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THE UNRULY IMAGE
Memory and Transmission in Argentina

Ana Paula Saab



foto: Fígona Colectivo Fotográfico

The Unruly image
Memory and Transmission in Argentina

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INTRODUCTION

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

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



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

Adelina's Gaze

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Objectives and Research Question

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

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

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

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary of the Chapters

This thesis is structured into two parts:

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

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

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

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

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



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

PART 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduction to Part 1



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



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

Laundered Photos

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF MEMORY

Memory and Narration

In Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus enjoys the hospitality of the Phaeacians. Part of this warm reception is the songs of a blind bard, Demodocus, who sings about the story of the fall of Troy at the request of Odysseus himself. Odysseus has not revealed his identity to his hosts, but when he hears the song, he is unable to contain his emotions remembering all the events that he had experienced and he struggles to hold back his tears (Homer 8.72–92). To conceal them from his hosts, he covers his head with a blanket and lets his tears flow freely. This early passage of Western literature raises several issues with regard to our relationship with memory. Thanks to the song, Odysseus, the man of action, the versatile man, the *polytropos*, is emotionally affected to the point of tears upon discovering his intimate story told by others. A specific relationship is established (centuries before the emergence of tragedy and, much later, psychoanalysis) between memory and the renewal of pain, and between pain and catharsis (Sloterdijk). What stirs up Odysseus' emotionally charged memory is something external, an artistic artefact, rather than the progression of his own thoughts. In a certain sense, it could be said that what causes Odysseus to cry is an emotion in the face of events that can be recognized as being carried out by the same body, an emotion of and for identity, but this emotion is induced by the story that others have given about him. Odysseus thus discovers his *narrative identity* (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 42–43) and the epic song to a hero who still lives allows the past to emerge as the past (Hartog 52).

The passage in question tells, among other things, of Odysseus' feats during the Trojan War, suggesting that the hero is hearing from the bard fragments of Homer's *Iliad*, which are presented in this passage of the *Odyssey* as a *mise en abyme*. In this passage, the song presents the conditions of its own reproduction. It could be said that the text educates its future readers about how they should read it, creating the conditions for engaged listening, for an environment of reception and for passing it down. The poem claims a fate for itself as a presentation of the past, as an indisputable record of decisive events in the form of a tribute to the heroes; that is to say, it thematizes the conditions of its own transmission. The *Odyssey* incorporates the images of other times into the horizon of the present, offering interpretative frameworks and certain hopes, and it does so through repeated group or collective listening and in a ritualized way (the conditions of the epic, festive recitation, rhapsody contests, etc.). The song of the bard here represents the epic of the text itself, called to be a foundational

connective structure (J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* 2), an imperishable cultural product, that is, canonical and a particularly successful medium (because it survives, re-signified, to the circumstances of its appearance) of an eventual cultural memory not only of that Greek people but of all subsequent Hellenism. There is also a surprise and an interruption in these tears that Odysseus cannot hold back. It is clear that the hero, constantly on guard against the possible dangers of the present, was not prepared to hear his own story. His emotional *breakdown* has something to do with the surprise of encountering himself, encountering that piece of his own life objectified in song, turning his experience into a transmissible and shareable object. It could also be said that there is an interruption of an ongoing, diffuse, or undifferentiated present where the character lives immersed in multiple tasks that are always urgent and dangerous, with an eye on his next goals and the challenges and dangers ahead. This process of hearing his own story produces an inflection in this extended, ongoing, diffuse and undifferentiated present that is personal life, establishing a new difference in the hero's consciousness: one that divides the present in two, between a pure present and a present that has already been. On the other hand, what this passage of the *Odyssey* tells is affected by a slight anachronism, since it makes the "legend" coincide with its protagonist, a resource that Cervantes would use virtuously in *Don Quixote*. Thus, the song speaks of its own genesis, as if the song had arisen from the events it narrates. By memory organized as an oeuvre, a rift is established: the present turns towards itself and is problematised. The evocation of a time that *has already been* creates a shift, but also introduces an emotional difference in the relative affective indifference with which we live in the now. Odysseus' tears are the affective mark of a fissure in the present that creates a new absence: that of time gone by which, consequently, evokes the idea of finitude and, more specifically, the prospect of death. It could be said that the reference to the past creates or builds it (the past), and establishes a rift that introduces the now of lived experience to its discontinuity. And along with that introduction that challenges the pure present of lived time by confronting it *with its difference*, emerges, among other things, the pain for what is re-presented as lost.

But what is the relationship between lived experience and the present of remembrance? To what extent do Odysseus' tears revive the experiences of the past, his past adventures? Between lived and remembered experience there is an immeasurable ontological rift. Odysseus' emotions, though triggered by the bard's tale, are inevitably a matter of the present, involving distance and reflective elaboration. In a certain sense, the songs build a past (or even the past as such). In "The Storyteller", Walter Benjamin differentiates between two types of experience, *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and *Erfahrung* (experience as ethos),

identifying the latter with narration and memory. There would be no experience without narration. It is narration that consecrates a part of our experiences as memorable and, therefore, as transmissible. In narration, to which Benjamin even attributes functions of healing, a community can become reconciled with its past and shape its identity. A lived experience without narration only forms part of memory as trauma. As has been continuously pointed out in literature on trauma and memory, trauma is not an experience: trauma is a *failed experience* (van Alphen, *Failed Images*). This passage from the *Odyssey* presents certain keys to understanding the functioning of individual memory in its relationship with culture: the idea that beyond its neurophysiologic conditions, individual memory requires a certain type of material objectification on which to rely and, thus, a social environment; the idea that memory is fundamentally narrative; and the idea that memory always occurs in the present and divides it or opens it up for consideration. What re-activates the past as past is the anamnesis embodied in song, in art, at a time when narration and legend were not differentiated from History. And this song is jointly processed; it creates a circle of complicit listeners, who in turn will transmit it to their descendants. Homeric hymns were a specific way of organizing cultural memory, but these elaborate frameworks of remembrance and commemoration transcended the interactive and oral situation in which they were conceived, and a subsequent community, composed of much later generations, found in that specific form of narrative organization, crystallized in writing, a useful medium, a connective medium, to imagine an identity. This is how they became a cultural text. Whereas a literary text produces meanings that are not binding and are generally limited to the time in which the text was generated, the cultural text, according to Jan Assmann (*Cultural Memory*), acquires unequivocal and timeless status, as is the case in general with texts that become sacred.

In this sense, it could be said that every community is a cultural community organized around a text (not necessarily a book). The *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, the Bible, and the Popol Vuh, despite the great differences between them, are all tutelary texts around which a series of values and rhetorical figures, conceptions of time, space, the laudable and the abject, the good and the evil, constituting not only the self-image of a group but also a horizon of perception and thought, is preserved and transmitted. They are texts that do not need to prove their authenticity, because they function as a medium for storing and conveying cultural memory, that is, as texts that recall a heritage and texts that are also remembered as objects of cultural memory themselves. They are objects of tradition and archives of experience, what a community has decided to remember. As a cultural text, the *Odyssey* founded a heritage and

an identity that undoubtedly served as propaganda for the ruling castes, providing them with forms of social and cultural legitimacy (Adkins).

In this sense, the perfect consistency between the hero and the song that speaks of him is remarkable: crying here is not only the emotional symptom of a disturbance; it is also, in some way, an assent, a compliance, because the hero recognizes in the song his immediate past and, therefore, his tears are an involuntary homage to the bard Demodocus. On praising the bard, Odysseus tells him that it was as if he had witnessed the battle of Troy himself or that it had been recounted to him by someone directly involved, which seems to raise complex questions about the quality of the classic testimony and questions that history as a discipline would raise in the nineteenth century, i.e. the issue of sources, the fairness or veracity of versions about the past and the necessary evidential mechanisms. However, it is unlikely that Odysseus' praise is related to the historical or *pre-narrative* veracity of the song. What his tears show is that this song was congruent with the conventional ways of evoking the past in his cultural universe and consistent with the culture of memory and the horizon of meaning in which he was immersed. The truth in Homer's songs is still the truth of an image, of an *eikon*, and not the truth according to the criteria of modern history. Odysseus is not concerned with the truth as consistency, or as verisimilitude, but as *adequacy*.

There is one last notable detail in this passage: while Odysseus mourns his fellow soldiers who fell in combat and he is clearly a survivor of the Trojan War, his mourning is not that of the victim whose sufferings were inflicted on him by superior and unknown forces, but that of the actor who proudly recalls the acts in which he played the lead role. In later literary traditions, the story of Odysseus could also be updated many times as the memory of a traveller, explorer, and conqueror: the memory of a victor. Through, among others, the writings of Caesar on his Gallic Wars, Odysseus' epic undoubtedly inspired the conquering travellers of America in the sixteenth century, giving glorious meaning to the destruction of the aboriginal cultures of the West Indies.

Individual Memory and Collective Memory

Regardless of what is remembered, individual memory is an incessant neuronal or physiological process that constitutes an essential part of cognitive processes. What we call memory, mentally, but also bodily, making the past (i.e., what is no longer there) present, can manifest itself consciously or unconsciously (as in dreams). As we have seen, given the social condition of the human animal, these processes cannot be understood without social mediations of all kinds. If the song of the bard in the commented passage is essential to

perceiving a part of the ongoing present as past, this means that the past, as we know it or are moved by it, requires the songs and these rituals of commemoration or festive recitation insofar as a group, people, nation, etc., collectively agree on a particular image of that past. And perhaps that agreement is the effect of those rituals. Remembrance, memory, occurs in a scene with the narrative as an essential vehicle, which in turn involves not only a narrator but also those who listen to it. Odysseus will probably always be unable to discern what part of his memories he owes to his cognitive or neural memory and what part he owes to the song of the bard.

The mystery of memory – its content, the way it works, its timeliness, its relevance, its inevitability or necessity – is an ancestral concern of human beings that has undergone different forms of development in mythical, scientific, religious, and theoretical configurations, across different disciplines (including philosophy, psychology and history, intellectual history and literature, theology, rhetoric, and sociology, among others). It has even generated new methodological delimitations and strategies in the present, such as those linked to cultural memory studies. There is, in any case, a Greek or classical moment of memory, of which the Western cultural tradition remembers the mythical figures of Mnemosyne related to the timeless memory of the primordial or of the previous lives of the human soul. Plato and Aristotle considered memory of capital importance in relation to knowledge, to the veracity of images and traces, and in general, to what is true. The reflection on the relationship between topography and memory (in the famous story of the poet Simonides of Ceos, the legendary inventor of mnemonics) is also Greek in origin, and its rhetorical articulation in Cicero and Quintilian, Roman. Mnemonics related to topography, the idea of sites or places of memory or for memory, was a regular practice in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (and the colonial period in America), during which holy or sacred places multiplied, as well as places where relics were kept (such as the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia), religious pilgrimage routes (such as the Camino de Santiago in Europe), and miracles or apparitions that were remembered (such as the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico). Mnemonic topography acquired a highly ideological charge in the hands of modern nation-states and their national identity politics. Every national state is recognizable by a network of patriotic monuments and “historical” places throughout its territory.

There was a moment of particularly intense interest in the functioning of memory between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a time that is related to the professionalization of the historian, and also to the works of Henri Bergson (particularly *Matter and Memory*; 1896), the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (*Untimely Meditations of*

1873–1876 and *On the Genealogy of Morals* of 1887) and Sigmund Freud (e.g., “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” of 1914 and “Mourning and Melancholia” of 1914–1916). As is known, from 1925 to 1950 Maurice Halbwachs (*The Collective Memory*) founded a new field of sociological research through the academic coinage of the concept of “Collective Memory”, which he developed based on certain writings of Emile Durkheim in relation to the collective unity that can be established by rituals and common symbols. Defining the concept of collective memory is difficult because it is used in different disciplines and the definitions vary significantly from one another. One of the first problems of collective memory as a concept is deciding where this social or collective memory resides and, secondly, by what resources it is formed. Halbwachs argued that not even the most personal memory can dispense with certain *social frameworks*, starting with language and continuing with the set of cultural references that constitute the medium in which individual memory finds its forms and supports in order to unfold. These seminal ideas were challenged almost immediately. Halbwachs’ contemporary Marc Bloch objected that the concept of collective memory was nothing more than a transposition from individual to collective psychology (“*Memoria colectiva*”).

Susan Sontag also discussed the problem of agency in collective memory. For Sontag, this concept would be ontologically impossible, as there cannot be a group that remembers what they have experienced in the way that an individual does. In other words, there is no neural basis for collective memory. A collective memory can only be the product of deliberate instruction, for example, by the (totalitarian) state. Collective memory, for Sontag, is another word for ideology (Sontag, “Regarding the Pain”). Yosef Yerushalmi, in turn, says that in a strict sense it cannot be admitted that a people can remember a past that they did not live. What a given community remembers is what has been transmitted to it in its present (Yerushalmi 18). However, the idea of the social frameworks of memory has become popular in recent years as an umbrella concept for a wide variety of disciplinary approaches ranging from psychology to history and cultural studies. Basically, and broadly speaking, today we recognize, as Halbwachs did, that even the most personal memory experiences are mediated by the social. Memory is always individual but is marked by the social and the common past of a group that is constructed and reconstructed in the present. For Ricœur, for example, it is possible to speak of collective memory because one does not remember in solitude but with the help of the memories of others. Our memories are often borrowed memories; they belong to the stories of others. Personal memories are part of collective stories that are, in turn, reinforced through public commemorations and celebrations (Ricœur, “*La lectura del tiempo*”).

pasado”). In addition, Jan Assmann has stressed the dependence of an idea of the past on the frame of references that constitute the present. According to Assmann, the past does not arise on its own but is the result of a cultural construction and reconstruction; it is always governed by specific motives, expectations, hopes and objectives and formed by the frame of references of a present (*Cultural Memory 2*).

Maurice Halbwachs did not conceive of collective memory as a synthesis between the various individual memories; he argued that the process should be considered exactly in reverse: it is on the basis of collective memories that individuals construct what they (illusorily) experience as individual memories. It is precisely what Halbwachs referred to as social frameworks of memory that make individual memory possible and condition it in the form of social pressures and influences of all kinds. Thus, it could be said that memory not only plays an obvious leading role in the constitution of individual or group identities but essentially in societal ties and in the formation of subjectivity. In this regard, speaking of collective memories means affirming the essentially social character of memory, but it also implies that both individual memories and cultural memory (as another, less controversial name for the concept of collective memories) are subject to or highly conditioned by the field of forces and political tensions of the present. The individual needs their memory to maintain their personal identity over time. However, collective memory, if it is not simply a psychological absurdity, is the result of mechanisms of transmission. The way in which a group preserves its identity is through a series of mnemonic products or gestures that are presumed to preserve certain fundamental identitarian signs. This consists, on the one hand, of maintaining in the memory of individuals a complex of knowledge associated with identity objectified in symbolic forms (myths, songs, rituals, sacred texts, routes, etc.), and on the other, of a series of practices, such as commemoration, contestation, repentance, and recognition.

In this regard, Ernst van Alphen argues that memory is produced as long as there are subjects who share a culture, as long as there are social agents who attempt to “materialise” these meanings of the past in various cultural products that become “vehicles of memory” and expressions that incorporate the past performatively (*Caught by History*).¹³ The function of this cultural mnemonic device is to guarantee group identity, or at least its continuity; its strategy is repetition and interpretation. Jan Assmann (*Cultural Memory*) differentiates

¹³ “Archives are no longer passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where social power is negotiated, contested or confirmed” (van Alphen, *Staging the Archive* 16).

between the different forms of collective memories; for example, *communicative memories* and *cultural memories*. The former occur during the time in which the protagonists of the period in question are still alive. Communicative memory is an active memory that the community of contemporaries shares and which for many members is a direct memory. According to Assmann, this period usually covers about 80 to 100 years and involves at least four generations. The forms of transmission are testimonial and informal. Within the framework of communicative memories, there is also a social memory, that is, social practices that involve unintentional, non-educational forms of transmission that nevertheless thematise the past in various ways and transmit it. According to Harald Welzer, “[f]our media of the social practice of forming the past can be distinguished: records, (moving) images, spaces, and direct interactions. Each refers to things which were not produced for the purpose of forming tradition, but which nonetheless transport history and shape the past in social contexts” (286).

The second, cultural memory, is the more or less institutionalised accumulation or storage where the documentary traces of the past are gathered or piled up, that is to say, the collection of documents preserved by a given community that no longer includes among its members people with direct memories from that past. The eventual transmission of cultural memories is generally in the hands of experts (heirs of the remote Greek *archon*) who keep the archive: priests, shamans, professors, and academics. The set of traces of the past is usually referred to as tradition. In general, tradition enjoys a general consensus, while communicative memories, sometimes called *hot memories*, are usually disputed memories. These traces of the past, however, are also the product of a selection, the product of what a community has deemed worthy of preserving. This documentary storage where information from the remote past is kept, in turn, contains both canon memory and archive memory. The first are the objects that the community or group (particularly its dominant social sectors) considers necessary to permanently update and transmit to new generations. The canon is what a community, particularly the national state, considers worthy of being transmitted and is usually part of formal education programs. The second type of memory, which we call the archive, consists of what is preserved but not actively communicated and is usually the subject of historiographic research. As Yerushalmi has written, using as a basis the vicissitudes of Jewish memory and his obligation to remember, this selection, which involves the canon and is usually configured as an official memory of the community, is not always the same: changes to the canon are made on rare occasions and in general by certain specific groups (often elites) who undertake a task of remembrance and rescue a certain past that they

consider important for the present of the community, for their identity as a group. If this rescue and transformation of the past is successful, it becomes part of the tradition. The process of remembrance cannot avoid changing that past: all remembrance involves changing its object (at least certain focal points in the inherited texts and images). Memory, like identity, is thus the result of an action; through the selection of memories and through a certain balance between memory and forgetting, individuals and groups turn arbitrary and fragmented experience into communicable stories about the past that at the same time condition the present existence and provide a basis for future action.

Heretical, Clandestine, or Prohibited Memories

One interesting concept in this respect is that of “clandestine” memories, or to use the name used by the Jewish Diaspora, “marrano memories”. Halbwachs himself refers to clandestine configurations of collective memory in early Christianity:

In the core of Christian collective memory there are as many collective memories, each of which claims to reproduce more faithfully than any other that which is their common object: the life and teachings of Christ. The Church has known many such conflicts since its beginning. In attenuated forms, the mystical schools reproduce ancient heresies or affiliate with recent heresies. (*On Collective Memory* 115)

But there are also clandestine memories in the case of the memory of the vanquished on the American continent after the European conquest, involving a temporality, a periodization, and causal and symbolic networks that are radically different from the one ultimately imposed by Western Europe, as explained by Nathan Wachtel in his well-known 1971 work *The Vision of the Vanquished*. Clandestine memories are related to counter-memories or memories that are a counterpoint to public memories or official memories upheld by institutions, national states, and the historiographic canon about the past.

Paul Ricœur defined the active exercise of memory as *remembrance* (*Memory, History, Forgetting*), a term related to what the Greeks called *anamnesis*. It is a conscious effort involving both will and intelligence. But a memory can emerge in a random and fragmentary way without the subject actively seeking it. Memory can take the form of an affliction suffered passively by the subject, that is, something that happens to them. This last form is referred to by Ricœur as *mneme*: memory that emerges to be received involuntarily (*Memory, History, Forgetting*, 14–15), or in Freudian terms, a *mnemic* image. In Marcel

Proust's experience, the forgotten, the lost past is something latent that can only be made intelligible as a result of chance sensations that activate a sensitive memory and appear to us in the form of images (Proust 28). Proust would call this last form of memory *involuntary memory*. Walter Benjamin explored the possibilities of this kind of memory and this kind of images as an opportunity to break with the inherited and canonized tradition of history ("history of the victors") and explore new connections between the present and the past allowing alternative forms of intelligibility and emancipation in the present (Tiedemann 936).

It is in this counter-hegemonic fissure where the memory cultivated by the Mothers during the dictatorship is situated.

Memory and Politics

Aleida Assmann identifies the need for a "political pedagogy" for the transmission of memory, which she understands as a sum of mediations:

Institutions and groups do not possess a memory like individuals do; there is, of course, no equivalent to the neurological system. Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, governments, the church, or a firm do not "have" a memory—they "make" one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments. Together with such a memory, these groups and institutions "construct" an identity. Such a memory is based on selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful from not useful, and relevant from irrelevant memories. Hence a collective memory is necessarily a mediated memory. It is backed up by material media, symbols, and practices which have to be grafted into the hearts and minds of individuals. The extent to which they take hold there depends on the efficiency of the political pedagogy on the one hand and the level of patriotic or ethnic fervor on the other. (55)

It is highly significant that Assmann mentions such "patriotic or ethnic fervor" as one of the pillars that could sustain a collective memory. It is difficult in current studies on cultural memory to imagine collective forms linked to memory that do not participate in one of the following four categories of community life: the business world, the religious sphere, the state, and the ethnic or national world. All of them suppose institutional structures of power (economic, state, or ecclesiastical) with a clear hierarchical bias and institutional devices for dissemination. None of them, however, can be applied to the group of people

involved in keeping alive the memory of the disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship. The relevance of this detail lies in the fact that the theoretical concepts linked to the study of collective memory phenomena are developed on these models or these alternatives, thus restricting the scope of such concepts.

One of the ways of understanding the chains of memory transmission, according to Aleida Assmann, is the passages from social memory to cultural memory. This distinction is motivated by the need to avoid the vagueness of the concept of collective memory.¹⁴ It indicates that there are various formats of memory that exceed the concept of collective memory. These expressions are divided into two large classes that in general terms describe social and interactive memory on the one hand, and political and cultural memory on the other. The first is based on lived experience that fades with its carriers, and the second refers to more durable carriers whose manifestations are external symbols and representations. The shift from a (social) memory that is intergenerationally embodied to a transgenerational (cultural) memory leads to processes of homogenization, specification, and institutionalization of long-term memory.

The passage from one to the other requires an organization that the author summarizes in five points: 1. the events must be organized in a narrative that is emotionally charged and mobilizing; 2. verbal and visual signs that serve as a memory aid; 3. institutions of learning and dissemination in the media; 4. sites and monuments presenting palpable relics; 5. commemorative rites that periodically reactivate memory and encourage collective participation. She adds:

Though grounded on external symbols, a collective memory can be re-embodied and transmitted from one generation to another. The cultural memory of a society is based on institutions such as libraries, museums, archives, monuments, institutions of education and the arts as well as ceremonies and commemorative dates and practices. While social forms of memory are short-lived because they depend on embodied and interactive communication, political and cultural formats of memory are designed for a long-term use to be transmitted across generations. (Whether they achieve this goal,

¹⁴ “The term collective memory, I would argue, is not necessarily a spurious notion, but it is much too vague to serve as a critical term. It is an umbrella term for different formats of memory that need to be further distinguished, such as family memory, interactive group memory, and social, political, national, and cultural memory” (A. Assmann 55).

is of course another matter, depending on the stability and continuity of the political infrastructure). (56)

It can be said that in Argentina all of these requirements are met, with some exceptions. Point 1 (narrative) is problematic not because of the absence of vigorous and emotional narratives, but because of the lack of a consensual narrative. The requirement under point 2 (verbal and visual signs) is widely met in Argentina, but the development and dissemination of these verbal and visual signs was the work of groups of Mothers and the artists who supported them. The few state interventions (before the Kirchner period) in this area were challenged or rejected. Regarding point 3 – institutions – groups that promote memory in Argentina have done a remarkable job of dissemination (until the Kirchner period, outside of the state media structure), in close partnership with social movements. The conditions mentioned in point 4 (monuments) were created in a long process that included the conversion of clandestine detention centres (CDCs) into museums. Those of point 5 (rites) are met in Argentina through the consecration of anniversaries that until 2002 were *unofficial*, as is the case of the marches of March 24, which every year commemorate the fateful day of the coup d'état with mass demonstrations supported and sustained by almost all of the social movements that raise demands in Argentina. Without these institutional and infrastructural supports, social memory could not endure, but Aleida Assman does not seem to contemplate the possibility that certain types of groups, not necessarily linked to state, religious or business institutions, persist over time because of an unresolved tension at the level of political antagonism, as is the case in Argentina.

Based on the above description, it could be concluded that the struggles for memory and for the transmission of these memories in Argentina had more to do with the way in which these struggles were linked to the political antagonisms of the country and civil society than with a kind of public or state policy firmly established in institutions. It is also necessary to underscore the fact that the movements for memory and justice, particularly the Mothers, have always had a universalist (human rights) approach and do not identify with any identitarian subculture. Those in Argentina who take up the cause of justice and truth have not necessarily had direct experiences with state repression in the past nor necessarily have relatives who have been victims of state terror. It is their present experience with the national state that leads them to insist on the obscure origin of present legislation and to seek its antecedents and expose them. This practice of memory is not based on identity dynamics or on a conflict between subcultures, but on a political conflict that implies the need to

profoundly rethink the relationship between the state and society. Each of its public manifestations in democracy was in itself a challenge to the political order (now democratic or post-dictatorial) that succeeded the dictatorship. It was through these challenges that a critical constellation has been built around the groups that defend human rights, which includes not only the testimonial activism of the victims of a regime, but also a series of intellectuals concerned with defining not only the historical dimensions of the damage but also the network of state and social complicities that made the past crimes possible. The struggle for the meanings of the recent past encouraged the exercise of “critical memory” and an inevitable questioning of the current institutional order, since post-dictatorial democracy could never completely free itself of the stigma of multiple forms of continuity between that recent past and the new democratic legality (Oberti and Pittaluga, “Memorias en montaje”).¹⁵

Memory and Temporality

At this time, there is not only a revival of interest in memory but also a paradigmatic shift particularly in the way Western Europe experiences temporality. According to historian Enzo Traverso, this sudden interest in memory cannot be understood without taking into account the political, social, and ideological turning point during the last decades of the twentieth century (*Left-Wing Melancholia* 56–57). Some concepts laid out by Reinhart Koselleck are useful in understanding the dimensions of this paradigm shift: “experience space” and “expectation horizon”, two historical categories. Koselleck explains that after the French Revolution, a profound change in our experience of time occurred that affected the balance that existed, according to Koselleck, between two dimensions of our historical experience: what he called the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation” (255–275). Modernity upset this balance, giving rise to the acceleration of historical time and a new concept of revolution, that is, not as rotation but as radical innovation (Koselleck 43–57). The twenty-first century, on the other hand, inaugurated the era of another experience of time that French historian François Hartog referred to as “presentism”. Our century has naturalized a

¹⁵ “Se trataría (de la memoria crítica) de memorias que actúan para perturbar las estrategias instrumentalizadoras del pasado que sirven para mantener la dominación, para mantener el orden, estrategias que incluyen, como en todo proceso hegemónico, voces e historias opuestas. ... Formas de presentar el pasado, de articular el presente y lo sucedido que evitarían también que los ejercicios de memoria sean utilizados para desconocer las demandas políticas y sociales actuales, es decir, las deudas generadas hoy.” (“It [critical memory] would be about memories that act to disrupt the instrumentalizing strategies of the past that serve to maintain domination, to maintain order, strategies that include, as in any hegemonic process, opposing voices and stories. ... Ways of presenting the past, of articulating the present and what happened that would also prevent the exercises of remembrance from being used to disregard current political and social demands, that is, the debts generated today”; Oberti and Pittaluga, “Memorias en montaje” 45–46; translated by Marisela Trevin).

social structure that is experienced as immanent and immutable, in the framework of which historical time accelerates without affecting this structure at all. For Hartog, this is a new *regime of historicity*. Based on these approaches, Traverso maintains that the turn of the last century was characterised by a crisis of the utopian imagination. *Presentism* is a time suspended between a past that no longer passes and a future that can no longer be anticipated or predicted, except in the form of a catastrophe. This yields a diluted present that absorbs both the past and the future in such a way that “the dialectical tension between past and future is broken in a world withdrawn into the present” (Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia* 57). In this new frame of reference, symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the idea of an end of history, stories about the past serve as warnings for the present, anti-totalitarian warnings that gradually become warnings about the political.

The dominant idea about the historical past that in some way inspires the current type of academic approach to memory is the feeling that the past, a past that has been overcome, was nothing more than a time of violence, genocide and totalitarianism, an overwhelming time that only produced countless victims. This way of seeing things is, in fact, related to the discovery of the victim as the great forgotten figure of the twentieth century. The victim (and the need for them to be named and remembered) becomes a focus of historical research and practices of memory as never before. But this figure is, above all, a figure of passivity, of infinite suffering. Emblematic examples are the victims of the Nazi genocide in European concentration camps and the experience of the survivors. They are people who were gathered together, classified, deported, displaced, and murdered exclusively because they belonged to a supposed *race*, not because of their ideas or practices. The indescribable crimes of Nazism and their replication in the crimes of Soviet Stalinism preceded and conditioned reflections on memory at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. When the political link between the present and the past disappeared and memory as memory of the oppressed was depoliticized, the link between identity and memory returned to its old place of national memory; they were extended to ethnic memories or memories of minorities, memories that in the multicultural context of late capitalism, we could say, degenerated towards a situation of memories in competition. This competition can only take place when the demands to remember and commemorate the victims of past atrocities revolve exclusively around identity struggles. As Michael Rothberg saw it, this situation led to a struggle for the pre-eminence of certain memories in public space at the expense of others (2). A classic example in the United States, according to Rothberg, is the competition between the memory of slavery and the memories of the Holocaust (23). His proposal for

multidirectional memories in permanent negotiation, capable of articulating, for example, both the Holocaust and the history of slavery around a topic like the history of racism in the United States, is an attempt to re-politicize memory. If we understand politics in the way Rancière does, that is, as the conflict between the logic of domination (police-administration) and the radical democratic logic of equality, it will be necessary to conclude that historical and collective memory is political when it exercises a certain distance from the ideological obsession with identity. According to Rancière, political subjectivation is not constituted without a break with the previous *distribution of the sensible*, that is, the functions, the ways of saying, doing, and living of different social sectors in a given society (*Disagreement* ix–x).

In a society of *post-politics*, the immediate past is no longer perceived as a time of struggles between different societal projects, between different futures, a time of struggles and changes, but as a time of undifferentiated violence exclusively inhabited by perpetrators and victims. According to Rancière (“The Ethical Turn”), this climate of the time should be called “the ethical turn of politics”, in the sense of a community without conflict where politics and art are judged based on morality. What is somehow obliterated in this new ethical approach to the twentieth century is the agency of those who resisted or acted politically to transform the social conditions of existence. Agency in these new narratives is reserved almost exclusively for the executioners or perpetrators of these crimes (too often forgetting uprisings like that of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943 or strikes against the occupier, such as the strike of February 1942 in occupied Amsterdam). Current sensibility regarding the past (what is transmitted in educational spheres and favoured in academic research) is a type of work on memory focused on constant mourning for the victims, and what is transmitted to new generations is not the need “to change the world” but rather the duty to remember and honour them, along with the explicit or implicit warning that any political initiative that puts this hegemonic liberal-democratic present at risk may end in disaster. “Nowadays, the actors of the past need to achieve the status of victim in order to conquer a place in public memory” (Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia* 57). In this way, commemoration easily becomes an implicit celebration of the present. Germany in particular, and its specific relationship with its totalitarian past, was the central place from which this metamorphosis of historical consciousness, or in other words, this radical change in the regime of historicity, was able to take place. Undoubtedly among the motivations for this change was the experience of the end of socialist states and the planetary hegemony of an unbridled and triumphalist capitalism. This process was parallel to the breakdown of the old workers’ *socialities* built around an industrial fabric that in Europe was almost completely dismantled, and also parallel to the

crisis of the old social democratic or communist mass parties that were a driving force of the twentieth century, within the framework of which a memory of the left was successfully transmitted.

In Latin America, the military coups played this role of dismantling and reorganising the social fabric in neoliberal fashion. If we accept Traverso's interpretation, the new impetus of memory must be understood as a fundamental paradox, because while this shift from the social towards memory occurred in the 1990s, there was a simultaneous erasure, a forgetting, of old forms of subjectivity shaped by transformative practices. Very important twentieth-century traditions such as social militancy, workers' memory, and anti-fascism were thus obscured. This shift towards memory cannot be understood without the disappearance of the future, of utopia, and of the emancipatory change in contemporary considerations about the fate of today's society. In a world without collective projects, without utopias, one's gaze inevitably turns to the past. The abrupt abandonment of the "principle of hope", as the Frankfurt Marxist Ernst Bloch called utopian energies, determined the intellectual atmosphere of the European and North American twenty-first century, giving shape to a type of commemorative inquiry focused on history as a nightmare without any possible redemption, in the absence of any project other than that of reconciliation and consensus (*The Principle of Hope*). Our profoundly depoliticized age is characterised by a type of temporality where the public imagination, as explained by Frederic Jameson, finds it "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism", as continuously demonstrated by the popular genre of apocalyptic cinema ("Future City" 76). If memory is a matter of the present, the manufacture of a past according to the needs and concerns of the present, as asserted by Jan Assmann, then the present we inhabit will obviously tend to create a past of undifferentiated violence, where political oppositions are reduced to the difference between (liberal) democracy and totalitarianism. Thus, paradoxically, the terror of the past (conceived as an effect of political or ideological commitment) continues to serve as a warning; that is to say, in each commemoration, we are reminded of our fragility and the terrible consequences of rising up against the State. It is precisely this aspect that is of enormous relevance for the debates on memory in post-dictatorial Argentina.

Memory and Forgetting

In 1942 the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación* published a short story by Jorge Luis Borges that later became part of the famous 1944 collection *Ficciones*, namely "Funes el memorioso" (55–58; translated by Anthony Kerrigan as "Funes, the Memorious" 107–115).

Borges' story takes place in 1887 and is the "evocation" of a young peasant from Uruguay who, after an equestrian accident, is blessed with an absolute memory. Ireneo Funes was 19 years old and would die in one year. When Funes fell, he lost consciousness, but "when he recovered it, the present was almost intolerable it was so rich and bright; the same was true of the most ancient and most trivial memories" ("Funes, the Memorious" 112).¹⁶ Shortly afterwards, he realized that he was completely disabled. But this barely affected him. While before his accident Funes was almost incapable of reading, now a single reading of Pliny's *Naturalis historia* was enough for him to list, in Latin and Spanish, all of the cases of prodigious memories that were mentioned there, in Chapter 24 of the seventh book: "Cyrus, king of the Persians, who could call every soldier in his armies by name; Mithridates Eupator, who administered justice in the twenty-two languages of his empire; Simonides, inventor of mnemotechny; Metrodorus, who practiced the art of repeating faithfully what he heard once" (111).¹⁷ Tied to his bed, Funes the invalid "remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book which he had seen only once" (112).¹⁸ He could reconstruct "all his dreams, all his fancies. Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day" (112),¹⁹ although each reconstruction had in turn required a whole day. However, he was incapable of constructing abstract thoughts, and he was not interested in doing so either. The common human being needs definitions to find his bearings in the world; Funes just needed to remember.

Rumour had it that it was actually the weight of Funes' memory that destroyed his young life. This defence of forgetting raises the issue of memory as a selective machine, and its relationship with narrative, the canon, and the archive. Forgetting as a theme, as a necessity, and the uses and abuses of forgetting have been debated since ancient times, but here I will highlight the most influential modern examples. One of the most well-known is Friedrich Nietzsche's essential defence of forgetting in his *Untimely Meditations*.

¹⁶ "cuando la recobró, el presente era casi intolerable de tan rico y tan nítido, y también las memorias más antiguas y más triviales" ("Funes el memorioso" 55).

¹⁷ "Ciro, rey de los persas, que sabía llamar por su nombre a todos los soldados de sus ejércitos; Mitrídates Eupator, que administraba la justicia en los 22 idiomas de su imperio; Simónides, inventor de la mnemotecnia; Metrodoro, que profesaba el arte de repetir con fidelidad lo escuchado una sola vez" ("Funes el memorioso" 56).

¹⁸ "sabía las formas de las nubes australes del amanecer del 30 de abril de 1882, y podía compararlas en el recuerdo con las vetas de un libro en pasta española que solo había mirado una vez" ("Funes el memorioso" 57).

¹⁹ "todos los sueños, los entresueños. Dos o tres veces había reconstruido un día entero" ("Funes el memorioso" 58).

As if he were referring to the famous Borgean character, Nietzsche had written in his second *Untimely Meditation* of 1874: “Imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting[.] ... He would in the end hardly dare to raise his finger. Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic” (“On the Uses and Disadvantages” 62). Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed in his *Untimely Meditations* that we suffer from an all-consuming historical fever, a living without being able to forget that destroys the vitality of a culture and precludes action, and he postulated the need to know how to forget voluntarily, in the same way that we also remember voluntarily. In this work, of which the central theme is the clarification of the relationship between life and history, Nietzsche asserts that the society of his time *suffers* from history. An excess of historicism sickens and damages life (67). History as a science has become separated from life, it has become an end in itself. The result is a confusing storage of information that is indigestible. Excess memory conspires against life.

For the German philosopher, memory is not related to remote mandates, but to the *presentness* of debt and pain in the body. Man is an animal that can keep promises. But these promises are experienced as guilt or debt, which in German are the same word: *Schuld*. What is at the origin of the feeling of guilt is, then, a feeling of debt, the idea that we owe something; but that feeling is also socially institutionalized in contractual relationships and ultimately sanctioned by penalties. A memory that is not antithetical to forgetting would allow it to be redirected to the future instead of to the past, making memory valuable to human life. He refers to this new conception of history that transforms past contingencies into future necessities as *counter-history* because it reverses the flow of time and finds necessity not in what was and is but in what may be in the future. Thus, the past is not something that must be accepted with resignation as a given, but that must be formed and transformed, interpreted and re-interpreted. This idea leads Nietzsche to assert that history at the service of life is an art and not a science, and that the impetus that shapes and transforms the past is artistic, not epistemological.

Nietzsche’s idea of the pedagogy of pain can be used to venture the hypothesis of an association between the cultivation of a victimizing memory with the extension of fear, that is to say, with an interest on the part of the state in reminding its citizens of the price that is paid for questioning the state’s monopoly on violence. Forgetting the stories of resistance against and defiance of the state, and remembering almost exclusively and in great detail the pain inflicted on the bodies of the victims of the state, not only inspires compassion and anguish; it also fills us with a feeling of helplessness and a certain sacred terror. Nietzsche’s intention is

not to proclaim what he calls “animal forgetfulness” – that form of “bliss” denied to human beings – as the formula for dealing with the past. The focus of Nietzsche’s criticism is the kind of historiographic practices of his time, particularly the claim to objectivity typified by the historian Leopold von Ranke. For Nietzsche, the theoretical-scientific ideal of the nineteenth-century historian, based on the criterion of objectivity, involves a certain passivity characteristic of an antiquarian. The antiquarian loves objects from the past and would like them to remain unchanged. Forgetting is not a force that inhibits memory but one that is actively involved in the evolution of memory. Memory is not opposed to animal forgetfulness but rather participates in that forgetfulness. When memory is radically opposed to forgetting, it can generate a past that undermines the future of life.

However, when memory is involved in forgetting, it establishes a relationship with the past that enriches life. The history that Nietzsche criticises is one that assumes a timeless point of view and attempts to judge the past with unalterable criteria according to an idea of consciousness as absolute and always equal to itself. Thus, Nietzsche opposes history as the preservation and veneration practised by an *antiquarian* and proposes as an alternative not so much forgetfulness but a fluid relationship with the past that constitutes a critical memory and is at the service of life. This formulation by Nietzsche can be interpreted as echoing Karl Marx’s well-known passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (595)

Remembrance and forms of identification with discourses and behaviours of the past were used by the bourgeois revolutions to legitimize an unprecedented transformation. For example, the leaders of the French Revolution reappropriated the vocabulary of the Roman Republic, thus disguising the historical novelty of the revolution. These acts of historical masking or camouflage were also recognised by Halbwachs:

In this way the new structure was elaborated in the shadow of the old. We might say that the new ideas became salient only after having for a long time behaved as if they were the old ones. It is upon a foundation of remembrances that contemporary institutions were constructed. For many of them it was not enough to demonstrate that

they were useful to make them acceptable. They were forced to fade into the background, so to speak, in order to make apparent the traditions behind them which they aspired to replace and with which they tried in the meantime to fuse. (“On Collective Memory” 125–126)

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx posits that “[t]he social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past” (597). In this sense, memory is viewed as a reactionary devotion that makes the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness and a new subjectivity in line with the purposes of the emancipation of labour impossible. Great memories are nothing more than the presence (the present) of the past as a rite and as a limit to the emancipating powers of the present, and for this reason, Marx believed it necessary to subject them to criticism in order to distance oneself from them.

This radical stance against memory was due to the idea that the future communist revolution needed to invent its own language if it wished to avoid the distortion of its substance. But in relation to the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx himself ventured the possibility of a revolutionary tradition, that is to say, a memory that belongs entirely to the labour movement, that would remember and honour its leaders or martyrs. This is the starting point of other frameworks, completely different from national traditions, for a memory of history that leaves numerous symbols, works of art, significant materialities, and places of collective memory, that is to say, what we may call workers’ memory.

One of the themes that is often associated with the uses or abuses of memory is what is referred to as official national history. During the consolidation of nation-states in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the educational structure of the state was conceived as a way of creating national citizens and, for this purpose, it deployed what would be referred to today as “politics of memory”. Each country had its national history, an account of the nation’s past that promoted feelings of patriotic loyalty. This is particularly true in Latin American nations born in the early nineteenth century out of the contingencies of their struggles for independence, as fragments of the old Spanish colonial empire. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the new independent nations did not constitute fully justified nations, according to the ideas of the time (in general, romantic ideas about the people and the national genius, language, and identitarian legends). The national states made great efforts towards cultural uniformity, especially through the teaching of history in general

primary and secondary school education. This history was obviously national history, a kind of official history of the nation. It was a story based primarily on a romantic narrative that idealized the “heroes” or “forefathers” of independence and the first civil wars. The extent to which these national histories were at the same time sustained by a series of monuments, tributes, and places of memory can still be recognized today in the urban landscape of Buenos Aires. These monuments consecrate a unique version of national history and are intended to be timeless, as shown by the profuse use of marble and stone in commemorative monuments and bronze in equestrian statues. The construction of this story was the work of professional historians and designers of teaching materials whose success in shaping a certain national tradition depended largely on the political forces at play and the specific composition of the ruling elites, their economic interests, and their political projects.

Pierre Nora has done a formidable job of compiling information on the sites of national memory in France, based on Halbwachs’ ideas on the construction of collective memory.²⁰ To him we owe a series of considerations regarding the differences between history and memory. For Nora, history must conform to the facts, while memory always includes emotional, identitarian, or political aspects that are not based on documentary veracity. National memory is an obviously selective narrative, in which a fabric of collective memories related in the style of romantic literature is coupled with a fabric of forgetfulness that is no less dense. It is this “necessary” forgetfulness that sustains the coherence of the official narrative and perhaps the ideological consistency of the nation as a distinguishable and recognisable community, at least for its inhabitants. The contemporary insistence on the essentially narrative character of historiographic discourse has contributed to a great extent to the loss of credibility of these national narratives conceived as an “objective” historiographic contribution to national culture.

In Ernst Renan’s famous defence of forgetting in his 1882 lecture entitled “What is a Nation?” the French intellectual justifies these efforts on the part of the state because he denies that nations are based on ethnic backgrounds and verifiable historical origins. In his view, nations are voluntary constructs supported by a mixture of populations. The awareness of a common past is an indispensable element for the constitution of nations, but its survival depends on a selective memory. In order to maintain national cohesion, certain disruptive aspects in the events of the past must be excluded from memory; “all its individuals must

²⁰ *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*. The texts by Pierre Nora that make up this book were published in French in the collective work, under the direction of Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*.

have many things in common, but must also have forgotten many things” (Renan 137). This well-known lecture is useful for understanding how the agents of memory and particularly the nation-state do not implement politics of forgetting or politics of memory, but rather act to establish a particular *articulation* between the two in order to sustain what Benedict Anderson has called an “imagined community” (6–7).

In the twentieth century, Freud also reclaimed the value of forgetting, but as an inevitable constituent dimension of psychic life. Psychoanalytic theory does not consider forgetting as a failure, or a loss, but as the result of operations of censorship and repression that govern or structure the critical balance between conscious life and the abysses of the unconscious (“Psychopathology”).

For Paul Ricœur, forgetting is a “disturbing threat” and what allows its abuse is the inevitable narrative configuration that every attempt to transmit the past acquires (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 412). Thus, the manipulation of memory is based on the means of variation offered by the work of narrative configuration: “The strategies of forgetting are directly grafted upon this work of configuration: one can always recount differently, by eliminating, by shifting the emphasis, by recasting the protagonists of the action in a different light along with the outlines of the action” (448).

Memory is the selection and narration of events, which therefore presupposes a specific social organisation of memory. What influences this selection in the first place is forgetting. It is obvious that between what happened and what is remembered, between what happened and what is forgotten, there is a very complex network of mediations that includes interests, narratives, politics, and emotions, in addition to chance, which makes memory a problematic matter by definition. Every memory or every image that comes to mind is associated with something that is forgotten or overshadowed. Forgetting follows memory like its shadow. Ricœur distinguishes between two important figures of profound forgetting. One of them is forgetting due to destruction of traces. This destruction may be voluntary or involuntary and is organized into three types: documentary, cortical, and affective. This division into three types of destruction is organized by Ricœur based on three types of mark or footprint. One of these marks is the document as a fingerprint. This can be destroyed by ideological interests or power interests. Archives are the defence we have against this type of destruction. Another is the cortical or neuronal imprint (its destruction is then related to brain dysfunction). The third is the affective mark, the image of something or someone that survives in our memory, a memory that can remain unavailable for a long time but that returns at the (almost miraculous) moment of recognition. In this last case, oblivion occurs as

a form of profound forgetting. It is what Ricœur called a forgetting held in reserve. It is forgetting as an obstructed memory or as a manipulated memory (412–415). Political repression in Argentina was intended to ensure oblivion through the destruction of documents and the manipulation of memory. To this, the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo opposed their own testimony and the construction of a counter-archive.

Memory and Archive

The archive is the place that contains rigid data, dead or resolved things that have lost the impetus of contingency and, thus, the knowledge it produces always has a funereal air. Archives preserve not so much the events of the past as they have occurred, but rather the interested forms of their recovery and the nature of their retrieval. For this reason, it can be assumed that the archive, in addition to performing its function of preservation, creates the event, produces it. Founding an archive is above all an act of tracing, selection, and registration, in which social memory is guarded and organised in paradigmatic relationships that regulate the way in which the past can be transmitted. The documentary relevance of what will remain is decided in the archive, but these decisions can never be separated from the way in which this documentary storage is organised, that is to say, what is kept is registered in a specific place, a category, placing it in a syntactic relationship with other objects, creating significant series.

The idea that the archive not only organizes but constitutes our knowledge is an idea that Michel Foucault developed in his 1969 book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. The archive is, first of all, the place that makes certain statements possible and inhibits others. Thus, all critical work must begin as the critique of the archive. Photography as a document, for example, emerges in the act of photographing, which already involves the power to crop, a design of reality, a staging, but the archive reserves for itself the power to classify photographic material, incorporating documents and rejecting others, according to arbitrary criteria. What we find in the photographic archive is what has survived a double cropping or a double filter (the capture of the image and its archiving) inspired by different interests. This involves more than an arbitrary selection: it involves a regime of appearance.

In the personal identification systems of the modern state and the series of institutions of which it is composed, what is recorded in its archives is not our personal sense of identity, but rather an objective or reified identity, created in connection with a series of specific characteristics, such as a profession, a marital status, educational or medical data, and even racial or ethnic characteristics that in a certain sense take the form of a certain fate. On the

one hand, the subject is interpellated according to that manufactured identity and, on the other hand, those who do not appear in those records do not exist. Today, the mechanisms of identification of state archives are established on the basis of biometric data with respect to which we cannot exert individual will or practice any distancing. They are procedures of identification and recognition inscribed in the body and even in our genetic code, and they reduce us, as Giorgio Agamben has tirelessly repeated, to *bare life*, where there is no room for personal or collective ethics (*Nudities* 51–52). The passion for identification of modern archives, which promotes a surveillance technology that is in constant development, has led to what is known as *big data*, built on the basis of computer platforms capable of storing innumerable personal data. The algorithm aims to group users together in “echo chambers”, allowing them to know their preferences and habits of consumption and thus to create complete psychological profiles which are trafficked. This is referred to as the *performative* character of the archive (van Alphen, *Staging the Archive* 16), because the funereal aspect of the modern archive does not prevent it from being a dynamic device. The archive is supposed to preserve (or save) the events of the past, or personal data, but its primary utility is prospective; its authentic purpose is the future, because the identifying archive is a machine that converts the future into something calculable.

What we have of the past is always remains, fragments, and their meaning is always problematic. Cultural memory is often spoken of as an inheritance, a kind of buried treasure that one must unearth to find. But as Hannah Arendt pointed out in *Between Past and Future*, citing a well-known text by the poet René Char, “[o]ur inheritance was left to us by no testament” (3). What is meant by this is that the buried treasure of the past that was left to us has no legal heirs; it is subject to a political dispute and it is in danger. This is an idea that Walter Benjamin had defended in several of his texts, particularly in “On the Concept of History”, when he refers to a tradition threatened by its barbaric transmission. “There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism”, Benjamin argues, suggesting that memory is governed by the victors (392). Georges Didi-Huberman asserts that we not only inherit memories but also inherit what is forgotten, and wonders, for example, how does one inherit the courage of others? Referring to the fate of the memories of the Warsaw ghetto (*Desear desobedecer* 315–330), Didi-Huberman’s question could be reformulated as follows: to which archive does the Warsaw Ghetto insurrection belong? What archive can account for those acts? Could there be a relationship, a link between the archive and the revolt to the extent that it can be said that the primary purpose of the state archive is to prevent it?

Applied to the archives, the principle of revolt always involves a categorical disruption. A paradigmatic case of a close, political link between revolt and archive is the Ringelblum Archive, the archive of resistance of the ghetto that operated from 1939 to 1943. The Nazi government was a formidable archiver, as shown by the meticulous documentation carried out in the camps (van Alphen, “Monument for Future Memory” 5). It was the criteria of selection, delimitation, registration and administrative discrimination that guaranteed the effectiveness of Nazi extermination. The ghetto inhabitants who were organised in the Bund, the socialist Jewish organisation, and the left-wing Zionists (like Ringelblum himself) knew very well that annihilation awaited them, but they also knew that the Nazi government would administer the future memory of Polish Jews. There was even a plan for a “Central Museum of Extinct Races in Germany” (“Monument for Future Memory” 3). Faced with the Nazi archive of “extinction” and its future museum, the archiving team of Oyneg Shabes (in Hebrew, those who celebrate the Sabbath), formed within the ghetto around historian and anthropologist Emanuel Ringelblum, made the political decision to dispute that future memory by collecting and hiding everything that could be gathered about the lives of the ghetto inhabitants. While the act of archiving means *setting apart* what is relevant, separating it from what is not, the underground archive of the ghetto was aimed at recording everything: life diaries, chronicles of starvation, poems, stories and children’s drawings, personal belongings, provisions established by authorities, resistance diaries, photos, maps of the camps, theatre posters, mementos and testimonies, farewell letters, calls to arms, statistics, and testaments. It is a storage archive, a horizontal, underground, exuberant collection, lacking hierarchies and fixations, and can only be described by the Borgean strategy of chaotic enumeration.²¹ These materials were buried before the ghetto uprising and partially recovered after the war. The decision to build this archive was purely political: it involved a break with the strategy of appeasement and negotiation of the *Judenräte*, or Jewish Councils, whose policy was to act as intermediaries for the Nazi government. It involved the acceptance of illegality as the only autonomous area of action: a break with the illusions cultivated by many in the ghetto, who sought to prolong their lives by obeying the authorities. It involved setting in motion “a politics of truth”, and a truth that can only be an underground truth (Didi-Huberman, *Eparses* 71–79). It also involved building the archive on the basis of

²¹ For Ernst van Alphen, the model of Ringelblum’s archive, whether willingly or not, is that of the “classical archive”, which reconstructs a life, not the modern archive, which creates reified identities. See van Alphen, “Monument for Future Memory”.

collective and complicit work linked to illegal mutual aid organisations (underground schools, soup kitchens, medical assistance, etc.) inside the ghetto.

The principles of the modern archive are capturing, fixation, and uniformity. Police archives show marks that power has inflicted on wretched or “infamous” lives, marks on the fragile human body, that is to say, lives which are only brought to our knowledge because they had the misfortune of having come into contact with the state (Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men”). A good example of this type of archive is the secret archives of state terror, which are carried out by political and social repressive apparatuses in an illegal or semi-legal manner, often using parallel structures, such as *death squads*. These are archives that facilitate the organization and effectiveness of illegal repression. They could be conceptualised as *unspeakable archives*, a special variant of the modern archive and the police archive.

There are two key examples that shed light on the modes of operation of state terror: one is the National Police Archives of Guatemala, which were discovered by a combination of chance and ineptitude. An explosion in December 2005 in the munitions depot of the police institution where they were kept (or concealed) revealed 75 to 80 million pages of police files on almost a century of abuses, especially the systematic and naturalised racism of the State in Guatemala, but also on the dirty war and annihilation of the 1980s and 1990s: arbitrary detentions, secret executions, disappearances, and systematic torture.²² The other example is the archive that was also found by chance in 1992 in Paraguay, documenting the fate of hundreds and perhaps thousands of victims of Operation Condor in the Southern Cone.

In Argentina, however, the fate of this kind of unspeakable archive is still unknown to us. In this case, one would have to speak of an *absent archive*, since there is only extremely fragmentary knowledge of it today and the Argentine state has been unwilling or unable to obligate the armed forces to provide this vital information about their operations.²³ Research

²² Kirsten Weld, citing Gloria Alberti, refers to these as “archives of terror”, contrary, and at the same time complementary, to the “archive of pain”, which involves documents and testimonies collected by relatives, human rights organisations and other non-state actors (4).

²³ One of the cases that testify to the existence of these hidden files is the photos of disappeared detainees that the graphic worker Víctor Bastera managed to steal from the ESMA (the Navy Mechanics School – current Museum of Memory – and one of the largest clandestine detention centres in Buenos Aires, located in the Federal Capital). Bastera was detained at that centre between 1979 and 1983 and he was in charge of taking passport photos of the repressors. Starting in 1980, Bastera began to hide some of the photos in his underwear and photosensitive paper envelopes (envelopes with the negatives whose opening implied the veiling of the

on state terror in Argentina continues to depend on the documentary contributions of human rights organizations, the families of the victims and survivors, their oral testimonies, and the remains found in mass graves. Any consideration of the theme of the archive in Argentina, according to Pittaluga, must begin with this observation, that of the *absent archive* (“Democratización del archivo”).²⁴ These archives were intended to remain hidden, destroyed, or buried. It is remarkable that these archives of terror were, in a way, also underground archives, even though they were organised by the State, and that they were intended to be concealed, just as the Ringelblum Archive was buried in the ghetto area. But the Ringelblum Archive was buried to save it from destruction, to save the life testimonies and the historical denunciation of thousands of people who knew their death awaited them. *It was buried in order to be found*. The underground archive formed by Ringelblum and his group gathered from the ghetto multiple forms of experience, even the most anodyne, anything that would serve to rebuild a life. Van Alphen thus explains the initiative of Ringelblum and his people as a battle for memory, fought in advance – a battle against the Nazis’ handling of that past.

Didi-Huberman, for his part, points out that this battle continues today. There is no consensus on the memories of the ghetto. The right wing of Israeli Zionism claims them as part of the eternity of the Jewish nation. But for some survivors and former leaders of the uprising, such as Marek Edelman, the legacy of the ghetto is not the glory of the State of Israel but a social struggle in which evil is not Nazi, but human, and a legacy that tells us how to recognise that evil wherever it emerges, in every situation of oppression. Thus the legacy of the ghetto uprising is not the State of Israel; it belongs to all those who fight against unjust power. Here we have the same experience and memories that are diametrically opposed to each other, or a politically contradictory legacy.

In Argentina, this *storage* archive, which confronts the biopolitical strategies of the power that disappeared those who resisted, is the archive of the Mothers and Grandmothers

photos). Since 2007, the images have belonged to the exhibition “Faces taken from ESMA”. They were shown for the first time in the Museum of Art and Memory of the city of La Plata.

²⁴ “Pensar el tema de los archivos en Argentina implica inmediatamente reflexionar sobre su escasez, sobre la falta de repositorios públicos, de tal manera que quien quisiera escribir una “historia del archivo” tendría que ceñirse a una historia de su ausencia, de su liquidación, su emigración o su privatización. O, dicho de otro modo, una historia de las formas de desplazamiento, del desplazamiento del archivo como uno de los fundamentos de la vida cultural de nuestro país.” (“Thinking about the issue of archives in Argentina immediately implies reflecting on their scarcity, on the lack of public repositories, in such a way that whoever wanted to write a “history of the archive” would have to stick to a history of their absence, of its liquidation, its emigration or its privatization. Or, in other words, a history of the forms of displacement, of the shift of the archive as one of the foundations of the cultural life of our country”; Pittaluga, “Democratización del archivo”).

of the Plaza de Mayo, which was a response to the archival act of the dictatorship. It could be said, according to Didi-Huberman's reasoning, that the Mothers, a group that never intended to seize power, either voluntarily or involuntarily, exerted certain *unpower*, which is a kind of *potency*. This ability led them over the years to spearhead the general resistance against the dictatorship. Part of this potency (which implies political inventiveness) was the slow construction of an archive. It is an archive that, like Ringelblum's, was a response to that X, to that hole in the state archive, an "other" archive, to the extent that the family and personal histories of the victims and even art aimed at evoking the disappearance were added to the inventories of legal data of the disappeared. Both of these archives can be described as counter-archives, or better yet, archives *in revolt*. Although both make an inventory of the destruction on the ground, Emanuel Ringelblum's *Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto* and Rodolfo Walsh's "Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar" ("Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta")²⁵ in Argentina are identical political acts in that they attempt to break through the walls, addressing the future, announcing a possible justice, and a kind of hope *that was no longer for them*.

²⁵ "Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta" is the last work of writer and journalist Rodolfo Walsh. It was written in March 1977, one year after the military coup. It is a detailed analysis of the situation and a forceful denunciation of the government's actions. Walsh managed to make numerous copies of it and mailed them to various media outlets abroad. Gabriel García Márquez described the text as a "masterpiece of journalism". Hours after writing the letter, Walsh was kidnapped and killed.

CHAPTER 2: THE LAST MILITARY DICTATORSHIP IN ARGENTINA

The disappeared do not celebrate birthdays. Their date of birth is just the starting point for determining their age. The disappeared do not age because their bodies – the place where ageing occurs – are unimaginable. They also do not tolerate the accumulation of years that calculate the passage of infinite death. There is no celebration or mourning. Nothing except the persistence of memory that preserves the fading pain of a search: the disappeared are – only – the sum of acts in the effort to make their deaths visible, to overcome the unbearable anxiety produced by the unnameable. Death is precise. No one is fated to be born; on the other hand, no certainty is more solid than unavoidable death. The disappeared are those who have not died; those who face the threatening possibility of having been born forever without being eternal. No invention is crueller than the one expressed in the idea of limbo, the “frontier” of hell that will never be crossed. That is where the disappeared can be found, on the immobile border. (Héctor Schmucler, “En nombre de la Patria”)²⁶

Introduction

In this chapter I will expand on four axes that I consider essential for laying out the contextual background of memory practices related to state terrorism in Argentina. First, I will make a brief review of the national and international historical context and the emergence of the civil-military dictatorship in Argentina. Second, I will address the rhetorical construction of the enemy in the dictatorial account, that is, the concept of the *subversive*. Third, I will review the repressive design in the Argentine case with the help of the most recent studies on this subject. Finally, I will concentrate on that new social actor that emerged in 1977 as a product of resistance to state terrorism: the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. International coordination around a systematic annihilation plan was contradicted by the

²⁶ “El desaparecido no cumple años. El día de nacimiento queda abandonado como punto de partida para establecer una edad. El desaparecido no envejece porque el cuerpo –lugar del envejecimiento– no es imaginable. Tampoco tolera la acumulación de años que calculan el transcurrir de la infinita muerte. Ni celebración ni duelo. Nada salvo la constancia de la memoria que preserva el esfumado dolor de una búsqueda: el desaparecido es, solo, la suma de actos que marcan el esfuerzo por hacer visible su muerte, por superar la insostenible ansiedad que produce lo innombrable. La muerte es precisa. Nadie está destinado a nacer; ninguna certeza, en cambio, es más sólida que la muerte indeclinable. El desaparecido es el que no murió; el que se enfrenta ante la amenazante posibilidad de haber nacido para siempre sin ser eterno. Ninguna invención es más cruel que la expresada en la idea de limbo, “frontera” del infierno que no se cruzará nunca. El desaparecido está ubicado allí, en la frontera inmóvil” (Schmucler, “En nombre de la Patria”).

production of new political configurations that decisively hindered the repressive program. The mechanisms of resistance against the systematic disappearance of physical bodies engendered new forms of political action, mainly led by Mothers' activism. This generated resistance practices linked to archival practices of reconstitution and reinterpretation of the past.

The Historical Context

The dictatorial contexts in the Southern Cone are not easily comparable to other contexts marked by policies of repression or extermination. Forced disappearance in Argentina and the emergence of the figures of the disappeared detainee must be understood in relation to long-term sociohistorical processes that refer to structural (global and regional) and conjunctural modifications, both internal and external to Argentina. The context of the Cold War is undoubtedly important, as is the dismantling of the Welfare States in those Latin American countries that knew local modalities of this form of political and economic management. The continental extension of forms of contestation and resistance, the conjunctural prestige of the Cuban revolution as an inspiration for egalitarian and democratic revolts, and the decolonization processes in Asia and Africa between the 1950s and 1980s all mark a time of profound transformations in the capitalist economic model, giving rise to a generalized confrontation over the meaning of modernity. The dictatorial processes of the Southern Cone in Latin America were coordinated at the regional level through a repressive strategy known as "Operation Condor". The countries of the region, supervised and protected in different ways by the US and its foreign policy of countering "communist influence", which was materialized in a joint military doctrine called "National Security", cooperatively implemented mostly clandestine policies of state terror, and it was within the framework of these policies that the strategy of the forced disappearance of people took place.²⁷ The objective of all of these repressive policies was to break the different forms of worker and popular organization, thus permitting profound socio-economic reconfigurations, the influence of which continues to this day. In 1973, the constitutional president Salvador

²⁷ "'State Terrorism' is understood as the systematic use of the State to perpetrate violations of human, civil and political rights by means that transgress even the consensual frameworks of repression established under the legal system in place. The practice of State terrorism seeks to annihilate or repress the armed or unarmed opposition and social protests and achieve obedience or active collaboration from the population. It should be noted that the concept of 'State Terrorism' can conceal or ignore the active or passive consensus and support of sectors of civil and political society for the policies of extermination or political persecution by reifying the State as the only actor in the practice of terror" (Crenzel, "Políticas de la memoria" 2n2).

Allende was overthrown in Chile. The dictator Augusto Pinochet governed for seventeen years, until 1989. That same year, constitutional guarantees were suspended in Uruguay until 1985. By that time, the dictatorial processes that had taken place in Paraguay and Brazil were already underway. Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay was “re-elected” for 35 years from 1954 until he was overthrown in 1989. Beginning in 1964, Brazil was ruled by a dictatorship that lasted until 1985. On March 24, 1976, the bloodiest dictatorship in Argentine history began by overthrowing the discredited government of Isabel Martínez de Perón, and would last until 1983, the year of the elections that would be won by Raúl Alfonsín of the Radical Civic Union (UCR). In Argentina these global and regional processes converged with internal processes of socio-political and economic confrontation that were related to the proscription of Peronism starting in 1955, the prominence and intermittent occurrence of authoritarian or dictatorial governments until 1973, and the growth of social, trade union, and student organizations that resisted dictatorships and their model of economic development, which was experienced as unjust and despotic.²⁸ During this period, forms of armed resistance to the Argentine state were also developed, inspired by the victory of the Cuban guerrillas in 1959. The military dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía – which began in 1966 – took on a strongly repressive character and imposed the rule of the privileged sectors under the economic model in place. In this context, there was a sustained rise in the level of conflict that culminated in Argentina in 1969 with the mass uprising of the city of Cordoba called the Cordobazo. The Cordobazo was a political event launched by the university students’ movement, whose demands quickly spread to other sectors of the population that participated in mobilizations against the Onganía dictatorship. This mass uprising was followed by those of other large cities in the country. The phenomenon of bloody repression against leftist social organizations in Argentina, therefore, predates the dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla, which was officially called “El Proceso” (“The Process”; an involuntary but significant reference to Franz Kafka’s book *The Trial*, which in Spanish is translated as *El proceso*). However, the strategy of disappearance as a form of annihilation of the most rebellious sectors of the population had already begun to be used in the confrontation with the guerrilla groups in the

²⁸ Juan Domingo Perón governed for two terms from 1946 to 1955. He was overthrown by a coup in 1955. His third presidency was in 1973, upon his return from exile in Spain. In 1974, Perón passed away and his wife, Isabel Martínez de Perón, took over the presidency. Along with the Minister of Social Welfare, José López Rega, she conducted the political actions that would enable the coup of 1976. “Peronism” as a subject of investigation is a source of academic controversies between those who interpret it as a populist phenomenon that favoured the access of the working class to significant union rights and economic levels, and those who see it as a strain of paternalistic populism sympathetic to European fascism, among many other interpretations.

province of Tucumán in 1975, as well as the policies of paramilitary terrorism against activists of the opposition. During the democratic government of Isabel Martínez de Perón (1974–1976), for example, a sinister ultra-right paramilitary organisation led by the Ministry of Social Welfare (López Rega), the so-called Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (AAA; Anti-Communist Alliance of Argentina),²⁹ specialized in terrorist attacks on trade union and leftist political parties' headquarters and the executions of militants and political activists. It was precisely at this time that the state handed over the leadership of the fight against the guerrillas to the armed forces, giving them *carte blanche* to implement a policy of elimination.³⁰

The State's Narrative: "Who's the Enemy?"

From the 1970s the government and the military leadership designed what would be their target of exclusion and political persecution: the "subversive". The insistence on defining the "subversive element" and distinguishing it from the rest of society paved the way for the construction of a narrative that was legitimized almost without objections within the society.

In 1975, the section "Legal Framework for Subversive Elements" was incorporated into the Military Regulations, in which the term "guerrilla" was discarded and the term "subversive" was adopted. The document distinguishes "clandestine" from "open" subversion and characterises the target as a "criminal" that is not subject to international law. The figure of the "subversive" thus altered the legal system in place.³¹

The characterization of the enemy as a "subversive element" is significant. The term does not refer to an ethnic or racial minority, but to every person that according to military intelligence was conspiring against "Western and Christian values" and, in general, "the national way of life". This conspiracy consisted not only of the possible use of violence against the State, but also of the "indoctrination" of people in values contrary to those of nationals. The subversives were criminals not only for carrying arms and carrying out "terrorist attacks", but also for inciting other people, through their revolutionary ideas, to

²⁹ The Alianza Anticomunista Argentina, better known as the "Triple A", murdered numerous political opponents with the support of the Argentine state.

³⁰ In 1975, Executive Order 265 of President María Estela Martínez de Perón authorized the actions of the Armed Forces in the province of Tucumán, which would subsequently expand to the entire country under Executive Order 2772, issued by provisional President Ítalo Luder at the end of the same year.

³¹ The Geneva Convention, to which Argentina adhered, prosecuted as "prisoners of war" those who by their actions identified with the guerrillas, "prohibiting them from being tortured, killed or disappeared" (Larraquy).

perform acts that were contrary to certain values. According to General Videla, “terrorism is not only considered to be such when one kills with a weapon or placing a bomb, but when one activates other people through ideas that are contrary to our Western and Christian civilization” (qtd. in Lvovich and Bisquert 17).³² The subversive were distinguished not only by their possible actions, but also by their vocabulary (the use of certain words), what they read, their social affinities, and, more obviously, their political memberships.

The ideological basis of their opinions was an important indication for detecting them. Marxism or any inclination of a progressive or leftist nature could betray their subversive character. General Jorge Rafael Videla summarised this as follows: “Argentine citizens are not victims of repression. The repression is against a minority whom we do not consider to be Argentinian” (qtd. in Lvovich and Bisquert 18).³³ Those identified by this regenerative regime as subversives were considered “stateless criminals” who obeyed the interests of an international terrorist conspiracy. Subversion, as pointed out by Marcelo Cavarozzi (qtd. in Lvovich and Bisquert 17), was any form of dissident agitation, any critical behaviour in schools and factories, but also heterodox behaviour within the family, any non-conformist expression in the arts and culture, any questioning of the authority, and sometimes any student whose hair was too long and who was too politically extroverted. “The military leaders of the coup conceived a boundless enemy, which, they claimed, could only be defeated through (a dirty) war” (Lvovich and Bisquert 17).³⁴ Their different proclamations show that the military considered themselves to be saviours of a doomed nation that had lost its moral values and its “aspiration to greatness”. They also described themselves as surgeons operating on the sick body of the nation. Medical rhetoric was incorporated into the military narrative: the state machinery would proceed to remove “the subversive cancer” from the body of the nation. In order for this healing operation to be successful, these individuals, who were like cancer cells, would need to be deprived of any rights that could protect them, because as Vicente Palermo and Marcos Novaro have suggested, “what for *the Process* entitled people to have rights was not citizenship or humanity, but being ‘good Argentines’, which required organic ideological adherence to the postulates of the regime, from which it

³² “El terrorismo no es sólo considerado tal por matar con un arma o colocar una bomba, sino también por activar a través de ideas contrarias a nuestra civilización occidental y cristiana a otras personas” (17).

³³ “La ciudadanía argentina no es víctima de la represión. La represión es contra una minoría a quien no consideramos argentina” (18).

³⁴ “Los militares golpistas concibieron a un enemigo incommensurable, al que, según afirmaban, sólo se podía derrotar a través de la guerra” (17).

could be understood that subversives had no rights whatsoever” (qtd. in Lvovich and Bisquert 18).³⁵

The figure of the subversive, as defined by the doctrine of national security, can be compared to the *Homo sacer*, the legal figure of ancient Rome that Giorgio Agamben discussed in his work of the same name, i.e., a figure of exception or an included exception, an individual who could be killed without this constituting a crime. The project of annihilation could be read, if it was read correctly, in all public statements made by the military before the coup. One example is the Statement, published on March 24, which listed the *Basic Objectives for the National Process of Reorganisation*. The Statement established a series of goals that would serve to guide the military junta in power: to restore the “validity of Christian moral values, of national tradition and the dignity of the Argentinian” and to guarantee “national security, eradicating subversion and the causes that favour its existence” (Palermo and Novaro qtd. in Lvovich and Bisquert 17). This in itself clearly announced that the military would not stop at the military defeat of the guerrilla, which, furthermore, had already occurred before, in 1975, but would advance against all forms of sociability that could have “favoured their existence.” This eradication turned out to be for a large part of those affected by an atrocious literalism.³⁶

The Disappearance as a Technology of Power

“The killing machine”, as described by Larraquy, was part of a broader repressive design that unfolded within the framework of Operation Condor and undoubtedly involved registries, albeit secret ones.³⁷

In 1976, Argentina’s dictatorial power generalized and systematized a way to solve political problems that had numerous precedents in Argentine history, consisting of eliminating active dissent. Remember that Michel Foucault called *biopolitics* the

³⁵ “[L]o que para el Proceso daba derecho a tener derechos no era la ciudadanía ni la humanidad, sino el ser ‘buenos argentinos’, que exigía la comunidad orgánico ideológica con los postulados del régimen, de donde se podía entender que los subversivos no tuvieran derecho alguno” (18).

³⁶ It should be noted that this military narrative, despite its occasional setbacks, has never lost its relevance, as shown by its current resurgence in democracy with President Javier Milei’s triumph.

³⁷ Currently, human rights movements and the Mothers continue to demand the opening of the archives of the dictatorship. For their part, the military leadership insistently denied the existence of such an archive. However, some fragmentary records of the repressive design have been found. For more information, see Florencia Larralde Armas’ reflections on the photos stolen from ESMA by the missing former detainee Víctor Bastera.

management or administration of life by modern forms of government.³⁸ These forms of government require a set of techniques, rationalities, and practices that replace the old form of exercising power, which was to kill and let live, with its opposite, to make live and let die. However, according to Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembé, biopolitics cannot be understood without a necropolitical dimension that makes massacre profitable. This becomes evident in the forms of modernity in the global south linked to colonialism and racism, the latter – being a fundamental fictional element – to make violence against certain bodies acceptable.

Although racism always constituted a substantial part of the mechanisms of domination, in the repressive structures of the Southern Cone during the seventies, racist fiction was not exactly decisive. The enemy of the state and the nation was the “subversive” person, whose ideas and practices, according to the regime’s discourse, corrupted the most “sacred” aspects of the “national being”. However, this policy of elimination had undeniable economic value, considering that it facilitated these countries’ entry into the neoliberal logic of economic governance. Understanding the nature of power, then, means understanding its techniques and procedures, its structural framework. This technical framework or technology of power that acts on the population by showing that it can decide who deserves to continue living and who does not, could gradually begin to be known and studied after the defeat in the Falklands/Malvinas War.³⁹ The defeat left the armed forces apparatus severely weakened and on the defensive.

What became undeniable from the outset is that at the centre of this technology of detention was the figure of the disappeared: the concealment of bodies, the sharp separation between a person’s identity signs and their referent. It was a mechanism for making people disappear that was already in operation before the coup d’état. It had been used occasionally in combating guerrilla warfare and in actions by anti-communist paramilitary groups.⁴⁰ The coup of March 1976 made it systematic and widespread. The objective was not only to neutralize the defined enemy but also to prevent their remains from becoming a reference,

³⁸ Foucault wrote systematically about this concept in “17 March 1976” in *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, pp. 239–263, and “Right to Death and Power over Life” in *History of Sexuality* vol. 1., pp. 133–159.

³⁹ Armed conflict between the Argentine dictatorial regime and the United Kingdom, under the administration of Margaret Thatcher, 1982.

⁴⁰ In fact, in 1975 the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights was created to complain about disappearances, meaning that the search was institutionalized before the 1976 coup.

memory, or evidence. This entailed setting up extensive infrastructure whose axis was the clandestine detention centres (CDCs). The CDCs were transitional places between kidnapping or detention and death. It is possible that by 1976, the repressive architecture, inspired mainly by French colonial experiences, was already designed.⁴¹ Its techniques included civilian and military infiltration into universities, trade unions, and even factories. Military intelligence also intervened in educational institutions and social and cultural organizations. Repressive actions were coordinated jointly among the different branches and were recorded in a “Central Meeting” place. There were task forces responsible for tracking and detaining targeted victims. There were “specialists” in charge of the “interrogation” of detainees. These procedures, in turn, led to new detentions. Thus, the operations multiplied. A “presumed extremist” was identified through a “target order”, leading to a raid, usually at night, invading a private residence without a judicial order or prior notice. Suspects detained without prior surveillance were called targets of opportunity. The three branches of the military and the intelligence agency (SIDE) coordinated their information in the so-called “Situation Rooms”. There, the final fate of the detainees was decided based on data obtained under torture. Victims could be released or placed at the disposal of the PEN (National Executive Power). They could be transported to a CDC or subjected to a “final disposition” order, meaning death and disappearance. As Pilar Calveiro pointed out in her work *Poder y desaparición: Los campos de concentración en Argentina* (*Power and Disappearance: Concentration Camps in Argentina*), if one examines the organizational structure of military actions, the centralized, planned, and therefore deliberate nature of all these operations becomes clear. But at the same time, it shows the degree of autonomy and impersonality that characterized this killing machine. The aim was to make complicity in these actions widespread and collective, thus spreading eventual responsibility. All personnel were involved in one way or another, and this is one of the reasons why the so-called “pact of silence” in the Armed Forces persists to this day.

Those who did not succumb in the confrontations with their persecutors could die in false accidents or be subjected to various forms of torture. Tortures aimed to extract useful information from detainees, but their normal effect was moral and physical degradation.

⁴¹ See the influences of the Prussian army and the methodologies of repression of the French school in the massacres that took place during the attempts to liberate Algeria. One of the offices dependent on ESMA – the main detention and torture center in Argentina – had inscriptions from the French general who directed the repression in Algeria.

Many of them were then transferred to what we now call “death flights”.⁴² Under international pressure, in 1977, Videla declared that the disappeared were part of the “anti-subversive war”, that they had gone into hiding, fled the country, or were unidentified bodies resulting from armed confrontations. The effectiveness of this machinery was also due to the enthusiastic participation of powerful sectors of civil society, including the church and business groups. Their collaboration consisted mainly, but not exclusively, of denouncing alleged subversives. Chaplains participated in the confession of the tortured. Both sectors provided “blacklists” of parishioners, in the case of the church, and workers, in the case of companies. Faced with questions from foreign journalists about the issue of disappearances, Videla asserted that the disappeared “have no entity, ... they are neither dead nor alive, they are disappeared”.⁴³ This distinguishes the Argentine case from other extermination practices, such as those applied against “Jews”, “Gypsies”, or “Armenians” in the past. Unlike these cases, the disappeared simply “are not”.

The effect of the violence exerted by this technology of disappearance extended not only to the body of the detainee and their subjugated individuality but also to their family and social environment and the set of relationships that constituted their social being.⁴⁴ Families were struck by a sudden and enigmatic absence. Social networking spaces were disrupted. This resulted in interruptions, suspensions, and isolation. People no longer asked about the disappeared; they even tried to disengage from the social sphere to which they belonged. Thus, support relationships in the community were deactivated. The regime provoked profound transformations in social life, reconfiguring the boundaries between what is visible and what is not, between what can be openly stated and what can only be whispered in privacy. The criteria for deciding what can be openly enunciated and what can only be whispered in intimacy are transformed. Secrecy is established as the main axis of coexistence: a secrecy that the power manages at will, making the illegal proceedings in the

⁴² “Every Wednesday, for two years, transfers were made ... Around fifteen or twenty Capucha prisoners were called by their number and taken to the Basement hooded and shackled. In the infirmary they gave them an injection that made them sleepy. The prisoners crossed the metal gate and, helped by the guards, got into a van that took them to the airport. They took flight. On the plane they were given one more dose and after a few hours they were thrown naked into the sea ... The officers also received spiritual support from the ESMA chaplain and sought a Christian explanation for the criminal act ... During the Soccer World Cup in 1978, most of the ‘death flights’ were carried out” (Larraquy 197).

⁴³ Videla’s 1979 television statement, <https://www.lavoz.com.ar/noticias/politica/videla-1979-no-esta-muerto-ni-vivo-esta-desaparecido>. Accessed August 26, 2024.

⁴⁴ See Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*.

victim's environment partly visible. Terror acts by violating the psychic singularity of the subject but, at the same time, deeply affecting their relational environment.⁴⁵ The state disrupts the certainties upon which one's own identity is constructed.

A parallel logic develops. The state denies certain heinous acts for which it is responsible but at the same time obliquely evidences them, generating murmurs that contribute to spreading terror. People disappear one night, in front of a few witnesses, but also during the day, in broad daylight and publicly. The disappearance device not only consists of making people die without a trace. As befits biopolitical power, power also lets live. Many children of pregnant militants were born in captivity. In most cases, their parents were eliminated, but their children were offered for adoption to couples in the executioners' environment or were handed over to adoption institutions. In this way, the military power actively intervened in the lineage of several generations. Power disrupted identities, creating new genealogies, affecting the continuity of memory, and producing, not only annihilating, ways of life. Some of the kidnapped were released. These people returned to their original social environment after going through all the stages prior to their disappearance. In this case, one could speak of a survival or additional life to the survivor, the unexpected extension of a life constantly threatened with revocation. Thus, power confirms its sovereignty over bodies, not only by killing, as I said, but by allowing to live. The person who has returned from hell will always be surrounded by a stigma, an aura of suspicion, and at the same time will serve as a living example of what can happen to anyone. The unexpected "appearance" of the disappeared is a decisive aspect of the device. It is a particularly anti-political resource. If the self-exposure of singularities within the community framework is a condition of politics, according to Jean-Luc Nancy's definition (*The Inoperative Community*), or it is the public exposure of "those without part", in Jacques Rancière's definition, the disappeared body represents the opposite of politics. It cannot even be said that the disappeared is absent because it has not left from anywhere (to be somewhere else).

Disappearance is a process without end; it does not expire and it does not end. That is why mourning is impossible, and the state's debt to society cannot be repaid. In the words of Jean-Louis Déotte, "there is an infamy of disappearance on which not enough reflection has

⁴⁵ "What is it that disappears? An individual, a body, personifies and at the same time articulates social relationships that, when faced with the sudden emergence of this very particular form of violence, are broken and violated. They break over each of the bodies that have disappeared, but also over the bodies of the survivors. ... [I]t is in the subject and in his own body the place where the problem of domination and power is settled and debated" (Vega Martínez 187).

been made. An indefinitely prolonged doubt, as disappearance is an event that lasts forever” (“Las paradojas” 274).

The Battles of The Mothers

The strategy of disappearance implemented by the military government, in the framework of the political and economic transformations required by this new phase of world capitalism and the military logic of the Cold War, was opposed by a handful of relatives of victims who did not resign themselves to the state’s terror. Their strategy was to expose what state power had tried to hide: the identity of the abducted and the fact of their disappearance. At the centre of this struggle were the photographs of their children and new ways of appearing in the public space. The mothers took these photographs to the most symbolic space in the country: the Plaza de Mayo. The Mothers’ first public demonstrations generated the symbols that represent them as an organisation at the national level and worldwide: rounds, headscarves and silhouettes. These modes and means of symbolic production and reproduction have been closely linked to public practices of remembrance, not only in their representative nature, but also in their performative character, “and they have even come to be recognised as part of a universal symbolic language” (Langland 88). During the dictatorship, the Mothers fought several battles in which what was at stake was precisely the visibility of their cause. Once the procedures for filing complaints with the institutions were exhausted, these battles were fought fundamentally by the occupation of symbolic urban spaces. The initial battle occurred when the Mothers stood in the Plaza de Mayo for the first time. One of the accounts in the Mothers’ testimony concludes that the first round was probably carried out on April 30, 1977. According to this account, there were about fourteen Mothers gathered in the Plaza de Mayo. They had not received an answer from the institutions and so they took to the streets. Azucena Villaflor was one of the founders of the Mothers’ organisation and she was the one who encouraged others to take to the streets to make their cause visible. Since the authorities prohibited them from staying together in the Plaza and ordered them to walk around, they decided to walk in circles, in pairs, around the central monument of the Plaza. So they walked around in the Plaza, but in circles. The Mothers agree that the rounds in Plaza de Mayo “were practically invented by the police ... They would ask us to walk around, in pairs. We had to walk around, so we started to do so”.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ To access the complete testimony of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, see Televisión Pública, “Madres de Plaza de Mayo. La historia - Capítulo 1: Los caminos de la plaza (1975-1977)”. YouTube, 25 Mar. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDJP9vRUX2o>. Accessed February 19, 2019.

The rules of martial law did not allow meetings to be held in public places, but they did not expressly forbid people from walking around in pairs. The rounds were formed by the Mothers walking in circles around the central pyramid of the Plaza de Mayo (a symbol of freedom, an emblematic monument of the main square of Buenos Aires) *carrying the photographs of their children*. They began to walk in rounds systematically every Thursday at 3:30 pm... and continue to do so, to this day (fig. 1).⁴⁷ At the beginning, more and more Mothers began to join them, and afterwards, various sectors of society and occasional passers-by accompanied them in their rounds. The rounds were part of the construction of a new political space, virtually the only public space of opposition and a place of resistance that remained during and after the military dictatorship.



Fig. 1. Round and first March of Resistance. December 10, 1981, Archive of the Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.

The path of the Mothers' march bears a series of interesting possible connotations. Their circular walk in the heart of Buenos Aires can represent the frustrating circularity of

⁴⁷ During Kirchner's government, there was a period in which the Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo proposed that the resistance marches be suspended, because they considered that their demands had been met and there was no longer any reason for resistance. This caused tension among some groups of Mothers who did not support the Kirchner administration. The rounds resumed in 2016, against the government of Mauricio Macri. It should be noted that, the day after the inauguration of the new administration, the pro-government newspapers published articles questioning the number of disappeared and minimizing the consequences of the last military dictatorship. Shortly afterwards, Macri's administration tried to gain the approval of the "2 for 1" bill that cut prison terms for military officials in half. This resulted in hundreds of requests for the release of military officials who were serving prison sentences. The bill was widely rejected by society and opposed by successive demonstrations. The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation eventually rejected its validity.

mothers looking for their children in the Kafkaesque labyrinth of the state bureaucracy but it also involuntarily clearly symbolizes the determination to persist and the infinity of that persistence. The round, the circle, has no beginning or end; it is a symbol of eternity. A group of Mothers who identify themselves as such (wearing a baby's diaper as a headscarf or with their children's ID card photos hanging from their necks; fig. 2) also allude to another kind of temporality, a very different kind than that of the ephemeral and historical political events of the dictatorship. The round alludes to a time that is not the linear time of history, but that of the millenarian circuits that govern the time of things that are considered eternal, such as the processes of reproduction and death. It is the circular time of natural history, in which the military intends to intervene and which it tried to control. That is to say, against a state that seeks to be eternal and that intends to become the arbiter of life and death, but that is essentially temporal and historical, the circular march of Mothers seems to present a timelessness or the eternal return of natural life. Furthermore, this figure on which the Mothers have insisted since 1977 was in some way a living archive or the first form of an archive that the Mothers presented against the state archives.

The implicit message is *habeas corpus*, meaning, *there is a body*: in place of those bodies secretly taken away by the Argentine state, the Mothers put their own bodies and, later, use their own bodies to hold the photographs of their children. What the Mothers manage to do with these ritual appearances in the public square is to bring private issues regarding filial relations out into the public sphere of politics. This is so because the filial relationship, their kinship, the relationship of mother and child, is what is continually being represented. The effect in a country with strong family traditions, and with a government that supposedly wants to save family unity, is considerable. But in addition, and this could only be understood much later, the performative ceremony of the rounds was changing the very conditions of politics. The men, who were by definition the agents and protagonists of politics and public space, withdrew, were neutralized, or were attacked at the core of their subjectivity. It was the women, and in principle or especially women as mothers, who would take on the leading role under these new conditions. The circumstances of the private sphere, filial relations, and natality would occupy the entire public space.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "The Benjaminian prophecy will thus be fulfilled: our era will be that of male impotence in creation, and that of the metamorphosis of masculine sexuality into feminine sexuality. With the political withdrawal of the fathers came the emergence on the public scene of women as mothers: the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the Women in black, etc. and a new way of understanding the event according to Arendt: the event as 'natality'" (Deótte, *La época de los aparatos* 350).



Fig. 2. Mother wearing child's ID card photo. <https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/E-s4xiuUcc6y8E5F7Hbl0iqaP4hSfQvOYbgNGgDP-3uHB0PUQSg-mvTqMy9t9bhsQzGy=s110>. Accessed March 26, 2019.

The second great battle for visibility was the procession to Luján organized in October 1977 in the framework of the religious festivities dedicated to the Virgin of Luján in the Luján basilica on Mother's Day. The ceremony was multitudinous and was widely covered by the media. The Mothers decided to wear white headscarves to recognize each other and to make themselves visible among the crowd. Many of those headscarves either were or represented diapers. The Mothers thus emphasized on Mother's Day their status as women stripped of their children. In their testimonies, the Mothers recognize that the procession to Luján was not what they had expected in terms of the visibility of their searches, but on October 9, 1977, the white headscarves would become the symbol that would identify a struggle (figs. 3 to 7): "This metamorphosis from the diaper to the headscarf would be the first of a series of transformations that this symbol would experience, of enormous signifying power" (Gorini 119).



Fig. 3. White headscarves. <http://manifestacionesdeayerhoy.blogspot.com/>. Accessed March 26, 2019.



Fig. 4. Headscarves and helmets. Mothers of Plaza de Mayo protesting the laws of pardon at the doors of the *Casa Rosada* (House of Government). 1987, Archive of the Association of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.



Fig. 5. White headscarves. <http://www.periodicodesdeboedo.com.ar/40-anos-del-proceso/>. Accessed March 26, 2019.



Fig. 6. The symbol of the white headscarf is painted on the surface of several main squares in the country. 2012, *ARQHYS* magazine.



Fig. 7. White headscarf illustration. 2012, *ARQHYS* magazine.

The third major battle of the Mothers, one of the most costly, was in December 1977 and consisted of managing for the first time to have an important national newspaper publish an announcement with the names of the disappeared children and the Mothers' appeal for information on their whereabouts. What the Mothers did not know was that they had been infiltrated by a Navy intelligence agent, the infamous Captain Alfredo Astiz, who had pretended to be a relative of one of the disappeared. After overcoming great obstacles and receiving threats, the Mothers managed to get the announcement published, but the following day the regime unleashed a fierce counteroffensive: the Mothers' most prominent figure, Azucena Villaflor, was abducted and disappeared along with two other Mothers and twelve members of the Santa Cruz human rights group and several French nuns. It was a harsh blow. The Plaza de Mayo was surrounded by soldiers and a powerful mechanism of intimidation was put in place. Fear spread within the movement of Mothers and many chose not to go or not to enter the Plaza de Mayo. Nevertheless, that Thursday, thirty Mothers managed to enter the square and reclaim it. The fourth battle of the Mothers took place in 1978, when the dictatorship obtained a great media victory by organising and winning the World Cup (fig. 8). On that occasion, the Mothers, in great isolation and surrounded by nationalist euphoria, managed to maintain their presence on the street and even project themselves abroad thanks to the foreign media present at the event (fig. 9).



Fig. 8. The dictator Videla with the players of the Argentine team. 1978, *Infobae*, <https://www.infobae.com/deportes-2/2018/06/01/a-40-anos-del-comienzo-del-mundial-78-ceremonia-inaugural-dictadura-militar-alemania-polonia/>.



Fig. 9. Still from the news programme *Telesur* during the World Cup. 1978.

It should be noted that the “flights of death” took place especially during the 1978 football World Cup. The traces had to be eliminated through the disappearance of the bodies.⁴⁹ According to the shocking statements of one of the very few remorseful soldiers, Adolfo Scilingo, the detainees were hooded and dragged to a plane belonging to the Navy, in which they were anaesthetised and from which they were thrown out alive between the Río de la Plata and the Argentine Sea.⁵⁰

The fifth battle took place when the first “March of Resistance” was held in December 1981, the first mass demonstration against the dictatorship, in which the Mothers were at the centre of a massive protest (fig. 10). The Mothers appeared not only as a particularly affected group, but as leaders of the resistance to the dictatorship.



Fig. 10. March of Resistance. 1981, Hasenberg-Quaretti Archive.

⁴⁹ There is a natural element that resists the disappearances: the sea. A wave of corpses would appear between the Uruguayan and Argentine coasts, dragged there by the sea currents. These corpses were buried as NN and the Junta tried to conceal the findings from the press. The writer and journalist Rodolfo Walsh was one of the first to denounce this operation. Walsh was persecuted by the dictatorship, and disappeared at the hands of a task group in 1977.

⁵⁰ “The flights were officially reported by Mendía [Vice Admiral of the Navy] a few days after the military coup of March 1976. It was reported that the procedure for handling the subversives in the Navy would be without a uniform, and wearing trainers, jeans and T-shirts. He explained that subversives would not be shot in the Navy, since they did not want to deal with the problems faced by Franco (in Spain) and by Pinochet (in Chile). Nor could they act against the Pope. To respond to the questions of some of the naval officers, they explained that the subversives would be thrown from the planes in full flight” (testimony of Adolfo Scilingo, former captain of the Navy, repressor of the ESMA, in 1995, qtd. in Verbitsky 22).

The sixth great battle took place during the Falklands/Malvinas War, in 1982, the last attempt by the dictatorship to regain popular support, again through nationalist propaganda. On this occasion, the Mothers, who opposed the war, were, once again, almost totally isolated. The occupation by the Argentine military government of the Malvinas Islands in 1982 resulted in mass euphoria in Buenos Aires, comparable only to the exultation of the masses in Vienna at the start of World War I in 1914, one of those strange moments of mass joy that precede a great catastrophe. In Argentina, the state had accustomed its citizens from childhood (from primary school) to experience the British colonial occupation of the archipelago (which occurred in the eighteenth century) as a historic humiliation, a kind of bleeding wound in the country's sovereignty. The military knew very well what kind of feelings it would provoke in the population by the (ill-judged) manoeuvre of challenging the United Kingdom in this matter. The military then presented themselves as heirs of the founding heroes of the nation and believed they deserved the support of the entire country. It is assumed that the vast majority gave them this support, including several opposition and even human rights organizations. There was mass participation in the provision of logistical support to the soldiers on the islands and thousands of people volunteered. This explains the difficult situation of the Mothers, whom many began to see no longer as spoilsports, as during the 1978 World Cup, but even as traitors. The Mothers, however, launched the slogan "The Malvinas Islands are Argentinian but so are the disappeared" and the disastrous process of the war, which ultimately discredited the Armed Forces, placed them back in the centre of the mass protests. This led to a decisive chapter in the struggle for visibility: the alliance with the artists of the so-called "siluetazo" (silhouette protest).⁵¹

⁵¹ The "siluetazo" will be addressed in Chapter 5 of this work.

CHAPTER 3: THE TRANSMISSION OF THE RECENT PAST

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transmission and its Conditions

Transmission and subjectivity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transmission and temporality

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

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

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

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

Transmission and politics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transmission as a visual and emotional plot

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Memory practices and pedagogy

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 4: IMAGE-SPACE

From Storage Archive to Image-Space

The expressions of collective memory linked to the dictatorial past had their visual matrix in the photos of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and in the “siluetazo” movement. From this, I argue, the long development of these visual practices can be organized into three generative nuclei: the first is oriented towards proof and testimony; the second is linked to artistic interventions with a singular political dimension; and the third is linked to the formal transmission of recent history and a project of democratic citizenship.

Images in the second category cannot be confined to a specific period or identified with a specific group of creators. Although they “educate” us in a deep sense, they are not only didactic images. They do not indoctrinate – they do not prove anything nor do they pretend to teach – but they affect us at different levels of consciousness. Nor are they emblematic images that can be used as flags of a political mobilization. They deal with time, absence, its remains and traces, and with stupor or desire. Their political nature does not lie in the reaction to a specific social situation. The photographic materials for these works on memory come largely from the artists themselves, from the family album and in many cases from the archive of Mothers and the human rights movement. The protagonists of this type of visual transmission are found in the HIJOS organization and its environment. In this same environment, didactic forms of political art that intervene in politics directly were also developed. Although I will not discuss them in detail, we must include here organizations such as the Street Art Groups (GAC) and the Colectivo situación (Situation Collective), which carry out surprising and fleeting actions in public places that have both an aesthetic and political character.

Power Is Always Optimistic

It is not a unique phenomenon that memory work in Argentina has constantly required images. What is unique is that, from the beginning, these (persecuted, banned, slandered) images were fundamentally inconsistent with the narratives of the state. The imaginary promoted by the military governments did not consist only of a paranoid narrative (the danger of subversion) and was not exclusively nourished by military images. It also promoted triumphalism and optimism. The dictatorship meticulously organized a policy of “psychological action” aimed at winning the “hearts” of citizens (Risler 45–49) and spreading an optimism of which the most ridiculous aspect is symbolized by the poster

produced during the Malvinas War which shows a young man giving a thumbs-up and the words: “We are already winning! Argentiniens, let’s defeat them!” (official notice, *Clarín*, May 4, 1982). The subsequent military governments presented their policies as modernizing advances, in short, as progress. It was an entire program of affective management that had its climax in the 1978 World Cup and in the first days of the Malvinas War. During the post-dictatorship, particularly during Carlos Menem’s administration in the 1990s, the government’s calls for national reconciliation and the need to look toward a promising future became widespread. It was a time when the painful conscience of the failure of collective utopias was combined with the emergence of neoliberal optimism. As various authors have shown,⁶² this was a dogmatic, naïve, and even cruel optimism which replaced the old collective solidarity with aspirational models for solitary and increasingly precarious subjects, promoting dubious success-oriented images. In a certain sense, the 1990s were a euphoric time in which the equivalence between the Argentine peso and the US dollar, established by Menem’s government, seemed to validate commercial and individualist values. It was a time that replaced hope in collective emancipation with “individualized drives for the inexhaustible consumption of commodities” (Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia* 7).

When this kind of affective or emotional regime and its repertoire of images manage to impose themselves on the social climate, denialism and forgetfulness advance. As Sara Ahmed explains in *The Promise of Happiness*, the promise of happiness contained in attitudinal optimism induces acceptance and submission (12–13). This was the case in the 1990s in Argentina. In this context, the memory practices associated with disappearance, those of the mothers and grandmothers, were not only a political counterpoint but also an affective one. They disrupted the cadences of the state and sabotaged the therapeutic optimism of the elites. This affective sabotage acquired an even more radical dimension with the group HIJOS. The optimistic imaginary spread throughout the country and the world based on the notion of the “end of history” (Fukuyama) was counterpointed in Argentina by a broad social protest movement linked to the struggles for memory and justice. Needless to say, the policies of privatization, job insecurity and parity with the dollar resulted in an economic and political debacle that led to the massive uprising of 2001.⁶³

⁶² See Eagleton, Ahmed, and Berlant.

⁶³ In December 2001, Argentina witnessed one of the most significant popular uprisings in the region, known as the “Outbreak of 2001”. The deep economic recession resulting from neoliberal policies of the 1990s

The Lesson of Walter Benjamin

In 2014, a symposium on Walter Benjamin was held at the ESMA, a former clandestine navy prison that today is a memory site. Several Argentine academics who worked on the theme of memory and the recent past (such as Ricardo Foster, Roberto Pittaluga, and Luis Ignacio García) have developed a special interest in this German author. There are two emblematic texts by Benjamin that have been particularly inspiring for the memory, truth, and justice movement in Argentina. One is Benjamin's essay "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia". The other is his collection of theses "On the Concept of History". In the former, Benjamin shows his enthusiasm for the surrealist movement, to which he attributes a gesture of radical freedom. In the second, the author develops a concept of history that is intended to be materialist and that fundamentally differs from the historicism of his time. Benjamin's interpretation of history in terms of catastrophe, his attempt to overcome the cult of progress, and his idea of a history of the defeated have had significant repercussions in Latin America.

Historiography of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century interpreted the past as a linear development towards progress. This cult of progress so closely associated with modernity was for Benjamin of an ideological nature. Modern historiography treated the past as a one-directional narrative where the event is a necessity in the causal chain of history. To structure the past in this way implies considering it natural and definitive. What is more, the past described in this way becomes a legitimation of the present, making the latter its logical result. This is why the conventional historical narrative is a story that empathizes with the victors. In his "On the Concept of History", Benjamin traces an extreme dichotomy between mythical time (which he equates with progress) and historical time (which he equates with human experience).⁶⁴ These are incompatible poles. In mythical time, human beings cannot escape their destiny. This means that authentic novelty is impossible (Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing* 78–79). Historical time, on the other hand, is volatile and contingent, and it can be determined by the conscious human will.

culminated in a social and political crisis. Within the framework of the massive social protests, 39 people were murdered due to the repression ordered by the Executive Branch. President Fernando de La Rúa had to present his resignation and flee by helicopter from the Government House. Before the inauguration of Néstor Kirchner in 2003, the country was immersed in a period of political instability in which five provisional presidents succeeded one another.

⁶⁴ "Strictly speaking, myth and history are incompatible. The former dictates that because human beings are powerless to interfere in the workings of fate, nothing truly new can happen, while the concept of history implies the possibility of human influence upon events, and with it, the moral and political responsibility of people as conscious agents to shape their own destiny" (Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing* 78).

The task of the materialist historian, according to Benjamin, was to read history “against the grain” (“On the Concept” 392). This means that the facts that have been ignored by positivist history as irrelevant to the present, the “marginal” facts, gain new visibility when they are removed from their original context. This is particularly true for the defeat of emancipatory revolts in the past and for the terror exercised by colonial systems and indigenous genocide in the Americas. According to Benjamin, what we call progress is also a story of conquest and destruction, whose debris “grows toward the sky” (392). “There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” and it is this barbarism that disappears in the narrative synthesis of historicism (392). For Benjamin, the historical past is neither fixed nor decided: it is as contingent as the present itself and can be interfered with through critical action. This action must retrace the path of history as progress and dismantle its character as fate. The aim is then to “read what was never written” (Benjamin, “Paralipomena” 405). The purpose is not to recover what has been forgotten – an endeavour that for Benjamin is impossible and futile – but to look for the form that the past takes in a critical constellation with the present. Historical knowledge must be connected and referred to redemption.

A Dialectical Relationship with the Past

The historicist’s claim that a historical event can be reconstructed as it was has an unacknowledged model in the photographic technique, understood as a technical, that is, unmediated, representation of a moment in the past. For Elizabeth Collingwood-Selby, this kind of “photographic reason” has been at the core of historicist conceptions. As clearly shown in our time, every photograph is an inevitable staging, a limited point of view, a specific relationship between the inside and outside of the frame or the field of the camera. Similarly, every historical event is such by virtue of some form of record (documents, testimonies, photographs) and this already implies mediation. The event of positivist historiography is not the event in its *here and now*, but an inevitable selection. This selection is based on the needs of the present. The present remembers only the aspects of the past event in which it can recognize itself, that is to say, which are related to it and which it can categorize and manage. Historicism as a claim of historical objectivity is managed memory. For Benjamin, integral memory does not exist, except in a messianic future. The past is by definition something open, pending, and each present relates to it in a different way. The indigestible remains of the past persist in uncontrollable areas of collective memory. It is as if they are waiting for the moment in which they become legible (readable) or the “moment of

its recognizability” (“On the Concept” 390). According to Sigrid Weigel (74), for Benjamin images reside in language and only become visible at the time of their legibility (*Lesbarkeit*). The moment of cognoscibility is necessarily a present moment, that is to say, it takes place when a present enters into a critical and fleeting constellation with an image of the past. This occurs in a moment of crisis, that is, in a present saturated with tensions, or a present in its “moment of danger”.⁶⁵ Benjamin also associates this moment of legibility with an awakening from the dream of history.⁶⁶

In his work on surrealism, Benjamin refers to these critical constellations, these sudden moments of historical lucidity, as “profane illuminations”, that is to say, non-religious revelations; in his text “On the Concept of History”, he uses the concept of the “dialectical image” for them. This concept needs some explanation. The narrative exposition of history records historical time as a linear and natural continuity. The dialectical image, on the other hand, presents a shocking display of images that denote the tensions of an undecided historical situation. In this regard, for Benjamin the dialectical image seems to be a device of both thought and experience, and a method as well as an objective. It is a method of inquiry to the extent that it involves contrasting fragments, ruins, or heterogeneous objects in order to achieve a non-synthetic image of the past. It is an objective because these images must be the goal of the materialist historian. The dialectical image recovers those dilapidated remains that are obscured by the narrative of historical progress but refuse to disappear. In the “rubbish” of history we find what the historical narrative has discarded, the evidence that all progress is also destruction. But we also glimpse collective desires, old and truncated promises that still smoulder among the ashes of the past.

In his essay on surrealism, Benjamin credits André Breton with discovering the revolutionary energy that appears in the antiquated, that is to say, in outdated, outmoded, abandoned, and obsolete remains. Although he understood it primarily as a literary phenomenon, surrealism constituted for Benjamin the first model for the concept of the dialectical image. In surrealist literary practice and avant-garde cinema he found a “principle of montage” that he understood to be ideal for the materialist presentation of history (*Arcades*

⁶⁵ “to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (Benjamin, “On the Concept” 391).

⁶⁶ “The history that showed things ‘as they really were’ was the most powerful narcotic of the [nineteenth] century” (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 463).

Project 461).⁶⁷ Benjamin suggested that the anachronistic remnants that persist in the present, rearticulated according to the principles of montage, could “blast open the *continuum* of history” (“On the Concept” 396; italics mine), thus doing them justice. Relying on Louis Aragon’s *Traité du style* (1928), he contrasts the image with metaphor. He describes bourgeois progressivism as a bad poem saturated with metaphors. It should be noted that, in surrealism, the metaphor is not distinguished in a strict sense from the comparison that narratively and constructively harmonizes everything. The surreal image is the opposite of a comparison, which belongs to the explanatory calm of rational and Cartesian discourse. The surreal image seeks the unexpected encounter of heterogeneous entities, thus blasting meaning. It is the chance encounter of dissimilar logic, a fleeting spark or lightning bolt that produces a momentary illumination, without any mediation. The classic example of this is the well-known image of the umbrella and the sewing machine in a dissection room. This spark originates in the juxtaposition or montage of antithetical series of facts, images, objects, etc.; they can produce, according to Benjamin, a kind of revelation that he referred to as a profane illumination, “an immediate mode of knowledge that is exempt from the protocols of epistemic control” (García, “Una política” 115), yet is in no way a mystical or religious epiphany. Benjamin thus replaces a conceptual logic with a visual logic and the metaphorical concept with the image. The image represents the “interruption of a continuity in the now of remembrance” (García, “Una política” 130). For Benjamin, it is in politics where metaphor and image drastically collide. While the former serves the continuity and progress of discourse, the latter interrupts, disarms, and halts.

Memory Practices as Image-Space

Given the collapse of the historicist pretension of an “objective” and narrative recovery of the event, the task of the historian is necessarily political. The relationship with the past suggested by Benjamin involves a practice of memory as a “political relationship with history” (García, “Una política” 112). In the essay on surrealism, Benjamin also introduces the concept of *Bildraum*, which can be translated as space of images or image-space. García views Benjamin’s *Bildraum* as a repository of past collective experiences, of truncated promises of emancipation, ready to be politically updated in the present (“Una política” 126).

⁶⁷ “The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism” (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 461).

This means that the image-space that surrealists work with “is the space of utopian action” (Hansen 319) and thus is also a political space in terms of messianic temporality. In fact, the attempt to “win the energies of intoxication for the revolution” (Benjamin, “Surrealism” 215) is for Benjamin the great merit of the surrealists (Löwy). The image-space constitutes a point of view from which the past is decoded not in historical but in political terms (Benjamin, “Surrealism” 216–217). In this complex, suggestive, ardent essay, Benjamin proposes that the critical artist find his place in this image-space, abandoning a contemplative attitude.

The concepts of *Bildraum* and *dialectical image* are unfinished ideas. It is not possible to reach a conclusive definition and a transversal and terminologically consistent theory of either of these concepts in Benjamin’s work. It is also not easy to determine their operational scope for the historian of the present. This has been the conclusion of prominent Benjamin scholars such as Rolf Tiedemann and Max Pensky.⁶⁸ Benjamin’s poetic writing style and use of ambiguity as an epistemological-critical resource should also be taken into account. Despite its nebulous contours, the concept of image – the dialectical image, particularly – continues to be a fruitful one as a critique of essentialist historiography and of the concept of linear temporality. It also constitutes a formidable tool for dismantling the persistent mythology of progress in capitalist society. But above all it is a concept that reconfigures the relationships between memory and history through politics (Benjamin, “Surrealism” 217). The radical novelty of this concept is that it shifts the point of view of the past as an objective fact to that of the past as a fact of memory. This is not because objective facts have not had a material existence, but because they can never be separated from the way in which they are registered, and from the movement that remembers, constructs, and reconstructs them. This is how it has been viewed time and again by art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, for whom the image confronts us with time. Although Benjamin thought in linguistic images, Didi-Huberman applies his concepts to graphic or artistic images. The image combines various times and it is not easy to understand the historicity it contains. In fact, the image expresses our relationship with the past more clearly than history. For him the image, like memory, is rooted in anachronisms and survivals, as explained by Aby Warburg (*Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*), who believed that images, or cultural products in general, were

⁶⁸ “Dialectical image and dialectic at the standstill are, without a doubt, the central categories of the *Passagen-Werk*. Their meaning, however, remained iridescent; it never achieved any terminological consistency” (Tiedemann 942). “If the dialectical image was the quintessence of his method, this fact both establishes the continuing attraction of an imagistic approach to radical cultural criticism, and the profound difficulties in appropriating such an approach in the present” (Pensky 195).

endowed with their own vitality and that they were recirculated anachronistically in very different configurations and times. This constituted their *afterlife* or *Nachleben*, that is to say, the survival of images, their covert return after being forgotten. Didi-Huberman sees in Warburg's monumental project *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (1929), which is like a heterogeneous album of surviving images that explores their anachronistic relationships, an attempt parallel to that of Benjamin in his *Arcades Project* with its montage of quotations. He considers the concept of survival as similar to the concept of a dialectical image (Didi-Huberman, *Arde la imagen* 24). Its survival makes it liable to enter into an unprecedented constellation with the present, allowing an overlap and thus creating the possibility of the consciousness of another story. For Didi-Huberman, the inevitable anachronism of images contains a messianic energy that makes it possible to reinvent history through the images created by the historian and the artist.

Works of art establish unexpected relationships not only between themselves, but also within themselves. This means that *Bildraum* should not only be understood as an artistic and political sphere or circuit where artists work by generating alternative images, but as the space that opens the work itself to historical reconsideration. In the montage procedure the artist can associate different temporalities, making the fragment and anachronism key to dismantling linear chronology. Thus, the images of memory trace backwards a temporal series that includes the victims of past genocides and current cases of political disappearance. The events of the past are not static or inert, but in motion. What is more, the past constantly produces new traces, new inscriptions in the present. These are traces of the past that are lodged in a kind of collective unconscious and resurface in another era in the form of desynchronization, *déjà-vues*, and anachronisms.⁶⁹

I would like to highlight two ideas that appear in Benjamin's essay "Surrealism", which are useful to understanding the relationship between image and memory in the Argentine context: the idea that, faced with the progressive optimism of social democracy (which generates conformism), it is necessary to "organize pessimism" (217) and the idea of an "image-space" linked to the body and political action. Regarding the first, it is evident, as we have seen, that memory practices in Argentina prevented the people in the present from

⁶⁹ "It is a memory that the historian summons and interrogates, not exactly 'the past.' There is no history that is not commemorative or mnemonic: this is something evident... For memory is psychic in its process, anachronistic in its effects of montage, reconstruction or 'decantation' of time. We cannot accept the commemorative dimension of history without accepting at the same time, its anchor in the unconscious and its anachronistic dimension" (Didi-Huberman, *Ante el tiempo* 60).

accepting a self-complacent narrative of national history for many years. The images of the memory of the recent past have never ceased to be “killjoys”, which time and again prevent the collective imagination from retreating into conformity and acceptance. In this regard, the call to “organize pessimism” can be understood as the call for a certain reorganization of images. In that sense, I believe that the set of visual creations that form the corpus of this thesis is part of a circuit, both political and aesthetic, that maintains a vitally critical relationship with the recent past. It is a space that generates unmanageable images, to the extent that it is difficult for a historical narrative to absorb them without scandal. They display the “debris of history” in different ways, associating the present with its spectres. But they are also images that indirectly recall collective hopes deployed in the past. Images of memory keep the past open and suggest that acts in the present can reconfigure it. Lastly, they evoke and involve the body in various ways: not only the body of the disappeared, but the body that carries their portraits or the caring body that lends itself to drawing their silhouettes, or the body that is anachronistically articulated with the disappeared (as in Lucila Quieto’s photographic montage operations).

Didi-Huberman has worked on this relationship between body, emotion and politics in *Pueblos en lágrimas, pueblos en armas* (*People in Tears, People in Arms*). For Didi-Huberman, collective suffering over the victims of an oppressive system can be transformed into an uprising. Images that evoke the horror of the past can be innervated in the body through emotion, which is political in that it is collective. In the art of HIJOS, one can distinguish perspectives and formal procedures that were decisive in the surrealist revolution. Some examples of this are the perspective of childhood or the child’s gaze, the intervention of the technological in art, and the intertwining and dialogue between different genres and media, which Susana Rosano referred to as the “transmediality” of the creations of HIJOS. Humour can also be mentioned as a corrosive and de-realizing element that Benjamin presents in his text on surrealism as a gateway to this alternative image-space.⁷⁰

I believe that the alternative archival materials that human rights organizations managed to put together were the material basis for the development of a new fabric of images of memory. They are traces of a traumatic past that continue to be inscribed in the present. Artists in this sphere work with *survivals*; they work on the past using the principles of montage and remembrance. The montage thus has a political dimension because it exposes

⁷⁰ “For in the joke, too, in invective, in misunderstanding, in all cases where an action puts forth its own image and exists, absorbing and consuming it, where nearness looks with its own eyes, the long-sought image-space is opened” (Benjamin, “Surrealism” 217).

conflicts and clashes. They do not aim to reconstruct or document historical events. They work on anachronistic encounters, irruptions, and temporary desynchronization that are like disruptive symptoms in the present consciousness. They produce new isolated remains of the past in search of future coherence. They are images awaiting a present that can finally make them legible, recognizing itself in them. I argue that visual memory practices in Argentina, as closely associated as they are with the struggles against state violence, constitute a potential reserve of dialectical images. This is why I believe that these practices can be understood as part of what Walter Benjamin called a *Bildraum*, or image-space.

The Uruguayan sociologist Gabriel Gatti, a child of disappeared parents, recently described the phenomenon of detention-disappearance as a foundational disaster that undermines our understanding of the world and results in a collapse of language (12). This means that in the environment of those affected directly or indirectly by this collapse, the same images that have emerged in response to an erasure (legal, civic, existential erasure, the erasure of history that in terms of the individual involves a forced disappearance) become cognitive tools, forms of exploration. In these visual practices, the artificial boundary that separates the relatives of the disappeared from artists who are not (directly) their relatives is diluted.

The City and Its Symptoms

Among the first purely artistic images that were created on the subject of the disappeared is the exhibition *¿Dónde están?* (*Where Are They?*) by RES (Raúl Eduardo Stolkiner) in 1989. In some of RES' photos, an empty city appears where photos of a tapir foetus hang. This defamiliarization produced by the tapir foetus leads us to think not only about the disappearance of pregnant detainees and the theft of babies, but also about disappearance as a process that interrupts birth. It is as if we are talking about an aborted generation. The image is a reference to the futures that were terminated as soon as they were born. The long exposure time in these photos creates the feeling of bodies that are not so much disappeared as *disappearing* (Fortuny, *Memorias fotográficas* 53). They are spectral figures, bodies in motion, where different layers of time alternate that mimic the lack of discipline of memory self. The defamiliarization that a guilty city produces, where empty spaces still predominate as a result of fear and control, is epitomized by this enigmatic key suspended in the night

air.⁷¹

Another photographic art serial that displays empty, ambiguous, and enigmatic urban landscapes is that of Fernando Gutiérrez in his 1996 photographic essay *Treintamil* (*Thirty Thousand*) and the other two parts *Secuela* (*Sequela*, 2001–2004) and *Cosas al río* (*Things to the River*, 2008–2010). These are reminiscent of Eugène Atget's photos, which Benjamin considered as anticipating surrealism. In Fernando Gutiérrez's photos of urban and suburban spaces that are not clearly delimited and that are devoid of people, we see a ruined car in the middle of a vacant area, walls, inscriptions and shadows on walls, remains of buildings, and a single ghostly face. Whereas allegory is central the work of Raúl Eduardo Stolkiner, known as RES (e.g., the foetus of the animal and the disappeared person), Gutiérrez works with dilapidated objects in a metonymic relationship with the past. Remains like aeroplanes, the river, the Ford Falcon, barbed wire, and army trucks parked on the pavement are present in the collective memory. The photo at the end of the book features three pairs of shoes placed in a line next to the photographer's bare feet. The shoes reveal intolerable absences and are reminiscent of storage in Nazi concentration camps.

The Blasphemous Twist

The incorporation of humour (and black humour) in works related to the drama of disappearance shows how this image-space has not been fully captured by the disciplines of testimony and pedagogy or, more generally, by the logic of memory as public policy. A careful reading of the novel, blog, or diary by Mariana Eva Perez titled *Diario de una princesa montonera – 110% verdad* (*Diary of a Montonera Princess – 110% Truth*; 2020) and the theatrical show *Montonerísima* (2013), written and performed by Victoria Grigera, reveals, however, that this unexpected blasphemous twist (in that it is playful and humorous) does not denigrate (as one might suspect) either the tragedy of the past or the practices of memory and justice, but rather attacks the solemnity and ritualism that empties these practices of real content.⁷² A parody is made of the massive and institutionalized discourse of memory brought into vogue by the Kirchner administration and built on the figure of the

⁷¹ "Si algo hay en estas fotos de Res es extrañamiento. En el sentido de ostranenie o extrañeza de la que hablaban los formalistas rusos de principios de siglo XX : algo en la obra (en este caso la fotografía, no ya la literatura) quiebra la expectativa de quien mira, rompe con la percepción automática. Algo disruptivo logra que lo habitual se convierta en extraño." ("If there is something in these photos by RES, it is defamiliarization, in the sense of the early 20th century Russian formalists' concept of *ostranenie*: something in the work (in this case, the photograph, not literature) that breaks the expectation of the viewer, that breaks with automatic perception. Something disruptive turns the familiar into something unfamiliar"; Fortuny, "Memoria fotográfica" 3).

⁷² See on this topic: Pifano, and van Alphen, "Playing the Holocaust".

victim as the foundation of a renewed conception of citizenship. The novels (or diaries) of Mariana Eva Pérez and Victoria Grigera (and the playful montage in Bettini) put into practice, according to Jordana Blejmar, *profane memories* that create an alternative vocabulary that parodies the automatisms and clichés that are derived, for example, from the anachronistic and formulaic use of slogans and the militant terms of the 1970s today (qtd. in Mandolessi). These automatisms and commonplaces full of false solemnity that the institutional recognition of Mothers and Grandmothers created in progressive circles are, in fact, an obstacle to the transmission of the past. Using the old militant terminology of the seventies and the modern discourse of human rights, the government institutionalized the protest associations, integrating them into the institutional apparatus of the State where they follow the pace set by the State. In this regard, the *profane memories* of HIJOS are departures from this situation. They are renewed, provocative, and bold searches. By introducing self-irony and parody in their biographical texts, they disrupt the canonization of the victims and make works that cannot be used for civic education. A very useful text to situate in its true dimension the debate on this type of artistic transgressions or profanations, and the taboos imposed by the duty of memory and the methods of formal teaching, is the article by Ernst van Alphen entitled “Playing the Holocaust and playing with the Holocaust” (151–162). In this article, van Alphen defends the insolent and playful aspects of art to untighten the Holocaust archives and allow the flow of memory.

It is a paradoxically emancipatory gesture. First of all, they reject the way the media and institutions have confiscated and trivialized their private pain, recovering it as their own pain, one that cannot be transferred. At the same time, their works (addressed to everyone) constitute a gesture of disidentification. They distance themselves from the figure of the victim as a public identity. As Gabriel Gatti explains, these kinds of profane works reflect on the mechanism that sustains them, that is to say, the institutionalized notions of memory and truth and their trail of pious or moralizing formulas. To place the figure of the victim at the centre of philosophical reflection is to replace political thought with morality, making piety the axis of social praxis.⁷³

The works of HIJOS that parody the jargon, rituals, and bureaucracy of memory abandon the sphere of institutions to continue inhabiting the image-space and their characteristic inclination towards dissent. They are expressions that escape the forms of capture that place memory at the service of institutional purposes.

⁷³ Alain Badiou has written a scathing essay on this issue: *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*.

The Child's Gaze

For Benjamin, the crisis of experience had a lot to do with the crisis of narrative, that is, with the modern impossibility of sustaining tradition through narrative language in the era that began with the First World War. In these conditions, it becomes necessary, among other things, to recover the child-like dimension of perception. Benjamin consistently applauded the role that surrealist expression assigned to the child's gaze, which is capable of unapologetically undertaking a destructive and creative activity with respect to tradition. In childhood there is a tendency to disassemble and reassemble as an exploration of a new path. Nothing can separate the child from his or her concentration on the play and attraction to discarded things, to that which the adult has disdained. Benjamin's own concept of materialist history is inspired by this model governed by play and passion for what is left behind. In each rejected object the child recognizes "the face of the world of things" (Padilha 2). Childhood temporality is marked by the moment, which continues all the time. Walter Benjamin refers to this particular experience of time as the *Jetztzeit*, the *now-time*, where present, past, and future are combined and re-articulated. When objects deviate from their original function, they take on other possible meanings, which is a poetic principle of dealing with them. This is what occurs with toys in a child's hands. This is the case of images, according to Benjamin, for whom "each image proposes a reconsideration of the entire universe" (Padilha 3).⁷⁴

The creators connected to HIJOS are structurally burdened by an essential difficulty in transmitting the experience of their parents' disappearance. For most of them, this experience is above all and literally a childhood experience. Thus, the novels of HIJOS use a child's narrating voice to refer to the events that marked their lives, as if the adult narrative were incapable of accounting for those events. Some examples of this are the 2008 novel *La casa de los conejos* (*The Rabbit House*) by Laura Alcoba, where an autobiographical piece is written "from the height of the girl I was" (Alcoba, *La casa* 12), and the 2012 film *Infancia clandestina* (*Clandestine Childhood*) by Benjamín Ávila, which is built around the gaze of Juan, a twelve-year-old boy. In the 2003 film *Los rubios* (*The Blondes*) by Ernestina Carri, the events associated with the parents' disappearance are represented and explained with the help of parts of a children's toy made of building blocks (*Playmobil*). In the first images of

⁷⁴ "Para Benjamin a imagem substitui o conceito e cada imagem propõe uma revisão de todo o universo" (Padilha 3).

the 2007 film *M*, by Nicolás Prividera, the camera pans through the rooms of a house from the height and perspective of a child.⁷⁵ The remembering child cannot help but refer to a nebulous place of experience. For Benjamin and the surrealists, however, this type of gaze can also be the gateway to a greater sensitive density of lived experience that avoids the anaesthetic character of the historicist linear narrative.

The Recontextualised Image

Photography in relation to disappearance is, in some way, condemned to permanently oscillate between public and private or family contexts. The idea of removing the inherited image, often the photograph of disappeared parents, both from the family album and from the documentary archive of human rights organizations, and making them appear in different, sometimes unexpected contexts, is probably a means of satisfying the child's need to find their own unique relationship with these photographs. It is a gesture that can be associated with the attitude of the collector (if we exclude the frivolous aspect of it) who, according to Benjamin, rescues objects from their utilitarian or mercantile capture and in this way redeems them (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 9). For family members and especially for children, photographs that used to be traces (in the sense of objects that were metonymically connected to the absent person) were transformed into substitute objects, "paradigmatic devices for the representation of absence" (Fortuny, "Memoria fotográfica" 7). In the intervened photos made by HIJOS artists, we observe how the figure of the disappeared father or mother moves towards the figure of the child who attempts to share the image-space with that of the parents, as in the photographic overlaps of Lucila Quieto. The encounter in and through the image proposes, as we have seen, an alternative or third time between the father's time and the daughter's time.

In the series of photomontages by Gustavo Germano, for example, presence and absence, life and disappearance, are contrasted, highlighting the "suspended" condition of the disappeared (Balletta 760). These are images that create tension in the essential relationship of photography with the temporal dimension. On the other hand, as already pointed out, neither Quieto nor Germano conceals the artificial nature of their compositions, which forces the viewer to remain awake. Germano does not "correct" the old amateur photo, nor does he retouch the new one so that it resembles a photo taken with an old technique. He simply

⁷⁵ The different variants of this child's gaze were studied by Mariella Peller in "La mirada de la niña. Sobre *La casa de los conejos* de Laura Alcoba".

juxtaposes both photographs where passages, environments, and the pose of those photographed are repeated (and where the victim no longer appears in the new image). Before being moved by what this implies, the viewer is driven to trace differences without being distracted by contrivances (Balletta 761). This means that intellect is challenged first, and only afterwards is emotion stirred.

1st Year, 6th Division, Class Photo 1967.

The school photo that Marcelo Brodsky shows in his work *Buena memoria* (Good Memory; 1997) is a classic group portrait of a secondary school class, on which the author's former classmates have written comments about its subsequent fate (fig. 1). Many of them are humorous. The "future" disappeared, however, are crossed out and surrounded by text indicating when and how they disappeared. The photo was not conceived to be exhibited as a work of art but as a communicative act for an event with students. The effect is disturbing because the indication appears among other more recognizable and banal biographical comments about the life trajectories of the other members of the group. We inevitably tend to look in the eyes of the future disappeared person for some omen of their fate. The anachronistic dimension of the photograph, the lines of writing that surround the faces, all of this makes us think of a previous present (that of the photo) visited by an atrocious future that leaves its marks (Fortuny, *Memorias fotográficas* 84). It is a set that evokes the work of the French artist Christian Boltanski, to whom I will refer in Chapter 5. Boltanski shows faces of young people who gradually became the faces of Jewish corpses. Here time is represented at a standstill before the catastrophe, inviting us to reverse the social erasure that all disappearance is. It reminds us that, before being fulfilled, every catastrophic omen is more like a hypothesis.

None of these visual expressions of memory can be understood in terms of testimony. They are expressions of desire. They return to the past, dismantle it, rewrite it, and reinscribe it in the present. They constitute small fragments of a weak utopian energy.

Conclusions

Taken in its broadest sense, images are integral to our relationship with the world. There is no doubt about the power that graphic images, such as photography, exert over our perception of reality. Advertising and journalistic images provide daily evidence of how images, regardless of their medium, can impact or stimulate the human sensorium. Artistic images possess the unique ability to challenge our visual clichés, occasionally prompting a sensitive

reconfiguration of the world or a sudden illumination that aids in its reconsideration. We comprehend the Benjaminian concept of the dialectical image as a both sensory and intellectual operation that disrupts the imaginary governing our natural connection with the present, reopening our memory to the injustice of the past that underlies this very present. It is, in part, in this sense that we will understand the political potentiality of the image in general.

It has already been pointed out that the importance of the image in the creations of the children is the simultaneously logical and paradoxical response to the phenomenon of disappearance. Now it should be noted that the artistic and protean use of these images in the works of HIJOS brings us closer, so to speak, to the possibility of a different kind of politics, to the extent that they move away from denunciation and demonstration, to enter a space that is experimental, both intimate and collective, where representation and identity lose their centrality in favour of shock and anonymity. The constellation of images that developed around the fight for the disappeared to be returned alive – images that made what was absent present, that made the past current, that revealed what had been concealed by the regime – still constitutes a political-affective space that produces constant instability. The meaning of the word “image” cannot be restricted to the photographic, graphic, or artistic image. The image must be conceived as an aesthetic-political operator that stubbornly insists on the violent origin of the present. Within this sensitive space, the mystification of progress and the linear temporality of capitalist modernity falter.

The infinite mourning for the victims of state terrorism is not only the mourning of family members, that is to say, a private or individual process, but a collective mourning that decentres us as individuals and nourishes our critical relationship with a common historical past. This is why it constitutes a political device of resistance. It is this relationship between mourning and politics that Judith Butler captured in *Precarious Life*, where she posits that mourning is not necessarily something private and solitary, but rather “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order” (22).⁷⁶ According to Didi-Huberman, who briefly, but significantly, returns to the concept of “space-image” in *Desear desobedecer*, the image, in its direct relationship with *pathos*, also produces, or is capable of producing, a common

⁷⁶ “Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the “we” is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation” (Butler 22–23).

space of emotion, a sensitive space within which collective figures (and, therefore, political figures) of social and historical questioning can “function” (365).

One can thus posit the existence of a network of images that, due to their very nature, that is, due to the unstable and paradoxical relationship they establish between absence and presence, past and present, allow the creation of a “we” that continuously interferes, through its insistence on memory, with the (linear, triumphalist, amnesiac) temporality of domination.

I therefore return here to the distinction I made at the beginning of this chapter between three configurations or regimes in the treatment of images of collective memory. One is of a testimonial nature and orders the images by the strength of their evidentiary evidence. Another presents the images without determinations: images in a state of shock, closer to *profane enlightenment* than to any idea of civic utility (for police, informative, or educational purposes). The third is a configuration that organizes the images according to an educational or explanatory logic and whose objective is citizen education within the framework of a rule of law. These three forms of image organization contribute in different ways to the transmission of the recent past (in its documentary, affective and political aspects).

Benjamin suggested that the image-space initiated by surrealism enables an expansion of experience capable of affecting the sensorium of the body through a process of *innervation* made possible by new technologies, and thus creating an imaginary of collective rebellion (“Surrealism” 217–218). Beyond Benjamin’s debatable confidence in the efficacy and utopian energies of surrealism (an aesthetic that is currently appropriated in advertising) or in the critical possibilities of technology, it could be said that the images that emerged in the spheres of memory work, especially the creations of the children, mimic that space of ungovernable images. When artists take photographs from police or family archives and subject them to an aesthetic treatment, they transform them into political images, to the extent that the tensions they bring into play remain unresolved.

As Susan Buck-Morss has pointed out (*Dialectics of Seeing* 334–336),⁷⁷ for Benjamin, cultural transmission (in a broad sense that contains the so-called high culture as well as the so-called low culture) plays a privileged role in the task of redeeming the past. Transmission constitutes a political act of primary importance, not because culture itself has the power to change the world, but because historical memory decisively affects the collective will for

⁷⁷ “From what are the phenomena rescued? Not only, not so much from the discredit and disregard into which they fall, as from the catastrophe of how a particular form of tradition so often represents them, their ‘appreciation as heritage’” (Benjamin qtd. in Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing* 331).

change. The images of memory, in addition to contributing to collective memory, should nourish the collective imagination – but on the condition that the images do not become metaphors or illustrations that mitigate differences, that they are not placed at the service of what Benjamin referred to as the progressive or social democratic optimism that moralizes politics. For transmission to actualize such potential, a space must exist in which images are the point where memory and action are articulated (García, “Una política” 115).⁷⁸ The images of memory must express a tension, a disjunction, and an intransigence contrary to all political optimism, thus affirming “the primacy of politics over morality” (117).

In a time like ours, in which capitalism as a form of production, as a logic of life and death seamlessly occupies, as Mark Fisher pointed out, “the horizons of the thinkable” (8), and even decorates our oneiric life, we need to rely on survivals. The advance of denialism, militarism, rearmament, open racism, and indifference to the collateral deaths of capitalism on the borders of the West throughout the world today shows that the ideals of tolerance and democratic consensus have failed. Institutional attention to human rights education in recent years has not prevented the mythical circularity of oppression. This regression is, as Slavoj Žižek explains, “strictly correlative to the depoliticization of our society, i.e., to the disappearance of its proper political dimension” and its replacement by ethno-theological conflicts (116). This underscores the “need for a theory of history in which fascism can become visible” (Benjamin qtd. in Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing* 303). It is not so much that the decisive events of the past are forgotten; it is that their potential truth remains imprisoned in catastrophic forms of transmission.

I would like to propose that the future of the transmission of the past in Argentina depends on the future of this image-space, founded by those first passport photos held up by the mothers. This future depends, in turn, on the continued interruption by a flow of alternative images – images of dissent, not captured in a police-like logic of means and ends – of any project of imaginary understanding between the oppressors and the oppressed.

⁷⁸ For Luis Ignacio García, the image in Benjamin “is the point at which memory and action are articulated, and the ‘dialectical image’ is the instance of condensation of his political theory and his theory of history” (“Una política” 113).



Fig. 11. Marcelo Brodsky. *Buena memoria*. 1996, <https://marcelobrodsky.com/buena-memoria/>. Accessed September 24, 2023.

PART 2: TOWARDS THREE CONFIGURATIONS OF MEMORY

Introduction to Part 2

His black eyes, full of fire and shadowed by bushy eyebrows, caused an involuntary sensation of terror; because Facundo never looked straight ahead, and out of habit, out of art, out of the desire to always make himself fearsome, he usually had his head bowed and looked between his eyebrows, like the Ali-Pasha of Monvoisin. (Domingo Faustino Sarmiento 81; my trans.)⁷⁹



Fig. 1. Daniel Santoro. *Civilización y Barbarie*. 2006,

<http://www.danielsantoro.com.ar/obra.php?anio=13&obsel=2653>. Accessed May 19, 2019.

⁷⁹ “Sus ojos negros, llenos de fuego y sombreados por pobladas cejas, causaban una sensación involuntaria de terror; porque Facundo no miraba nunca de frente, y por hábito, por arte, por deseo de hacerse siempre temible, tenía de ordinario la cabeza inclinada y miraba por entre las cejas, como el Alí-Bajá de Monvoisin” (Sarmiento 81).

Education and Barbarism

The national schooled history, which emphasizes, among other things, the places and dates of national memory, was perhaps the first experience with a state-sponsored pedagogy of memory. In Argentina, this memory narrating the origins of the nation was built upon colonial presuppositions. The genocidal practices against the indigenous population in the nineteenth century at the dawn of the republic were largely silenced. The modalities of this partial concealment, and sometimes legitimization, can be easily traced in the school representations (images) alluding to the gestation of the modern Argentine state. The idea of native peoples as destructive and savage hordes was also artistically endorsed in the literary and pictorial theme of the *malón* and *la cautiva* in the nineteenth century.

The construction of a modern Latin American identity was marked by colonial and peripheral conditions regarding the global distribution of power in the world, that is, by a condition of political-economic subordination to central countries (Calveiro, “Golpes de Estado”). Coloniality is a sustained process and did not cease in the nineteenth century with the wars of independence. The practices of dispossession and extractivism by central countries in the Latin American region continue to persist. A “just memory”, in the sense given by Paul Ricoeur to this concept,⁸⁰ should note that discriminatory, exclusionary, and homicidal practices against indigenous peoples are not solely matters of the past. Current examples of concentration of land ownership at the expense of the native population have resulted in new disappearances and killings, such as the emblematic cases of Rafael Nahuel and Santiago Maldonado during the government of Mauricio Macri in recent years.

There exists a natural alliance between memory and art against these official narratives that systematically fuelled collective memory with oligarchic myths. To the strategic fiction described by historians, art and memory oppose their “own truth, woven from what the witnesses know and what they don’t know, the conscious action of individuals and the unconscious law that binds them” (Rancière, *Politics of Literature* 74).

Diana Lenton warns of a common regime of legibility, which could include crimes of military dictatorships, indigenous massacres, and disappearances in democracy. Common here does not mean continuity but sharing a pattern that places systematic extermination operations on structures of economic oppression ready to be reactivated whenever their

⁸⁰ “It is along the path of critical history that memory encounters the sense of justice” (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 500).

stability is threatened. This regime of legibility also allows linking anti-colonial struggles with current struggles of social movements in a common code of resistance.⁸¹

The question of the recent past is, among many other things, a question about the forms that social exclusion processes took in Argentina. If there is a figure or *grand narrative* that has preceded exclusion policies with singular persistence, it is embodied in the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. The image that inaugurates this section evokes the origin and persistence of a national myth. In 1845, Sarmiento wrote from his exile in Chile *Facundo or Civilization and Barbarism in the Argentine Pampas*. It was the brilliant creation of a formula around which various discourses of “progress” and modernization were organized. According to Maristella Svampa,

Facundo is the description of a country, the literary-social portrait of a leader and his roots, a work written under bullets; a text that promises a leading company but already slips in an ideology of social domination; a book that expresses the theoretical assumptions that will guide the construction of the Argentine State, and that at the same time that promises the path of integration, establishes a principle of exclusion. (*El dilema argentino* 383)⁸²

This principle, as is known, envisions a European and urban modernity that could only develop by excluding a large part of rural Argentina’s population (individuals, their beliefs, and their ways of life). Sarmiento’s work identified both the Spanish colonial heritage and the indigenous population, especially the groups called “castas” during colonial times (gauchos, indigenous peoples, descendants of slaves, etc.), as agents of backwardness. *Facundo* was written amid the civil war between Unitarians and Federalists. For Sarmiento, provincial caudillos represented the Asiatic despotism of pastoral cultures. These caudillos

⁸¹ According to Lenton, “we must confront the task of emphasizing that within the physical and social space framing the Argentine nation-state today, there are human groups that are not merely ‘descendants’ of those who survived the genocidal practices of the late 19th century, but are simultaneously themselves victims of a past-present that persists in more or less subtle practices, which nonetheless remain genocidal. This is one of the elements that configures them, both those of today and those of yesterday, as part of a ‘community of victims’ that, to some extent, shapes their subjectivity today as political subjects—Argentinian citizens, yes, but citizens/victims/descendants. Similarly, they are participants in an economic exploitation relationship—exploited/victims/descendants” (16).

⁸² “Facundo es la descripción de un país, el retrato literario-social de un caudillo y sus raíces, una obra escrita bajo las balas; un texto que promete una empresa dirigente pero que desliza ya una ideología de dominación social; un libro que expresa los supuestos teóricos que guiarán la construcción del Estado argentino, y que al mismo tiempo que promete la vía de la integración, establece un principio de exclusión” (M. Svampa, *El dilema argentino* 383).

(like Facundo Quiroga) personified barbarism. They were supposedly brutal leaders of rural castes, beings who could not control their passions, closer to nature than to culture. The formula split reason and passion, culture and nature, light and darkness, embodied in a social distribution. The antinomy between civilization and barbarism is evidently a false dichotomy or even a “hoax”, in Svampa’s words (*El dilema argentino* 371). It is something that has been demonstrated many times. But this hoax is not innocent: it has been used every time “the plebeian” breaks into the public space (404). The book was born as a brilliant pamphlet against the ruling caudillo, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and to defeat rural caudillos. Later, it became the foundation for social engineering operations carried out on indigenous peoples and the lower classes: enculturation, integration, extermination, or subalternization. Much later, in the mid-twentieth century, similar exclusion and disciplining techniques were exercised against the so-called “descamisados” or “cabecitas negras”: rural immigrants who arrived in the capital during the 1940s and 1950s in search of work and who had largely embraced Peronism.

According to Svampa, the dichotomy “Civilization or Barbarism” is not an inherent structure of the Argentine ideo-political system (*El dilema argentino* 371). It is neither an explanatory category in itself nor a “structural totality”. Instead, it has served as a principle of political legitimation, a political invective, a social representation (inconsistency of the social), and a global conception of history (373). However, Sarmiento’s image has always functioned as a key that, rather than facilitating, obstructs the possibility of thinking about the real divisions in the country. Its reactivation in the political field has always had the advantage, over the democratic conception, of connecting the political present to a framework of political and historical intelligibility.

The dictatorship had relied on the National Security Doctrine, focused on the “subversive” and communist threat. In the post-dictatorship period of the 1990s, a dual surveillance system emerged: one that subjected the poor to special supervision and another, milder one for the “citizen” of the middle class. By the late 1990s and with the upheaval of 2001, there was a revival of the old Sarmientine image. A new subject of social protest emerged: the *piqueteros* (unemployed workers) and territorial movements that now embodied the figure of the dangerous classes. The image of danger concentrated on the mobilized poor classes. Even today, when right-wing politicians address “la gente de bien” – that is, “people of good standing” (distinguishing them from others whose very existence appears criminal) – they are invoking the old oligarchic and liberal myth that divides the country between agents of progress and uncultured and even visceral forces.

However, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento – a figure loaded with ambiguity – not only wrote the most important literary work of the nineteenth century in Argentina but also, during the same process of nation-state foundation, initiated the Argentine public universal and free education system. The creator of the grand image of exclusion is simultaneously the founder of an extensive system of inclusion. The classic dichotomous image was also articulated around two principles: one of exclusion and the other of integration. The principle of exclusion justified the elimination of the native population and the second justified the socioeconomic system and the triumph of the oligarchic civilizing project (also aimed at acculturating immigrants).⁸³ Throughout national history, this famous dichotomy has been redefined many times, always in a tense relationship between the political and intellectual fields. Ultimately, it was the social scene that, at different historical moments, defined or managed the fluctuations between both fields (Svampa, *El dilema argentino* 369).

In the same year that marked the thirtieth anniversary of the last dictatorship, the visual artist Daniel Santoro drew with charcoal on a 170- by 130-centimeter paper his own interpretation of “Civilization and Barbarism”. In this drawing, the nuances of colours given by charcoal reveal a standpoint: sepia for the background of a threatening forest surrounding the headquarters building of “human reason”, black for the panther (barbarism), and white for the girl in a school apron (civilization). However, the elements of this composition are not purely oppositional based on colour; they are also complementary based on the arrangement of bodies. Civilization rests here on barbarism. Barbarism is the animal, embodied in a panther that does not sleep, receiving the girl on its back and embracing her with its tail. Civilization is represented as a combination of dream, childhood, and school; it is a schoolgirl: childhood and femininity as a symbol of fragility sleeping its innocent sleep on the panther. The girl wears a public school apron and is suggested to belong to a working-class family. Santoro raised a suspicion about the old Sarmiento formula whose poles seem to become porous. His image draws from the sentimental Peronist imaginary of resistance. Note that the girl wears a mourning armband for the death of Eva Perón (on July 26, 1952). It

⁸³ According to Adriana Puiggrós, “[e]l antagonismo entre ‘bárbaros y civilizados’ no fue ajeno sino que formó parte de la trama de un sistema, que al mismo tiempo fue uno de los más igualitarios de su época. Sarmiento no inventó el antagonismo; conceptualizó de manera genial la matriz de los vínculos entre los argentinos. Mientras continuaba como Presidente de la Nación el genocidio en el Paraguay, Sarmiento consolidaba el sistema de “educación común destinado a todos los argentinos, que llevaba dentro su propia negación.” (“The antagonism between ‘barbarians and civilized’ was not incidental but was part of the plot of a system that, at the same time, was one of the most egalitarian of its time. Sarmiento did not invent the antagonism; he ingeniously conceptualized the matrix of relationships among Argentinians. While the genocide in Paraguay continued under his presidency, Sarmiento was consolidating the system of ‘common education for all Argentinians,’ which carried within itself its own negation”); 341).

transports us to a time of nostalgia and idealized recreation of the early Peronist governments. Santoro recovers or re-imagines an era that knew how to invent the idealistic reading of civilization and barbarism, where the poles reconcile, and antagonisms are not so evident. The work represents an example of a transformation of the meaning and references of this image. In his canvas, the energies of the wild, the animal, and the barbaric do not oppose culture. Rather, a sacred alliance seems to have been woven between the school and the desert, between the people and the jungle. While in other regions the references of this image have remained unchanged, in the Argentine case, there is an alteration in which the poles of the dichotomy are reversed; it is a “conversion of barbarism into the positive national core, the true place of Civilization, against a false liberal civilization” (Svampa, *El dilema argentino* 369).

The way of imagining civilization, that is, imagining Argentine modernity offered by *Facundo* (with its idealized vision of colonial powers), acquired significant symbolic value in schools and remained stable and continuous over time. Santoro created the painting “Civilization and Barbarism” in 2006: it is the post-dictatorship era; Néstor Kirchner is governing the country. It is a time of revisionism and pedagogy of memory. Argentina in 2006 reflects the weakening of the poles of the image. However, this traditional figure that represented good and evil for so many years still retains powerful symbolic efficacy as a social representation linked to the new dangerous classes. The emergence of the invisible and displaced, a constant in the Argentine scene, tends to be read in a Sarmientine key. Santoro’s painting expressed the desire to overcome this dichotomy, an overcoming conceived from public, universal, and free school education.

Revisiting the dictatorial past leads to revisiting the explanatory tables offered by the elites to explain the historical conflicts of Argentina. The opposition between civilization and barbarism is inevitably present in the background of the new images of the past. It is in this revisionist context that a school pedagogy of memory emerged. In the following sections, I will try to contextualize it, focusing on some of its visual expressions.

Three Configurations of Memory

Practices interested in evoking and recovering the recent past, particularly memory pedagogies, have been characterized by the importance of visibility and the use of images. The materials used within the framework of educational policies are substitutes for these memory practices that used visual records, first as a denunciation pattern and later as educational material.

Relatives who demanded the “aparición con vida”, that is “appearance alive” in the maximalist protest logic of “They took them alive, we want them alive”, had to certify, or rather, provide evidence of what had already been denied by the state. The proofs of existence were loaded with visibility – passport photos – and were extracted from the state’s own archive. According to van Alphen, “[t]he problem is that, like archival texts and documents, most photographs have the status of non-fictional testaments to what once was. But as images they do not articulate their content, opening up to a plurality of readings” (*Staging the Archive* 32). This second part of the research consists of three chapters in which three aesthetic configurations of memory are identified. The analytical focus on these configurations revolves around the use of images linked to the recent past. The periodization established among the configurations is delineated from the emergence and circulation of the first images of the disappeared to the production of the collection belonging to the “Education and Memory” Programme, with a focus on the volume *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina (Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina)*.

The first memory configuration arises from 1977, during the initial rounds of the Mothers, where the documentary use of photographs of the disappeared children attached to bodies predominates. It is a stage marked by the prevalence of documentary photos that accompany the search and demand for detained-disappeared children.

The subsequent visual development around this theme partly responds to the question of the possibilities and difficulties of “representation”, addressing the problems posed by the inscription of the ineffable as a communication requirement. The pedagogical engineering work dedicated to memory practices and the transmission of recent history (to be developed in the following chapters) was influenced by the various responses given to these fundamental questions.

A second configuration is recorded in the mid-1990s with the formation of the HIJOS group and the artistic intervention of photos: the emergence of fictional photos. This configuration solidifies the link between art and politics, reshuffling images in a way that challenges the knowledge compiled in the Mothers’ counter-archive with new representation strategies. It is noteworthy that the initial initiatives were led by the second generation, concentrated in the HIJOS group, the group of *Family members of disappeared detainees*, and independent artists.

The third memory configuration refers to a new movement in the use of images mediated by memory policies. In this period, memory pedagogy emerges and becomes

inscribed in educational processes. Starting in 2003, and with significant emphasis in 2005 and subsequent years, the Argentine state subscribed to a plan for the production, transmission, and circulation of memories and stories of the recent past, strongly anchored in the educational system and, more specifically, in teacher training. Initially as a recipient of the demands of the “human rights movement” and later as a promoter of “memory policies”, the state played a material and symbolic mediating role between civil society and the recent past through systematic processes of memory institutionalization with a marked pedagogical intentionality.

The “pedagogy of memory” is an inevitable part of a widely recognized process known as the “memory boom” or “memorial explosion”, which was documented in Argentina towards the end of the 1990s (Lvovich and Bisquert; M.P. González and Pagès; Cucuzza and Spregelburd). According to Jelin’s studies (“Memoria y democracia”), the “pedagogical” concern usually follows a stage involving active political subjects demanding state and social commitment to justice processes. In a second stage, “the emphasis lies in the concern for legacies and their transmission, something we could define as the properly ‘pedagogical’ dimension of memory” (“Memoria y democracia” 226).

The material selection was conducted by taking as units of analysis a set of images divided into types: the document-image, the art-image, and the school-image. Specifically, a selection of documentary-format photographs used by the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers Archive), works by various artists who are relatives of disappeared individuals and independent artists (exhibitions of free circulation), and school photographs (production of the “Education and Memory” team: *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina* [*Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina*]) were incorporated.

CHAPTER 5: THE PHOTOGRAPH AS A DOCUMENT

Introduction

The repressive strategy of forced disappearance was, as we have already noted, a known practice in different countries of the Ibero-American sphere, both before and after the Argentine dictatorship of 1976. However, as Pilar Calveiro (*Poder y desaparición*) and Mandolessi and Alonso (*Estudios sobre la memoria*) have pointed out, it was in Argentina where this repressive modality, due to its systematic organization, would reach the degree of an authentic technology of power. It could be said that in this country, then, the very concept of the disappeared detainee would reach the highest degree of condensation.

In this chapter, I will address the first ways in which the Mothers tried to make the fact of disappearance visible. I will see how this need alternated the reporting initiatives both in the public street space and in the legal space. This stage corresponds to the centrality of the ID photo of the missing person. I will try to account for the paths that these images travel (between the state archive and the public exhibition, between the family archive and the political manifestation, between the document and the aesthetic intervention) until they settle into a kind of counter-archive of the nation, governed by other ordering logics than the traditional ones.

The Silhouettes⁸⁴

In addition to the rounds and white handkerchiefs, one of the great artistic acts that accompanied the struggle of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo was the “siluetazo” (silhouette action). This visual resource had already been used during the conflicts in the Argentine provinces of Tucumán and Córdoba in the years before the military coup. It consisted of the use of cardboard silhouettes that cut out the outline of the human figure in natural size. Sometimes the inside of the silhouettes is empty, but generally it is completed with the names and dates of birth and the dates of the kidnapping of the Mothers’ children. It was the human rights organizations who, towards the end of the dictatorship, proposed to the Mothers the serial production of silhouettes to account for the real dimension of the number of missing

⁸⁴ Longoni (“Fotos y siluetas”) challenges the idea maintained by the authors of numerous studies that the silhouettes were consolidated as a visual resource before the photographs. The photographic records of the events of the dictatorship relativize this position. These records show the extended use of the photograph as a leading medium to promote the visibility of the conflict from its beginnings. During 1983 and in subsequent years, the photographic work of Gil, García, etc. show the use of all types of media to display the photos: signs, banners, media on the Mothers’ bodies, posters, etc.

people. It was about giving them a place – occupying a space. An attempt was made to respond to a problem of representation: how much space would silhouettes representing the disappeared take up? The background of this idea is located in the same question that the Polish artist Jerzy Spasky asked himself to represent the numerical dimension of the extermination in Auschwitz.

On that occasion, the silhouettes were classified to show the number of deaths per day. Initially, the Mothers proposed that the silhouettes be empty because the total number of missing persons was not known, nor were all their names available. The first “siluetazo” was carried out in 1983, still during the dictatorship, within the framework of the third March of Resistance. An outdoor workshop was held in which the organizers and protesters made and posted the silhouettes in different public spaces. Somehow a body was returned to the missing. The passers-by and protesters added phrases and messages or made drawings. The response from the public and protesters in general exceeded the expectations of the event organizers. The images, in which the perspective places a participant lying down while being contoured, at first glance appear to show a dead body lying on the street with people crowded around it (figs. 1 and 2). For a moment, the places are exchanged: the living take the place of the dead; the living lend their bodies to the dead who are not there. The isolation of the Mothers has ended. Now it is the people who ask: where are they?



Fig. 1. Guillermo Kexel. *El siluetazo*. 1983, http://www.cvaa.com.ar/02dossiers/accion/3_histo_4.php. Accessed October 18, 2018.



Fig. 2. Eduardo Gil. *Silhouette*. 1983, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, <https://muac.unam.mx/exposicion/el-siluetazo>. Accessed October 18, 2018.

The silhouettes had not been conceived for this 1983 march, but the artists offered them to the Mothers. They imposed their own conditions: the silhouettes would not be displayed horizontally and the figures would be represented empty, because the data on all the disappeared was not available. The silhouettes should also represent children and pregnant women, therefore there would not be a stereotyped outline. According to Eduardo Gruner, the silhouettes are

attempts to represent what has disappeared: i.e. not simply what is ‘absent’ – since, by definition, every representation is of an absent object – but of the intentionally absent, what was made to disappear by some form of material or symbolic violence; in our case, the representation of the bodies disappeared by a systematic policy or a conscious strategy. (qtd. in Longoni, “Fotos y siluetas” 51; translated by Marisela Trevin)⁸⁵

In Longoni's terms, “the logic at play is that of a restitution of the image as a substitution for the absent body” (51; translated by Marisela Trevin).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ “[L]as siluetas son intentos de representación de lo desaparecido: es decir, no simplemente de lo ‘ausente’ – puesto que, por definición, toda representación lo es de un objeto ausente–, sino de lo intencionalmente ausentado, lo hecho desaparecer mediante alguna forma de violencia material o simbólica; para nuestro caso, la representación de los cuerpos desaparecidos por una política sistemática o una estrategia consciente” (51).

⁸⁶ “la lógica en juego es la de una restitución de la imagen como sustitución del cuerpo ausentado” (51).

The refusal of the Mothers to place the silhouettes on the ground shows their resistance to equating disappearance with death. The lying images are a death certificate that halts the battle for signs. The disappeared will not be represented as dead, because for the Mothers this implies an end and disappearance, by definition, does not. The silhouettes would be upright (figs. 3 to 10).

It should be noted that towards the end of the dictatorship, the military drafted self-amnesty laws and declared all of the disappeared dead. The Mothers did not accept this declaration and would continue to demand that they be “returned alive”, as well as demanding the prosecution of the perpetrators. “We want to know where our children are. What have they done with them?” (Archive of the Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo). The military maintained a “pact of silence” under which no collaboration was provided for the search for the bodies.



Fig. 3. Siluetazo. <http://revistamutt.com/visuales/el-siluetazo-ponerle-el-cuerpo-a-la-desaparicion/>. Accessed October 18, 2018.



Fig. 4. Guillermo Loíacono. Protests with the display of silhouettes represent the disappeared (“Siluetazo”). October 1983.



Fig. 5. “Silhouettes and Cops”, (two policemen with their backs to the silhouettes, looking away). 2006, Exhibition at Sala PAYS, El Parque de la Memoria-Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado (Memory Park-Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism) on the 30th anniversary of the 1976 coup.



Fig. 6. Gerardo Dell'Oro. Eighth March of Resistance. December 1988.



Fig. 7. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200410190647/https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201305/19498-el-siluetazo-a-30-anos-en-el-parque-de-la-memoria.php>. Accessed October 18, 2018.



Fig. 8. Roberto Amigo. *Siluetas blancas entre Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. 1990, Archivos en Uso, <http://www.archivosenuso.org/viewer/475>. Accessed March 26, 2019



Fig. 9. Roberto Amigo. *Madre de Plaza de Mayo junto a una silueta roja*. 1989, Archivos en Uso, <http://archivosenuso.org/viewer/464>. Accessed March 26, 2019.



Fig. 10. <https://journals.openedition.org/agedor/898?lang=en>. Accessed October 18, 2018.

The “siluetazo” had a significant impact among those who produced the event, among those who participated and those who simply walked around the city on subsequent days. The silhouettes, some would say, were “silent screams”, “silent demands”, provoking “surprise” or “discomfort”. The faceless bodies watched. A sort of mirror looked back at the pedestrians. Now, the disappeared were like a contoured community, but contoured by whom? The effect of lying down to lend one’s body to the silhouettes turns an individual act into a collective act: after that experience, it is not the individual who gets back up, but an exposed community, the possibility of political community. This relationship marks the

passage from the aesthetic to the political and vice versa. The Mothers are no longer singular families who lost their children because “they had done something”. Instead, the Mothers are Mothers of the 30,000, and the 30,000 do not belong to the Mothers, but to society as a whole. By virtue of this, “the community is not established as a sum of the I, but as a distribution of the we” (Didi-Huberman, *Pueblos expuestos* 102). Here, the image caused by the silhouettes is “as a sensitive support for our reflection and our political memory: so that the protest, the revolt, the desire for those dead bodies to continue, as long as the image lasts in our memory, continue. they are not entirely, for history, a dead letter or commonplace” (Didi-Huberman, *Pueblos expuestos* 101). The power of representation is multiplied in the “absent” as Gruner says, and it is here where artistic intervention is political intervention.

The silhouettes made human bodies appear in contact with others: “Presence is impossible except as co-presence” (Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 62). The exhibition of the silhouettes is not only an exhibition of the disappeared; it is a mutual exhibition. Here, the disappeared are not exposed as a spectacle; it will not be possible because the community has been broken. The town is not a unit. The disappeared are spatially exposed to the people, and the people themselves are exposed, but exposed in their brokenness. The public demonstration does not represent the aspiration for popular romantic unity, but rather gives visibility to those who dramatically have no part (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*).

Photography and Memory Practices

Disappearance precisely entails the avoidance of all forms of imagination or representation regarding the fate of the detained. This has rendered visibility a crucial concern in memory practices in Argentina and has placed photography in a problematic position within these practices.

In summary, the photographs accompanying the victims’ legal data on their identification documents were the initial visual expression of what were not yet memory practices. They symbolized the urgency to fix the image to its referent. One could argue that the Mothers respond to the silence of the state with an image. And they do so using the same administrative means that the state employs to register its citizens: a front-facing or profile picture, a series of cold data that reveal nothing about the personality of the missing person. The aim is to document a legal existence.

Initially, the passport-sized photo, that face stamped on 4-by-4 photographic paper (figs. 11 to 13), was the means to identify the loved one whose fate seemed unknown to all. Documentation sent to various national entities included, alongside the photo, a physical

description of the missing relative. This was the standard procedure in individual inquiries. It was deemed that the mere name of the disappeared relative was insufficient for identification by the authorities (especially considering that political activists often used aliases or war names). The Mothers hoped that their children would be recognized by someone who could provide them with any information about their whereabouts.

As these photos became symbols of a collective endeavour, family members who did not possess such photos utilized pictures taken from the family album but cropped them to the passport photo format. Adapting a photo to resemble a passport photo implies “sharing a symbolic system that ultimately organizes its contemplation and interpretation” (Da Silva Catela, “Revelar el horror” 10; translated by Marisela Trevin)⁸⁷



Fig. 11. ID card photo of Francisca Torres. Archive of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

⁸⁷ “compartir un sistema simbólico que ordena finalmente su contemplación y lectura” (10).



Fig. 12. <https://www.pinterest.es/pin/64950419604684374/>. Accessed March 26, 2019.



Fig. 13. Photograph of grandmother Alicia “Licha” Zubasnabar de De La Cuadra. Founding grandmother and first president of the Grandmothers. Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

The photos circulated in national and international media. The instances reproduced petitions and improvised dossiers that were photocopied many times using techniques from decades past. This results in the typical photo of the disappeared being generally a rather imprecise face (fig. 14). The French artist Christian Boltanski, in *Chases High School*, created in 1988, selected a set of photographs belonging to the graduation class of Jewish children found in a book about the Jews of Vienna.⁸⁸ Boltanski re-photographed and enlarged the originals until achieving a blurry effect on the faces, which thus acquired a cadaverous appearance. The photographs were installed on pillars of rusted biscuit tins where the light from desk lamps illuminated the ensemble from above, much like the lights in a classic police interrogation room. Although this imprecision of the faces in the identification photos of the disappeared is not deliberate, it is possible to establish a comparison with Boltanski's intervened images. The catalog of his exhibition

includes the original photograph with the following caption: "All we know about them is that they were students at Chases High School in Vienna in 1931." This caption stresses the fact that the remaining picture has no correspondence with present reality: the faces of the children as they appear in the photograph have disappeared. This disappearance is acted out in extreme close-ups. We now see not the realistic illusion of a living subjectivity, as the standard view of photography and of the portrait would have it, but empty, blinded faces. And blinding is a figurative way of objectifying or even killing a person. (van Alphen, *Caught by History* 98–99)

In Boltanski's work, the photographs belong to lives that are presumed to have been suppressed in concentration camps. In the case of the Argentine identification photos, the conditions of the portrait are disturbed by a sinister uncertainty. At this point, both representations of faces diverge. We observe in Boltanski's work that the very photograph seems to reproduce the effect of the concentration camps on the appearance of these faces: "The enlarged images, which transform the faces into skeletal vestiges, remind us of the photographs published after the Second World War had come to an end, of the emaciated survivors of the death camps" (van Alphen, *Caught by History* 99). In the case of the Argentine photos, the faces are frozen moments that at first can tell us nothing about how these people were annihilated. These are not aesthetically intervened photos, but the "natural"

⁸⁸ Work studied by Ernst van Alphen in *Caught by History*.

wear or degradation suffered by these identification photos, subjected to mechanical reproduction and their eventual enlargement and mass production, produces the effect of a gradual derealization, of a progressive loss, never fully completed. Though through different paths, the wear of the images can evoke what van Alphen has termed the “Holocaust Effect”:

It is important to realize that the last two ways in which Boltanski evokes the Holocaust—by reducing them to photographs and lists made at the time as documentation—are not based on reference per se. I call a “Holocaust-effect” by means of a reenactment of principles that in a sense defines the Holocaust—a radical emptying out of subjectivity as a road leading to the wholesale destruction of a people: genocide. (99)



Fig. 14. Photographs of Ana María Lanzillotto and Domingo Menna. Their son's identity was restored on October 3, 2016, at the age of 40. October 3, 1976, Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

The passport-sized photograph maintains a metonymic relationship with the body of the disappeared. By being publicly displayed, its appearance becomes politicized. These photos exhibit a face, but also its wear, its gradual graphic destruction, which emulates not only the destruction of subjectivity but also the natural process of forgetting. However, their public and political display constitutes a reaffirmation of the will to remember. In Argentina, this collection of displayed photographs interrupted the monotonous continuity of a regime of secrecy and monopoly of signs.

Disarticulated were the political forms of social relations, as the dictatorship promoted forms of socialization based on spectacle and consumption. The dictatorial state is also a producer of fictions, an apparatus of persuasion, an instance that not only inhibits critical images but produces and disseminates its own. The imposed images of concord, peace, health, and unity were complemented by an atmosphere of frivolity that the mass media knew how to design and propagate. Even for those who had been directly exposed to repression and had the fortune to survive, or for the relatives of those who never returned, it was difficult to escape this celebratory and amnesic community. Those who could not share this mandatory optimism were condemned to social isolation or to leading double lives. The writer Mario Benedetti coined the term “insilio” for this latter situation, that is, the idea of an inner exile. An aura of suspicion or immorality hung over these individuals.

It is around the photos of the disappeared loved ones that a semi-clandestine community begins to gather. In these meetings, according to Ludmila Da Silva Catela (“Revelar el horror”), the past is discussed and experiences are exchanged: they are spaces for the reworking of memories. Each relative of the disappeared needed to reclaim for themselves the certainty of events as unforgettable as they were denied. Hence, the analogue photograph, as a trace, as a luminous certification of a body on a photographic plate, became the foundation of a sentimental community organized around a difficult knowledge. Déotte describes this as an “era of disappearance” that demands an “art of disappearance”: an art that needs to cling to photography as evidence of existence (“El arte” 156).

The first struggle of the Mothers was thus an intimate confrontation with themselves, an affirmation. The photograph was exhibited as evidence but was also an amulet wielded against an entire society bent on naturalizing forgetting.

Individual memory is undoubtedly related to a neuronal apparatus, but collective memory grows from an identifiable subject, from a body. It is the material marks preserved over time that contribute to a common memory. The past and the changing narratives that allude to it are preserved in the material environment that surrounds us. Aleida Assmann distinguishes between semantic memory and episodic memory. Semantic memory is the ability to process, learn, and store in the mind the data of the surrounding world. Episodic memory, however, dedicates individually experienced incidents to the exteriorized self. Any verbalized or represented individual memory becomes part of the subjective symbolic system and ceases to be the inalienable and exclusive property of one person. Through language, individual memory is encoded. This allows for its eventual appropriation. Socially encoded memory can be assumed by others or challenged or corrected. No individual memory can

completely dispense with a social and cultural infrastructure. It is this infrastructure, these external signs or social marks, that allow people to preserve memories. The political-cultural action of the Mothers consisted precisely in the constitution of a symbolic space in which individual and untransferable memories could be shared, initially among themselves and later with society.

At the end of the dictatorship, when the Mothers led popular demonstrations, the passport-sized photos were enlarged to be used as banners. (figs. 15 and 16). The faces of the disappeared then appeared in close-up, above the heads of the demonstrators. The banners could be carried by anyone, not just the biological mother of the victim. The image detaches from the body and rises in the air to inhabit public space. It is as if now civil society itself is making a claim for justice.

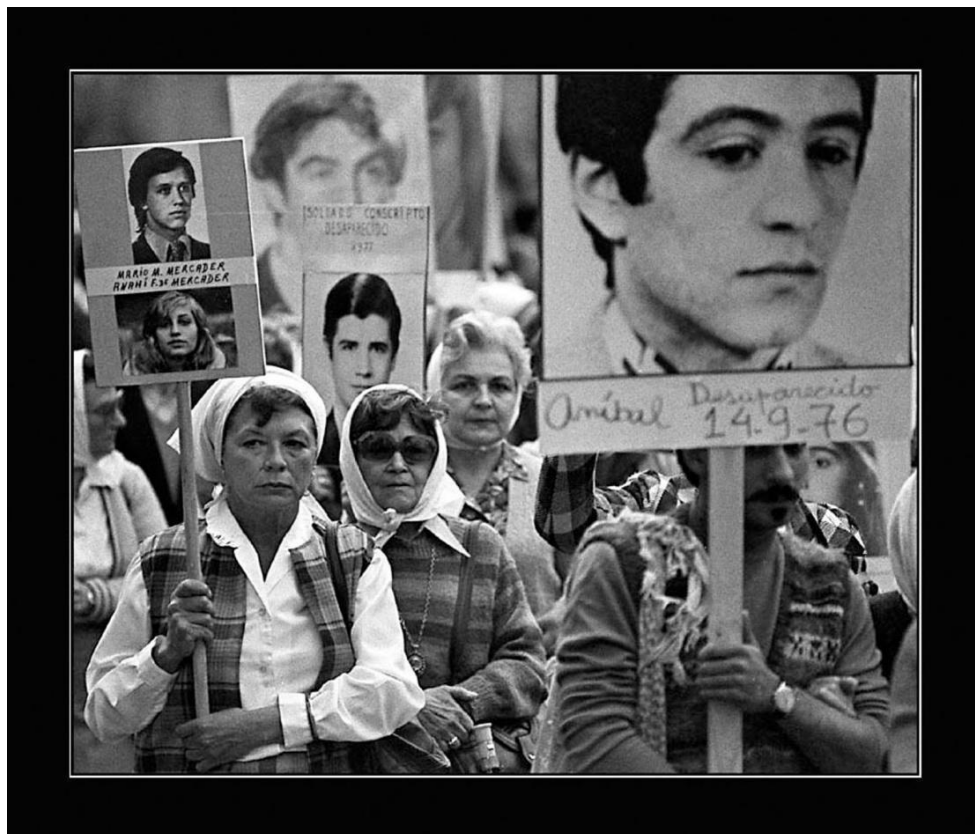


Fig. 15. Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.



Fig. 16. Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

But photography cannot fail to be at the same time a “falsification” of the referent, since the picture captures and fixes a single moment that is separate from the vital flow of the person being photographed; that is to say, it portrays the referent in an unrepeatable and existentially impossible moment by representing an instant in a living continuum.

The referential function of photography varies according to whether the image is old or recent. In the words of van Alphen, “[e]specially old photographs demonstrate that, over time, the photographic image becomes severed from its referent. It is only in old images that the main function of the medium of photography can be assessed” (*Staging the Archive* 28).

In the case of photographs of missing people, these temporalities coexist in a contradictory way. The photographs were originally taken from a state archive or a family album, but they also belong to the archive of missing people. How old is a photo? How old is a missing person?

When we look at a photograph that tells us about a past time, we can attribute a different meaning to the original. The observer looks at the image from his own horizon of meaning and experience. Images cannot be read beyond their circumstances of production and circulation and cannot be interpreted separately from the acts of their reception. The photos of the victims are intended to represent the disappearance, to make the hidden visible. What led to this way of interpreting them are the diverse circuits of reception and the social,

political and historical dimensions that made these photographs – initially used to record citizens – an affective emblem of disappearance.

Photography can be the material medium of a shared narrative. The photo adds credibility to the common story. The inexpressive aspect that we appreciate in every identity photograph acquires in this context the forcefulness of an interpellation. The visages look back at us. They implicitly ask us to name their bearers, to ask about them.

The Photograph and the Archive

The photographic image, of course, has caused a series of vertigos of perception since its inception. As pointed out by Nelly Richard (*Políticas y estéticas de la memoria*), the effect of presence is technically denied by the dead time that the photographic image inhabits. This is what various authors, from Siegfried Kracauer to Jacques Derrida, will consider the ghostly or spectral character of the photograph; that is to say, the character of being ambiguously placed between what is and what is not, the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible, what appears and what disappears. The photograph was conceived in association with the idea of the certification of the referent, at the service of its classification and identification. It has thus been used by geographical and historical archives, especially colonial archives and in general by mechanisms of state control (van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*). However, the essential ambiguity of the photograph lies in the fact that its indicative power can never be separated from the scenographic disposition by which it is framed or preceded, nor from the significant environment in which it appears, nor from the effects produced by the passage of time between the time when the photograph was taken and the moment of its perception. The photographic image is never a mere document; it also provokes an inevitable vertigo of temporality between what was and what is, between what still is and what is no longer. If we also consider that there is something spectral about every photo, the public exhibition of the faces of people who can no longer be found, or have been removed from the continuum of the living, is inevitably spectral, insofar as such exhibition presents the photos of the people that the state believed could not be part of the group of the living and especially the group of the visible in the new Argentina. The ghostly return of these people who were “removed” from the body of the nation (due to their pathogenic nature, in the language of the dictatorship), and their photographic reappearance in the middle of the most important square in the country inevitably had an extremely disturbing effect for the regime. But for those who remember and demand explanations, these photos are spectres of loved ones whose definitive return is continuously awaited and who are thus always and

indefinitely on a voyage of return that will never be completed. In his publication *Failed Images*, van Alphen highlights the following:

Documents are older than photographs and therefore command more status. The document's archival status is the performance and record of its act. Photographs, in contrast, do not possess the status of an act in that sense; they are considered more passive; reservoir more than record. It is this status of the photograph as passive and as reservoir that posed a problem for the archive, in particular for archival classification and regulation, as the photograph is inherently unstable. It unsettles the grounds of archival classification. In contrast to other kinds of documents, photographs are never just established records of the past; once severed from their referents they can always be read differently. This is how the status of the photograph morphs from record to an archive in and of itself. (226)

This instability of the photographic image, as indicated by van Alphen, has turned the photograph into a double-edged sword for archives, as it creates doubts regarding what the photograph exactly certifies. In this sense, a photograph often says much more about the person who takes it than about its intended referent. The place of the photograph, that is, the series of which it is a part, is as significant as the photographic impression itself when it comes to determining what is perceived in it or the senses it promotes. It is the archive that organizes or stores them, the series of which it is a part and the way in which it is done that allows its archivists to establish a certain order of visibility, consecrate or naturalize "evident" hierarchies, or impose social or sexual stereotypes on reality, turning certain power relations into emanations of nature. More than evidence of reality, the photograph is an effect of truth in a network of power relations. Contemporary photographic art has been nourished by this ambiguity, sabotaging in many ways the pretensions of objectivity in photographic images.

One of the issues that is inevitable in this problem is the relationship between the photograph and the archive, understood in a double sense: as a data bank and as "the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events," in the words of Foucault, that is, as a system of the historical conditions of possibility of statements (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 145). And it is inevitable because the entity considered by the dictatorship to be unclassifiable, that of the "disappeared," the void in the archives of the state, was challenged with a true alternative archive, the Mothers' archive,

which has continued to grow and which promotes another series of statements that have converged ever since with national political life, always acquiring new nuances.

Today, in Argentina, Chile, or Uruguay, a series of ID photos on the street can hardly mean anything other than the series of photos of young people who disappeared during those countries' respective dictatorships. Thus, the classic ID photo that is still identified today with the bureaucracy of any state and is characterized by an impersonal image, the natural context of which are files, institutions, or state archives, has undergone a series of essential changes. In the context of the photos collected by the Mothers, they no longer prove the mere bureaucratic existence of an individual before the law and the nation, but, much more frequently, they evoke a particular fate. And that fate is the fate of the disappeared, that is, of uncertainty and state crime. There is a shared cultural and political background established between the remembrance of the disappeared, their memory, and these ID photos in black and white.

The nationality data next to the photos of the children seems to respond to the denationalization by the military of those they have called subversives. The attached photos and data prove that these people are Argentinian, according to the state's own sources, showing that the national sphere as an extension of the family (an ideal that is promoted by Latin American authoritarian regimes) is a parody, an insubstantial construction, or one whose substance is precisely ruinous. This means that, in part, the photos of the state archive exposed or mounted in the public space, removed from the context of the civil registry, constitute an enactment of that same registry, its black mirror. Thus, what the Mothers inaugurate is a different principle of selection of reality, where the information discarded by the society of the disappearance ends up, generating an immense agglomeration of uncomfortable data. In the ID photo, the individual appears before the state or before the law, separated or isolated from any other characteristic of their daily context. What is characteristic of the ID photo is the fixed and inexpressive look on a white background that turns the registered face into a face with no context or history. In the ID photo, an individual appears before a place of social control and expresses in itself an aspiration of fixation, registration, identification, and immobility. It should be noted that the first photos of this kind were taken as a police strategy and related to criminal files. Their purpose was to detect suspects and their effect, among others, was the criminalization of certain social groups. The ID photo is thus part of a grammar of power that frames, divides, and serializes, while exhibiting on a mass scale and individualizing subjective singularities. But the photo, or at least its public exhibition in the framework of the Mothers' peaceful agitation, is an

outstanding aesthetic intervention. When the perennial and inexpressive look of the disappeared person appears in the midst of a continuum of media images of the present, a short circuit occurs, a violent anachronism that forces us to reconsider everyday life. The emergence of the disappeared person's face thus resulted not only in the aggression of the regime, which saw in it a disturbance of public order, but the hostility of many of the very passers-by, who were extremely disturbed by the spectral return of an undigested and indigestible past. It is the proscribed image where all the ambiguities that are characteristic of the image are exasperated. The Mothers disrupt the apolitical national harmony that the military intend to show and reintroduce the conflict that is inherent to the political, challenging the regime of visibility imposed by the regime, thus initiating a dispute around the representations of the community (Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*).

Regarding the displacements that art has deployed to question these forms of representation, van Alphen (*Staging the Archive*) takes the example of the artist Fiona Tan to analyze the problematic relationship between the archive and photography.⁸⁹ Tan's project consisted of holding the video camera for one full minute over people who were asked to remain motionless in front of the lens. The videographic portrait is so used as a resource to capture the image. In the case of photography, the still image is factual, although it enables multiple readings that question such rigidity. In Tan's experience, these portraits escape fixation. According to Doris von Drathen, "people stare at her. One minute is a long time. As each second passes, the mask of their everyday activities slowly begins to slip and fall away, as if an eggshell were gradually metamorphosing back into a soft membrane. In turn, the faces interrogate the one scrutinising them" (qtd. in van Alphen, *Staging the Archive* 37–38). The faces of the disappeared, cut off from their vital contexts, suffer a similar fate not because of a videographic device, but because of their displacement from the civil registry to the street.

Another example of these displacements in the value assigned to the photograph is the sum of the faces of the disappeared (figs. 17 to 18). The use of flags depicting the sum of the photographic portraits of the disappeared implies the passage from the singular to the serial, and from the individual to the collective. While at the beginning of the Mothers' search the priority was to disseminate the data, the signs of identity of the absent, with the passage of time and the intensification of the Mothers' political role in the struggle against the dictatorship, the photos were gathered together, forming something like banners. There is one

⁸⁹ On Fiona Tan's work see van Alphen, *Staging the Archive* 36–40.

of them that is particularly well-known, which symbolizes the struggle, and which constitutes a portrait of the whole: it is the sum of all available faces arranged side by side (fig. 19).

In this use of the ID photo, the referent, which in a previous phase was the highlighted element, what was shown, what was essential in the photo, is again shifted into the background. A new distance is produced between the photo and its reference that distances these photos from the portrait and brings them closer to allegory.

In this new context, the grouping of the photos once again shows the state's mechanism of identification based on photographic humiliation, serialization, or standardization that objectifies, depersonalizes, disciplines, and subdues. It also shows that the suffering of the detainees is part of the same process of depersonalization. The gazes in the photos in the context of their public appearance become scrutinizing; they are disturbing though elusive gazes. They are faces accompanied by other faces. Substituting the isolated and personal portrait for the series implies a way to deconstruct the humanistic and sentimental concept of the portrait. It implies their entry into a political dimension.

Removed from the archive series of the state and their identity documents, the faces once again lose the appearance of faces bearing a unique biography (which obviously is lost in the series of portraits). This is because they evoke this very serialization and depersonalization, but now as an accusatory duplication that allegorizes the seriality of the crime, its systematic nature, the repeated or reiterated atrocity, and the magnitude of the elimination.



Fig. 17.

<http://www.keywordbasket.com/ZGldGFkdXJhIGFyZ2VudGluYSBkZXNhcgFyZWNPZG9>

[Z/](#). Accessed March 26, 2019.

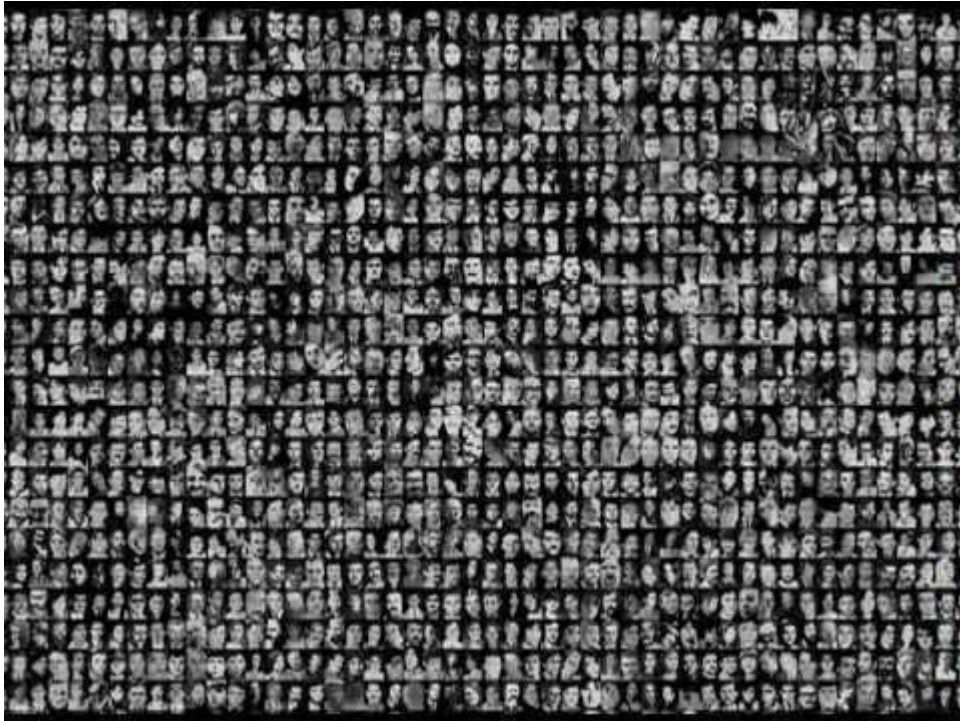


Fig. 18.

<http://www.keywordbasket.com/bG9zIGRlc2FwYXJlY2lk3MgZW4gYXJnZW50aW5h/>.

Accessed March 26, 2019.



Fig. 19.

https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/bTf_x3UKERYkGlwoQkLK3yS_4b5z4ZCiBRnqUVhNCzooMchkhKET2rWo598qrqR8oFkyjw=s116. Accessed March 26, 2019.

The other series, or the other archive used by relatives of the disappeared is that of the family album (figs. 20 to 22). While the ID photo, as indicated by Susan Sontag (*On Photography*) belongs to the state archive and to a form of classification governed by typology and closely linked to the police investigation, the family album photo belongs to a chronological category. It represents the ceremony of shared, private, and family spaces. Once these photos, although individualized and within family relationships, are decoded as photos of the missing, a crossing of temporalities inevitably occurs for the viewer. On the one hand, the meeting of at least two times is typical of photography, but, on the other hand, the viewer cannot help but think that the photo was taken at a time in which its referents felt safe and could not know what was going to happen to them.⁹⁰

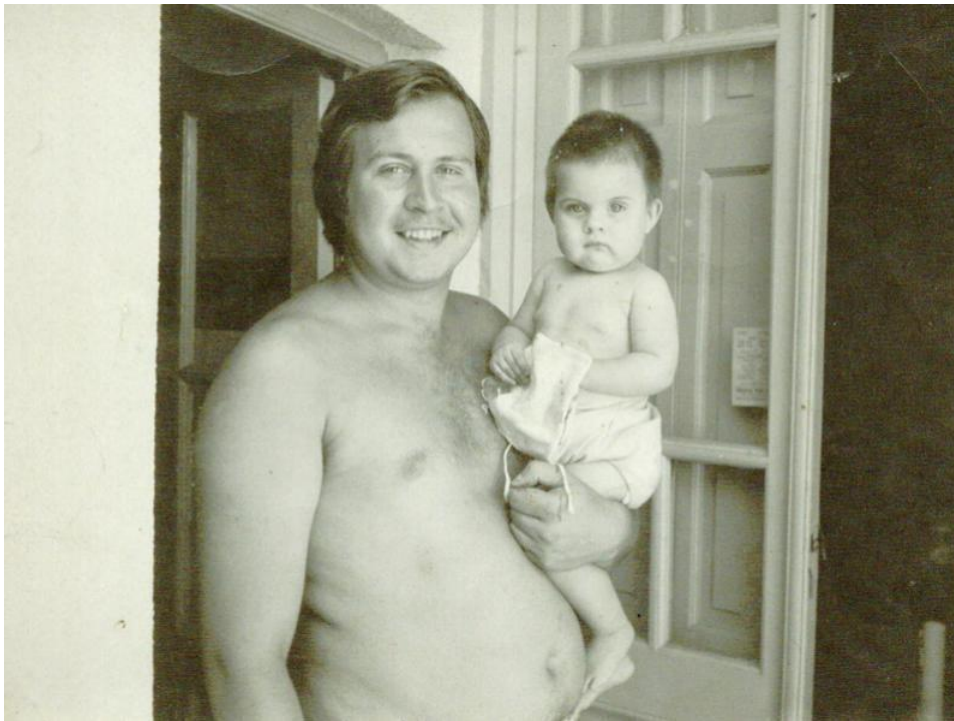


Fig. 20. Ricardo Iwanski with the couple's first daughter, Marta. Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

⁹⁰ "La tensión latente entre lo despreocupado del rostro en el tiempo pasado de la toma fotográfica que no sabe de la inminencia del drama, y el tiempo presente desde el cual miramos trágicamente la foto de alguien luego convertido en víctima de la historia, compone el desesperado 'punctum' que emociona y conmociona esas fotos de álbum de desaparecidos." ("The latent tension between the lack of concern in the face in the past moment at which the photograph was taken, when the referent is unaware of the imminence of the drama, and the present time from which we tragically contemplate the photograph of someone who subsequently became a victim of history, composes the desperate 'punctum' that moves and shocks in those album photos of the disappeared"; Richard qtd. in Longoni, "Fotos y siluetas" 48).



Fig. 21. Portrait of Martinis and Neuhaus at their wedding. Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.



Fig. 22. María Isabel Luque, probably with her son, Marcos. Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza Mayo.

But family photos are exposed to a certain semiotic erosion, as both Kracauer and Barthes have pointed out (van Alphen, *Staging the Archive*). With the passage of time, these photos cease to be an indication of the person portrayed; they lose the power to evoke the familiar of well-known faces and they acquire other values, another chain of associations. The signs of the time, the fashion of that period, become an obstacle. The photograph of a person becomes a portrait of an era. When subject to other archival contexts, it acquires other meanings and does not contribute to personal memory anymore. As pointed out by Barthes, *History* stands between the face that is sought and the observer of the photograph (64).

Furthermore, the photographs in question are, as indicated above, in place of a void, in the absence of a body and of a photograph illustrating or providing proof of the fate of the disappeared detainee. On these publicly exhibited inexpressive faces and in the absence of referential bodies, different narratives have been built, which have been greatly conditioned by different political phases. I have mentioned the criminalizing military narrative, whose definition of subversive has been previously discussed, a dominant narrative during the dictatorship that casts suspicions of immorality on the entire family of the detainee. This narrative has been historically exemplified by the frequent reaction of many to the news of a disappearance: “*They must have done something*”. On the return of democracy and while the CONADEP (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) was conducting its tasks, the narrative that began to circulate was that of “innocent victims” of excessive or unrestrained repression. That is to say, it was a story that stripped the victim of any political will, of any agency and responsibility. During this phase, the family photo, which documents the common lives of ordinary people, could serve to support this version of the story. The officialization of the preamble to the CONADEP report led to the circulation of the so-called “theory of the two demons”. This theory describes the recent past as a military confrontation between two equally demonic sides: the guerrillas and the Armed Forces. This version continues to rely on the military definition of the enemy as a subversive, but it places the military on the side of immorality and violence as well. This version had the advantage of placing the entire population in the position of the innocent victim of that confrontation, as if it had simply suffered through it, without taking sides or taking part in the conflict. Another version that circulated sometime later was that of idealization. The disappeared were all heroes who had given their lives for a better world. In this case, the photo acquires an auratic value, as defined by Walter Benjamin, preventing a fluid or critical relationship with the past. The ID card, or the void of the referent around which the politics of memory develops, allows the self-serving proliferation of versions of the past and characterizations of the absent. The

private practice of memory, on the other hand, invents rituals of evocation that limit this natural dispersion.

As we have seen, in the case of the photo as an instrument of collective denunciation, sometimes a family photo is cut into the shape that a passport photo usually has. As Ludmila da Silva Catela has pointed out, the procedure can be the opposite: the same photo used on the street banner can be transformed into a family photo in the domestic sphere (figs. 23 and 24). In this space, the photograph does not appear with the document numbers, the name, or the date of disappearance. In some cases, the photo is framed. In many others, it occupies a special place in the family home, surrounded by flowers and other objects (fig. 25). The public and private use of the photo are thus differentiated. In the private use of the photograph, which, as discussed above, could be the same photograph that is taken to the demonstrations, it is no longer a matter of insisting on the incorporation of a face into an immense series of faces that share the same fate, but on the violent disruption of a particular fate and the disintegration of a particular family.

The disappeared often do not appear alone, but among friends or relatives, sharing moments of sociability prior to their detention, in a time and with a familiarity in the context of which it would have been very easy to ask them about their thoughts or situation and we will always be intrigued to know to what extent they were aware of what was about to occur. With the passage of time, the need to render tangible the void of the disappearance in the family has led to a series of aesthetic interventions in the family albums which represent it. One of these interventions consists of a current photo that is kind of a duplicate of an old photo in which the disappeared detainee appears in the company of his relatives (figs. 27 and 28). In the current photo, the family is portrayed in the same place where the previous photo was taken and with the same people, now older, distributed in the same way. The first thing that usually draws the viewer's attention in this type of construction (before and after photos) is precisely the change in appearance of the characters, because we tend to experience anxiety over the passage of time. We are faced with the not-always-easy task of recognizing the characters despite the changes in their age and appearance. Therefore, perhaps the first thing we notice is the changes in fashion and the processes of ageing. But the photo that represents the current moment, and that is an imitation of the first, highlights the absence of the missing person, without whom the disposition of the personages in the photo is incomplete. The photo exhibits the domestic consequences of the disappearance: the artificial disruption of a family's life cycle. The separate photos would simply be frozen moments in the lives of certain people and would be subject to the process of semiotic degradation mentioned above.

Together, however, they highlight the void of the disappearance as the most notable consequence of the time lapse between one photo and another.



Fig. 23 (left). Photograph of Estela de Carlotto, president of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. <https://www.elonce.com/secciones/sociedad/378107-walimir-oscar-montoya-companero-de-laura-carlotto-y-padre-de-ignacio-hurban.htm>. Accessed October 19, 2018.



Fig. 24 (right). Estela de Carlotto, president of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, publishes the last commemoration of her daughter Laura, after having found her grandson. <https://www.minutouno.com/notas/334182-estela-carlotto-publico-el-ultimo-recordatorio-su-hija-hallar-su-nieto>. Accessed October 19, 2018.



Fig. 25. Photograph of Elsa Sánchez de Oesterheld. She was a member of the Board of Directors until she died in June 2015. Her four daughters and her husband were disappeared. Two of the daughters were pregnant when they disappeared. She died without having the chance to embrace her grandchildren, who must have been born in November 1976 and December 1977–January 1978. *The Washington Post*, Archive of the Association of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

These deliberate voids in the family photos recall the very famous case of altered photos from the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union. In those photos, the leader of the revolution, Leon Trotsky, who appeared in several photographs next to Lenin, was removed from the photos and replaced by a carefully reconstructed empty space. Trotsky's removal from the photos of the revolution was aimed at erasing Lenin's comrade from the history of the revolution, but above all it was the preamble to his physical elimination. In the case of these photographs, the process is the reverse. The elimination of the body occurs first and the photographs represent the consequences of that elimination in the natural environment of the disappeared person. One of the variations is that in which a natural landscape becomes the environment of the disappearance.

The following selection belongs to a series called *Ausencias*, carried out in 2006 by Gustavo Germano, brother of Eduardo Germano, arrested-disappeared in 1976. The series consists of 15 pairs of photos that reflect the before and after the dictatorship in families that resided in the province of Entre Ríos (figs. 26 to 28). The photographs show a landscape identical to a previous one that served as background to a photographed person or group of people. In the new photo, those bodies are not there. We only see the landscape. It is notable that in this case, that which could disperse the attention of the observer, the details of the environment, seen side by side in these photos, allude precisely to the absence itself. The photos have not been altered like those under Stalinism; they are not a montage, but they are an enactment. In these photos, History, which Roland Barthes (64) indicated was an obstacle that stands between the observer and the recovery of the referent, or between the image of memory and the photographic image (van Alphen, *Failed Images*), conspires here to evoke it.⁹¹ The landscape in the current photo, usually to the right of the old photo, would lack any historical significance if it were not linked to the photo on the left. Together they form a series. They historicize the absence. The location of the captions below each photo pair reinforces the absence. In these captions the dates of the photographs (before and after the dictatorship) and the names of the people photographed, in the form of lists located in two

⁹¹ "Photographic Image" and "Memory Image" are concepts studied by Kracauer and introduced by the French philosopher Henri Bergson. In *Failed Images*, van Alphen synthesizes both concepts in the following terms: "Whereas according to common-sense ideas, the two are more or less the same or in continuity with each other, in the sense that photographic images support memory images, according to Kracauer the two are actually opposed. The main stakes or meanings of these different kinds of images are at odds with each other. Whereas the memory image is highly selective and focuses only on what is significant, the photographic image is not at all selective. The memory image retains only what is significant, whereas the photographic image grasps everything that is present in the spatial continuum of a moment. It includes all spatial elements in front of the camera. As a result, a photograph reveals nothing of a subject: 'a person's history is buried as if under a layer of snow'" (230).

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columns (below each photo respectively), are exposed. The combination of the dates and the missing names in the lists refer directly to the vacuum and to the breaking of the family composition.

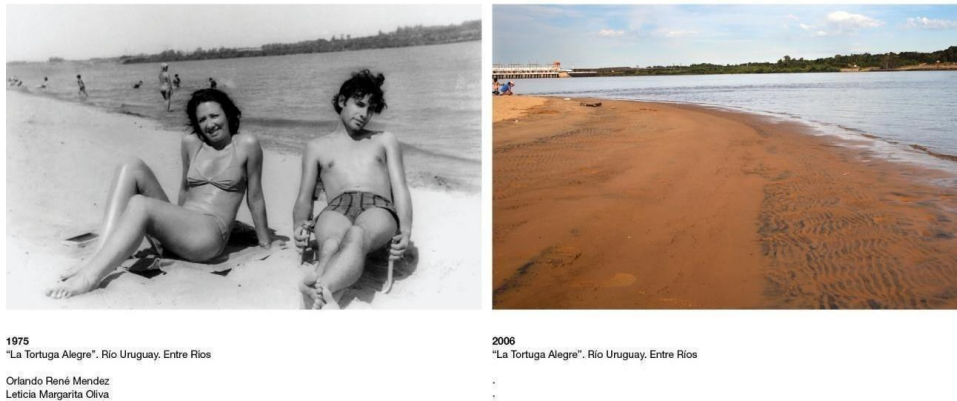


Fig. 26. Gustavo Germano. Images from the series *Ausencias* (*Absences*): detainees-disappeared and murdered of the province of Entre Ríos, 1976–1983. 2006.



Fig. 27. Gustavo Germano. Images from the series *Ausencias* (*Absences*): detainees-disappeared and murdered of the province of Entre Ríos, 1976–1983. 2006.



Fig. 28. Gustavo Germano. Images from the series *Ausencias* (*Absences*): detainees-disappeared and murdered of the province of Entre Ríos, 1976–1983. 2006.

Conclusions

Disappearance occurs when it becomes impossible to connect a proper name, a singularity, and a space where something must have happened. From disappearance, a narrative cannot be extracted, nor can a fable be developed that is classically subjected to space-time conventions that organize a plot. Faced with the absence of a photograph documenting disappearance, the Mothers responded with a flood of images that allude to it. Among the photographic images, the public archive and its rigid taxonomic criteria, and the family archive, governed by a capricious sentimental chronology, the Mothers and the children of the disappeared, their grandchildren, invented a third dimension. This means that the struggle of the Mothers was not only against the current reality of detentions, but also against the natural fate of certain images. The photos of the disappeared needed an alternative archive that visually spoke of the contingency of disappearance, that anchored the images to the contingency. It was like an alternative home that the memorial and political activism of the Mothers was constituting against the inevitable process of semiotic degradation of photographic images.

The work of un-disappearing (because this could be one of the names of the Mothers' task) is undoubtedly an archival work, but the work of a singular archive where what is

recorded does not die, does not settle, since what has disappeared can be replaced, metaphorized, or metonymized, but not archived. Let us remember the words of Rafael Videla: the state can account for the living or the dead, not for the disappeared. The disappeared is an unarchivable category. It is eloquent that when the first democratic government encouraged and made the effort to catalogue the disappeared (the CONADEP report), an important part of the Mothers' movement refused to cooperate and responded that "the disappeared are not archived". By this, they meant that composing a definitive register of the absentees was to declare them dead, to give them a place in the tomb of the archive, to stop the investigation of thousands of cases not yet recorded in the available lists. They saw the CONADEP report as a closure, a way of declaring the beginning of a time of forgetting and reconciliation. Thus, the military institution would be exempt from the requirement to provide the missing data and the state from continuing to seek justice. This paradox deserves deeper consideration.

The archives that the Mothers themselves had been weaving during the darkest years were much more than a reservoir of unanswered grievances; they became an alternative way of reading the past and national reality. Their selection criteria were opposed to those of state archives. What the Mothers' archives recorded were not only the positive facts that identity records need, but also the negatives, which the institutional archive disregards. The Mothers' investigation works on the dimension of the unsaid, on the power of the as-yet unspoken – on that which in these lives, at stake in the vicissitudes of struggle and persecution, goes beyond any biography.

More than a proper archive, the collecting activity of the Mothers would have to be defined as the possibility of an archive that is at the same time linked to the possibility of justice. It gives sensible form to what is normally obscured in the positivity of the record; it stores around the void of disappearance a series of collateral data that allude to it. It is an archive as a reading device. It is this that the Mothers' reserve seems to want to protect – because read from this material, the entire social and political life of the country appears to revolve around disappearance, and disappearance itself as its "epistemological principle". Seen in this way, all normalization and reconciliation of society with itself is revealed as a false closure, a concealment, and ultimately as a renunciation of justice.

This open archive, impossible to close, inhabits a temporality that is no longer proper to either the past or the future, but to a surplus time, or in the terms of Giorgio Agamben, "a time that remains" (*Time that Remains*). As the dimensions of the catastrophe became confirmed, what this alternative archive began to suggest was not so much or not only the

details of indescribable excesses, but the terrifying awareness that they were not excesses. What the Mothers' inheritance achieves in the post-dictatorial era is not to explain disappearance but to understand the entire society from there; to understand the fact of disappearance as its "black box" and exception as the rule.

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 biting 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 visibility. 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 intellectually 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 intellectual 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 visibility 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 unimaginable. 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 (Inzaurrealde 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 Bastera, 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 Bastera, 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. Bastera 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, Bastera 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. Bastera 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 Bastera 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 Bastera’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 Bastera'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 Bastera'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.

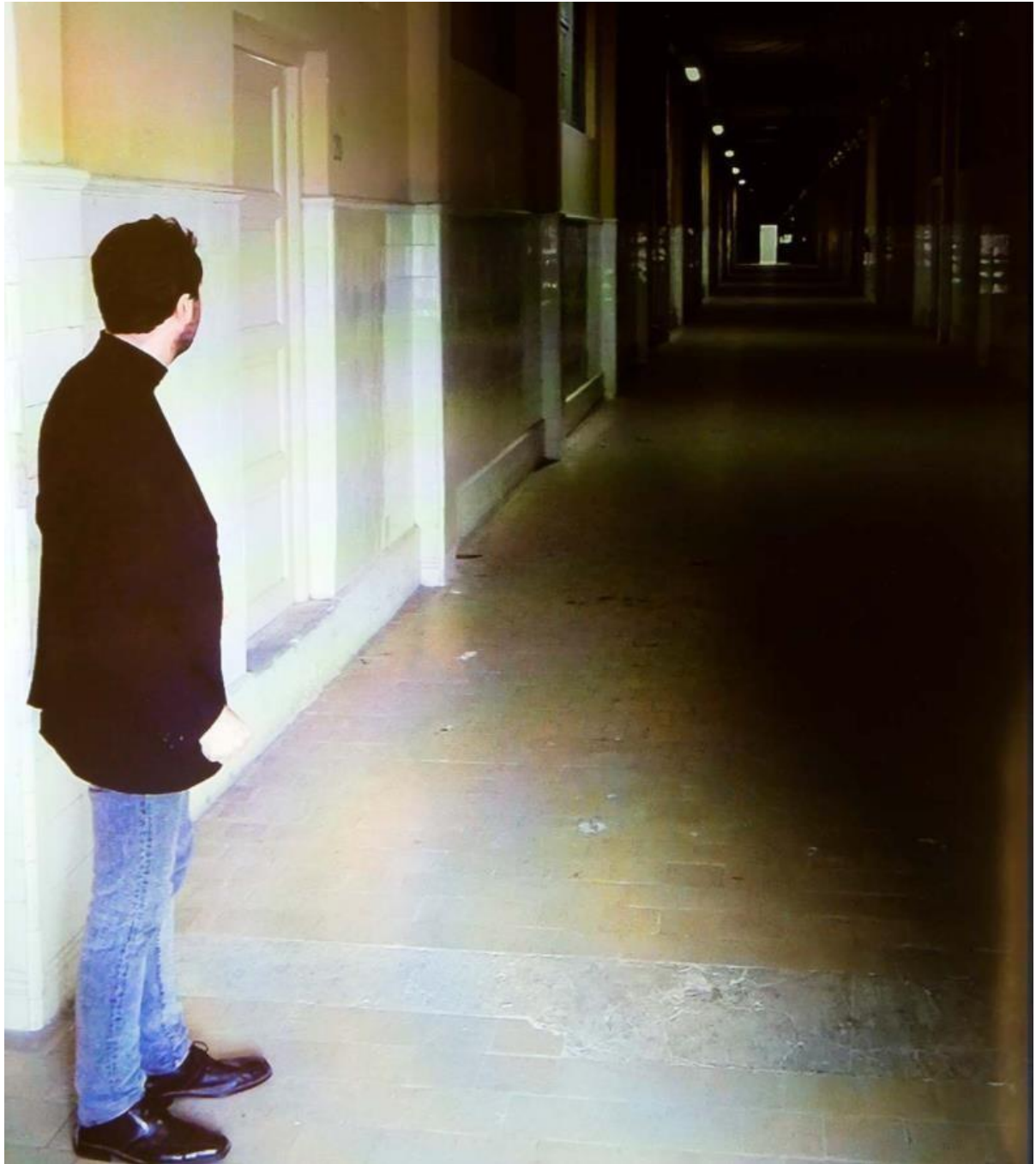


Fig. 13. Sebastián Díaz Morales. Still from *Pasajes I* (*Passages I*), 2012.



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 heteroclitelike 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, Aborigines, 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.

CHAPTER 7: IMAGES UNDER SCHOOL REGIME

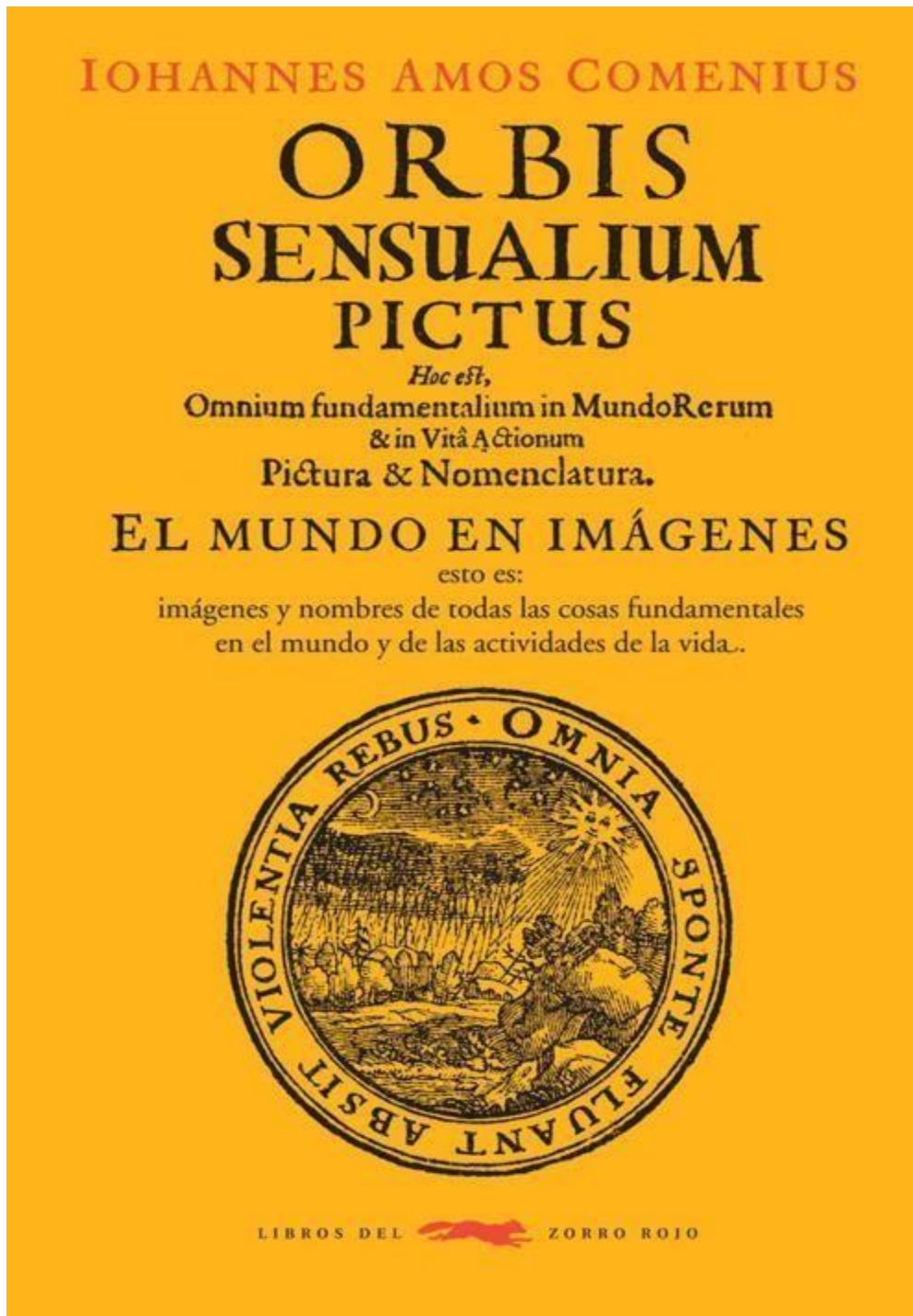


Fig. 1. Iohannes Amos Comenius. Cover of *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*. 1658. 2017, Libros del zorro rojo.

Introduction

The conventional opposition between historical and imaginative has become a real hindrance because what we need now is an aesthetic transformation of the historical. (Ernst van Alphen, "Playing the Holocaust" 157)

What form do you suppose a life would take that was determined at a decisive moment precisely by the street song last on everyone's lips? (Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism" 210)

The school photos do not have the urgency of the Mothers' documentary photos. They are not the made-up memories of the children, nor do they represent Basterra's "images despite everything". The school images are pacified photos, stripped of the urgency of the search, of made-up memory and unconditional risk. They are photos on which "nothing weighs", images that illustrate or provide a face for the information. And yet, many of them – now integrated into schooling – in some way share the same space of images created by those who led the struggles for memory against and outside of the state.

The group of images that make up the third configuration examined in this study results from processes of transmission connected to a manifest desire to educate people about state terrorism in Argentina. The intentionality and systematization of this type of transmission stem from the state, which at the beginning of this century aspired to manage the policies of memory. The result of these policies was materialized in what is known as the pedagogy of memory, of which the main initiatives were set forth in the "Educación y Memoria" ("Education and Memory") Programme created in 2006. This programme is part of a set of "negotiation" processes between the government and social movements. One of the novelties that arose from this new political constellation was the incorporation of a previously excluded sector, namely human rights movements, with the establishment of lines of transmission.

To account for the change in configuration, I will analyze one of the most representative productions of the "Education and Memory" Programme: the volume *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina (Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina)*.¹⁰⁹ By way of closing, this volume will be briefly contrasted with the publication *Treinta ejercicios de memoria (Thirty Memory Exercises)*, which is

¹⁰⁹ This volume belongs to one of the collections of the "Education and Memory" Programme together with two other texts: *Pensar Malvinas (Reflections on the Malvinas)* and *Pensar la democracia (Reflections on Democracy)*.

considered an antecedent to the “Education and Memory” Programme. The title alludes to the prominence of artistic practices that, in different senses, invigorated memory practices in Argentina. Here, applied to teachings about State terrorism, they seem to depart from the principles of traditional educational transmission. This set of works exposes the possibilities of art: what it is and what it can do with respect to social memory when its objective is pedagogical transmission.

In previous chapters, I reviewed the origin and trajectory of the images that questioned the state’s account of disappearance. They were controversial images that became symbols of protest, on the one hand, or disturbing montages in themselves, on the other. They represented alternative, clandestine, or underground memories. They constituted a sort of counter-archive and finally a space of images from which the narratives and representations of power were contested. This space was developed over a long period that started with the beginning of the dictatorship in 1977 and included the democratic transition and post-dictatorship period under presidents Raúl Alfonsín, Carlos Menem, and Eduardo Duhalde, until the people’s uprising of 2001.¹¹⁰ This chapter will show the clash between the power of this space of images and the Kirchnerist governments’ attempts to transform part of all of this material into school material.

The Unexpected Alliance

From 2003 to 2007, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Association (hereinafter AMDPM) and the government of Néstor Kirchner began to establish an unanticipated alliance. As we have seen, AMDPM had previously maintained an intransigent position, not only against the dictatorship, but against all the democratic governments that followed it. In the Mothers’ view, none of these governments had kept their promise to do justice and expose the truth about the disappeared and other victims of the dictatorship. This is unsurprising if one considers that the different administrations (mainly that of President Carlos Menem in the 1990s) attempted to implement various forms of closure and forgetting through pardons and “full stop” (*punto final*) laws. But the Mothers also blamed the post-dictatorial governments for continuing and even deepening (neoliberal) economic policies that the dictatorship itself had imposed by force. This shows the extent to which the Mothers and memory activists

¹¹⁰ In December 2001 in Argentina there was a popular revolt caused by an economic, political, social, and institutional crisis. Under the slogan “Let them all go”, the popular mobilization caused the fall of the government of Fernando de la Rúa, who was succeeded by five presidents in a few months. State repression killed 39 people during mass gatherings in different regions of the country.

merged with social movements. During Menem's administration in the nineties, the Mothers' relationship with the Argentine state was one of continuous confrontation. With the inauguration of Kirchner's government in 2003, this situation began to change. For the first time, the Mothers saw potential in an alliance with the state or, at least, with the new government.

The reasons or motives for this alliance, which was mutually beneficial but had ambiguous results, are complex and have been debated for years. For some, it was merely a form of economic or financial cooptation by the government (Gasulla, *El negocio*), or the result of an exchange of favours that allowed the government to appropriate the banner of human rights to legitimize its policies (Romero, *Breve historia*). For other authors, it was a contingent alliance resulting in the political resignification of the role of the state (Andriotti Romanin, "Actores, Estado"; Montero and Vincent; M. Morales; Retamozo). For the former, the first Kirchnerist government needed to legitimize itself due to its lack of substantial electoral support, creating out of thin air a commitment to human rights that its representatives had never before shown. For the second, in the actions of the new government, the Mothers believed that they had received for the first time a serious response to their historic demands and, in a way, they shared an ideological affinity with the government's political project. It is necessary to emphasize that, regardless of his motives, the new president showed that he was capable of absolutely original measures compared to all previous post-dictatorial governments. These measures were substantial: they involved practices of support, institutionalization, recognition, apologies from the state, and the annulment of laws that prevented the prosecution of those responsible for crimes against humanity.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Some of the measures were materialized in: the repeal of the Law of Due Obedience and the Full Stop Laws (under National Law No. 25,779 of August 21, 2003); the declaration of the invalidity and unconstitutionality of the pardons granted; the extension of reparation policies for people who suffered human rights violations directly (under National Law No. 25,914 of August 4, 2004 and No. 26,564 of November 25, 2009); the creation of the National Human Rights Plan Program (under National Executive Order No. 696, of May 14, 2010); the creation of the National Memory Archive (2003), the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights on the grounds of the former ESMA (2007), the Haroldo Conti Cultural Centre (2008), and the Dr. Fernando Ulloa Centre for Comprehensive Assistance to Victims of State Terrorism (2009), among other spaces; the strengthening of the CONADI (National Commission for Identity Rights; under National Executive Order No. 715, of June 9, 2004) and the Genetic Data Bank (under National Law No. 26,548 of November 18, 2009), among others; the enactment of the National Law of Memorial Sites, No. 26,691, of June 29, 2011; and the marking (from 2005 to 2015) of approximately 200 places that functioned as clandestine detention sites during the last dictatorship.

Under the Kirchnerist governments, Argentina would go further than any other country in terms of an institutional self-critical review of the recent past and the prosecution of those responsible.¹¹² The new government expressed the need to critically remember the dictatorial past as a legislative commitment and resolutely implemented public policies in this direction. There is no doubt that sectors of the Mothers were induced by very understandable political and emotional reasons to discontinue their policy of hostility towards the government and the state.¹¹³

A Momentum That Is Slowing Down

According to Wendy Brown, the type of citizenship that neoliberalism promotes is “sacrificial” in nature (211). It is a citizenship reduced to “human capital” where civic responsibility is actually a form of *accountability*. In political terms, Kirchnerism functioned as a “progressive” response to the crisis of this neoliberal model promoted by President Menem in the nineties, which culminated in the popular uprising of 2001.

The new policy inaugurated in 2003 by Néstor Kirchner, at least on the level of discourse, departed from the liberal logic of a neutral, neo-welfare state, as well as from the old liberal consensus around the theory of the “two demons” that equated guerrilla actions with state policies of terror.

The Kirchnerist style of government was a form of decisionism, but it was also integrative and neutralizing. It turned the state apparatus into a belligerent force in favour of human rights, but at the same time absorbed, through different forms of institutionalization, the political energies that the Mothers’ associations had deployed along with social mobilization (Suárez). This also occurred with other social movements that emerged in response to the neoliberal transformation of the economy and coexistence during the 1990s. It could be said that this new policy promoted two opposite processes: on the one hand, it took on as its own certain demands made by class-based unions and social movements, leaving aside the frankly neoliberal rhetoric that had predominated until that time. On the other hand, it showed a strong tendency towards normalization, isolating and repressing any emancipatory public demonstrations whose militant structure it did not control.

The Kirchnerist government thus attempted a partial return to the old welfare state that was forged under the first “national and popular” Peronist administration (1945–1955)

¹¹² The governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015).

¹¹³ For a brief review of the current debates on this alliance, see Andriotti Romanin, “¿Cooptación, oportunidades” 7.

and, with great differences, in post-war Europe. In Europe, the origin of this concept of citizenship can be traced to Thomas Marshall's seminal article "Citizenship and Social Class" of 1950. It was texts like this one, and above all the anti-fascist agreements imposed by the triumphant resistance to the occupation, that founded the exceptional democracy that would govern post-war Europe between 1949 and 1989. Citizenship was here defined as equidistant between the idea of the liberal citizen and the Marxist category of class and was articulated with the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes. In the exceptional circumstances of post-war Europe, this relationship produced the model of a welfare state. For Marshall, public education was central and was supported by a concept of participatory citizenship. In his model, public education was not merely education for the poor, but authentic citizen education. It is clear that the pedagogy of memory as an educational project is part of this attempt to revive the idea of citizenship of a social democratic nature, based on aspirations for a strong civil society, firmly rooted in citizens' rights. This is what Néstor Kirchner was referring to with his proposal for a "serious capitalism" and the Kirchnerist project as an agenda for the enshrinement of rights. It is a compensatory policy that accepts the "fated" nature of capitalism, promising in return to alleviate its most violent effects. A binarism is established around nuances: on the one hand, Kirchnerism recovers certain traditions of the (nationalist, protectionist, and social democratic) "national and popular" Peronist movement, creating a rhetoric of confrontation with models of neoliberal administration while accepting most of its assumptions. These displacements generated a space for the presentation of new and old social demands. These demands were managed primarily by incorporating their political representatives into the state bureaucracy. The Kirchnerist administration needed to broaden its support base, and it achieved this through a mixture "of lucidity and astuteness" (García, "El legado como exterminio" 19). Taking advantage of a temporary export boom, he revived a social democratic strategy comparable to that of the first Peronist administration and the classic policies of European social democracy.¹¹⁴

The government rhetorically reissued the old populist Peronist matrix, which according to Maristella Svampa's definition is

¹¹⁴ Today it seems that the Kirchnerist model is in crisis and we find ourselves at the threshold of a new cycle, characterized by neoliberal and even neo-fascist radicalization.

a certain political-ideological matrix that is part of the “average memory” (the experiences of the 50s and 70s), which employs a disruptive language (the exacerbation of antagonisms) and tends to be supported by three pillars: the affirmation of the nation, the redistributive and conciliatory state, and the link between the charismatic leader and organized masses. (“La década kirchnerista” 14; translated by Marisela Trevin)¹¹⁵

Thus a new political language was inaugurated that could and did sometimes override the attempts made to control it. According to Montero (20), the Kirchnerist governments simultaneously displayed a disruptive intention that took up the cause of the violated rights on the one hand and, on the other, practised a policy of normalization and national unity. This divided the memory movements between those who were part of the structures of the new government and those who remained dissidents. For Svampa, through this dynamic of belligerence and incorporation, the Kirchnerist government, in its first phase, absorbed and neutralized a large part of the social movements that had led the 2001 revolts.

The political and symbolic measures of the new government towards the Mothers and Grandmothers were part of this new impetus. The imprint that the Argentine historical conjuncture imposed on this project (the echoes of the 2001 rebellion) consisted of the reparations to the victims of violation of rights during the dictatorship; that is to say, the figure of the victims and their memory was incorporated as the moral foundation of this new citizenship. Even so, the new model did not put an end to extractivist policies, job insecurity, patriarchal structures in social life and the workplace, or the systematic loss of real purchasing power among workers (Féliz). The social reforms it introduced were not aimed at a true transformation of the productive system in the sense of a policy that attacked the core of inequality. The Kirchnerist governments attempted to channel the people’s discontent through the discretionary use of resources and instruments of state compensation (such as social plans), which on the one hand temporarily alleviated the situation of large impoverished sectors, but on the other reinforced clientelist relationships between the state and vulnerable sectors of society, thus consolidating the “naturalization” of marginalization

¹¹⁵ “una determinada matriz político-ideológica que se inserta en la “memoria media” (las experiencias de los años 50 y 70), que despliega un lenguaje rupturista (la exacerbación de los antagonismos) y tiende a sostenerse sobre tres ejes: la afirmación de la nación, el estado redistributivo y conciliador, y el vínculo entre líder carismático y masas organizadas” (M. Svampa, “La década kirchnerista” 14).

and dependency. The Kirchnerist governments politicized the state in a decisionist and personalist manner, acting decisively in favour of the establishment of a national memory of the dictatorship, but, on the other hand, they introduced an element of tutelage in this regard, typical of the populist modality of government. The institutionalization of certain practices of memory was aimed at converting what had previously belonged to the political dimension of events, that is, to the terrain of social antagonism, into the *ethical* dimension of public administration. One of the consequences was, however, that the emblematic images of the struggles for memory in Argentina became, in part, an aspect of the legitimation of the government project. Thus, what previously constituted a *desire* to remember became a *duty* to remember, and many of those who had previously been activists were now state officials. But the political cooperation of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo with the Kirchnerist project was not unanimous. There were also significant sectors of Mothers and the human rights movement that maintained an independent policy of confrontation with the state. This was shown by statements made by the Memory, Truth and Justice movement (of the Madres Línea Fundadora [Founding Mothers]) both on March 24, 2010 (during the bicentennial) and in 2016. These statements insist that the progress made in the prosecution of members of the military is not the merit of any government, but of the social struggle. They also criticize the insufficiency of state policies regarding the definitive investigation of the crimes of the dictatorship and the continuation of repressive policies against people's struggles in the present.¹¹⁶ As a result of the disappearance in September 2006 of Jorge Julio López, an essential witness in the trial against notorious repressor Miguel Etchecolatz, which revealed the persistence of paramilitary structures in the state apparatus, the repression of indigenous movements mobilized by the promises of justice made by the government itself in 2010,¹¹⁷ and the criminalization of organizations of *piqueteros* (picketers) not included in structures of cooperation with the government, the government's policies of memory acquired a shadow of ambiguity over time.

¹¹⁶ "The government that proclaims itself a 'defender of human rights' uses this banner so dear to our people to mask its impunity while it represses and uses gangs against fighters for social justice" (*Gathering for Memory, Truth and Justice* 3).

¹¹⁷ On November 23, 2010, during the first administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the Qom Potae Napocna Navogoh indigenous community, led by Félix Díaz, blocked National Highway 86, which crosses the province of Formosa, in protest against the construction of the headquarters of the National University of Formosa on ancestral lands. The violent intervention of the provincial police led to the death of Qom community member Roberto López and a representative of the police force.

“Education and Memory” Programme

Pedagogy is, as they say, the art of forging the souls of our children, of developing their knowledge, their discourses, their values, even their feelings. Therefore, it is fatally a battlefield, in which the powers of subjection and those of liberation never cease to come into conflict”.

(Didi-Huberman, *Cuando las imágenes* 180)

Pedagogy? The art of “learning to see abysses where there are commonplaces”, as expressed by Karl Kraus.

(Didi-Huberman, *Cuando las imágenes* 182)

The memory-based shift at the turn of the century had helped recreate an academic world committed to critical thinking and political activism. This was the case even before the official fall of the dictatorship. As the revolutionary horizon disappeared from the expectations of social change, memory had led to the emergence of a new kind of politicization. Memory studies expanded the use of a language that allowed one to continue criticizing the system without the need to be directly associated with Marxist or revolutionary thought.¹¹⁸ According to Jelin (“Memoria y democracia”), memory came to be stubbornly associated with the concepts of democracy and human rights. This led to a very specific type of intervention by scholars of collective memory.

In the long history of memory practices in Argentina, two tendencies can be distinguished. The first seeks a general consensus of a rather ritualistic nature around the ideas of tolerance and respect for human rights. It views the dictatorship as a stage that has been overcome and considers that it is sufficient to insist on its condemnation to guarantee a democratic coexistence. Thus, the memory of the atrocities of the past is gradually and imperceptibly transformed into a celebration of the present. This tendency defends the need to reconcile and forget. In its most extreme version, it even engages in relativization and denialism. The different democratic governments had prioritized this way of understanding the relationship with the past.

The second tendency, led mainly by the Mothers, insisted on an essential continuity (or complicity) between the governments of the dictatorship and the governments of the post-dictatorship. For this tendency, the formalization of a parliamentary democratic state

¹¹⁸ For Lazzara, for example, memory has the potential to become the fundamental space from which to develop critical thought and social change (26).

was not the end of the dictatorial process, but rather its continuation by other means. From this point of view, the word “justice” not only refers to the prosecution and punishment of those guilty of crimes against humanity, but also encompasses the social injustices of the present that the dictatorship promoted and institutionalized.

Between 2003 and 2008, Néstor Kirchner’s government, as we have seen, was forced to alter this dichotomy. As the representative of the state, Kirchner took on part of the demands of the activists for memory. He made symbolic measures of great significance for the entire movement for truth and justice and even adhered to the idea that the neoliberal governments of the post-dictatorship during the 1990s represented forms of continuity with the dictatorial project. One could say that this rhetoric and these measures constituted a victory for the human rights movement, and in a certain sense they did, but at the same time their effect was the partial deactivation of the social movements that the 2001 uprising had created. The Kirchnerist administration exacerbated social antagonisms from the state with a promise of justice, but its strategic purpose was to lead the normalization of a society in political turmoil. To achieve this, the president placed himself at the forefront of the movement for memory, truth and justice. This alliance crystallized, among many other things, into a strong commitment to the transmission of the recent past within the school system, and resulted in the formation of the “Education and Memory” (EM) team (of the Undersecretariat of Equity and Quality) by the Ministry of Education in 2006 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the military coup and inspired by the idea of transforming the relative consensus around the slogan *Never Again* into a state policy. It was an educational proposal that acquired the status of a Programme and, in its national circulation, was entirely financed by the state.¹¹⁹ This pedagogical proposal emerged from

¹¹⁹ The references that provided regulatory support to the Programme were the National Education Law (LEN 26206/06), along with the formalization of the National Teacher Training Institute (INFD) in 2007, and the National Teacher Training Plan (Res. CFE 23/07) in the same year. Under the LEN, the Programme was established as a priority for an “educating State” that seeks to reaffirm respect for human rights, sovereignty and national identity from a “Latin American regional perspective (particularly of the MERCOSUR region); the cause of the recovery of the Malvinas Islands; and the exercise and construction of the collective memory of recent history. These actions are aimed at generating among the students reflections and feelings in favour of democracy, as well as the defence of the Rule of Law and the full exercise of Human Rights” (aspects contained in the LEN, Arts. 3 and 92). From the perspective of the state narrative, memory policies are an act of state responsibility based on the idea of a state that repents of the crimes of the dictatorship. The booklet alludes to a “Copernican shift” to refer to the apology given to the people by the then president Néstor Kirchner (*Pensar la dictadura* 14).

the “30 Years after the Coup” Project (2006) and then expanded with multiple actions within the framework of the proposals of the INFD (National Teachers’ Training Institute).¹²⁰

The Integration of Memory into Schooling

But between both events there is an accumulation of experiences: a war that is no longer “joyful” and a defeat that exposes the ignominy of the dictatorship. It is then that society begins to come to terms with the question of the disappeared, realizes the magnitude of the country’s foreign debt and loads the concept of democracy with positivity. (Jorge Saab et al. 11; translated by Marisela Trevin)¹²¹

The development of an educational program linked to the pedagogy of memory meant the development of a citizen’s ethic that explicitly repudiated the criminal conduct of the state as it had manifested itself during the years of the military dictatorship. Deciding on a school program about this past in turn involves a system of incorporations and exclusions that should be capable of manufacturing a consensus. It should be noted that the transition from memories in struggle to the development of a common national narrative involves all kinds of forceful adjustments. Not only was it necessary to define what to tell, but a system of exclusions was set up. Pollak points out that states not only establish references to the past in terms of social cohesion but also define a series of “irreducible oppositions” that “frame”

¹²⁰ It carries out simultaneous actions with the Programme: “Between the past and the future. Young people and the transmission of experience in recent Argentina” (2007), aimed at Teacher Training Institutes, mainly for teachers and students of secondary education teachers’ colleges. The documents produced in the framework of the project and the program in the first few years form the background of the central theoretical body of my research. The collection “La enseñanza del pasado reciente en la escuela” (“Teaching about the Recent Past in Schools”) of the Ministry of Education, was distributed in three volumes: *Pensar Malvinas (Reflections on the Malvinas Islands)*, *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina (Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina)* and *Pensar la democracia (Reflections on Democracy)*, 2013. The volume *Holocaustos y genocidios del siglo XX (Holocausts and Genocides of the 20th century)* was subsequently published in 2014. In 2013, the Federal Board of Education (CFE Res. 201/13) approved the creation of the National Continuing Training Programme “Nuestra Escuela” (Our School; PNFP). “Education and Memory” would participate in several of the pedagogical proposals implemented under the PNFP, in a series of courses and postgraduate degree classes including “Teaching about the Recent Past in Schools”, “Teaching about the Malvinas Islands 35 Years after the War”, and “Memory, Identity and Democracy at the Initial Level”. It is not the intention of this work to emphasize the pedagogy of memory as a public policy, but as an initiative in the framework of processes of integration of culture into schooling that have an impact on the transformation or modification of the meanings of the past.

¹²¹ “Pero entre ambos acontecimientos media una acumulación de experiencias: una guerra que deja de ser “alegre” y una derrota que pone al desnudo la ignominia de la dictadura. Entonces sí, la sociedad asume la cuestión de los desaparecidos, se desayuna de la magnitud de la deuda externa y carga de positividad al concepto de democracia” (Saab et al. 11).

the content to be transmitted (“Memoria, olvido, silencio” 25).¹²² The program could not simply let individual memories and their subjective testimonies speak for themselves; it had to axiomatically place certain limits on the flow of testimonies, opinions, and images of collective memory. One of the instruments for this replacement was the so-called “floors of truth”; that is to say, to ward off denialism, it would be established that everything that had been legally determined would be considered true and not subject to discussion or revision: there had been a dictatorship, 30,000 were disappeared, and this is irreducible to opinion.¹²³ The “floors of truth” were a powerful tool against denialism, as supported by legal decisions on state crimes. The *Nunca Más* (*Never Again*) report, which documents almost 9,000 cases of disappearances, was republished with an updated prologue in 2006, the year of the establishment of the “Education and Memory” Programme. The new pedagogy of memory in the programme was designed on the basis of these two axiomatic pillars.

It is evident that this way of ensuring the educational transmission of the traumatic past is taken from the way in which teaching about the Holocaust was approached in Europe and the United States. The problem is that this way of defining frameworks or putting limits on speculation about the past, using prohibitions and taboos, usually generates the opposite of what is proposed. As Ernst van Alphen has pointed out regarding conventional forms of teaching about the Holocaust in Europe, the student, subject to strict control of the educational process, loses control over himself. The process of knowledge is regulated and contained by moral prohibitions or “commandments”. This solemnity does not contribute to achieving an affective mastery of the subject, a felt knowledge, in the subject to be educated,

¹²² In the same text, Pollak employed an alternative term to that of collective memory that had been used by Henri Rousso: “To maintain internal cohesion and defend the boundaries of what a group has in common, which includes territory (in the case of States); these are the two essential functions of common memory. This means providing a framework of references and reference points. It is therefore absolutely appropriate to speak, as Henri Rousso does, of framed memory, a more specific term than collective memory. To say *framed* is to refer to a work of *framing*.”

¹²³ The “floors of truth” were explicitly mentioned in some of the materials prepared in the “Education and Memory” Programme and were referenced in the following terms: “an analysis of the distinction between different memories, sometimes opposed to each other, and the State voice regarding the period, established on the basis of what we call ‘floors of truth’, that is to say, events whose veracity is beyond dispute. ... If memories are subjective, if they are subject to dispute and if they change over time, then: Is there no historical truth? Is all memory valid? Do all memories have the same ‘value’? How do we avoid the path of relativism and/or denialism? ... Now, regardless of the variety of circulating memories, it is necessary to know that in these years of democracy we have built real floors. Through the accounts of the witnesses, historiographic knowledge and, essentially, the sentences issued by the Judiciary (from the Trial of the Juntas of 1985 to the judicial proceedings against the repressors that are still ongoing) we can confirm that in our country there was State terrorism, which involved the systematic violation of human rights” (“Memory, Identity and Democracy at the Initial Level”, Course, Class No. 02: Memory and Democracy. “Our School” Program, INFoD, 2015, pp. 1–4).

but rather it usually generates rebellion or boredom (“Playing the Holocaust” 152).

The institutionalization of memory in schools inaugurated an inverted scene of consensus and resistance: this time it was the state that defended the historical claims of the human rights movements. The conservative and liberal opposition that began to group together to the right of the Kirchnerist party always considered this policy a demagogic trap and its powerful media began to lean more towards the opposite side, that is to say, towards the relativization of state terror and sometimes towards denialism. When the Kirchnerist party lost the elections in 2015, a day after Mauricio Macri, the new president, took power, *La Nación*, the influential conservative newspaper, published a highly controversial editorial titled “No More Revenge”. In that editorial, the publication challenged the method and timing of the trials of the dictators and defined the desire for justice by memory activists as “vengeful”. It thus condemned a large part of the Kirchnerist program, as well as the human rights movement itself.

On the basis of the so-called “floors of truth”, the educational teams sought to replace and correct a state voice, a voice that had been discredited on the issue of the dictatorial past, an institutional voice with national reach (Cueto Rúa 4). The government of Néstor Kirchner even defended the old revolutionary militancy, as a large part of the HIJOS movement had done since the nineties. The traditional universalist and neutral perspective on human rights, which had characterized the first post-dictatorship government (of President Raúl Alfonsín), was therefore abandoned. And, thus, the “theory of the two demons” on which the first *Nunca Más* (*Never Again*) report was based, and which established a moral equivalence between the repressors of the state and those who fought against them, was also abandoned. For some authors, however, this measure reproduced, at another level, a moral judgement of the victims, obstructing critical approaches to the militancy of those years (Barros 15). Another objection was that it established a single subject of memory, preventing the emergence of new meanings around the past (Jelin, *The Struggle*). A third objection that could be formulated is the arbitrary nature of the identification of Kirchnerism with the revolutionary ideas of the seventies.

The practices of memory, as we have seen, closely related to social struggles and characterized by their dissidence and libertarian spirit, acquired a civilizing aspect through the alliance with the state. The teaching of the recent past had to resort to the old formulas of history teaching in schools, in which, as we know, the narrative had always been subject to the needs of the state and its ideological apparatus. It should be noted that the purpose of

history teaching in schools is not so much to foster encyclopaedic knowledge but rather the formation of a national and patriotic citizens' consciousness.

School History Education and the Concept of Citizenship

History as school content has always played a role in the consolidation of national states related to the construction of national identities or "imagined communities" (Anderson). Dussel defines the act of "teaching" as the transmission of a culture oriented towards incorporation into a tradition and recognition in a lineage and a history ("La transmisión" 67). Civic education and the teaching of national history in Argentina were formed within a dichotomous framework, the first expression of which was the already discussed classic essay of Sarmiento, *Facundo o Civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas* (*Facundo or Civilization and Barbarism in the Argentine Pampas*). In *Facundo*, the struggle between civilization and barbarism was identified as an existential confrontation between urbanized and Western ways of life, identified with progress and modernity, and traditional, rural, indigenous, and presumably violent ways of life. That is to say, social conflict was interpreted in civilizational (and, subsequently, plainly racial) terms. This model or grand narrative that identified opposing trends at the dawn of the nation became a guiding matrix for the state. Over time, it became a mechanism of political invective and a rhetorical instrument to point out and exclude "the dangerous classes" (Artieda; M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*). The idea of citizenship to which this modern paradigm contributed was the one that was implemented in traditional mass schooling. It should be noted that the Argentine educational system maintained the old programs of school institutionalization related to the teaching of national history practically without alterations. In fact, the successive textbooks that, together with the framework of national anniversaries, shaped the collective historical consciousness, underwent no substantial changes in a hundred years. The gap between school and academic history continued to widen throughout the twentieth century (Amézola 195). This situation continued even after drastic changes at the top levels of the state and despite the profound historiographic renewal (especially after 1955) that took place in Argentine universities.

The school matrix was built on an apologetic, religious (social-Christian and neo-Thomist), Eurocentric, and patriotic history, full of national anniversaries and ceremonies with a militaristic aesthetic and organized on the basis of authoritarian structures. The pantheon of national heroes is made up of the male figures that share the greatest affinity with the dominant classes and the patriotic deeds that are recounted coincide with their

political and economic choices. The traditional concept of citizenship was a *male* construction (until 1983, the country's inhabitant was defined as "the Argentine man"), and obviously a Eurocentric one. Above all, it involved a two-fold denial. It meant the denial of the particularities of indigenous people and immigrants. The cultural homogenization of the population occurred under the mandate of forming "Argentine citizens" and "patriots". The subject of education and the subject of exclusion have been almost inextricable since the emergence of the nation-state. The reading books used in the framework of the Argentine pedagogical project between 1880 and 1940 are, for example, an instance of stigmatization of the indigenous people that completes, at the level of school education, the violent destruction of their sovereignty and political communities (Artieda 25). The mostly European immigration, which made up almost a third of the population in 1914, was also subjected to an aggressive process of acculturation or "Argentinization" (Massone and Andrade 27). The idea of citizenship rooted in this double denial is the pillar on which pedagogical projects linked to nationality and citizenship were historically based.¹²⁴ The construction and transmission of a "certain" collective memory finds in the school a privileged space for its public institutionalization. After 1955 and until 1983, the Argentine ideal of citizenship continued to be Christian, patriarchal, patriotic, and anti-communist.¹²⁵

In the seventies, the National Reorganization Process, which is what the civil-military dictatorship called itself, undertook to eliminate "subversion" both on the streets and in the "souls". The military worked on a long-term project aimed at ensuring a hierarchical system of virtues in which new generations should be trained. The values of work, family, religion, and patriotism were paramount. The nation was considered part of a Christian West and, as a nation, an heir to national-Catholic Spain. The school was the chosen institution to instil these ideas, and Civic Education and subsequently Moral and Civic Education were its powerful ideological weaponry (Sacchi and Saidel 179). The first time that lessons on recent or contemporary national history were taught at school was precisely under the dictatorship, as an effort by the military authorities to prevent "foreign"

¹²⁴ Between 1952 and 1997 we have the following school subjects: 1952, Citizen Culture; 1955, Democratic Education; 1973, Studies of Argentine Social Reality (ERSA); 1976, Civic Training; 1978, Moral and Civic Training; 1983, Civic Education.

¹²⁵ Just one example of what was written in this type of School Civics Education Manuals. In the Manual of Civic Education by Blas Barisani, from 1981, we can read: "Let us not forget that the greatest danger to our country is subversion at all levels. Precisely, to achieve the subversion of the person, international Marxist aggression uses, among other procedures, the destruction of the concept of family, which destroys the profound concept of the homeland" (16).

or “communist” ideological tendencies among the students.¹²⁶ During the post-dictatorship, however, the emphasis shifted from patriotism to the concept of democracy: the Constitution became a symbol and reading its Preamble became a ritual, although the principles of liberal democracy had been stripped of their historical content. Citizenship was restricted to the right to vote and mediated by political parties. The traditional concept of citizenship in Argentina was part of this grand national narrative that still resonates in citizen education texts on topics such as sovereignty, although the idea of sovereignty as state authority always prevails over that of sovereignty as the government of the people.¹²⁷ This is the result of a concept of nation that even in recent democracy continues to return to the dichotomy between “Argentineness” and foreignness, with the latter seen as a threatening constellation.¹²⁸ The aim of the pedagogy of memory program was to intervene in this persistent tradition, but it had to necessarily become part of this heavy inheritance.

Citizenship and Memory

In the idea of citizenship promoted by the Kirchnerist governments, human rights played a central role and this needed to be reflected in educational legislation that took shape in programs and resolutions – 188/13 and NAP (Core Learning Priorities) – that formalized the treatment of the recent past within the educational system.¹²⁹ The problems of what and how to transmit the recent past renewed the debates on citizen education. The old founding formula of educating the “citizen”, “patriot”, and “Argentinian” was not completely suppressed, and in some way it was reinforced as of 2005 (as seen in the part dedicated to

¹²⁶ As Navy Captain Orlando R. Pérez Cobo said in his “Message to teachers from the Provincial Minister of Education and Culture”: “At this moment in time in the country ... we have before us a landscape with two defined areas: one broad area, which represents the vast majority of the population, with its working men and women, its honest professionals and businessmen, its hard-working housewives, clean youth and selfless teachers, dedicated to a vocation that leads to progress and culture; and the other, which represents a minuscule group with shady intentions that seeks to destroy, and exerts violence on a daily basis, murders, kidnaps and steals. ... Therefore, the objective of our educational process must be to comprehensively train our children, ensuring that they adopt a hierarchy of values rooted in Christian morality, national tradition and Argentine dignity, educating them for the optimal fulfilment of their personal vocations, their social roles and the transcendent destiny of man” (Educational Information Bulletin No. 16, 1976).

¹²⁷ “any allusion to a ‘people’s sovereignty’ ends up fading, in the face of the notion of “supremacy of state power” (Quintero and Privitellio 152).

¹²⁸ “the logic of national states in the context of the turbulent 20th century led governments to demand from schools a ‘discourse of reaffirmation’ that was necessarily dogmatic and, therefore, uncritical. In this context, the ‘others’ only had a place as enemies or allies, hardly as different ‘others’ on an equal footing with ‘us’” (Saab et al. 38).

¹²⁹ Federal Board of Education, 2009. National Compulsory Education Plan; Educational Plans; Initial level; Access To Education; Adult Education; Secondary Education; *During the Basic Cycle of secondary education, the school will provide teaching situations that promote in students: ... the construction of a critical, participatory, responsible and committed citizenship.*

the war over the Malvinas Islands). What was incorporated in the new context was the notion of a “violated” or “damaged citizenship” in the immediate past. The damage caused by the dictatorship to the country’s “citizenship” had to be resolved with supplementary citizen education and, in this pursuit, the teaching of recent history was assigned a fundamental role.

In a certain sense, an attempt was made to reverse the classic oppressive role that states had assigned to their official or “framed” histories by precisely promoting the memories that had previously been underground or excluded (Pollack 20). This done from the authority of the state, involved not only a new pedagogy of memory, but also limits, renunciations, hierarchies, and formalizations. An example of this was the recovery of the militant stories of the seventies. This recovery was aimed at putting an end to the prejudice according to which the victims of the dictatorship were viewed as “innocent” (having been repressed without any apparent cause), while shifting the revolutionary horizon that characterized these forms of militancy and redirecting it towards the new “Kirchnerist” ideal of a democracy conceived as an “expansion of rights”.

A “duty of memory” was thus established and obviously what is usually referred to as the “right-wing media” presented this as an “ideological” imposition and insisted quite successfully on publicly defining this connection between the government and human rights organizations as an opportunist and clientelist relationship, in an attempt to discredit not only the government, but also the movements of the Mothers and Grandmothers themselves.

The incorporation of researchers and human rights activists into the ministerial educational apparatus was also not without tensions. For them, this move meant a shift from the status of academic researcher (and possibly social activist) to that of state agent (Cueto Rúa 3). This led to incompatibilities and disagreements that on some occasions led to rifts. Critically reflecting on the formalization of the anniversary of March 24, Federico Lorenz, for example, who directed the program for a period, stated:¹³⁰

¹³⁰ March 24 is the date of the 1976 military coup. It was formalized as a national anniversary in 2002 by National Law 25,633, Article 1 of which establishes: “March 24 is hereby instituted as a National Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice in commemoration of those who were victims of the process initiated on that date in 1976”. Ministry of Education, <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/efemerides/24-marzo-memoria#:~:text=El%20D%C3%ADa%20Nacional%20de%20la,10%20de%20diciembre%20de%201983>. Accessed October 10, 2022. According to the school logic, this anniversary is understood as one of the materialities of the pedagogy of memory.

The logic of the anniversary, in this case, conspires against social appropriation (in terms of re-appropriation), and prolongs the effectiveness of the repression: “human rights violations were what occurred in the past”, “now they will never happen again”. It strips a social confrontation of its historicity and politicacy; it contributes to eliminating, through the dogmatic installation of a concrete (historical) form of violation of fundamental rights, the possibility of thinking politically about the present society, that is to say, of identifying human rights violations today. (“Rechazo” 5; translated by Marisela Trevin)¹³¹

In general, it can be said that, during the initial period, the pluralistic and transversal militant and academic logic predominated over the rigid ministerial or state logic, but this changed over time. The tension between the investigative vocation of academics gave way to the need for institutionalization, inherent to the state apparatus, and was also influenced by the advance of the restorative and normalizing aspect that ended up gradually prevailing within Kirchnerism itself. This was confirmed by gradual changes of focus. Over time, the memories of the Holocaust, for example, were increasingly highlighted to the detriment of the chapters devoted to the workers’ and people’s struggles prior to the dictatorship. This trend was consolidated when the neoliberal Mauricio Macri became president in 2015. Memories of the Holocaust are generally much less controversial. Its treatment in schools is in line with the practices of the West, particularly the United States. During Macri’s administration, the state budget for educational policies on memory was also drastically reduced.

Criticism of Kirchnerism’s policies of memory came from two directions: according to the political right, the topic of the memory of the recent past was simply one of Kirchnerism’s political “business operations”. From the opposite side, some authors who were committed to the struggle for memory believed that the government was replacing the goal of a more just social order with a mere tribute to the victims of the past. Researcher Federico Lorenz wondered, for example, if memory, cultivated without a connection with

¹³¹ “La lógica de la efeméride, en este caso, conspira contra la apropiación social (en términos de re - apropiación), y prolonga la eficacia de la represión: “las violaciones a los derechos humanos fueron antes”, “ahora nunca más sucederá”. Despoja de su historicidad y politicidad un enfrentamiento social; contribuye a anular, mediante la instalación dogmática de una forma concreta (histórica) de violación a derechos fundamentales, la posibilidad de pensar políticamente la sociedad presente, es decir, de encontrar las violaciones a los derechos humanos hoy” (Lorenz, “Rechazo” 5).

the politics of the present, was becoming an end in itself, that is to say, something like a “consolation prize” (“Rechazo”).¹³²

The Kirchnerist stage of memory opened doors to the memory of the recent past that had been previously closed. It undoubtedly constituted a powerful driving force towards a renewed social awareness of what State terror had meant. But this driving force was limited by its political inability to change the neoliberal matrix that is at the core of radical inequality, to open the secret archives of the repression and to definitively dismantle the repressive parastatal structures that still operate in the sewers of the state. Its promise of justice was limited by the objective of leading an institutional normalization to restore the authority of the state, which necessarily had to result in the partial deactivation of social organizations.

Even so, and thanks to the committed and meticulous work of the academics and activists linked to the project, this educational policy constituted a serious, innovative, and bold attempt to transmit vital contents of historical memory to new generations. For the general interest of emancipation, it is likely that what was most interesting about the Kirchnerist political project was its overflows. That is to say, what is interesting about this government is its excesses. One of them was certainly the educational commitment made by the government regarding the recent past and its transmission in schools.

¹³² Claudio Altamirano and Estela B. Carlotto, *Puentes de la memoria en el campo educativo*. Ministry of Education. “Education and Memory” Programme, 2014, [https://ccc.opac.com.ar/pergamo/opac.php?a=bsqEditor&n=Buenos+Aires+\(ciudad\).+Ministerio+de+Educaci%C3%B3n.+Programa+Educaci%C3%B3n+y+Memoria](https://ccc.opac.com.ar/pergamo/opac.php?a=bsqEditor&n=Buenos+Aires+(ciudad).+Ministerio+de+Educaci%C3%B3n.+Programa+Educaci%C3%B3n+y+Memoria).

The Volume *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina* (Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina)

Corpus Selection Criteria

The source selected for the analysis of this chapter is one of the main productions of the National Ministry of Education's "Education and Memory" Programme. The *case selection* was made on the basis of the collection *La enseñanza del pasado reciente en la escuela* (*Teaching about the Recent Past in Schools*) of the Ministry of Education, distributed in three volumes: *Pensar Malvinas* (*Reflections on the Malvinas Islands*, fig. 2), *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina* (*Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina*, fig. 4) and *Pensar la democracia* (*Reflections on Democracy*), 2013. The selection is based on considerations regarding their space of circulation (in schools), their relevance, specificity, and the specific use of the images included in the selection. A survey of the units of analysis showed that the volume *Reflections on the Dictatorship* is one of the most representative texts in relation to the state position. This volume forms the core of the rest of the productions in the collection and plays a central role in delimiting the configurations of memory. It establishes the foundations of the "Education and Memory" Programme and the educational proposal that is subsequently replicated in the remaining volumes. Images of the front cover and back cover of some of the volumes of "Education and Memory" have been included to show the graphic design of the production (figs. 2 and 3).

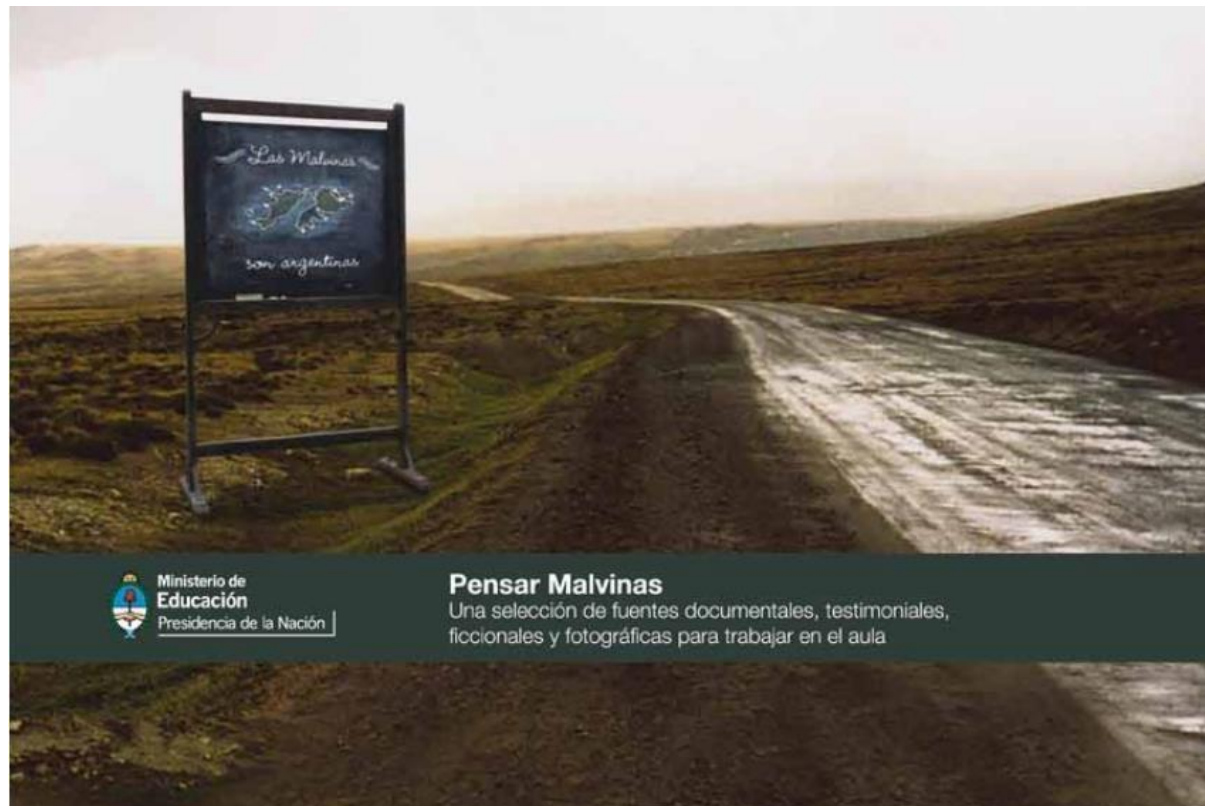


Fig. 2. Cover of the volume *Pensar Malvinas* (*Reflections on the Malvinas Islands*). 2014, Programa “Educación y Memoria” (“Education and Memory” Programme).

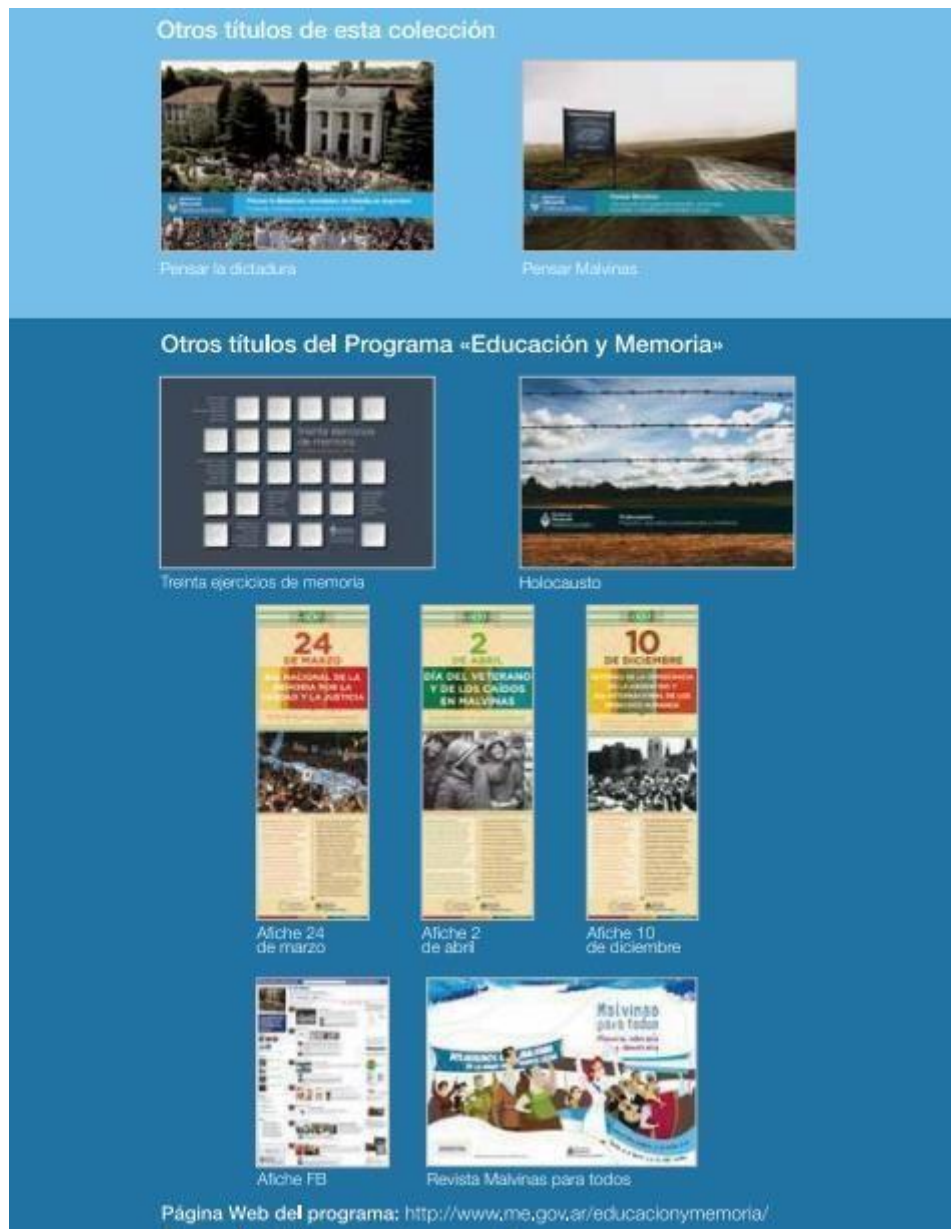


Fig. 3. Inside back cover of the volume *Pensar la democracia* (*Reflections on Democracy*) with images of other titles from the “Education and Memory” Programme.

Volume Description: Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina (Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina)



Fig. 4. Cover of the volume *Pensar la dictadura* (*Reflections on the Dictatorship*). Cover photo: Gonzalo Martínez. Former ESMA. 2004, ARGRA photo library.

The photograph of the former Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA) is on the cover of the volume *Pensar la dictadura* (Fig. 4).¹³³ It was one of the emblematic images of memory politics during the Kirchnerist era. However, this image not only stands out because it shows one of the largest clandestine detention sites in the country, but also because of the presence of a considerable mass of people “taking over” the building that was a bastion of the last military dictatorship. It is an image that contrasts with the other covers in the collection (the other volumes), which show empty spaces or spaces “emptied” by the Nazi genocide, the Armenian genocide and the Malvinas War (see fig. 2).¹³⁴ The photo displays one of the most

¹³³ Link to the volume *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de estado en Argentina* (*Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina*): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eyRb4P1ic2PXZ39LP3RNd71fwBAO8v6t/view?usp=drive_link.

¹³⁴ The photograph in fig. 4 was taken on March 24, 2004, when the government handed over the ESMA to human rights organizations. One of the transformations that remains out of the focus is the signature silhouettes that were placed on the bars that surround the ESMA. This time, the silhouettes were not anonymous but were

impressive transformations of an emblematic space of horror under the dictatorship. It went from being an inaccessible, mysterious, and private place of military repression, to a public space that was “taken over” and converted into an *active* memory space.¹³⁵ *Pensar la dictadura* was published in 2014 and is presented as free distribution material for secondary school teachers in Argentine federal territory. It consists of 190 pages and includes 71 images. It shows 58 documentary images, of which 19 were included in the *sources* section. There are 9 fictional images (for documentary use), of which 5 are used to explain the representation of the dictatorship in the cultural sphere (and stills from films) and 4 are artistic works. There are 4 fragments of images that are used in the presentation of each chapter. There are 35 black-and-white images and 36 in colour.

The photographs used were obtained from different archives: General Archive of the Nation (AGN), Dipba Archive, Provincial Commission for Memory, Héctor Osvaldo Vázquez, CONADEP, Relatives, Antelo family archive, Gente Magazine, and courtesy of Marina Franco and Lucila Quieto.

The structure of the content is based on the presentation of 25 questions distributed in four chapters, namely: “El terrorismo de estado” (“State Terrorism”), “Dictadura y Sociedad” (“Dictatorship and Society”), “La dictadura en el mundo” (“The Dictatorship in the World”) and “El pasado en el presente” (“The Past in the Present”). Each chapter contains an organizational sequence that presents the main contents through questions and answers, sources, an image gallery, proposals for working in the classroom, and photographs. Each section can be distinguished by the background colours of the pages: white is used for the educational content distributed in the format of questions and answers, as well as for the full-page photograph included at the end of each chapter; grey is used for the teaching resources included between the sources and proposals for working in the classroom, and finally, black is used for the image gallery. The following sections are

created by visual artists invited by the human rights organizations to present their work. This off-camera element involves a new displacement of the images, which, using Longoni’s terms, emerges from “inappropriate” conditions: “Why do I view them as inappropriate? On the one hand, because it seems to me that it shows the opposite procedure or the reverse path to that of the *Siluetazo*, which was an initiative of artists appropriated by the crowd and that could be done by anyone, where there is no signature to the device, anyone can become in a silhouette producer. Here, it is the organisations that ask renowned artists to make the silhouettes. But I also think the place where they decide to place these silhouettes is wrong. It is the place that most powerfully symbolizes the extermination and disappearance of people in Argentina, where more than 5 thousand people were disappeared. And the silhouettes end up being placed, not in a march, at the Plaza de Mayo, in a recovered public space, but in the same place where more than 5 thousand people were disappeared” (Longoni, “Arte y Política” 16–17).

¹³⁵ ESMA Memory Site Museum, <http://www.museositioesma.gob.ar/>.

distributed in the teaching resources: prompts for searching for information, reflection prompts, discussion prompts, analysis prompts, research prompts and prompts for working with images. The volumes were coordinated, produced and designed by a group of researchers from different areas and national universities organized by the Ministry of Education through the INFoD (National Teacher Training Institute).

The Place of the Image in School Programmes

Photography works hand in glove with image and memory and therefore possesses their notable epidemic power.
(Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite* 23)

Unlike the previous configurations, it could not be said that the images in the school corpus constitute a configuration in a strict sense, but rather a reconfiguration that disrupts the image-space prevailing until that time. The “Education and Memory” Programme does not create images, but rather recreates those that already exist in the social sphere and organizes them in a new scenario. This organization is conditioned by an inevitable tension: that which emerges when attempting to articulate the practices of social memory with school practices to establish a state pedagogy of memory.¹³⁶

There are obvious, although decisive differences between the social space in which the images emerged (from the first two configurations) and the school space by which they are organized. Although both spaces are public, the first tends towards dispersal, contagion, invention, and anachronism, while in the second the images of memory are organized according to a hierarchy and linearly subjected to a general design. The preference for the documentary tone of the school programme delimits the images, and more specifically the photographs, as part of an objectively recorded event (documentary use). As detailed in Chapter 3, pedagogical activity has signs that make it unique: it has an objective, it designs didactic sequences, it converts time and space into school time and space, and it also has the intention of teaching and producing learning. This means that the transmission is entrusted to knowledge, to a domain of the subject in encyclopaedic terms, but to a knowledge guarded by prohibitions and moral warnings. What is left out is the sensitive knowledge or felt knowledge of the artistic and political activity that characterized the transmission in the previous period.

¹³⁶ For more information on the differentiation between both practices, see Chapter 3.

Image Sequences: Two Series of images

In order to expose the use of images in the context of formal education, two sequences of images are examined. Both belong to the source *Pensar la dictadura* (*Reflections on the Dictatorship*; hereinafter, “the volume”).

For the two sequences, the arrangement of images is analyzed according to the description of series identified in the source. In this case, the concept of *series* involves a unit of meaning within a pedagogical sequence that, in this case, reorders memory discourses and images from 1977 to 2014. The series is meant to establish a linear meaning and order of arrangement. It is linked to the past by the succession of events that operates through temporal continuity. It is flow and course, often without a link to the present. For this research, the images or series of images in the volume *Pensar la dictadura* were selected using patterns of reiteration in the arrangement of the photographs.

The first series, *Imágenes “con-texto”* (*Images with Text*) reflects the most conventional (“instructive”) attributes of this volume, in which there is a conservative preference for the documentary use of images that tends to fix the photographs to the narrative of a past that is experienced as closed (Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite* vii). Didi-Huberman points out that with the “purely” documentary narrative one risks “falling back entirely on things to the detriment of relationships, on facts to the detriment of structures”.¹³⁷

The second series, however, shows certain deviations from this dominant model. Although it tends towards the linear and documentary narrative typical of the school logic, certain lines of flight can be identified. I will refer to this set of deviations or possibilities of deviations that involve the reader’s gaze as *memory passages*. They project a significant difference with respect to the previous series. They are a hybrid set that is torn between conservation and innovation, and they are somewhat *elusive* with regard to the strict school format. In this series, three of these *memory passages* do not strictly follow patterns of spatial and instrumental reiteration of the photographs, which are subsidiary to the story, but involve points of distinction or analysis, of an opening to an alternative relationship with the images.

¹³⁷ “Now, there are, strictly speaking, neither complete metamorphoses nor absolute facts. Therefore, there must be *conditions of experimentation* to be able to show the non-ideal character of history, that is, the innate impurity —the incompleteness, the contradictory, conflictual, lacunary nature— of all historical metamorphosis” (Didi-Huberman, *Cuando las imágenes toman posición* 58).

First Series: Imágenes “con-texto”

This selection is considered representative of the central narrative body of the pedagogical proposal of the volume. The order of presentation is organized into a graphic selection (including two pages for each chapter of the volume),¹³⁸ a reference table of the images, and considerations about the contents of the series.

Display of Images

Chapter 1: “State Terrorism”

normalizar el funcionamiento de la economía a partir de la exclusión y la represión de los trabajadores. En aquel momento se suspendió por tiempo indeterminado la actividad de los partidos políticos y de las instituciones parlamentarias. Para el general Onganía el «tiempo económico» tenía prioridad sobre el «tiempo social y el tiempo político».

Con el peronismo aún proscrito y su líder, Juan Domingo Perón, en el exilio, poco a poco se fueron gestando movimientos de oposición en el ámbito sindical, estudiantil, cultural y religioso. Todos ellos desembocaron en grandes movilizaciones de protesta, insurreccionales y violentas, siendo el Cordobazo (1969) su manifestación más contundente. Estas expresiones fueron de a poco alimentando a los grupos armados en formación. Como sostiene Pilar Calveiro, la lucha armada surgió como respuesta a una estructura de poder ilegítima, en un contexto de descrédito general de la democracia como régimen de gobierno, donde la progresiva radicalización de la violencia formaba parte de la política.

En ese marco emergieron los grupos guerrilleros que operaron principalmente en los años setenta: en 1968, las FAP (Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas); en 1970, los Montoneros, las FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias), el ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo) y las FAL (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación). Todos ellos buscaron disputarle el monopolio de la violencia al Estado, lo que en ese momento era visualizado por buena parte de la población como una práctica política aceptable.

La creciente movilización de los sectores populares y el accionar de los grupos guerrilleros precipitaron la



29 de mayo de 1969. Agustín Tosco al frente de una de las movilizaciones del Cordobazo. AGN

convocatoria a elecciones nacionales sin la proscripción del peronismo. Tras casi dos décadas de prohibición, signadas por el fracaso de los sucesivos intentos de extirpar al movimiento, el peronismo volvió a ocupar el gobierno no a través de la figura de su líder sino por medio de su delegado personal, Héctor Cámpora. La campaña se realizó bajo una famosa consigna: «Cámpora al gobierno, Perón al poder».

El 25 de mayo de 1973, Héctor Cámpora asumió la

presidencia en medio de un clima de gran movilización social. Las consignas referidas a la «patria socialista» y «liberación o dependencia» expresaban el deseo de un cambio profundo por parte de muchos militantes peronistas, sobre todo de aquellos que se enrolaban en la denominada Tendencia Revolucionaria.

La estrategia de Perón para el período fue impulsar una política acuerdista y conciliadora a través del denominado Pacto Social. Sin embargo, estos objetivos

Fig. 5. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 24. Photo: Agustín Tosco at the head of one of the Cordobazo demonstrations.

May 29, 1969, AGN (General Archive of the Nation).

¹³⁸ The complete page is presented for this selection to show the distribution of text and image.



1.



2.



3.

estuvieron concentrados en el centro del país. Uno de los más conocidos fue la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), ubicado en la Capital Federal, sobre la Av. Libertador, en un barrio residencial, poblado y con circulación frecuente de personas. Su máximo responsable era el almirante Emilio Massera. Allí tuvieron lugar algunos de los hechos más aberrantes de la represión. Hoy, más de treinta años después, este centro fue transformado en Museo de la Memoria.

La pregunta quizás más inquietante que surge al conocer las historias de vida de quienes pasaron por la experiencia concentracionaria es cómo fue posible la existencia de este sistema represivo de desaparición forzada de personas. Es decir: cómo fue posible que la sociedad argentina haya producido y albergado campos de concentración en su propio seno.

Según explica Pilar Calveiro el campo estaba perfectamente instalado en el centro de la sociedad; se nutría de ella y se derramaba sobre ella. En su libro *Poder y desaparición* escribió: «Los campos de concentración eran secretos y las inhumaciones de cadáveres NN en los cementerios, también. Sin embargo, para que funcionara el dispositivo desaparecedor debían ser “secretos a voces”; era preciso que se supiera para diseminar el terror. La nube de silencio ocultaba los nombres, las

razones específicas, pero todos sabían que se llevaban a los que “andaban en algo”, que las personas “desaparecían”, que los coches que iban con gente armada pertenecían a las fuerzas de seguridad, que los que se llevaban no volvían a aparecer, que existían campos de concentración. En suma, un secreto con publicidad incluida; mensajes contradictorios y ambivalentes. Secretos que se deben saber, lo que es preciso decir como si no se dijera, pero que todos conocen».⁵

El sistema de centros clandestinos, entonces, disciplinaba al resto de la sociedad, infundiendo temor y obediencia frente a lo que se intuía como un poder de dimensiones desconocidas y omnímodas. Se sabía que algo sucedía o, al menos, había indicios para saberlo, pero la mayoría no sabía exactamente qué era eso que sucedía y otros decidieron directamente no saber como un mecanismo de defensa. Sin cuerpos no hay pruebas, sin pruebas no hay delito, como tantas veces dijeron los militares mismos. La desaparición instalaba en la sociedad una incertidumbre y, sobre todo, un gran temor a lo desconocido y amenazante: ¿qué había pasado con el vecino, el compañero de trabajo, el amigo, el hermano, el hijo?, ¿dónde estaban?, ¿estaban vivos?, ¿estaban muertos?

Ese efecto era suficiente para imponer una cultura cotidiana del miedo y de la desconfianza («por algo será» o «algo habrá hecho»), del silencio («el silencio es salud») y del autoencierro. Tal vez, un buen ejemplo de esa sospecha y ese miedo difundidos en toda la sociedad sea aquella famosa publicidad del período dictatorial cuyo slogan decía: «¿Sabe usted dónde está su hijo ahora?». La sociedad era controlada y todos se controlaban entre sí. La sociedad se patrullaba a sí misma.

1. Ex CCC El Pozo, Rosario. Darío Ares- Archivo de la Memoria de Rosario.
2. Ex Jefatura de Policía, Rosario. Darío Ares- Archivo de la Memoria de Rosario.
3. Ex CCC La Calamita, Rosario. Archivo de la Memoria de Rosario.
4. Ex CCC en Santiago del Estero. María Rita Ciucci.



4.

5. Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina*. Buenos Aires, Cáliz, 2001.

Fig. 6. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 33. Photos of former clandestine detention centres (CDC). Clockwise: 1. El Pozo. Darío Ares. Rosario; 2. Former Police Headquarters. Darío Ares. Rosario; 3. La Calamita. Rosario; 4. Former CDC in Santiago del Estero. The source of the first three photographs is the Memory Archive of Rosario and the source of the fourth photograph is María Rita Ciucci.

Chapter 2: “Dictatorship and Society”

realizado una destacada labor en la recuperación de la identidad de los niños secuestrados por los militares. Gracias a su trabajo, ya son 101 las personas halladas.

Además de las Madres y las Abuelas, existieron otros organismos de Derechos Humanos que realizaron un importante trabajo para denunciar los crímenes de la dictadura. La organización Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos por Razones Políticas fue creada en enero de 1976 con motivo de la desaparición simultánea de 24 personas en Córdoba. Además, entre otras, se destacan: el Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ), creado en 1974; el Movimiento Ecueménico por los Derechos Humanos (MEDH) de 1976 y el Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) de 1979. En 1975 también se había formado la Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (APDH), a partir de una convocatoria realizada por personas provenientes de distintos sectores sociales (políticos, intelectuales, sindicalistas y religiosos), preocupadas por el aumento de la violencia y por el quiebre de la vigencia de los Derechos Humanos más elementales.

Las denuncias de las desapariciones, la creación de estrategias de visibilización, la búsqueda de los niños secuestrados y la lucha permanente son algunos de los objetivos que cumplieron los organismos a lo largo de todo este tiempo. Nuestra democracia se enriqueció con sus esfuerzos porque gracias a ellos sabemos que hay tres palabras que deben ir juntas: memoria, verdad y justicia (ver pregunta N° 23).



Madres de Plaza de Mayo reclamando por la aparición con vida de los detenidos-desaparecidos. Comisión Provincial por la Memoria.



Paseos. Símbolo de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo dibujado en distintas plazas de todo el país. San Carlos de Bariloche, Río Negro. Archivo fotográfico Educación y Memoria.

Fig. 7. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 67. Top photo: Mothers of Plaza de Mayo demanding that the detained-disappeared be returned alive. Provincial Commission for Memory. Bottom photo: symbols of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo drawn in squares throughout the country. San Carlos de Bariloche, Río Negro. “Education and Memory” photographic archive.

(1981) y Cayetano Licciardo (1981-1983).

El proyecto educativo implicó un doble objetivo. Por un lado, la expulsión de docentes; el control de los contenidos, de las actividades de los alumnos y de sus padres; y el intento de convertir a las escuelas en cuarteles a través de la regulación de comportamientos visibles (prohibición del uso de barba y pelo largo, prohibición de vestir jeans, normas de presentación y aseo).

Y, por otro lado, la internalización de patrones de conducta que aseguraran la permanencia de los valores promovidos y enunciados obsesivamente por la dictadura, todos ellos vinculados a «la moral cristiana, la tradición nacional y la dignidad del ser argentino (...)» y la conformación de un sistema educativo acorde con las necesidades del país, que sirva efectivamente a los intereses de la Nación y consolide los valores y aspiraciones del ser argentino», según decía el acta que fijaba los Propósitos y los Objetivos Básicos del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional.

Estos objetivos intentaron materializarse, por ejemplo, en el reemplazo de la materia ERSa (Estudio de la Realidad Social Argentina) por Formación Cívica (luego Formación Moral y Cívica), en considerar a la familia y sus «valores permanentes que la caracterizan» como el agente principal de la educación, y en construir un modelo de docente «aséptico».

En el marco de un sistema educativo que se consideraba amenazado por el «virus marxista» se insistía en remarcar que los educadores tenían la responsabilidad de ser los «custodios de la soberanía ideológica» ya que «la incesante búsqueda del ser nacional y la lucha sin

tregua por consolidar su conciencia, no reconoce final».¹⁴

Como afirmó el represor Adolfo Vilas «hasta el momento presente sólo hemos tocado la punta del iceberg en nuestra guerra contra la subversión. Es necesario destruir las fuentes que alimentan, forman y adoctrinan al delincuente subversivo, y esas fuentes están en las universidades y en las escuelas secundarias».¹⁵

En función de alcanzar esos objetivos se diseñó la estructura represiva de alcance nacional ya mencionada, entre el Ministerio del Interior y el Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, y se instrumentaron una serie de medidas y estrategias represivas como la desaparición, el encarcelamiento, el exilio y el silenciamiento con la idea de atomizar a los docentes, los estudiantes, los directivos, los investigadores, los editores. Además se suspendió el Estatuto del Docente y todas las gestiones gremiales colectivas, hubo inhabilitaciones y cesantías de educadores, control de programas, bibliografías y exámenes. Se realizaron acciones de espionaje, por ejemplo se incluyeron servicios de inteligencia trabajando de celadores y se crearon áreas de inteligencia encubiertas. Se brindaron instrucciones para detectar el lenguaje subversivo en las aulas. Se incentivó a que los padres controlaran, vigilaran y denunciaran a sus hijos si observaban «conductas sospechosas». Se cuestionó la educación sexual, la literatura contemporánea y el evolucionismo.

Como señaló el investigador argentino Pablo Pineau, las estrategias instrumentadas por la dictadura en el

campo educativo implicaron «el principio del fin» de la educación pública heredada de las décadas previas. Las estrategias represivas sentaron las bases para la consolidación de los proyectos educativos neoliberales de las décadas siguientes.¹⁶



Acto escolar durante el periodo de la última dictadura. 1977. Archivo Licha Antelo.

¹⁴ Tomado del documento *Subversión en el ámbito educativo, convocamos a nuestro enemigo*.

¹⁵ Richard Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón. Los Montoneros*, Buenos Aires, Grijalbo, 1988.

¹⁶ Tomado de Pablo Pineau y Marcelo Mariffo, *El principio del fin. Políticas y memorias de la educación en la última dictadura militar (1976-1983)*, Buenos Aires, Colihue, 2006.

Fig. 8. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 72. Photo: school ceremony during the last dictatorship. 1977, Licha Antelo Archive.

Chapter 3: “The Dictatorship in the World”

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¿EN QUÉ CONSISTIÓ EL PLAN CÓNDOR?

El Plan Cóndor fue una operación organizada, a mediados de los años setenta, por los Servicios de Inteligencia de varios países latinoamericanos, entre ellos Argentina, Chile, Brasil, Paraguay y Uruguay. El Plan Cóndor tenía varios objetivos: intercambiar información sobre individuos o grupos insurgentes, facilitar la captura de prisioneros políticos que habían logrado escapar de su país de origen y trasladarse a algunos de los países limítrofes, organizar operativos en común –atentados, fusilamientos– contra aquellas personas consideradas peligrosas o que constituían, bajo el prisma de los militares, serios obstáculos para la aniquilación de los «enemigos políticos». El carácter secreto del Plan Cóndor permitió que en las operaciones conjuntas participaran no sólo fuerzas militares sino también paramilitares, convirtiéndose así la región en una suerte de zona liberada para que las diversas fuerzas represivas actuaran con relativa libertad, más allá de las fronteras del país de pertenencia, a los fines de conseguir los objetivos militares propuestos.

Manuel Contreras, jefe de la DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional), es decir, del Servicio de Inteligencia chilena, fue quien concibió el Plan y lo defendió ante sus pares en Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Venezuela y Estados Unidos. Este último país avaló el Plan y contribuyó a



El dictador Jorge Rafael Videla junto a Alfredo Stroessner, dictador de la República del Paraguay entre 1954 y 1989. AGN

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Fig. 9. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 112. Photo: dictator Jorge Rafael Videla with Alfredo Stroessner, dictator of the Republic of Paraguay from 1954 to 1989. AGN.

del Cáncer que se iba a celebrar en Argentina entre el 5 y el 12 de octubre de 1978, el COBA también desplegó una campaña de desprestigio que tuvo efectos sobre el evento ya que distintos especialistas en la materia decidieron no participar.

En 1979, gracias a estas campañas de denuncia, apoyadas por el gobierno estadounidense del demócrata James Carter, se presentó en Argentina la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos para investigar los centros de detención, el estado de los prisioneros políticos y la situación de los desaparecidos. La comisión de la Organización de Estados Americanos, tras visitar nuestro país, fijó el número de desaparecidos en 7500, en el exilio ya hablaban de más de 15 mil.

En 1980, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, presidente del Servicio de Paz y Justicia, y firme defensor de los Derechos Humanos en Argentina, tras realizar un sinnúmero de denuncias públicas sobre lo que acontecía en Argentina, recibió el Premio Nóbel de la Paz.

Por último, el otro acontecimiento que conmovió a todas las comunidades de exiliados y a la opinión pública internacional fue, sin lugar a dudas, la guerra de Malvinas.

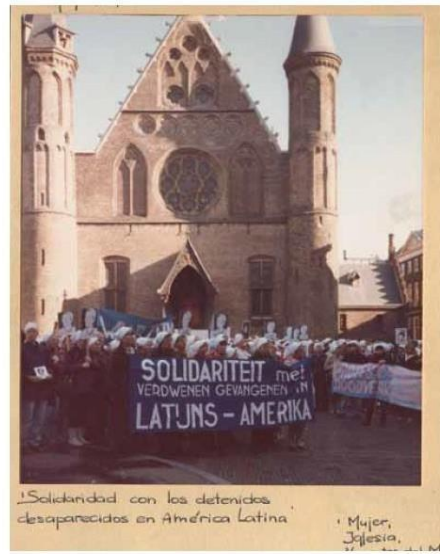


Fig. 10. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 116. Photo: Cosofam poster for solidarity with the detained-disappeared in Latin America. La Haya (The Hague). Family photo.

Chapter 4: “The Past in the Present”



Fig. 11. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 141. Images: 1. *Nunca Más* (*Never Again*). Annex Cover. Volume 1; 2. *Nunca Más*. First edition cover; 3. Image of ESMA during the CONADEP (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) investigation. CONADEP. Photograph of the sector called “capucha” (hood), on the third floor of the building where the clandestine detention centre operated at the Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA). The name “hood” was used because this is where hooded detainees were kept.

berti y Oscar Bidegain, sobrevivientes de la conducción nacional de Montoneros.

De esta forma, escudándose en el discurso de la «reconciliación nacional» y aludiendo a la necesidad del reconocimiento de errores de «ambos lados»¹⁰, Menem relativizaba la experiencia del terrorismo de Estado y la equiparaba con la violencia insurgente: es decir, reforzaba la vigencia de la «teoría de los dos demonios» (ver pregunta N° 20).

A pesar de las masivas manifestaciones de repudio a los indultos presidenciales motorizadas por organizaciones de Derechos Humanos, agrupaciones estudiantiles, partidos políticos, sindicatos, asociaciones profesionales y miles de personas sin filiación alguna, la medida se llevó a cabo poniendo en libertad a los represores/torturadores condenados por crímenes de lesa humanidad y graves violaciones a los Derechos Humanos y dejando instalada la sensación de impunidad y de clausura de toda posibilidad de justicia.

Sin embargo, a partir de la asunción del presidente Néstor Kirchner en mayo de 2003, el escenario jurídico cambió considerablemente. Así lo demostraron una serie de gestos simbólicos y acciones contundentes de su gestión: el relevo de toda la cúpula militar, el juicio político contra parte de la Corte Suprema que había sido designada durante el menemismo, el retiro de los retratos de Videla y Bignone del Colegio Militar, las declaraciones presidenciales afirmando que quería unas

Fuerzas Armadas «comprometidas con el futuro y no con el pasado», sus expresiones a favor de la nulidad de las «leyes del perdón», y la creación del Espacio para la Memoria y la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos en la ex ESMA.

Asimismo, en julio de 2003 el presidente Kirchner derogó el decreto del ex presidente Fernando De la Rúa que imponía el principio de territorialidad y que impedía llevar a cabo las extradiciones solicitadas por la justicia. En este caso se trataba de un pedido realizado por el juez español Baltasar Garzón para detener y extraditar a 46 represores de la última dictadura. A partir de su anulación la justicia argentina podía considerar esos pedidos y evaluar en cada caso qué decisión tomar.

En agosto de ese mismo año las denominadas leyes del perdón fueron anuladas por el Parlamento, tras lo cual la Cámara Federal de la ciudad de Buenos Aires ordenó la reapertura de las causas de la ESMA y del Primer Cuerpo del Ejército. En junio de 2005, la Corte Suprema de Justicia declaró la inconstitucionalidad de las leyes de Punto Final y Obediencia Debida, lo que permitió y produjo la presentación de nuevas causas por violaciones a los Derechos Humanos como así también que prosiguiera el tratamiento de las causas abiertas con anterioridad, sumándose algunas de ellas a las abiertas en el exterior. A fines de 2007, «existían más de trescientos detenidos bajo proceso, pero sólo habían sido condenados tres de ellos: el suboficial de la Policía Federal Héctor Julio Simón, apodado el «Turco Julián», el oficial de la Policía de la provincia de Buenos Aires Miguel Etchecoatz y el sacerdote Christian Von



Retiro de los retratos de Videla y Bignone del Colegio Militar. AGN.

Wernich.»¹¹

Sin embargo, este avance en la justicia se vio empañado por la desaparición de Jorge Julio López, testigo en el juicio contra Etchecoatz, y por las sospechosas muertes de dos imputados por apropiación de menores durante la dictadura, poco antes de prestar declaración judicial. Unos y otros hechos demuestran que la justicia y el «Nunca Más» siguen siendo una tarea a defender y construir.

10 En el decreto 2742 del 30 de diciembre de 1990, puede leerse: «Que el Poder Ejecutivo Nacional pretende crear las condiciones y el escenario de la reconciliación, del mutuo perdón y de la unión nacional. Pero son los actores principales del drama argentino, entre los cuales también se encuentran quienes hoy ejercen el gobierno, los que con humildad, partiendo del reconocimiento de errores propios y de aciertos del adversario, aporten la sincera disposición del alma hacia la reconciliación y la unidad.»

11 Daniel Luvovich y Jaqueline Bisquert, *La cambiante memoria de la dictadura. Discursos públicos, movimientos sociales y legitimidad democrática*, Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2008.

Fig. 12. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 147. Photo: removal of the portraits of Videla and Bignone from the Military School. AGN.

Reference Table of Images

The presentation in a diagram makes it possible to directly identify the relationship between the written content and the photographic content. There is a linear equivalence between the photographic images and the textual content. It should be noted that the four chapters are distributed according to a series of questions that serve as subtitles. Table 1 highlights the chapter, the questions (subtitles), the photograph number and a reference to its content. The table makes it possible to observe, even without directly accessing the full text, the literal correspondence between questions, photos, and their respective contents.

Table 1

Chapter	Question (Question and subtitle number as presented in the volume)	Figure No.	Content
CHAPTER 1	No. 2. “What was the political-social situation prior to the coup?”	5	Black-and-white photograph of the “Cordobazo”, 1969: worker-student alliance of resistance against the Onganía dictatorship. This event is considered the beginning of the dictator’s downfall.
	No. 7. “What were the clandestine detention centres?”	6	Four colour photographs of well-known buildings that functioned as CDCs in different parts of the country (today they are recovered memory spaces).
CHAPTER 2	No. 11. “What role did human rights organizations play?”	7	Two black-and-white photographs. The image above portrays a group of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in a demonstration carrying a sign with the legend “We ask that the detained-disappeared be returned alive”. The image below shows the Mothers’ traditional white headscarves that were painted in various public spaces throughout the country. This photo in particular was taken at the San Carlos Square in Bariloche, located in one of the main tourist enclaves of the Argentine Patagonia. The same square and its surroundings are currently the scene of conflicts between the repressive forces of the provincial state and the Mapuche communities.
	No. 13. “What happened to culture and education during the last dictatorship?”	8	Colour photograph referring to education during the dictatorship: the raising of the national flag as a school ritual of homage to national symbols.
CHAPTER 3	No. 15. “What were its connections with the other dictatorships in Latin America?”	9	Black-and-white photograph. Dictator Jorge Rafael Videla with Alfredo Stroessner, dictator of the Republic of Paraguay from 1951 to 1989.

	No. 16. “How was the dictatorship viewed abroad? What role did the exiles play?”	10	Colour photograph. Propaganda of international resistance to the dictatorship. Public demonstration of exiles from Latin American dictatorships held in The Hague, Netherlands.
CHAPTER 4	No. 18 “What were the CONADEP and the <i>Nunca Más</i> report?”	11	Three photographs. The main photo is in black and white; two small colour photographs from different editions of the CONADEP publication <i>Nunca Más</i> are superimposed on it. The main photograph is a replica of one of the images published in the CONADEP <i>Nunca Más</i> archive, 1984. It portrays one of the ESMA spaces where detainees were held with their heads covered.
	No. 20. “What were the Due Obedience and Full Stop Laws and the Decrees of Pardon?”	12	A black-and-white photograph. The portraits of dictators Videla and Bignone were taken down under President Néstor Kirchner’s administration. This is an emblematic image that consolidated the alliance of the Kirchner administration with human rights organizations.

Considerations on the Content of the Images

The material medium of this volume is reminiscent of the rules of school manuals: a display organized according to a hierarchy based on a pedagogical explanation. The images are photographs from heterogeneous sources, generally obtained from the General Archive of the Nation (AGN), the press, and human rights organizations. They are documentary photographs taken from 1977 to 2014. In general, the photographs show spaces, different social actors such as the Mothers and the military, diagrams of repression, press clippings, clandestine detention centres, public squares, graphics of repression, resistance marches, and scenes of repression from daily life. With the exception of one image, this volume does not display the faces of the disappeared, nor the family albums (this distinction will be explained in further detail in the following series).¹³⁹

¹³⁹ The last photo exhibited in the Image Gallery, belonging to the series *Arqueología de la ausencia*

This series of images shows that the school configuration shares the documentary use of images with the first configuration, but its objective is not denunciation. Rather, it is transmission. These images are not proof of existence but instruments of a narrative. For the most part, these photos are part of the documentary materials gathered around the *Nunca Más* report (in its first edition in 1984), and greatly differ from the counter-archive created by the insurgent practices of the Mothers.¹⁴⁰

The school creates didactic sequencing designs that place the images in predictable formats of readability: it is known that the images will complement a text, it is known that some of them will be associated with “image analysis” prompts, and it is known or assumed that they will not be images that *contradict* but rather *create a consensus* and make the act of reading a text more enjoyable or understandable. This serialization of images does not proceed only by reiteration or subordination of images to a narrative, but rather normalizes them in a chronological thread based on a historicist conception of the school narrative. In this regard, the school format imposes a sequential and explanatory order on the images, but in doing so it limits the power of the images. For Benjamin, the power of images lies in their unstable character that allows them to form unprecedented constellations, and thus interrupt the *continuum* of history (“On the Concept of History” 391).¹⁴¹ This makes it difficult to definitively establish the meanings of the past and, logically, the school has trouble domesticating this aesthetic corpus. In this case, the school selection leaves aside the pre-existing images of the first two configurations and replaces them with others that are more accessible to the school system: they must be firmly fixed in a past (understood here, as a *fait accompli*) in order for them to function correctly in a school setting. This increases their disconnection from the present.

These images are part of an informative school logic and follow a pattern of normalization, serialization, and subordination of the image to the text through a clear narrative unity and without the aesthetic risks of the first two configurations.¹⁴² The image

(*Archaeology of Absence*; 2006) by Lucila Quieto, analyzed in Chapter 4 of this work, seems to be the exception: Lucila Quieto and her disappeared father.

¹⁴⁰ In the CONADEP *Nunca Más* archive there are photos of the CDCs (clandestine detention centres), but the faces of the disappeared are not shown. For more information on *Nunca Más*, see Crenzel, *La historia política del Nunca Más*.

¹⁴¹ “The image is to history what the act is to politics, that is to say, the breaking point, the interruption that establishes the very possibility of the series that fails” (García, “La comunidad en montaje” 101–102).

¹⁴² Aesthetic risk is understood as a way in which we proceed to reflect on the complex materiality of images: it involves an exercise of critical rigour, and a particular sensitivity in the sense of affectation (of being involved).

loses its centrality and is articulated in a way that suits an explanatory system. As Rancière has tried to demonstrate in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, the explanatory logic reinforces the hierarchies between educator and student. It establishes, even without intending to, a difference between the capable and incapable, the authorized and unauthorized. It confirms this difference again and again and hinders the social appropriation of memory images.

Second Series: Memory Passages

Passage I: Memory Boards.

The second identified series is found in the “Image Gallery” section and is presented at the end of each of the four chapters of the volume. I will refer to these – four – unique spaces as *memory boards*. In the volume they are indicated as a complement to the “proposals for working in the classroom” and, more specifically, they are associated with the “prompts for working with images”. The identification of this series is very evident and accessible at first glance, since it occupies a prominent place in the volume. Each of the *boards* consists of three photographs on a black background.¹⁴³ As previously mentioned, *memory passages* refer to the (not necessarily intentional) possibility of decorative figures being recombined, creating authentic images. It is possible for the elements of the series to be combined in various ways, provoking new meanings. These are the passages where photographs escape their function established by mutual agreement. One of these passage areas is the black background. The black background has been one of the most frequently studied qualities in topics related to the arrangement of images.¹⁴⁴ In school syntax, the black background bears a certain similarity to the school blackboard as a surface for inscription: its elements can be deleted, moved, added, excluded, displayed, etc. The black background leads us to think that the order of the figures is arbitrary, that it can be intervened in to create other links between them. There is therefore a system of previously established relationships – in school planning – but also a series of unforeseen possibilities, given the “floating”, “promiscuous” status of images (Buck-Morss, “Visual studies” 224).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ The photographs belong to different documentary archives referring to the dictatorship (AGN, Héctor Osvaldo Vázquez and CONADEP/Family archive, the Antelo family archive, Gente Magazine/AGN, courtesy of Marina Franco/Family archive, Lucila Quieto).

¹⁴⁴ Some variables of the use of the black background in the redistribution of the Bastera photos proposed by Brodsky have been analyzed in the first chapter.

¹⁴⁵ “But the fact about images is that they do float in isolation, moving in and out of contexts, freed from their origin and the history of their provenance. The superficiality of the image, its transferability, its accessibility—all of these qualities render the issue of provenance ambiguous, if not irrelevant. An image is stumbled upon,

In other words: although the school narrative imposes a way of interrogating these photographs and connecting them to each other, there are alternative arrangements that allow an escape. We can resort to montage and disassembly operations.¹⁴⁶ To do this, we have the conjunction between the essentially anarchic and polysemic condition of the image and (distracted) observation that opens new layers of meaning.

The scene captured in these plaques with a black background can become, for example, the encounter of three different temporalities: on the one hand, the temporality of the event, dated and portrayed in each photo; on the other, the temporality in which the volume is produced and in which the treatment of the image is subordinated to a state-school time, and finally, the vague or incalculable temporality offered by the black background “impasse”, with which the plaque containing the triad of photos is framed.

On the other hand, the black background points to a potential “off-scene”, a tendency to exceed the visual frame, allowing the images to be completed through imagination and experience. The following examples taken from the source suggest rearrangements and discontinuities with respect to the traditional school use of images. Below is an analysis of the four *memory boards* that belong to the second series.

found without being lost. Arguably most at home when it ‘knocks around the world,’ an image is promiscuous by nature” (Buck-Morss, “Visual studies” 224).

¹⁴⁶ García’s idea of montage in the Argentine case is interesting: “The aim is to suggest an image regime ... that also undertakes the task of constructing *multiple images*, is committed to the risk of asking *how* to account for that excess, that break, how to make visible a scene whose traumatic core is always removed. ... The montage is the *representation that remains* in the imaginary when its constituent removal has been accepted. ... After the explosion of an order of vision, montage is the chaotic record of its disseminated shards. This involves neither the problematic transparency of representation and its fetish-image, nor the quagmire of the mosaic mandate and its taboo image, but the reflective gesture of an image that stages its own conditions of possibility, of an image that begins with the disfigured fragment to build from it a meaning that is nihilistic and constructivist at the same time. The *image-montage* is a possible name for an overcoming of the aporias related to representation in a debate that exceeds the Argentine experience” (*La comunidad en montaje* 38).

Board 1.

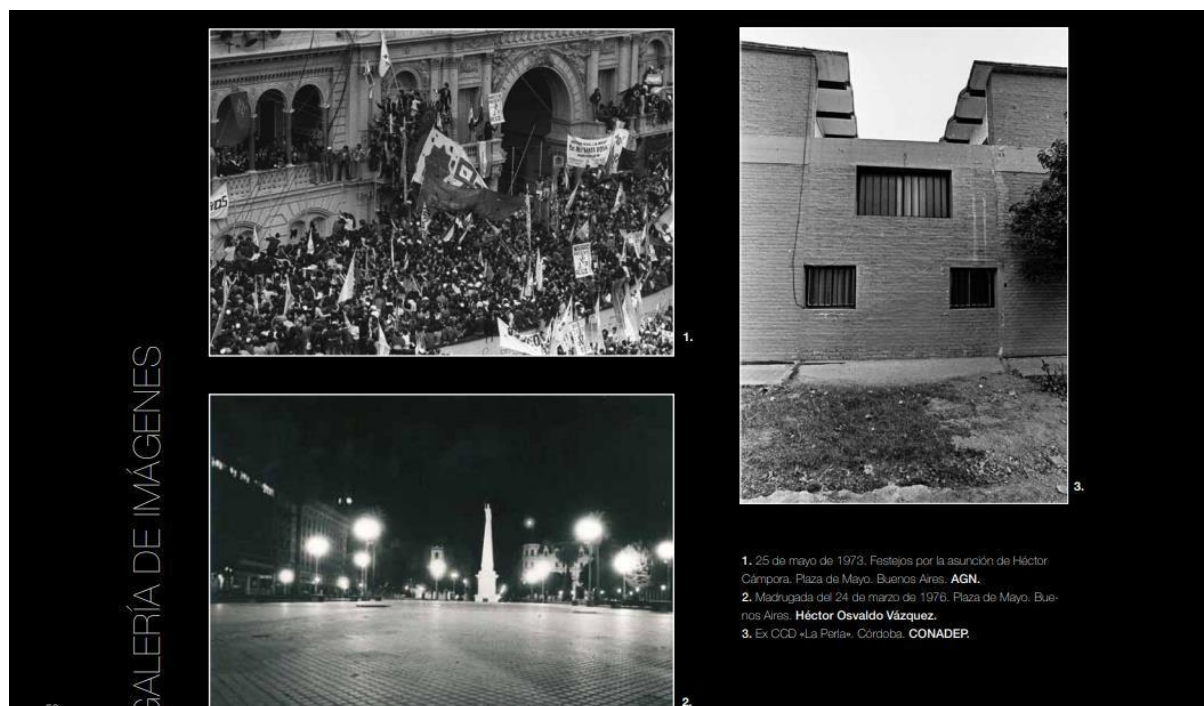


Fig. 13. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 52. Board 1.

The first scene (fig. 13) shows three documentary photographs. It is a scene that articulates struggle and disappearance through the display of the spaces that functioned as *common places for the bodies that inhabited them*. The photographs present spaces that have some relationship with power. We see moments in which these spaces were collectively taken over to challenge that power. We also see empty or emptied spaces as a visual metaphor for the restored order. They are emblematic spaces in Argentina. The two photos on the left portray various angles of the Plaza de Mayo in different historical periods. The Plaza de Mayo, an emblem of the mass mobilization, is presented in the top photo occupied by a crowd, and in the bottom photo, the same square is shown deserted. Photo 1 shows a scene from the day that Cámpora took office as president in 1973. Photo 2 belongs to H. O. Vázquez, who portrayed the beginning of the dictatorship in the “Madrugada del 24 de marzo de 1976” (“The Early Morning of 24 March 1976”).¹⁴⁷ There is a “before” and an “after” and it is easy to identify the contrast between the square “inhabited” by the people and the sinister emptiness of a square that is an omen of the disappearance of the bodies by which it was previously inhabited. Photo 3 appears on the right side of the first two and shows “La Perla”, one of the most well-known CDCs in the city of Córdoba. These images bring together two

¹⁴⁷ This image was analyzed by Pittaluga (“Imágenes (d)e historia”).

territories that are associated with the collective memory of the dictatorship: the main square and the CDC. They are also active places of memory and, in the case of the Plaza de Mayo, a space that is associated with past, present, and future struggles. Since Buenos Aires was a village, this square has been a meeting place where “history passes” and from which phases and “historical meanings” are consecrated. State terrorism established CDCs as part of the mechanism of this new technology of power, which removes free bodies from the square, to “disappear” them in these new closed spaces where the repressive system materialized. The placement of the figure of the CDC in a vertical photo that encompasses the space *between* both photos of the square seems to represent not only a new space – of confinement, contrary to the square – but a *consequence* or the frightening *fate* of those who embodied the struggles. Using the freedom of the black background, one could undo this chronology, and turn it the other way around. What came first: the confinement or the commotion? Where is the story going? Is the history of Argentine violence not a history of alternation between crowds and emptiness?

Board 2.



Fig. 14. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 98. Board 2.

The second scene (fig. 14) occurs in the middle of the dictatorship. Photo 1 is the emblematic circle of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, an image of international significance; photo 2 is a scene that refers to a characteristic school ceremony, in which traditional patriotic symbols, such as the flag and the national anthem, play a central role. The photo shows teachers and students dressed in their immaculate, radiant white uniforms. We know that popular desire for the Malvinas Islands as unredeemed territory is an achievement of public schools, which instilled in the population a feeling of grievance and loss since the mid-twentieth century. Photo 3 portrays a crowd in Plaza de Mayo supporting the announcement of the launch of the Malvinas War by dictator Fortunato Galtieri (April 2, 1982). A comparison between Photos 1 and 3 shows that the bodies are arranged in the same space but on different days. In Photo 3, the informal and shapeless crowd gathers in the square to express their enthusiasm. It is an image that at first glance is reminiscent of the seventies and the historical Peronist movement, including the marches against the dictatorship, but this time we do not see a popular or populist leader on the balcony, but rather a general of the dictatorship (whose function has always been to empty the square) celebrated by the crowd. The photo captures a paradox, provokes confusion, and disorganizes expectations. The photo links collective joy to the start of a war. It is

reminiscent of the mass “joy” at the beginning of the First World War in 1914.¹⁴⁸ In Photo 1, the perfect circle geometrically and imperturbably represents resistance to the dictatorship. They are photos that complement each other by their tension, a tension created by the arrangement of bodies, and also by the deployment of narratives: from this same circle, the Mothers would turn their backs on the 1978 World Cup, and they would also object to the triumphalism of the Malvinas War. Photo 2 seems to be located at an intersection between the two. It is curious – or perhaps not – that the raising of the flag and the arrangement of the disciplined bodies are placed to honour the national symbol. Here we have several paradoxes: a perfect circle expressing a “disorder” and a reservation with respect to the delirium of national unity. On the other hand, we have a chaotic and patriotically obfuscated crowd, precisely showing subordination and unity. This photo of Galtieri in the square tells us about a liberal/Catholic dictatorship that harnesses the energies of the crowd for its self-preservation. His gesture of greeting, his outstretched arm, even seems to extend to the Mothers. The last photo is a complete expression of the dictatorial aesthetic desire: uniformed bodies at school, in order, controllable and controlled, organized bodies expressing obedience. But isn’t this apolitical connection between disciplined patriotism and the celebratory crowd the fascist moment by definition? In the face of war, society celebrates its own unanimity, its own consensus, and its willingness to obey. Here, the circle of Mothers represents disengagement, the remainder, the unassimilable particle. But weren’t geometric figures precisely used to embody the Dadaist disengagement from the enthusiasm over the First World War in 1914?

¹⁴⁸ The beginning of the disastrous war against Paraguay in the nineteenth century, which bears great similarities to the First World War, did not provoke so much enthusiasm in Argentina, quite the opposite.

Board 3.

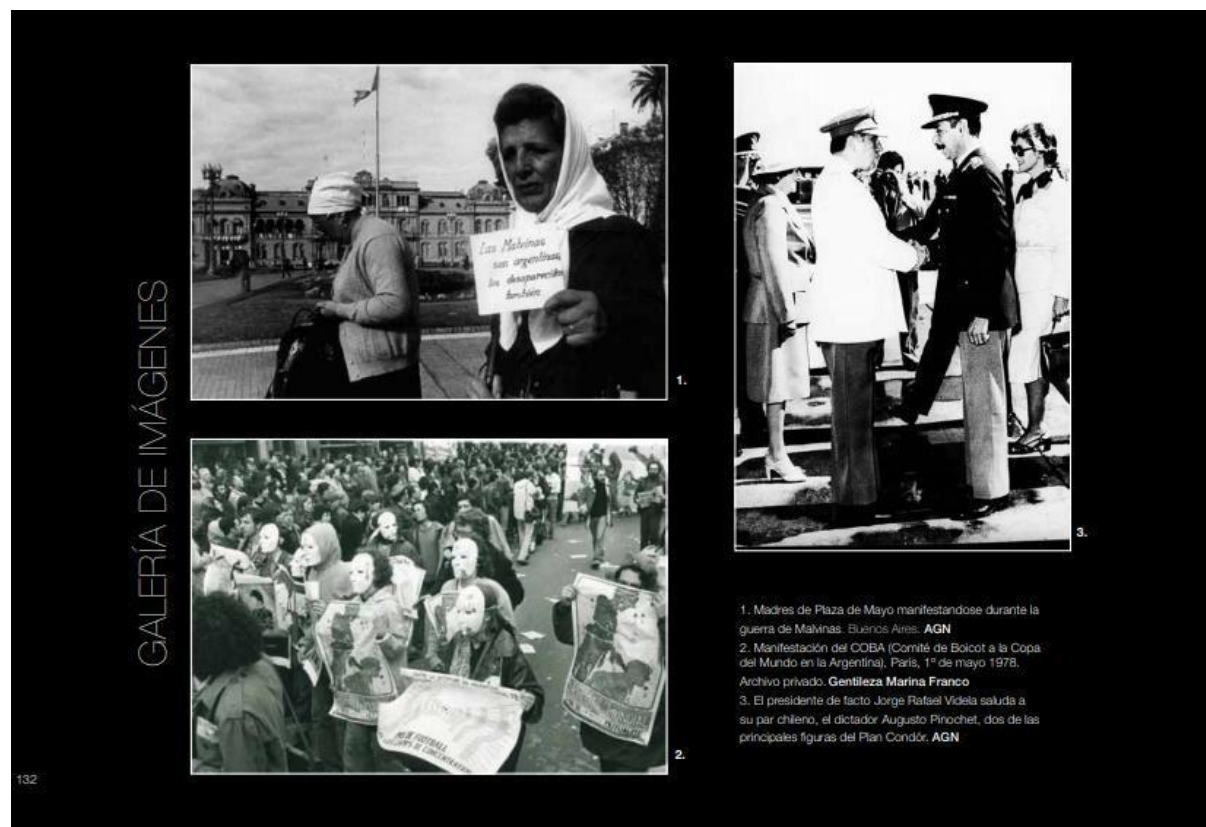


Fig. 15. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 132. Board 3.

The third scene (fig. 15) brings together two protests and a meeting between two dictators (Videla and Pinochet, dictators of Argentina and Chile respectively) united by Operation Condor and the CIA but separated by their border disputes in the south. Photo 1 was taken during one of the rounds of the Mothers (the “killjoy” Mothers), who remind us that, while the Malvinas Islands are Argentinian, the disappeared are also Argentinian. Photo 2 is a demonstration led by exiled militants in Paris in 1978 against the football World Cup (Committee for the Boycott of the World Cup in Argentina). Note the use of white masks: a controversial form of protest due to its depersonalizing nature. There is a particular colour arrangement throughout the three images: a radiant white on a dark background. The Mothers’ headscarves, the masks of the protesters in Paris, and the Chilean dictator’s jacket are white.

The three elements merge into that neutral colour, the colour without colour. But they have different functions: on the dictator it is a mark of pristineness but on the Mothers it is the white of innocence. Lastly, the white masks allude to emptiness, serial suppression, and the anonymization of bodies. Only forgetting, which in some way is also white, can merge all these figures into nothingness.

Furthermore, in this scene, everyone is wearing an item on their face or head that identifies them according to their aesthetic-political role in the conflict: the headscarves, the masks, and the military cap. The first two emerged as an element of resistance; the third is an omnipresent symbol in the repressive apparatus. The three elements continue to represent an aesthetic position on the social stage and the Argentine memory scene: *politics and police*. They are part of a system of visual tensions where the masks reveal the dual act in which masking and unmasking are simultaneously involved. The masks of the repressor fall when the people wear white masks.

Board 4.



Fig. 16. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 172. Board 4.

Almost at the end of the volume is the fourth and final scene (fig. 16), with a suggestive triad of images. They are images of the post-dictatorship: photo 1 is a portrait of the trial of the Military Juntas in 1985; photo 2 is a mobilization that identifies the relatives of the disappeared, and in a particular close-up shows children and grandchildren carrying a sign with the inscription “We, the children, do not forget. No more coup leaders”; and photo 3 is part of the renowned artistic photo-montage by Lucila Quieto that inaugurates the series *Arqueología de la ausencia* (analyzed in Chapter 6).

There are two curious aspects to this scene: the first peculiarity is that in a previous edition to the volume, photos 2 and 3 were inverted (photo 2 was located in the centre, below the first two, and the number and placement of photo 3 were different: it was numbered as photo 1 and located on the upper left side); the second peculiarity is that, for the first time, and at the end of the volume, the photo of a disappeared person “appears” in a close-up. It is not the classic documentary photo, but an intervention by Lucila Quieto analyzed in a previous chapter. This photo is also the only one that belongs to the archive of the previous configurations and does not have a place in the body of the volume’s central narrative (I will return to this topic in Passage III). In both editions, the photo of the soldiers “being judged” looks towards the images of resistance in the post-dictatorship.

Passage II: The Fragmented Image

This series differs from the previous one in its composition and distribution. The composition consists of a photograph that refers to the theme of each chapter. The particularity of this selection is that a fragment of the selected photograph appears at the beginning of each chapter, and the complete photograph is reserved for the end of the same chapter: there is a photograph and a fragment of it. It is a duo of images consisting of the same photograph. At the beginning of each chapter, we see the fragmented part. It is a cut-out, a dissected image of the complete photograph that is located on just a few centimetres on the right margin of the full page. This fragment of the image is used as a background on which the number and name of the chapter are printed. The rest of the page is made up of a notable white background on which a brief text is placed that explains the contents of each chapter and that has no particular relationship with the image. The second photo is used as the closing of the chapter and shows the complete image accompanied by a brief text describing it. The fragments or cut-outs function as a preview of the final photo; they do not seem to be random cut-outs but rather reflect the topics considered most relevant by the authors of the volume. One of the virtues of these fragments is that they generate intrigue before the full image is presented. These solitary and arbitrarily dissected parts seem to remain suspended on a threshold of meaning awaiting their completion. This incompleteness at first evokes in a way the *impotence of the unrepresentable*; however, the sequence of impossible questions enters the pedagogical domain with the promise of certainty. The school programme will complete the fragmentary preview, eliminating all ambiguity. It will assign names, ask questions, and formulate the answers to them. However, as has been highlighted before, there is something about the images that remains elusive and leaves a vacant meaning. It is the power of the fragment that, for a period of time, remains available for invention.

Below is the series that consists of 4 pairs of images – fragmented image and full image – corresponding to the four chapters of the volume, respectively.

Fragment 1: The Chapter on “State Terrorism”

Este primer capítulo explica algunos de los aspectos nodales de la última dictadura: cómo se instaló en el poder, cuáles fueron las características del sistema represivo implementado por el terrorismo de Estado, y qué proyecto económico se puso en marcha. También propone un análisis de las cuestiones que otorgan especificidad a la dictadura argentina: el método de desaparición forzada de personas, la existencia de centros clandestinos de detención y el robo de niños.

A su vez, ofrece algunas claves para pensar la funcionalidad del terrorismo de Estado. El impacto de los crímenes cometidos desdibujó –y aún lo hace– la posibilidad de examinar la racionalidad de la violencia. La distancia reflexiva puede contribuir a su análisis: a qué sectores sociales se dirigió la represión, qué consecuencias tuvo para la estructura económica nacional y a qué sectores sociales benefició.

Estas ocho preguntas ofrecen un marco que permite explicar qué fue el terrorismo de Estado en Argentina.



Fig. 17. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 19. Fragment 1a.

Ex centro clandestino de detención «La polaca»

En la frontera ciudad correntina de Paso de los Libres, funcionó un centro clandestino de detención dentro de la estancia «La polaca». Por este CCD habrían pasado cerca de 300 detenidos-desaparecidos, en su mayoría secuestrados en el paso de frontera argentino-brasileño. El predio, conformado por 40 hectáreas, fue elegido como un punto estratégico del Plan Cóndor (ver pregunta N° 16). Dependiente del ejército, fue especialmente utilizado para aniquilar a militantes de la organización político militar Montoneros cuando en 1980 intentaban ingresar al país durante la denominada «contraofensiva Montonera».

Foto: María Alejandra Mumbach

Fig. 18. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 56. Fragment 1b.



Fig. 19. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 57. Fragment 1c.

Fragment 1a (fig. 17) opens the first chapter with the presentation of a cropped image of an outdoor space. The cropped image reveals a striking, colourful background where the vivid colours of nature contrast with the grey of what appears to be an old, dilapidated construction. Further back, in the shadows of the gallery, there is the dark figure of a door, announcing the dark fate of its inhabitants, or prisoners, forced to go through it. The text that accompanies this fragment is not associated with the image but with the (school) contents of the section. Only at the end of the chapter is the complete photo shown and its source revealed (figs. 18 and 19). It is the CDC “La Polaca”. This building housed an operations centre for the annihilation of the Montonero counteroffensive in 1980 at the “Paso de los Libres” border crossing.¹⁴⁹ This photographic selection shows one of the main symbols of the technology of power imposed by state terrorism: the CDCs. As previously mentioned, this selection and that of the entire volume omit the images that refer to the disappeared. When the CONADEP’s *Nunca Más* archive was published in 1984, the omission of the faces of the disappeared was denounced by some dissident sectors of the human rights movements. The only images that the *Nunca Más* archive displayed were those of the CDCs.

¹⁴⁹ From 1979 to 1980 two armed actions were carried out by the Montonera (left-wing Peronist) guerrilla that had gone underground after state repression had killed most of its members.

That historic document only provided lists of names and dates. It contains no photographs of the disappeared. Does the state, every state, fear the spectral gaze of its victims?

Fragment 2: The Chapter on “Dictatorship and Society”



Fig. 20. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 59. Fragment 2a.

Esquina militarizada

17 de septiembre de 1976. Un fotógrafo registró, sin ser visto, una escena de la vida cotidiana en la ciudad de Buenos Aires durante la última dictadura. La posición del anciano con la bolsa de compras en el centro de la fotografía propone lecturas divergentes en el contexto de esa esquina militarizada. ¿Su inmovilidad expresa pánico?, ¿tranquilidad? ¿Se trata de una escena común la de los soldados apostados en las columnas del edificio? La esquina es la del cruce entre la calle Miró y la Av. Rivadavia, a pocas cuadras del centro geográfico de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. La pareja de jóvenes que observa desde el umbral del edificio de Rivadavia muestra, a su vez, otro modo de vivir la experiencia del terrorismo de Estado en Argentina.

Foto: Clarín

Fig. 21. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 102. Fragment 2b.



Fig. 22. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 103. Fragment 2c.

Chapter two is presented with a fragment of an image that I have previously analyzed and which is extremely suggestive. The fragment (fig. 20) focuses on the figure of a soldier with a weapon in his hand in a combat position stationed in an outdoor urban space. It also shows the diagonal section of the building that suggests the photographer's point of view, occupying the upper half of the fragment. The complete image appears at the end of the chapter (fig. 22). An ordinary man from the neighbourhood with a shopping bag triangulates a scene flanked by a group of soldiers in a combat situation in broad daylight and on a random street in the capital city.¹⁵⁰ As we have seen, the image offers at least two readings of the connections between all these characters. First, it can be read as propaganda, showing the harmony between citizens and the army in the face of a common enemy. The second, more subtle reading, showing the loneliness of the resident, the fear of the teenagers on the side, and the piece of windowsill that reveals the precautions taken by the photographer, presents the terrifying nature of this spatial relationship. This is a paradigmatic case of an image that can only reach its definitive legibility after the end of the dictatorship.

¹⁵⁰ This is one of the images analysed by the historian Roberto Pittaluga, author of *Pensar la dictadura*, who dedicates an academic article to the detailed analysis of this photograph. It is also used for the didactic proposal for working with images that is displayed at the end of the chapter in *Pensar la dictadura*.

Fragment 3: The Chapter on “The Dictatorship in the World”

Este tercer capítulo analiza la relación de la Argentina con el mundo durante la última dictadura. Explica qué fue el Plan Cóndor y cómo éste permitió coordinar la represión con otros regímenes del Cono Sur; cuenta qué pasó con los exiliados argentinos, sobre todo con aquellos que impulsaron las campañas de denuncia de los crímenes que se cometían en el país; y examina la política exterior que, entre otras cosas, condujo a la guerra de Malvinas en abril de 1982.

Durante los años del terrorismo de Estado, las denuncias internacionales por las violaciones a los Derechos Humanos fueron provocando un creciente aislamiento internacional de nuestro país y, de a poco, quedó en claro que la articulación de la política exterior de la dictadura estaba basada, exclusivamente, en el plano represivo.

Estas cinco preguntas ayudan a visualizar qué pasó con la dictadura por fuera de las fronteras nacionales y brindan elementos para comprender qué sucedió en la guerra de Malvinas.



Fig. 23. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 105. Fragment 3a.

Festejo infausto

Emilio Eduardo Massera, Jorge Rafael Videla y Orlando Ramón Agosti, los integrantes de la Primera Junta Militar, festejan los goles de la selección nacional de fútbol durante la final con Holanda durante el mundial celebrado en Argentina en 1978. La fotografía fue tomada en 1978 por Higinio González, fotógrafo de Presidencia de la Nación. A pocas cuadras del estadio de River donde se jugaba ese partido funcionaba la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) donde estaban detenidos-desaparecidos cientos de víctimas directas del terrorismo estatal. La victoria de la selección supuso uno de los momentos de mayor hegemonía por parte del gobierno de facto. Durante la celebración en la Plaza de Mayo muchos argentinos ovacionaron al general Videla cuando salió al balcón a saludar.

Foto: AGN

Fig. 24. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 136. Fragment 3b.



Fig. 25. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 137. Fragment 3c.

Chapter 3 deals with Argentina's international relations during the period of state terrorism. The fragment at the beginning of the chapter shows an open hand on the upper margin of the photographic cut-out (fig. 23). It is not the back but the palm of the hand that stands out on an extended arm that fades into the *chiaroscuro* of the photographic shot. Probably the first impression of an open palm reminds us of an imposing gesture or of the well-known "stop" icons. But a certain atmosphere of ambiguity also surrounds this fragment, in which the wide-open hand could refer not to a "stop" but to a greeting, or to the intention by one person to indicate to another their position in a certain spatial location. At the end of the chapter, the full photograph is overwhelming once put into context. It is the hand of dictator Videla celebrating Argentina's victory against the Netherlands in the final of the 1978 soccer World Cup (fig. 25). The text that accompanies the image refers to the championship and the proximity of the stadium to the former ESMA CDC, where some detainees-disappeared who were still alive were able to hear the shouting from the World Cup celebrations. As is well known, the international sports scene served as a distraction from state crimes. A sort of "final solution" was perpetrated during this period, as the fate of the disappeared would be sealed by the "death flights", which were mostly carried out during 1978. The intrigue created by the outstretched hand in the initial fragment is resolved as an unforgettable

gesture. Videla is surrounded by leaders of the dictatorship in suits and ties and with distraught faces, which today seem truly terrifying to us. What victory are they actually celebrating? The two victories are off camera. One is over the rival team and the other, over the abducted bodies. Nobody forgets a World Cup victory. Certainly not in Argentina. But those exultant and sinister faces, *that* celebration and *those* off-camera deaths can never be dissociated. They will constitute a set of elements trapped on a specific date but that will, perhaps, wander infinitely.

Fragment 4: The Chapter on “The Past in the Present”

Este cuarto capítulo indaga en dos cuestiones centrales: ¿Cómo procesan su pasado las sociedades que emergen de un período dictatorial, signado por la muerte y la represión? y ¿cómo impacta en ese proceso la desaparición forzada de personas? Para responder estos interrogantes, este tramo propone un recorrido por las principales acciones llevadas adelante en pos de la justicia y la memoria: los avances y los retrocesos de las leyes; las políticas estatales; las luchas de los organismos de Derechos Humanos; las representaciones culturales del cine, la literatura y la plástica; y las políticas educativas.

Estas acciones se entrelazaron y construyeron la memoria de un proceso signado por una profunda herida, en muchos casos no resuelta y que todavía aguarda justicia.

Estas siete preguntas proponen un reconocimiento de esas diferentes acciones y una reconstrucción de sus trayectorias históricas, para comprender la íntima relación que, desde 1983, existe entre los contextos políticos y las políticas de memoria, verdad y justicia.



Fig. 26. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 139. Fragment 4a.

«Y sin embargo estoy aquí»

El 24 de marzo de 2006, cuando se cumplieron treinta años del último golpe de Estado, un sinnúmero de actos conmemorativos fueron realizados en todo el país. Los medios de comunicación realizaron programas especiales y a partir de ese año el 24 de marzo fue convertido en el feriado como «Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia». Esta fotografía muestra el acto realizado en la ciudad de Rosario con apoyo del municipio, llamado «Y sin embargo estoy aquí».

Foto: Franco Trovato. Archivo del Museo de la Memoria de Rosario.

Fig. 27. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 176. Fragment 4b.



Fig. 28. *Pensar la dictadura*, p. 177. Fragment 4c.

In the last chapter of *Pensar la dictadura*, the photographic fragment corresponds to the complete photograph without major visual challenges. At the top of the fragment there are several tiny, diffuse lights that begin to be distinguished as candles in the visualization of the rest of the fragment (fig. 26). Towards the centre and the bottom, one sees first the body of a woman in focus holding a candle, and then another woman wearing the typical headscarf of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. Towards the bottom of the fragment, the light from the candles becomes clearer. From there, it is not difficult for observers to complete the image. It is actually a mass mobilization held on March 24 (fig. 28). In this particular event, the text of the complete photograph refers to the commemoration of the 30-year anniversary of the coup, in 2006, in the city of Rosario (Santa Fe). This was also the year of the formalization of the “Education and Memory” Programme and the inauguration of memory policies as they were formulated by the Kirchnerist administration. The image is undoubtedly moving, immediately understandable, and even attractive, but we could say that *it does not provoke unease*. It alludes to a form of commemoration characterized by silence, meditation, and mourning. It has a universal and even religious flavour. It is an image that contrasts with the

notable annual marches held every March 24 in the capital and which are not usually characterized by silence, respect and introspection, but by being massive, challenging, noisy and demanding demonstrations held during the daytime. On March 24, the state crime is commemorated while actively showing a collective repudiation of the current state of affairs. March 24 is an intergenerational demonstration where present-day injustices are also denounced. All kinds of artistic and political expressions that refer to the dictatorship, but also to its consequences, are displayed there. It is not exactly a discreet, circumspect, nocturnal funeral march. It usually involves noise, excitement, movement, and a combination of anger and collective joy; anger at the continued injustice, joy from everyone coming together and knowing that they are not alone in their attitude of struggle. March 24 in Argentina constitutes an open image-space where connections with the past have an impact on the present. They are true collective political acts, where the disappeared are named and where their faces are always displayed. These are surrounded by the crowd and raised upward as emblems of a struggle that is still ongoing. The photo selected for this teaching material perhaps represents the desire to consider the event of disappearance almost as a private tragedy and pain, occurring to a specific group of people, a long time ago. However, it is important that the “Education and Memory” Programme selects a photograph that every person, regardless of their ideas, can sympathize with. The effect it produces is closer to compassion than solidarity; closer to the *institutionalization* of memory than to its political and conflictive potential; closer to consensus than to conflict and antagonism. It perhaps represents the government more than it represents the authentic spirit of March 24. Governments can more easily join a funeral ceremony than an unpredictable mobilization.

Passage III: New Obscurities

I have previously referred to the conservative shift in the treatment of images in *Pensar la dictadura*. In the “Education and Memory” Programme materials, the images shown tend to be treated exclusively as documents and even as illustrations (as indicated in the first series). They are at the service of the narrative and of an informative logic. I have also referred to the relationship between this configuration and the first: both use documentary, evidentiary images, generally from the state archive. In this last passage, I will refer to a manifest omission. It could be said that it is a systematic omission. The school selection of memory images excludes ID photos and family album photos from the memory archives of the first configuration.

According to Ana Longoni, the photographs and silhouettes constitute the visual matrix of memory practices in Argentina. They are part of a political invention that is the foundation of a visual regime in the representation of the disappeared.¹⁵¹

But the disappeared is what does not appear in the volume's images, contrary to what occurs in social memory practices. For Natalia Fortuny:

The category of the disappeared represents a triple condition: the absence of a body, the absence of a moment of mourning and the absence of a burial. This triple absence will be the constituent mark of the struggle for memory in our country, which will of course appear in many subsequent artistic productions (*Memorias fotográficas* 13; translated by Marisela Trevin).¹⁵²

The ID photos play a peculiar dual role in the image-space: on the one hand, as a surface for verifying an objectively proven existence in the state's technical civil registry, and on the other hand, as a surface for filing a claim. That is to say, they were incorporated as critical material in the struggles for memory. But their relationship with temporality is even more complex. They are photos on which several layers of time are superimposed. In one sense, ID photos refer to a time that is inevitably in the past – *someone existed, something was there* – and, on the other hand, they are an image that refers to the relationship between identity and power: they bear the signs of social control based on photographic and corporal subjugation for the purpose of surveillance and punishment imposed by the state (Richard, "Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras"). As traces, they are a testimony of truncated lives and dissident biographies. The display of faces was first an act of judicial evidence, but it later became the banner of a struggle. According to Nelly Richard, the faces "have become the densest symbol of this memory crusade carried out by

¹⁵¹ One of the hypotheses put forth by Longoni is "the capacity that these events (the state repression) had to promote a kind of creative dimension of political practice ... to think basically of two large matrices of representation of the figure of the disappeared in these creative policies, in these visual or performative policies within the Human Rights movement ... And, basically, I distinguish these two matrices around the figure of the photographs and the figure of the silhouette. The silhouette is also associated with the practices of hands, of masks ... We will see the differences or tensions around these two privileged forms of representation that have been established as more or less well-known, reiterated, knowable resources, as unequivocal signs within these struggles in Argentina" (Longoni, "Arte y Política").

¹⁵² "La categoría desaparecido representa una triple condición: la falta de un cuerpo, la falta de un momento de duelo y la de una sepultura. Esta falta por triplicado será la marca constitutiva de la lucha por la memoria en nuestro país" (*Memorias fotográficas* 13).

victims to remember and make people remember the past” (“Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras” 166).

The pedagogy of memory is presented as the greatest exponent of the teaching of the recent past. For this purpose, it makes a narrative selection that is also aesthetic. The exclusion of these photos is evidently a political decision (its consequences are also political). Not only is it striking that the photographs of the faces of the disappeared are absent, but so are the family album photos. The absence of these two photographic modes of dealing with recent history – the ID card and the family album – constitutes a reservation, as if the school refused to deal with them. Richard refers to a feared “presence effect” (“Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras” 165). There is a fear of the spectral condition of these faces. Their untimely, disturbing appearance seems to problematize the normalizing tendency of the school logic. Luis Ignacio García wrote that these photographs resist

the perpetual media-commercial-totalitarian threat of a flat language, a linear time, a present image and a closed past. The disappeared did not have a grave. For this reason, they are not only disappeared, but always re-appearing, wandering spectres demanding justice. Therefore, the spectres speak from the past, but about the future, and that is why their anomalous irruption into the present is so disturbing ... To take in this power is to allow oneself to be permeated by spectres, to inscribe the tomb that never was. Between law and justice, the sayable and unsayable, document and fiction, the photographs of the Argentine post-dictatorship are also forms that reflect on the structure of contemporary (militant) subjectivity, and question it from its power as an event. (“Espectros” 145; translated by Marisela Trevin)¹⁵³

The family photos displayed in the public square visually deconstruct national fantasies. According to Richard,

¹⁵³ “la perpetua amenaza mediático-mercantil-totalitaria de un lenguaje plano, de un tiempo lineal, de una imagen presente y de un pasado cerrado. El desaparecido no tuvo tumba. Por eso no es sólo desaparecido sino siempre un re-aparecido, un espectro que vaga clamando por justicia. Por eso el espectro habla desde el pasado, pero acerca del futuro, y por eso es tan inquietante su anómala irrupción en el presente (...) Cobijar esta potencia es dejarse atravesar por los espectros, es inscribir la tumba que no fue. Entre derecho y justicia, entre decible e indecible, entre documento y ficción, las fotografías de la postdictadura argentina son, también, formas que piensan la estructura de la subjetividad (militante) contemporánea, y la interpelan desde su potencia de acontecimiento” (“Espectros” 145).

Publicly displaying these photos torn from albums that show people torn from their families, as the relatives of the disappeared do; diverting these photos from their private ritual to turn them into an active instrument of public protest, also shows that the “national” – a simulated extension of the “family” – is nothing more than a parody of unity made up of injured bodies and truncated identities. (“Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras” 168)¹⁵⁴

The school selection of memory images avoids these inconveniences. It omits foundational, emblematic photos of the struggles for memory. It omits a disruptive and untamable set of elements. It avoids dealing with the emblems of a confrontation with the state and the uncomfortable temporality of the spectral.¹⁵⁵

The images of resistance shed light on a political community, that is to say, one that is in conflict. It is a community established around what is missing, the *constituent hole* (Schmucler, *La memoria*) described in previous chapters. But the school provides its own – institutional – translation of this legacy, and the school photos or the photos incorporated into schooling take another direction. They take a cautious detour around these original photos, without displaying them, thus proving their inexhaustible critical power. Although the school syntax seems to fill everything, tell everything, they are texts that avoid uncertainties, the undecidable. They do not expose the gaps in representation.

The material is based on a linear succession, the pace of which prevents the gaze from stopping. It is a light and fast succession, without intensities. “[T]he flatness erases the volume and the folds of historical temporality”; they are images that are easy to *pass through* (Richard, “Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras” 169).

Without the uncomfortable images, the school neutralizes the question about the present and obliterates the evidence of structural conflicts.

¹⁵⁴ “Exhibir en la calle estas fotos arrancadas del álbum que muestra a sujetos arrancados de sus familias, tal como lo hacen los familiares de los desaparecidos; desviar estas fotos de su ritualidad privada para convertirlas en activo instrumento de protesta pública, permite también comprobar que lo “nacional” -extensión simulada de lo “familiar”- no es sino una parodia de unidad hecha de cuerpos lesionados y de identidades truncadas” (“Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras” 168).

¹⁵⁵ The school lesson, on the other hand, usually only addresses problems that the state can or is in the process of solving. The state acts on behalf of the population and not with the population.

Conclusions

[A] fragile, precious reality: the image.
(Walter Benjamin, "On the Image of Proust"
240)

The Initial Images and the Abrupt Contrasts

In this chapter, I have examined the proposals for transmission of the recent past in the framework of processes of integration of memory into schooling.¹⁵⁶ This means, in its most traditional version, an attachment to the school canon of explanatory modes of presentation, the preponderance of the written text, the preference for the documentary image, and the subordination of images to the text in a sequential narrative thread. However, very shortly before the formalization of the "Education and Memory" Programme, there was a different proposal. In 2006, the *A 30 Años (30 Year Anniversary)* Project was created. Its emergence was part of a group of actions linked to the Ministry of Education (ME) for the commemoration of the 30-year anniversary of the last dictatorship. The ME opted for a "tense collage" and "abrupt contrasts".¹⁵⁷ During this period, this proposal for teaching recent history was spread, giving prominence to images in a very particular way. The book was titled *Treinta ejercicios de memoria (Thirty Memory Exercises)*; hereinafter "the book") and was one of the first educational productions of the Kirchner administration to reach schools. Thirty images were presented as thirty memory exercises. This source is considered a precursor to the "Education and Memory" Programme. Its introduction at the closing of this chapter is intended to place the school use of images in a broader process of continuities and ruptures, on which significant contrasts in the quality of the transmission are registered.

To Look Closer

Below is a selection of the cover and back cover and four images of this book. This selection was made to prioritize the heterogeneous and non-prescriptive nature of its images.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Processes of integration of memory into schooling exclude alternative forms of transmission of the recent past, that is, the image-space produced in the framework of clandestine or unclean memories. They collect elements from documentary sources and reorder them in a proper school archive, which involves a linear temporal sequence, subordination of the image to the text, and an explanatory narrative.

¹⁵⁷ "Our position, as a Project of the Ministry of Education, was to open a territory large enough so that it could contain even abrupt contrasts that, nevertheless, are recognized in the assessment of democratic life and its institutions. This book could be read as a tense collage, which, based on fragments and dissonant perspectives, demands the articulation of its stories in a multiple, multifaceted body" (National Ministry of Education, *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* 10).

¹⁵⁸ Link to the book *Treinta ejercicios de memoria*: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bjJ5VrqheXF-FTp0zZToA3ZkT1k0F_S6/view?usp=sharing.

Cover and Back Cover Images

The first three images illustrate the cover (fig. 29), presentation (fig. 30), and back cover (fig. 31) of the book. These images refer to the cards of the board game “Memotest”. This game consists of pairs of identical cards that are mixed together, face down (so that the images on the cards are not visible). They are then arranged in rows and columns to start the game. Each participant must reveal two cards per turn, attempting to find identical pairs: if they do not match, they must be placed face down again. The player who manages to find the greatest number of identical pairs wins. The challenge of this game is to memorize the images and their location on the rows and columns in order to find the pairs before one’s opponent. The book’s cover illustrates the beginning of the game with the cards facing down. The presentation and back cover show the revealed images. These are based on the iconography of the dictatorship: a police cap, a Falcon 400 car (used by the military to abduct people), the Mothers’ headscarf, the 1978 World Cup mascot, a gun, the former ESMA, the Malvinas Islands, a burned book, etc. It should be noted that some of these images refer to a particular story or image contained in this book. For example, the bicycle and the 1978 World Cup mascot are references to some of the stories included in the book. The playful visual beginning of *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* differs significantly from the solemn and organized character of the volume.



Fig. 29. Cover of the booklet *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* (Thirty Memory Exercises).



Fig. 30. *Treinta ejercicios de memoria*, p. 12.

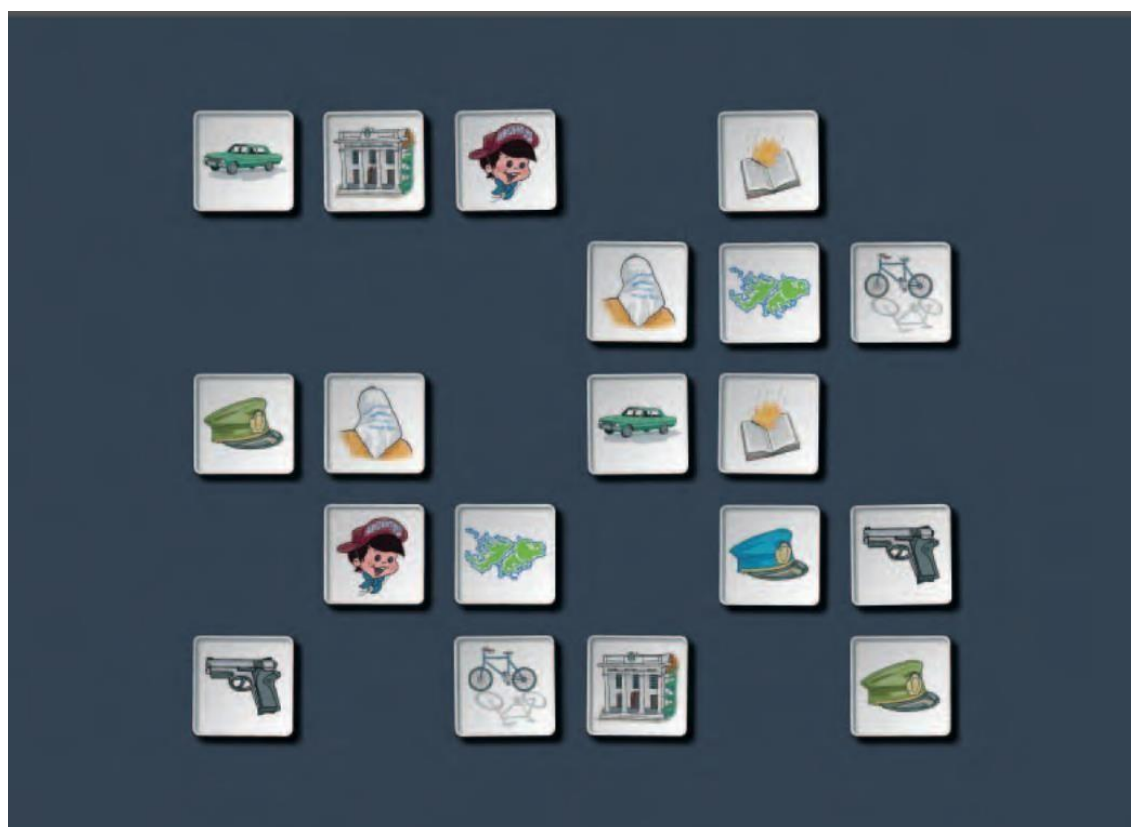


Fig. 31. Back cover of *Treinta ejercicios de memoria*.

Images in the Body of The Text

Ten images with hybrid characteristics (due to the use of different media, their different authors, and their location in the text) are presented in this selection.¹⁵⁹ Some cards with images, with a fragment of the text associated with them, are deliberately reserved for the end of the visual journey. The purpose is to favour a distance from the *images without text* and later contrast these images with the text or a fragment of the text with which they are associated. Unlike in the first series, there is no explicit linear correspondence between image and text. The story is individual (often reminiscent of testimonies) and the narrator is sensitively affected and involved in the content. Finally, considerations are made with regard to these images.

¹⁵⁹ My considerations about these images are presented together, as the objective of this study is not to perform an analysis of *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* in particular, but rather to observe a general contrast with the volume *Pensar la dictadura*.

[30 ejercicios de memoria]



Fig. 32. *Treinta ejercicios de memoria*, p. 30. Image: Carlos Alonso. “Sigo creyendo en el arte” (“I Still Believe in Art”).

Figure No.: 32	Title: “Sigo creyendo en el arte” (“I Still Believe in Art”) (Image 9, p. 31)
Full text: <i>I continue to believe in art and, above all, in its incorruptible, non-sentimental memory that is nonetheless capable of preserving the wounds that reality leaves in us. I do not believe that art can solve any of the world’s problems, especially when ambiguity invades figurative art and banality is consecrated for public use. The States of the world attempt to sterilize us with poverty and terror, but it is with that terrified love that we can create our paintings.</i>	
Author: Carlos Alonso (Mendoza, 1929) is a painter and illustrator. He has presented exhibitions all over the world and made illustrations of classic works such as <i>Don Quixote</i> and <i>The Divine Comedy</i>.	



Fig. 33. *Treinta ejercicios de memoria*, p. 38. Image: Florencia Abatte. “La ética contra la historia” (“Ethics against History”).

Figure No.: 33	Title: “La ética contra la historia” (“Ethics against History”) (Image 13, p. 38)
Fragment: <i>Saying “no” is an essential gesture. But for it to work it must be deep; it must go beyond this point or that point. It cannot simply be a commonsense rejection. Eichmann had great common sense. And he didn’t know how to say “no”. A place in each person’s heart asks others not to do them harm. The cry of pain that evil causes in us is not personal. It emerges from the feeling of contact with injustice through pain. It is a reaction that surpasses ideological debates. Words are always insufficient to describe it. There are those who enjoy hearing that part of the heart that cries out in pain in the face of evil; others are unaware of it. Perhaps those spiritual states complement each other. Those who attack it can provide different justifications. Each person “chooses” with their face pressed against the moment of history that they are dealt, against their own minute. But there is no worse argument than that which relies on the strength of a State. There is a desire to kill. And that unites everyone in the</i>	

history of the failure of social systems. Between the body and the systems is that musicality that is out of tune, like a drunken abyss. And the dead, who no longer have any other love than that which wants us all equal and free from harm, simply look on in pain. There is an ethical demand in those gazes. (Written based on texts by Simone Weil and Pier Paolo Pasolini.)

Author: Florencia Abatte (Buenos Aires, 1976) is a writer, journalist and professor. She teaches at the University of Buenos Aires. She published the novel *El grito* (2004) and the volume of children's stories *Las siete maravillas del mundo* (2006).

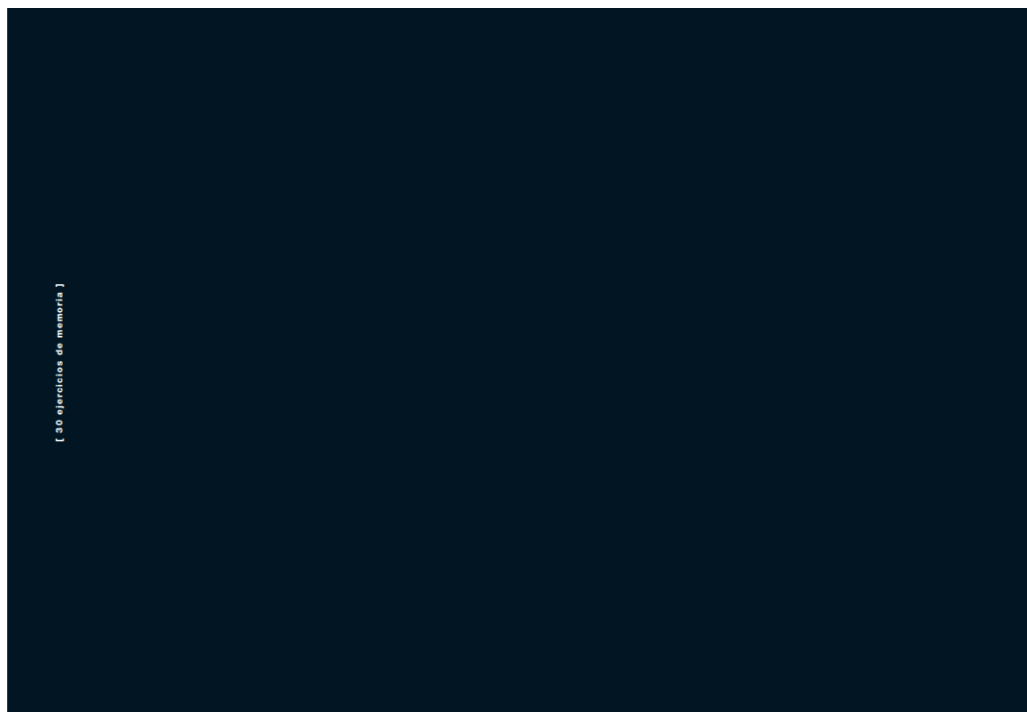


Fig. 34. *Treinta ejercicios de memoria*, p. 40. Albertina Carri. “Una película pasada en sinfín” (“Film on a Loop”).

Figure No.: 34	Title: “Una película pasada en sinfín” (“Film on a Loop”) (Image 14, p. 40)
Fragment: <i>To think of an image that represents the massacre committed by the last Argentine dictatorship is difficult, if not impossible, for me. ... I realize that the disappeared, the dictatorship, the horror, are not the past but are in the present and, as such, they move, they branch out into the fabric of everyday life. The cigarette that I smoke, the letter that I press on to write these words, the dog that watches me with dog eyes, everything around me speaks, screams that infamous time. That is why these lines are presented without an image. She, that image, is inside our bodies, she is in the land we inhabit and she moves like the little dolls in an animation or like the blood of the daughter of disappeared people that runs through my veins. There is no inanimate body, there are stories, memories and moving images, like in a film played on a loop.</i>	
Author: Albertina Carri (Buenos Aires, 1973) is a film director and screenwriter. She created the feature films <i>Los Rubios</i> (2003), <i>Géminis</i> (2005) and <i>La Rabia</i> (not yet released). <i>No quiero volver a casa</i> (2000) was her debut film. Her films were presented in festivals in Buenos Aires, Rotterdam, London, Vienna and Toronto, among others.	



Fig. 35. Treinta ejercicios de memoria, p. 42. Sebastián Hacher. “La carta de Mariana” (“Mariana’s Letter”).

Figure No.: 35	Title: “La carta de Mariana” (“Mariana’s Letter”) (Image 15, p. 42)
Fragment: <i>When the man leaves, we remain silent. Mariana contemplates the texture of her work and caresses it like a sleeping child. She reads some of the sentences written on the strips of paper she taped on the table. I know she doesn’t need to read: she does it out of habit. For years she has been cutting out lines from that letter and gluing them one after the other. She knows by heart each of the twelve pages that her father left her before trying to escape from Argentina. She says it’s a way to start a dialogue. Every word she adds is a little response to the letter. The blank spaces represent the answers she may never find, the silences that cannot be drawn with any colour. Manolo used a similar table, 29 years ago, to write the letter to Mariana. It was the 23rd of March 1977, at the Antigua Perla bar in Once. It was 2 o’clock in the morning when he finished it. “I have gone underground”, he writes. I am a wanted person... I have been wandering around the city all day. They are the words of a cornered man who is trying to save his life. “I have decided to leave. I must reach my destination for the sole purpose of finding myself again”. But he also knows it’s a dangerous journey. “Today we live and die very quickly. I am not sure I will be able to finish this letter”.</i>	
.Author: Sebastián Hacher (Buenos Aires, 1976) is a journalist and photographer. He works from various alternative media outlets, for which he covers news from different Argentine provinces and Bolivia	

Considerations on the Images in the Book

The invitations to collaborate on the production of this book were extended to a broad range of actors and were not limited to experts in history or education. The aim was to include collaborators from many different regions and generations.¹⁶⁰

The production of the book marked an opening to different “memory entrepreneurs”, many linked to communication and art, as well as to political activities.¹⁶¹ The requirements for participation were flexible and participants were asked to submit an image and a text. The exhibition showed a heterogeneous and non-hierarchical variety of objects, works, montages, writings, comics, photographs of the faces and family scenes of the disappeared, photographs of soldiers, etc. The images were not of an instrumental nature in the sense that they completed or complemented written text, nor did they attempt to establish another model of citizenship. None of the written texts was predictable; text and image implied one another but did not correspond to each other.

The images were presented in different formats and sizes and always preceded the written texts. The starting point was the image that was presented followed by the text that started with a title and the name of the author. The text also lacked a predetermined format: the variety of formats ranges from personal stories, poems, reflections on a particular topic, family memories, letters, etc.

This material has a riskier bias in aesthetic-political terms and is less formal than that used in the materials previously analyzed.

¹⁶⁰ The ME formulates it in the following terms: “We asked thirty writers, poets, educators, psychoanalysts, journalists, film-makers, visual artists, photographers and actors to choose a significant image, the one that was most representative of their own experience during those years, whether it was a private or public photo, an art work, a graphic cut-out, an object, or any other image. And based on that image they were asked to write a short text about the reasons for their choice, performing what we call a personal memory exercise. We thus tried to ensure that the exercises gathered here came from different generations and locations in the country, and that they would give us a glimpse of different biographical situations during the years of the dictatorship” (*Treinta Ejercicios de memoria* 9).

¹⁶¹ According to Jelin, “[i]n the field we are concerned with here, that of memories of recent political violence and state terrorism in conflict-ridden political scenarios, what we should find is a struggle among ‘memory entrepreneurs,’ who seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one (their own) interpretation or narrative of the past. We will also find them engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise. Who are they? What do they seek? What motivates them? At different conjunctures and times, the actors on the scene are diverse, as are their interests and strategies. With respect to the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, the human rights movement has been and continues to be a privileged actor in the political enterprise of memory. Its visibility and capacity to mobilize social support have varied across the countries in the region. In Argentina, its presence and actions have been systematic and permanent, while it has been less continuous and somewhat less significant in Chile and Uruguay” (Jelin, *State Repression* 33–34).

What is often concealed behind an overwhelming number – 30,000 disappeared persons – becomes, in several of these exercises, a specific face and a concrete biography. Thus, *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* contributes to challenging the widespread consensus during the years of the democratic transition, a consensus that promoted the idea that our society, fundamentally its young people, had been a passive target of State terrorism, imagined as a foreign body that appeared like a lightning bolt in a serene sky. The recognition of different militant (political, union, student, and even armed) groups is currently an unavoidable aspect of the critical construction of a history of the social fabric that was dismantled at that time. (*Treinta ejercicios de memoria* 10; translated by Marisela Trevin)¹⁶²

There is also another important difference: the reference to the idea of “(memory) exercises”. An exercise involves participatory action and the active commitment of the subjects involved. In the volume *Pensar la dictadura*, on the other hand, the explanatory tone reinforces the passive role of its audience. In *A 30 años*, the tone is inappropriate for the language of the state. Belligerent terms, such as “resistance” or “against the grain of terror” emerge. Although the book was produced as a school resource, its coordinators believe that it is “particularly open to multiple possibilities of interpretation and its objective will be achieved in each school or teacher training institute if it allows an unexpected irruption, if it has unexpected repercussions among students or sparks a new debate among its readers” (*Treinta ejercicios de memoria* 10).¹⁶³

Within the set of available memorial devices, these cultural artefacts are characterized by the breadth of resources that exceed the classic photographic medium. Their specificity is non-specificity, the impossibility of an order or a hierarchical classification. They are devices of experience built around the recent past that refer to the social and personal memories of a common past. The format is predominantly visual and

¹⁶² “Lo que muchas veces se esconde en una cifra abrumadora -30.000 desaparecidos- se vuelve en varios de estos ejercicios un rostro preciso y una biografía concreta. Es de este modo que *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* colabora a desafiar el consenso extendido durante los años de la transición democrática, consenso que resaltaba que nuestra sociedad, fundamentalmente sus jóvenes, había sido blanco pasivo del terrorismo de Estado, imaginado como un cuerpo extraño que se hizo presente como un rayo en cielo sereno. El reconocimiento de distintas militancias (políticas, sindicales, estudiantiles, incluso armadas) es hoy una zona ineludible en la construcción crítica de una historia de la trama social desmantelada en aquella época” (*Treinta ejercicios de memoria* 10).

¹⁶³ “particularmente abierto a múltiples posibilidades de lectura y su objetivo estará por demás cubierto en cada escuela o instituto de formación docente si permite una entrada imprevista, si desata entre los estudiantes alguna resonancia inesperada o algún nuevo debate entre sus lectores” (*Treinta ejercicios de memoria* 10).

multiple (photographs, paintings, objects, frames, comics), and makes an inseparable pair out of the image and the text, which is, nonetheless, neither necessary nor hierarchical.

The different works are not grouped in a specific way. They follow the order of personal experience: participants could submit “anything” and then write about their choice. The narrative in this case is based on images that are not gathered together by virtue of a historical synthesis. Rather, it appeals to a “rude”, barbaric, and perhaps dialectical view. The proposal or “staging” of this set of images is not linear; it proceeds by jumps, through unstable sequences that refer to “very personal” experiences. It fosters unexpected dialogues between images whose relationship with the story disarms any pretension of totality or narrative closure. The grand narrative of history tends to turn events into fate, and the past into an overcome past. The fragmentary images of memory, however, provide the past with an alternative possibility of connection with the present; these images are the ones that are normally left behind in historicist narratives. In them, ethics confronts history and objects are extensions of our nostalgia and our desire.

The past decomposed into images of memory can help us recompose what was discarded, revive the defeated, and reconstruct emancipatory projects towards the future. “To know, one must imagine for oneself” is the well-known phrase with which Didi-Huberman summarizes Hannah Arendt’s thoughts on the connection between politics and imagination (*Images in Spite* viii). Comenius, the author of *The Great Didactic*, thought the same thing when in 1650 he began to conceive his *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (figs. 1 and 36). The original project underwent successive migrations, not only due to the author’s turbulent life of political and religious persecution, but also due to difficulties – of a more practical nature – in finding artist engravers in the region. Finally, the book was first published in Nuremberg in 1658. Comenius aimed to condense the world in images with the aim of facilitating the learning of school-age children.¹⁶⁴ The author not only noted the power of illustration as a driving force of children’s curiosity and a stimulus for learning, but also the possibility of creating an aesthetic experience: “There is nothing in the understanding which

¹⁶⁴ Iohannes Amos Comenius was a theologian, philosopher and pedagogue born in 1592 in what is now the Czech Republic. His fundamental work was *The Great Didactic* (1657), which, together with other writings, constitutes what is currently recognized as the foundation of the comprehensive training of the human being, synthesized in a pedagogical treatise on teaching. His avant-garde thought is associated with ideas of the pansophical ideal of education, the elimination of physical punishment, pleasure as the objective of learning, the teaching of Latin simultaneously with the stimulation of the vernacular language, and a fundamental concern for the method, understood as the technique of knowledge transmission. Comenius is an exponent of the political, religious, and cultural crisis of his time. *Orbis Pictus* is a visual encyclopaedia consisting of one hundred and fifty chapters. This didactic book was used for many years in Europe as an official text for teaching Latin.

was not before in the senses. Therefore, skilfully exercising the senses to conveniently grasp the differences of things is the basis of all wisdom, learned eloquence and prudent action in all things of life” (Comenius 6). Imagination was considered a fundamental mediator of thought. The ethical transformation of daily life was possible through work on representations of the material world. In the observation of the world, the education of perceptions and, more specifically, the education of the gaze, had a privileged place in Comenius’s pedagogical ideology. Preoccupation with images is not new. According to Inés Dussel,

rather, it could be argued that in non-literate societies [imagery’s] influence was even greater than it is today, since they did not have the competition with writing that they have now. What is new are the methods of their production and circulation, their participation in a certain visual regime; or, to put it in more sophisticated terms and using the words of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, what is new is their participation in a new “distribution of the sensible” that has to do with ways of seeing, feeling and saying that are different from the ones we were used to. (“La imagen” 4)¹⁶⁵

The introduction of a pedagogy of memory conceived as a state policy has various consequences upon entry into the school system. For the first time, there is the possibility of systematically and didactically studying the recent past with the assistance of what historical research could offer. This form of organizing knowledge is useful for creating a critical distance from the “toxic” or sensationalistic images that mass media prefer to disseminate. On the other hand, the historicist approach to the material limits the possibilities of the dictatorial past being productively related to the present. The permeability that would allow us to establish parallels with similar events in a previous era is also restricted. By stitching the pedagogy of memory into a government-driven project of democratic citizenship, collective memory is given an exclusionary form that prioritizes the promotion of behavioural norms (tolerance, respect for diversity, human rights) over political analysis. An

¹⁶⁵ “más bien, podría argumentarse que en sociedades no letradas su influencia era aún mayor a la actual, ya que no tenían la competencia con la escritura que tienen ahora. Lo que es nuevo son sus modos de producirse y circular, su participación en un cierto régimen visual; o, para decirlo en términos más sofisticados y usando las palabras del filósofo francés Jacques Rancière, lo que es nuevo es su inscripción en un nuevo “dispositivo de lo sensible” que tiene que ver con maneras de ver, de sentir y de decir distintas a las que estábamos habituados” (“La imagen” 4).

ideal citizenry of caution, prudence, and even obedience is emphasized instead of fostering participatory dispositions. Civic or citizen morality regulates political activity by subjecting it to formal protocols (voting, elections, appropriate and inappropriate places for its exercise). The citizen entrusts the fate of common affairs to their rulers. Let us not forget that the primary objective of the Kirchners' politics was the redirection and deactivation of a popular uprising. Educating to avoid repetition can thus simply become avoiding any repetition, dangerously approaching an attempt to de-politicize society. That is, the sense is created that the source of all evils lies not so much in the disposition to violence of the dominant sectors of the economy and their state agents, but in the insubordination of their social victims. The evil would lie in the passion for an idea, in the readiness to engage politically in an emancipatory project.

Perhaps that is why the "Education and Memory" Programme largely dismisses other images that originated within the movement for memory – a movement that owes its existence precisely to "improper" practices and the invention of unprecedented spaces for political action. The "Education and Memory" Programme differs from the *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* project precisely in its treatment of images. The project involved a dialogue between the school and the proliferation of artistic, personal, and unique images that spontaneously emerged in the space founded by memory practices. In contrast, the "Education and Memory" Programme resorts to the image as an illustration, framed by an explanatory (and somewhat authoritarian) text that turns the image into a documentary extension, not an opportunity for the creation, resignification, and re-politicization of a social reality that continues to be characterized by violations of fundamental rights. The formalization of images in schools excluded political imagination and its creative excesses in memory practices. In a certain way the desire for memory was replaced by the duty of memory. This opens the door to the complementation of this *image deficit* by militant right-wing denialism.

In times of "Googleization", the school preserves Comenius in – among other things – its aspiration to summarize everything, to explain the world. However, the school did not inherit the confidence in the power of images promoted by that pedagogue. State terrorism and its traumatic consequences have generated the need for formal teaching of recent history. Something that is so close to the country's contemporary experience, however, requires images that are freer and fairer than the traditional school image. Faced with codified and chronologically organized knowledge, knowledge that demands obedience and produces saturation, perhaps the reactivation of a new ignorance is needed. I am referring to

an ignorance of the narrative order and epistemic mastery regarding what happened. What is needed, as van Alphen would say, is the reactivation of “a performative mastery of the emotions triggered by happenings” (“Playing the Holocaust” 156).

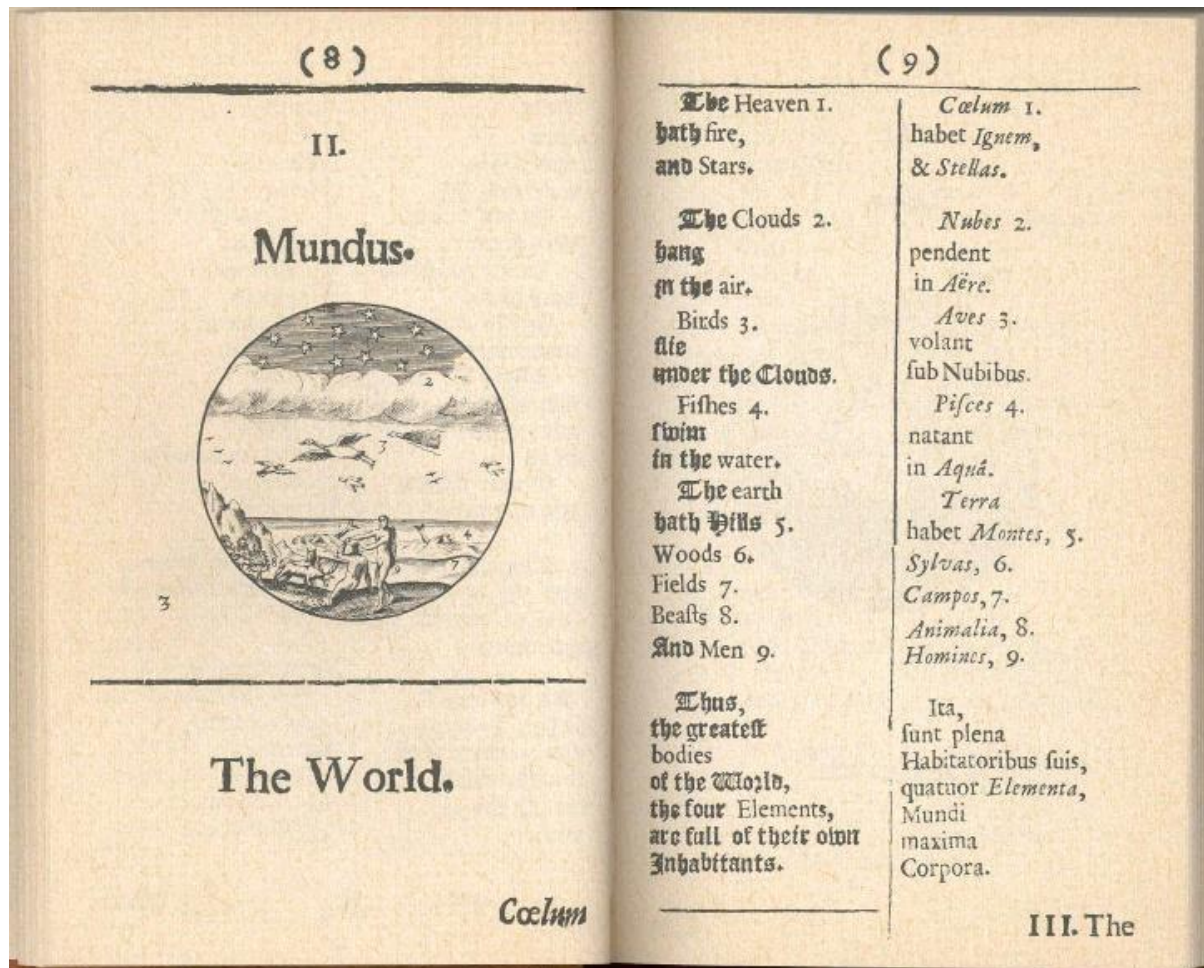


Fig. 36. Iohannes Amos Comenius. *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*. 1658.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The Event and Its Consequences

The emergence of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in 1977 constituted, within the context and timeframe in which it occurred, a profound anomaly. Initially perceived as an inconsequential event, it soon metamorphosed into an act deemed both irrational and a logical contradiction. Their appearance challenged not only the prevailing legality but also the protocols governing the presence and actions of a political entity during that particular period and circumstance. Generally, the Mothers did not belong to an opposing political party or a pre-existing human rights institution. They were not, for the most part, political professionals, but they jointly articulated a series of ideas that changed the way we understand the relationships between ethics and politics.

Their appearance challenged existing legality and, at the same time, political protocols – because if the act or gesture of the Mothers and Grandmothers is political, it is so in a very particular sense. It was not about representation, here. The Mothers do not *represent* the interests of any particular social sector. Nor was it about aspiring to the power of the State even if they pressured it. The act of the Mothers is a *presentation*, direct and subjective, and its meaning can not only be described as a claim: it is an act of justice in itself. Justice for the Mothers is not a government program or a plan. It is an act that demands and does justice beyond any legal or police interpretation of this word.

The dictatorship attempted to thwart the emergence of this strange entity in Argentine society at the time in various ways: by ignoring it, prohibiting it, discrediting it, and repressing it. However, persistence and creativity (resources of the weak), and chance, led to a public square in the city centre becoming the site of an event. In this work, I have conceived by event a situated, unpredictable and singular fact that cannot be understood from the prevailing logic and that therefore cannot be easily absorbed into the current explanatory systems without distorting it. Conceived in this way, an event is something incalculable, occurring very rarely, and its fate is generally to fade away and be forgotten unless a faithful subject sustains it over time.

What often initiates an event is an apparently insignificant act. A well-known example is the perhaps not entirely conscious act of Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955, on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a city bus, defying the customs and regulations of the situation. Her gesture, contradicting the norms, triggered a whole process of struggle against racial segregation in the US, whose

consequences endure to this day. In this sense, an event is how history breaks with nature, and the subject breaks with the structure that initially conditions it. In the Argentina of the seventies, no one had expected, no one could have expected, that a group of middle-aged ladies walking around a monument in a city square would give rise to a process as long and complex as the one that unfolded since then.

The struggle initiated by the Mothers was, in a way, a fight against nonexistence as understood in the philosophical system of Alain Badiou. “Nonexistence concerns a being that appears as ‘nothing’, has no entity; [it exists] in the ontological sense, but not in [a] logical sense” (Gordillo, *Filosofía y política* 537). It exists but is not named; it exists but does not appear in the tally of presences. Jorge Rafael Videla himself, as we have seen, defined the disappeared as beings who “have no entity”. The disappeared were the real (in the Lacanian sense) of the dictatorship, the founding fact that does not appear in the formalization. The Mothers gave volume and voice to this nonexistence. However, the event itself is too fragile; it “is nothing – just a sort of illumination”. It is destined to fade unless someone takes responsibility for what happened, declares it, and works on its consequences (Badiou, *Infinite Thought* 187).

Memory and Politics

The emergence of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo had a series of prolonged consequences, both objective and subjective. Among the former, their decisive contribution to the isolation and downfall of the dictatorial regime, the various trials of coup leaders, and the discovery of remains of disappeared individuals and hundreds of stolen children are noteworthy. Equally important were the subjective consequences. Their relentless activism even led to the partial moral delegitimization not only of the dictatorship but also of the post-dictatorship governments, which were committed to pardoning the oppressors and maintaining a self-complacent narrative about the past.

The political sequence initiated by the Mothers directly led to the emergence of HIJOS and numerous groups that continued and diversified their efforts. Their emphasis on a civilian complicity (in business and ecclesiastical realms) linking the dictatorship to neoliberal policies and the interests of economic elites played a significant role in the 2001 rebellion. Although uncomfortable for the elites, this historical interpretation had to be acknowledged by the Kirchnerist administrations after 2003, becoming part of government discourse and common understanding (Adamovsky, *El cambio* 211).

Even the remarkable concessions by the state regarding human rights during the Kirchnerist era, such as reopening trials against military figures or handing over ESMA to social movements, were closely tied to the moral and political authority of the Mothers. Another factor was the impact of the general uprising in 2001, which shifted the boundaries of what was deemed possible for the Argentine state. However, the Kirchnerist agenda never aimed to definitively end neoliberal transformations that impoverished the majority. Its political role was, rather, to redirect protests and rebuild the legitimacy of the state.

Aligning with the Partido Justicialista, the Kirchnerist movement could not avoid following its conservative drift. Furthermore, Kirchnerism fell victim to the current impotence of any government to alter the course of globalized capitalism. As a result, it became the ideal adversary for the extreme neoliberal right, with its prolonged decline and economic failures exploited by the neoliberal right to discredit the memory movement that the government had incorporated into institutions.

What distinguishes this sequence of struggles is its radical nature, going to the root of issues. Within the political space created by the Mothers, there is a clear intent to politically identify state terrorism. This involved reclaiming the political activism of the victims, preventing what the Italian historian Enzo Traverso has termed the *delegitimization* of collective struggles of the past (“About the complexity”). It also meant resisting the attempts of post-dictatorial governments to turn memory into ritualistic and harmless gestures that facilitate consensus, reconciliation, and smooth business operations. State interests prioritize order and consensus around market economy priorities, while memory practices are acts of justice, inherently ethical and axiomatic, leading to radical experiences.

The television images of December 19 and 20, 2001, with the Mothers protesting against the state of siege and facing police repression, clearly express the role the human rights movement played for decades in defending democratic freedoms against repressive and regressive practices in the post-dictatorship era. The connection of the Mothers and Grandmothers with the state during the Kirchner governments weakened these uncomfortable aspects of memory.

Undoubtedly, in this context, memory practices serve as educational acts. This is not about formal and doctrinal education that attempts to uniformly transmit content decided by the state. Memory practices are actions, gestures, or public acts intended for anyone, forcing casual observers to take a position and think for themselves. Memory practices aim to draw attention to a legacy the state prefers to ignore. If we accept that every educational act is an

act of justice, as disinterested education aims for a just relationship with what is inherited (Romano 161), then education, memory, and justice form a kind of Borromean knot.

The organization HIJOS gave renewed impetus to the aesthetic and political activism of the memory movement. Within this space of images, various initiatives emerged, such as GAC and the Colectivo Situación, which were closely linked in multiple ways to the 2001 popular uprising. In the following years, they actively participated in numerous collective expressions that aimed, alongside a mobilized population, to invent another economy and another country. Another social movement inspired by the struggle of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo was the powerful Argentine feminist movement, whose fights for the legalization of abortion have become legendary.

Cultivating the memory of victims, clarifying the circumstances of their disappearance, and giving artistic and narrative expression to survivors' grief is only half of this unique story. As seen throughout this thesis, the Mothers' movement and its allies generated societal interpretations of the national past that can be extrapolated to other historical moments. Thinking from this broad space of images allows glimpses into a logic of extermination that extends far back in history. It reveals, beyond official histories, a disposition of dominant sectors to defend and expand their sectorial or class privileges through state violence (as seen in the extermination of indigenous peoples in the nineteenth century). It exposes the colonial heritage in its changing articulation with global capitalism.

In the twentieth century, the readiness for the annihilation of political dissent as a political resource prevailed among oligarchic sectors, evident in the Patagonian strikes of the 1930s and the brutal 1955 bombing of the government house and its surroundings. This refutes the so-called "two demons" theory, which treats political violence in the 1970s as a historical accident involving two criminal groups outside the majority of the population. It also directly challenges the denialist version claiming that the Argentine military simply defended the country from a foreign and terroristic attack. The military dictatorship was not an aberration or emergency; it was part of a historical continuity, a foreseeable and calculated initiative of a social order and its economic regime.

Thanks to the memory practices of human rights organizations and their intellectual and aesthetic environment in Argentina, various forms of individual or collective denialism could not impose their agenda of forgetting. This is an exemplary case of how collective memory can stimulate new approaches to historical understanding (Lvovich, "Historia reciente" 115). Violating linear chronology, memory and its present images can establish

novel forms of historical intelligibility, discovering continuities that illuminate seemingly resolved pasts, without falling into teleological or evolutionary orientations.

Memory practices and calls for justice could also point out relevant continuities between the state terrorism regime and the subsequent transition to democracy, i.e., the post-dictatorship period. On March 24, 2001, one of its largest public mobilizations demonstrated how deeply the memory of the dictatorship still influenced civil society's response to human dignity violations.

The current animosity of the new (yet old) Argentine right against memory practices and the collectives supporting them shows how much the neoliberal project, with its "shock therapies" where terror is an economic instrument (Klein 99), needs oblivion. It also demonstrates how the sectors that have always benefited from the militarization of society have not completely depoliticized memory. Moreover, it indicates how much the memory and justice movement had struck a chord essential to the fabric of domination.

The political importance of the image-space founded by the Mothers lies in maintaining a sensitive relationship with the recent past and the inquisitive and political nature of that relationship. Keeping the passage to the past open had significant consequences, including the feat of slowing down and hindering the pace of neoliberal modernity in Argentina for decades. In this line of thought, we could assert that in Argentina, politics – albeit politics without a specific party affiliation, detached from the representation of interests and state power – became a form of engagement linked to ethics (Badiou, "Filosofía, ética y política") and to recollection. It served as an extension of memory through alternative means.

The Media Image and the Dialectical Image

I have identified at least three socially constructed aesthetic configurations within the framework of the memory of state terrorism. The first and foundational configuration is the documentary counter-archive of the Mothers, where, among other things, material evidence becomes a political symbol. The second is the aesthetic-political activism of HIJOS and its followers, and the third is a normalizing configuration subjected to the school archive. The first configuration establishes the critical foundations that underlie a unique space of images. The second directly inherits from the first and forms a kind of aesthetic-political circuit that combines militant activism with a deep exploration of fragments from the past converging in the present. It is within this constellation that the recovery of montage as a critical strategy emerges. Montage seeks to break down or dismantle an image or thing and reassemble its

fragments or pieces in such a way as to generate illumination or discovery. The procedure aims for critical distance as surprise and estrangement, concepts linked to Bertolt Brecht's theatre, surrealism, and avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. Famous examples of these techniques include Brecht's construction of his *Kriegsfibel* (1955) with texts and photographs, and Hanna Höch's photomontages from the 1920s. However, in Argentina, historical precedents can be traced back to the montages of Grete Stern in the 1950s and even to some works by muralist Antonio Berni. Memory practices employed a variety of artistic resources to account for the subjective fractures produced by state terrorism in at least three generations.

One of these resources was photomontage, which has been studied by Gabriele Bettini and Lucila Quieto. Given the way in which memory images relate the past to present circumstances and the political dimension that remembrance acquires, I associated these practices with Walter Benjamin's ideas regarding the elusive concepts of the image-space and dialectical image. The image-space is not an archive; it can violate or suggest archives but its elements are not objectifiable. The flow of images here produces unforeseen effects, and can define contours and freedoms; it can even provide materials to other areas that do depend on a specific organization, such as legal and educational spaces, and yet, it can escape their classification schemes. It is a space that can torment images until it extracts other meanings because the image is always linked to a function of alterity.

However, memory images also form part of what José Jiménez has described as a kind of global continuum of representation, that is, they are part of the infinite media amalgam in which we live. Artistic images no longer differ from advertising products, essentially commodities of the media flow, not in the level of skill distinguishing their creators or the techniques of their elaboration but because, by singularizing, they interrupt it. More than a "doing", the artist of memory subjects images to a process of differentiation, cutting, and identification in terms of singularity. This means that the memory images, as crafted by HIJOS artists and their allies, are in general pre-existing images (like Marcel Duchamp's readymades) but subjected to an artistic and political process of reconfiguration. This process involves decontextualizing, selecting, and rearticulating fragments with a truth-seeking purpose.

In the image-space, materials from family albums, judicial archives, and culture or information are liberated from the meaningful networks that kept them bound to pragmatic purposes and causal logics. Once disconnected from a linear narrative, these materials are recovered in a new network of associations linking them to the present as potential dialectical

images. Many of the works exhibited in memory museums today are the result of artistic collectives and originated in street actions directly related to protesters or passersby. Emblematic cases include the urban art of the GAC (Street Art Groups) and their moral and political mappings of the city (such as those designed for neighbourhoods inhabited by perpetrators of crimes against humanity; figs. 1 and 2). Persuasion in the art of memory does not consist of offering a finished illusion of reality but of schemata and patterns for action and thought. The proposal is conceived more as a virtual surface where the flaws of the image precisely emerge. Where the flaw is shown, the possibility of critical knowledge exists.

This explosion of creativity converged in the great uprising of 2001. In those days, there was massive disobedience to the political class, and a halt to the imperative temporality of capital occurred. Then, the spectral images of the past returned, summoned by a present “in a moment of danger”, to paraphrase what Walter Benjamin wrote in his “On the Concept of History” (391). A variety of artistic collectives linked to the struggle against impunity and forgetting helped forge an art of revolt. In this massive laboratory for a new coexistence, artists of the second configuration kept the past open and rearticulated it with the present, organizing its images into new configurations of meaning.

The media continuum subjected to the imperative of the commodity subjects reality to appearance, repetition, and banalization. The memory images generated within the image-space founded by the Mothers’ activism complicate our relationship with the past and the present; they are disruptive images, invitations to think or reflective thinking. Therefore, they are also political.

In the third configuration, I speak of images organized according to a school regimen with primarily informative value. The history of a recent past, such as the one at hand, had not been systematically addressed in Argentine schools before. The reason for this was naturally the fear of reopening wounds and contradictions, that is, the absence of consensus on the past. The materials for the school treatment of the dictatorial period were scarce, and many students and their parents opposed schools teaching about such a recent period. It was argued then that the subject did not meet the condition of temporal distance that would have guaranteed the neutrality of the investigation. Neutrality was expected from both history and the school. But neutrality in this context is a positivist nineteenth-century myth.

After 2003, the Kirchnerist governments brought about a change in this situation, relying on new historians who began working on the recent past based on both archival documentation and oral testimonies. This resulted in the most comprehensive and bold educational programs about the recent past. However, I observe an essential difference

between the visual materials of the first version of this effort and the second. In the first version, with the book *Treinta ejercicios de memoria* (*Thirty Memory Exercises*; 2006), I still see a fruitful porosity between artistic or personal images of memory and explanatory texts. In the second version, with the volume *Pensar la dictadura: terrorismo de Estado en Argentina* (*Reflections on the Dictatorship: State Terrorism in Argentina*), I observe that the images have regained a certain tranquillity. By connecting this educational effort to a project of democratic citizenship and aligning itself with a long tradition of school citizenship construction, the volume *Pensar la dictadura* becomes more cautious. It returns to an informative narrative and a functional treatment of images.

In this phase, the images are framed in a chronological and linear narrative around an explanatory text, organized according to a traditional and somewhat authoritarian pedagogical device in the sense that it designates what to see and how to understand it. The sensitive creations from the image space linked to memory practices are excluded. Moreover, the volume *Pensar la dictadura* is incapable of establishing bridges with other pasts and, above all, with the present. It provides valuable encyclopaedic knowledge but excludes other forms of historical intelligibility that would put those facts in a conflictive tension with the present. The transmission of the recent past began with memory practices linked to the struggle against the dictatorship and its legacies. Every memory practice in the space of images founded by the mothers was fundamentally an educational act. This (collective, subversive) act took place outside state institutions and was characterized by horizontality in the exchange of experiences and memories. An educational act, like any act of justice, both understood as an egalitarian interruption of the hierarchical police order, has as its fundamental problem its duration, its sustainability (Gago and Sztulwark). The school organization of transmission was an attempt to give continuity and institutional form to critical memory, but this involved a return to authoritarian and traditional educational structures. The school configuration of the images cannot be understood without taking into account the political decline of Kirchnerism, which has become a tool for social containment and normalization.

The Right-Wing Life

Time has been revealing not only the political power of memory's images but also its fragility. The virtual disappearance of a general egalitarian hypothesis in the realm of ideas and political praxis since the 1980s has left us with a world that is univocal and unilateral. It should be defined as the era of almost absolute dominance of private property and the free

market. If we extend the logical consequences of this dominance over time, humans would have two possible destinies: one characterized by helplessness and destitution, and the other characterized by consumption and possession; some will be losers, and very few will be winners. According to Alain Badiou, this is “the general law of the contemporary world” (*Trump*).

No government, no formal democratic management, can escape this law. Who governs is increasingly irrelevant. That’s why electoral and parliamentary politics has lost all genuine interest and has regressed into a spectacle. That’s why democracy has become an obstacle or an annoying residue for the interests of global capitalism. In the midst of this virulent return of old oligarchic forms of economic domination over the majority, we now witness the emergence of a new class of activists and images that encourage gangster practices in the media or digital social media. It is important to be able to distinguish these images from those that emerged from memory practices. They promote an effective pedagogy with a misogynistic and racist character. They orthopedically impose, through repetition and saturation, reactionary meanings on words that were once associated with the emancipatory impulse (such as freedom, libertarian, justice, politics, equity, or equality). They seize grammars of social resistance to construct a simulacrum of rebellion (Stefanoni). There is no invention and much less creation in this dark circuit – just forgery and manipulation.

In 2015, an unsettling essay on the aesthetics of the post-dictatorship appeared in Buenos Aires. Silvia Schwarzböck wrote in *Los espantos* that the defeat of revolutionary movements in the 1970s had been definitive. The fall of the dictatorship was actually a victory disguised as defeat. According to the author, since then, it is only possible to live “a right-wing life” (23). The victory of Javier Milei in the 2023 elections, the forces and images he mobilized in his support, suddenly reminded us of the magnitude of that defeat. Although the dictators have been judged, although their methods and atrocities have been exposed, none of this can hide the fact that a new era began with them. Today, hope for a more just coexistence seems to have evaporated. The ideas that legitimize inequality and social injustice seem to impose themselves relatively easily and with little resistance. At the root of all this cultural change, there is an increasingly atomized life and a communicational technology that favours isolation.

With the electoral campaigns of 2015 and 2023 in Argentina, narratives associated with the dictatorship were recycled. These old ideas are transmitted on new media platforms. A dark pedagogy has been thriving for decades on social networks, fuelled by a diverse set of powerful foundations (such as Atlas Network) and think tanks scattered throughout the

Atlantic world (Fischer and Plehwe). It is a discourse that combines intellectual propaganda in favour of the free market with unprecedented discursive violence against critical thinking and emancipatory policies. It could be said that advertising techniques based on pure immediacy, consumption, and immediate satisfaction are involved in a strategy of psychic redesign (Valencia and Sepúlveda 76). Many of these media images that populate our devices do not need coherence or discursive consistency: they work on a pre-reflective layer of consciousness that generates emotional dispositions as violent as they are paralyzing. They are characterized by their aggressiveness, repetition, and simplification. They replace the density of paradox with mere falsification, reflection or estrangement with hypnosis. And it is the life of the right, from which none of us can escape, that does not need to create new forms of life. It only produces simulacra, forms of aestheticizing and making fascinating a series of regular and accomplished facts, even if these facts are sometimes atrocious. President Javier Milei was lifted up by these types of images. Media and political right-wing images have always fed on the entertainment industry, but the fascination that Milei exerted on his electorate is intimately related to the new digital obscurantism.

“There is no such thing as society”, Margaret Thatcher said on one occasion, “there are individual men and women and there are families”. The individual that characterizes our time is generally deprived of collective structures of relationship other than those of the market. Every interaction with others is mediated by technical devices of a mercantile nature. The market regulates and economically exploits even the most personal aspects of individuals’ lives. Every interaction with the world is therefore an interaction with the market. Mercantile forms of social relations work on appetite and primary emotions, not on reasons or feelings. They offer an anaesthetic and addictive distraction where conventional politics must obey the law of the spectacle. At the centre of these compulsive images, and as the recipient of these preachings, there is a solitary and often paranoid individual, captured in a logic of war. For this subjective figure, society is an obstacle, and democracy a tedious system of absurd rules.

Much of the folklore disseminated by these new media powers is inherited from old fascism and encourages in young people “two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude” (Sontag, *Under the Sign* 91), which is an aesthetic of consumer and soldier. For this diffuse discourse that does not shy away from incoherence, there is no other legitimate life project, no other epic, than that of a business life dedicated to the accumulation of money, and no other passions than those of consumption or war. In an era of shrinking the world and progressive “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey), the promise of individual happiness

is increasingly unsustainable. In this context, economic power needs resilient subjectivities or militaristic models of subjectivity.

Digital media (series, memes, videos, influencers) successfully disseminate scientific or political delusions. They massively promote regressive sensibilities, absurd conspiracy theories, and a brutal humour that preys on vulnerable social groups. Social networks are not only this, of course, but their rhythms and devices have facilitated the massive cultivation of fascist affections and languages (Sánchez Cedillo 197). One would say that it is a programmed disorientation. From their personal devices, anonymous autocrats spread unabashed aggression towards imaginary or difficult-to-define enemies, but preferably embodied in migrants, feminists, the poor, dissident sexualities, and “communists”. And in Argentina, obviously, they attack the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

The manifest fascination with the military and the businessman probably lies in the not-so-strange alliance between the extreme right and liberalism, as notable in Pinochet’s dictatorship and Javier Milei’s government. As a recent Argentine historian has said, “[i]t’s not that liberalism and reactionary right become indistinguishable: it’s that their difference ceases to be too relevant” (Adamovsky, *Del antiperonismo* 132). The inegalitarian passion of neoliberalism and its marketing aesthetics imply a visual regime based on overexposure and absolute representation where appearance constitutes essence (Schwarzböck 24). If critical memory relied on montage, collage, and street intervention techniques, forgetting spreads through cosmetic (and analgesic) representations of advertising, where the world appears designed, smooth, and seamless, while social networks simultaneously cultivate a mood close to paranoia.

Franco Berardi distinguishes between two types of significant relationships with things: some are conjunctive, and others are connective. I think that images of critical memory would be, in Berardi’s language, “conjunctive images” because the connections they offer are semantic. In these cases, “[t]he production of meaning is the effect of singularization of a series of signs (traces, memories, images, words...) ... The exchange of meaning is based on sympathy, the sharing of a *pathos*” (18). The conjunctive exchange can even give rise to a previously non-existent meaning. “Conjunction, therefore, can be viewed as a way of becoming other” (18). The media image, on the other hand, develops, in my view, according to a “connective” logic that is always syntactic: “The interpreter must recognize a sequence and be able to carry out the operation foreseen by the ‘general syntax’ (or operating system); there can be no margins for ambiguity in the exchange of messages, nor can the intention be

manifest through nuances” (20). According to Berardi, we are undergoing a connective mutation related to new communication techniques.

This means that the space of images that shaped memory practices is part of a mental activity linked to will and intentionality, that is, human agency and political action capable of transforming the environment and changing a life situation. The media image and its connective and syntactic logic, on the other hand, have a “swarm effect” on human behaviour where techno-linguistic interfaces serialize conduct and subjugate imagination (Berardi 24).

The right-wing life assumes a society entirely dedicated to economic valuation, without social or local marks and without a determined historical past. Its current drift seems to be shaping a dystopian, atomized, and surveilled society. The goal seems to be an autistic world where capital flows over a uniform surface, without affective or political obstacles, without frictions and without memory.

Remembrance practices in Argentina have been powerful enclaves of resistance to this progressive dehumanization of the world. We have in the image-space founded by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo an indispensable legacy for the future. But this cannot replace the lack of a general strategic orientation that restores our hope in a more just society. There is no doubt that the new despotic and denialist administration that took office in Argentina in 2024 has unleashed a fierce offensive against the last defensive structures remaining for the propertyless, workers, and women. Nor can it be doubted that the human rights movement will again act in intimate alliance with social movements. But it will not be enough. We need to start over. We need new images. The challenge of building a free and egalitarian society today requires a multiple and sustained effort for the reconstitution of social resistance bonds. Our time needs the subversive potential of art, of images that remind us of the cancelled futures of the past and reconstruct something like a collective experience from which a new emancipatory fiction can be formulated: a renewal of hope.



Fig. 1. *Pensamientos, prácticas y acciones del GAC (GAC Thoughts, Practices, and Actions)*, p. 170–171. The image corresponds to March 24, 2005. Speech balloons were pasted on the advertising posters along the route of the march on March 24, 2005. These carried the questions: do you know that Carmen, Marcela and Margarita are imprisoned? In Ezeiza, for asking for work? Do you know that there are political prisoners today? What happened to the political prisoners? Do you know that Elsa, Marcela and Selva are imprisoned in Caleta Olivia for asking for work?



MAPA "AQUÍ VIVE UN GENOCIDA". ESCRACHE A JORGE HCTOR VIDAL, BARRIO DE FLORES. 27 DE DICIEMBRE DE 2003.

AQUÍ VIVEN GENOCIDAS. 24 DE MARZO. En el recorrido de la marcha del 24 de marzo, se pegan los afiches que contiene las direcciones de los genocidas escuchados. El afiche se volvió a realizar para la misma fecha en los años, 2002/03/04/06. En cada caso se transformaba el diseño y se agregaban las direcciones de los nuevos escuchados. El de esta imagen pertenece a la versión 2004.

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Fig. 2. *Pensamientos, prácticas y acciones del GAC (GAC Thoughts, Practices, and Actions)*, p. 50–51. Left image: MAP “A GENOCIDER LIVES HERE”. “Escrache to Jorge Héctor Vidal, Barrio de Flores. December 27, 2003.” Right image: “GENOCIDES LIVE HERE. MARCH 24TH”. Along the route of the march on March 24, posters containing the addresses of the genocidal perpetrators are posted. The poster was made again for the same date in the years 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2006. In each case, the design was transformed and the directions of the new scratches were added. The one in this image belongs to the 2004 version.

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SUMMARY

This dissertation addresses various visual products that have characterized political and artistic practices related to the memory of the dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). These practices create a visual matrix that paradoxically evokes the forced *disappearance* of political prisoners. Building upon these images, this dissertation explores the circumstances and challenges of conveying the past in contemporary Argentina and the formation of a collective memory about the recent past.

The sequences of images that have received public attention or evoked both political and aesthetic resonances can, in my opinion, be organized into three groups or configurations: a first configuration of images is centered on the identity photograph of the disappeared person, originally intended for documentary purposes. The identity photographs are included in files that family members present to official, legal, or human rights organizations to document the disappearance of a family member and to reveal the face and identity of missing sons or daughters. These are the famous images used by the Mothers and Grandmothers in public places, during the first years of the dictatorship. These images underwent changes, both material and subjective. The old reproduction techniques applied to analog photography, the procedure of enlarging the photograph, the multitude of inscription surfaces used, and of course the passage of time, left their mark on the material.

On the other hand, from a purely identity document, the face of the disappeared person transforms into an emblem of the systematic disappearance of people orchestrated by the state. In this context, where certainty about the death of the missing person slowly grew, people began to carry the images as flags in demonstrations against the dictatorship. Many faces were also placed together on a surface of fabric, to represent the massive dimension of the extermination. The image of the disappeared person evolved from an identity document and personal relic to a collective symbol that questioned history and society as a whole.

The first images handled by the Mothers are the origin of several things: firstly, the documentary archive of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, which I consider an *archive in rebellion* against state archives. Secondly, the birth of an *image space* characterized by particular memory practices. These practices are not only the expression of a need for mourning and commemoration but developed in close relation to social struggle, to an instance of political challenge directed against the state.

The second set of images that generates memories of the dictatorship coincides with the coming of age of the children of political disappearances. A significant number of these young people have founded activist and cultural organizations such as H.I.J.O.S., and in one way or

another, along with other young people who were not necessarily directly affected by the drama of the disappearances, they formed something resembling a second generation of memorial activists in their struggle for truth and justice. This second generation renewed and radicalized the heritage of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo movement. Many of them carried out unique artistic creations based on images from the archive of the Mothers and Grandmothers or from their own family album. In the hands of *the Children*, the images seem to deviate even further from their referential and documentary function, giving more space to the problematic chronology that the photographic print entails and to the promiscuous and anachronistic character that, according to Didi-Huberman, is inherent to images.

In this way, the artists of H.I.J.O.S. condensed the relationship between image, memory, and politics. More than testimonies of an experience, their works form unique aesthetic constellations, where the process of montage, composition, recycling, and re-composition of inherited visual material seems to point to a profound reconfiguration of the usual forms of memory transmission. These are works that revolve around the "constituent void" that the disappearance of their parents or close family members brought, the bewilderment of identity, the affective dimension of all this, but also presupposed the search for a political meaning of the experience.

The third configuration of images that this dissertation explores is that which appears in the most recent manuals of the *Education and Memory Program* developed by the Argentine Ministry of Education during the Kirchner governments (2003-2015). In this educational, school context, inherent to the transition from social memory to cultural heritage and the stabilization of signs, the images appear in a pacified form, in a marked return to their illustrative, informative, and referential functionality. This shift coincides with the political decline of the Kirchners as an alternative to neoliberal modernization.

In these series of configurations of images arising from the political event of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, I have seen a particular space or realm, both aesthetic and political. I have associated this space, which consists of creation and resistance, with Walter Benjamin's elusive concept of *Bildraum* as outlined in his famous essay on surrealism. I see in this image space not only the expression of a specific form of mourning and transmission of the past, but also an alternative way to decode history that has epistemological and political consequences.

SAMENVATTING

Dit werk behandelt verschillende visuele producten die herinneringspraktijken met betrekking tot de dictatuur in Argentinië (1976-1983) kenmerken. Deze praktijken creëren een visuele matrix die paradoxaal genoeg de gedwongen verdwijning van politieke gevangenen oproept. Voortbouwend op deze beelden, dit werk onderzoekt de omstandigheden en problemen van het overbrengen van het verleden in hedendaags Argentinië en de vorming van een collectieve herinnering van het recente verleden.

De sequenties van beelden die publieke weerklank hebben gekregen of zowel politieke als esthetische resonanties hebben opgeroepen, kunnen naar mijn mening worden georganiseerd in drie groepen of configuraties: een eerste configuratie van beelden draaide om de identiteitsfoto van de verdwenen persoon, oorspronkelijk bedoeld voor documentaire doeleinden. De identiteitsfoto's zijn bijgevoegd in dossiers die familieleden presenteren bij officiële, juridische of mensenrechteninstanties om de verdwijning van een familielid te documenteren en om het gezicht en de identiteit van het slachtoffer (meestal zoons of dochters) te onthullen. Dit zijn de beroemde beelden die door de moeders en grootmoeders op openbare plaatsen werden gebruikt. Deze beelden ondergingen veranderingen, zowel materieel als subjectief. De oude reproductietechnieken toegepast op analoge fotografie, vergrotingen, de veelheid aan inscriptieoppervlakken die werden gebruikt, en natuurlijk het verstrijken van de tijd, lieten hun sporen na.

Aan de andere kant, vanuit een louter identiteitsdocument, transformeert het gezicht van de verdwenen persoon zich tot een embleem van de systematische verdwijning van mensen georkestreerd door de staat. In deze context, waarin de zekerheid over de dood van de vermiste persoon langzaam groeide, mensen begonnen de beelden te dragen als vlaggen in demonstraties tegen de dictatuur. Veel gezichten werden ook samen geplaatst op een oppervlak van stof, waarbij de massieve dimensie van de uitroeiing werd ingebeeld. Het beeld van de verdwenen persoon evolueerde van een identiteitsdocument en persoonlijk relik naareen collectief symbool dat de geschiedenis en de samenleving als geheel ter discussie stelde.

De eerste beelden die door de Moeders worden gehanteerd, zijn de oorsprong van verschillende dingen: in eerste instantie het documentaire archief van de Moeders en Grootmoeders van Plaza de Mayo, dat ik beschouw als een *archief in opstand* tegen de staatsarchieven. Ten tweede, de geboorte van een *beeldruimte* die gekenmerkt is door bijzondere herinneringspraktijken. Deze praktijken zijn niet alleen de uitdrukking van een behoefte aan rouw en herdenking, maar ontwikkelden zich in nauwe relatie tot sociale strijd, tot een instantie van politieke uitdaging gericht tegen de staat.

De tweede reeks beelden die de herinnering aan de dictatuur genereert, valt samen met het volwassen worden van de kinderen van politieke verdwijningen. Een aanzienlijk aantal van deze jongeren heeft activistische en culturele organisaties gesticht zoals H.I.J.O.S., en op een of andere manier, samen met andere jongeren die niet noodzakelijk direct getroffen waren door het drama van de verdwijningen, vormden ze iets wat lijkt op een tweede generatie van herdenkingsactivisten in hun strijd voor waarheid en gerechtigheid. Deze tweede generatie vernieuwde en radicaliseerde het erfgoed van de beweging van de Moeders en Grootmoeders van Plaza de Mayo. Velen van hen voerden unieke artistieke creaties uit op basis van beelden uit het archief van de Moeders en Grootmoeders of uit hun eigen familiealbum. In de handen van *de Kinderen* lijken de beelden nog verder af te wijken van hun referentiële en documentaire functie, waarbij meer ruimte wordt gegeven aan de problematische chronologie dat de fotografische afdruk met zich meebrengt en aan het promiscue en anachronistische karakter dat, volgens Didi-Huberman, inherent is aan beelden.

Op deze manier verdichtten de kunstenaars van H.I.J.O.S de relatie tussen beeld, herinnering en politiek. Meer dan getuigenissen van een ervaring vormen hun werken unieke esthetische constellaties, waarbij het procédé van montage, compositie, recyclage en hercompositie van overgeleverd visueel materiaal lijkt te wijzen op een diepgaande herconfiguratie van de gebruikelijke vormen van herinneringsoverdracht. Het zijn werken die draaien om de "constituerende leegte" die de verdwijning van hun ouders of naaste familieleden met zich meebracht, de verbijstering van identiteit, de affectieve dimensie van dit alles, maar ook de zoektocht naar een politieke betekenis van de ervaring veronderstelden.

De derde configuratie van beelden die dit proefschrift inneemt, is die welke verschijnt in de meest recente handleidingen van het Educatie- en Herinneringsprogramma ontwikkeld door het Argentijnse Ministerie van Onderwijs tijdens de regeringen van de Kirchners (2003- 2015). In deze educatieve, schoolse context, inherent aan de overgang van sociaal herinnering naar cultureel erfgoed en de stabilisatie van tekens, verschijnen de beelden in een gepacificeerd vorm, in een nadrukkelijke terugkeer naar hun illustratieve, informatieve en referentiële functionaliteit. Deze verschuiving valt samen met de politieke neergang van de Kirchners als alternatief voor neoliberale modernisering.

Ik heb in deze reeks configuraties van beelden die voortvloeien uit het politieke evenement van de Moeders en Grootmoeders van Plaza de Mayo een bijzondere ruimte gezien, zowel esthetisch als politiek. Ik heb deze ruimte, die bestaat uit creatie en verzet, in verband gebracht met Walter Benjamins laatste concept van *Bildraum* zoals uiteengezet in zijn beroemde essay over het

surrealisme. Ik zie in deze beeldruimte niet alleen de uitdrukking van een specifieke vorm van rouwen en overdracht van het verleden, maar ook een alternatieve manier om geschiedenis te decoderen die epistemologische en politieke gevolgen heeft.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Ana Paula Saab was born on November 28, 1971 in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. She completed her pre-university studies at the National College No. 13 Tomas Espora during the period 1985-1989. She holds a degree in Education Sciences and is currently actively participating as a member in two research projects: "Political-Pedagogical Projects and Educational Practices of Liberal-Conservative Groups in Contemporary Argentina" and "Pedagogy of Memory in Argentine Education: The Education and Memory Program (2005- 2015)," both based in the Department of Education at the National University of Luján (UNLu), Buenos Aires, Argentina. Additionally, she serves as a lecturer in the Theories of Education II courses within the Bachelor of Educational Sciences Program. Presently, she benefits from a research scholarship in the Higher Training Category, administered by the General Directorate of Science and Technology at the National University of Luján on behalf of the Department of Education. She has actively participated in numerous national and international academic events and has authored several articles spanning recent history, pedagogy of memory, and the history of education.

PROPOSITIONS

1. In the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, on a Thursday in 1977, economic power began to lose its control over collective memory.
2. Memory practices in Argentina involve a *space of images* where three aesthetic configurations coexist, gravitating around three different signifiers: the document, art, and the school.
3. History seeks to make the past intelligible, while memory seeks to problematize and politicize it. The memory of the defeated opens the political dimension to history.
4. The aim of transmitting the past to future generations is not to prevent the past from repeating itself, but to deconstruct the 'glamour' of the present.
5. The difficulties in transmitting the past are not related so much to ideas but to the present political and existential conditions of perception. In the space of the image, history is decomposed: the memory image is a knowledge mediated by affect.
6. Just as the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo interrupted the continuous discourse of the dictatorship, the most radical images that emerged from memory practices in Argentina evade the global network of automatism fueled by media images and the algorithmic law, restoring to us the singularity of human experience.
7. Where the professional historian discovers a meaning of the past, the survivor finds the nightmare of meaning.
8. The flame of the past goes out in school textbooks and official National Histories. That is why the artist of memory is a virtuoso of ashes.
9. For the financial elites of Latin America, cruelty was a pedagogical resource and state violence a program to lower inflation.
10. Parliamentary democracy is the reluctant homage that economic power pays to the equality of human beings.
11. Writing an academic dissertation is like traveling on the legs of a spider.
12. Courage is a women's legacy.