradictory trends in contemporary life: on the one hand, a constant acceleration of life, driven by technological innovation that leads to the continuous shortening of distances and the fast-paced development of communications, without this resulting on the other hand in a greater availability of significant time for people. Furthermore, this acceleration does not seem to be heading anywhere. It lacks intelligible goals and, therefore, future expectations of change. Rosa maintains that the incongruity between these two trends forms a new equilibrium in our experience of time: a kind of "dynamic stabilisation" ("La 'resonancia'" 73). Late modernity is not moving towards any place (the future is cancelled) but it increasingly accelerates its procedures. For Rosa, this frenzy without rational objectives inevitably results in the absence of commitment with respect to others, our times and our spaces, giving rise to a state of *alienation* (*Alienation and Acceleration* 96). This *liquid* modality or condition of coexistence, to use the term coined by Polish sociologist Zygmund Bauman, certainly conspires against the cultivation of historical memory or the practice of a critical recollection of the past. In this regard, acts of memory, including works of art that sensorially reconnect us with the traumatic past, have the virtue of momentarily interrupting this present suspended in its own frenzy, creating the possibility of what Rosa would call "resonance" ("La 'resonancia'"); that is to say, a momentary significant relationship with the world, where things "look back at us". For Rosa, a non-alienated

experience entails being *affected* by our environment in such a way that we feel compelled to stop and attempt a renewed and novel dialogue with an object (of any kind) that at that moment constitutes the modality in which the world is presented to us. This relationship of *resonance* with things allows a transformative assimilation of both the object and ourselves. A pedagogy of memory should also be included in – or be part of – one of these “spheres of resonance” that Rosa distinguishes in certain areas of society (“La ‘resonancia’” 78). This would involve a type of contact with the remains of the past that gives way to an experience of transformative assimilation in our own relationship with the present.

Transmission and politics

In principle, the transmission to future generations of the events of the Argentine dictatorship could be included in the type of memory practised globally in relation to the Nazi genocide, taking into account the mass scale and state systematicity of this annihilation, the collective shock regarding the enormity of the carnage, and the impossibility of representing the *camp experience* with conventional instruments of representation. But in Argentina this type of transmission and commemoration model is problematic. In the case of the prototypical victim of genocide (Armenian, Jewish, Roma, African, indigenous, or aboriginal), *culpability is based on ethnicity*. It was not the victims’ actions but their identity (an identity forged by the knowledge of the dominant group) that was used by those in power to justify their persecution and annihilation. For the perpetrators of the Nazi genocide, Jewish and Roma people bore their culpability in their blood. In Argentina, the aim was not ethnic cleansing (despite the clear anti-Semitism of the security forces in Argentina) but the neutralization of social resistance. First, it is important to take into account the politically belligerent nature of a large part of the victims. In this regard, the massacres of communists in Indonesia in the 1950s and the massive executions carried out by Francisco Franco’s regime in Spain in the 1930s and 1940s are closer to the Argentine model. Thus, the commemoration of the victims without addressing the issue of their potential political involvement, as was done during the phase of the “Sábato report” or the first edition of the *Nunca Más* report, disregards the specific characteristics of the tragedy.

Current debates on cultural memory seem to focus on a temporal gap that divides history between a “totalitarian” past and a relatively unalterable liberal democratic present. Thus, according to the dominant “common-sense” view, political struggles for a more just coexistence, including the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century, are almost exclusively associated with resistance to a dangerous “totalitarian” condition. It is as if the

political antagonisms of the past were the Machiavellian product of “ideologies of hatred”, “resentment”, or “intolerance”, often reducing politics to psychology and social struggles to struggles for the symbolic recognition of minorities. A memory focused on the harm done to the victim and the cruelty of the executioner only asks the survivors for accounts of their suffering. Thus, identities are cultivated as damaged identities. According to Aleida Assmann, for example:

The memory boom reflects a general desire to reclaim the past as an important part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue, and to reassess it as part of individual biographies and the way individuals position themselves in a wider historical perspective. ... While the term memory has ousted the term ideology, it has reinforced the term “identity” on an individual and in particular on a collective level. (54)

The problem with this displacement is that what is ultimately political in cultural memory is reduced to a theme of identity. As Rancière pointed out, what is actually political, however, is not identity or identification, but improper names and de-identification:

The logic of political subjectivization ... is never the mere affirmation of an identity, but is always at the same time the denial of an identity imposed by another, determined by the logic of the police. The police in effect want “exact” names, which indicate the assignment of people to their positions and their jobs. Politics, for its part, is a matter of “improper” names, of my names that express a fault and are a manifestation of damage. (“Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization” 62; translation modified)

It could thus be said that identity concerns the *police*, not politics. As is known, the realm of the *police order*, for Rancière, is politics in terms of management, control, and administration. The police order is the domain of the law (generally implicit) that regulates consensus and defines the parts of the social group. Inscribed in the police order are ways of doing and saying that correspond to social roles distributed in “natural” hierarchies. This sensitive configuration rests on the certainty of identities. When a group gathering around harm invades the public space, it always does so with improper names. That was the role played by the name “Locas” (“Madwomen”) given to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the name by which the Argentine state intended to identify and at the same time neutralize the

Mothers' movement. "Madwomen" in this context means "lacking identity", "unclassifiable", or "ungovernable". Appropriating this improper name with rage and pride in 1977 was a political gesture.

In this new relatively depoliticized context, the only conceivable critical gesture, according to Aleida Assmann, is to distinguish "more 'malign' from more 'benign' memories – that is, memories that perpetuate resentment, hatred, and violence from those that have a therapeutic or ethical value" (54). The problem is that it is not clear that all memory that revives a resentment (especially resentment for harm that has gone unpunished) is "malignant". And it is not certain that therapeutic memories are "benign" (especially when therapy consists of learning to accept the abuses of the past as irreversible).

The depoliticization of the past allows a certain lack of differentiation where any idea of justice becomes impossible because the power relations that were at the root of the conflict are obscured. The generic rejection of violence, for example, places us precisely before an ethical *aporia* when it equates the suffering of the oppressors to that of the oppressed. The direct consequence is the acceptance of an equivalence between the members of the Armed Forces fallen in the fight against the guerrillas as "victims of terrorism", and the disappeared, executed or tortured by the state who belonged to left-wing organizations. It is from an identity point of view (the identity of the army, for example) that the armed forces demand a "complete memory", a discourse on the past that assigns them the status of victims.

When trying to show that the perpetrators had also been victims, [the army commander] Brinzoni reflected the social legitimacy that the figure of the "victim" of the 1970s had acquired, mainly from the action of human rights organizations, and transformed it into a mechanism of legitimation or relativization of the action of the victimizers. This is the interpretive framework that prevails within the Army. (Badaró 122)

And today, in 2024, it is official government doctrine. The argument that is generally put forward against this equivalence is of a legal nature: crimes against humanity, imprescriptible crimes, are those committed by the state, not by individuals. From a perspective on the past exclusively focused on the victim of violence (of either side), this objection is very weak. It is clear that every victim of violence in general deserves respect for the pain of their loved ones; every victim has the right to be honoured and remembered, even publicly. It is also clear that this right was never considered in the case of those who disappeared and were executed by

the Argentine state. But cultural memory is not only about the grief and pain of loss. It is a matter of essential disagreement: a struggle for the meanings of the conflict, for the root causes of violence. It is also about the reasons for the fight (even admitting that the fight was undertaken in a disastrous way). The armed struggle of a part of the Argentine left must be subjected to profound criticism, even in the moral sense. But there can be no general *political* equivalence between an emancipatory struggle and the systematic work of extermination undertaken with a secret workforce discipline by the Armed Forces against armed or unarmed militants. This equidistance between “contending identities” would be unacceptable if a moral, cultural, and political equivalence were claimed between the Jewish dead during the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the German soldiers who fell during the annihilation operation. The tendency to reduce social conflict to conflicting identities, the centrality of the figure of the victim, and the refusal to conceive universal ideas of emancipation have created a strange landscape where memories are tribal memories, condemned to an infinite and particularistic struggle for prominence. Michel Rothberg has pointed out the problems with this connection, namely “[t]he assumption that ... a straight line runs from memory to identity and that the only kinds of memories and identities that are therefore possible are ones that exclude elements of alterity and forms of commonality with others” (22).

It should be the opposite. When the memory of harm enters the public space in a conflictive manner, it can be conceived precisely as a force of *alterity* that arrives to redesign the space of what is common to us, not as a cultural statement in competition with other “cultures” but *on behalf of everyone*. Rothberg combats the notion of a “public sphere as a pregiven, limited space in which already-established [identity] groups engage in a life-and-death struggle” (22). The idea that some memories (whose history of harm has common political roots) are linked to identities in conflict for the public space is the result of the disconnection that has been established between memory and politics. As Rothberg points out, “[m]emories are not owned by groups—nor are groups ‘owned’ by memories” (5). What Rothberg does by turning to postcolonial literature and the remote genesis of identity politics is rediscover the intimate *political* relationship, for example, between anti-colonial and anti-racist memories. His idea of the complementarity of memories is a reinterpretation of the complementarity of the emancipatory struggles as they were understood until the 1980s.

How far do the consequences of a depoliticised memory go? In 1992, in the midst of a massive protest by teachers and students against the new education laws, Argentine president Carlos Menem warned his mobilized critics that if the civil protests continued, we could get “another contingent of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina demanding the return of

their children” (qtd. in Natanson 7). The president resorted to the memory of past pain to intimidate his opponents in the present.⁵⁷ Much more recently, in October 2019, in the context of growing mass social protests in Chile demanding the repeal of the constitution, established during the dictatorship, that was still in force, the government of Sebastián Piñera decided to impose a curfew and send the army out on the street. This measure had not been taken since the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The spectacle of militarized streets was intended to “remind” Chileans of the price to be paid for insubordination. Either verbally or visually, the state reminds citizens of past violence to silence criticism in the present. Furthermore, this includes an implicit interpretation of the recent past: *those who protested were to blame* for the state terror. This implicit consensus which had, until then, been practically kept secret (and spread obliquely by the hegemonic media), came out of the shadows with the electoral victories of Mauricio Macri, Piñera, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Javier Milei, and Nayib Bukele. It illustrates the continuity in democracy of a singular pedagogy of violence designed and perfected during the military dictatorship. Depoliticized memory is a perverse instrument of the state, not “therapy” for survivors.

Transmission as a visual and emotional plot

What makes a certain continuity between generations possible is the narrative transmission of a legacy from the past and the recognition of that legacy in the present. This is precisely what we refer to as a culture or a cultural memory as a whole. This memory requires institutional support. Many memories generated in social or communicative memory (with a more limited lifespan) become part of the archive of cultural memory. Others do not, and still others survive or continue in the form of clandestine memories. Although cultural memory tends towards preservation, fixation (canon), and the establishment of traditions (through reutilization and repetition), the legacy of the past does not have to bind future generations to specific cultural forms or specific forms of memory. The intrinsic discontinuity and ambiguity of memory (which cannot be constituted apart from narrative and invention) promote resignification or reinterpretation, resurgence, survival, and new narratives. In order to prevent collective memories from becoming formalized and dogmatic knowledge, it is

⁵⁷ In the context of the student and teachers’ protests, the former president stated the following: “I call on you to reflect. Now is not the time for this. I am not against the broad freedom that people enjoy in the Argentine Republic, but we have to be careful that we don’t get another contingent of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina demanding the return of their children” (qtd. in Natanson 7). The Full Stop Law (*Ley de Punto Final*, 1986) and the Law of Due Obedience (*Ley de obediencia debida*, 1987) enacted by Raúl Alfonsín’s government and the *pardons* promoted by Menem are recognised by human rights movements and broad sectors of society as laws of impunity. They were repealed in 2003, during Kirchner’s government.

necessary to share an affective sphere that is independent of state institutions. One of the purposes of institutions and, more in general, of power, is to keep collective emotional life within lanes that are appropriate for maintaining the order of things. Although all states practice this form of affective control, in the case of a state of exception, a dictatorship with powers of erasure, censorship, and elimination, like in the 1970s and 1980s in Argentina, or in the almost forty years of Franco's rule in Spain, state intervention can be carried out in an exceptionally brutal manner in spaces where social ties and their mnemonic materials are established. The state of exception can destroy the way in which collective inheritances (especially the legacies of social struggle) are preserved by annihilating their bearers, closing publishing houses, censoring the media, burning books, and banning images. A resolute police intervention in the social mechanisms of transmission is a radical and abrupt intervention in the delicate relationship that links memory to forgetting. The effects of these operations may last longer than might be expected and in ways that are not directly detectable.

The dictatorship has the exclusive monopoly (and it can go further) to (re)design collective memories, shutting down the transmission of certain memories but supporting and promoting others, that is to say, acting *productively*. Today, the transmission of experiences about the recent past in Argentina is clearly disputed territory. The degree to which these memories are such (i.e., a reason for dispute and not for consensus) is related to the relative failure of this normalizing intervention on social ties. What is at stake in this dispute are memories and the ways in which remembering occurs. Affects also come into play. On the basis of the *constituent hole* that makes it impossible to represent the disappearance, the Mothers and Grandmothers, the children of the disappeared, and a social and political environment involved in denouncing state crimes have ended up creating a political space that is also a space of images or *Bildraum*, as defined by Walter Benjamin in his 1929 text on surrealism ("Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia"). According to Didi-Huberman (*Desear Desobedecer*), the image, in its direct relationship with *pathos*, also produces, or is capable of producing, a common space of emotion. In this case, these are shared emotions whose frames of reference are essentially images and statements.

For Didi-Huberman, while institutions of the state, institutions of power, seek to stabilise a certain distribution of emotions to homogenize social behaviours, affects are on the side of a *potency* that is the driving force of uprisings and that is also a *powerlessness* (qtd. in

Gianera).⁵⁸ This means that Didi-Huberman establishes a difference between power and potency. The images and affects represent a potency stripped of power (political, state, military, economic). They constitute a fragility capable of generating many things, a powerful fragility.

In these cases, the affective life of the community escapes from the emotional management of the state and affects go on to fuel a rebellion. “Everything then depends on the relationship between that normalising power and the potency of affects capable of rebelling against it” (Didi-Huberman, *Desear Desobedecer* 249). Didi-Huberman suggests that mourning and its dramatic forms of expression may be at the emotional core of these shifts. It is undeniable that, over the years, the broad movement sparked by the demands of the Mothers and Grandmothers created an affective constellation in which a singular balance was reached between memory and politics. This movement was supported by a collective *potency* capable of escaping from the normalization initiatives, first of the militarized state and later of a post-dictatorial state that was too eager to leave the recent past behind.

Practices of memory in relation to the disappeared were built on the basis of a legacy that is both political and affective, and perhaps in a way, political to the extent that it is affective. And this is related to the way we understand collective emotions. As Didi-Huberman pointed out, the truly political character of emotions is only realized when the complaint of the harm sustained is no longer conjugated in the first person, but in the third. The act of taking on a third party’s suffering with the virulence that one would express in relation to one’s own suffering, is the condition of (political) emotion and contradicts both modern individualism and mere identitarian passion. Perhaps this is what Gilles Deleuze meant when he referred to emotions from a Spinozian perspective, stating that “emotion does not say ‘me’. ... Emotion does not belong to the order of the self, but to that of the event” (Didi-Huberman, *Desear Desobedecer* 251).

⁵⁸ “Todo mi desarrollo se articula aquí en torno de la diferencia entre *pouvoir* y *puissance*, poder y potencia, que es una diferencia que se encuentra también en Spinoza, Nietzsche y, en consecuencia, en Deleuze y Antonio Negri. Las lágrimas no tienen ningún poder: son la expresión de un *pathos* que es la impotencia, el no poder. En las famosas escenas de *El acorazado Potemkin*, de Serguéi Eisenstein, las madres y las abuelas de Odessa no tienen ningún poder contra los cosacos, pero, igual que en las tragedias clásicas, tienen la potencia de transformar su sufrimiento en energía revolucionaria: en fuerza de sublevación.” (“All my development is articulated here around the difference between *pouvoir* and *puissance*, power and potency, which is a difference that is also found in Spinoza, Nietzsche and, consequently, in Deleuze and Antonio Negri. Tears have no power: they are the expression of a *pathos* that is impotence, powerlessness. In the famous scenes of *Battleship Potemkin*, by Sergei Eisenstein, the mothers and grandmothers of Odessa have no power against the Cossacks, but, just as in the classic tragedies, have the power to transform their suffering into revolutionary energy: into a force of uprising” (qtd. in Gianera; my trans.). See also Didi-Huberman, *Sublevaciones* 39.

Memory practices and pedagogy

There is no act of transmission of memory that is not in some way a political act. The antecedents of the transmission of the recent past for the Argentine case illustrate the extent to which the successive governments in power in the state have hindered not only the progress of judicial proceedings, but also those linked to the transmission processes. In contrast, the period of the Kirchnerist government (2003–2015) corresponds to a stage of inflexion regarding memory policies.

As a planner of new acts of memory, the state in the hands of the Kirchnerist management has formalized an institutional transit system of transmission recognized as memory pedagogy. This initiative involves the institutional systematization of knowledge articulated for this purpose. The government's symbolic gestures in repudiation of the dictatorial past (the removal of Videla's portrait, the handing over of the ESMA building to human rights activists, etc.) granted the government a new type of legitimacy. Nothing like this had happened since Raúl Alfonsín's first government.

The Kirchner government sought to refound democracy around notions of principles related to human rights. In this framework, it formalized and institutionalized the transmission of memory, anchoring it in the educational system. It is in the context of this new policy that an attempt was made to work on a pedagogy of memory.

The pedagogy of memory is not exempt from the traditional components of educational actions that are institutionalized and that respond to processes of schooling of culture. The category "processes of schooling of culture" emerged in Latin America in contrast to the Euro-western category of "school culture". Unlike the latter, this concept also contemplates "the persistence to the present day of other modes of production, transmission and distribution of knowledge that occur outside its walls (Cucuzza and Spregelburd 11). This becomes particularly relevant in a context where part of the inputs that nourished memory policies were obtained from the counter-archives generated by social protest movements. The pedagogy of memory was born as a variant of memory practices that involve the state as its main mentor. The state proposes itself as society's debtor for the crimes committed during the dictatorship and the pedagogy of memory is presented as part of a set of reparations that are established from the perspective of an "educating" state. From this point, the pedagogy of memory involves a series of decisions about what and how to teach. This pedagogy consecrates anniversaries and promotes public morality about the past through citizen education. The term "pedagogy of memory" gained strength in 2005 during the preparations for the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the military coup

by the “Education and Memory” Team. The delimitation of this singularity is crucial because there is a re-domiciliation of the contents from a “Human Rights perspective”.

This initiative was impressive at the time: for the first time in history, the Argentine state assumed responsibility for its crimes and committed to refounding its legitimacy on the basis of the values embodied in human rights; on the other hand, the state establishes itself as the arbiter of the past, “which entails the risk of trivialization and instrumentalization” (Lvovich and Bisquert 91). The pedagogy of memory also involves transforming certain memory practices into school formulas that are fixed in educational resolutions and programs in order to achieve effectiveness in the modes of transmission, circulation, and long-term appropriation in the intergenerational circuit. The pedagogy of memory is developed within the framework of a state discourse, with a homogeneous voice, which establishes a coherent unity and is based on the principle of the existence of “floors of truth”, that is, the establishment of mandates and prohibitions or assumptions whose discussion is considered closed. Table 1 summarises the components of the actions that were institutionalized in the processes of integration of memory into traditional teaching forms during the Kirchner administration.⁵⁹

Table 1

Components of educational actions that are institutionalized	The way in which the institutionalization of knowledge is manifested (the quotes are taken from a fragment that is repeated in all presentations of the printed collection disseminated by the “Education and Memory” Programme).
Purpose (why it is taught)	“The ‘Education and Memory’ Programme of the National Ministry of Education aims to consolidate an educational policy that promotes the teaching of the recent past in the classroom as a contribution to the construction of a new political citizenship. Its actions are carried out in the general framework of National Education Law No. 26,206, which states in Article 3 that <i>education is a national priority and is established as a State policy for building a just society, reaffirming sovereignty and national identity, reinforcing the exercise of democratic citizenship,</i>

⁵⁹ Table 1 is based on the diagram resulting from the investigations of the Social History of Education Team, to which I have belonged since 2016 in representation of the UNLu (National University of Luján) in Buenos Aires; it was founded by Rubén Cucuzza and is currently coordinated by Paula Spregelburd. This team has conducted numerous research studies within the framework of the HISTELEA (History of Reading and Writing in Argentina) Program and its work is ongoing. The original diagram was used to describe “transitions from educational modes typical of oral cultures to institutionalized written forms integrated into schooling” (Cucuzza and Spregelburd 11).

	<i>respecting Human Rights and fundamental freedoms and strengthening the economic and social development of the Nation”.</i>
Timeline (when it is taught)	The “program” format establishes short-term completion times that varied according to the educational proposals. The basic courses lasted 2 to 4 months and the postgraduate courses, 2 to 3 years.
Spaces (where it should be taught)	The “Education and Memory” Programme combined face-to-face and virtual spaces, at the jurisdictional and federal level.
Actors (who teaches and who learns)	Research teams from different national universities were convened by the Ministry of Education, through the National Teachers’ Training Institute (INFD), to prepare proposals and actions related to education and memory that were primarily aimed at teachers. Initially, the proposals focused on Secondary Level teachers. They were subsequently extended to the entire educational system, including the Initial Level. ⁶⁰
Knowledge (what to teach)	“[I]n line with Article 92 of the law, it proposes resources for the inclusion of common minimum curricular content in relation to the construction of a national identity from the Latin American regional perspective; the cause of the recovery of the Malvinas Islands; and the exercise and construction of the collective memory of recent history ... The Program fundamentally consists of three thematic pillars: State terrorism: memories of the dictatorship; the Malvinas Islands: memory, sovereignty and democracy; Holocaust and genocides of the 20th century”.
Methods (how it should be taught)	The “Education and Memory” collection formulates a series of “questions, answers and proposals for teaching; it is aimed at facilitating the work of teachers in addressing this complex historical

⁶⁰ One of the original criteria of the Programme is defined by the mediation and recipients of the transmission of the past. The initial recipients were teachers of different levels of the educational system. In the framework of permanent teacher training, the transmission to teachers was expected to radiate and multiply throughout the rest of the educational system. This constitutes another difference between the pedagogy of memory and the practices of memory. Intergenerational transmission has been one of the most sensitive transmission-related issues in the recent past in Argentina because the search for the children of the disappeared was and is still ongoing. The forms of dialogue with younger generations were and continue to be mediated by this search. Therefore, it became imperative to identify and establish a hierarchy of the recipients of the transmission. The Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo demonstrated inventiveness in response to this challenge. They differentiated the discourses according to the passage of time: it was not the same to “speak” for children, as it was for adolescents or adults. In the case of adults, there was the advantage that their legal age placed them in an independent position for an autonomous search for their identity if they had suspicions regarding their origins, but for the same reason, the disadvantageous position of having been educated and influenced in homes that were unfavourable for the search. Thus, transmission strategy was two-pronged and consisted of a specific transmission to those potential “children” and a public or social transmission to the rest of society. The force of interpellation was focused on the transmission strategies. After 2006, with the formalization of the Programme, the recipients were joined together for a common purpose: to reach the entire population between 5 and 18 years of age through the teachers’ education of memory.

	experience. It is structured into questions and answers in order to organize the reading and comprehension of the different aspects that characterise this genocide and promotes, at the same time, the formulation of new questions about genocide, memory, cultural identity and respect for the other. In this regard, the inclusion of a variety of sources – documents, images and testimonies – enables multiple inputs which are recovered in the proposals for working in the classroom”.
Circuits and sequences (when and where to teach each target)	The proposals were prepared through a format of “educational programmes” that incorporate different actions and time periods for their completion. The “Education and Memory” Programme was often coordinated with other related programs. The “Our School” Program, for example, proposed a considerable offer of basic and postgraduate courses in which the “Education and Memory” team participated.
Supervision (how to monitor achievements)	The evaluation processes were limited to the different formats provided for in the Program.

Unlike memory pedagogy, memory practices are not necessarily assimilated to state practice; they can be located “on the margins” of institutions and even oppose each other. Nor do memory practices concentrate on a delimited past (to the exclusion of other pasts or events related to them in the present). Memory practices gather a multiplicity of voices and their materials come from heterogeneous experiences. The pedagogy of memory, on the other hand, inevitably has a desire for order. Disputes about the past are resolved and there is a tendency toward a kind of official narrative.

What the Kirchner administration attempted to initiate and lead was a process identified by Jan Assmann as the transition from communicative memories to cultural memories. The government attempted, on the one hand, to identify itself with this vast movement and, on the other, to give it a certain direction. By encouraging a democratic education based in large part on the slogan *Nunca más* (*Never again*), the government’s educational cadres aspired to build a national consensus around the values of the rule of law and in particular human rights.⁶¹

⁶¹ The images disseminated by the state within the framework of the pedagogy of memory will be addressed in the last chapter of this study.