The unruly image: memory and transmission in Argentina.
Saab, A.P.

CHAPTER 6: OVERFLOWS BETWEEN ART AND POLITICS

> In front of me is a photo of my mom with me. We are lying on the sand, you can barely see the sea foam at an angle. Her face is covered by her hair, all I can see is the back of her neck and her hand tangled in my curlers. I don't know how old I may be in the photo, I can say that her elbow is resting right at the beginning of my back and her fingers are lost in my hair. How old do you have to be for your mother's forearm to have the exact measurement of your torso?
> (Marta Dillon, *Aparecida* 11)[92]

Introduction

There is a second generation of direct victims of state terrorism in Argentina. It is the generation of the children of missing, murdered, or imprisoned militants. Many of them lived with a falsified identity or had a childhood that was, to say the least, rarefied, as a consequence of the militancy of their parents or because of their kidnapping and adoption by families close to the regime. For all of them, their own origin is surrounded by uncertainties, difficult questions, and problematic memories. During the 1990s, a militant organization was formed: HIJOS, made up of children of disappeared people at its core. An entire form of political activism developed around this nucleus, but also what Teresa Basile has called a cultural field. In the first instance, HIJOS is a political activism organization that advocates for truth, memory and justice. However, we also associate with this organization the multiple literary, artistic, and cinematographic manifestations carried out by this group of young people and their generational allies during the 1990s and the beginning of this century. The children of the disappeared maintain their own relationship with the photos of their missing parents, especially when it comes to recovered children, born in captivity and delivered to other families related to the regime. Much of their cultural and political production can be considered a practice of memory, although it is a different type of memory than the ones survivors work on. For them, the story of their parents operated as the detonator of a kind of singular self-awareness that was resolved many times as a political commitment and many more times as a documentary and aesthetic inquiry. In most cases, these two ways of dealing

[92] "Frente a mí hay una foto de mi mamá conmigo. Estamos tendidas sobre la arena, apenas se ve la espuma del mar en un ángulo. Ella tiene la cara tapada por el pelo, a mí solo se me ve la nuca y su mano enredada en mis rulos. No sé cuántos años puedo tener en la foto, puedo decir que su codo se apoya justo en el nacimiento de mi espalda y sus dedos se pierden en mi pelo. ¿Qué edad hay que tener para que el antebrazo de tu madre tenga la exacta medida de tu torso?" (Marta Dillon, *Aparecida* 11)

with the consequences of the dictatorship ran in parallel. In this chapter I investigate some of the works that are part of this cultural field, seeing particularly in the visual expressions of these practices a specific configuration of images.

Things Told and Cinema

La historia oficial (The Official Story)

The first massive platform for an alternative and narrative representation of the past was film. Films from the 1980s, such as *La historia oficial* (*The Official Story*; dir. Luis Puenzo, 1985) and *La noche de los lápices* (*The Night of the Pencils*; dir. Héctor Olivera, 1986), had a significant impact on public opinion, in part because of their linear, conventional or "realistic" narrative and their educational intention, despite the fact that they were works of fiction. When the filming of *La historia oficial* began, the dictatorship was still in power, although in crisis after its defeat in the Malvinas War. It is the story of a family: a middle-class woman (Alicia) married to a businessman (Roberto) whose business flourished during the dictatorship. Alicia begins to discover that her daughter is one of the stolen children and that the biological parents of her adopted daughter were among the disappeared. The form of this progressive "discovery" can be described as a metaphorical journey that the woman makes from her domestic sphere (rooted in a general sense of protection and safety, common sense, and conventionality) towards a disturbing outside. This outside (the central streets of the city and the school where she works, a sphere of new ideas and news) turns out to be liberating. The military regime is collapsing and other voices and other messages are beginning to be heard on the streets. Alicia understands that her husband (a collaborator with the military) is involved in the theft of the girl. Significantly, Alicia is a history teacher and what she mechanically and dogmatically transmits to her students is the "official story" of the nation. The students begin to question this version of the past and the teacher's authority gradually begins to waver, as do her convictions. The film promotes a historical review of the nation's past, stimulated by the memory of the recent past. Significant inconsistencies begin to emerge between her domestic world (as a mother and wife) and her professional world (as a teacher). In what was still at that time a bold act, Alicia contacts the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The conflict – at the core of which is the true origin of her adopted daughter – is resolved in a violent altercation with her husband. The fight results in the couple's separation and the beginning of a new life for Alicia. Interestingly, this film anticipates many issues that will only be debated later in Argentina. The film addresses, for example, the complicity of the state's civilian "technicians" and the controversial role played by the church in those years, that is to say, the civil fabric of the military dictatorship. In a certain sense, the adoptive mother's experience is seen as the experience of the Argentine population: she (re)discovers herself as an involuntary accomplice of the murderers. But the most interesting part of the personal and political changes she underwent is the scenes in which Alicia, still listening to the moving first-hand account of her best friend (a victim of repression and exile), seems to refuse to listen, seeming to want to close herself off from the intolerable truth. We understand that Alicia refuses to accept what she probably already knows deep down. The film tells the story of an awakening, Alicia's awakening to memory and social commitment. This awakening bursts the protected bubble of her domestic life. The world (the unnameable past) ultimately invades the house, and its effect is devastating. The problem with this film is perhaps that it promotes a relatively reassuring version of the story that exempts most people from any responsibility for the narrated events. In a way, its plot alludes to a past that is horrific, but that is already in the process of being overcome. It displays inevitable critical potential regarding the recent past, but it redirects this potential towards a desired democratic balance. It favours an interpretation of the past as the irrational struggle between two violent extremes in a sphere beyond that of a defenceless and innocent population, the struggle between "two demons" (the Armed Forces and the guerrillas) that supposedly destroyed democracy together, before the eyes of a dismayed and impotent majority. However, due to Alicia's shifts between suspicion and denial, and her winding path towards the recognition of the true dimension of the country's historical drama and its impact on the family, this film continues to be an essential work of reference in the debates on the transmission of the past.

Things Told and the Children's Films

In the transitional or post-dictatorship stage, the public transmission of an unresolved past was brought to a halt (under Carlos Menem's administration, with the Full Stop laws that pardoned the military). This situation was reversed during the second half of the 1990s, especially due to the public statements made by repentant agents (Scilingo) and the emergence of the organization HIJOS, created in 1995. At the core of this organization were children of the disappeared. The acronym HIJOS stands for *Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (*Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence*) and the organization's goal was to demand that the state ensure the prosecution and punishment of those responsible for crimes against humanity, who were free under the Law of Due Obedience and the Full Stop Law. They gave a public voice to a new kind of social demand for memory, as well as to a renewed curiosity and fascination that directly interpellated them. Their relationship with the recent past, however, is obviously very different from that of the survivors. Affected by a sort of *sui generis* orphanhood, the children of the disappeared (especially those born in captivity) have little direct memory of their parents, or of the circumstances of their disappearance. Many of them grew up with other families, sometimes military families. It is this contradictory field of images, denunciations and practices of memory that allows them to undertake a renewed process of discovery and self-knowledge. The young people grouped together in HIJOS carried out a more forceful activism than that of their predecessors. They invented new forms of social pressure such as *escraches* (demonstrations in front of the home or workplace of a pardoned criminal or torturer to draw attention to his crimes), which were imitated in many other countries. Films such as *Los rubios* (*The Blonds*; dir. Albertina Carri, 2003), the medium-length *Papá Iván* (*Daddy Iván*; dir. María Inés Roqué, 2000), and *M* (dir. Nicolás Prividera, 2007) were produced during this period. Other examples are novels such as *La casa de los conejos* (*The Rabbits' House*; Laura Alcoba, 2008) and the literary and performative works of Félix Bruzzone (since 2008), as well as montages of Lucila Quieto and Gabriela Bettini (Pighin).[93] They are all works that entailed important changes to what could be called "the imaginary of loss". These works take other angles of reflection and tend to diverge from the binary victim-perpetrator framework, exploring and questioning the role of society itself during state terrorism. In referring to the cultural and political products of these *children*, many commentators resort to Marianne Hirsch's concept of *post-memory* (*Generation of Postmemory*). Post-memory takes shape when the memories of one generation acquire such force in the lives of the subsequent generation that the latter experiences them as their own. Here, Hirsch refers to a supposed second generation of Holocaust survivors, that is to say, to their children and even their grandchildren. Ernst van Alphen ("Second-Generation Testimony") questions this hypothesis. For van Alphen, it is debatable whether one can speak of "generation" and especially of "memory" in this context. In his opinion, post-memory should not be interpreted as a subsequent memory but as a situation that emerges after memory. According to van Alphen, Hirsch confused the strong connection felt by the children of survivors and their desire to learn about their parents' traumatic past with a *sui generis*

[93] Felix Bruzzone wrote stories in anthologies, magazines and media that were published in different parts of the world: *76* (story collection published in 2007), *Los topos* (*The moles*; 2008), *Barrefondo* (*Bottom Sweeper*; 2010) and *Las chanchas* (*The pigs*; 2014).

form of memory. What interests me in this debate is van Alphen's emphasis on the ultimately unintelligible character of the past (which is certainly relevant in the case of the children of the disappeared). For van Alphen, the difference between traumatic experience and transmissible experience is as radical as it is insurmountable. HIJOS (those who express themselves in political and cultural terms as children of the disappeared) have found at a certain point in their lives that they have received a difficult inheritance. They live under a different political and semiotic regime and their passion (or that of many of them) for engaging with their parents' past, from their current biographical condition, involves recognizing this insurmountable difference. On the other hand, they need to invent (in the sense of *creating*) their own relationship with that parental absence. The children (HIJOS) are obviously not driven to this need by personal memories but by the set of cultural mediations (or *space of images*) previously created or promoted by protest movements in relation to the recent past. What they did was modify the scene, reappropriate that legacy and those images and create new ones. At the core of their public interventions on the streets were the *escraches*: they carried them out through noisy demonstrations, graffiti, and new slogans and chants. HIJOS managed to develop new spaces of expression for this unique generational group and did so by using artistic devices that displayed their ways of rethinking the past. Although the children of the disappeared, those detained, or those in exile were at the core of this movement, many important works were produced by artists who did not have such a direct link with state terrorism (possibly indicating a generational affinity). Examples of these hybrid groupings around HIJOS were the *Grupos de Arte Callejero* (GAP; *Street Art Groups*) and the *Colectivo Situación*.

The leaders of the HIJOS movement obviously did not take part in the demonization of their elders and even though many of them assumed they were continuing the militancy of their parents, they did not practise a naive heroization either. What is interesting about their emergence on the scene of Argentine culture and politics is that they operate consciously from the present. They did not aim to reproduce the trauma, as was often the case with the previous generation of those affected. Rather, they distanced themselves from previously established discourses (often conditioned by the need to consolidate democracy) and from the melancholic atmosphere that characterized the previous generation. They seek their own approach, separate from the figure of the innocent victim needed by public opinion to foster compassion. They take on a new agency that leads them to investigate, review, accuse and create. What they contribute is a new insolence, developing strategies of representation linked to humour, irony, and self-fiction. In the film *Los rubios*, for example, the reconstruction of truthful and intimate knowledge about the main character's parents is hindered by the subjective chaos in the testimonies, the contradictory versions, and the confusion regarding identity that affects the main character herself (the "daughter"). Unlike *La historia oficial,* the film *Los rubios* is halfway between a work of fiction and a documentary. Although it includes direct sources (such as the oral testimonies of the parents' neighbours and comrades) it openly shows the seams of its fictional operations. Most notably, it includes an actress who represents the main character, but with whom she discusses the alternatives of the search on camera. A group of young people appear on stage carrying out a kind of wild investigation into the remains of the past. The entire crew comes together in a van. Their interviews are obtained virtually by assault and the editing is practically carried out in an assembly-like manner. The result of this investigation is not a recovery; it is rather the certification of an irremediable loss, discovering that no origin can be reconstructed. What is offered to the viewer is not an exhaustive and much less transparent narrative about the life of the protagonist's parents.

The first instance of mockery of the possibilities of memory is in the title. The director's family, her parents and her sisters were called "los rubios" (the blonds) by the residents of the neighbourhood in which they lived when they were kidnapped. But none of the family members were blond. This name was related more to the bewilderment caused by the family of newcomers in the neighbourhood than to the actual colour of their hair. Her parents were "foreigners" in the neighbourhood. Now the film crew that returns to the scene of the tragedy and assaults the same neighbours with questions and demands also causes bewilderment in the neighbourhood. It is the same bewilderment felt by the children when they visit the scene of their parents' lives without having experienced the events that influenced them. This is why the director has the entire crew wear blond wigs. Albertina Carri seems to suggest that the best fidelity is a creative form of infidelity to the past. None of the testimonies of survivors who either idealize their parents or turn everything into a political analysis can fill the children's void. There does not seem to be an empathic reaction to the representatives of the previous generation, the direct protagonists of those events. The main character is unable to unravel the enigma of that hole in her personal life that no testimony can reconstruct. *Los rubios* is a film with more questions than answers. The result is the continuation of the same perplexity by other means. The film shows both the desire and the epochal estrangement of a generation with respect to the previous one. It is an estrangement that confronts her generation, that of the children, with that of her parents, somehow deconstructing certain persistent myths of leftist militancy. But above all, this film is based on the discursive and cultural schism that separates her from her disappeared parents, the *change of epoch* that was promoted by the dictatorship itself, among many other factors, and which has rendered the parents' discursive legacy unintelligible for their daughter. At the same time, this controversial film rethinks the relationship between the personal and the political, the emotional and the documentary, and is thus part of a new political beginning that has only just begun.

In relation to the inaccessibility of the past, it is interesting to note the plot of the film *M* (2007) by Nicolás Prividera, the son of a disappeared woman (Marta Sierra), which is in some ways like that of a detective story. Nicolás himself investigates his mother's story with all the resources available to him: from direct testimonies and relevant scientific literature to the information recorded by human rights organizations, and he does so with impeccable logic. Unlike in *Los Rubios* and *Papá Iván*, the investigator does not confront his own generational environment with that of his parents as if they were incompatible. He shows the discomfort and the differences or disagreements but insists on establishing a dialogue. And he does this through an exhaustive use of the available archive. He not only investigates the facts of the disappearance but also the logic of the political choices made by his mother and her comrades. What he finds, however, are mostly obscurities, not only because of the silence of the state and the incompleteness and disorder of the files available, but also because those who are supposed to know – the survivors, witnesses, relatives, or acquaintances of his mother – provide him with a relatively meagre account, full of omissions, things that had been incompletely heard, anonymous rumours, contradictory accounts, and inexplicably forgotten information. *M* is a film about the singular architecture of the silence in which not only the state participated, both during and after the dictatorship, but also the surviving victims, or protagonists, themselves. They show partial knowledge affected by the fact that they were in hiding, which had imposed opaque formulas of communication, by oblivion, and even by guilt. The investigator enquires, searches, asks, reviews, and discusses, but his tenacity and discipline in forging a path or making a clearing in the confusing mass of data and rumours become entangled in the impenetrable clumps of silence, oblivion, and complicity that grow around the commemorative plaques. And although *M* does not make concessions or idealize leftist militancy, it does not lose its way in defining the true responsibilities for the killings, nor does it refrain from showing the remnants of the social fabric that sustained the struggles of the past. The film manages to show the impossibility of a totalizing story, but nevertheless attempts to give political meaning to the experience.

All of these films changed the image that had been cultivated by the compassionate atmosphere that the tabloid media had created around the children of the disappeared. With these works and this change of tone, the children took on a new agency. Their radical artistic practices focus not so much on evoking the details of past violence, but on investigating its causes.

The Current Cinema of Memory: Rojo (Red)

The children have managed to displace the discourse of victimization and sacralization of democracy rooted in the political era of the post-dictatorship, and critically address the values of the previous generation. The film *Rojo*, directed by Benjamin Naishtat, is perhaps a prime example of current concerns about memory. Released in 2018, *Rojo* is set in a disturbing retrospective. The time of the dictatorship cannot close in on itself, and *Rojo* is re(set) before the coup: in the film, it is 1975 (one year before the coup). The "democratic" government of Isabel Perón had entrusted the army with the task of eradicating the guerrillas and, at the same time, the entire fabric of social protest. The government directly organized clandestine paramilitary actions. This entails the first significant displacement in the hegemonic discourse of memory, because the plot begins and ends during this period, practically presenting it as the "natural" fate of a sick society. The opening sequence of the film focuses on the front of a house, which the still camera shows as a "frozen" shot. The house seems to be closed, with the blinds drawn. A few seconds later, the door opens from the inside, and people start to come out of the house, removing different objects from it. One person is carrying a mirror, another is carrying a television set, and a woman is seen taking out a cart full of objects, etc. At first, the viewer thinks they are watching a move, but it quickly becomes clear that these people who are leaving the house in different directions, carrying all of these objects, do not return, nor do they know each other or live in the house.

A few sequences later, the scene is completed: the camera takes us inside the house, no longer empty, but "emptied". The viewer sees the remains of a looted house or, rather, a house in the process of being dismantled: broken objects and drawers scattered on the floor where a mess was made of what seems to have been a family photo album. The traces of blood suggest that the house was not emptied by its own owners, but that what took place was involuntary and violent. An entire family has disappeared. The neighbours take advantage of the situation to steal things. And the atmosphere on the street is disturbingly calm: *as if nothing had happened*. This simulation – *as if nothing had occurred...* – is mirrored in a macabre certainty: people can "disappear" with "nothing" being disrupted. There are people who are "disappearable" and no one seems to be shocked, on the contrary.

The ad for the film says “When everyone is silent, no one is innocent”. The film uncompromisingly shows a pattern of social behaviour that resulted in civil complicity – albeit passive – with the repressive violence. There are “extras” who prolong the dispossession of the disappeared bodies, becoming small beneficiaries of the repressive activity. The theme of the benefit, denial and concealment permeates the plot at different levels. The film’s plot develops on the basis of the profound consequences of a trivial altercation between a lawyer with a placid lifestyle and a supposed desperate, suicidal victim of political persecution who provokes him. The altercation ends with a confusing episode in which the lawyer ends up killing the deranged militant and hides his body. Towards the end of the film the investigator who discovers the crime forgives the main character, since, after all, the victim was one of those eliminable beings that Agamben has referred to as a *homo sacer,* resorting to an ancient figure of Roman law (*Homo Sacer*). At the same time, the main character establishes a relationship with a businessman who proposes that they create a business partnership. The business consists of appropriating the abandoned house. There is a circularity between indifference – to what is known – and denial – of what is seen. In this film, the conventional middle-class family survives the disturbing signs that seem to announce a catastrophe by adapting to them. In fact, these small businessmen benefit from state terror, in terms of their lifestyle and standard of living. Once impunity is established, everyone ends up benefiting from it in one way or another as life becomes stained with red. Only a few of the characters directly affected by the silent disappearance of their loved ones become part of the group of unbalanced or depressed people. They are patients who are separated from the management of affairs.

It is the definitive triumph of instrumental relationships, the implosion of politics. The long opening sequence seems to show from the beginning a society that is willing to benefit from the crumbs left from the loot of the victors. This new perspective, which is fascinated by the coexistence between daily life and terror, by the “banality of evil” (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*), and which bitingly explores the affective indifference and civil complicities of terror, is the one shared by a large part of the creators of the second generation.

Things Told: Montage and Dismounting

Family Photomontages

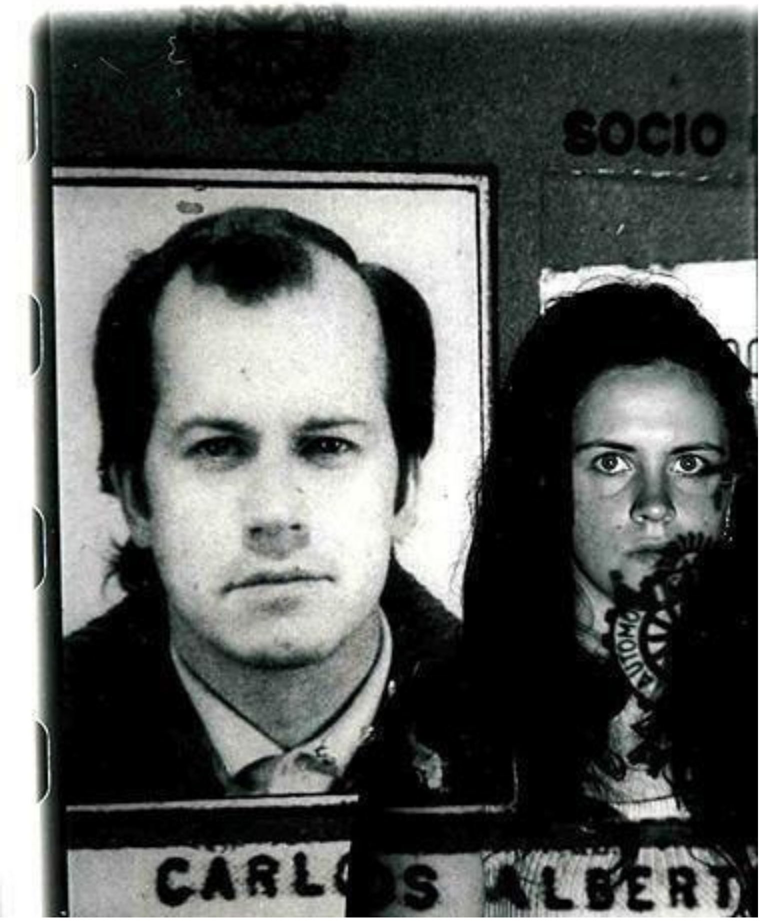

Fig. 1. Lucila Quieto. Image from the series *Arqueología de la ausencia* (*Archaeology of Absence*). 2004.

A specific case of the forms of visual transmission of memory was the role of the family album. It is almost inevitable for the starting point for transmission to be the nuclear family, because the victims are always someone's children, spouses, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts. One of Angela Keppler's studies, cited by Astrid Erll, maintains that the transmission of family memory is not based so much on the consistency of "things told" as on the weight of the continuity of practices of memory of shared memory.[94] Works that allude to the recent past are often presented as family stories. But these stories (the things told) have their own grammar, specific to series that give an account of family gatherings or parties, rites such as marriage or baptisms, holiday and birthday photos, and smiling faces that

[94] "Family memory is, thus, a dynamic context-dependent construction that can change considerably over time as well as according to different settings and audiences" (Erll 313).

are still unaware of *what we know*. Although they are often far from being linear histories in chronological order, they set out the personal history. To account for the essential discrepancy between the (non)representations of the state and those of the family album, between the domestic traces of the disappeared and their inapprehensible absence, many artists resorted to anachronism, figurative dislocation, or the alteration of the sequential order. These forms are more than the expression of an avant-garde intention: they are the affective and aesthetic evidence of a fundamental unintelligibility.

The children of the disappeared are a group of people who, as adults, inherit the materials or mediations (visual representations, narrations, documents) that their elders had gathered to allude to their parents' disappearance. Suddenly forced to deal with a mysterious past and driven to explore it, they experience this late reunion with unknown and missing parents as a distressing chronological chaos.

A good example of this new sensitivity can be seen, for example, in Lucila Quieto's work where the daughter's face is superimposed on that of the father, using photographs in which they are both the same age. The selected images belong to the series *Arqueología de la ausencia (Archeology of Absence*), which the artist presented in 2004. It is a composition of 35 images related to 13 visual narratives. The author is a daughter of disappeared parents and undertook to represent an encounter between parents and children through montage techniques. She used the projection of the photos of the family album on the wall on which the children posed, achieving a compositional unity between bodies and unknown times. In Quieto's series, the photos present the absent or "absented" person, who appears next to a current picture of their surviving daughter or son (fig. 1).[95] The photos enact an impossible encounter and evoke the famous nineteenth-century spiritualist photos in which the deceased loved one appeared next to a current portrait in the form of a ghost. In the photo included as an example, the spectral figure, embodied in the shadow or silhouette seen on the right side of the photo, is not that of the disappeared mother, who appears clearly in the centre of the photo, but that of the daughter at her current age (fig. 2). Without concealing the artificiality of the procedures, the photographs are presented as montages and reconstructions, as aesthetic-political forms of intervention in the construction of memories: "I am always reconstructing myself, reconstructing the story that created me," said the artist (qtd. in

[95] Jorge Julio López (1929–2006) was a former detainee of the last military dictatorship. He participated in the Truth Trials, which opened in 1998. After the annulment of the impunity laws in 2003, López testified as a victim and witness in the trial for crimes against humanity in which the repressor Miguel Etchecolatz was sentenced to life imprisonment. López disappeared one day before the sentencing.

Fortuny, *Memorias fotográficas* 89). This kind of intervention represents *an impossible encounter* in a time that cannot be the past or the future but *a utopian time* in which parents and children often meet at the same age, or children are even older than their parents ever were.

The series created by Gerardo Dell'Oro was titled *Imágenes en la Memoria* (*Images in Memory*) and was presented in 2008 at the Museum of Art and Memory in the city of La Plata. Gerardo Dell'Oro's exhibition reflects various stages of the search in the private setting of family life, and in the social-political setting in which a witness – Julio López – appears, who is willing to testify on the disappearance of his sister, Patricia Dell'Oro. The use of the photo card is updated in these interventions and is combined with the old symbolic universe created by the Mothers. Twenty or thirty years later, children and brothers resort to the use of the silhouettes of the disappeared to intervene in images. In fig. 3, we see a recast of pre-existing symbolic elements: the passport photo in the foreground, the silhouettes in the background, and the artist's hand fusing both planes, holding the photo of his sister.

Fig. 2. Lucila Quieto. Image from the series *Arqueología de la ausencia* (*Archaeology of Absence*). The photo is of the detained and disappeared mother of an activist of the group HIJOS, represented by the shadow. 2004.

Fig. 3. Gerardo Dell'Oro. Image from the series *Imágenes en la Memoria* (*Images in Memory*). The ID photo belongs to Patricia Dell'Oro, the artist's sister, who was detained and disappeared. 2008.

The disappeared will never cease to be such; they are without absence or existence. Like the impossible time in which the children pretend to meet their parents, the extravagant archive of the Mothers would be the exceptional ontological surface where the existence of the disappeared can continue to assert itself. In this context, it would be convenient to review the way in which Déotte ponders what "makes an epoch" and defines the current one as the "epoch of disappearances":

> We will present the hypothesis that our era, much more than an epoch open to trench warfare and its "unknown" soldiers, the genocides of totalitarianism, the massive bombings of cities and the terrorist policies of the State, can be referred to as an 'era of disappearance'. But what is the event of the disappearance, since by definition there were no witnesses? (*La época* 32)

The author argues that more than historical events or works, it is the conditions of appearance that define an epoch. The conditions of appearance presuppose a relationship with time and are configured by an *appareillé* or "technical device" like film, photography, digital video, or the museum. The device not only makes it possible to reproduce the forms of existence and those of appearance in general, but it is the condition of their transformation. One of the promises of the visual device is related to the acquisition of political rights that are also aesthetic rights: when what was rendered invisible appears, it is exposed in a new distribution of the sensory world. The political potential of the Mothers' archive would then be precisely that of challenging the state and the media's rate, forms, and priorities of appearance. In this regard, it could be said that the photograph is also a form of resistance to the law: the disappeared existed and the photographed faces "are awaiting the same thing: the name of the person who was present" (Déotte, "El arte").

Fig. 4. Gabriele Bettini. Image from the series *Recuerdos inventados* (*Invented Memories*). 2002–2003.

Recuerdos inventados (*Invented Memories*), the series of photomontages created by Gabriela Bettini (born in Madrid in 1977, the daughter of a couple in exile and the granddaughter and niece of disappeared people) goes a step beyond the figuration of these impossible encounters. Like Quieto, Bettini belongs to a generation of artists who deliberately show the artifice of their compositions, although her techniques are more reminiscent of the photostory. Bettini exasperates and multiplies referential games, allusions, and anachronisms, combining a certain playful frivolity with hard data. In fig. 4, the artist shows a photographic composition that not only superimposes the past with the present, but depicts, on the basis of this discrepancy, an impossible dialogue with her disappeared grandfather. It is a scene of "things told", a family scene. But it is the granddaughter who seems to be telling her grandfather of the circumstances in which he was tragically implicated: his own disappearance. On this basis, the games with the past and memory multiply, widening the gap between the past and the present even further and rendering it strangely sinister. The photo of the disappeared person is properly framed, as if that frame contained the potential for social and political disorder that these faces have had in public space. The scene suggests a normal relationship of succession between generations in a middle-class family. However, the surreal dialogue between the granddaughter and the portrait of her grandfather is precisely about the *Nunca Más* (*Never Again*) report, which she appears to be showing him. It should be noted that the *Nunca Más* report, or "Sábato report", is the first systematic work commissioned by a government on the crimes of the dictatorship and one of the best-known official accounts of state terrorism. The disappeared person observes, perhaps, his own name in the report, with an attitude of curiosity and reflection. What increases the strangeness of the scene is its placidness. It is as if *nothing had ever happened*. Family members are the first people with whom we experience life and with whom we remember (Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents"; Erll 303). It is in the family environment where exemplary events and stories are transmitted, as well as the cognitive frameworks that allow us to organize them. This makes the family one of the first social frames of reference of collective memory (333). However, the family should not be understood as a kind of isolated and self-sufficient bubble, but precisely as the intersection between the public and the private. The composition of autobiographical memories draws material from the vague contours between what is shared and what is one's own, the inherited and the experienced.[96] One of the obvious obstacles to the comprehensive transmission of memories related to disappearance is that they are difficult to transfer as a lived experience or an account of the lived experience and can often only be externalized as trauma or as the impossibility of experience (van Alphen, "Second-Generation Testimony"). Bettini's montage fictionalizes this instance of a family account where family members speak placidly about the past. The disappeared grandfather is a militant of that time, a situation that associates him with the public sphere and, in general, with an anti-bourgeois and anti-familialist culture. In Bettini's composition, the character is reconsidered in his domesticity, returned or redirected to the fiction of the domestic sphere, to the artificial happiness of the family album and its orderly generational continuities. However, this family

[96] With regard to the question of family memory, see Aleida Assmann: "It is sometimes notoriously difficult to distinguish what one has experienced oneself from what one has been told and afterward incorporated into one's own stock of autobiographical memories. Similarly, what we have experienced ourselves and what we have read about or seen in films can be equally difficult to disentangle. Oral narratives, texts, and photographs are important props of autobiographical memory, which explains why the boundary between individual memory and shared material signs (such as texts and images) is not always easy to draw" (50). See also Erll: "[F]amilies function as 'mnemonic intersections' that can mediate, transmit, and transform cultural traditions. Halbwachs already hints at these questions when he maintains that family 'tends to interpret in its own manner the conceptions it borrows from society.' Such questions are increasingly raised in current social research on family memory" (308).

is precisely discussing the *Nunca Más* report, which tells of the opposite, that is to say, of a fatal disintegration.

Bettini's aesthetic is undoubtedly linked to the photographic language and surreal irony displayed by the photographer Grete Stern in *Los sueños* (*Dreams*), a series of photomontages published from 1948 to 1951 in the magazine *Idilio*, directed by Gino Germani.[97] In Stern's work, she plays with the photonovela, psychoanalysis, and advertising. Women are shown in their conventional roles, locked in the family, marital and patriarchal cage, but desiring and pointing in an encrypted and oneiric manner to an unspeakable liberation.

Bettini's compositions also evoke domestic environments with a surreal atmosphere, but not to subvert them in an oneiric way, as in Stern's work, but to reconstruct them as an ironic memory trap. On the one hand, Bettini's work shows the tension between fiction and document that is part of an age-old dispute in the field of photography, and on the other, she brings into play three superimposed time periods or eras: the period of terror (the dictatorship), the literature of the 1980s about that terror (the *Nunca Más* report), and her own era (the present). The contradictory combination of all of these references suggests disordered time periods, an encounter of opposites, and archives in disarray. In this regard, what returns on the face of the disappeared is not the past or melancholy, but a future justice, "justice in the form of a general disorder of image and time", says Luis Ignacio García somewhat enigmatically (*La comunidad en montaje* 65). Bettini's theatrical productions show the impossibility of an explanatory or reintegrating sequential narrative providing meaning, exhibiting the artificial and performative dimension of memory. By attaching pantomime to documentary data and connecting the traces of political frenzy to the classic family scene, Bettini's work shows an alternative path for the transmission of the past: in order to tell *things*, one has to invent memories.

[97] Grete Stern. *Los sueños 1948–1951*. 2013, Fundación Malba. The *Los sueños* series was published from 1948 to 1951 on the "Psychoanalysis will help you" page in the magazine *Idilio* (Editorial Abril). The photomontages illustrated the analysis of dreams that the readers of the magazine submitted to the editorial department, interpreted by the sociologist Gino Germani, director of *Idilio*. About 150 compositions were published. During the first year, Grete Stern photographed almost all of the photomontages before submitting them. Today only 46 negatives from a private collection remain.

Esquina militarizada (Militarised corner)

Fig. 5. *Esquina militarizada* (*Militarised Corner*). September 17, 1976, *Clarín* newspaper.

In addition to the use of photomontages (Quieto, Bettini), the transmission of traumatic events linked to the period of the dictatorship can take the opposite route: the *dismantling* of a photograph. This is the case of one of the most emblematic photographic images of the period: *Esquina militarizada*. It was captured on September 17, 1976, at a corner in Buenos Aires and was published by the pro-dictatorship and collaborationist newspaper *Clarín*.[98] The image shows a disturbing visual triangulation between a man with a shopping bag standing in a corner and about to cross the street, flanked by three armed soldiers *behind him* in a position of surveillance. The centrality of this composition seems to be accentuated by the effect of the upper walls of the building pointing in the shape of an arrow towards the man standing at the corner. On the periphery of the scene on the right, a girl can be seen standing on the threshold of the adjoining building. Her position is partially concealed by the entrance of the house. The

[98] See Pittaluga's analysis in "Imágenes (d)e historia. Una mirada sobre los fragmentos visuales de la última dictadura en Argentina" ("Images (of) and History. A Look at the Visual Fragments of the Last Dictatorship in Argentina"; 2014). The newspaper *Clarín* was one of the media outlets that supported the coup. It is a national newspaper and one of the most widely read in the country. The date of the photograph appears in the archive of the newspaper's publications.

bodies are located on a background of closed shutters and an illuminated plane that, by the distribution of its shadows, announces the hours of nightfall. In 1976, this image was intended to convey a sense of protection and safety, a safety provided to citizens by the military in the public space. Today – 44 years later – the same image subjected to the passage of time subverts the meaning of its original (con)text. Uncomfortable questions arise: what or whom are the soldiers "waiting for"? Whatever it is, it is a threat that is located off camera, underscoring the indeterminacy of that enemy of the nation, whose constant spectral presence legitimizes the Armed Forces' actions. But then there is a certain instability in the image: how do we interpret the old man's posture of strange "normality"? Does he know what is happening behind his back? Is he not looking directly at the mysterious threat that justifies the soldiers' postures of combat? Does he not run the risk of being caught in the crossfire? How is the military deployment to be understood if the image is intended to suggest an atmosphere of tranquillity on a typical Buenos Aires street? The tension between the supposed serenity of the passerby and the military deployment suggests an urban setting where these poles coexist without conflict. And what is more, the military deployment is supposed to ensure the peace of mind of the old man and the girl (whose attitude of curiosity from her hiding place could convey the idea of a game). The distribution of the bodies, the soldiers' posture, and the combination of military and everyday elements lead to an association between this image and scenes such as those that have been brought to us more recently, by the press, of US soldiers stationed in Iraq, filmed while they alternated with civilians who they were supposedly protecting. The behaviour of the man and that of the girl "are no longer contradicted by a danger shown in the posture of the soldiers, but rather they are the consequence of a habitual military presence that is exhibited, but that is read as protection against the threat" (Pittaluga, "Imágenes (d)e historia" 12). When the photograph is removed from its initial medium (a newspaper that supported the dictatorship) and read "against the grain", the assumptions may be different: the military presence in the city is shown and normalized; violence itself is normalized. The civilians are literally *exposed* to the regularity of this violence and isolated and powerless before it. The old man on the corner is not protected from terror but is *subjected* to terror. His posture indicates that the alleged enemy is absent, and thus the military paraphernalia behind his back has no other purpose than to display military possession of the territory. The girl is used to the military, but she watches the deployment from her improvised hideout. Both embody a new subjective figure illuminated by the *state of terror* as a general atmosphere. The old structures of coexistence have been dismantled, and the collective transmission of political experiences, interrupted. The individual is alone before the power of the state (at its mercy) and adapts and submits to the situation trying to go unnoticed, practising a forced indifference (which the girl is unable to sustain).

No image is innocent. Every photograph is staged in some way. The point of view, the luminosity, the field that the photo captures, the position of the bodies – all of these details are significant. Those that are not perceived at first glance are also important: on the right side of the photo, a fragment of the windowsill can be discerned. This is evidence that the person who took the photograph seems to have retreated into the house to take the photo from further behind, without exposing himself entirely at the window, as would have been more logical to do if the intention was to capture the whole scene. The photographer steps back to take the photograph and this detail reveals a certain caution or fear that perhaps constitutes the true *Stimmung* of the situation.

Fig. 6. A sign reads "Carnicería La Perla" ("La Perla Butcher Shop"). September 17, 1976, magnification of fig. 5.

In the central part of the background of the image there is a poster that is illegible in its normal format. The enlarged image shows the name of a business: "Carnicería La Perla" ("La Perla Butcher Shop"; fig. 6). The inevitable instability of the signifiers seems to have played a dirty trick on the official newspaper. Today we know that *La Perla* is the infamous name of a clandestine detention centre, an important part of the methodical organization of military *butchery*. No one had noticed the coincidence until a college student drew his professors' attention to this detail. It was perhaps only then that the propagandistic photo in the newspaper *Clarín* finally revealed its intimate secret.

The Instability of The Past

> *The individual should be allowed to feel as much anguish as warranted by reality", said Adorno thirty years ago, on reflecting on whether an education that could prevent a new Auschwitz was possible. But, is it possible to learn from that which is unique? A repetition of the holocaust as carried out by the Nazis is not foreseeable. Something worse could happen: the aestheticization of daily occurrences could erase the memory of the tragic element that constitutes us.* (Héctor Schmucler, *La memoria* 116)[99]

Fig. 7. Nicolás Guagnini. *30,000*. 1999, Parque de la Memoria (Memory Park).

Fig. 7 shows a sculpture located in the Parque de la Memoria in the city of Buenos Aires, on the banks of the Río de la Plata. It was created by Nicolás Guagnini. In 1999, the artist painted an enlarged photo of his disappeared father on 25 two-meter-high metal blocks, symmetrically grouped together on a grid, on which they are arranged at a distance of half a meter from each other, together forming a cube. His father's face is painted on the angles, based on a diagonal projection of his photograph on the vertices of the blocks. It is one of the unmistakable black and white portraits of the faces of the disappeared (it is an image of the

[99] "Al individuo debería permitírsele tener tanta angustia como merece la realidad", afirmaba Adorno hace treinta años al pensar si era posible una educación que pudiera evitar un nuevo Auschwitz. Pero, ¿es posible aprender de aquello que es único? No es previsible la repetición del holocausto a la manera nazi. Puede ocurrir algo peor: que la estetización de lo cotidiano borre el recuerdo de lo trágico que nos constituye" (Héctor Schmucler, *La memoria* 116).

image, a documentary ID photo taken from the archive of the disappeared). Although Guagnini portrays his own father, the artwork is titled *30,000*. The borders between the family space and the public space are thus shifted. Private and non-transferable suffering becomes part of a collective and communicable suffering. The work has its own dynamism, which profoundly alters the criteria associated with contemplation (a fixed point of view, unidirectionality, stillness). But above all, there will never be a definitive image that "the thing" can convey – not only because the image is essentially ambiguous, but also because it is subject to wear. Perhaps what is most significant about this artwork is that its visibility depends on the position of the viewer. It is the viewer who must leave the stillness (of the present) and move around the sculpture to find the "authentic" face (of the disappeared, of the past). The image can appear and disappear or be distorted, twisted, or cropped according to how the viewer's body is positioned. This "walking around the image" to discover it highlights the unstable nature of photography, which reveals and conceals, promises and disappoints. The image is "made" by walking, and changes with each step.[100] The point at which the spectator encounters the face of the disappeared person belongs to an "ideal point of view", in a very delicate balance that is always threatened and always uncomfortable. What is interesting about this work is that it metaphorically exhibits the problems of visuality. Seeing is not just opening your eyes. Seeing is mediation; it is *praxis*.

To See or Not to See: That is the Question

The thing is first and very clearly formulated by the words of the dictator Videla when, in response to questions by foreign journalists, he explained that the state can answer for the living or the dead, but not for a disappeared person, as this word refers to a *non-entity*. The first transmissible form of the *thing* was paradoxically a supposed "hole" in the state archive. The repressive productivity of this hole consisted of a strange knowledge that was spread among the population. Or perhaps, rather, a *not-knowing* that nevertheless operated silently and productively on the humour or the mood of the population, causing certain types of questions to be avoided, inhibiting attitudes (of criticism, curiosity, or protest), or promoting others (obedience, discretion), extending an atmosphere of condemnation, as vague as it was generic, of dissent. The hole in the state archive naturalized ways of saying and keeping silent, of seeing and not seeing, of hearing without hearing. One need only listen to the

[100] Luis Ignacio García refers to the constructivist character of this montage: "Memory as 'anamorphosis': only the arduous work of the "gaze" makes it possible for the object to be seen, and once obtained, a small slip, a moment of distraction, would suffice for it to disappear again" (*La comunidad en montaje* 52).

subsequent testimonies of neighbours who lived so close to the clandestine detention centres that they could hear the screams of those tortured or see mysterious vehicles regularly entering and exiting, transporting people who were never again seen alive. Did they hear them? Did they see them? And, consequently, did they know what was happening? It depends on what we understand by seeing and hearing and their relationship with consciousness. It is impossible for them not to have heard or seen them. However, those sounds and images, in a profound sense, were not actually heard or seen. They were images and sounds that could not be organized as a shareable or communicable experience. In this sense, it is very interesting to note what van Alphen writes about the relationship between seeing and understanding in the testimonies of the Holocaust. While the enlightened tradition grants epistemological status to vision, closely associating visual impressions with comprehension, certain testimonies show that this relationship is not so obvious ("Caught by images" 207). The witnesses who were victims of the universe of the Nazis' concentration camps saw things (atrocities) that they could not intellectively organize. It was a seeing that did not "see" and that could be *relived*, but not explained. Notwithstanding the incommensurable distance between these extreme experiences and the strange experience of the neighbours of Argentine clandestine detention centres, it could be said that Argentine society during the dictatorship was subject to a sensory or perceptual regime that prevented the connection of sensory impressions with their intellective processing. The regime even naturalized certain types of emotions (unspeakable fear, sentimentality, national pride, consumerist enthusiasm, joy in the format of the media and advertising), and inhibited others (such as emotions linked to the experience of solidarity, politics, or collective mourning). The dictatorship imposed a certain regime of representations where what is not said, or what is only suggested, is just as important as what is openly proclaimed. And this also entails a type of emotional control, a specific distribution of the sensible. The political act of the Mothers was to open not only a new and fragile public space in this atonic world, but also, as previously mentioned, a certain *space of images*. It is this space (in a broad sense) that made it possible for a new regime of looking and feeling to emerge.

Images from Hell

The Mothers' images alluded to a radical discrepancy between the state archive and the family album.[101] Publicly opposing these two ways of organizing images was the Mothers' first political act. It was a political act in the sense that public space for opposition did not previously exist. The Mothers created it through strategies of transgression. The aim of the Mothers was not to make known something that was absolutely unknown. It was to bring the known out of the realm of rumours and hearsay; it was to publicly express what was intended to be expressed confusedly, in whispers and low tones. The drama of the disappearances did not have a narrative syntax during the dictatorship. Nor was there a sphere that would allow the emotional display that the events demanded. That is why the image of the disappeared was inevitably accompanied by silence and repetition, insistence and the circle. The photographic media publicly exhibited by the Mothers would paradoxically embody the "appearance" of the disappeared, opening the door to the visual and emotional production of what seemed to be simply invisible. Thus, the white headscarves and the ID photograph were constituted as violations of the grammar of power. But the transmission of the past is not a unilateral process: a generation does not directly or linearly transmit the contents of their lived experience to the next. The ways in which lived experiences are stored or encrypted in the body do not depend on the will of the person who suffered them. On the other hand, there are words that are no longer understood. There are holes in memory and intolerable memories. There are contexts that have disappeared along with their protagonists. There are factors that condition reception that depart from the established plan and new and unsuspected forms of communication. The ID photos of the disappeared, for example, were first evidence, visual documents, then a symbol of the struggles and, lastly, a basic material for artistic expression. The paradox of visuality in the evocation of the disappeared is also related to a long (mostly French) debate regarding the value of images as ways of representing horror. Luis Ignacio García asks the following, for example:

> We are faced with a problem that is a legacy (or rather, the legacy) characteristic of the previous century: that of the crisis of representation and the paradoxical demand that the unrepresentable be represented, that the unpronounceable be said and that the

[101] "The demand that the disappeared be returned alive" was a double demand, as it implicitly admitted the possibility of another – lifeless – appearance. In this duality, the slogan presented the problem of disappearance as the key problem: it named the constituent hole – if I may use this term – of the repressive design on the basis of which the regime intended to reshape an entire society" (Pittaluga, "Imágenes (d)e historia" 3).

> unimaginable be imagined. The paradox is clear: How can one attempt to make sense of the horrific annihilation of all meaning? How can one bear witness to such a traumatic experience, the forgetting of which would mean the impossibility of all culture, but whose representation may entail the vile and fetishistic attempt to usurp a void of which one can only bear witness from its own silence? (*Políticas de la memoria* 64; translated by Marisela Trevin)[102]

This question, which has been posed in relation to the representability of the Holocaust, and which centred in France on Claude Lanzmann, the director of the film *Shoah* (1985), has been answered in various ways by different authors (including Didi-Huberman, Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Rancière). The debate began with the photographs that were at the centre of a 2001 exhibition in Paris called *Mémoires du camp*.[103] These were photographs secretly taken by members of the *Sonderkommandos* of a group of women heading to the gas chambers and the cremation of bodies at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The photographs were taken at great risk and handed over to the Polish resistance. The title of Didi-Huberman's famous 2012 book that addresses this debate, *Images in Spite of All*, expresses in a condensed manner all of his reasoning and, by extension, the contours of the controversy (particularly with Gérard Wajcman).[104] Didi-Huberman defends in this work the value of exhibiting these photos in question, of putting them into play in the investigation of the past. It is true: no image can account for the Holocaust and any claim to the contrary would constitute a falsification and even blasphemy. But no image can be the whole of something. Images always tell a biased story. They have a necessarily fragmentary character. It is a *not-all* story that in this case was desperately intended to be transmitted to a possible future, crossing the boundaries of the present. The other objection would be that of the historian: the images of poor quality collected by members of the *Sonderkommandos* can only be partially useful as evidentiary documents. The problem is precisely in the "phenomenology" of the image

[102] "Nos hallamos ante un problema que es un legado (diríase el legado) característico del siglo que nos precede: el de la crisis de la representación y de la paradójica exigencia de representar, sin embargo, eso irrepresentable, de decir lo impronunciable, de imaginar lo inimaginable. La paradoja es patente: ¿cómo pretender otorgar algún sentido a la horrorosa aniquilación de todo sentido? ¿Cómo dar testimonio de una experiencia tan traumática cuyo olvido significaría la imposibilidad de toda cultura, pero cuya representación puede implicar la pretensión infame y fetichista de usurpar un vacío que sólo puede ser testimoniado desde su propio silencio?" (*Políticas de la memoria* 64)

[103] The exhibition, curated by Pierre Bonhomme and Clément Chéroux, was presented in Paris at the Hôtel de Sully from January 12 to March 25, 2001.

[104] The texts by Rancière and Didi-Huberman refer to Gérard Wajcman's position in "De La Croyance Photographique," *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 613, March–May 2001, p. 63.

(*Images in Spite of All* 36), that is to say, in the poor quality that tells us about the conditions in which it was produced. The dark blot of a failed shot or the off-centre image tells us of the photographer's anxiety, their hiding place, their hesitancy, and their courage. They are a substantial and decisive part of the history that is to be reconstructed. Reading them is not an act of curiosity: it is a duty to the witness, and in Didi-Huberman's terms (*Images in Spite of All*) and, of course, in terms of Benjamin ("On the Concept of History"), a task of redemption.

But there is something else: the action of taking these photos tells us about an agency. Our era has become reluctant to accept that agency (Inzaurralde 162–163). This is why the photos were cropped and re-framed, precisely removing from the original frame the black blot that reveals the difficulties and anxiety of the photographer, the agent, and focusing the image on the only characters of interest to the contemporary ethical approach to the past: the victim and the executioner. For his part, Jacques Rancière took Didi-Huberman's side in *The Emancipated Spectator*, particularly in the chapter entitled "The Intolerable Image". According to Rancière, these photos were never intended to represent the entire Shoah. What is concealed in this debate is a discrepancy regarding the hierarchies of representation, between evidence and testimony, image and narrative. For Rancière, Lanzmann's film, based on oral testimonies, is also made up of images. Regarding the frequent relationship between image and trivialization, Rancière proposes that it is not that there are too many images of martyred or suffering bodies on the screens; rather, there are too many intermediaries and decipherers: "If horror is banalized, it is not because we see too many images of it. … [W]e do see too many nameless bodies, too many bodies incapable of returning the gaze that we direct at them, too many bodies that are an object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak" (96).

For Rancière, what constitutes images is not the false attempt to duplicate reality, an attempt that disqualifies the image as evidence. Images are not a mere reproduction, but "a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid" (93). The political potentiality of images is played out in the modalities of this fabric that associates, separates, or connects. "An image never stands alone. It belongs to a system of visibility that governs the status of the bodies represented and the kind of attention they merit" (99).

Stolen Photographs

Argentine memory possesses some of these *impossible images*, exceptionally taken from "hell". This is the case of the photographs of Víctor Basterra, a survivor of the ESMA, a well-known clandestine detention centre and today a museum of memory. Nearly 5,000 detainees passed through its facilities, of which only 200 survived. They are photographic portraits taken for the purposes of archiving and control. They are the faces and bodies of people who are alive but fated to disappear. As indicated by Luis Ignacio García, "[t]hese photos bear witness to what is impossible to witness: the between-two-deaths, that spectral state between a first human death and a second biological death" (*Políticas de la memoria* 66). The photos were stolen from the ESMA by the graphic worker and Peronist militant Víctor Melchor Basterra, himself detained for years in the facilities where he was forced to work in conditions of slavery, because of his knowledge of graphic work. His task was to photograph and design the fake documents used by the Task Forces for the covert operations of the illegal repression. Basterra took the precaution of always keeping a negative of these photos. Thanks to his knowledge of graphic work, he could not be eliminated because there was no one who could replace him. Towards the end of the dictatorship, in the midst of the process of the destruction of archives, Basterra was subject to a special regime. This regime included supervised outings to visit his family. He was thus able to steal dozens of negatives with the identity of the repressors, photos that he had taken himself. But he also rescued the photos of about twenty disappeared detainees from a bag containing materials that were supposed to be burned. Basterra survived his captivity and this exceptional material, along with his own statements, was later used in the trials against leaders of the dictatorship. In August 1984, the CELS (Centre for Legal and Social Studies) published a document called *El mito de la "Guerra sucia"* (*The Myth of the "Dirty War"*) about Víctor Basterra and the ESMA photographs (Frontalini and Caiati). This report is focused on the documentation of the names and photographs of ESMA officials and the identification of the disappeared.

Only 20 years later, the photos of the victims took on a new importance. In 2005 Marcelo Brodsky, visual artist and brother of a disappeared person, published the book *Memoria en construcción*. *El debate sobre la ESMA* (*Memory in Construction: The Debate on the ESMA*). In March 2007, some of these photos were displayed at the Museo de Arte y Memoria (Museum of Art and Memory [MAM]) in La Plata, in an exhibition entitled *Rostros, fotos sacadas de la ESMA* (*Faces, photos taken from ESMA*). Thus, Víctor Basterra's photographs, which had been used as evidentiary documents and documents mainly used to identify the repressors, became an aesthetic set of documents, subjected to various interventions. Basterra's photographs were discussed by various authors. In addition to Luis Ignacio García and Ana Longoni ("Imágenes invisibles"), it is important to mention the contributions of Karen Garrote, Claudia Feld, and the detailed work of Florencia Larralde Armas. This section draws on the contributions made by all of them. The presentation of Basterra's photographs underwent significant changes at each stage, at each moment of memory, which determined the conditions of their reception. The reconstruction of their frames, the cropping, and the change in the background colours are related to the different "moments of memory" (Larralde Armas) which emphasized different needs or priorities in the material. When they were used to identify the victims, many of them were cropped at chest height (fig. 8),[105] and the captions still include the technical language of the police. During the trials of those responsible, priority was given to the ID photos of military personnel, taken by Basterra himself, which in the trial of the juntas served as incriminating material. When the photographs of the victims became part of inventories, their edges were cropped out, as well as part of the background that showed the shadow of the detainee and a white wall or door could be distinguished. When they were retouched in the MAM, they were softened by the addition of a sepia colour to the background, as if with the intention of removing these bodies from their captivity and martyrdom or giving them back their humanity. The problem with this intervention, according to Larralde Armas, is that a good part of the informative value of the photographs is lost, namely what they illustrate about the state and circumstances of the detainees. To make his book *Memoria en construcción. El debate sobre la ESMA*, Marcelo Brodsky, brother of a disappeared person who appears in one of the photos, requested and obtained, along with Basterra himself, the originals that had remained in the archives of the dictators' trial. With these originals he made his book, which begins with 10 totally black pages. He thus returned the figures of those bodies to their sordid original surroundings and returned to the full-body shots that the repressors themselves had taken, but also surrounded them with a thick black frame, which has the curious effect of highlighting the expression on their faces and sometimes even the marks of abuse on their skin, the traces of torture. These procedures increase the sensorial impact of the photograph, allowing the appearance of significant details, like the untied shoelaces, on previously omitted surfaces that tell of Ida Adad's state of defencelessness (fig. 9). For García and Longoni, however, this work suffers from a certain depoliticization, since the militant

[105] Testimony on the clandestine detention centre at the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada Argentina (Argentine Navy Mechanics School, ESMA), CELS, October 1984. Illustration by Claudia Feld (2014), in *Clepsidra*, March 2014, p. 36.

backgrounds of the disappeared are not mentioned and the *act of resistance* constituted by Víctor Basterra's theft of the photographs is hardly mentioned. According to García and Longoni, the photos belie the adage about the absence of images of the disappearances. There are several photographs and documents that allude to them, albeit in a fragmentary and indirect way. But each present, each moment of memory, has asked for different things from these materials. What has been seen or has not been seen in them is closely linked to the reading device by which they were supported. Although Basterra's photographs played an essential role in the first trials of the juntas in the 1980s, 20 years passed without them being discussed. After having played their revelatory and evidentiary role, these photos were no longer seen, or *could not be seen*. They were not seen as sensorial testimony to the horror. They were not identified as photographs that not only proved the existence of a network of clandestine detention camps, but also spoke to us specifically about what was happening in the ESMA, about the suffering of the detainees, and about the experience of the victims in the secret places of state terror. Years later, once the crimes of the dictatorship had been more than sufficiently proven, a renewed interest in these photos emerged. They are, of course, a horrific exception. They are very different from the faces of the disappeared that the mothers carried with them and that became emblematic of the protests for justice. Those ID photos, and the photos that had been taken in family environments, were of people who could not have suspected their subsequent fate. These front and side photographs, on the other hand, were taken at ESMA itself and portrayed individuals who had been abducted shortly before and who had already disappeared but had not yet been murdered. The people who inhabit those images are already being subjected to the depersonalization process of the clandestine detention centre universe. Most of them had even undergone torture sessions, as was apparently the usual order of the procedure, and perhaps suspected or knew that they would not return to the world. They are the images that most closely represent a "real" assumption of disappearance. The experience of the viewer's gaze on these photos is therefore of a different nature than on any other. The gaze of the photographed people now has a heartbreaking impact on us. The person who stands before them inevitably and disturbingly participates in the perspective of the perpetrator. What we capture on looking at them is what he captured. The changes in the setting and the place of exhibition do not attenuate this origin marking. One of the most impactful photographs is perhaps that of Graciela Estela Alberti Salaberry, a member of the organization Montoneros (fig. 10). She was abducted with her partner in 1980, when she was 26 years old. The photo reveals the traces of abuse, but in the photo in which Graciela looks straight into the camera, we notice an indefinable distance. It is as if she is looking from above, with a strange indifference and even a distance. It is as if her gaze pierces through the walls and beyond the situation. Her gesture can be interpreted (although in a highly speculative, almost Kabbalistic way) as a combination of resignation, disdain, and perhaps defiance. Although we know that the object of that gaze is the captor or kidnapper, although the photograph shows us a person who is unarmed, trapped, and unable to decide, those eyes (of someone who has already been condemned), somehow *look back at us*. And perhaps what looks back at us is the gaze of the undefeated (*invaincus*) according to the fitting expression used by Rancière and Caicedo (79). It is the gaze of people who, though defeated and destroyed, condemned to disappearance and oblivion, in a profound sense, were never *defeated*. Marcelo Brodsky's aesthetic intervention on the ID photo does not add, mask, or embellish, but rather enhances something that the document could not show us: the persistence, *in spite of all*, of a glimmer of subjectivity, which, nevertheless, had always been there.

Fig. 8. Marcelo Brodsky. Photos from the exhibition *Rostros, fotos sacadas de la ESMA* (Faces, photos taken from the ESMA). 2007, *Museo de Arte y Memoria* (MAM), La Plata.

Fig. 9. Marcelo Brodsky. Photo of Ida Adad. Detained-disappeared at ESMA. From the exhibition *Rostros, fotos sacadas de la ESMA* (Faces, photos taken from the ESMA). 2007, *Museo de Arte y Memoria* (MAM), La Plata.

Fig. 10. Marcelo Brodsky. Photo of Graciela Estela Alberti Salaberry. She was kidnapped with her partner in 1980, when she was 26 years old. From the exhibition *Rostros, fotos sacadas de la ESMA* (Faces, photos taken from the ESMA). 2007, *Museo de Arte y Memoria* (MAM), La Plata.

RES, *Dunamis: Entre el desastre y la esperanza* (*Dunamis: Between Disaster and Hope*) and *Tosca memoria* (*Coarse Memory*)

Fig. 11. RES (Raúl Eduardo Stolkiner). *Dunamis: Entre el desastre* y *la esperanza* (*Dunamis: Between Disaster and Hope*) and *Tosca memoria* (*Coarse Memory*). 2012, *Parque de la Memoria*.

In a work as famous as it is, at times, enigmatic, entitled "Critique of Violence", Walter Benjamin shows the indissoluble relationship between violence and law. For the German critic, there are two types of violence, that which establishes the law and that which preserves it. Both types are related to the German term *Gewalt*, which refers both to the state and to the law and its enforcement. Both forms of violence are legitimized according to a logic of means and ends. The only way to deactivate this incessant cycle of mythical violence, related to power and not to justice, is the sudden emergence of a third type of violence, *divine violence* ("Critique of Violence" 249), a mysterious violence that is purely a means and that acts in an immediate, total, and not necessarily bloody manner. Benjamin's reasoning is based, on the one hand, on the theological-political concepts of Carl Schmitt, and on the other, on the Jewish theological tradition, as well as on Georges Sorel's reflections on the revolutionary general strike. Perhaps mass uprisings that are accompanied by political general strikes could be understood as anticipations of this divine violence.

Otherwise it would be quite difficult to explain the unexpected and entirely unforeseen reach of certain mass revolts that mark a turning point in the political history of nations. Perhaps this was the case of what in Argentina was called the Cordobazo (1969). It was a massive protest that the military repression turned into a general revolt. It involved a novel alliance between students and workers, a general strike, the takeover of the city, and an expansive wave that reproduced the uprising in another set of cities. Many studies have been carried out on this uprising, but no causality put forth by the scholars. Neither the economic conjuncture of Argentina in the 1960s, nor the beginning of the disintegration of the country's industrial fabric, the history of the repression of the labour and students' movement, the history of Peronist trade unionism, the influence of May 1968 in France on student activists, or the exhaustion of the military governments of the time can fully explain the unusual dimensions of the uprising. The Cordobazo, during the dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía, is an event, if by this we understand what Alain Badiou explains as an occurrence that cannot be logically deduced from the laws that regulate the foreseeable and the possible in a given world. In philosophical terms, the event is a fissure in the field of current knowledge, a hole in the encyclopaedia (*Being and Event* 181–182). It is the opening of new possibilities. Its effects depend on the subjects who appropriate and declare it. The Cordobazo erupted as an unforeseen response to a long sequence of state violence – repressive violence and economic violence. But at the same time it entailed the birth of new forms of struggle, new types of social alliances, and new militant practices. Its political influence lasted for at least a decade. It can easily be considered a milestone, a crucial date, a turning point around which the country's social and political history would gravitate for a long time. Its immediate consequence was the fall of the dictator Onganía and, in the medium term, the fall of the dictatorship itself in 1972. It could be said that the 1976 coup d'état attempted to put a definitive end to this influence and gravitation with its extermination program. More in general, it could be said that the Cordobazo was the emergence of politics as defined by Jacques Rancière in *Disagreement*: the momentary interruption of the logic of domination by the logic of equality. Rescuing the memory of the Cordobazo, evoking the subjectivities that were formed around this event, the insurrectionary spirit that it awakened among mass sectors of the population and the media, is what the artist Raúl Eduardo Stolkiner, RES, a Córdoba native, apparently set out to do.[106] And he did so by drawing on the raw materiality of its remains. RES's work frequents that relationship between memory and its materials: matter and memory. RES is concerned about the spaces, paths, and settings where the *things told* occurred. He thus returns to the sources of mnemonics: the relationship between space, the arrangement of objects and memory. In *La ruta de Cortés* (*The Route of Cortés*; 1999–2000) he explores the origins of colonial America in a landscapist and objectual

[106] Raúl Eduardo Stolkiner, photographer, artist from Córdoba. He lived in exile in Mexico from 1976 to 1985. Since 1989, when his works were part of the Argentine submission to the U-ABC show at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, his work has been continuously exhibited individually and collectively in many countries.

way. It is the memory of a journey that can be classified as that of a violence that established the law, that of the colonial order. *Necah 1879* (1996–2008) focuses on the route of the Argentine army in the south, during the expedition that destroyed the original peoples of Patagonia and that marked the beginning of the modern Argentine state. What is expressed in his exhibitions and photographs is the conviction that memory is in spaces and objects. That they have a material memory that intersects unevenly with subjective memory. It is as if memory dwells in the worn rock of the road, the yellowish edge of books, or the rusty folds of debased metal. *Dunamis*: *Entre el desastre y la esperanza* is a 2012 RES exhibition located in the Parque de la Memoria. It is a monument to the victims of state terrorism. It comprises an arrangement of old books from the standard youth library of the 1960s. These were intertwined or entangled with plants: plant memory connected with cultural memory. Arranged like many other objects were photographs of the 1969 Cordobazo. They showed marches, police and military violence, smoke from the barricades, and the burning of cars. The exhibition was organized again, with additional materials, in Buenos Aires from October 31 to December 7, 2018, with the name *Tosca memoria.* On the one hand, the word "*tosca*" (meaning *coarse* or *rough* in Spanish) refers to the coarse, intricate nature of the materials, to memories in a raw state, memories of a violence that is difficult to frame in a discourse of victimization. On the other hand, it is an allusion and homage to the famous labour movement leader Agustín Tosco, one of the leading figures of the Cordobazo. At the centre of both exhibitions, RES placed a Citroën 2 CV, Model 69. This is an emblematic car from the 1960s in Argentina. The modest car represents the great effort made by a part of the population to become part of the middle class. Significantly, it is the car of Mafalda's father, in Quino's well-known comic strip. And this is no coincidence. Mafalda's family is a typical lower-middle-class family, constantly threatened by financial insecurity. Its main distinguishing mark is this Citroën, which is obsessively taken care of by the father of the family. It is thus a vehicle whose design evokes common memories. On May 28 and 29, 1969, in the days of the Cordobazo, dozens of these cars, brand-new models, were taken from striking car factories and burned at the barricades. The exhibition presents a video or short film where RES burns an old Citroën with his guests. They burn it in a field with Molotov cocktails that an old militant of the time teaches them to make. It is a provocative investigation into the topology of rebellion. The installation is reminiscent of the exhibitions on memorable uprisings made by Didi-Huberman in different countries (*Sublevaciones*). Thus, the artist brings back to life the street violence of 1969 in Cordoba, when the developmentalism of the Argentine dictatorship is revealed as a chimaera. The burned car evokes the end of an illusion and the beginning of a revolutionary decade in Argentina. I began by pointing out that what made state terror possible during the dictatorship was the combination of secrecy and rumours, of knowing and not knowing, or of that incomplete knowledge that prevented the population from knowing or measuring the true dimension of the state's power. The Cordobazo was the exact opposite. In those days, the repressive power revealed its actual strength and then also its limits. With the destruction of the vehicle, RES shows a strange beauty associated with transfiguration by fire. The car loses its functionality; it becomes something else, an aesthetic object. Its relationship with speed and traffic is suspended; it ceases to be a commodity and a symbol of social status. Exhibited in the present, this vehicle model is anachronistic, just like the evocation of a tactic used in street struggles that is barely conceivable in our time is also anachronistic. Thus, in ruins, the car acquires the ability to evoke the exceptional temporality that characterized the event. It is a temporality that transcends the time of the state and of production, of work and profitability. It was a time when the powerless potency of a collective force challenged not only the repressive power of the state, but the sacred character of property. The remains of the burned car have been placed on old books on jurisprudence, as if alluding to the relationship between law and violence mentioned at the beginning. The subject is linked to or enters into a dialogue with its forgotten collective dimension, the present with the past, the law with the exception, the violence of the law with divine violence.

The Fine Line of Memory: The Passages in the Work of Sebastián Díaz Morales

> *'I don't know.' It's like you're on an escalator into a cloud with him, you never know where the escalator lets off.* (Justin Theroux's statement on David Lynch while filming *Mulholland Drive*. Qtd. in Lattanzio)

> *The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent reality.*
> (Prologue to *Crash*, 1979)

Fig. 12. Sebastián Díaz Morales. Still from *Pasajes I* (*Passages I*). 2012.

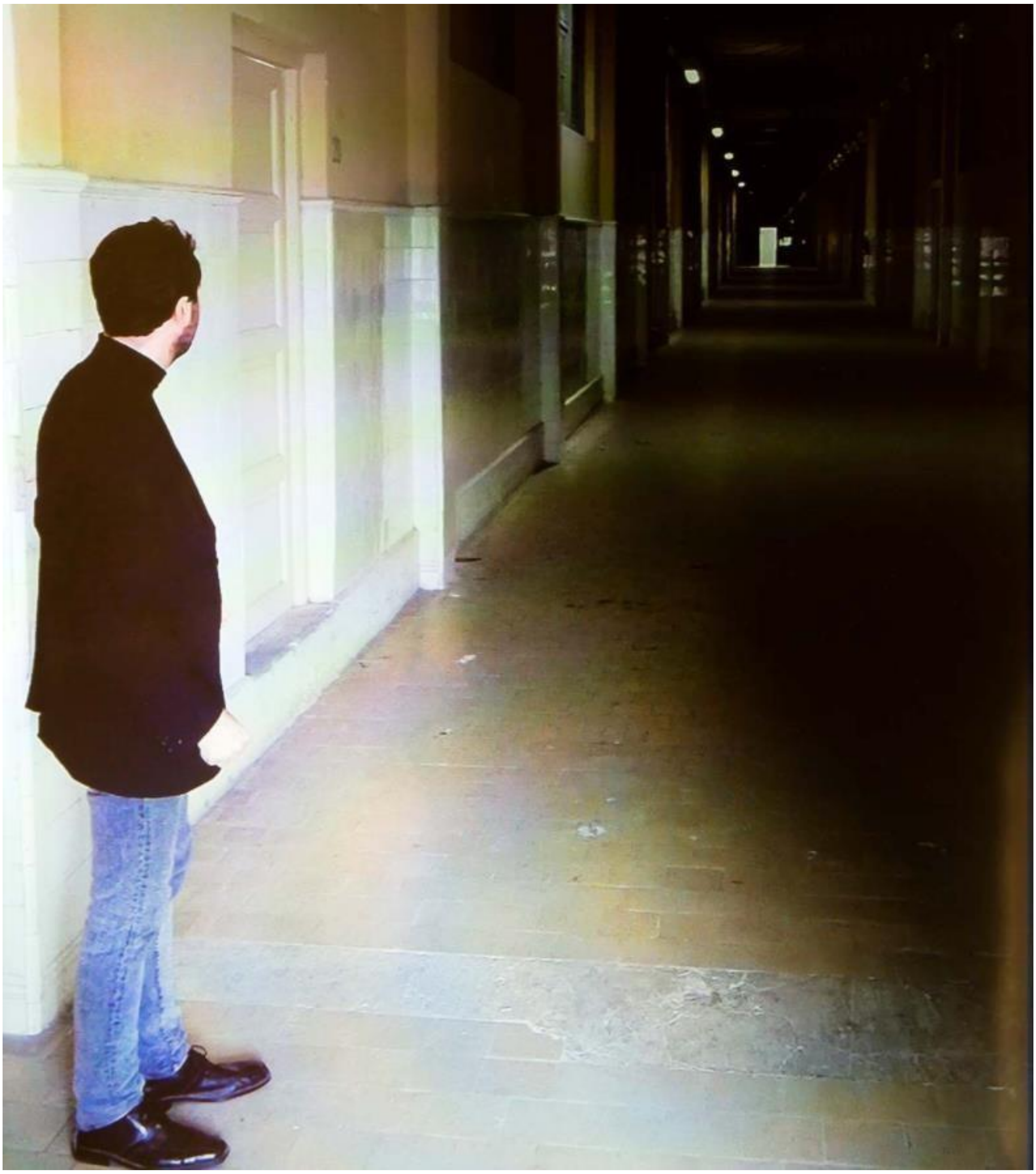

Fig. 13. Sebastián Díaz Morales. Still from *Pasajes I* (*Passages I*). 2012.

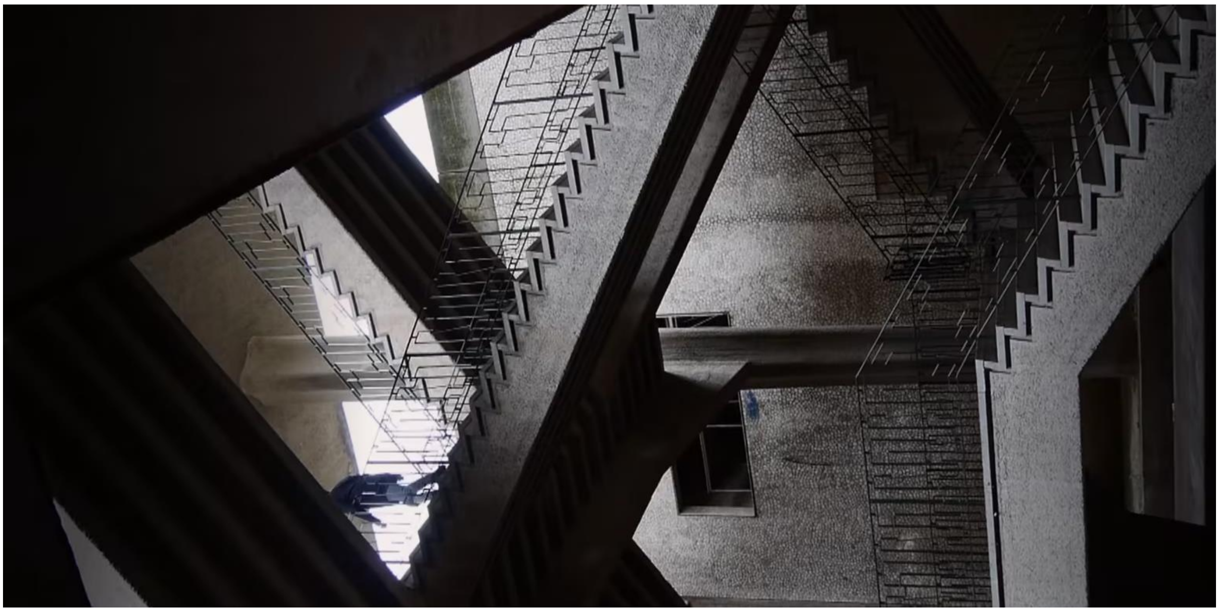

Fig. 14. Sebastián Díaz Morales. Still from *Pasajes II* (*Passages II*). 2013.

Fig. 15. Sebastián Díaz Morales. Still from *Pasajes II* (*Passages II*). 2013.[107]

[107] In this passage are posters with the face of Mariano Ferreyra. Mariano Ferreira was a leader of the *Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires* (*Buenos Aires University Federation*) and a member of the *Partido Obrero* (*Workers' Party*). He was murdered at the age of 23 by the union bureaucracy during a mobilization for demands for improvements in the working conditions of railway workers in 2010.

Fig. 16. Sebastián Díaz Morales. Still from *Pasajes II* (*Passages II*). 2013.

In this section I will analyze two of the five video installations *Pasajes* (*Passages*) created by the artist Sebastián Díaz Morales. *Pasajes I* and *Pasajes II* (2012 and 2013) essentially show a path. In *Pasajes I*, an individual goes through rooms, halls, empty classrooms, and corridors. In *Pasajes II,* the individual goes through abundant and endless stairs. We see neither the beginning of this journey nor its end. We know nothing about the character or his object. He is an individual in motion, someone who moves forward without ever going back, but we do not know the motive or the logic behind this endless displacement, from which any logical articulation between causes and consequences has been elided or simply does not exist. Nor does it appear to have a starting or ending point. The images of heterogeneous spaces follow one another, with the subject that runs through them and the regular sound of their steps as the sole common thread.

The man who walks is not a kind of *flâneur* or a tourist; he is not walking or visiting these buildings. The apparent determination and directionality of his walk, and the fact that he does not stop anywhere, suggests that he is indeed heading somewhere. This turns the spaces crossed into obstacles, the passage never becoming a place where one could dwell or linger, not even to rest. The spaces crossed are mere spaces of transit. However, the arrival that would give this wandering or transit a meaning seems to be infinitely delayed. It is about a journey that emancipates itself from its instrumentality, just as waiting strips off its object in *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett), thus dissolving its eventual meaning. This, however, does not seem to demoralize the lonely walker we meet in the middle of his march and leave in the same situation. The rooms he passes through appear to be public places, stations, banks, college corridors, classrooms, lofts, and offices. The absence of transitions produces the feeling that all these spaces are contiguous. The few people who cross paths with him seem to be possessed by the same spirit of transit that inhabits the walking subject. If the first passage is marked by the doors that are crossed, the second has its sign on the stairs. The variety of staircases – which in their intricacy remind us of the magical continuities of the Möbius strip, or of Escher's geometrically vertiginous figures, and even, sometimes, of Piranesi's speculative architecture – also appear in a succession of linked fragments – by the path of the walker. As in the Möbius strip, what looks like an ascent is altered by the perspective of the camera that rotates and inverts the planes, transforming all ascent into a simulacrum and all descent into an inverted ascent.

The spaces that we walk through with the protagonist are visibly degraded by time, by use, and by a lack of maintenance. Some fleeting signs that we distinguish in the protagonist's path inform us of a transcendent geographical location. The map on the wall of a school, the recognizable facade of the ESMA, and a poster protesting the murder of Mariano Ferreira are signs that give away Buenos Aires. But it is a purely interior Buenos Aires, the dilapidated interior of the great and once pretentious public buildings built in the early twentieth century. They are buildings that bear the traces of a "glorious" past and now seem to vegetate in decadence or relative abandonment that makes the passage of time sensitive. The city is then reduced to its interiors because its eventual exteriors, its streets and squares, its urban agitation, have been elided. It is the disturbing geography of a labyrinth without an outside, an infinite labyrinth, full of possibilities (doors, corners, corners, corridors, stairs, passages), but that lead nowhere, and above all to no exterior.

At times, we suppose that this man is looking in vain not for a specific place of arrival, but simply for an exit door. This turns their tiring wandering into a nightmare. Wherever the subject goes, he will find new rooms or new stairs that impel him to march on. Morales seems to have resorted to the narrative structure of infinite postponement that characterized many stories by Franz Kafka ("An Imperial Message") (and in Latin America, the stories of Jorge Luis Borges and Mario Levrero). Walter Benjamin called it the "epic *remembrance*" of Scheherazade ("The Storyteller" 154). There is always one more story, after the story. There will always be a room beyond this room, and another corridor at the end of the hall. As in the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise that so fascinated Borges, the finite set that is a city contains an infinite interior. But Kafka's messenger (carrying the message of a dead man), Mario Levrero's lost traveller in *El lugar* (2016), and even Scheherazade, have a discernible purpose, something our wayfarer seems to lack. Infinite postponement has always functioned as a metaphor for the implosion of meaning.

It is possible to understand this wandering as the conscious search for a memory by the walking subject. In that case, the subject and his own search, as unsuccessful as it is incessant, would be shaping the rooms, which would allude to the performative nature of memory. But if the walk of this passerby has no cause, neither formal nor efficient, nor, consequently, a destination, what shapes or channels its perpetual movement, is space itself. When the space of memory or memories is not organized by a story (and every story is nothing more than a journey), the subject loses consistency and remains lost in the labyrinth of memories. He remains a prisoner of drives, which are like doors that open or stairs that invite you to climb. These interiors of infinite possibilities and infinite concatenations could constitute a metaphor for the past as it is preserved in memory: more like an accumulation of sediments of varying intensities than a map that adequately represents the logic of its twists and turns. Temporal indiscernibility refers to a personal appreciation of time, that is, it reproduces the way in which the subject perceives the temporal dimension while remembering. The logic that governs the mnemonic act is not the classic narrative logic (because the past is always recovered from the present and distortions, hesitations or forgetfulness are common). One memory leads us to another, or an image leads us to another image, without a solution of continuity, in the same way that a room takes us to another room without the association process being able to effectively resolve itself into a coherent story or journey. Before the rooms can be transformed into a meaningful whole, if only by the well-known surrealist procedure of chaotic articulation, the walker (and with him the camera that follows him) has already left them without exploring them. It is as if we can only realize its infinite multiplicity.

Even so, these rooms claim meaning. The arrangement of their furniture, their posters, the pictures, and the signs that we see fleetingly propose or simulate an order. We would like to "suspend the step" – this step that marks time with the sound precision of a compass – of the walker and say that history passed by as an old sign says on one of the doors that are crossed: "you are going to enter history" (minute 8). All this would not be so much about personal memory but rather the heteroclite landscape of a shared oblivion, the warehouse where the ruins of a national past accumulate. We feel that somewhere in this labyrinth, there is an image of the past that is waiting for us: a room, an image, that corresponds to our time. A fragment of the past in which the present can be recognized.

Conclusions

If we understand Benjamin's concept of *dialectical image* as an image that interrupts the present, a series of images that govern the public sensitivity of the present, drawing attention to the injustice of the past, which is at the base of this very present, we will understand the extent to which any image has the potential to become political. The films and images that I have reviewed in this chapter are not nostalgic passages. Each of them establishes a special or specific link between a certain past and a certain present. Thus, the ID photos that inaugurated the visual transmission of what was intended to be invisible also inaugurated an unprecedented relationship between the private and the public, between family mourning and public protest. These images were, as a photo-document, part of the legal arguments and inventories that documented the disaster. But they were also a symbol or banner, the emblem of a struggle whose ramifications affect us. In this phase, it became important to reconstruct the biographies of the disappeared. Finally, once this probative and mobilizing urgency diminished, the photographs were turned into aesthetic material as photos-fiction, where the documentary value tends to be diluted in the allure of an aesthetic – even authorial – significance, showing that the disappeared have a subsequent biography, thus engaging in the struggles for memory and the (re)constructions of identity" (García, "Espectros" 132).[108]

The relationship we establish with photography is constantly changing. Faced with the persistence of a gaze or a gesture frozen in time, what we discover in it is always something different. The aesthetic reworkings of these persistent remains show the different forms of perception that accumulate around the original material.

Any reference to a practice of memory transmission must begin by asking questions about its necessity, or rather about when, why and by whom this transmission is considered necessary. As we have already pointed out, it is important to keep in mind that the transmission of memory about the dictatorship cannot completely follow the guidelines that in Europe have been decided on to transmit the memory of the Shoah to new generations. The big difference is that the memory of the Holocaust focuses on an innocent victim, whose supposed guilt lies in their ethnicity (race and religion). This has also happened with other ethnic genocides (like the genocides of Armenians, Roma, Aboriginals, and Africans). In Argentina it is assumed that the majority of the victims had some political activity and that this was what made them a target for elimination policies. This brings the Argentine case

[108] "donde el valor documental tiende a diluirse en la pregnancia de una valencia estética, incluso autoral, y en las que se viene a patentizar que los desaparecidos tienen una biografía posterior, comprometiéndose así con las luchas por la memoria y las (re-)construcciones de identidad" (García, "Espectros" 132).

closer to the Franco dictatorship in Spain in the 1930s–1970s, which practised a policy of political extermination during the postwar period. The so-called "Sábato report" and the first edition of the *Nunca Más* (*Never Again*) report exclude this essential aspect of the Argentine tragedy.

Second, the original excess of the state's crime in Argentina resided in its recourse to the systematic disappearance of people. For the essayist (and father of a disappeared person) Héctor Schmucler (*La memoria*), the novelty of disappearance as a repressive strategy consists of the fact that it is an "ontological crime". What distinguishes the Argentine dictatorial regime is not the illegal practices of the regime or its production of death, but rather the fact that it took the dehumanization of the concentration spaces system to the extreme of robbing the victims of their own deaths. "The disappeared are such because they have no death" (*La memoria* 213).

Third, the transmission of the memory of the victims through commemorative rituals that present the events of the past as completed and unrelated to the present clashes with what Roberto Pittaluga ("Democratización del archivo") has referred to as *the absent archive*: the fact that the state has never allowed the total disclosure of the files containing documentation of the crimes, or the names and the total number of victims, let alone reliable information on the identity of all those responsible, rendering state terror a matter of the present and making an endless tragedy of the disappearances.

Fourth, the undoubtedly political action of the Mothers occupying the Plaza de Mayo opened the door to an inevitable and continuous reconsideration of the present in light of the events that occurred during the period of the dictatorship, taking into account that many of the repressive habits, including the clandestine infrastructure of State security forces, have never completely changed (as demonstrated by the disappearance of the important witness of the reopened trials of military leaders, Julio López, in September 2006 or the case of Santiago Maldonado and the repression of the Mapuche people today). The repressive semi-legal system already existed before the military coup and its secret structures have probably never been deactivated.

Fifth, the dispossession carried out under the dictatorial regime with respect to structures that could have limited or resisted an exacerbation of inequality and the growing economic exploitation of the country's citizens has not changed with democracy, not even during the Kirchners' administrations. Consequently, the transmission of the past cannot be limited to bearing witness to and illustrating the harm sustained but should be an activity governed by the objective of *reversing* the social, political, and cultural effects pursued by those who carried out the work of annihilation and who are still part of today's reality. Failure to take this element into account results in the ratification of the perpetrators' administration, their macabre rationality. The practice of memory is thus a practice of clarification, not only of consolation, or a consolation and a remedy that, to be such, requires clarification, ideas, and protest.

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 an illusion. 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. The presentation of historical events as irreversible events limited to a fateful time turns them into museum items that only consecrate the present of the victors. A pedagogy of memory should make the materials of the past available to the new generations, not in the form of complete knowledge, but in the form of a question, an unknown that has yet to be resolved and a task to be carried out. It is a task centred on a legacy. It is the struggle around that legacy and the politicization of that legacy in the present. The *space of images* initiated by the Mothers, an affective space that goes beyond the archives of horror and that is both aesthetic and political, should become a space for practices outside of the state. It should be a space where it would be possible to rehearse in advance a temporality that is different from that proposed by the state, that is to say, different and opposed to the temporality of domination. Memory practices will only make sense if they manage to critically recover lost futures and are aimed at reopening the present.

Some of the images discussed in this chapter have been alternately forgotten and recovered at different times. The emotionality, or the pathos they convey, are possibly fated to survive, in the sense defined by Aby Warburg (*Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*) and his surviving images. This is because no image of the past is really lost. They can live underground for a long period of time and resurface in times of danger because there is, as Benjamin asserted in "On the Concept of History", "a secret agreement between past generations and the present one" (390). The place and time of that rendezvous is the point where the images finally become legible: the point where melancholy and grief give way to tactics.