HERITAGE AND MEMORY STUDIES

Edited by Ihab Saloul, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso
and Cristina Demaria

Questioning Traumatic Heritage

Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America

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Questioning Traumatic Heritage

Heritage and Memory Studies

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This book is generously funded by the EU research project, H2020-MSCA-RISE-2017 "SPEME-Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia" (H2020 project number 778044). This publication is one of the deliverables of SPEME's dedicated research on spaces of memory and traumatic heritages and their transformations.

Cover illustration: El Olimpo Clandestine Detention Center, Buenos Aires. Anna Maria Lorusso, March 2023

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 685 6
e-ISBN 978 90 4855 386 0 (pdf)
DOI 10.5117/9789463726856
NUR 686

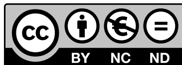

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Table of Contents

Introduction 7
Questioning Traumatic Heritages and Spaces of Memory
Ihab Saloul, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria

1 Constant Consensus Building 21
Art and Conflict in the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory
Alejandra Naftal

2 Why Matter Matters 39
Doris Salcedo's Material Memorial Movements
Mieke Bal

3 Trauma and Allegory 61
Truthfulness in Fact and Fiction and Making a Private Archive Productive
Lars Ebert

4 Hypermnesia and Amnesia 81
Remembering (with) the Body and Post-Conflict Memorials and Architectures
Andrea Borsari, Giovanni Leoni

5 Art and Memory: Magdalenas por el Cauca 101
Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril

6 "Adapt or Resist?" 125
Narratives of Implication and Perpetration in the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam
Mario Panico

7 Entanglements of Art and Memory Activism in Hungary's Illiberal Democracy 145
Reka Deim

8 Memory, Art and Intergenerational Transmission 173
Artistic Practices with Young People in Memory Sites in Argentina
Lizel Tornay, Victoria Alvarez, Fabricio Laino Sanchis, Mariana Paganini

9 Representing the Trauma of Colonialism in Museum Exhibitions 195
Cape Coast Castle and the International Slavery Museum
Sarike van Slooten

10 The Dogma of Irrepresentability and the Double Bind of Holocaust Memory 215
Valentina Pisanty

11 Entangled Memories of Colonialism and Antisemitism 225
The Scandal of Taring Padi's "People's Justice" at Documenta 15 (2022)
David Duindam

12 Objects Despite Everything 243
Testimonial Objects Between Memory and Trauma
Patrizia Violi

Index 253

Introduction

Questioning Traumatic Heritages and Spaces of Memory

Ihab Saloul, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria

This book marks the conclusion of a six-year international and interdisciplinary European Research Project "SPEME Questioning Traumatic Heritage in Europe, Argentina, Colombia" (2018-2024) in which university researchers and heritage professionals debated the role played by urban spaces in the construction and representation of events and subjectivities involved in collective traumatic experiences. The project took into consideration how a difficult past can be articulated in the spaces of museums and heritage sites, not only to represent what happened, thus freezing the past in a historical sense, but also to understand what practices and narratives are possible so that trauma can become a springboard for reflection on contemporary societies, and how countries and communities relate to an unbearable history. In the field of heritage and memory studies, debates on the narration of traumatic pasts through space are certainly not a new topic.

For example, in their work on so-called dissonant heritage, Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) illustrated how space can be, at the same time, a nonhuman witness to a dramatic event and a tool for the narrative management of subjectivities: indeed, places communicate the often blurred boundary between those who are to be considered victims and those who are perpetrators. However, they suggest, space can also provide a starting point for communicating that same history to future generations. This is not only limited to a (sometimes utopian) reconciliatory mission that sees the realization of the motto "never again", but can provide an understanding of what social missions these places and the professionals who work in them can have in mediating the past.

In the last decade, memorials, monuments and museums have become the battlefield for competing and conflicting visions of the past and the

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_INTRO

hegemonic or counter memories of the so-called "difficult heritage" or "traumatic heritage". Far from being mere spaces of musealisation that freeze and fix dominant narratives of the past, spaces of memory are increasingly turning into sites of negotiations and reconfigurations of meaning in which social and political identities are debated, strengthened, or weakened in reference to the traumatic experiences of the past which they "represent". Yet, what does it mean to spatially represent traumatic heritages and memories, and what is a space of memory?

In expanding and, simultaneously, problematizing Pierre Nora's (Nora 1996) category of *lieu de mémoire,* the way we think of spaces of memory aims at an in-depth examination of the peculiar yet specific ways of re-thinking the nexus between space and memory: how do we activate, elaborate and make visible spaces for memory? This question points to the dynamic construction that underlines the production and connection of spatiality and memory, as well as to the coexistence of a plurality of meanings and experiences that characterize spaces of memory. Hence, when we refer to spaces of memory we think of both material places and sites of commemoration and memorialization, as well as sets of more immaterial semiotic constructions, representing spaces that elaborate and interrogate the (traumatic) past through ritual practices, documentaries, and artistic performance. Spaces of memory thus include museums, former detention centers and camps, monuments, and memorials, some of which are indexically linked to past traumas[1]. This is because these spaces of memory stand in the very place where violence and extermination occurred, and any intervention or artistic practice which investigates the multiple versions and their articulations that we can produce of the past, as well as the multiple ways of forming, interpreting, and experiencing the presence of the past when the latter assumes a spatial and relational dimension.

As Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril aptly writes in her article, "Art and Memory: Magdalenas porel Cauca", both the spatiality and rationality of spaces of memory is rep- resented in the understanding of spaces of memory as:

1 We refer here to the linguistic category of 'indexicality' as reformulated by Patrizia Violi in her book Landscapes of Memory (Violi 2017) to express the direct link that exists between certain spaces and the signs that have been devised to build it. Violi investigates in particular the case in which a monument, or a memorial, is located exactly at the place where a massacre or a traumatic event took place, thus expressing a direct link with that place, increasing its significance as a "trauma site". In linguistics, "indexical" is used to mean an expression whose interpretation depends on the context and varies as the context varies.

> […] series of existential relations that guarantee dialogues and interactions related not only to strategies for context transformation, but also those ways of representation of violent events that define the condition of "victim". In spaces of memory meanings of location, territory, areas of influence, ethical and political responsibilities, power relationships, and resistance exercises are recovered. In spaces of memory, the knowledge linked to traumatic events is appropriated and socialized." (Pardo Abril, this book).

All the contributions in this book delve into the multi-layered dimensions of the nexus between spaces, spatiality, memories, and traumas that consist of, and, at the same time, put these dimensions into a productive tension in various academic and professional contexts. A more concrete, literal, and stricter acceptation of a "space of memory", as explained by Alejandra Naftal and Lars Ebert in the two articles of this book, is that of space as the product of signifying practices, as a discursive and textual device through which the concept of "memory" is worked through neither as an abstract nor fixed and codified system of knowledge.

Through the semiotic and cultural lens that we adopt here, memory is envisaged as an active force field of competing discourses within which individual and collective acts of remembrance are constantly re-negotiated, re-elaborated and recounted in often conflictual and contested narratives. As Ihab Saloul argues in his book, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*, "memory is a volatile concept. The work of memory in all its forms, from historical essays to personal reminiscences, legal testimonies, and imaginative recreations, is not only slippery but also inherently contradictory. On the one hand, memory posits a past reality that is recalled outside the person's subjectivity. Yet, on the other hand, memory requires a narrator who is equipped with conventional cultural filters of generational distance, age and gender, class, and political affiliations, on whose authority the truth of the past can be revealed. Memories are narrated by someone in the present but nonetheless we still use them as authoritative sources of historical knowledge" (Saloul 2012: 4–6). An important lesson that those dealing with these issues must bear in mind is that memories, both individual and collective, are always the result of a form of mediation. The meaning of what is remembered as a 'past' inevitably traverses the apparatuses that gravitate in our culture and that have allowed memory to become. These objects, which provide a vehicle for memory, inhabit the world, feeding and changing values, and shaping the identities of those who encounter them. Working on memory

and these apparatuses does not mean merely dealing with what has been, with what has happened, but rather how things are represented as having 'happened', who has the right to speak or narrate, or which histories and subjectivities have been silenced and, consequently, forgotten for political and social reasons.

This is a conception of memory not as an irrevocably deposited and defined notion but as an active and transformative force that reshapes the past as much as the future, as it interrogates the present, its politics and the subject positions that constitute forms and communities of remembrance and memory transmission. A multidimensional and multi-layered memory is, for that matter, what animates the interdisciplinary broadening field of Heritage and Memory Studies, whose most cited and recognized authors are, not by chance, constantly referred to by the authors of this book[2].

The shared assumption of this, which stands as the theoretical and analytical culmination of the work conducted during the European research project "Speme", is that for memory to be active and to have a transformative impact it must not be musealised and frozen in fixed and unquestioned forms of representation and communication. Memory and the spaces that it affects, in this sense, are configured not as static and monolithic devices that manage to offer a positivistic interpretation of what happened in the past, but as laboratories in which the process of remembering is continuously dynamic, the polyphonic result of a series of operations that involve not only those who design the space, but also those who live in and through it.

Instead, memory with its various forms of exhibition, spatialisation and transmission, must reach out to new kinds of social actors, and must develop new forms of interaction with the political, social, and cultural contexts within which it is negotiated and promote innovative forms of expression. Here we come to another nexus that helps us to further problematize the category of spaces of memory as a set of dynamic processes of meaning construction and re-configuration, especially when exploring the impact of artistic practices within a memory site as a way of building a space of memory. Nowadays, spaces of memory certainly do not entertain an accidental relationship with different forms of trauma and artistic expressions. Rather they become sites of temporary exhibitions, theatrical and artistic

2 Obviously, it is impossible to summarise here the main categories and theories of the interdisciplinary field of heritage and memory studies, animated by a series of reflections that are partly shared and partly debated. See, for example, the work of authors such as Maurice Halbwachs, Aleida and Jan Assmann, Tzevan Todorov, Marianne Hirsch, Michael Rothberg, Georges Didi-Huberman and many others.

performances, and, in some more radical cases, spaces of memory are themselves turned into works of art, making the boundaries between memorial commemoration and aesthetic experience ever more blurred. While many sites consecrated to the conservation and transmission of memory resort to art, contemporary artists seem to constantly re-elaborate and aesthetically transform several of the topics linked to (traumatic) memory. The works of Christian Boltanski and of other artists such as Doris Salcedo, Regina José Galindo, Ana Mendieta, Anna Maria Maiolino and Teresa Margolles, are but few seminal examples in this context.

Moreover, the resort to artistic expressions in memorial spaces and contexts is an attempt to answer one of the main and all-encompassing questions regarding these spaces: what do we make of places that oftentimes have been the stage of mass violence, of suffering and deaths; of places that bear the burden of collective lacerations, civil wars and conflicts between communities and actors belonging to the same country and the same culture? This question is debated in several articles in this book in which artistic practices provide a possible alternative to the paralyzing opposition between an obsessive repetition of the traumatic event and an oblivion aimed at erasing all its traces, offering a way to evoke, represent or think through "what happened" in a symbolic form. A trauma is indeed not only the wounding of bodies and flesh; it is, first and foremost, the breaking of symbolic connections, the impossibility to integrate and balance cognitive, emotional, and symbolic elements of our experiences. Within this frame, artistic practices and expressions may gain an imaginative function able to reconstruct the lost connections, and to suggest new images and alternative thinking paradigms to reduce the "hermeneutic gaps" that separate the past from the ways we have access to it in the present. The many thoughts and reflections advanced by the authors of this book revolve around the premises discussed so far, as in the two essays written by two professionals who work in museums and archives and who take us *inside* two emblematic spaces of memory in Argentina (Naftal) and in the Netherlands (Ebert), while in the essay by Leoni and Borsari, in which the authors force us to face all the contemporary challenges posed by what we could call the "enterprise" of memory making and cultural heritage in the 21st century as an endeavor defined by the constant tension between remembering and forgetting, gripped between an excess of memory and an excess of oblivion, whereby what is needed is often either to reactivate "dormant memories" or unmemorable, indescribable, ones. What is also at stake is how to retrace intentionally erased traces as was the case with Holocaust memories in Europe, and with the tragedy of the desaparecidos in

Argentina (see also Tornay et al in this book) or, else, with traces that have withered away due to the passing of time and the death of direct witnesses, while many other memories are celebrated with redundancy. Both the variety of case studies considered by the authors – for instance, in Mieke Bal's article on the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, or David Duindam's interesting reflections on Documenta 15 (2022) – and the dialogue that the various chapters engage in throughout the book express the extra-European interest in investigating the relationship between memory, art, museums and memorial spaces.

In addition, the authors in this book do not limit themselves to a mere architectonical or urbanistic description of the logic and the narratives at play in a space of memory and the many signs it displays and exhibits. Instead, the authors also discuss the practices developed and envisaged around and within a place that is thus turned into a meaningful space; often time bottom-up practices following the paradigm of an active and transformative memory as discussed above.

Some practices are also the outcomes of a programed artistic research project, as the one analyzed in the articles of Pardo Abril's and Lizel Tornay et al. Others are the result of bottom-up movements of political resistance and activism, as in the case of the Hungarian monuments investigated by Reka Deim, where the direct intervention on a site of memory aims at contesting and challenging the government's official version of the recent national past. As such, several causes for reflections emerge, starting from the already mentioned role of art as an *ethical role* that appeals to artistic practices which do not take for granted what is true and appropriate, or what is wrong and inappropriate, but rather take a stand to re-establish a direct involvement and an intimate contact with the social, political and cultural dimension of any politics of memory and its spaces as spaces of trans-generational and transcultural transmission and convergences. Thus, the role of direct, physical experience as it gets *embodied in memory* practices and the spaces they transform, defies the idea of spaces of memory as a form of the archive neither as a stack of documents nor as a series of already established and closed narratives or as a fixed set of unchangeable symbols. On the contrary, memory becomes what is lived and experienced through a subject who is and, at the same time has, a body; a subject who is both a product of sensation and feelings and a member of a community thought of as a space of belonging, of constant negotiations, conflicts, and acknowledgments. To focus on experience means also to look at all these dimensions, to reflect upon a memory that is embodied in and through the very relationship between spaces and beings that produce, cross, and

transform them. At stake here are also *memory affects and emotions*, such as nostalgia, or indignation and resentment when it comes to traumatic pasts, but also hope as a "structure of feeling" intended to question how one can remember without having hope for the future. Finally, what is repeatedly underlined in the essays in this book is the topic of *memory and intergenerational transmission*. In this context, Marianne Hirsch's well-known concept of "postmemory" (Hirsch 2012) is put under scrutiny not so much for its lack of relevance, but because, at times, it proves to be too encompassing and generalized. As such, the reader will not find theories of postmemory in this issue but rather concrete and actual examples of intergenerational transmission of diverse traumatic pasts such as the Argentine "dirty war" and state terrorism; the European Holocaust in the Netherlands and Italy, as well as the armed conflict that has been lacerating Colombia for more than fifty years. Therefore, the questions we must ask are: how do we attract new and young generations to spaces of memory? How do we talk about and recount a (traumatic) past to subjects who are neither familiar with this past nor lived or experienced it? How do we develop alternative forms of knowledge that can trigger new ways of thinking around the often-overused slogan, "nunca mas" (never again), as a deeply felt commitment through narratives and images that unpack and balance discussions of concepts such as "guilt", "complicity" "responsibility" and the "victim-perpetrator" dualities and paradigms? How do we make something visible that has become invisible, of which no more traces are left?

It would be overly ambitious to claim that this book offers definitive answers to all these questions. Rather, the book aims at re-formulating these questions, thus adding clarity and, at the same time, raising doubts on the many implications that surround the intertwining of space, memory, and artistic practices by giving concrete examples of how memory works, and of how spaces of memory may trigger relevant processes of identification, socialization, working through and possible forms of reconciliation. As we have attempted to argue, it is not only appropriate, but also necessary, to find new ways of thinking about the transmission of knowledge of the past to new generations, and to overcome the silences, repressions, and embarrassments that the traumas of the 20th century have produced. Furthermore, it is urgent to reflect on *active and participatory* processes of memorialization and heritagisation to bring back to the center of any discussion on memory building the importance of enhancing the sense of *response and responsibility* of both individuals and local, national, and transnational communities with respect to both "what happened" in the past, and to what *will* happen.

What follows is a short itinerary among the chapters that compose this book. Alejandra Naftal presents us with a concrete and exemplary case of a site of memory located in Buenos Aires – the *ESMA-Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights* where in 2015 the *ESMA Museum and Site of Memory* which Naftal directs was inaugurated. In this space of memory, the former *Casino de los Officiales* is now turned into a museum, a space during the Argentine military dictatorship where thousands of people were tortured, imprisoned and from there "prepared" for the flights of death in which prisoners were thrown out from planes to drown in the sea. Naftal recounts the many steps and the heated debates that preceded the opening of the museum, which is a space that represents concrete legal evidence of the crimes that have been perpetrated by the military Junta, and asks how should the former detention centers be treated? Most importantly, how do we conserve the traces and how do we exhibit them? And when facing traumatic events encompassing the torture and disappearance of hundreds of people, how do we turn this site of suffering, horror, and tragedy into a space for memory transmission and the preservation of testimonies for future generations? These questions haunt every attempt to musealise a trauma site, starting from how to differentiate acts and practices of documentation and preservation from the audience interpretative, and sometimes very diverse reactions. In her chapter, Naftal engages with these debates and discusses how to conceptualize effective and respectful modes of representation of a recent traumatic experience that is still part of the living memory of a large part of Argentine society.

The second contribution is by Mieke Bal. The scholar deals with the role that artistic creativity plays in the construction of the past. In particular, dealing with the works of the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, and their very materiality, Bal shows how art can help to overcome trauma, trying to build an imaginary link between what happened and the present. For example, studying Salcedo's installation *Palimpsesto* (2017), Bal investigates the distinctions and tensions between still and moving images, and, for visitors, between inside and outside. Through the concept of cultural memory, Bal grasps the profound meanings that bring matter and thought together.

The chapter by Lars Ebert deals with another concrete case of a space of memory, that is of Herengracht 401 (H401) located in Amsterdam, the former house of a hermetic community of artists and scholars that was funded during the years of the Nazi occupation of the Nether- lands (1940–1945) and that was offered as a hiding place for a small community of Jews, some of whom managed to survive. Ebert follows the evolution and transformation of a place that witnessed different traumas and ar- gues that artistic

research and practices continue to play an equally, yet different, and surely not confined and hermetic role, today. This is so because the space of H401 has become an archive engaging with artists who, during their periods of residence and thanks to their sensitivity and experience, try to fill the "hermeneutic gap" that still separates the present from the past that is constantly re-invented and fictionalized without losing its power and its force, yet departing from any pre-conceived ideas of truth and authenticity.

In its two distinct yet dialogic parts, Giovanni Leoni and Andrea Borsari starts with a critique of memory tools and aids, and the paradoxes produced by the excesses of memorialization on one hand, and the tendency towards oblivion, on the other. Leoni and Borsari explore new forms of remembrance that mix the experiential dimension and the urban public sphere, and hence, open up new pathways for the reactivation of dormant memories, counter-monumental strategies and uncoded amnestic traces. Moreover, by highlighting how the experience of political and racial deportation during World War II drastically changed the idea of memorial architecture, the article elaborates on the specificity of architecture as an art craft that not only represents but also builds places which do not only recount experiences but rather *generate* them. The article thus proposes to develop a new conception of "concentratory" architecture, along with its constructing or deconstructing potentialities that can rethink the relationship between the architectural work and the existing surroundings, and to bring the body and experience back to the center of the project.

Pardo Abril's chapter starts from a broader conception of spaces of memory whereby audiovisual representations of memory can become spaces of remembering and healing. The author analyzes a video production that is closely linked to a physical space, namely the Cauca River, where various hideous crimes were perpetrated between 1986 and 1994, within the framework of the yet-to-be-resolved armed conflict in Colombia. The video not only reproduces, but also participates in what became a ritual of memory on the river, thanks to the organization of an exhibition and procession that mobilized many of the people who struggled and suffered in that place. Through a discursive analysis of the audio-visual restitution of this performance of, and on, memory, the chapter explores the narratives, the semantic nuclei and the deep underlining values marking the difficult re-elaboration of the memory of this very recent, and for some still ongoing, trauma.

Mario Panico's chapter proposes a reflection on the idea of the implicated subject as proposed by Michal Rothberg (2019), using the new permanent exhibition of the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam as a concrete example.

Through the analysis of the different narrative strategies adopted there, he studies the meaning effect that is produced, in particular around the idea of collaborationism. Panico deals with how the museum exhibits micro-histories and personal lives to represent and discuss a collective event like the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Drawing from contemporary debates in Memory Studies, Panico considers how the binarism between victim and perpetrator can be called into question, not so much in order to justify one or to downplay the commemoration of the other, but to enable a more dynamic and realistic understanding of forms of violence.

Reka Deim's chapter examines the top-down dialectic of Hungarian national memory politics, taking into consideration, on one hand, the national policies that either impose, rewrite, or celebrate a certain vision of homeland history and public memory, and on the other hand, the practices of civil resistance to national memory expressed through forms of grassroots activism. The memory on which Deim reflects is that of Hungary during its periods of transition from the country's independence to its membership of the Soviet bloc, to the gaining of national autonomy from communism and the so-called "Third Republic" (1989-present), up to the establishment of Victor Urban's national-conservative government which many people consider either as authoritarian or as a government with 'undemocratic' features. According to Deim, the coexistence of several contrasting memories, expressed in symbolic monuments and museums that have triggered numerous demonstrations and bottom-up practices of resistance and opposition around them, has not always had effective and productive results. Moreover, the so-called "multidirectional memories" (Rothberg 2009) don't always have a positive outcome but rather often fail to build a collective and shared awareness. For Deim, multidirectional memories have an element of paradoxicality because while they manage to render different visions of the past explicit, they nevertheless increase conflict and internal turmoil that may even solicit the drive to silence them.

The chapter by Lizel Tornay et al focuses on the transmission of memory to the new and young generations. Choosing not to resort to the concept of 'post-memory', they focus on two heritage sites linked to the traumatic memory of the dictatorship ('the Park for Memory and Human Rights' and the "El Olimpo" memory site, a former Clandestine Detention Center) by looking at two artistic projects hosted by these two spaces and designed specifically for a young audience prompted to creatively "interpret" and represent them. Thanks to these two examples, the chapter reflects on how the recourse to an artistic reworking (be it with posters and drawings or with the use of poetry) produced by some of the youngest visitors of the Park

of Memory and the "El Olimpo" may, on the one hand, keep the traumatic memory alive by highlighting lived and concrete aspects of these places, and, on the other, how it can stimulate further and broader reflections that go beyond the single traumatic event of the state terrorism, opening up to a more general discourse on the ongoing local and global violation of human rights.

Sarike van Slooten deals with the representation of colonialism and the memory of slavery by looking at two concrete cases: the Cape Castle in Ghana and the International Slavery Museum in the UK. The author conducted a series of interviews and a display analysis of these spaces, mainly taking into consideration what kinds of narratives were implemented in the construction of the traumatic past. In addition to highlighting the different perspectives adopted to represent the trauma of slavery in these two very different contexts, she focuses on the emotional involvement of the viewer and how the spaces propose a re-signification for those who experience them.

Valentina Pisanty's chapter deals with how artists working on the memory of the Holocaust should take into account a double bind: that of the duty of remembrance and that of the unrepresentability of trauma. While in the first case, the artist has the obligation to remember what happened, transforming the Holocaust into a universal dogma, in the second, they are faced with the paradox of having to mediate something that cannot be recounted, something that is beyond the limits of human imagination. Starting with this reflection, Pisanty offers a very convincing account of how these two (often contradictory) dynamics have fundamentally characterised the culture of post-Holocaust memory.

David Duindam's chapter delves into the controversy sparked by the artwork "People's Justice" at Documenta 15 in 2022. Created by the Indonesian art collective Taring Padi, the piece portrays Indonesia's communist history and the subsequent authoritarian regime under Suharto. International outrage erupted when two antisemitic figures were discovered on the banner, prompting criticism of the festival and its organizers. Duindam contends that German media reactions reflect Historikerstreit 2.0 and Europe's exclusionary memory politics, marginalizing both Jewish voices and Indonesian memories. By studying Taring Padi's activism and transnational visual culture, and challenging the metaphor of travel, Duindam ultimately foregrounds the relevance of proximity rather than distance in globally dispersed memory cultures.

In closing, Patrizia Violi's chapter considers the role played by material objects in the construction of the memory of traumatic events. Referring to

the objects of the victims and prisoners of concentration camps, which are often displayed in museums and memorial sites, Violi proposes a distinction between serial and singular objects. The first case refers to those objects that are displayed in museums through a dynamic of repetition: for example, countless shoes in Holocaust museums. The second case refers to those objects that were not taken away from the victim but, on the contrary, were created by the victims themselves, therefore assuming a value associated with a form of resistance.

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About the Authors

Ihab Saloul is Professor of Heritage, Memory and Narrative, founder and Academic Director of the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture (AHM), University of Amsterdam. His interests include heritage and memory studies, cultural studies, narrative theory and semiotics, postcolonialism, aesthetics, and diaspora and exile in contemporary cultural thought in Europe and beyond. His latest publications include *W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacies: Memory, Word and Image* (2023), and *Diasporic Heritage and Identity* (2023).

Patrizia Violi is an Alma Mater Professor at the University of Bologna and the founder of 'TraMe – Centre for the Semiotic Study of Memory' at the same university. She was director of the 'Centro Internazionale di Studi Umberto Eco' and PI of various European funded projects on trauma and urban space. She has published internationally on the relationship between trauma and memory, with a specific focus on Chile, Argentina and Colombia. Her latest publications include *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Space, History* (2017), and *Reading Memory Sites Through Signs: Hiding into Landscape* (2023).

Anna Maria Lorusso is Professor of Semiotics at the Department of Arts of the University of Bologna. Lorusso was President of the Italian Association of Semiotics (2017-2021). Her research is focused on the semiotics of culture, logic of information and cultural memory. Lorusso is the editor of *Memosur/Memosouth: Memory, Commemoration and Trauma in Post-Dictatorship Argentina and Chile* (2017), and the special issue "Perspectives on Post-Truth" (2023).

Cristina Demaria is Professor of Semiotics at the Department of the Arts of the University of Bologna, where she teaches semiotics of conflict, gender studies and semiotics of social sciences. She has worked extensively on traumatic memories and their representation, on visual culture and documentary films, and on gender studies and post-feminism. Her latest publications include *Post-Conflict Cultures. A Reader* (2021), and *Reading Memory Sites Through Signs: Hiding into Landscape* (2023)

1 Constant Consensus Building

Art and Conflict in the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory

Alejandra Naftal

Abstract
This chapter describes the history, development and social role of the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory, which is located on the grounds of the former clandestine centre for detention, torture and extermination, in the intergenerational transmission of traumatic memories of the Argentinian dictatorship. The project is characterised by the cumulative effort of artistic expression, public debate, conflict and tension. Through the presentation of different artistic installations and plays, the chapter explains the focal function of art practices in spaces of memory that are strongly linked to a traumatic past, as well as how undertaking these practices can lead to the establishment of consensus.

Keywords: ESMA Museum and Site of Memory, State Terror and Human Rights Violations, Performing Arts and Conflict, Victimhood and Public Debate

Introduction

Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina endured a violent civic-military dictatorship that implemented state terrorism. According to current estimations, the military regime was responsible for more than 600 illegal detention sites across Argentina, 30,000 disappeared detainees and thousands of political prisoners and people forced into exile. It also systematically stole children who were born to imprisoned women.

ESMA (Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada) is located on a 17-hectare area in the city of Buenos Aires. It was a teaching institution for officers and NCOs of the Argentine Navy. During the dictatorship, the place

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH01

operated as one of the most notorious concentration camps in the country. At ESMA, nearly 5000 men and women were detained and disappeared. Many of them were political and social activists, members of revolutionary organisations, workers, professionals, artists, entire families and members of the clergy. The list of crimes committed at ESMA is long, amongst them are kidnapping, torture and homicide.

The buildings where the clandestine centre operated is a design typical of the architecture from this area from the 1930s. It has three floors in the shape of a comb, sitting on a total area of 5,500 meter squares. Each area had a specific function during the years of repression. There were sections where torture, confinement and slave labour took place. However, the compound also comprised sections where repression agents operated, officers' bedrooms and a weekend house for the director and his family.

At the end of the dictatorship in 1983, the Argentine Navy surrendered ESMA to the newly-democratic state. The buildings were gutted of furnishings and left in a condition of total abandonment. Survivors' testimonies are the prevailing source of evidence to make sense of what took place at ESMA.

How should such former detention centres be treated now? This question has been asked time and again throughout post-dictatorship democracy. Responses have varied according to changing historical context and the collective construction of memories in the present that have worked to continually reframe it. Today, the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory serves a dual purpose. One the one hand, it provides material evidence in the ongoing trials for human rights violations committed here. On the other hand, ESMA's current cause and strategy have initiated a transformation of this site of horror and tragedy, into a space for memory transmission and the preservation of testimonies for future generations.

The Creative Process

In 2012, a multi-disciplinary team of professionals was formed to begin transforming ESMA into a Museum and Site of Memory. The new team's expertise comprised of museologists, architects, artists, researchers, journalists, designers, audio-visual specialists, computer scientists, poets and writers. In the preceding two years, the team had produced around two-hundred versions of the site's design and content. These proposals were presented to diverse sections of society, including victims and their families and friends. From this early stage on, ESMA's principle of interpreting and including diverse perspectives of the past guided all our efforts.

Public discourse about the treatment of sites connected with torture and abuse by the military junta has been varied and often contentious. At present, many sites have been established as spaces for memory, while at the same time, they are associated with traumatic violence and loss by their neighbouring communities and society as a whole. The discourse on what position such spaces should occupy is particularly shaped by the engagement between academics and museal specialists and those directly impacted by violence. Some have called for the demolition of clandestine prisons and torture centres, while others have regarded these spaces as spaces of mourning and emphasised their material emptiness.

The ESMA was established through dialogic engagement with all viewpoints on these questions. The result is the product of long-term facilitation of exchange of thoughts. While discussion has been a paramount element to the achievement of consensus, the ESMA was also made through close examination of a broad range of national and international archives, including documentation of legal cases, academic texts, news articles, literary and artistic works. Above all else, the testimonies of survivors were central to the site's creation.

The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory was conceived for different audiences. The space needed to provide appropriate communication about this period for those visitors who were alive during the dictatorship and later generations. We also needed to provide resources that would meet the needs of local visitors, visitors from other parts of the country, as well as from abroad. The difficulty then, was to challenge this broad range of perspectives to actively engage in the painful and traumatic events that took place here. Our cause is summarised as the creation of a space in which 'those who are comfortable feel uncomfortable and those uncomfortable feel comfortable'. Our central purpose is to challenge those visitors who might have previously been indifferent and complacent. Our intention is that such visitors will engage anew in the past and also to become aware of the continuing need to remember this past in the present.

It was important that the museum's exhibitions and use of language were appropriate and do not resort to 'low blows' – melancholic or overt messaging that might distract or put off visitors. Language chosen for interpretation and information is consistently respectful and sober. We include distinct perspectives of events throughout to provide visitors with different viewpoints. It is our belief, for instance, that providing only details of traumatic events prevents any mechanism of identification and reproach – disabling reflection and meaningful action.

We have had to remain conscious of the fact that the past we share with visitors is very recent. Many relatives of the disappeared are alive, as well

as survivors of violence that took place here. For this reason, the Museum is also a place of repair and reflection to living victims. Moreover however, the building in which we work continues to provide material evidence for ongoing legal processes against perpetrators of the violence that took place here. For this reason, it is vitally important that nothing about the building be altered or modified. This seeming limitation was added to by the fact that we had received a building that was completely emptied. The empty building and the stories of what happened there told by survivors formed our main message to the public.

What are the arguments against preserving a clandestine centre of imprisonment and torture? This question was a driving force in the process leading to the Museum's creation. Reconstruction of events, for instance, was a key ethical debate in our presentations to stakeholders. At the end of a presentation of the project for human rights organisation Madres de Plaza de Mayo, for instance, I recall that one member told us: "I want the people who visit the site to suffer the same as my son suffered. Let them feel the pain, the cold, the torture". Her words were followed by an intense silence amongst the group gathered to hear our presentation. While such a visitor experience would be unethical, we understood through such statements the expectation resting on the project to provide insight and defend this contentious past for survivors and victims' families.

For this reason, we reconstructed events through the testimonies of survivors as a foundation to interpreting these spaces. It was our conviction that we provide as many testimonies as possible for the same object or space, in order that visitors can piece together a whole picture of events from subjective viewpoints.

The Museum

As it was a Museum, we understood that we represented in the social imaginary a place of truth and an authorised voice. It was, therefore, essential that we distinguished between historical documents and interpretations of the present.

The Museum consists of two museal devices in order to distinguish between historical fact and interpretation:

1. *Traditional Historiographic Interventions*: Panels featuring graphic prints, photos, documentary images, journalistic sources and testimonies. These devices provide historic

Figure 1 Museum facade (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

information about different subjects from the military dictatorship.

2. *Contemporary Experiential Interventions*: Used in order to appeal to an affective reception amongst visitors. Methods included here work to stimulate curiosity and engagement about violent events and their symbolic import. These interventions, based on contemporary museographic devices, are made up of mapping, holograms, lighting, sounds and temperatures. Their objective is to transmit and approximate "the experience" in this place, both in the most aberrant aspects of the repressive dynamics and in the resistance of the people detained there.

Despite our working with these two categories of project design, there were still moments of tension and challenge in the process of reaching agreements over what the final site would represent. These challenges arose frequently from the highly personal nature of exhibition materials and the ongoing trauma of violence experienced by victim's relatives. Particularly problematic in some instances was the exhibition of photographs of victims that have also been used in public demonstrations and legal processes. For instance, a mother of a victim requested that a photograph of her daughter be removed from the Museum, because she did not want her daughter to be figuratively in the space where she was tortured and murdered. We respected this wish

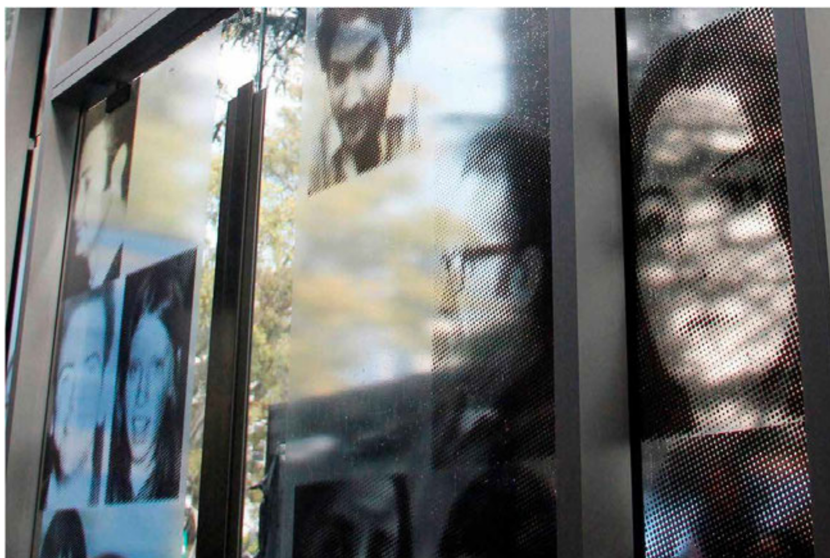

Figure 2 Museum façade, Detail (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

and it led to our thinking about how best to exhibit such photographs while respecting the views of family members of victims.

We designed a glass panel that would be printed with the photographs of victims, that is graphically dotted in order to trace but obscure their facial features and reveal them from certain angles. Displayed towards the entrance to the building, the panel generates a sense of scale of the number of victims. Secondarily, the viewer is able to see the faces of victims from afar, but is unable to make out their features when while walking towards the panel.

On another occasion, the grandmother of a victim told us: "Art, art!!! It's the best way to transmit this horrible experience to young people." (Hebbe de Bonafini, Presidenta de la Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo; August 2013; La Plata; Argentina). Bonafini's phrase guided us in the Museum's creative process. One of the first rooms visitors go through is the old entertainment hall for Navy officers. We do not have any testimonies from prisoners about this place. As it is a spot that has a lighter symbolic weight, we decided to use it to introduce visitors to the story they will go through both rationally and emotionally. We set up a screening of a film about the military dictatorship that features archive footage providing context about the politics, economics and culture that led to the coup of 24 March 1976, the resistance to the dictatorship and the fight of human rights organisations and other sectors of society in the search for memory, truth and justice. The film reflects

Figure 3 Context room (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

the way in which we curators wanted to use artistic interpretations in the Museum. We use art as a communicative and transmissive tool.

The third floor was the area of captivity, torture and slave labour. Along with the basement, these areas were the most complex places in the building due to their spatiality and their high historical and symbolic value. The visitor enters this section through the main staircase and through a narrow hallway.

Along the third floor, we installed a wooden walkway that serves several purposes. It preserves the original floor, guides the visitor and hides the technical installations since we could not carry out any alterations to the building. The walkway guides the visitor closer and further away from the exhibits to evoke changing emotions. We decided to make the walkway out of wood, which is a warm, soft element. It helps the visitor get closer to the experience, but we also wanted to provide room for reflection and distance. Therefore, just as we did not rebuild a concentration camp, we were not going to build anything aesthetically unappealing. We employed beauty as an ethical and aesthetic concept that would contribute to our goal of transmitting a legacy and a memory.

The "El Dorado" room originally was a ceremonial hall. During the military regime, the Intelligence Centre was established here. Here, kidnappings were planned, the information obtained from prisoners in torture sessions was analysed and decisions about their life and death were made. This is

Figure 4 Context room (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

where the files containing the information of each of the detainees and their political organisations were kept. The dictatorship's propaganda campaigns were also developed here.

The El Dorado room is the last room the visitor enters and we developed an audio-visual intervention about ongoing trials of perpetrators. They are portrayed in photographs taken from military files of the dictatorship, which were then replaced by photos of them in court. These pictures are leaning on the floor. This is an allegory of the action carried out on 24 March 2004, the anniversary of the 1976 coup d'état, a date Argentina established as a national day of remembrance. On this day, President Néstor Kirchner took down the picture of the repressor Videla from the wall of the Military College.

Art at ESMA

Five years after it opened, the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory has established itself as a place of active participation. To this day, it has received more than 400,000 visitors from diverse backgrounds. They include high school students, university students, tourists, officials, politicians and representatives from other countries.

Initially, the curators had a different vision considering the role of artistic expression in the exhibition. However, we adapted our ideas accordingly

Figure 5 Third floor, Capucha (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

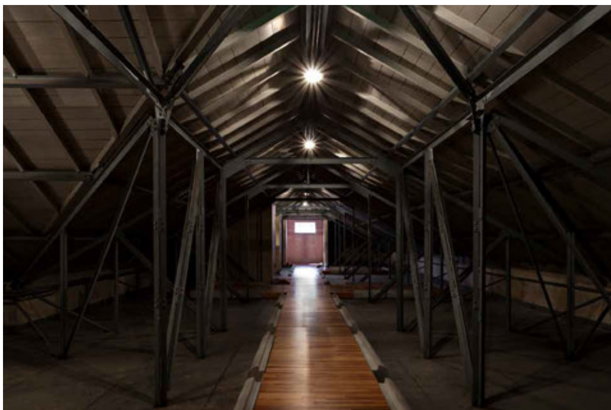

Figure 6 Third floor, Capucha (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

Figure 7 “Dorado” room (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

to achieve consensus. This happened with the basement of the building, which is perhaps the place with the greatest symbolic load, since it was the area where brutal torture was inflicted and also the last place the detainees saw before the "transfers", a euphemism used to describe the ultimate fate of the prisoners. In that basement, prisoners selected for death flights were lined up, stripped naked and given an injection of pentothal to numb them. They were then loaded on to trucks and taken to military airports. There, they were moved into airplanes and finally thrown alive into the sea.

In this dark place, we intended to put a large installation that would take up almost all the space, a rock, suspended from the ceiling, opposed to another rock suspended on the floor. Between them, we wanted to place a rainfall of water that came out from 30,000 pores and project the only photos we have of this place during the dictatorship taken by a former detainee. However, we were not able to reach consensus about this installation as it was unacceptable to several survivors and victim families. This exemplifies that the tensions between artistic languages and the vision of the victims can be contradictory and ambivalent. Therefore, we say that the Museum is an ongoing project. This is fruitful for the connection between the educational and emotional realms that are present in the stories we wish to tell.

I want to comment on some concrete experiences of artistic articulation, where these tensions were strong. One of the proposals of the project was to apply our focus on consensus to explore new channels and languages to help engage audiences and transmit what happened. This resulted in heated and fruitful exchanges between academics, the Museum and the artists. We treated various questions, such as what was at stake for each stakeholder? When and how should they intervene? How should we combine the artistic, academic and institutional visions on curating?

Performing Arts

We were curious to find out whether we could integrate performing arts and innovative curatorial practices to create a dialogue with art galleries and other sites of memory to come up with new questions. In recent years, ESMA developed diverse projects to explore languages that help broaden the audiences beyond the communities around the direct victims. In the month of November 2019, the Museum featured the Memory and Performance Art series.

ESMA hosted a performance for the first time, namely Araceli Arreche's *The Voices of the River*. It was performed by a collaboration of graduates

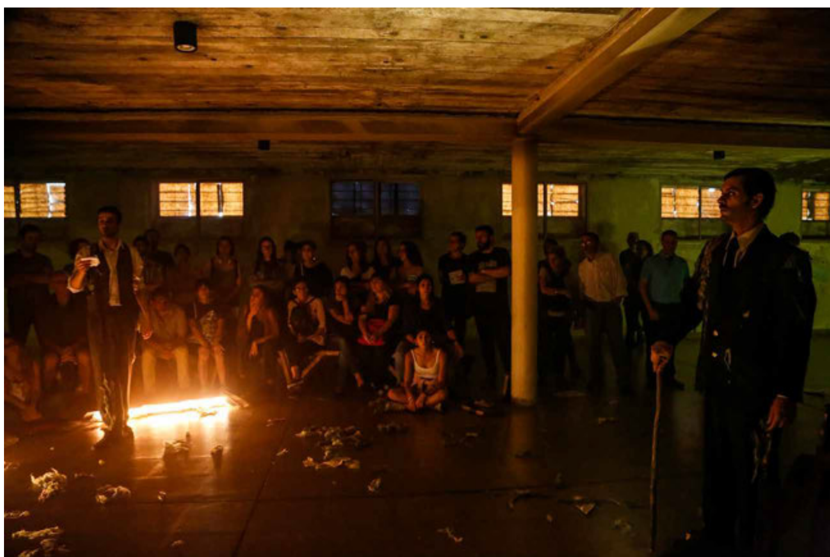

Figure 8 Voices of the River (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

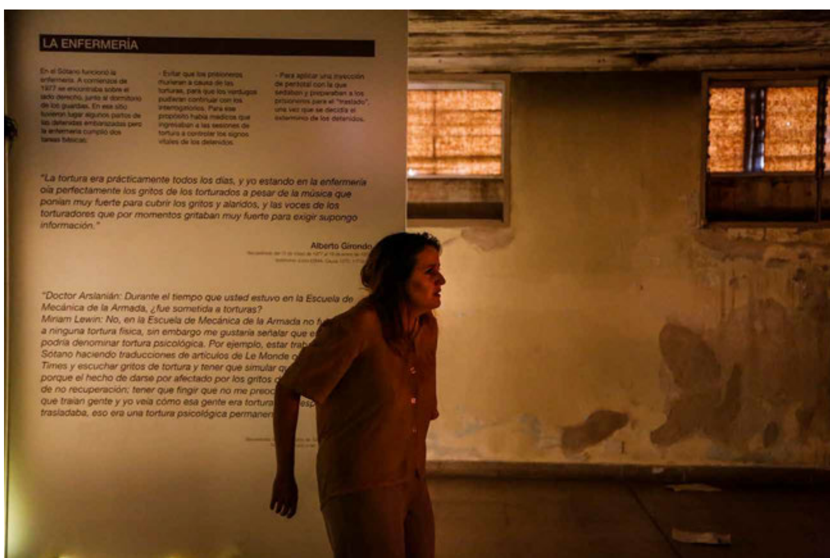

Figure 9 Voices of the River (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

of the Metropolitan School of Dramatic Arts (EMAD) and the University of San Martín (UNSAM). The play describes some of the darkest aspects of Argentina's history through a fictional encounter in the depths of the Río de la Plata between Leopoldo Lugones, Roberto Arlt and the French nun and death flight victim Alice Domon. *The Voices of the River* seeks

Figure 10 The Impossible Scene (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

to challenge viewers to re-think through art how the past continues to resonate in our present. Director Martín Paglione wrote to the Museum director's office in his proposal for the play how he intends to combine the locality of ESMA with the content of the play by integrating a tour through the Museum's spaces. Based on this proposal, we worked together for two months during which the Museum specified its requirements of not altering any area of the exhibition and maintaining an atmosphere of respect and lightness.

We aim to use the space, based on its history and its connection with the play. We will begin by welcoming the public at the reception with some opening words. We will move towards the historical context, where the public will settle on the seats and the floor to watch the full screening. Once the video is over, the first act of the play begins. Then we will move on to the ESMA History sector, where the tour continues and we will proceed to the basement. There will be another section of the play. We will immediately go up to the golden room, where the rest of the play is performed (Martín Paglione, November 2019; Buenos Aires, Argentina).

In that same month, two other plays were performed at ESMA. *The Impossible Scene* was performed by Polish visual artist and theatre director Wojtek Ziemilski in collaboration with Argentine playwright Ruben Szuchmacher, during the artist's stay at the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory as part of the research project *Staging Difficult Pasts* of the University of London. The performance examines how theatres and museums influence the public memory of difficult pasts through situating them in narrated scenes. This was an international exchange programme between artists, curators and cultural institutions from Poland, Lithuania, Spain, Argentina

and the UK. The second performance was the play *Adjournment. A Guide for Audiences of Crimes Against Humanity*, by writer Félix Bruzzone Y and French-Argentine attorney, actress and writer Mónica Zwaig. This play tells the story of an unexpected romance in the context of legal trials for crimes against humanity.

The first performance took place at the "Admiral's House" room, an area that functioned as a weekend family retreat for the head of the clandestine centre. Ziemilski's play raised questions about the perpetrators. Do they cry? Do they regret it? Can they cry? Question about the soldiers' minds that made up the armed forces were difficult to accommodate in the Museum. Their voices have mostly been eliminated from the public sphere and many are currently in prison. However, the institution they were part of has never issued an institutional apology for their crimes and their voices are still inaudible in places like the Museum. Here, their representation is limited to their role in the repression and the crimes they committed. The artists were trying to find another way to access their stories through making them human. Ziemilski stated during the premiere:

It seemed to me that there was something crucial in the idea of being able to imagine something that is an Other. What is there? A human Other who does not correspond to the idea of being human we have. That is why I wanted to represent what exists on the other side to open something else. It was easy for me to do this while I was away, but when I got here, the story had its weight, its difficulties. When I started working, it became heavier, more difficult. Each step, each day, each decision became more difficult. I tried to establish a certain contact with the public, an empathy. Being here, in this space, I did not find another way to approach the subject. Afraid of you, of your thoughts and feelings. (November 2019, Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Ziemilski spent three weeks in Argentina and he spent a year studying the local characteristics of state terrorism. He asked questions and thought of different proposals for the play. Should he name the perpetrators or not? Who were they, anyway. Actor Rubén Schumajer recalled that it is a subject that is very close to him. The son of a Polish immigrant, his cousins were killed in World War II concentration camps and he has relatives who disappeared at ESMA. He said: "I usually refuse to represent these themes. It is the first time I have done it, but having done this play, having to play a perpetrator who tries to cry at the hand of Wojtek (Ziemilski) was a very important experience that I am grateful for." (November 2019, Buenos Aires, Argentina)

The second performance, *Adjournment*, took place at the Golden Room, home of the ESMA Task Force's intelligence headquarters, which today

Figure 11 Voices of the River (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

Figure 12 Voices of the River (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

features an audio-visual installation that describes the Argentine path to justice, from 1983 to this day. The play is a testimony to a real meeting between Felix and Mónica, two people who speak different languages and yet agreed on the fact that it is possible to talk about trials for crimes against humanity without biting one's lips or crying. *Adjournment* proposes a tour

Figure 13 Adjournment (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

Figure 14 Adjournment (ESMA Museum and Site of Memory)

through the delirious, incomprehensible and absurd areas which the judicial body imprints on the darkest events of recent history.

Monica Zwaig said about the experience of doing the play in what used to be one of the most notorious concentration camps: "There was laughter, and I felt strange about hearing so many laughs here. But I think I kind of liked it." (November 2019) Félix Bruzzone added: "We had an expectation of starting very low, not just because we were doing it in this place, but because the audience came from another tour, already charged, but curiously enough, they quickly responded to our play. I was very surprised that it happened here. It seems good to me that we were able to carry out the work this way and that this space can welcome this type of pieces." (November 2019)

Conclusion

To what extent do art performances allow us to develop new ways of transmitting stories? We have been asking such questions ever since the first scenes were staged at ESMA and also posed them publicly. We are going to evaluate together with the project researchers, the various sectors associated with the search for consensus as we always do to find out whether this is effective or good or something that enables us to continue thinking and exploring new languages to re-think about what happened, facing the need to re-evaluate ourselves to be – and to become – better. Through these activities we managed to engage audiences who had never been near the Museum, mostly artists and drama students.

A few days after these events, some very intense debates took place amongst the members of the Museum's Advisory Board, which is made up of representatives from human rights organisations and victims. One of the most important opinions again questioned the scope of what should be done in the Museum. These were mostly issues related to artistic manifestations, some of them were almost turning the site into a sacred temple whose only objective was to remember and pay tribute to the disappeared detainees of ESMA. This debate continues because memory is a collective construction of the present that is in a constantly dynamic state.

To be able to participate in Project SPEME and share academic and professional experiences with our colleagues from Amsterdam, Bogotá, Bologna and Buenos Aires is an important contribution to the Museum and to these debates. This chapter has provided a professional perspective on the challenges the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory faced in representing Argentina's recent history. Through extensive debates with artists, relatives of victims and the public, ESMA strove to establish consensus about how the past should be represented here. The interior of the museum itself, but also performances organised here and artistic installations are geared towards unsettling accepted truths about the military dictatorship and stimulate reconciliation.

About the Author

Alejandra Naftal is an Argentinian museologist. She holds a master's degree in Image and Institutional Communication and Social Anthropology. She was the general curator of the museological project and executive director of the Museum and Memory Site ESMA – Former Clandestine Detention,

Torture and Extermination Center. Within the field of memory and human rights, she was the coordinator of the Oral Archive of *Memoria Abierta, Acción Coordinada de Organizaciones de Derechos Humanos* (Open Memory Civil Association – Coordinated Action of Human Rights Organizations). She carried out the historical research, elaboration, and development of the signage of the Espacio para la Memoria Ex ESMA. She worked as a museologist at the National Directorate of Museums, the National Secretariat of Culture, and the National Museum of Fine Arts. In the area of communication, she worked in the Ministry of Defense, and in citizenship and rights campaigns in the Government of the City of Buenos Aires and in the Ministry of Social Development, in the State News Agency (TELAM). Within the private sector she also worked for TV production companies and advertising agencies. In the field of civil society, she is a founding member of the civil association *Buena Memoria* (Good Memory); Executive Director of the Institute of Inter-religious Dialogue; Secretary of the Support Commission of the Haroldo Conti Cultural Center, Member of the Board of Directors of the Espacio EX ESMA and of the *Parque de la Memoria* – Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism. She participated in several audiovisual productions, among them: “ESMA” – a four-chapter documentary; in the feature films “Crónica de una Fuga”, “Garage Olimpo”, “Hermanas”, “Flores de Septiembre”, and others. In 1978, as a high school student, she was arrested and later detained-disappeared during the last military dictatorship. Once released, in 1979 she went into exile until 1983. She has testified in national and international court cases.

2 Why Matter Matters

Doris Salcedo's Material Memorial Movements

Mieke Bal

Abstract

Traumatic heritage sites must be both preserved and questioned; maintained and critically assessed, through the simple but key question: what happened? Knowledge of the past must be improved and generate the creative imagination of new social subjectivities. Colombian artist-sculptor Doris Salcedo is one of the most prominent contributors to that knowledge-building. She demonstrates how art can help overcoming trauma, and restore the broken social bond. Starting with her most recent work, *Uprooted* (2022), this chapter examines how she does that. In that endeavor, materiality is a major issue. Consisting of dead trees, *Uprooted* integrates the environmental crisis and the refugee crisis. This integration "explains" how the world and its inhabitants must collaborate through empathy to make life livable again. Not only for the traumatized victims of past violence but for today. A few earlier works will be (re-)visited, since Salcedo has devoted her entire career to the need to remember, the building of material memorials, and to invoking empathy in the visitors. She achieves this through in-depth experiments with the fine lines between the categories we tend to count on. Her installation *Palimpsesto* (2017), for example, challenges the distinction between still and moving images, and for visitors, to find yourself between inside and outside, participant and viewer. With the help of the concept of cultural memory, it becomes possible to grasp the profound meanings that bring matter and thought together.

Keywords: Memory, trauma, materiality, sculpture, refugees

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH02

Introduction: Bringing Empathy to the Traumatized

Traumatic heritage sites, spaces of memory, artistic practices: this is the integrated theme of the current research project. The reason why this combination of cultural sites and practices is relevant for our examinations in the Humanities is obvious. They must be must be both preserved and questioned; maintained and critically assessed, through the simple but key question: what happened? Without such probing, there is too much of what we call "the past" that is either taken for granted or forgotten. Knowledge of the past must be improved and generate the creative imagination of new social subjectivities. With its insistence on creative thinking and imaginative making, art can assist us in this endeavor. There has been so much violence assaulting people and making their lives and memories unlivable by the traumatic experiences of war, torture, and personal ("domestic") violence, that the core of what we must address in cultural analysis is what is called, frequently too easily, "trauma". In this reflection I will attempt to consider how art can help overcoming trauma, and restore the broken social bond. The primary tool for this restorative operation is empathy.

First of all, it is imperative to distinguish between three aspects of trauma: its cause, the situation or state that cause produces, and the state of near-powerlessness of bystanders. This distinction can be summed up succinctly as follows:

- *violence* – an event (that happens)
- *trauma* – a state (that results)
- *empathy* – an attitude (that enables)

The subjects of these three facets are different: the violence has an agent (the culprit, perpetrator); the traumatised subject is the victim; and the subject of empathy is the social interlocutor, who can potentially help overcome it. This is the role of the public that visits art exhibitions with a keen sense of their own presence and potential contribution. For example, in the Don Quijote exhibitions that I have curated on the basis of a sixteen-screen installation I made in 2019, I aimed to activate visitors to become such empathetic subjects. The display is meant to exert *performativity* in this specific sense. Hence, in the examination of cultural sites of heritage and memory to which this book is devoted, the primary research question is not the factual answer to the question "what happened?" but the performance-oriented one, "what can we do?" that encourages visitors, viewers or readers to take up their own social potential.

My *Don Quijote* project was not the first attempt to address this question and thus give art agency. Earlier (in 2012) between psychoanalysis and

cultural analysis, Michelle Williams Gamaker and I made a video project based on the book by French psychoanalyst Françoise Davoine, *Mère Folle*. This extraordinary book deploys the author's unique combination of intellect and creativity in a "theoretical fiction" to argue with – not against – Freud. The issue was the possibility to analytically treat psychotic patients, most significantly the traumatised who, the inventor of psychoanalysis alleged, cannot perform transference: the projection of their traumas on the analyst that treats them. Reversing the burden, Davoine claimed that the psychosis, the madness resulting from trauma, is mainly inflicted by social agents, and that consequently, society has the duty to help. For this purpose, she revised some tenets of the Freudian method, and with great success.[1]

How can we approach this challenge as ordinary social agents, not professionals of mental health? In everyday life, images of violence conducive to trauma are considered informative ("the news"). We take them in, even get bored by their repetitive nature, not even absorbing what that repetitiveness says about the world. This is one way to consider Don Quijote's endless adventures, in Miguel de Cervantes's 1605 novel. According to philosopher of language John Austin, it is better to change gears and consider such images not informative but enhance their *performativity*. This can result in a shift from *activist* art, which persuasively focuses on specific political issues, to *activating* art. The rationale of this shift is the insight that the trauma and the powerlessness that result are not inherent in the violent events themselves. As analytical psychiatry has diagnosed and cultural analysis has studied, it is the impossibility to process, even to experience the extreme violence that generates the trauma and obstructs its representation, even its memory. The pain remains and keeps assaulting the suffering subject, but the memory itself evades consciousness. This is why trauma does not go away; there is no "post" to it. But it can be addressed, and even softened, with the help of empathic others. It is the task of the artwork to invite an empathetic audience.[2]

Of the artists who reflect on and with trauma in their artistic attempts to contribute to the betterment of the social fabric in post-traumatic times, I selected one whose work is masterly relevant in a combination of artistic,

1 Her book, a masterpiece of socially relevant reflections on what I have termed "imaging" – a figurative creation of what cannot easily be presented – has been long sold out but is about to be reissued in 2023 (Paris, Érès). My preface to this reissued publication explains succinctly how stories, images, and theoretical reflections are intertwined in Davoine's book.

2 The theory of trauma is succinctly explained in relation to narrative in an indispensable article by van Alphen, 'Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory and Trauma', 107-122.

material, and emotional modes of addressing memorial issues in an international and material-oriented perspective. The art of Columbian sculptor Doris Salcedo (1958, Bogotá) insists on the importance of the material presence of memories, or objects, sites, and other forms in or through which memories remain alive, whereas trauma can be at least partly softened. Her work suggests that oblivion – forgetting the violence that leaves its victims with trauma – counts among the forms of violence that *cause* trauma. Her art has been devoted from the beginning in the 1980s to counter the oblivion of violence and the violence of oblivion. Salcedo is among the world's most incisive political artists, with a sharp sense of time, memory, and the materiality this involves. Her most recent work, *Uprooted* (2023), demonstrates this commitment anew. Beginning with a short visit of this work, I will discuss two other large artworks, installations and/or sculptures, that are devoted to this resistance, in ways I will attempt to unpack in this essay. The key issue is the integration of empathy and matter, in other words, materiality and movement in relation to (emotional) moving, as ways of dealing with traumatic memory.

Dead or Alive?

The word "uprooted" stands for a disastrous event. It has literal and metaphoric meanings. In her new work, both are combined, entwined. Let me first describe it. A row of eight hundred dead trees constitutes two "things", ideas, places, or figures at once: both the house of which the inhabitants have been deprived, since it is no longer inhabitable, and the trees themselves, dead things not even suggesting anything concrete beyond the obvious and readable shape of tress. Whereas they are not representation at all – Salcedo's work never really represents anything – the dead trees of which a section vaguely recalls a house of the simple shape a child's drawing would give it, do evoke, but not as their representation, the dead forests killed by the warming of the planet, and the subsequent hurricanes that swept them away. I imagine the artist and her staff gathering the dead trees as they were dispersed through the section of the depleted land, and carrying the heavy burden to the studio. But beyond the little house, further along the row, dead as they are, the trees evoke the rows of people chased out of their environment and forced to migrate, walking in a procession towards an uncertain future. The qualifier "dead" is both literally appropriate, since the trees do look quite totally dead indeed, and metaphorically suggestive, with the discoloration without a trace of green overruling any attempt to

Figure 15 Juan Fernando Castro, *Uprooted*, Commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation, with the generous support of Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland, Courtesy of the Artist 2020-2022, 804 dead trees and steel, 650 x 3000 x 500 cm © Doris Salcedo

detect something "live". The fabricated house, small as it is, dominates the scene; the procession of imagined people seems to be walking away from it, as if fleeing.

Which is, precisely, what they are "doing". The densely assembled branches that, pressed together, shape the house, become more spatialized. This happens when the house dissolves into individual trees, each standing metaphorically for a fleeing individual. The slightly increasing distance between the trees figures their travel, but also hints at the aspect of loneliness, which is the fate of the fleeing refugee. But then, another element comes in. The increasing distance also hints at the speed of the flight, the indispensable *movement* that is a key element of what we have called "refugeedom". Lonely but never alone, always in a rush, never relaxed, never socially engaged: the refugee, be it someone fleeing the disasters produced by climate change or by war, discrimination or other forms of violence, or someone starving or whose life is otherwise threatened, must fight, run, and never look back, in order to stay alive. It matters, I suggest, that the loneliness of refugeedom as a mode of life be visible, so that those who don't need to flee have visual access to the need for empathy that could, eventually, soften the sharp solitude. If we take the time and effort to look at these dead trees with sufficient care, noticing their small differences and the unequal distances between them, we can bring them to life, make

them alive again, through personified figuration, and see how they are each different from one another.[3]

At some point in time, Salcedo's consistent construction of material traces of memories of conflict, violence, and the resulting objection to oblivion has become more overtly "moving", in the literal and in the figurative sense. (Physical) movement in the work can be (emotionally) moving. The installation *Palimpsest* from 2017 (on which more below) is a very strong case. In addition to her insistence on materiality, what I call her materialist bend, there, movement has become a second pillar of the forcefully militant refusal of forgetfulness that her work embodies. For now, I wish to foreground another connection, of the trees as symbols of refugeedom. These connect to what Ihab Saloul wrote about the relevant concept he proposed: "memory in exile".

Through this concept, which Saloul theorizes and connects to oral history and ethnography in a methodologically meaningful manner, he reconciles the somewhat problematic "post-ness" of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (Hirsch 2012), with the "present-tenseness" of acts of memory. In an argument for interdisciplinarity between narratological and ethnographic analysis, Saloul writes:

> I argue that any disciplinary perspective employed should pose 'the subject of the everyday' as the question at the heart of any narrative about the condition of Palestinian exile. Posed as a question, 'the subject of the everyday' can help us not only to refine our reading of exilic narratives as historical representations but also to supply insights into the narratives' depiction of current affairs. Most importantly, with regard to the visioning of Israel-Palestine, I explore oral histories and ethnography as forms of visioning that go beyond palpable visual materials. This mode of reading entails a shift of focus from the historical event itself, in its inevitable pastness, to the subject of this event and his or her present-day condition. Rather than referring to al-Nakba of 1948, I shall mobilize what I call *mankoub* – the "catastrophed subject". (Saloul 2020, 245)

This final concept makes the encounter between the empathy of the public and the traumatized state of the victims, potentially productive for a new kind of social subjectivity. In order to make the memories of that subject, in the present-everyday, relevant for a "visioning" (to recall the title of the

3 We invented the neologistic noun "refugeedom" for the title of a short film, which I co-made with the artist Lena Verhoeff (2022). Bal & Verhoeff, *Refugeedom: Lonely but not alone*.

book in which this was published) of, in his reflection, he first establishes and then destabilises the distinction between autobiographical and memorial modes of story-telling. This balances out a potentially exaggeratedly individualised sense of subjective identity and brings the friction between past and present experiences that memories harbour, to bear on "cultural citizenship", as a destabilising, hence, a de-essentialising tool. It brings resilience and resistance into each other's orbit. This is where Salcedo's art and Saloul's conceptualization hold hands.

I find Saloul's refinement of the concept of postmemory eminently suitable to remedy the problems of that concept. According to the performative conception of art, art participates in the political – it does not simply represent it; rather than merely critiquing, it intervenes. For such intervention to be possible and relevant, art needs to possess as well as bestow agency. I understand "relevant" in the sense of being incisive for that domain where differences of opinion are recognised and treated as antagonisms – as the alternative to enmity. In the remainder of this chapter, I will revisit two works in which the question of my title, why matter matters, is answered in a variety of ways, all relevant for the tenor of this book. Knowledge sites such as museums, artworks such as sculptures, and places turned into monuments, all constitute attempts to preclude forgetfulness and instead, keep memories of painfulness alive, not to cultivate pain but to help soften it. Why it is important that through such traces of conflict we hold on to a material presence of the horrors that happened and that we would like to (literally) bury but must keep touching? This is the issue that Salcedo's work raises. In her case, the violent moments that produce traumatic wounding, hence, enduring suffering, are imaginatively located inside homes, pieces of furniture such as cupboards, and the objects that these harbour, including clothing, bones, and human hair. The connections between movement, moving, matter and materiality do matter: this is the point of Salcedo's conception of sculpture in her attempts to revitalize memory and to soften trauma.[4]

Moving Movements

I will now first go through a relatively recent experience of Salcedo's work where movement became the political motor of the artwork's effectivity. Movement, of the smallest, subtlest kind, trembled through an immense

4 On sculpture and its materiality, see van Alphen, *Seven Logics of Sculpture. Encountering Objects Through the Senses*. For more on the materiality of Salcedo's artworks, see my 2010 book.

plaza consisting of large slabs, each four and a half meters long, 1.28 cm wide, in sand colour, with a grainy surface of extremely fine pebbles, designed to resist the absorption of water. Nearly effaced names are written on them, in a dark hue. These are written in sand. Overwriting these are other names, in the same size and font, in shallow relief engraved in the slabs. Suddenly, a shiny drop of water appears, rolling towards the relief; then more, until the letters of the name are filled, and the water becomes a convex shiny surface, surmounting the flatness of the slabs. After a few minutes, the water letters start to tremble; then they disappear. Appearance and disappearance: the names keep moving. Moving, as physical instability, and as emotional effect, producing turmoil. The flat ground on which the visitor must walk; the humble material; and the constant unsteadiness: these are the basic tenets of this artwork titled *Palimpsesto*. The water names overwrite the sand names, which remain as a palimpsest, a trace of forgotten people.

I saw, and experienced this work in the Palacio de Cristal in the Parque del Retiro in Madrid. Installed on commission by the Museo Reina Sofía, it stayed there for six months, then went to the White Cube in London. In my view, Salcedo has made, over five years and with a team of twenty, an exceptionally brilliant, effective political art installation. The term "counter-monument", although certainly appropriate, doesn't begin to cover it. It is also a performative work; one that keeps moving and changing. And inviting the visitor to walk on it – there is no other space for us – it includes the public in the performance. Every step, one has to decide whether to avoid stepping on the names or, in what seems to me a callous indifference, walk on top of them. The possibility of indifference also hits a nerve, since the names form a recollection of and homage to the innumerable victims of European indifference who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. Refugeedom again.[5]

Just as the dead trees do evoke but not represent refugees, this is not a "theme"; the work is not "about" this acutely political issue. Salcedo does not represent the violence she invokes, nor the oblivion she counters. Although her work is never abstract in the traditional sense, neither does it ever proclaim political opinions, in a loud voice. Her work "deconstructs", in line with Derrida, and then Deleuze, the binary opposition between abstraction and figuration. The objects in her early work are concrete "things" – stacked shirts, pieces of furniture – but they signify on a very different level, with their materiality deploying affect and subtle light to touch their viewers. Without ever stating a "theme", the work does concern, and is committed

5 For a critical view of the concept and institution of counter-monument, see Huyssen, 'Monumental Seduction', 191-207.

to, a political cause. In *Palimpsesto,* the issue at stake is the most tragic one, over-visible due to the media, yet too well-known to avoid becoming invisible, of the world in our time. Too much sand and too little water push people to embark on the precarious boats of human traffickers, only to perish on too much water. Sand and water: they are part of the basic conditions that preclude survival, so that people cannot stay where they were born and would like to have stayed if only they had the merest chance to survive the negative dialectic of too much (sand), too little (drinkable water), too much (sea water).[6]

An artwork can hardly be more *contemporary* – performatively happening in our time, today, and devoted to that tragedy of ongoing violence we all, in Europe, continue to condone. The names tell us that the drowned are not an anonymous mass but an enormous group of individuals, whose lives matter – each of them as human as we all are, or pretend to be. After five years of strenuous work and creativity, at great personal expense of time, artistic thought, and economic resources, *Palimpsesto* shows the cultural necessity yet difficulty to mourn, to grieve for unknown dead; a protest against the violence of indifference and of the acceptance, and even a certain stimulation of the murderous violence by governments. She targets not only the Colombian government, that accepted the loss (with the tiniest majority) of the referendum for peace with the FARC, to which Salcedo immediately responded with another enormous artwork, *Sumando Ausecias,* covering the entire surface of the central Plaza of Bogotá. But she indicts the violence of all governments, and in this case, specifically the European ones. A protest that is at the same time an homage to each of those persons, now named by their names. That double effect, of soliciting indignation and grief, of beauty and pain, is unspeakable. As Ludwig Wittgenstein stated at the end of the *Tractatus,* of what one cannot speak, one must keep silent. But later, he retracted, or modified that statement, when he said that of what one cannot speak, one must show. I titled my 2010 book on Salcedo's art after Wittgenstein's dictum.[7]

The surface of this work covers the entirety of the Art Nouveau glass building of the Palacio de Cristal, of 1,065 square meters. Each of the 220 slabs measures 4.53 x 1.29 meters and weights 980 kilos. One can only imagine the

6 It is hard to imagine, or "image", what this artwork really figures and does. I made a short documentary about it to make the experience more concrete. See *Palimpsesto*, 12'13".

7 See Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art.* For Wittgenstein's change of heart, see first the final sentence of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; then *Philosophical Investigations* n. 41, commented on by Davoine and Gaudillière, *A bon entendeur, salut! Face à la perversion, le retour de Don Quichotte*, 17, 51-52. They quote Maurice O'Drury, 159, 170, 173.

logistics of transporting it. The appearance and disappearance of the water has a strong impact as movement, in the two meanings of that noun. It makes the visitor want to stay, to see the vanishing water reappear, and thus witness the act of witnessing that this work constitutes and performs, and thereby encourages, but which can never stop as "done". One cannot write on water, and sand will not stay in place. But the artist demonstrates that one can write *with* water, and *with* sand. The names written in sand belong to victims of European indifference who died before the year 2000; the names written with water, to those who died after 2000. Only a fraction of the individuals who died could find a place in this enormous work. But that each of them counts is clear. As clear as the brilliant drops of water. The name is what distinguishes one human being from another; it is the label of her uniqueness. Against the abjection of anonymous death, the brilliance of the water dignifies the persons named. The transparency and the evaporation of the water with which the names are written, constitute a subtle metaphor of the fragility of human existence, and in these cases, of the lives cut off too early.

A complex mechanism underneath the slabs pushes the water up, drop by drop, to the surface. Each drop "walks" towards the sculpted letters, through the tiniest hole in the stone, between the minuscule pebbles. That slow movement of the water matters. When the drops merge, and take leave from their brilliant appearance where the sun makes them look like precious stones, we realize we must resist that metaphor because nothing stays stable and the material is humble. Instead, we see tears; the earth is crying. This weeping of the stone stands in for the absent tears of all of us, who shake off the everyday spectacle of deaths shown, in half a minute, on television. Instead, in Salcedo's installation, one is captivated enough to spend a long time *with* the dead. While waiting for the vanished water to return, we can and must take the time to reflect on the political issue so powerfully made tangible, due to the absence of representation. Thus, as in all of Salcedo's art, grief is brought together with at least a minimal effort to suggest that we can, indeed must break the cycle of silenced violence. The tool: memory.[8]

Memory Moves

Memory is usually understood as a *cultural* phenomenon as well as an *individual* and *social* one. Although the term "cultural memory" has been

8 On the speedy passing by of death on the news, see the artbook by Huber, *Archive OneThirty*, and my comment on it, 'Halting the News', 10-17.

quite popular for a few decades now, my assumption is that these three "kinds" of memory cannot be separated. The distinction is only a matter of emphasis, of perspective and interest on the part of the memorizing subject. All memories have an individual, social and cultural aspect. This is only logical, since the subjects that remember are also participants in all three of these domains. Moreover, memories have a three-partite temporality. Memory is a connection between the three times of human temporal awareness: the past, in which things happened that the memory engages – or not; the present, in which the act of memorizing takes place and into which the remembered content is retrieved; and the future, which will be influenced by what the subjects in the present, together and embedded in their cultural environment, remember and do with those memories. If I focus on "cultural memory", this is a focus only; one that brings forward political aspects, and the plurality of the subjects involved. In the installation, no visitor is alone. The fact of being together in a (social) space is an important aspect of the experience; while developing the thoughts that the work solicits, one is aware of being *with* those others as well as with the dead.

Salcedo's work addresses cultural memory in its negativity, its failure, and seeks to find hints of solutions. Failure of memory is not so much *forgetting*, a very useful concept we should not *forget* when considering memory; and one which Aleida Assmann, in her book *Formen des Vergessen,* usefully sums up as "a filter, as a weapon and as a prerequisite for the creation of new things". Instead, Salcedo's focus is on *actively* forgetting, albeit not necessarily purposely *repressing* or, in a different view, *disassociating* – in other words, *dis-remembering*, as the title of a 2015 work calls it, on the one hand; or willfully, in what can even go as far as bad faith, *distorting* potentially helpful memories on the other, as *mis-remembering*. Both are devastating, wasteful missed opportunities for the present and future. Without moralizing, Salcedo counters these failures. If she eschews representation, I imagine various reasons for this.[9]

Disremembering, misremembering: these two failures of memory take shape in the cultural imagination in, and with which, humans exist. The *human figure* constitutes the primary subject matter of figurative literature and art, although by no means exclusively. In literature, especially narrative, the human figure takes on the propulsion of narrative thrust. As agent or patient, it carries the action that is the motor of the plot. Here, this figure is named *character*. Both figure and character can be seen as figurations: *figurative* in that they embody ideas shaped in forms, and

9 Assmann, *Formen des Vergessen*.

figures of anthropomorphic appearance that are, do, and appear. It is the convergence of figure and character in their guise of figurations that projects the terms in which we tend to analyze art. A most emblematic manifestation is the recurrence of the self-portrait, and the memoir, autobiography or self-reflexive moments in fiction. I see in the convergence between art and its analysis the work of "the anthropomorphic imagination." With this neologism I mean a tendency to approach cultural artifacts through the lens or frame of frequently unacknowledged anthropomorphic concepts. The tools of analysis are thus made congruent to the objects.[10]

This telescoping of object and analysis produces a number of tendencies, of which I point out a few of the problematic ones. One such tendency is the conflation of artwork and the maker's *intention*. Another is the *unification* of the artwork, to resemble a unified human being anxious to hold himself together. A third tendency is the "*spiritualization*", the de-materialization or dis-embodiment of art, art-making, and viewing or reading. These three tendencies produce instances of failures of memory. It is in countering these tendencies that Salcedo's work yields to the victims in need of remembrance. While recognizable for their subtlety and that intricate combination of formal beauty with affective bleakness, her works are impossible to "sign". They also pluralize the human beings they bring back to memory, thus precluding the anxious unification. And they are profoundly material. The material above called "humble" of sand and water make any spiritualizing tendency to disembody them, futile. And while the work is so large as to cover an entire museal space, every name, every letter, every drop and every pebble counts as recollection of every human being destroyed by violence. To realize, feel, and thus, remember this, is the *work* of art, which thereby becomes a more serious, effective, and stronger utterance than any news item or political debate – these days reduced to tweets anyway – can effectuate.

In this work with and for memory, Salcedo joins artists who deploy the shadow as the spectre of the dead returning. I am thinking especially of Indian artist Nalini Malani and her famous shadow plays. The shadow as the trace, such as the names written in sand in *Palimpsesto,* becomes a spectre when we take time itself into account. And time is the motor of memory, as well as of forgetting, disremembering, misremembering. When we think of time, we cannot ignore history, but I am under the impact of the

10 For more on the terminology, especially "figuration", see my book *Image-Thinking: Artmaking as Cultural Analysis*, where I rely on the first chapter of Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy After the New Media*. Rodowick explains the concept of figuration brought up by Jean-François Lyotard.

Figure 16 Juan Fernando Castro, *Palimpsesto*, Hydraulic equipment, metal, ground marble, resin, corundum, sand and water, dimensions variable© Doris Salcedo

contemporaneity of this artwork, hence, of the history of the present. There, the plurality of experiences of time lead to what I have called "heterochrony". One of the durational differences in the various experiences of time is the duration of the look. The Deleuzian "crystal image", can be seen as a variant of such duration. This is a tangled unit of an actual image and its virtual image where we see the sprouting of moments of time through the various facets of the crystal, as if doubled. All these temporal forms are activated in the contemporary crystal of this multi-tentacled artwork.[11]

Slow or Still?

A third work by Salcedo that I want to bring in, for its insistence of materiality for memory and on movement as between still and slow, is titled *Plegaria Muda*, from 2008-10. Its title suggests still, as in still, unmoving sculpture, but also as in "silent" (*Muda*). "Each unit is approximately the length and width of a standard coffin," Doris Salcedo wrote in the artist statement for this work. The word "coffin" stuck in my throat, for, when I was asked to write about Salcedo's work for the catalogue, I had just had my own experience with coffins. For the feature film on madness mentioned in the Introduction that I was involved in making, I travelled to Seili Island, Finland, to a former

11 I have proposed and developed the concept of heterochrony in several earlier publications, most systematically in *Image-Thinking*, 131-174.

psychiatric hospital, a pinkish building amidst green meadows. On Seili, a former leprosy colony had been converted into a "madhouse" – something that, as Michel Foucault has told us (1961), had been done in many cases. The disappearance of leprosy marked the invention of the madhouse, or psychiatric hospital. On Seili, patients were admitted on one condition: they had to bring their own coffin. This chilling fact turned our filming on that location into a historically layered moment that I qualify as "political."[12]

Salcedo not only uses the dimensions ("approximately") of coffins but also the material: wooden tables; and the colour, or discoloration, of the grey that we recognize from her earlier work *Unland* (1995–98), which was also made of treated and aged tabletops, and now, of course, from the dead trees that constitute the inhabitable house of *Uprooted*. Working with and for the victims of political violence has been Salcedo's artistic program and life project from the beginning. Death caused by human hands; victims de-humanized when their bodies could not be retrieved, buried, mourned, because the violence was denied. Mass graves hidden in green pastures, where the hiding is like a second killing, parallel with but opposed to the traditional second burial. In *Plegaria Muda,* those killing grounds themselves become visible – barely, piercing through their attempts to stay hidden – for the first time. Green, growing grass, life: it is almost shocking to see those tiny bits surface from between the grey, dead slabs. Slowly but surely, the grass grows.

Like the coffins of the history of Seili that sentenced, without trial, the allegedly mad to life imprisonment, never to be seen again, the coffin-size sculptures do not explicitly reference any violence at all. They do not tell stories; they just "are", touching the visitor with hair-raising horror while remaining mute, immobile, silent as the grave. This is art after all – not committed journalism, not politics, not propaganda. Yet there is a reality behind them, or inside them: the reality of mass murder. That is the reality of the history of the present, in the aftermath of which we live and enjoy great works of art. This reality is invoked in a manner that is both absolutely inevitable and yet indirect. The numerous units, working together to constitute a mass – as in "mass graves" – cannot avoid working *together* to convey or touch us with the horror that inspired them. But nowhere can any representation of violence be seen. Even the grass of the killing fields is modest, small, growing shyly from between two layers of wood that evoke

12 Foucault, *History of Madness*. I wrote a longer text on the work I now discuss, 'Waiting for the Political Moment', 79-86. See www.crazymothermovie.com for more information about *Mère Folle*, the film I co-authored with Michelle Williams Gamaker.

but do not represent the coffin. It is as subtly moving as the water drops in *Palimsesto*.

From within that present in which Salcedo shows her work, the small bits of grass that pierce through the layers of attempts to keep life under a lid, I must look back at the earlier work I have seen so often (but not often enough), and by which I have been touched so often, through Salcedo's primary medium: affect. I have written about that work, but never seen it through those shades of green. Green goes very well with grey; but the beauty of a colour scheme matters here only ironically. Instead, it is the struggle of those small green elements that touches me, with the contradictory combination of two meanings. They conceal the place of violence, the invisible grave, by overgrowing it. This makes the grass guilty by omission, complicit with the cruelty that not only killed but also concealed the killing, thus preventing mourning. Yet, they also indicate the perseverance of life, thumbing their noses at those who think killing can erase life.[13] Such sculptures subtly hint at the human figure that they refrain from representing. They deploy the human figure allusively. They cloud the human figure in concealment, as silent nuclei. These terms, which I borrow from an essay on the Latin-American Baroque in literature, are, in Salcedo's case, to be taken in two ways. They refer both to the strategies deployed in the art and to the violence of concealment and silencing that art addresses.[14]

"Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" Walter Benjamin wrote in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History". In this sentence, the key word "recognized" does not clarify the ambiguous preposition "of" in "image of the past." Does "of" indicate provenance or subject matter? In other words, is Benjamin talking about images that come from the past or images that represent the past? The irresolvable ambiguity defines Salcedo's relationship to representation. It is through this ambiguity that the sculptures can do their political work. Benjamin insists on the need for images of the past to be in the present – to be "the case," to use Ludwig Wittgenstein's definition of "the world" in the opening sentence of the *Tractatus*.[15]

Salcedo's works are entirely visual: they use no words other than their titles, and the only sound they emit is that of an emphatic silence. Yet,

13 The idea of the grass as guilty resonates with a book by van Alphen, *Armando: Shaping Memory*, in which the landscape is indicted for just growing on.

14 Sarduy, 'The Baroque and the Neo-Baroque', 133–60.

15 Arendt (ed.)., 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', 253–64 (255). Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

the art's very visuality – its forms, colours, and matter – also carries out conceptual work, all the while making its viewers do the same. And here, with *Plegaria Muda,* we cannot avoid seeing the conceptual work in the dimensions as well. While never representing a human figure, Salcedo does not allow us to forget that figure, if only by the dimensions. Nor can we forget the trace of life, the grass tells us.

Moving, Still

But none of Salcedo's works is didactically political. Instead, it offers its viewers tools to move beyond fixed concepts into the uncertain realm of mobile concepts, and challenges its viewers to endorse that mobility. I therefore would like to group these works under the heading of "practical philosophy" rather than that of "visual philosophy" because they reflect on how we can *deal with* the suffering of singular people caused by political violence. That "dealing with" – occurring only after the suspension of a sentimentalizing compassion – posits the intersection between the singular and the general, the punctual and the enduring as the site of the political. It also harbours the ambiguity of the preposition "of."

Art participates in the political – it does not simply represent it; rather than merely critiquing, it intervenes. For such interference to be possible, art needs to possess as well as bestow agency. The sculpture reflects on the place that representation has in such a search for art's political agency. It helps us to articulate possible ways of making cultural interventions, such as art practices, concretely relevant without the need to resort to representation and its drawbacks of repetition, reduction, and distancing – "stylizing", for which Theodor W. Adorno indicted it in his famous critique of culture and its studies. I understand "relevant" in the sense of being incisive for that domain where differences of opinion are recognized and treated as antagonisms; and antagonism as the alternative to enmity. Salcedo does not simply refuse, disavow, or reject those artistic and intellectual strategies she seeks to question. Therefore, representation retains a place – however problematical, minimal, and subverted that place may be. In *Plegaria Muda*, we can observe it in the dimensions, as well and in the thin stalks of grass.[16]

16 This text by Adorno is often alleged as an indictment of art "after Auschwitz," a negativity Adorno himself withdrew when it was taken up a bit too easily. See Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', 146–62.

Other artistic strategies take on a new life, so to speak, when seen through *Plegaria Muda*, such as its coffin-like dimensions and its shade of green. Negativity is necessary in order to avoid the moralizing talk of "dominant ideology" and instead to acknowledge complicity. But one further step is needed, and this step will restore the need for political art, albeit perhaps through the back door. In an essay on the predicament of the compulsion and impossibility of defining "culture" in anthropology, Johannes Fabian offers a convincing plea for a rigorously negative (non-)definition of this concept. He contends that it is helpful to invoke confrontation and negotiation as the moments in which "the cultural" emerges. This formulation both avoids positive, reifying definitions that are inherently "othering" and foregrounds process as the domain of culture. Thus, it involves temporality, agency, and plurality, without falling into the traps of self-congratulatory celebrations of multiplicity and freedom, of idealizations of the possibility of democracy, and of the insidious imposition of particular values as universal.[17]

Indeed, the phrase "political art" traditionally possesses a number of meanings that we can now discard or bracket. First, political art is obviously not overtly and explicitly *about* politics. Such a thematic concentration would disempower art that may be more effective for not being explicit. Second, the phrase cannot mean state-sponsored and/or -censored art. This perspective unwarrantedly makes invisible the infractions of politics on people's private lives. It would thus defeat the purpose of Salcedo's art, since this work insists on the way in which the breakdown of the distinction between public and private is, in fact, an imposing feature of war. Just imagine again the house of dead trees in *Uprooted*. Hence, rethinking reasons to protect that distinction may well be the most poignant area for an inquiry into political art. Third, we cannot see political art as punctual protest, as a singular political statement presented within the framework of the art world. For such art is not political *qua* art; it just happens to have a political meaning. Such art may be effective, as effective as protest marches, parliamentary lobbying, or actual warfare, but it is not effective *qua* art. These three senses in which the phrase "political art" functions share the fact that they suggest, as their alternative, a universal, and universally valuable, kind of art that protects itself from political "contagion." This art is pure, ethereal, and aesthetic only. Adorno therefore disparagingly called it "the work [of art] that wants nothing but to exist" (240). It advocates forgetting that, as he adds, this fetishization of aesthetics is "an apolitical stance that is in fact highly political" (240).[18]

17 Fabian, *Anthropology with an Attitude: Critical Essays*.

18 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*.

There is another meaning of political art, however, that is more difficult to discard because it is not caught up in this false binary of political versus aesthetic. This meaning makes indifference an impossibility. It emerges from and undermines another opposition: that between art and life. It is the kind of aestheticizing (or as Adorno would say, stylizing) of real-world politics, including – especially, I would add – violence. By definition, art stylizes. However, Salcedo demonstrates that it does not necessarily stylize violence *away*. This is one of the effects of the live grass piercing through the lids of the "coffins." The mode of representation can be such that it works to "undercode" the violence that it is addressing. Salcedo has been exploring artistic languages that enable her to do neither of these two things. Instead, she undercodes the violence so that its presence in the resulting work, which is partly representational and partly anti-representational, is all the more tenacious and acute. Her tool is the metaphoring between the particular and the general. She never compromises, refusing to choose between the two. Singularity is a function of the index and is therefore also a function of its key instance: the trace. But Salcedo's work concerns instances of mass violence occurring throughout the world, even though the work respects and foregrounds the singularity of each of these instances.

One of the tools of this constant bond between mass violence and the singular suffering it causes is the deployment of time. The growing of grass, its slow yet relentless return to life, focuses on the slow temporality of living against the fast one of killing. Human life can be destroyed faster than grass can grow, yet time is elongated in the face of torture and death. Time loses its meaning. In terms of time, the paradox is that most of Salcedo's work is *still*. Technically, it is still because it does not move. Sonically, it is silent. But it is also still in terms of mood. Yet, it is moving – not primarily emotionally but politically – because of the strong affective impact that compels agency without prescribing what the agent must do. As a consequence, Salcedo's work, which is committed to stillness, is able to overcome the formal opposition between "still" and "moving" images. It also negotiates the gap between an object and its affective charge, or, in other words, between the object perceived at a distance and the viewer whose act of viewing affects her. The small patches of grass, different in each unit, need a moving visitor in order to be perceived. While the radical incommensurability between looking at a distance and looking up close is a theoretical issue, Salcedo turns this incommensurability into a literal and experiential aspect of vision. Among the consequences of this paradoxical "state" is a complex relationship, not only with representation, figuration, and space, but also with another aspect of "human nature": its existence in time. The temporality of human existence

Figure 17 Oscar Monsalve, *Plegaria Muda*, 2008 – 2010
Wood, concrete, earth, and grass, 166 parts, each 164 × 214 × 61 cm, overall dimensions variable © Doris Salcedo

precludes stability and warrants constant transformation. This effect keeps the singularity of each artwork from falling back into (anecdotal) particularity.

Finally, the enormous scale of *Plegaria Muda* that inflects a gigantic space with greyness, combined with the green grass, and that of *Palimpsesto*, where the shiny water drops bring in something beyond stillness, bring our attention back to the *installation* aspect, crucial to all of Salcedo's work. In Salcedo's oeuvre there is a meaningful connection between the recurrent use of burial for metaphoring, the related preference for concrete as one of her materials of choice, and the endorsement of the dependency of sculpture on space. With *Uprooted,* the distinction between sculpture and installation is undermined, as if to foreground once more the unbreakable bond between singular suffering and mass killing, between the singularity that moves us to act and become political agents, and the universality that forbids us to feel comforted by any limitation of political violence to any one region. And with the insistence on life the refugees embody, we can no longer consider this mournful work in exclusively negative terms. It becomes clear now that life remained all along; as trace, as (photographic) negative, as memory.

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About the Author

Mieke Bal, author of 46 books and supervisor of 81 finished PhDs, cultural theorist, critic, video artist and curator, writes in an interdisciplinary perspective on cultural analysis, literature and art, focusing on gender, migratory culture, the critique of capitalism, and political art. In 2002 she began to also make films, as a different, more in-depth and more contemporary mode of cultural analysis. Since then, writing, filmmaking and curating go together. In her 2022 book *Image-Thinking* (Edinburgh UP) she develops her ideas about how to integrate academic and artistic thinking. As a filmmaker, she made a number of experimental documentaries, mostly about migratory situations, and "theoretical fictions", films and installations in which fiction helped developing difficult ideas. Then she made a 16-channel video-installation *Don Quijote: Sad Countenances* (2019) and a short essay film *It's About Time! Reflections on Urgency* (2020). Her most recent film made with Lena Verhoeff, *Refugeedom: Lonely but not Alone*, premiered in May 2023 in the SPEME program under direction of Professor Ihab Saloul.

3 Trauma and Allegory

Truthfulness in Fact and Fiction and Making a Private Archive Productive

Lars Ebert

Abstract
Herengracht 401 (H401), until 2019 known as Castrum Peregrini, represents the complex and intriguing history of a hermetic community of artists and scholars in Amsterdam which was formed in the years of the Nazi occupation of The Netherlands, 1940–1945.This chapter attempts to take stock on what we have learned in these ten years about the history of the place, as an indicator of memory politics. It also reflects on the hermeneutic gap of what we cannot know of H401's history as we lack experiential knowledge of eyewitnesses. As the author argues below, the site of H401 shows how the 'hermeneutic gap' can offer a chance to make an archive, such as in the case of 'the house on Herengracht 401', productive and meaningful through the artistic practice of research.

Keywords: Herengracht 401 (H401), Second World War, Archive, Hermeneutic gap, Art-based research

Introduction

Herengracht 401 (H401), until 2019 known as Castrum Peregrini, represents the complex and intriguing history of a hermetic community of artists and scholars in Amsterdam which was formed in the years of the Nazi occupation of The Netherlands, 1940–1945. Managed by a private foundation, the house was transformed into a cultural centre in the past ten years. H401's activities use the historic fabric of the house on Herengracht 401 as an archive for an interdisciplinary and thematically driven programme wherein the

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH03

relationship between memory and art plays a central role. Kathy Carbone reminds us of the nature and role of the archive after the archival turn and argues that, although historically embedded, the archive is "not about the past but about the future of the past and is a vital source for inquiry as well as a subject of inquiry that can inspire new ways of envisioning and living in the world." (Carbone 2020). It is exactly in this sense that H401 focuses on their historic fabric as a source to think about the societies we live in today and how these can become more inclusive. It is with this ambition that H401 engages in (artistic-) research projects locally and internationally, as well as networks concerning actual debates around spaces of memory, traumatic heritage, conflict and the politics of the past in the present.[1] This chapter attempts to take stock on what we have learned in these ten years about the history of the place, as an indicator of memory politics. It also reflects on the hermeneutic gap of what we cannot know of H401's history as we lack experiential knowledge of eyewitnesses. As we will argue below, the site of H401 shows how the "hermeneutic gap" can offer a chance to make an archive, such as in the case of "the house on Herengracht 401", productive and meaningful through the artistic practice of research.

The history of Herengracht 401 can be divided into different periods during and after WWII. During the war, the danger from the outside world and the sheer survival was a constituting feature of the group. After the war, the group needed internalisation of the group-defining forces that used to come from the outside to stay together as an alternative community. The war-time trauma was sublimated with a cult to maintain the feeling of togetherness and belonging only to bring back the pain much later in another shape and form.[2] With critical distance in time and space, some

1 On Fanaticism FIT (EU Grundtvig funded, 2009–2011), TimeCase – Culture is Memory in Action (EU Multilateral project, 20012–2014), European Academy of Participation (EU Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership 2015–2017), Heritage Contact Zone (EU Creative Europe, 2018–2020), SPEME – Spaces of memory (EU Horizon 2020, 2018–2022).

2 Traumatic experiences of the group hidden at Herengracht 401 in Amsterdam could be described under various viewpoints. Persecution had forced two Jewish young men underground, F.W. Buri and C.V. Bock. Both have published memories in which they give accounts of raids, hunger, illness, loss of beloved ones (cf. Bock, *Untergetaucht unter Freunden*). In addition, the ones who organised the hiding, Wolfgang Frommel and Gisèle van Waterschoot van der Gracht had both engaged in a love affair with Buri, which almost broken the group's bond. The traumatic impact of this for all involved was described by Buri himself in Buri, *Ich gab Dir die Fackel im Sprunge* and by Gisèle in letters to friends quoted in Mooij, *Het Eeuw van Gisèle*. Central aspects of the group-defining cult were ritual poetry readings and more generally reading out loud during communal meals, commemorative get-togethers, publishing memory books and the journal Castrum Peregrini; pedagogical friendships formed a particular aspect that has been described by Frank Ligtvoet as toxic in Ligtvoet, 'In de schaduw van de meester: seksueel misbruik in de kring van Wolfgang

eyewitnesses were able to identify their pain as trauma. The complexity of the history in which it is rooted is so dense, that distance in time and culture makes it difficult to understand and empathetically connect with this history in a straightforward, unmediated way.

The concept of the allegory helps to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of artistic interventions and research to create such access to a past that otherwise stays locked by simplified images of trauma or heroism. Some examples of artistic interrogation of the H401 archive showcase the potential of creative work with historical objects that enables fiction as a point of identification for a broad audience. The focus on 'form' (material artistic expression) complements the focus on content (conceptual artistic expression), theory and truth, which is the prevailing paradigm in the contemporary art world and its moral consensus (Pfaller 2020).

The artists and their work presented here do not lean on a preconceived truth or theory and, instead, value material, fiction and the unknown. Their works reveal a relevance of heritage and memory that would otherwise stay out of reach for the audience. They suggest that art and creative research can be free of any purpose, such as healing of trauma or showing truth. Their transformative power unfolds by having no other goal than creating meaning through their own artistic methods. Through this research practice, the artist builds an autonomous relationship to the historic fabric. These artworks, like any good fiction, create moments of identification and empathy for the viewer. They encourage the viewer to adopt a truthful view of history by applying the lens of their own life experience. My personal situation can fuel a unique and critical bond with history by questioning my own thinking and thereby developing a critical perspective on my own position. The role of arts here could be called "ethical", supporting the viewers to question their own ability to take responsibility for their views and actions, as opposed to a prefabricated moralistic answer to the problems of today. Whereas contemporary conceptual art can sometimes fall prey to a moralistic and predetermined reading of the past, the artists presented here put a focus on form (as opposed to concept) and object (as opposed to theory) as ingredients for an open-ended research process to connect with an incomprehensible past. The "auto-fiction" they produce, the stories that reflect their own history or world view, encourage the viewerto form their own views in a similarly autonomous and empathetic way, as a critical self-investigation.

Frommel', and by others as existentially positive experiences. Buri notes that Frommel did not want to miss the war-time community: "Wenn es nach Wolfgangs Wesen und Vorstellung gegangen wäre, hätte alles so bleiben können, wie es war" (cf Frommel and W. Buri, *Briefwechsel* 1933–1984, 39).

Figure 18 The Building Herengracht 401

What we seem to know: (Auto-)biographical-, Anthropological- and Justice-driven History writing

In the autumn of 1999, I entered Herengracht 401 in Amsterdam for the first time. The labyrinth of rooms full of objects and stories fascinated me as it fascinates everyone who enters the building. Back then, the centre of this hidden universe was undoubtedly the painter Gisèle (1912–2013), who loved to show visitors around and tell stories of a world of friendship and art. The way Gisèle looked at things was full of wonder and she could spark a sense of amazement of the beauty of small things. I learned that Gisèle and two other old men living in the house at that time, Manuel Goldschmidt and Claus Bock, were connected by their joint experience of war, persecution and survival on one floor of the house during the Nazi occupation of The Netherlands. The central figure in their stories from the past was the parlour scholar Wolfgang Frommel (1902–1986), whom they adored.

The stories of Frommel and Gisèle were somehow glorious. Although they also told stories of hunger, police raids and loss in war and concentration camps, they always ended in the wondrous survival through reading or writing poetry and, if the real story had not ended well, then at least that loss was not in vain. The memory of someone who had not survived, such as Vincent Weyand (1921–1945), who died in the concentration camp Buchenwald, was celebrated like that of a saint. Trauma seemingly did not exist. The horrors of the past were, instead,

sublimated in rituals of commemoration (e. g. poetry readings) and by awarding meaning to suffering and death (e. g. memory books). Similar to ancient Greek tragedies, there was no space for trauma, only for tragedy, pain and glory, gods and heroes, poetry and friendship. The post-war generation of friends around Frommel and Gisèle also internalised these stories that functioned as a founding and binding mythology of their own community, as an alternative form of belonging in a post-war society of petty-bourgeois values, but also later, as a substitute to the alternative stories that came forth from the student movement.

When the last Jewish hider from the war, Claus Bock, died in 2008, the literary magazine that was published by the survivors under the name *Castrum Peregrini* since 1951, ceased to exist. Its director since 1999, Michael Defuster, had formulated the mission of turning the hermetic and anachronistic activities of a community that had dissolved (with the exception of a few individuals and Gisèle who had survived them all) into outward orientated activities that would make a relevant contribution to contemporary society. This did not go without a struggle against the remains of the old circle that perceived opening up as betrayal.[3] However, with patience and persistence and the building up of a new network of individuals and institutional collaborators, Defuster managed the change, which I witnessed as a colleague and friend.

The first public interdisciplinary thematic year programme took shape in 2009. The programme of exhibitions, symposia, publications, theatre etc. tried to shed light on themes like fanaticism, freedom, friendship and cultural memory. The activities reflected upon the themes on a meta level so as to allow for discussions of broad relevance. The heroic history of the house provided narrative anchors towards topical issues. Its interiors, presented as a carefully curated archive of deceased heroes, provided conversation pieces from which to approach social problems of today.

The main source of narratives were the few witnesses still alive or texts that had been published by the community in their magazine *Castrum Peregrini*. Therefore, we felt the growing need for a critically distanced history-writing and, in 2011, took the initiative to have a biography written of Gisèle's life. We found Annet Mooij, who, in 2012, started to scrutinise the existing archives (Gisèle's own archive is vast) and interview eye-witnesses. The biography was finally published in September 2018 (Mooij 2018). The

3 This struggle came with disputes, intrigues and schisms, but also, amongst others, a lawsuit of many years between the foundation Castrum Peregrini and the legal heir of Wolfgang Frommel, former director Manuel Goldschmidt and his legal heirs, the Wolf van Cassel Stichting about the archive that had been taken from the foundations premises as a reaction to the new direction.

Figure 19 Gisèle in her studio on the top floor, 1960s

long and intensive research period had a cathartic side effect. It served as a framework for the post-war generation in which they reflected on their own experiences. Those ranged from a gay history perspective (Keilson-Lauritz 2013), to a first critically distanced albeit empathic ego-document (Haverkorn 2013), the editing of source material (Bischoff 2017), to accounts of sexual abuse (Ligtvoet 2017). The biography of Mooij incorporated these accounts into the life story of Gisèle. The one-dimensional, heroic story, as it was told from within the Herengracht community before, had now grown into a multivocal complex of stories that ranged from heroic to traumatic.[4] We started to realise that the materiality of the house as an archive represented the ambiguity of heroes, perpetrators and victims next to one another, sometimes even in personal union.[5] This newly-discovered

4 The shocking accounts of sexual abuse triggered the constitution of an independent investigation commissioned by *Castrum Peregrini* and chaired by retired judge Frans Bauduin. It resulted in an extensive report published at http://h401.org/wp-content/uploads/CASTRUMONDERZOEK.pdf.
5 Gilad Hirschberger reminds us that "for members of perpetrator groups, collective trauma represents an identity threat (Branscombe et al.), as it creates tension between the desire to view the group in a positive light (Tajfel and Turner) and the acknowledgment of severe moral transgressions in its past. The inability to reconcile the character of the group in the present with its character in the past may motivate group members, primarily high identifiers, to perceive an historical discontinuity of the group that serves to distance present group members from

polyphony or even cacophony seemed to represent a *condition humaine* in all its consequences. It provided for a radically new and challenging frame for the cultural activities of H401.[6]

What we long to know: Bridging the Hermeneutic Gap

Making the past relevant for today through creativity and fiction

The thematic approach of the H401 activities in the last ten years was distinctly interdisciplinary with a central role for artistic work rooted in the house as an archive. However, as this archive was staged and curated by its late inhabitants, to access the original meaning behind it, a certain knowledge of their lives and their times, a certain experience or a method of deconstruction was necessary.

Walter Benjamin wrote in *On the Concept of History* (Benjamin 1980): "Because the image of the past is lost in each new moment that does not recognize its presence as one of its own concerns." In theology, this problem is addressed within the field of "hermeneutics", a process of working out the meaning and significance of historic texts. In terms of the Bible, "hermeneutics" usually refers to the way we read and 'apply' the biblical message to our modern situation, how we take an ancient text and hear what it is saying to us, here and now.

The "hermeneutical gap" in a heritage situation refers to everything that separates us from understanding the meaning of a heritage object. Amongst the original users, authors or readers 'there and then' and us 'here and now', a gap opened up that prevents us from understanding it like 'there and then' and also from applying it 'here and now". Unless we have the right set

past offenders (Roth et al.). Sometimes, this discontinuity is reflected in the motivation to close the door on history and never look back (Imhoff et al.). One of the 10 recommendations of the report of the Commission Bauduin was to clear the historic war-time apartment from the traces of Frommel so as to make a clear cut with the past. This would nevertheless have been exactly what Gilad describes as 'closing the door on history'. On the contrary, we felt our responsibility to keep the door open and also make the negative aspects of the past part of our conversations today in order to hold the tension between positive and negative aspects of the past. As a personal note, I would add that growing up in Germany has made me aware that identification with the perpetrators – without any direct personal responsibility for the atrocities of the Nazis – brings a responsibility to remember as part of the 'never again' that formed our value system. I believe the same is valid for sites of memory, such as H401.

6 Please refer to Lars Ebert, https://www.roots-routes.org/the-moralistic-turn-working-through-trauma-in-a-climate-of-outrage-the-case-study-of-castrum-peregrini-by-lars-ebert/.

of "hermeneutical principles" or scientific methods, we may find this gap rather difficult to bridge. We need to piece a puzzle of endless amounts of information to experience the world as it was back then. Unintentionally, Gisèle had touched upon hermeneutics when she noted in her diary:

> "We all carry the Castrum story in us. It has settled in the corners of memory, taken various shapes that we bring to the surface from time to time, from this we can piece a puzzle. And then it will gain a face and others will look at it as one does at a portrait. But everyone will see something else" (Pigaht 2016).

Additionally, in the spirit of Benjamin, we fail to see anything meaningful at all, other than an abstraction or an illusion as the understanding of an object from back then is fundamentally different today in the context of the world we live in. In addition to the time factor, there is, of course, also the gap between cultural realms. We may understand a bit of the problem with the simple image of a glass of water. In The Netherlands, its significance is fundamentally different than in the Sahara. The need for hermeneutics will be even more important in a combination of time and space distance.

Methodological foundations for hermeneutics of the arts have been provided by, amongst others, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960) and Ernst Gombrich (1960). According to Gadamer, the understanding of an artwork depends on temporality, which also applies to human knowledge and experience. Gombrich similarly elaborates what is commonly expressed with 'the eye of the beholder', that only through our own life context and knowledge can we develop an understanding of what is in front of us. Contemporary art theory quite rightly claims to have overcome this binary model of truth and illusion, in the concept of artistic research as a "laboratory without a protocol" (Slager 2015). The question, according to Slager (2015), is whether the artist as a researcher today can be a spectator of history, with his or her laboratories being archives, bridging the hermeneutic gap with artistic tools.

> "Science is certainty, research is uncertainty. Science is supposed to be cold, straight and detached, research is warm, involving and risky. Science puts an end to the vagaries of human disputes, research fuels controversies by more controversies. Science produces objectivity by escaping as much as possible from the shackles of ideology, passions and emotions, research feeds on all those as so many handles to render familiar new objects of enquiry" (Latour 1998).

To which Sarat Maharaj (2004) adds by describing the specificities of artistic research as "spasmic, interdisciplinary probes, haphazard cognitive investigations, dissipating interaction and imaginary archiving." "That form of research cannot be channelled through rigid academic-scientific guidelines dealing with generalisation, duplication and quantification, since it engages in the unique, the qualitative, the particular and the local" (Slager 2015).

The "how", or the method of the researching artist engaging in memory fabrics and archives, remains a matter of concern as the viewer demands accountability. Christopher Frayling (1997) notes that "artistic research does not begin with a predetermined set of questions or assumptions, but arises from the particular situations or contexts being investigated." I would still argue that the awareness of a hermeneutic gap of our situation and ideological point of departure is often lacking, especially in the moral consensus of the contemporary art world. Looking at heritage with any kind of ideological or dogmatic perspective can be limiting, such as the one we see in the majority of, for instance, Documenta visitors. Art often is a self-directed appreciation of theory or cultural critique to confirm one's own truth (Pfaller 2020). Their references (*see* Butler, Deleuze etc.) underpin the politically correct message. As part of that system and a Documenta visitor myself, I do not write this without self-critique and the acknowledgement of the need for autonomous ethical thinking, instead of a moral compass that we seem to find in theory-based art. In its bold presence, one may easily overlook the investigative power of its counterpart, namely material-based art and fiction to bridge the hermeneutic gap. As an alternative concept to truth- and theory-based practices, artistic research that takes material, form and fiction seriously can offer truthfulness in creativity, if this creative research is truthful in the sense of being radical in its open-endedness and autonomy.

The Allegorical Impulse: Examples of the researching Artist in the Archive of H401

These developments of the last years have fuelled the impression, mainly in rich capitalist societies, that art is mainly about revealing often morally superior truth. Philosophers, such as Badiou, Derrida and Feyerabend, have characterised art as a practice of truth. However, art is also a practice of appearance, of fiction, deception and lie (Demeester 2018). Fiction is the centre of our human being. Without fiction, we cannot broaden our thinking nor handle the complexity of our world. To put it in the famous words of Picasso: "We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes

us realise truth" (Picasso 1923). Contemporary art practice often seems to forget that the one field fundamentally occupied by art is that of the appearance, the sparkle and that, without that sparkle, there is no truth (Pfaller 2020). The case studies of artistic works below support the thesis of Robert Pfaller (2020) that the material work of art (notwithstanding its conceptual backbones) is the only instrument of artists that makes it possible to discover something that they did not know or did not intend at the outset of the process of creative enquiry (Pfaller 2020). Cultural Studies and other fields of theory, as a point of departure for artistic research, on the other hand, hold the risk to produce art which merely illustrates what the artist and the viewer knew before they saw the artwork. It, therefore, broadens the hermeneutic gap.

When turning to fiction, material and form as an attempt to bridge the hermeneutic gap, the figure of the allegory comes to mind. The term, from Latin allegoria, is rooted in the Greek ἀλληγορία, composed of ἄλλος, "other" and ἀγορεύω 'to speak in the assembly, the ἀγορά. It means speaking through others, letting others speak, putting the meaning-making outside of oneself. In the ancient world, it was a literary figure and a method of interpretation to bridge the hermeneutic gap. Allegorical reading would reveal a meaning of historic texts for a yet-to-come future. Arnisa Zeqo (2019) reminds us of the allegorical impulse embodied in certain practices of artists that problematise the activity of reference. In the hand of those artists, images become something 'other'. Allegorist artists do not restore an original meaning; on the contrary, they make evident that there never was one. Meaning is added or altered in hindsight. This can be read in analogy to trauma following Ihab Saloul's conceptualisation of the term as not the painful, horrific or stressful event as such that automatically turns into a traumatic experience. Only, a posteriori, a trauma develops due to the lack of meaning and the feeling of useless suffering or unexpected, unfair and ungrounded loss.[7]

The following artists have worked for a shorter or a longer period at H401 and have used its stories and its materiality as an archive. They made it

7 The Viennese psychiatrist and Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl wrote in *Man's Search for Meaning*: "[...] any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal. Nietzsche's words, "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how," could be the guiding motto for all psychotherapeutic and psychohygienic efforts [...] Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a why—an aim—for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible how [...]". More commonly, trauma is seen to be caused by an event that breaks through our protective psychological shield, it overwhelms us and our ability to process its impression. See Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*.

productive through their artistic use of allegories or 'research' in the meaning described above to create a moment of truthfulness in which we can identify aspects of our own biography, our own longing, our own doubts and the urge to connect with the past as a compass for navigating our own lives.

Amie Dicke

Amie Dicke's participation in the first exhibition at H401 (then still Castrum Peregrini), AURA, curated by Michiel van Iersel, marked the beginning of a six-year long artistic engagement with the stories and the material heritage at Herengracht 401. Dicke was fascinated by what disappeared through material decay, by that which is hidden in plain sight in interiors and archives or that which reveals itself through being erased by her own hands. Dicke herself used the term the "unmade", which integrates two interconnected opposites and can be understood with the image of a palimpsest: by adding a layer, another one disappears, by erasing a layer an unexpected one appears (Dicke 2011).

Her first work for the AURA exhibition was the site-specific *Claustrophobic*. The exhibition marked a *rite de passage* from the "old" and inward-looking Castrum Peregrini, mainly publishing a magazine, to the newly-defined cultural activities that were directed towards the world. Van Iersel had asked a group of artists to reflect on what it means to transform a place into something new and whether the aura that was felt there would pertain when "re-produced", with a reference to Walter Benjamin.[8] Dicke was fascinated by the apartment in which, in 2008, Claus Victor Bock had died. The last Jewish survivor from the war-time period of Castrum Peregrini had come to live at Herengracht 401 again after retiring. Before the apartment was about to be dismantled, Dicke set out to cast a death mask over the interior before it disappeared and applied a layer of agricultural plastic over the furniture, covering and wrapping everything in the room. Only then was the apartment emptied and left a transparent plastic shape of what was no longer there, reflecting the essence or aura of a place, an "unmade" space.

Later, Dicke investigated the former hiding apartment, which is until today largely unchanged from what it was during the years of occupation. With a reference to *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard, she set out to realise a site-specific work with golden emergency blankets (Bachelard 1958).

8 In his essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, first published in Paris 1936, Walter Benjamin argues that an artwork loses its aura once reproduced.

The last inhabitant of the apartment was Manuel Goldschmidt, the life-time companion of Frommel. Dicke started to wrap furniture, books and objects so as to save them, just like victims of an accident are saved by emergency blankets from the destructive influences of weather or environment. She soon undid this wrapping exercise as the 'poetics' of the space had helped her understand the actual possibility for her creative intervention, the cracks and the in-between spaces of the historic interior. There was no need for drawing attention to any kind of emergency or the decay, the threatening loss of matter. Instead, the overlooked little slots between carpet and wall, the cracks in the furniture and plaster of the ceiling, the worm holes in a table, those were the overlooked parts of the interior, maybe the ones that held the genuine being and uniqueness of the space. Dicke meticulously and with utter care filled those mostly tiny spaces with gold foil. Upon entering the apartment, nothing was visible. However, just like eyes have to adjust to darkness, they had to adjust to this subtle grid of golden fault lines that defined the space anew and showed the substance matter of overlooked absence.

In a third stage of Dicke's engagement with the house, she turned to the apartment and the studio of Gisèle. Supported by the Mondrian Fund, she worked there for a year. Like an archaeologist, she documented details of the interiors that revealed original colours, when, for instance, frames were removed from their place at the wall. Dust functioned like the colour of a silk print, revealing the artwork when the screen is taken off the paper. She collected images from the archive, by having them photographed in the same way she did with the material structures of the furniture, the curtains, tapestry, upholstery, books and the endless numbers of *objects trouvée*. Through this act of archiving archival material and rearranging it in her artwork, Dicke follows the above sketched allegorical impulse and turned these images into something 'other', exactly not to restore an original meaning, but from her artistic perspective, to create meaning in hindsight. It is exactly in this act that fiction bridges the hermeneutic gap.

Another focus of this work is on the little notes that Gisèle had used more often as she grew older in order to compensate for the loss of her own memory and for labelling all kinds of objects, such as an empty video tape with the words "nothing to see here". It is exactly where we commonly assume that nothing is to be seen that Dicke makes us see. She established a photographic account on a website and ultimately made a final selection for an art book, arranging her finds like an archiver, but using an ordering system that only reveals itself by engaging in its flow of images. Henk Slager writes about this approach:

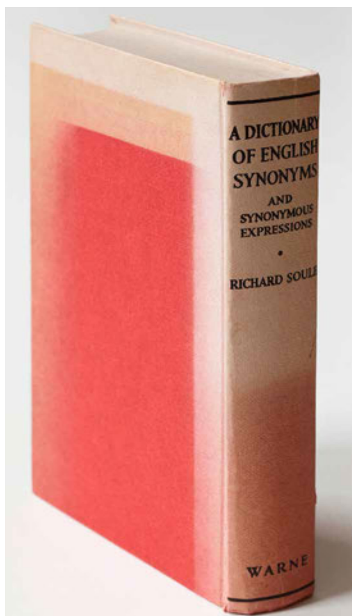

Figure 20 Amie Dicke from the series *Important Souvenirs*, 2016

> "Against the Foucauldian perspective where a clear connection is made between an archiving rhetoric and the dispositive of power, artistic archiving adds the perspective of desirology: thinking in terms of new orders of affective associations, of fluid taxonomies and, above all, a thinking in terms of intellectual and artistic pleasure linked to derange the symbolic order" (Slager 2015).

In this dynamic, Dicke's work could be seen as an 'archivist of trauma' like an ancient muse bringing forgetfulness by visualising the erasure of memory and, thereby, creating access to something that would have otherwise not been visible, namely new possibilities and meaning.

Ronit Porat

Ronit Porat engaged with the historic matter of the house on a longer term as well. First, during a residency in which she created new work for the H401 exhibition *In Search of Lost Time*, curated by Ronit Eden in 2014 and later as a one-year resident of the Transhistorical Coalition. Porat is a photographer by training and a tireless autobiographer or rather an 'auto-fiction-ist'. Porat grew up in a kibbutz in the north of Israel, did her military service and studied photography. She represents in all her being and

work the ambiguities that come with such a background, combining deep affection for her home country with the critical reflection on its violence and exclusion, suffering herself from the isolation so many of her peers feel. Her upbringing in a kibbutz, including small traumatic anecdotes like an accident to her brother, returns in her work. More broadly, Porat is interested in biographies and histories that constitute collective identities. With her own radically independent life, she frees herself from those collectives that have deeply formed her and for which she still feels an empathic bond. In her work, she digs into archives, brings histories and biographies to the fore, but always inserts her own presence into them and, thereby, breaks the emptiness of the photographic documentation with counter images, creating collages that air an absurdist or surreal quality. Porat's work responds to Benjamin's problem of the 'aura of an artwork in times of technical reproduction' by inserting the aura from her own genuine story, her own worries, sorrows, pains, joys and her own fantasy in the aura-less material of archival material whose truthfulness is unreachable, cut off by the hermeneutic gap.

During her residency at H401, she dug deeply into the histories of the hidden war-time community and into the books of Frommel and photographs from the archive, as if to free some of the biographies from the corset of the heroic narrative that Frommel and his circle assigned to them posthumously. Derrida, in his book *Archive Fever*, showed that archives represent an intrinsic link between narrative and power. The word archive comes from *Arkheion*, the seat of the rulers in ancient Athens and it is this residence of the powerful where also documents were stored (Derrida 1995). This archive preserved the stories of the winners and made these stories a historical reality or scientific truth. Where Herengracht 401, as an archive, preserved the truth of Frommel and his disciples Porat intuitively focused, amongst others, on Liselotte von Gandersheim, who drowned in the North Sea just after the war had ended and Vincent Weyand, who died in Buchenwald. She liberated them from the corset of a hero by taking their tragic, their vulnerability and their human smallness seriously. The collages that she produced were put into a spatial arrangement with one another in combination with objects from the archive, text-fragments from Frommel's library and some handwritten reflections of Porat that connected them to her own life-experience (Porat 2014). In her artistic approach, Porat achieves a twofold effect: by bringing to the surface the unacknowledged and, so far, hidden stories, Porat shows us the core of an archive and, therefore, any form of history writing which Hal Foster (2004) describes as "found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private". Porat does this by putting them in another context,

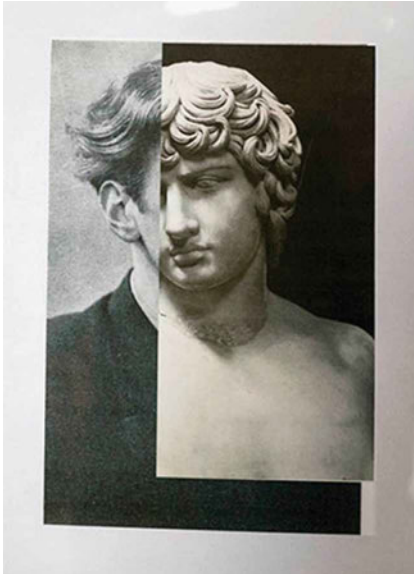

Figure 21 Ronit Porat from the series *In Search For Lost Time*, 2014

juxtaposing them with her own biography and, therefore, highlighting their otherness. At the same time, through this allegorical use of historic material, Porat offers the viewer an access through her own life story which she tells first hand. The gap between then and now is narrowed through our encounter with Porat herself.

Renée Turner

The Rotterdam based artist, researcher and teacher, Renée Turner, has developed a collaborative practice since her time in the cross-disciplinary art collective Geuzen. In her work at H401, she combines various visual forms of research with online writing to explore female identity, narratives of the archive, media ecologies and spaces of co-learning. The Warp and Weft of Memory maps the wardrobe of Gisèle d'Ailly van Waterschoot van der Gracht, as the most intimate remains of her as a person, that which was literally closest to her very being, her skin and body (Turner 2017). Fashion is treated as the medium, which situated Gisèle in the world. Turner developed a digital archive of Gisèle's wardrobe as a means to reflect on her life, work and various histories. She bridges the hermeneutic gap by setting up an alternative archive.

The web-based archive has various entry points. Turner's own notes offer a very personal view on the artist's encounter with a person she meets only

through her closet (Turner 2017). The 'Semantic Tapestry' offers an archive of photographs sorted in interrelated taxonomies that provide an order and, at the same time, a possibility to get lost and wander around. In the 'Epistolary Section', Turner provides access to two of her own correspondences with a writer and a scholar, as well as a letter to the late Gisèle.

Turner's own twofold background provides for a unique artistic profile, the practical impulse of putting things in order stemming from her own roots in the DIY movement. Her academic grounding in a theoretical discourse makes her seek references of critical reflection and, therefore, participation in a broader discourse. The latter translates in her pedagogic endeavours of creating spaces of dialogues for students, artists and scholars. A main tool for her research of Gisèle's wardrobe, consequently, were conversations with students in situ. Those who knew Gisèle would testify that she was driven by an intense urge for order. She explained this through her childhood experience of helping her uncle in the family archive. Throughout her life, she meticulously archived everything her life produced. Turner's work can be read as a poetic and yet, scholarly attempt to pay tribute to this life endeavour. Yet, the methodological rigour of Turner's approach is motivated by artistic experiment, establishing connections with her 'Semantic Tapestry' and associative connections in her 'Notes', both creating rhizomatic assemblages bringing together also the seemingly unrelated. Turner's view that "An archivist's work inevitably ends without a sense of closure" may have been true also for Gisèle's work and it may even be true for us trying to understand her life. We are left without a sense of closure. However, this open-endedness is the strength of the poetic aspect of artistic research work. Turner's fictional letter to Gisèle ends with the following sentence:

> "You left a tag on a pair of pants which read: 'These pants are good, but too short.' They were listed in one of your 'To repair' inventories. Just to let you know, I took them home, let the hem out by a centimetre and a half and then returned them to your closet. Judging by the length of the rest of your trousers, I think they would now fit" (Turner 2017).

This shows, maybe in the most concrete way, how artistic research practices can bring an uncomprehensible past closer to our living reality. Turner literally follows up the conversation, the to-do lists and the urges for order of the deceased historic person. Her material research object, Gisèle's wardrobe turns into an allegory to trigger thoughts from the historic material into the intellectual setting of Turner's work.

Figure 22 Renée Turner at work for *The Warp And Weft of Memory*

Conclusion

The one-dimensional, heroic story of Castrum Peregrini was an illusion. Its historic protagonists had consciously or subconsciously sublimated trauma in self-fabricated meaning and a cultic fundament of togetherness and belonging. The traces of their lives have led to a staged or curated archive that is more an artwork in itself than an objective source of history. As with ancient texts, a hermeneutic gap prevents us from deriving meaning from it today in an unmediated way.

We saw that artistic research may offer a mode of access, a mediation that allows us to unravel relevance and meaning for a contemporary audience. We looked at two modes of practice, based artistic research, the theory- and content-driven practice that results in concepts and the material- and form-driven practice that results in fiction. The latter holds the potential to bridge the hermeneutic gap, the distance between the viewer and the historic object that makes its understanding so difficult and may otherwise require complex scholarly approaches to fully comprehend. Memory work and more generally history, is a contested field of meaning making for today's societies at large and institutions like H401, in particular. Fiction-based art and form-based art that investigate historic objects and narratives build bridges to an unexpected dimension of history and offer a potential for identification, not so much through a theory-based truth, but rather by building a moment of truthfulness.

Instead of creating any kind of security of belonging that archives structured by power seem to provide, the approach of fiction and the unstable matter of artistic enquiry offers a moment in which we can relate to something otherwise incomprehensible like trauma or to anything "other" as such. Ideally, the artworks enable us to recognise the otherness in ourselves.

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About the Author

Lars Ebert is the Secretary General of Culture Action Europe, the major European network of cultural networks, organisations, artists, activists, academics and policymakers, advocating for access to the arts, participation in culture and for public investment in arts and culture. Until 2022, Lars Ebert was co-director of the cultural centre H401 in Amsterdam, whilst maintaining an independent practice as advisor, facilitator and curator. At H401 Lars implemented international collaboration projects such as Heritage Contact Zone, that investigated the role of contested heritage for community engagement and as laboratories for participatory research. Previously he was deputy director of The European League of Institutes of the Arts, eutrali on the implications of the Bologna Process for Higher Arts Education, including the establishment of a sector specific Qualifications Framework, Quality Assurance processes and capacity building towards a shared understanding of the European Higher Education Area for the arts. He serves on the board of various organisations in the areas of culture, education and research such as EQ-Arts, the first interdisciplinary and transnational accreditation agency for higher arts education institutions and programmes.

4 Hypermnesia and Amnesia

Remembering (with) the Body and Post-Conflict Memorials and Architectures

Andrea Borsari, Giovanni Leoni

Abstract
The chapter consists of two parts. The first part (§§ 1–2) investigates the indiscriminate and absolute remembering and forgetting of everything, hypermnesia and amnesia as the extreme terms that research has used and continues to use for the different phenomena of memory, both in individuals, social and political forms. In the face of these shifts it is thus indispensable to re-establish a critique of the paradoxical effects of memory aids and, at the same time, to seek new forms of remembrance that by mixing an experiential dimension and public sphere refocus the attention on the connection between latency, tension and experiential triggers of involuntary memory and on the ability to break through the fictions of collective memory. On this basis, the second part of the chapter (§§ 3–4) analyses how the experience of political and racial deportation during World War II drastically changed the idea of memorial architecture. More specifically, the analysis deals with a kind of memorial device that must represent and memorialise persons whose bodies have been deliberately cancelled. The aim is to present and analyse the artistic and architectonic efforts to refer to those forgotten bodies, on the one hand, and on the other hand to point out how for these new kind of memorials the body of the visitor is asked to participate, both physically and emotionally, in this somehow paradoxical search for lost bodies, offering oneself as a substitute.

Keywords: Body, experience, memorial aids, memorial architecture, remembering and forgetting.

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH04

Introduction: The Insurmountable Tension between Remembering and Forgetting

The indiscriminate and absolute remembering and forgetting of everything, hypermnesia and amnesia, are the extreme terms that research has used and uses for the different phenomena of remembrance, both in individuals, social and political forms. With its shifts and oscillations, the tension between remembering and forgetting within these extremes has marked the research in this field of study, as well as the policies that interact with it. Indeed, a recent trend has been to consider the results of neuroscientific studies on the functioning of individual memory and the role of forgetting for its physiology as an invitation to sever the internal link between ethics and memory. Faced with these shifts it becomes essential to explore the different possibilities of reintroducing an experiential and bodily dimension into the public memorial sphere by focusing attention on the connection between latency, tension and experiential triggers that stimulate all senses. It is a matter of seeing how to reactivate the forms of involuntary remembering, even reawakening dormant memories, and tearing down the fictions of collective remembrance. Thus proposing to keep alive the tension between what is worthy of being remembered and the unforgettable and developing it as a living phenomenon.

Summing up the epochal turning point in the public policies and practices of memory produced with the end of the Cold War and with the bustling start of the renewed processes of *eutralizatio*, in his agile *Libro della memoria e della eutrali* [*Book of Memory and Hope*] Remo Bodei questioned the relationship between historical remembrance, forgetting and collective identity (1995). In fact, in this context the philosopher focused on the character of unresolved and continuous tension between contrasting elements that defines the core of the problem in which the “contradictory and divided will” of “remembering beyond all disruptions” and the “forgetting of a lost past” are opposed, interpreting this tension as “tension incessantly reproduced between continuity and discontinuity”. Faced with the risk of favouring “the role of forgetting” due to the excess of self-defence against the extremists of memory, an imbalance towards the side of forgetting must be avoided. Though memory, while never safe, “will struggle tenaciously to not always be defeated”. In fact, factors that contribute to the changing and forgetting of the past include the loss of “institutional support” and “social frameworks of remembrance” that reinforced it, the presence of an “infinitely pliable past that does not pass”, the choice that is made with respect to it “based on a present where it never intermingles in its entirety”, the investment that

is not only "cognitive" but also "emotional" that is incessantly required, its constant characteristic of "controversial and contentious ground" and, no less significant, its characteristic of "place of paradoxical alliances between remembering and forgetting". Hence the need to adopt a posture that mixes the "logic of forgetting" and the "logic of remembering", giving rise to a "conflicting complicity between remembering and forgetting" that works by virtue of the schema *nec tecum nec sine te* (neither with you nor without you). As much as they are in perennial conflict, "forgetting is as indispensable to remembering as remembering is to forgetting" (Bodei 1995).

In recent years, however, there has been a trend to consider the results of neuroscientific studies on the functioning of individual memory – equivocating the different layers of discourse – as an invitation to sever the internal link between ethics and remembrance, starting from the assumption related to memory according to which remembering and forgetting are human faculties, neither good nor bad. For example, in her 2016 book on the forms of forgetting, Aleida Assmann exhorts studies on remembrance to focus on forgetting and its forms (Assmann 2016). Her considerations are based on the question posed by Jan Philipp Reemtsma: "Remembering is an obligation, the semantics of remembrance are imperative. But what is positive about remembering? Remembering and forgetting are human faculties, neither good nor bad, because they both help deal with life" (Reemtsma 2010). Such a position is read as an explicit correction to the central meaning assumed by the culture of remembering in Germany, in parallel with the conviction that the historical weight of the holocaust cannot be eliminated by forgetting about it. Hence a point of view develops that reveals itself as being problematic in ambiguously promoting constructive and therapeutic forgetting with respect to a traumatic past and in the failure to distinguish between the selective character of individual remembering and forgetting as a means to compose divided societies. The recognition of the seven ways to forget leads to the emergence of a "paradigm shift that has to do with a global ethic". However, this shift confirms "the oldest self-description of human memory, valid both for individuals and for societies and cultures". That is, most memory is lost, and remembering is always limited "because it refers to the experience of an individual or group" (Assmann 2016). This resembles more a sort of immutable law of memory than an eutralizatio to make its processes available to any manipulation of cultural practices of forgetting or to identify constructivist criteria for the art of forgetting.

Faced with such a scenario, for a position that intends to maintain the conflicting tension between remembering and forgetting in changed circumstances without reducing itself to "the ecology of forgetting" (Cimatti 2020),

it seems necessary to question and stimulate the strategies of remembering that work on latency and experiential triggering – starting from contact but which engage all senses – of the involuntary memory that incorporates the past into the present and of the "unforgettable" that "always newly disrupts the fictions of collective memory" (Agamben 2005). The close link between the immemorial and the unforgettable is shown – as Agamben himself made clear in his "idea of the immemorial" – in involuntary memory. In it, memory, "which gives us back the forgotten thing, is itself each time forgotten and this forgetfulness is its light": "It is not what we have lived and then forgotten that now returns imperfectly to consciousness, but rather, at that point, we access what never was, forgetfulness as the home of consciousness. [..] The immemorial, which plunges from memory to memory without ever coming to memory itself, is properly unforgettable" (Agamben 2020).

Some possible directions for this research include three perspectives that diverge from the unilateral results of excessive remembering, the hypermnesia that crowds memories and, by hardening them, makes them indiscernible, and of excessive forgetting, the amnesia that reacts to an excess of voluntary remembering but ends up confusing the physiological processing of forgetting with the questioning of immovable history underpinned by the ethical link with memory. The three examples given below as a first draft are those of providing spatial experience through the building of places having a strategy of reawakening "dormant memories", the conflicting relationship between monuments as aids to memory and counter-monuments as attempts to escape the paradoxical erasure of memory induced by the former, and finally of the recovery of a perspective derived from Georges Perec's infra-ordinary to experience crucial places of remembrance where time and human destruction have left nothing but pale traces of the horror that took place in them, as in the exemplary case of Auschwitz Birkenau.

Three strategies: dormant memories, experiential monuments and gaze at ground level

In his work of self-fiction focused on the search for his lost youth in Paris and the elaboration of an "art of memory with which he has evoked the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life-world of the occupation", as stated in the reason for his Nobel Prize for Literature (Le Monde 2014), the French writer Patrick Modiano showed how "the topography of a city becomes your whole life called to mind":

> "The city – as it happens Paris, the city of my birth – is linked to my very first childhood impressions, and these impressions were so strong that I have been constantly exploring the 'mysteries of Paris' ever since. When I was about nine or ten, it came about that I was out walking alone, and even though I was scared of getting lost, I went further and further into neighbourhoods I was unfamiliar with on the right bank of the Seine. That was in daylight, which reassured me. At the start of adolescence I worked hard to overcome my fear and venture out at night even further afield by Métro. That is how you get to know about the city, and Which was following the example of most of the novelists I admired and for which, since the 19th century, the city – call it Paris, London, Saint Petersburg or Stockholm – was the backdrop and one of the main themes of their books" (Modiano 2014).

Correcting his consecration as the "Proust of our time", Modiano clarified: "Today, I get the sense that memory is much less sure of itself, and that the search for lost time collides with a 'mass of forgetting that obscures everything'", clarifying that, lacking the ability to recreate the past in its smallest details, he intends more modestly "to make a few faded words visible again, like lost icebergs adrift on the surface of the ocean" (Modiano 2014). The method according to which he implements his own specific version of the Proustian procedure of recovering involuntary memory is that of recovering "souvenirs dormants" through the present experience of Parisian topography that produces a hybrid between past and present, reactivating its potential for the future, as is clear from his subsequent exemplary novel *Sleep of Memory* whose title refers precisely to "dormant memories" (Modiano 2017). In it, the city is "littered with ghosts, as numerous as metro stations and all the dots that light up when you press the buttons on the electric route map", feeling a nostalgia for the impossibility of "reliv[ing] something we'd already experienced, in the same time, the same place, and the same circumstances, but liv[ing] it much better than the first time, without the mistakes, hitches, and idle moments". So his personal *lesser* version of time would proceed through an attempt toeutralie his memories, putting them together like largely isolated puzzle pieces, thanks to which, "as we fumble through these efforts, certain names light up intermittently, like signals that might lead to a hidden path". The narrator thus tries to get to the bottom of the list of places and names, feeling like "an amnesiac, trying to break through a layer of ice and forgetfulness". To the point of evoking the dissolution of the self in the figure – derived from Blanqui's *Eternity by the Stars* – of the multiplication of lookalikes and the possibleeutralization

of memories: "Thousands and thousands of doubles of yourself follow the thousands of paths that you didn't take at various crossroads in your life, because you thought there was but a single one" (Modiano 2017).

In the discussion on the opportunity and purpose of memorial monuments such as buildings and physical objects, the consideration of the paradoxical nature of the monument has assumed an increasingly important role, like all mnestic aids (*hypomnemata*) – since Plato's *Phaedrus* – starting with writing: when we take note of something, we can afford to forget it because the device takes on the responsibility of remembering it for us. The monument "suffers from the same disease: created to remind us, it ends up making us forget, being both a machine of remembrance and forgetting", or as Robert Musil recalls: "The remarkable thing about monuments is that one does not notice them. There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument" (Pinotti 2014). The commemorative monument belongs to the broader class of external reminders, for which each memory relegated to an external device assigned the task of preserving it is exposed to the risk of being forgotten, since this same act of assignment concurrently implies the dispensation, the exoneration from remembering personally, and therefore an impliciteutralization to forget. If this is the structural link that is established between voluntary monuments and memory, in recent decades a broad strategy has been employed to ensure that memorials avoid the fate of being immediately transformed into devices of forgetting, to the contrary becoming capable of preserving and handing down memories. Among the ways to overcome this perverse effect of remembering, Pinotti himself has identified some countermonumental strategies such as: highlighting the absence and emptiness in place of what has been destroyed (the Twin Towers, the Buddha of Bamyan); insisting on verticality but denying it meaning and mirroring it underground (Jochen and Esther Shalev-Gerz: *Harburger Mahnmal gegen Faschismus*); subtract from the vision to combat opacity due to habit, so that I notice something only when its presence, although in principle visible, is denied to me (Christo and Jean Claude, *wrapping* or *packaging*); change from noble, resilient materials (stone, marble, metal) to lighter materials or non-materials like air and light (Shiro Takahashi, inflatable Buddha; Hiro Yamagata, laser images); apparently mimic a traditional monument, but depriving it of meaning, including through abstraction (the stelae of Richard Serra, the intransitive monuments of Cattelan) (Pinotti 2014). Other cases could be added to this type, such aseutralizationn (the small bronze chairs in front of the places of welcome, where the young Jews had been saved, planned for the design competition for the Villa Emma Memorial in Nonantola) or the joint presence of the separate elements of the information

centre and the stelae in the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* by Peter Eisenmann:

> "In the memorial these two heterogeneous dimensions of remembrance are topographically differentiated. Above ground the absolutely illegible stelae, below them an information centre reserved for reading. The immaterial threshold that separates these two forms of memory is the true place of the memorial. Keeping them separate is so important because otherwise the guilty conscience, which wants nothing more than to forget, would cover that which must remain unforgettable with a flood of memories" (Agamben 2005).

What emerges is a more determined propensity to emphasise the fleeting, transient and ephemeral character of the act and the memorial object that turns into an increasingly specific experience, not a pre-ordained experience but an action that depends on the involvement and active intervention of those who carry it out, well exemplified by the motto of the work of the Gerz spouses on "producing a monument together" (*ein Denkmal zum Mitmachen*): "Because nothing in the long term can withstand injustice in our place" (Harburger Mahnmal 1994). And the reflection of Georges Didi-Huberman on the possibility of experiencing the central place of the Shoah, the Auschwitz Birkenau camp, speaks precisely to an experiential conception focused on the involvement of the body (Didi-Huberman 2011, 2013). These are physical places where unspeakable things happened, but where at the same time there is (almost) nothing left to recall these events. Faced with the progressive inability to feel due to overexposure, the possibility of restoring a sense of these places, retracing the path of "places despite everything", is implemented through the choice to lower the gaze to the ground, to suspend the ideas received and to reconstruct circumscribed, partial images capable of commemorating the defeats of history and reactivating the image of what has been in the present, with a reference first only alluded to and then explicit in the infra-ordinary elaborated by Georges Perec, in the tension between metropolitan places of experience and the detection of body postures in the daily life of the camps: "We believe we know what is terriblwhich.. But we understand nothing. We don't understand the unendingness of hunger. Emptiness. Absence. The body eating itself away. The word 'nothing'. We don't know the camps" (Perec 1992). One must always start again from the: "experience at ground level, what you might call background noise. It's experience grasped at the level of the setting in which your body moves, the gestures it makes, all the ordinariness connected with [...] the exploring of your space" (Perec 1999).

By its nature the field of architecture would seem to be immune to the issues raised so far. Indeed, the nature of the architectural work seems to be the neutral scene of the described equilibria – and tensions – between remembering and forgetting because of a physical presence that remains and, one could say, watches over the community that produced it. More precisely, it could be said that the "neither good nor bad" human faculties of remembering and forgetting, as "they both help deal with life", always save architecture – which is the scenery of life – until a voluntary act of change or physical demolition intervenes. An act that generates nothing more than a new architecture in a continuous cycle. Thus architecture, broadly understood as 66eutralizatition of the space built by humanity, contains or rather testifies to a total memory since it is the concrete outcome of every productive act of life. But the areas of investigation mentioned above – "souvenirs dormants", countermonumental strategies and Perec's infra-ordinary perspective – nevertheless lead us to the heart of a crisis of the ongoing role of architecture as a witness of the productive acts of a community, including conflict and violence. The crisis consists in having to reflect on the existence of places – physical or mental – that are completely foreign to the community dimension that would inevitably seem to constitute the foundation of architecture. Places that are radically and desperately unique and solitary even though they are close to a community, places that are unrepresentable even though they are composed of matter and bodies, places whose density appears infinite because every slightest act of forgetting can renew that indescribable "offence" of the "demolition of a man", as Primo Levi described the experience of being held in a concentration camp.

Representing the Anonymous

The experience of political and racial deportation during the Second World War generated a break in the conception of memorial architecture, a paradigm shift that became immediately evident in the post-war recovery. This highlights an element of discontinuity that would have significant consequences on the entire architectural culture of the late 20th century.

The fracture stems from the totally new tasks which memorial architecture was called to perform. First, the task of remembering an act of violence, obviously for the benefit of the victims. This task excludes an entire field of memorial architecture, i.e. commemoration, remembering in a solemn and celebratory form. In fact, here what is being remembered is a loss, but in this case not in the form that memorial architecture typically takes in

funeral monuments, aimed at preserving the memory of the life of those who are no longer alive. Indeed, funeral architecture represents a loss but seeks to draw on positive content and can take affirmative tones. The new task, on the other hand, consisted in having to convey the memory of the loss itself, a loss that unites millions of individuals having very different destinies in an identical and shared experience, whose singular personality was erased from life by means of a deliberate project of annihilation. The result is a memorial commitment having a dual paradox.

On the one hand it is necessary to recall an experience of anonymity, of loss of individuality, not the collective experience that the concentration system created, but the enormous sum total of singular yet identical coincident experiences of loss, the concurrent loss of personality and sense of every possible community. Because while historical accounts have been able to fix and pass on the collective experience of deportation, by disciplinary statute they are not in the position to recall the profound – common but singular – nature of annihilation, of "an extreme and monstrous attempt to decide between the human and the inhuman, which has ended up dragging the very possibility of the distinction to its ruin", as stated in a consolidated interpretative formula (Agamben 2004).

On the other hand we have the second paradox, that the memorial regards the final outcome of a deliberate, violent human action whose purpose was to erase any physical trace of the victim. It is therefore the remembering of a void, the only material trace of which are the physical structures built by the perpetrators to carry out the annihilation. Traces that are increasingly evanescent over time due to natural physical decay, but also due to the fading, or what today we must refer to as the extinguishing, of the direct memory of witnesses who alone can "translate" the sense of the places of Deportation – totally determined by the perpetrators – into the language and meanings of those who were their victims.

This memorial task, as paradoxical as it is necessary, has been taken on by literary and artistic languages, but the position of architecture in this regard is specific since architecture not only represents but builds – or reconstructs or destroys – places and does not simply depict or recount experiences but rather allows or generates them. This is evidently not the specific fact of post-war memorial architecture, the element of discontinuity to which reference was made. Architecture as a whole has a dual nature, a dual term of comparison if we refer to the creative processes that guide it: on the one hand the formal conception that manifests itself in representation, on the other hand the material construction that progressively transforms the representation into a physical presence, entrusting the structure to its own

unpredictable destiny determined by the passage of time, by circumstance and by active human presence. The breaking point which post-war memorial architecture underscores derives from the different development that the two components – the representation and construction of a place – assume in the face of the memorial task described above.

On the representation front, architecture fully shares its efforts and its difficulties with the other forms of representation and expression – painting, sculpture, writing – that in the second half of the 20th century must deal with the "unmemorable", to use a definition that the aforementioned Agamben has also used in relation to architecture (2005). Indeed it can be said that the subject inaugurates a new season of close collaboration between architecture and the areutralizatioised by a retreat of architecture with respect to the other forms of expression incorporated within the project with an unprecedented centrality. This is especially true for writing, to which architecture immediately attributes a dual role: on the one hand an instrument for the necessary direct presence of witness accounts, on the other the need for naming as a memorial practice of restoring a brutally stolen identity to the victims. Both forms are ubiquitous, from the "tombstones" that name the victims in the *Monument to the Martyrs of the Fosse Ardeatine* (competition of January 1944), to the slabs with quotations from the Beatitudes and the tombstones with the names of the deportees added in an update of the project in the *Monument to the Fallen in Concentration Camps in Germany* by BBPR (Milan, 1945), from the writings taken from the *Letters of those in the Resistance condemned to death* and from the Hall of Names in the *Museum-Monument to Political and Racial Deportees* (BBPR, Carpi, 1963) (Leoni 2021), to the centrality of writing in the development process of the *Jewish Museum* in Berlin (1989) by Daniel Libeskind and the reappearance of the concept in almost all the works in this field. On other fronts, for example the relationship between architecture and sculpture, the disciplinary boundary even tends to disappear, creating a shared form. Consider the whole area of the anti-monument, from the stelae of Jochen Gerz in Hamburg (1986) to the "stumbling stones" of Gunter Demnig, a long-lasting project started in 1992 and still ongoing, just to name a few examples. (Young 1993, 1994, 2000).

With regard to the architectural task and remaining on the representation front, there are basically three strategies for dealing with the paradoxical task of an all-negative memory. The first is an attempt to draw on the tradition of symbolism, both by proposing architectural figures and – this is certainly more interesting – trying to find a form of architectural representation of the impossibility of using symbolic images. The architectural history of this

Figure 23 Museo Monumento Carpi

visible impossibility of drawing on the symbol, on the full, positive figure, begins again with the great "tombstone" of the Ardeatine, a real gap in the rich figurative and panoramic narrative of that project, and – after haveutralizatioised much of the production on the subject – certainly achieves its expressive and effective acme in the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (Berlin 1998) by Peter Eisenman.

The second path attempted by architecture consists in setting nature aside before the discipline, which is affirmative, to bring back to the centre of the project, and often limiting it to, an interpretative action of the place. This creates a dialogue with the existing that is always implicit in the act of building a new presence, the final objective of each architectural project, and which, on a case-by-case basis, even beyond the specific topic under discussion and not limited to the historical moment we are dealing with, can become central to a project, typically in restoration projects, but not only. For the memorial architectures dedicated to political and racial deportations during the Second World War, the novel element consists in the duty of this interpretative study of a physical and material nature conducted using architecture to deal with a structure that, as noted above, was totally built by the perpetrator, whichwhich must therefore be opposed in its anonymous nature, having being used primareutralizationsational and productive purposes, and which therefore does not manifestly embody the "discourse", the self-representation of the extermination programme, a programme that counts invisibility among its objectives. The space of the perpetrator, simultaneously evident and banal, must be forced, deconstructed and

Figure 24 N. Aprile, C. Calcaprina, A. Cardelli, M. Fiorentino, G. Perugini (architecture), Mí Basadella, F. Coccia (sculptures), Fosse Ardeatine Mausoleum, Roma, (1944-1951)

investigated using the tools of architectural design with the aim of conveying and preserving the experience of the victim, free of traces and sedimentation. With an additional difficulty that derives from the inescapable outcome of every architectural project, if that is what it is, namely the appearance of a new presence that, while understood as instrumental to the emergence of the evanescent physical testimony of the victims' past in the place, risks burying them even more deeply under the stratification of evidence and interpretations. While for explicitly symbolic projects the risk – or the field of study – consisted in the not saying and therefore the not understanding of what was stated, here the risk reappears in relation to the reliability and comprehensibility of the "text". In this regard all initiatives to conserve transit, prison and extermination camps deserve an analysis. But it eutralizaphasised that the interpretative and interrogative nature of the project in some way required by the *lieu de mémoire* in the strict sense also innervates projects that do not interpret the memorial place but rather build it. This method is fixed in poetic and masterful form in the aforementioned project of the *Museum-Monument* in Carpi, a work that as is known was designed by a direct witness of the deportation, but almost invariably reappears in every architecture on the subject, from the central role attributed to the interpretation of the surrounding city in the aforementioned Berlin projects of Libeskind and Eisenman to very recent projects in which the monumental

Figure 25 R. Boico, San Sabba Rice Mill National Monument and Museum, Trieste, 1975

dimension is expressed in an interrogative form such as the *Memorial of the Shoah* in Bologna (SET Architects, 2016) or the *UK Holocaust Memorial & Learning Centre* (Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad, London, 2021). The disruptive effect of a conception of monumental architecture understood in an interrogative form – somehow a paradox, it has been said – could then be followed throughout the architectural production of the late 20th century, even non-memorial, marking a profound change in sensitivity.

The third path undertaken, while still remaining on the representation front, consists of returning the work of architecture to the pure role of a service space for historical documentary narration or for other forms of narration. Therefore, not the representation of the renunciation of the symbol, not the attempt to find an architectural form to express the unmemorable component and not even the confinement of the architectural language to the role of commenting on the existing, but rather the decision to exempt architecture from any task of representation of memory by offering itself as a neutral medium for other representations or narratives entrusted to other disciplines. An exemplary work in this sense, unfortunately never built after a troubled design process, is the headquarters for the *Topography of Terror* foundation in Berlin (1993) by Peter Zumthor. Thus we close the circle of the possibilities that architecture has to represent the experience

Figure 26 D. Libeskind, The Jewish Museum, Berlin, 1989-2001

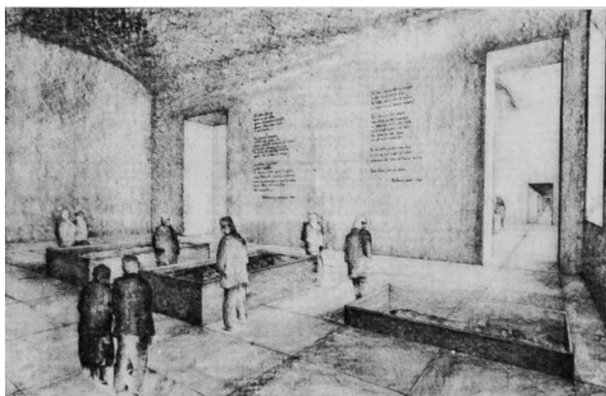

Figure 27 BBPR, Museum-Monument to Political and Racial Deportees in Carpi, drawing submitted for the competition, 1963

of deportation, because the renunciation of architecture in service of other expressive forms is the reason for the renewed relationship with the arts and writing mentioned above aeutralizatiocterises the field throughout the second half of the 20th century.

Of course the three strategies described here are almost never purely expressed in the individual works, and in the development of the architecture itself symbol, interpretation and act of service mix and often

Figure 28 BBPR, Museum-Monument to Political and Racial Deportees, Carpi, 1963-1973

conflict, making the history of most memorial architecture dedicated to Deportation particularly tormented. This happens not only because of the obvious political sensitivity of the area, but also because they are projects that directly deal with a fracture created in the discipline also and above all following the experience they recall, a fracture that the dominant historiography in the field of architecture has mostly neglected in favour of a narrative on the continuity and revision of the Modern Movement, but that in fact radically redefines the tasks of architecture in the second half of the 20th century.

Making Visitor's Body available to the Victims

It is in the space of this fracture that a specific opportunity of architecture manifests itself, an opportunity linked to its second purpose: not the representation of a form but the construction of an inhabited place. Much more space would be required to precisely exam how in all the works of architecture, in all the spatial devices of the second half of the 20th century dedicated to triggering or supporting memorial processes related to Deportation the subject of crossing, of the movement of visitors within space plays a central role. The consideration that BBPR appends to the end of the project report for the competition of the Museum-Monument in Carpi, after having illustrated the complex and innovative memorial device conceived by an architect-witness, as mentioned above, applies to all: "Spectators will practically breathe in the symbolic representation

of the events as they travel the winding path of the Castle" (Fossoli Foundation Archive). Here mention must be made of a very broad topic for architecture, namely the definitive crisis of the early 20th-century concept of functionalism: for post-war architecture there was no longer any possibility of directing its efforts towards human types, to develop solutions theutralizatidardised or even based on community identities. It is no coincidence that some of the earliest and most enlightened reflections on the crisis of the functionalist model are the considerations on the Anonymous published in *Domus* magazine by Ernesto N. Rogers during the years that the racial laws were first passed in Italy (Leoni 2017). Architecture is aimed at single persons, all different, to whom it cannot offer a single solution but rather only suggest opportunities for their own individual, singular, non-replicable interpretation of the place. The impact on representation of the desire to control space by geometric means is enormous, with important consequences for the history of architectural languages, but this is not the place to address this topic. But equally important is the opportunity to develop a new conception of architecture that on the one hand establishes an open relationship between the work and the existing surroundings, and on the other brings the body and experience back to the centre of the project. There is no doubt that this new need to set aside early 20th-century modernist architecture – different in form but in structural continuity with the long cycle of classical styles – in favour of a radically different, interpretative and non-affirmative discipline that understands form as the final outcome and not as a map for the building and development process is decisively driven or even triggered by the paradoxical task described above of interpreting and building places of memorial dialogue with the mass – yet anti-community and totally singular – experience of Deportation. The path through the Ardeatine caves, the view of the naked "wreckage" in the cases of the Museum-Monument in Carpi, meandering among the stelae in the aforementioned projects of Eisenman and Libeskind, walking through the petrified faces, all the same (metal masks, in reality) in the Jewish Museum, the work of the latter and infinite other examples that could be taken from other works show how the subject matter, in its request to deal with annihilated and erased bodies, induces this substitution, requiring visitors to make their own bodies available to the victims and their right to convey and share the violence of the event, a violence that was not healed by the ascertainment of responsibility, which remains over time as an annihilation of humanity and as a threat of a possible repetition of such annihilation.

Conclusion

Both the recognition of the problems linked to the definition of the relationship between remembering and forgetting in the international debate of the last thirty years and the balance of the challenge and disruption that the experience of political and racial deportation during the Second World War imposed on memorial architecture converge in highlighting the experiential and corporeal dimension of the relationship with the constructions of individual and collective memory. In fact, on the one hand the central point of the tension between remembering and forgetting is claimed as a dynamism of continuity and discontinuity in contrast with the attempt to equivocate the results of neuroscience in favour of a natureutralizationlisation of the ethical instance of remembrance derived from the history of the 20th century. And this acquisition leads to the possibility of a criticism of memory aids that opens up to experiencing new pathways for the reactivation of dormant memories, countermonumental strategies and uncoded mnestic traces. On the other hand, then, the loss of individuality caused by the experience of the concentration camps and the paradoxical memory of a vacuum that derives from it find a counterpart in the various attempts examined to produce architectures of the unmemorable through multiple strategies that insist on the impossibility of using symbolic images, on putting an interpretation of the places in context at the centre of the project or on bringing the architectural work back to the function of space for the deployment of historical or documentary narration. Criticism of functionalism, openness to anonymity and reassessment of the relationship with the existing surroundings thus converge in putting the body and experience back at the centre of the project. And they converge towards a living experience of what is worthy of being remembered that can only occur through the ability of bodies in action to reactivate latency, tension and experiential triggers that stimulate all senses.

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About the Authors

Andrea Borsari is full professor of Aesthetics and Faculty member of the Doctoral School in Architecture and Design Cultures at the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna (https://www.unibo.it/sitoweb/a.borsari/en). He directs the series "La vita e le forme" (*Life and forms*, Bononia University Press) and is deputy director of "Iride. Rivista di filosofia e discussione pubblica" (Il Mulino). He was recently visiting professor at University of California – Los Angeles, ENSA-Paris La Villette, the 4 Cities

Unica Euromaster in Urban Studies – University of Copenhagen and the University of Sichuan (University Immersive Program online), and visiting fellow at University of Amsterdam, National University of Colombia – Bogotà, University of Buenos Aires and Brown University – Providence. Among his publications: *Mondo, cose, immagini. Sulle forme dell'esperienza estetica* (*World, things, images. On the forms of aesthetic experience*, Bup, 2018), *Mimicry. Estetica del divenire animale* (*Mimicry. Aesthetics of animal becoming*, Mimesis, 2018) and, as editor, *Philosophical Anthropology and Critical Theory* (Iride, 02/2022), and – with others – *Georg Simmel et le champ architectural: Sociabilité urbaine, paysage et esthétisation du monde* (*Georg Simmel and the Architectural Field: Urban Sociability, Landscape and Aesthetization of the World*, Éditions Mimésis, 2020), *Aesthetics of the Anthropocene* (CPCL, 1-2/2022) and *Temporary: Citizenship, Architecture and City* (Springer, 2023).

Giovanni Leoni (1958) is Full Professor of History of Architecture at the University of Bologna, where he directed the Department of Architecture and the Doctorate in Architecture and Design Cultures. His research focuses on the theory and practice of design between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with particular attention to models of creativity, the relationship between Personality and Anonymity, and the role of architectural design in social and political processes. He edits the academic journals Histories of Postwar Architecture (hpa.unibo.it) and European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes (cpcl.unibo.it with Carole Hein, TU Delft). He has coordinated national and international research projects including ROCK Regeneration and Optimisation of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities (Horizon 2020). Among his recent publications are *In Memory of the Other Resistance* and *The Places and Architecture of the Fossoli Memorial.*

5 Art and Memory: Magdalenas[1] por el Cauca[2]

Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril

Abstract

Adopting an interdisciplinary framework of Memory Studies and Art and employing semiotics with a multimodal and multimedia character, this chapter explores how social groups in Colombia memorialise the violence of the internal armed conflict. The reflection associates the victims' experiences with those expressions of commemoration and remembrance that are narratives embodied in visual and scenic art. It is explored how a semiotic landscape of memory is created through a performative artistic proposal. In this landscape, not only cultural frames can be determined, but also the semiotic-discursive resources that give meaning to the relationship between art and memory. The aim is to characterise the performance known as *Magdalenas por el Cauca* (2008) which was recorded audiovisually in several spaces on the internet. It means that, in addition to the ephemeral *mise-en-scène*, there are records of the performative and communicative work. In this chapter, we analyse the video *X PEREGRINACION TRUJILLO y MAGDALENAS POR EL CAUCA* (2010), one of the records that perpetuates *Magdalenas por el Cauca*. This reparation act is an audiovisual narrative with ethical and

1 Magdalena refers to the woman who lamented for Jesus Christ, who died after the crucifixion. 'Cries more than a Magdalene' is a popular phrase in Colombia and the term has been appropriated to symbolize the suffering of women in grieving for their relatives.

2 Grupo Colombiano de Análisis del Discurso Mediático through ONALME (National Observatory of Memory Processes) cooperates with the network SPEME (Spaces of Memory) on collective memory and memorialisation processes. SPEME – *Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia* has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme and develops a joint programme between universities and technical institutions from Europe and Latin America (Project ID: 778044).

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024

DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH05

political character and produced collectively by relatives of victims, witnesses, artists and other interlocutors, which interpret and assign new meanings to the performance.

Keywords: Colombian armed conflict, *Magdalenas por el Cauca*, multimodal and multimedia semiotics, X pilgrimage Trujillo, memory and art

Introduction

Latin American societies and particularly Colombia have suffered several periods of systematic violence perpetrated by different types of actors. As a response to the victimising events, collective processes of symbolic reparation have emerged within the communities. One of the main purposes of those processes is the social construction of new meanings as traumatic experiences that "fracture those spatial and symbolic referents used by the communities to organise normal life activities" (Martínez Quintero 2013). Meaning-making processes allow the building of new forms of individual collective organisation and an exploration of updated forms of being and inhabiting the world. It is not only about recovering a version of the past; it is also about looking at its effects in the present and future. "X PEREGRINACIÓN TRUJILLO y MAGDALENAS POR EL CAUCA" (2010) is not only a video, but a work of symbolic reparation that aims to make the past understandable and to help to clarify specific events. This clarification encourages a potential healing process for survivors and victims' relatives in their role as active social subjects.

Colombia has suffered under an internal armed conflict that has left 9,165,126 victims (Unidad de Víctimas 2021, RNI retrieved 31 July 2021) due to crimes such as homicide and enforced disappearance, both with a balance of 1,253,597 victims (Unidad de Víctimas 2021, RNI retrieved 31 July 2020). In this social framework, it is our aim to explore the political potentialities of participatory and collaborative forms of artistic practices, in which memorialisation processes are committed to create, distribute, and socialise collective memories of mass violence in the period after the signing of the historic 2016 peace agreement in post-conflict Colombia. It is necessary to mention that, despite the agreement, the internal armed conflict is not yet over, a condition that is pivotal in its memorialisations as it deepens processes of revictimisation.

The memorialisation, analysed in this paper, corresponds to the victims in the Municipalities of Trujillo, Tuluá and Riofrío, located in the northwest of

the Antioquia Department[3], between 1986 and 1994, a case that was followed and interpreted by the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Center for Historical Memory) (2008). According to the information from relatives and humanitarian organisations, 342 victims of homicide, torture and enforced disappearance were registered as the outcome of a joint action on drug traffickers from the north of the Valle Department led by Diego Montoya and Henry Loaiza, paramilitary groups, and the Colombian Military Forces (Revista Semana 2008). The operation was part of a series of joint operations against the guerrillas in this area and in search of territorial control. Trujillo's inhabitants had to witness and suffer selective murders, tortures, forced displacements and enforced disappearances. Additionally, practices such as "social cleansing", assassination of key witnesses, were also carried out so that the crimes would remain in impunity. After these heinous crimes, the bodies were opened, filled with cement, and thrown into the Cauca River so they would not float. The river became a mass grave where the remains of the civilian population were hidden.

"Magdalenas por el Cauca" is a visual and artistic narrative that gives a concrete expression to the necessity of remembering the victims of Trujillo's massacre. In Colombia, the construction of collective memory through art has made it possible to create spaces that interrelate the artistic and political dimensions. This process fosters the appropriation of a civic culture by the citizens as new forms of knowledge are built. In the last decades of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century, Colombian artists have sought to represent violence through different formats and technical media: "installation, video, performance, drawing, interventions in public space, community art etc." (Ramos Delgado and Aldana Bautista 2016:).

Participatory art has been one of the most relevant art modalities. In this practice, artists elaborate a conceptual proposal which is executed and, in this case, critically reviewed by survivors, their families, witnesses and a team of artists committed to memory building in Trujillo. This way of producing art focuses on the set of human relationships in their social contexts, rather than on producing meanings as something exclusive or private: the interlocution, the dialogism and the possibility of recovery and dignifying of the "other", are some characteristics of this relational form of interaction (*see* Bal 2010 about the interaction ritual). Thus, the act of co-creation appears: the author's role is subordinated, and the artistic practice acquires more relevance, making more explicit its purpose of social transformation. As the exhibition pieces are elaborated through

3 A Department is a territorial and administrative division in Colombia.

collaborative work, they fulfil the requirement of participation and, at the same time, manage conditions of symbolic reparation (Lleras et al. 2019).

The artists Gabriel Posada and Yorlady Ruiz conceived and gave material shape to the work of art for the very first-time in 2008. Their exhibition is a combination of a performance and some paintings on rafts where the artist depicted faces of the mothers whose sons and daughters disappeared or were murdered and whose remains are still in the river. This is a "site of memory" where the victims' relatives perform remembrance rituals. In 2010, a pilgrimage along the Cauca River, together with an exhibition, brought about the whole artistic experience. "X Peregrinación Trujillo y Magdalenas por el Cauca"[4] showed how a sociocultural and political phenomenon gets the dimension of persistence over time and is part of a process of massive visualisation in culture. The video, our object of analysis, makes possible deducing schemes, identifying codes and recovering meanings and social interactions as it is an action motivated and structured through collective interest. It is also an action orientated towards and coordinated with "others" who act as actors or participants and establish relationships with each other that involve not only people, but also objects.

Collective memories, Co-Creative Art and Symbolic Reparation

Social groups and victims of the armed conflict and of historical violence, in general, find spaces of memory in artistic expressions. Spaces of memory are understood as series of existential relations that guarantee dialogues and interactions related, not only to strategies for context transformation, but also those ways of representation of violent events that define the condition of "victim". In spaces of memory, meanings of location, territory, areas of influence, ethical and political responsibilities, power relationships and resistance exercises, *interalia*, are recovered. In spaces of memory, the knowledge, linked to traumatic events, is appropriated and socialised. Thus, these events are updated for the purpose of identifying and imaging ways of social co-existence. Spaces of memory are semiotic and discursive expressions that shape diverse ways of understanding social existence since they build and give sense to the semiotic devices. All works of art, ethically and politically focused on the dignity and visibility of victims, are considered actions of symbolic reparation (Moffett 2015). It can be conceptualised as

4 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5EshU1M_CQ.

the set of governmental and socio-cultural policies and actions aimed to guarantee the victim's dignity, eliminating all forms of re-victimisation. In addition, if survivors, witnesses and supportive communities are called to participate in the artistic production, the result is necessarily a co-creation or a participatory work of art.

Participatory or collective artistic expressions are practices that formulate a spectra of co-creation in which co-authorship is legitimised on the aesthetic and political conceptualisation of the narrative (Osorio Bermeo 2018). This double condition grants the work of art the potential to become the support and the negotiating process for symbolic reparation. The reparation is integral and comprises two aspects: material and symbolic. Reparations are mechanisms through which governments open spaces for the victims to express suffering, to guarantee their individual and collective acknowledgement and to promote their dignification. In these spaces, processes aimed to fulfil the moral and legal obligation to provide material and symbolic reparations are associated with processes that guarantee the necessary socioeconomic conditions for the victims and their communities to have a dignified life (Naidu 2004). Symbolic reparation, according to the Victims and Land Restitution Law, "includes the display of works or acts of public scope or repercussion aimed at the construction and recovery of historical memory, the recognition of the dignity of the victims and the reconstruction of the social fabric" (Law 1448 of 2011).

Art has the power to creatively represent painful experiences as, through its narrative, it enhances dialogical and restorative collective memories. Art encourages citizen action and seeks for more horizontal political exercises that could promote a transformation of a social context. In collective memory, all remembrances from the past are interwoven and shape a common knowledge in a social group. However, this conceptualisation, originating in the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1992), does not make clear the connection with the political "doing" and "acting" of societies. Collective memory has a political function linked to the narrative that is expressed, silenced or forgotten (Jelin 2020). In the post-agreement phase in Colombia (2016), the rewriting of memory's narratives have also meant that the government, elite and power groups have used the tensions over the memory of the internal armed conflict to deny or distort what happened in the conflict. This has encouraged the return to old and new versions of the violence. These are useful to current socio-economic and political interests which are linked to the mechanism of neoliberal policies that are unaware of a sense of community identity, of the collective organisations and of the

multicultural and multi-ethnic character of the country, constitutionally established in 1991.

The resulting socio-cultural consequences imply forms of re-victimisation of those who are marginalised for not falling within the ethnic, cultural and socio-political standards of the nation, even when they are functionally and factually members of society. In this process of discrimination, a hierarchy of victims is created and actors, who, in many cases, are perceived by communities of victims as perpetrators, are imposed as heroes. Collective memory becomes a source for the construction of identities as it enhances dignity and self-respect of victimised individuals and communities.

The audiovisual narrative recovers a collective effort to represent the unrepresentable of the violence of the Colombian armed conflict. Thus, the video becomes a symbolic and material connection that enables a transition from conflict, pain and death into ways of explaining, understanding and interpreting the traumatic experience as it recovers the aesthetics of the victim and updates that of the perpetrators. From this perspective, the short documentary interweaves sound and visual elements making visible diverse voices in the construction of a narrative, articulated to the socio-political and cultural death of those defenceless people, whose acts of resistance transit the Cauca River. The relationship between the individuals and the objects is part of the staging's iconology. The victims' clothing embodies not only a sense of absence but, specifically, recovers the sense of the need for justice for a specific criminal act. In this case, the crime is, in the typology of the armed conflict, "enforced disappearance".

In the national shift that Colombia is experiencing still in 2021, a visual and artistic work, such as "X Peregrinación Trujillo y Magdalenas por el Cauca", uses a creative strategy that updates itself to question the absence of policies and governmental efforts for memory building. In the framework of the post-peace-agreement phase and with a still ongoing armed conflict, the memory actions have not been capable of responding to the challenges of the integral reparation process. Society responds by structuring a process stemming from the survivors, the collectivities, the supportive society, the victimised groups and the artists. The interests and attitudes of the political and economic elite, along with the absence of international cooperation for a permanent cessation of human rights violations in the country, are undermining those ways to comprehend and explain the social fabric's disintegration caused by violence. This situation also subverts processes through which communities confront and resist injustices and humiliations, framed in a conflict that has been strengthened in the last three years.

The Cauca River: a Site of Memory and an Art Space for Mediatisation and Communicative Interaction

In the remainder of this chapter, we propose to characterise the mediatised artistic proposal "Magdalenas por el Cauca" using the mediation process recorded in the video "X Peregrinación Trujillo y Magdalenas por el Cauca" that was collectivised on YouTube in its first media update. When representing this work of art, a communicative process and an interaction with multiple, diverse and virtual interlocutors take place; collective memory invokes unpredictable dialogues.

"Magdalenas por el Cauca" was performed in two phases: in the first, photographic records of sections of the river and contiguous areas were made. At this stage, an exhibition of these photos was displayed and the audience was asked to tell a story or express their reaction. In the second phase, female members of AFAVIT[5] painted the faces of victims' mothers holding portraits of the disappeared victims on large pieces of fabric. Later, the artist placed these fabrics on rafts that were set adrift in the Cauca River simulating the victims' dead bodies that were carried along by the force of the river's current. The rafts followed one another as if they were in a procession. In some of them, additional symbolic elements and images, such as a woman holding a cross, were also placed or the representation of La Llorona, a Colombian mythical character who endlessly suffers her children's disappearance (Osorio Bermeo 2018).

In the work of art, iconic and metaphoric elements are clearly marked. One of them is the intertextual reference to Magdalena, a biblical character who lamented for Jesus Christ and, in a culture influenced by Christian beliefs, refers to a woman who has lost her loved ones. The video on YouTube not only recovers the symbolic value of "Magdalenas por el Cauca", but also testifies through its narrative to the necessity to reveal the landscape of horror and death into which the river was transformed. An iconological reading of the rafts evokes the bodies of the disappeared and their mothers. The river is conceptualised as a site of memory, a space of interaction and rituals that create metaphorically a sense of funerals that could not take place and transform to that of a cemetery. Life and death are a journey. A blue cross embodies the co-existence with religious beliefs in which pain must be humbly endured, beliefs that are also serving a right-wing political position and which are addressed symbolically through the blue colour, which stands for the Colombian Conservative Party. The alliance between the Church

5 Association of victims' relatives of Trujillo.

and the Conservative Government in power favoured political violence in the country, especially in regions, such as Valle del Cauca (CNMH 2008).

"Magdalenas por el Cauca" commemorates all those people who were victims of homicide and enforced disappearance, dignifying survivors, victims' families and especially the mothers. Considering that the exhibition and procession is a symbolic act of visitation, the video "X Peregrinación Trujillo" (2010) recontextualises the rituality and performance of the population that also follows actively and visually the crafts' path, praying for the disappeared. The performative act embodies the co-creative art which involves not only its creator, but also who takes part in the pilgrimage. The exhibition-procession develops from the installation and the performance as artworks, to the ritual and commemoration as acts of memory. These two dimensions generate a semantisation of the river as they manage signification processes that include meaning-making beyond death and tragedy (Perdomo 2015).

The exhibition moves away from canons of patrimonialisation as it falls within the scope of "ephemeral" art and includes twenty community acts (the last one held on 7 November 2020 (CELAM 2020), in which the work is recreated in a co-authored act. It is a process of memorialisation that formulates the collective memory of a collection of communities and which expresses their will to make it visible in the whole country and socialise it with their interlocutors on the internet. Even when the exhibition-procession is materially preserved in time, it also displays its permanence in social cognition. What is remembered, silenced or forgotten is embodied in the experience of those individuals who participate in the ritual, the workshops and other events that the work of art fosters. Art becomes a medium for catharsis, a source for healing and for relief of the pain caused by the perpetrators as it builds a space to symbolically recover and bid farewell to the bodies of the disappeared. The landscape is intervened by the community as an expression of the religiosity and resistance of the communities. To recover the river as a form of purification, the collective artistic intervention is transformed into a public testimonial narrative. The testimonial narrative is a discursive unit that creates visibility for the victims of the Colombian internal armed conflict, dialogically creating a space on the public stage to be inserted from the life experience in the memorialisation processes.

Through "Magdalenas por el Cauca" and the performance "X Peregrinación Trujillo", it is possible to infer the potential of collective artistic practices to build spaces for interaction, in which those collective and individual memories of a painful past, caused by the violence in the internal armed conflict, are invoked and made visible. Memorialisation processes activate

a political potential and encourage new artistic expressions of supportive co-creation embedded in collaborative practices. These processes become forms of production, design and socialisation of collective memories. In this case, survivors, victims' relatives, witnesses and trauma inheritors, in general, are active participants who recover their presences and experiences. Their memories are interwoven with those of the individuals who were more directly involved, with the memories mediated by the community and memories indirectly built, despite the proximity to the victim. Thus, the video "X Peregrinación Trujillo" (2010) updates "Magdalenas por el Cauca" as a work of art: the video manages mediatised memories and fosters collectivities able to appropriate and keep the memories alive, despite State policies that tend to deny or obscure them. José Obdulio Gaviria, former advisor to the government of Álvaro Uribe Vélez, expressed: "Denying the conflict is a position based on facts" (El Espectador, Debate 10, 2019). In this tension, it is certain that the conflict happened, not only based on factual evidence, but also on institutionalised discourses, in which this is evident:

During the peace negotiations between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC, the Comisión Histórica del Conflicto Armado y sus Víctimas[6] (CHCV) was created to examine the causes, development and effects of the armed confrontation in Colombia. As a result, twelve essays and two reports were written by intellectuals with a clear plurality of approaches and explanations about the war that the country has suffered (Garzón Vallejo and Agudelo 2019).

The video gives concrete shape and perpetuates the construction of a collective knowledge that is integrated into social cognition, enabling emotional dialogue as a basic understanding and an ethical view of the violent past. The video also allows the appropriation of an aesthetic capable of sustaining its commitment to individual memories which become collective as that knowledge is managed, formulated and reflected in a dialogic process; the past is creatively built by using and giving shape to this kind of knowledge (2016). It is precisely in social cognition where collective memory is structured and has meaning, insofar as it is organised in the cultural and axiological background of a community.

In the video, a set of static images in large format, moving images of a religious and festive ritual, songs of resistance, declarations, denouncements and life declarations are articulated. A multiplicity of social actors are

6 The Historical Commission of the armed conflict and its victims (CHCV) was responsible of studying and investigating the phenomenon of violence in Colombia, as well as determining responsibilities of those who participated or had any sort of involvement in it.

involved: witnesses, survivors, leaders, community members as solidarity agents, civil and religious authorities, organised children and rafters, amongst other actors. There are multiple discursive genres: testimonies, political speeches including elegies and resignification of objects, such as clothing items, flowers and the rafts that, while passing, allow us to visualise what surrounds the river with the objects and people that pass through the waters; this is how the semiotic landscape is constructed. The semiotic landscape is conceptualised as a dynamic communicative interaction that materialises an artistic expression with multiple and diverse knowledge, which is amplified and updated in the act of remembering; and produced and interpreted from its sign character.

The relationship between memory, creation and imagination defines forms of knowledge that are spatially and temporally located and enhances other narratives from new interlocutors which recover violent events of the internal conflict. This is what Levy and Sznaider (2002) called "unlimited cultural memories": these are sources of knowledge which produce perceptual experience, articulate emotions and make "others" visible: their traumas, concerns, expectations and hopes. This cognitive process connects through representation in the present, the past and the future. The video records intangible expressions, individual and collective memories in which the dialogue that structures the process of memorialisation is formulated. The aim is to construct civic responsibility as it is anchored to the art co-produced by the victimised communities. Paterson (2017) points out that it is only through participation that members of a community are empowered, not only to imagine a change in solidarity, but to manage it in the search for the desired society. This way of proceeding empowers those who seek through social action for a transformation of a violated and vulnerated society.

Reading the Mediatised Semiotic Landscape

Addressing media expression requires tools of transdisciplinary nature through which the study of a discourse involving diverse interwoven signs of design, production and interpretation processes is formulated. Verbal language, non-verbal sounds, static and mobile images, colour and technological support media are used to make them function in the process of memory building and to create proper conditions to formulate strategies to achieve peace. Through the multimodal and multimedia study of a video, the semiotic modes, the appropriated resources for the construction of meanings (materialised in cultural frames) and discursive representations are investigated.

Following the approaches of Kress (2010) and Van Leeuwen (1999), Multimodal and Multimedial Critical Discourse Studies (MMCDS) are defined as a transdisciplinary and critical-reflective position that addresses discursive units, as characterised by materialising in different sign systems (modes), the relationship that goes from cognition to the social reality represented; and, for distributing and socialising the discursive units through technological sources. In this perspective, the processes of signification come from the inter-sign relationships that are typified in the discourse and from the material and technological devices that are available in the culture.

The characteristic media and multimodal expressions of contemporary media activity – come to life in signs – are not external phenomena to the social subject that uses them. Consequently, approaching them involves the individual who is defined by the conditioning of his social-communicative reality (Norris 2016). It is postulated that action and interaction bind social actions, memory processes and history, defining the identities of the actors (Norris 2016). The understanding and the explanation of a mediatised act involves, at least, the meaning's producer and the mediator; it addresses the tension that goes from the one who produces the meaning to the way in which the media transforms the signification, especially when it is staged on a platform like YouTube. Given the characteristics of the selected corpus, Rheindorf's and Wodak's (2019) proposal is adopted to reveal the differences handled between the social actors involved in the act of communication, the objects used and the symbolic world they build and inhabit. This implies selecting fields of social action and specific discourses situated to carry out a transversal analysis of the discourse.

The YouTube video "X Peregrinación Trujillo (2010)" is analysed to describe forms of interaction, to recognise and explain the relationships generated between the semiotic modes involved, to establish representations that are created in the socio-cultural frameworks and to give an account of the relationships amongst co-creative art, memory, symbolic reparation and collective social action. The video is a short documentary that supports the collective artistic action and functions as an index of the institutional and governmental support received. A short documentary can be characterised as short-time audiovisual work which expresses a representation about a type of reality from the perspective of those who document it. The main strategy is related to the type of video-assembly which gets a concrete shape through the articulation of semiotic resources producing a space and a temporality different from that of the represented events, in this case, the exhibition and pilgrimage. The short documentary becomes a narrative that goes far beyond the socio-discursive practices represented, managing

a new type of memorialisation, whose purpose is not only to contextualise the artistic work "Magdalenas por el Cauca", but also emotions as the visual complements the auditory elements (Martinec and Salway 2005).

Methodologically, the video is analysed from a mixed perspective since its segments are decoded sequentially and additively. Schemes are developed, theoretical assumptions are made and interactions are delimited; at the same time, meanings attributable to actions and actors are recovered, as well as their motivations and interests. In addition, relationships between the participants and the artifacts that have a meaning in social interaction are established. Natural settings as places for interaction are also recovered, as well as categories, such as density and permanence.

"Density" is understood as the set of qualitative values that come from the observation of the interaction through which the characteristics of individuals and artifacts are perceived in the video. The category "permanence" facilitates the recovery of the space/time sense that the medium guarantees and makes accessible the interactions, so they update and go through a process of re-semantisation channelled via the interlocutors. Within the framework of *permanence*, the characteristics of the communicative situation, the role of artifacts and accessories, the spatial organisation, the semiotics modes and the general atmosphere, represented in its place of production and interpretation, are verified (Knoblauch et al. 2014).

Representations are analysed in two dimensions: the appropriation of their symbolic meaning and the permanent re-semantisation. Epistemologically, it is assumed that semiotics go through all possible explanations to characterise all the semiotic modes involved. Consequently, the video is an integral system of signs, that is, it has a multimodal character and is socially distributed through technological resources (YouTube in this case) which also make it multimedial. The possible meanings and senses come from the design elements of the environment and their production, as well as from the density and permanence of the audiovisual data of the video, being recovered as a discourse and a narrative.

Reshaping the Semiotic Landscape of Memories

The forms of interaction include the objects, from which the relationship with the actors is established and the relationship with the environment is formulated. In the interval between 0:00 and 0:11 seconds, the first ritual of religious nature comes out, including a location where a prayer is attuned, the image of a crucified Christ and an altar with flowers and a candle in

the foreground. Without transitions, a ritual of resistance appears, marked by a procession accompanied by chanting the song written by Mercedes Sosa, "I ask only of God". There is an intertext between the song's title and nuclear issues related to the *X Pilgrimage*'s topic: religious beliefs, resistance and denunciation against war. The resistance ritual appears in the interval between 0:12–0:18 seconds and lets us recognise the stanza: "I ask only of God/ that I am not unmoved by injustice/ that I am not slapped on the other cheek/ after resigning myself to injury by a claw/"[7].

Between the seconds 00:30 and 00:40, another intertext links religious beliefs with the seeking of resistance: the verse written by Juan Antonio Espinoza[8]: "You cannot bury the light" / "If you do, the stones will scream – the invincible cause of the poor". These lines are related to the biblical quote in Luke 19:40 which tells about the impossibility of silence as testimony, despite the attempts of silencing it. The singing is performed, while the image displays in a high angle shot the scene when people walk to the river highlighting two verbal indexical markers that guide the interlocutor in space and time: "Riofrío, Valle del Cauca" and the MOVICE[9] billboard. In 1993, the Third Brigade of the Colombian armed forces entered the Municipality of Riofrío and pretended to combat guerrilla forces, when actually they were fighting civilians. Thirteen people were killed and several more were injured and were later presented as wounded in combat and as ELN militants. This crime against humanity has gone unpunished as the Supreme Court of Justice declared null the legal process against the perpetrators (CNMH 2008).

From second 00:40 to second 00:46, a large-format pictorial image is displayed, focusing on Carmen Londoño's face. She is considered one of the *Magdalenas* since one of her children, revealed in an inset at the bottom right, was killed in the Trujillo Massacre. The pictorial image by Gabriel Posada is based on a photograph taken by Jesús Abad Colorado for the report "Trujillo, a drop of hope in a sea of impunity."[10](Magdalenas por el Cauca, undated). This section of the video is accompanied by the verse "Ay, Magdalena, ay, Magdalena", part of the song "Alma de caminante" by Martha Elena Hoyos. These lines work as a link to introduce the segment 00:47–00:59 seconds where a religious authority, 'Padre Antonis' – Episcopal

7 Original text in Spanish: "Solo le pido a Dios/ Que lo injusto no me sea indiferente/ Que no me abofeteen la otra mejilla/Después que una garra me arañe esta suerte/".

8 Original text in Spanish: "No se puede sepultar la luz" / "Y si no, las piedras gritarán – la invencible causa de los pobres /".

9 MOVICE is a national movement that brings together groups of organisations that represent the victims of State crimes committed in the context of the internal armed conflict.

10 Original text in Spanish: "Trujillo, una gota de esperanza en un mar de impunidad".

Church, exhorts transposition of the meaning of death into that of life by saying: "After meeting her master, Mary Magdalene set out to announce life. You and I will set out to announce life"[11]. The discourse carries political content since its purpose is to formulate and build models of behaviour to establish a social body. A relationship between what is proclaimed and the characteristic ritualisation of the preaching is elaborated. Between minutes 01:00 and 01:12, there is a declaration accompanied by a kinesic gesture, characteristic of the Catholic-Christian rites, using the hand facing the river: "We declare restoration of life in this place"[12]. In the liturgy, the declaration has a performative character: it is considered that the restoration is executed on the symbolic and material level.

Symbology acquires meaning in the framework of the exhibition/procession as an act of remembrance. The performativity and rituality of the people who visually accompany the rafts' route performing post-mortem reparation acts, enables *Magdalenas por el Cauca* to acquire signification. This artistic and mediatised project provides the sociocultural conditions to build an active collective memory. The victims and survivors find a space to affirm their identity and socialise their common history of exclusion. The video becomes the support for co-creation of memory through art, as it connects and creates dialogues with virtual audiences transforming collective knowledge. These transfigurations provide new horizons to collectivise memories.

From 1:14 minute onwards, the life or festivity ritual materialises the restoration. The participants in the pilgrimage start dancing, there is an instrumental sound that results from the performing of the Brass Quintet of the *Instituto de Cultura de Pereira*. The presence of sister Maritze Trigos stands out amongst other actors as, from her role of a religious authority, she acts as companion, in horizontal relationship and as an active member of the Asociación Familiares Víctimas de Trujillo[13] (AFAVIT). The nun, although dressed as a civilian, legitimises the ritual by authority. Between minutes 1:42–1:47, in a wide shot, one of the rafts is displayed which is later on driven away by the current of the river. This moving image serves as an anticipation, prolepsis, of what is going to happen.

At 2:04 minutes, a *fade to black* is displayed, signalling the closure of the ritual of life or festivity and a more artistic and political ritual is introduced

11 Original text in Spanish: "María Magdalena, después de encontrarse con su maestro, salió a anunciar la vida. Ustedes y yo, saldremos a anunciar la vida".

12 Original text in Spanish: "Declaramos restaurada la vida en este lugar".

13 Association of relatives of victims of Trujillo (AFAVIT).

in which individuals with different degrees of authorities appear. Their presence is relevant because they are representatives of the victims, their relatives and the supportive civil society. María Isabel Espinoza, a writer born in Pereira who lives in the region, intervenes in the video – which is deduced from what is deictically indicated in the video ("Cartago – Valle"). The artist, called "the poet of the death" (Perdomo 2015), stands on a platform where pictorial images of portraits in white and black of some of the disappeared victims are placed, together with a pictorial image/portrait of one of the *Magdalenas* in large format and full colour and a cross that connects the *mise-en-scène* with the "Fundación Guagua". This is a social organisation committed to the defence of human rights which focuses on victims of the State in issues, such as forced disappearance, extrajudicial executions and crimes attributed to State forces or officials committed in the context of the armed conflict[14].

The intervention is characterised by the voice of the artist who narrates the events seen from the outside, but with a subjectivity legitimised by being both artist and witness of the dead bodies floating down the river. This scene implies an emotional event for the victims, survivors, relatives and community members. Evidentiality is produced through first-person modalisation and a phenomenon of hyperbaton, an inversion that gives the narrative a more poetic direction: "dissolved bones" and "grieving black vultures"[15]. The reading is accompanied by an inset where images of the exhibition/pilgrimage held in 2008 can be seen, these, by substitution, representing the bodies of the victims floating down the river without specific direction. This is how a memory process is updated:

Funerals in the Cauca River had become daily bread. The river waters became a casket coach carrying them without a destination. We say this because some of the corpses could not be recovered for identifying them or to bury their dissolved bones. Many remain in the stomach of fishes and of grieving black vultures (María Isabel Espinosa 2010).

The reiterated audiovisual resource of *fade to black* creates a temporal leap and brings into focus the label "Grupo infantil AFAVIT"[16]. Immediately, a girl appears speaking on behalf of a gathering of children and youths. In her words: "This group is called Jimmy García Peña in honour of a boy who was killed at the age of 18 months. He was killed in Naranjal". The presence of the group is an indexical marker of children and young people as victims

14 URL: https://fundaguagua12.wixsite.com/fundacionguagua/sobre-nosotros).

15 Original text in Spanish: "Desechos huesos" and "dolientes chulos".

16 AVAFIT children's group.

of the massacre and creates a sense of activism and resistance of those who, because of their birth, did not witness the massacre. The mnemonic resource in the children's intervention is anaphoric: "we are seeds, we are memory, we are life, we demand justice". In Western societies, children are symbols of hope. The verbal and graphic expressions transmit a process of socialisation, anchored in the construction of identity and desirable social transformations.

The next transition marker is a wide shot of the river in which an object on a raft is focused, covered in a white material and partially hidden behind the vegetation. Simultaneously, in *voice off*, a man who produces a remembrance act is heard. Eduardo Carreño (minute 3:08–3:58), member of the *Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear*[17], who has followed the case unofficially, addresses the people around the stage. The visual context is composed by black and white photographs of the disappeared victims, the crosses – three of them different from the cross placed at the centre – and, in the first third, at the right corner, there also appears an artistic image in large format of Evangelina López, mother of one of the disappeared who symbolically embodies every mother of the disappeared youths or children. In his speech, Carreño expresses his condition as a social subject and his point of view about the memory process in which he is immersed:

Recalling today 20 years of [the disappearance of] Tiberio, of Alba Isabel and of their companions, the victims whose mortal remains were thrown in the Cauca River [...] We believe that this case is symbolic on the national and international level, that is, what has been built for the victims. [...] In 1995, former President Samper publicly assumed responsibility for these crimes. We cannot forget them. We must reiteratively provide support to the victims [...], all the victims of State crime regardless of the region or sector they belong to. Neither forgiveness, nor forgetfulness! Punishment to the murderers! (Eduardo Carreño 2010).

In this speech, various temporalities are presented. The first is 1990, the year in which the priest Tiberio Fernández, his niece Alba Isabel Giraldo and other companions were assassinated. Members of the Colombian security forces used torture and sexual violence before they murdered them. The second is 1995, when Samper recognised the State's responsibility for these crimes. "Magdalenas por el Cauca", performed on 17 April 2010, evokes the anniversary of the murder of Tiberio, Alba Isabel and 25 other persons, artistically represented in "La Ofelia de Trujillo".

At 4:02, *fade to black* displays the motto "Magdalenas por el Cauca", initiating the spiritual and memorialisation ritual. The rafts navigate down

17 José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Association.

the river with images and artistic representations alluding to the victims and allegorical to the topic of the Magdalenas. At minute 4:04, an inset in a wide shot shows two rafts being driven; the use of a zoom effect magnifies the shot and brings the image closer to the observer. When the inset is enlarged, it is possible to observe that the rafts are driven by young men and that the closest raft in the shot is the one of Ofelia Trujillo. The implied intertext is the work of art "Ofelia" by the painter John Everett Millais in which the female character of the same name commits suicide and her body appears floating with flowers in a stream. The resource of intertextuality is expressed by iconological markers (the woman floating in the stream and the flowers), through which the senses of the violent death are recovered. To represent Ofelia, an image of Alba Isabel Giraldo's face was chosen (Perdomo 2015). From minute 4:25 onwards, there is a close-up that allows the observation of the elements accompanying the sculpture, amongst them being an image on the chest of Father Tiberio Fernández, flowers and the faces of 25 of the disappeared, which collectively make up Ofelia's dress.

At 5:16, one of the Magdalenas emerges; it is an artistic image in a large format with a blue and grey-scale background, it is a proposal to represent Rosalba Lozano, whose brother Agustín disappeared and the grief which killed her mother. The grey colour and the woman's facial expression set a sense of sadness. In minute 5:46, the poet Omar Ortiz intervenes by reading a story written in the first person producing a metonymy in which the character of the story represents the victims of the Massacre.

> I had my newly polished black shoes on, I looked like a handsome man, (said) my mother during the goodbye kiss ritual. In line, they took my photo for the job application, but quickly they pushed me into a car, they pressed two shotguns to my head and I ended up in a pigsty where they asked me about strangers. No sir! I said and they beat me. Yes sir! I said and they beat me anyway. They did everything as if he had no humanity, no bones, no blood, no soul. I no longer have a blue suit, or an orange tie, nor can I hug Margarita. Now I am a faded photo that my mother carries around in squares and parades (Omar Ortiz 2010).

The poet's reading is accompanied by zooms to the Magdalena with the face of Rosa Elena Montoya, with a black background, creating the sense of death. The woman's circumspect character, complemented by other symbolic elements, such as the presence of a rounded black object placed on her forehead, allows us to infer that a bullet went through her head, leaving the semiotic mark of the act of violence and its remains as she loses part of

her corporality, to be placed in the upper left corner. The artistic image of Rosa Elena, made by Gabriel Posada, is a re-semiotisation of the photograph made by Jesús Abad Colorado; the semiotic transformation involves the grey colour of the woman's hair and the face in the photograph of her murdered son, on the chest.

The *travelling* accompanies the raft of a woman who is indexically identified as Consuelo Valencia (minute 6:34). The pink background of Magdalena produces a contrast with the rest of the image. The presence of colour shows the character of Magdalena who is a survivor of the crimes committed against her immediate family. Her two missing sons are presented in a grey-scale, connecting iconology with the region's own sociocultural assessments. The marked shapes of the face, especially the facial folds, are indexical marks of the traces of time.

In minute 7:18, the Magdalena does not represent a person, but is made "in memory of all the women who were raped and murdered". This work of art was made by Orlando Naranjo, president of AFAVIT and relative of a victim. Some of the significant features of the woman represented are colours: black, grey; the red that connotes the blood product of violence; and blue which is culturally related to tears. The raft moves away slowly and this movement is associated with a visual-temporal resource that not only marks the end of the ritual, but also the distancing of the victims carried away by the river.

Table 1[18]: Visual-graphic memory: rituals

Religious ritual	Festivity ritual	Artistic-political ritual	Spiritual and memorialisation ritual
(0:00–1:13) Fig. 29a	(1:14–2:03) Fig. 29b	(2:04–4:01) Fig. 29c	(4:02–8:00) Fig. 29d

Death gives way to life through the symbolic act of accompanying missing lives. Simultaneously, a woman is heard in the background: "They will be rivers of joy for having overcome the horror of death. Rifles are the eyes of war. While some look at the dead, we dream of life" (Maritze Trigos 2010). The statement and the simile emphasise the transformation of the meanings associated with the river. The rafts are followed by the musical accompaniment of an acoustic guitar whose instrumental tones, soft and slow melody and rhythm give a feeling of tranquillity. At 8:08, the *fade in*

18 Source Images : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5EshU1M_CQ.

Figure 29 Rituals in the framework of the X pilgrimage Trujillo

black marks the end of "Magdalenas por el Cauca" and begins the credits that are accompanied by photographs of the *X Pilgrimage*. The video closing, as a unit, is made up of two types of visual resources: Ofelia in 30 different angles and planes, the artistic images of the Magdalenas; and the visual-graphic resources of a fixed image, in which, on the one hand, members of the community are recovered and represented and who actively participate in the pilgrimage as rafters; and, on the other hand, different moments of the resistance rituals of the population, which include a girl victim who makes a tribute with flowers, are shown.

The representation in the exhibition implies recognising the articulation that occurs between the iconic elements and the central meaning, transposing the meaning of death to that of life. These elements become icons due to the stabilisation of their socio-cultural sense. The conjunction of permanence and density is produced by its social diffusion and media reproduction. In Kohn's (2018) perspective, repetition transforms icons into memory units which are easily recognised by society.

The iconological relationship is formulated within the framework of religious rituals that can be approached in the video through the flowers and the cross. The flowers create an indexical relationship with life and death. Culturally, flowers are a semiotic resource that carries the sense of tribute and respect and gives a theme to the inescapable condition of

existence. The cross activates the Judeo-Christian sense of Calvary, the innocent victim and the search for the act of justice.

Within the framework of the festive ritual, whose centre is the sense of resistance, the iconology includes the image of the bridge, which updates one of the social movements for the victims and integrates two meanings: on the one hand, the transition from one situation to another, emulating an armed conflict and the peace process. On the other hand, the transition of life and death, which come together in the river's presence as a route. The rafts became the leitmotif as they recover the victim's presence and generate an intertextual relationship with the Greek myth of Charon's boat: the natural and forced passage between life and death is rebuilt. The T-shirts, worn by those attending the exhibition/pilgrimage, constitute an index of the inescapable act of resistance to which the socio-cultural community of the region is committed in search of guaranteeing reparation and non-repetition.

Conclusion

The icons work as traces of the presences and absences, collectively intervened in an act of dialogic co-creation, which is permanently reinterpreted and signified to permeate the memories with the collective meaning formulated in the Trujillo community. Iconology becomes the axis of the process of co-creation and interaction that is renewed, periodically, in the exhibition-pilgrimage, reformulating collective memory indefinitely. The analysis of the semiotic and mediatised landscape of memory in Trujillo allows us to unravel its socio-political and cultural implications, within the context of the Post-Agreement (2016). The multimodal and multimedia memorialisation initiatives constitute fundamental acts of collective resistance against the persistence of violence and human rights violations. In the process of semiotic-discursive characterisation of the video "X PEREGRINACION TRUJILLO y MAGDALENAS POR EL CAUCA" (2010), the artistic image of the victims was recovered, resignifying the meaning of existence in the rituals. Sign systems and the semiotic resources involved have a role in transforming the meaning of death and war into that of life and peace. Iconology and metaphors articulate the different sign systems, structuring the visual-verbal unit at the service of the visual-graphic. There is a verbal reinforcement that contextualises the beings and objects involved in the rituals and creates reference points for multiple interpretations.

The analytical perspective of the rituals, through which the representations of collective and individual memories are constructed, designed and updated, allowed the recovery of macro-micro-narratives to decipher forms of commemoration that articulate models of the past and (with hegemonic constructions of power) the transformations that update the present and project the future. Latin America requires that, from the studies of language, we explore the connections amongst practices of memorialisation and the symbolic ways of remembering the past as a guarantee for comprehensive reparation and non-repetition of violence, with its continuities and ruptures.

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About the Author

Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril got her PhD in Hispanic Linguistics from UNED Spain. She is a full time Professor at the Department of Linguistics and is linked to the Institute of Studies in Communication and Culture (IECO) at the National University of Colombia. Adding to that, she is the Coordinator of the Colombian Group of Media Discourse Analysis and Emeritus Researcher MINCIENCIAS – UNAL. Her work is focused on the line of Multimodal and Multimedia Critical Studies of Discourse (ECDMM) nucleated in semiotics, addressing phenomena related to the processes of memorialization in the context of the Colombian armed conflict; she haspreviously addressed the media representation of impoverishment and racism. She participates in international research networks such as SPEME, FELS, ALED, REDLAD and REDLEM and is currently the coordinator of SPEME-Colombia and vice-president of IASS-AIS for the Americas. Her most recent publications are the book "Memorias en el post-acuerdo colombiano: Narrativas relatos para construir paz" (2022) published by the National University of Colombia; the chapter "El hablar como práctica social" in the book "Manual de lingüística del hablar" (2021) published De Gruyter; and the chapter "A semiotic-discursive insight into short videos on memory and peace: A case on social media" (2023) published in the Chinese Semiotic Studies Journal.

6 “Adapt or Resist?”

Narratives of Implication and Perpetration in the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam

Mario Panico

Abstract
The main goal of this chapter is to investigate how the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam, using micro stories of ordinary people, thematises Dutch responsibility and implication in the violence committed by the Nazis during the occupation of the country in the Second World War. In particular, using the category of the “implicated subject” as proposed by Michael Rothberg in his seminal work on this topic in 2019, I consider the “meaning-effect” that the museum proposes by narrating not only the lives and the anti-Nazi actions of resistance fighters but also the ones of those who made different choices, directly or indirectly helping the Nazis. In the first part of this contribution, I discuss the “interrogative tone” adopted by the museum, aiming to emphasise the ethical and moral dilemmas (e.g. “Adapt or Resist?”) that preoccupied the Dutch people during the Nazi occupation. In the second section, I deal with how the museum exhibits micro histories and personal lives to represent and discuss a collective event. In the last part of the chapter, I consider the way in which the perpetrators are represented in the museum and what kind of risks are involved in “quoting” the perpetrator when his life is told in the same space of the victim.

Keywords: Implicated subject; Verzetsmuseum; victims and perpetrators; Dutch resistance; responsibility.

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH06

Between Macro and Micro Histories

What happens when a museum dedicated to the memory of an anti-Nazi resistance gives voice not only to the fighters and victims in that movement but also to the Nazi perpetrators who were responsibility for such crimes? What kind of effects underlie the syntagmatic relationship obtained when juxtaposing the life of a young Jewish girl and that of her Nazi killer? What kind of reflection on public and national memory does that museum propose, by choosing micro-lives and micro-perspectives to narrate collective trauma and suffering? This chapter addresses these questions in relation to the new displays of the Dutch Resistance museum, the Verzetsmuseum, in Amsterdam. Since its opening in 1984, the main objective of the museum has been to remember the brave actions of the Dutch Resistance fighters during WWII and to recount painful, quotidian life in the Netherlands under the Nazi occupation. After having been hosted for many years in the former Lekstraat Synagogue, in the southern part of the city, the museum was relocated to the Plancius building in the district of Plantage in 1999, in a site that was previously used as a Jewish cultural and singing centre. It is named after a geographer, Petrus Plancius, a leading figure in the Dutch golden age.

In these pages, I limit myself to the new display, inaugurated in December 2022. In it, the more generally historical narrative, focusing on the collective experience and the crucial events of the Second World War, dedicates much room for the exhibition of micro, personal stories. Indeed, what makes this museum very interesting in debates on the role of memory sites in the construction of accountability and past awareness is precisely the fact that it mixes macro history with micro histories (Ginzburg 1992). In other words, it gives space to the lives of ordinary Dutch people, stressing, in the narration, the moment in which they decided to do something "apparently banal" for or against the occupiers and, consequently, compromising (or not) the safety of persecuted Jews and minorities or the activity of the resistance fighters.

The macro historical frame is "portrayed" using six videos (one at the beginning of each section or "chapter" of the museum), which provide the visitor with information on the central events in the history of occupied country through the use of documents and animated reconstructions. For example, they focus on the unexpected invasion of the Netherlands by the Nazi German troupes on 10 May 1940; the *februaristaking*, the railway men's strike organised in February 1941 against the occupiers; the rounding up and deportation of Jewish people; and the liberation of the country by the

Canadians. It is worthy of note that the museum's videos and displays also weaves not only the Japanese occupation of colonised territories in Indonesia (at that time called Dutch East Indies) into its collective narrative, but also the Indonesian War of Independence which, also following international pressure on the Netherlands, resulted in the liberation of the country in 1949. A further emphasis on the macro perspective is also provided by additional information in the display texts about the lives of the Dutch people involved in the narration. For example, the story of Wim Henneicke (1909 – 1944), a man who was paid by the Nazis to capture Jews, is linked to a more general context: "Jew hunters across the country captured a combined total of around 15,000 Jewish people in hiding"[1]. This demonstrates how personal narratives are mediated in the museum, not only as prototypical stories but also as representative of certain attitudes and behaviours that were rooted in Dutch society of the time.

For what concerns the micro stories, these are recounted with the help of photographic material (portraits of the people involved), material objects that function as indexes and archaeological traces of the life being told, and written descriptions of how and why people decided to adhere or not to Nazi orders. The museum gives space to different kinds of lives: the courageous story of Willem Arondéus – a gay artist from Amsterdam who helped to plan and carry out an explosion at one of the offices where the Nazis registered Amsterdam residents, including Jews who would later be transported to concentration camps. But also Elisabeth Keers-Laseur – a radical member of the The National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands (*Nationaal-Socialistische Bewegin, NSB*) who supported the Netherlands being annexed to Germany, sharing in the pursuit of the Nazi idea of the pure Aryan race. If in these two cases the narrative positioning of these subjects is evident in the

1 Another interesting example of this interrelation between the individual life and the reference to the collective context is the one of the artist Mary Dresslhuys (1907 – 2004) who decided to register her theatre company with the Chamber of Culture as imposed by Nazis. The caption accompanying her photo reads: "Our initial reaction was: don't do it, stop. We give up!", said actress Mary Dresslhuys when her theatre company was required to register with the Chamber of Culture, founded by the German occupiers. Jews were excluded from membership. Anyone who didn't register would no longer allowed to work. Mary soon decided to register anyway. She explains: "No one had any money. We had an entire company to maintain." Her theatre group could no longer perform pieces by modern American or English writers, but was otherwise unaffected by the Chamber of the Culture. Mary had no regrets: "When you're responsible for so many people, you don't have much of a choice" *42,000 artists ultimately registered with the Chamber of Culture. A small minority refused.*
All subsequent quotations from the museum are reproduced word for word from the relative displays, unless otherwise indicated.

dynamic of memory, what I find particularly interesting is the space given to people, actions and beliefs that are not easily ascribable to the "good vs bad" binarism. This is the case, for example, of Jacob Lentz – a public official who helped the German Nazis to implement a very complex system of identity cards, therefore making the falsification of documents very complex for resistance groups. In addition to this personal history, the museum tries also to construct a "justifying" but not absolving narrative, highlighting how Lentz had been an advocate of the identity cards even before the occupation, and that when he was sentenced to three years in prison after the War, "he remained convinced that he had done nothing wrong".

Through the display of these kinds of lives, the museum sets up an interesting narrative operation: it avoids nationalist romanticism by representing Dutch citizens not as a united, heroic body that stood up against Nazism, but as a partitive unity composed of individual subjects (or small groups) with their own political ideas, aspirations and fears, and with their own (often problematic) idea of solidarity. Moreover, this (much discussed and criticised[2]) choice continues to fuel the debate on the indirect responsibility of the non-Jewish Dutch in the extermination of the Dutch Jewish community (cf. Ensel and Gans 2019) and, consequently, questions a certain public imaginary whereby all Dutch people were part of resistance groups and unanimously opposed by the German Nazis. It is not my aim to conduct a historical reflection on the public and academic debate on that national narrative (on this topic, see for example, Hansen and Zarankin 2011). Adopting a critical perspective on the study of memory museums (Williams 2007, Violi 2017, Sodaro 2018), my goal is to study the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies implemented to effectively thematise implication, focusing in particular on the potential risks of these choices when they are adopted in the representation of less ordinary people: the Nazi perpetrators.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I deal with what I call the museum's "interrogative" tone, which aims to emphasise the moral dilemmas faced by Dutch people during the occupation. Then, following the debate on the implicated subject (Rothberg 2019), I consider, how on this occasion, this category is preferable to that of the bystander (cf. Hilberg 1992, Cesarani and Levine 2002, Cole 2005, Morina and Thijs 2019) because it avoids the risk of semioticising the actions of non-perpetrators and non-victims as too passive. In the second part, I deal with how the Verzetsmuseum "exhibits" lives that are considered prototypes of more general behaviours, trying to represent

2 See, for example, the debate summarised in Siegal, "Nuance Is Difficult When It Involves Nazis, a Museum Finds".

the collective through specific individuals. In the same section, examining the personal stories related to the post-war period and the Indonesian War of Liberation, I discuss how the museum interprets the category of the implicated subject not as an ontological feature but as a contextual characteristic, mainly related to the situation in which the person acted. In the third part, my reflection then shifts towards the representation of perpetrators. Taking a specific section of the museum as an example, I observe how giving voice to the point of view of one individual subject can produce a risky levelling of responsibility when dealing not with ordinary citizens but with those subjects who had an active responsibility in the persecution of Jews and Dutch resistance fighters.

Dilemmas

Upon entering the museum, the visitor reads on a panel that the rooms will present the *dilemmas* that common people faced during the War[3]. The word "dilemma" in the welcome panel preludes a pivotal narrative isotopy, a sort of semantic repetition that will be present throughout the museum in various ways. It refers to the morally complex doubts and choices faced by ordinary people in the Netherlands, especially in relation to the persecution and deportation of Dutch Jews. As I already mentioned, these were quotidian choices that were not directly related to the committed violence. In other words, they were not orders given by perpetrators but actions with no apparent collective consequence, such as signing a document to declare that you are not Jewish so as to obtain a much-needed scholarship, knowing, however, that this will mean that Jewish students will be excluded.

From the very first room, the museum adopts an interrogative tone to frame the choices of the Dutch people it talks about. There are questions written on the signs directing the visitor's path, and on the glass boxes containing the people's pictures and objects asking, for example, "Adapt or resist?" (Fig. 30), "Cooperate?", "Remain in office?", "Register with the Chamber of Culture?", "Signature of a scholarship?". The meaning conveyed by these apparently open questions – the answers to which evidently do not not necessarily have criminal consequences – serves to represent, on the one

3 The "welcome" panel reads as follows: "In this exhibition, one hundred personal stories paint a picture of occupation and resistance in the Netherlands during the Second World War. Over the course of six periods, we take you back into the past. Each period starts with a film. The emphasis lies on the dilemmas that people faced under the dictatorial occupation. The stories illustrate that resistance was not an easy choice. The exhibition does not provide a complete picture of the people and events of the resistance".

Figure 30 One of the "questioning" signs directing the visitor's path in the museum (photo by the author)

hand, the pervasiveness of Nazi rule during the occupation, but also, on the other, to layer the national narrative about the war with a different kind of subject than the resistance fighters (whom are nonetheless also valued and commemorated by the museum). The reference is to those people whom it is difficult to frame narratively, precisely because they challenge the binarism of good vs evil, presenting themselves both as non-perpetrators and as non-victims, let alone as resisters. They were ordinary Dutch people who, by putting their priorities first and perhaps not recognising at the time the problematic nature of their choices, indirectly contributed to the extermination of 75% of the Dutch Jewish population.

This way of reflecting on national responsibility with such a great number of non-perpetrator and non-victim subjects is particularly innovative for a memory museum. Worldwide, there are many museums that represent the figure of the "bystander" (see Williams 2007), but this case in Amsterdam reinvigorates the terms of this process, overcoming the unrealistic passivity usually attributed to the bystander and centring on the agency of the people. Doing so, the Verzetsmuseum integrates the category of the implicated subject, as proposed by Michael Rothberg (2019) into the debate on museum studies.

For Rothberg, the implicated subject tries to go beyond the memory triangle of victim-perpetrator-bystander, focusing not so much on the ontological

characteristics that define these subjects in dynamics of violence, but on the "positionality" they have when some their specific actions are enacted. In this sense, the focus is entirely on responsibility and on the privilege of those who were indirectly part of the violence. In the introduction to his book, Rothberg writes:

> The implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less "actively" involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mold of the "passive" bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators (Rothberg 2019, 1).

Developing a theory of the repercussions of the implicated subject's assumed agency, Rothberg implements a new perspective on the category of the bystander, rather than on the perpetrator and the victim (cf. Knittel and Forchieri 2020). This is especially the case when he deals with the synchronic implicated subject, who unlike the diachronic one, acts in the present in which the violent situation takes form. Given these premises, it is evident how the Verzetsmuseum can thus be defined as a platform that theorises the implicated subject and the relationship between personal choice and collective accountability. Indeed, it focuses specifically on the impact that the choices made by some Dutch people had on the traumatic history of the country, proposing a reflection on responsibility more than complicity or culpability. The museum thus does not treat implicated subjects as the appendix to a more general war narrative or as a story that is inferior to other subjectivities (perpetrators and victims) in the dynamics of violence. Even though the "tone" of the museum is not accusatory towards the Dutch people it named, the visitor can construct their own judgment in relation to what is told. "Entering" into the lives of others and getting to know their moods and reactions to the occupation puts the visitor in an interesting position: one can either carry out an exercise of identification, wondering what they would have done in that same situation, one can set themselves up as a sanctioning subject: they can decide, according to their own experience and value system, whether they considers a choice to be understandable or absolutely unacceptable. The museum, in this sense, leaves the viewer

free to make one's own interpretation and judgment of the lives of the implicated Dutch people chosen to narrate the Nazi occupation. This aspect can be further stratified if one considers the nationality of the visitor: if it is a Dutch person, that sense of identification can certainly be followed by diachronic implication, as one recognises the potential to directly inherit the history and the responsibilities that are being articulated. Providing the possible receptions of the museum to the empirical visitor and expanding the discourse it proposes, the goal is not to "construct the antagonist", i.e., another ordinary perpetrator in the national discourse on the war, or to judge actions of people we know very little about and who live in very precarious war times. The museum is instead more committed to challenging a de-responsibilising narrative according to which there is an indistinct collective mass, a sort of passive crowd, that lies between perpetrator and victim. It tries to do so by configuring the grey zone of the "ordinary people", not as a blurred collective but as a partial unity composed of highly recognizable and visible subjects with names, jobs, agency, and priorities.

Exhibiting the Implication

Considering the great number of lives that the museum showcases, it is impossible, on this occasion, to render the polyphonic complexity of the site. As such, I have opted to concentrate on one display, as a main case, a display that tells a story of collaborationism with Nazism and a subsequent repentance. I refer to the space that in the site is devoted to a policeman, Jo Karelse (1910 – 2006). His story is told in these terms:

> As a policeman, Jo Karelse had the task of detaining Jews. He received this note with names[4], addresses and instructions. He was told to check the number of family members and their luggage, take the key and lock the house. Did he dare refuse? Anyone who refused would lose their job, or worse… And would it help the Jews if he refused? Jo decided to go.
> The scenes were often heartbreaking. In his report, he wrote: "Mrs Eisendrath was so upset that she collapsed and fainted". Two days later, Jo received another list. Once again, he followed his orders.
> In 1943, police officers were required to swear an oath to Hitler. Jo refused and joined the resistance. Throughout his entire life, he blamed himself for having followed German orders.

4 The reference is to the piece of paper exhibited alongside his personal photo.

Figure 31 The display which tells the story of Jo Karelse (photo by the author)

> Dutch police officers also followed other German orders, but they often used their position to help the resistance as well. Over 300 were killed for working with the resistance.

This is a meaningful case as it combines collaborationism and the anti-Nazi Resistance, allowing the visitor to reflect on the fact that very often resistance fighters became such after a personal journey of confrontation with the occupation. Heroism is not an ontological trait, but a narrative characterisation given to actions that were undoubtedly courageous, but also the result of different needs, experiences, beliefs and contexts. The story of Jo Karelse, like many others in the museum, challenges stereotypical memory characters to stress the human variability of actions that can be driven by opportunists or noble feelings. It does so with no hasty justification, without using the argument that everyone decides to behave according to their own ideologies or intentions, but instead recognises that a lack of solidarity the lack of recognition of the privilege of one’s position in a historical moment can lead to a disastrous social consequence. This “ordinariness” of the implicated subject is also expressed through the setting of the story. As the image below (Figure 31) illustrates, the main visual element accompanying the written texts (in Dutch and English) is a black and white photographic portrait of Karelse wearing his uniform.

This photograph is quite different from those usually displayed in memorial museums. It is likely the photograph was taken to give an official but not serve as representation. The policeman’s gaze is not turned towards the viewer, as in the case of victim photos (often taken by the victimizers themselves) or perpetrators (depicting officers in uniform, perhaps doing

their jobs) (Violi 2022). This seemingly irrelevant aspect revels a lot about the visual construction of the implicated subject as a common and ordinary man. Usually, in a museum, the photo of a victim evokes the moment that precedes death or a happy memory of life before the war (or trauma). In these two cases, the photo can therefore transmit sorrow (in the first case) or a sort of "nostalgia" for the unrealised future (Panico 2019). For an image of a perpetrator, on the other hand, museums often use the ID card-style photograph to transmit austerity and symbolise the bureaucratisation of violence. On this basis, a photograph of a man who is not the victim and who is smiling – maybe an image taken to be placed in the living room, as a manifestation of pride – undermines this logic, in the same way that the implicated subject likewise troubles the "good vs bad" memory rhetoric. Indeed, the picture contributes to the actorialisation of the implicated subject as a "quotidian" person, presented neither as a frightened subject about to die, nor as an algid, emotionless beast. The implicated subject is visually proposed as someone who can be recognised as familiar by the visitor, as closer to them(cf. Ricœur 2000). In other words, while questioning the polarised narrative of the demonisation of the perpetrator and the heroisation of the victim (Giensen 2004), providing this less binary reading forges the possibility for the audience to recognise (but not justify) certain familiar features in the implicated subject.

In addition to the personal portrait, a group photo of a Dutch police force is also presented. This picture returns us to the individual-collective dynamic I discussed earlier. The photograph places the individual subject in a collective group to which he belonged. This serves to consider the implication also from a quantitative and not only qualitative point of view, insisting that the action of these subjects was socially replicated and not isolated. The last showcased object is a piece of paper with the names of Jewish families written on it, like those the policeman evicted when carrying out the Nazis' orders. A simple piece of paper takes on a testimonial configuration that is particularly important for the museum's objectives. Besides being an index, the paper can also be regarded as a trace, conclusive and traumatic proof of the subject's responsibility. It is exhibited as a document of implication that leaves no room for alternative interpretations to that of responsibility. In a metaphorical manner, one might suggest that, with no direct communication implied between the gazes of the photographed policeman and the visitor, an I-you dialogue is realised by the yellowed sheet, whose names "stare" at the visitor – who, in the meantime, has moreover become aware of another mechanism of implication and who reads what Jo also read and enacted some time before.

As I already mentioned, the museum has been criticised because, according to some of the people who visited it and commented on the experience, it does not give much space to the heroism of the resistance, and it adopts a justifying attitude towards those who do not take a firm stand against the Nazi perpetrators. Although it is true that space is taken away from the stories of resistance, the proposed operation is very interesting and does not belittle the stories of courage. Indeed, as we read in the last sentence of Karelse's description – written with a different lettering to visually indicate the switch from the private to the collective –many Dutch policemen indeed helped Resistance operations, and Jo himself refused to swear an oath to Hitler. Moreover, the fact that the Resistance does not always have narrative centrality does not detract from the work of the resistance fighters, but places the narrative on a more realistic dimension of the past, in which those resisting were united in groups that had to operate in a polyphonic social fabric that was also made up of collaborationism and complicity with the occupiers.

This way of narrating the implicated subject produces at least two effects. First of all, it allows the visitor to decide how to judge and how to emotionally deal with the various actions that are mentioned. The museum does not give a specific or explicit sanction: in Karelse's case, for example, the fact that he "only" obeyed orders (a quotation that echoes Eichmann's 1961 justification of his actions) is not judged as positive or as negative, it is just left as an open question that is not addressed to the visitor (a question that is perhaps impossible to answer, given the impossibility of reliving the phenomenological experience of the subject) but merely represents the internal emotional state of the represented. As a second effect, this narration makes explicit the very clear and violent consequences that a lack of solidarity – in favour of an apparently legitimate self-interest – can have. This point is moreover quite evident in another story, of Mary Dresselhuys (1907 – 2004), an actress who, during the occupation, decided to register her theatre company with the Chamber of Culture, founded by the German Nazi to control artistic activities in the country. As the panel affirms, she is just one of the "42,000 artists [that] ultimately registered with the Chamber of Culture". This balance between singular life and plural actions makes clear that violence against humanity should not be understood merely as the action of a single individual, but as the complex result of a dense network of behaviours that are apparently small and unconnected, but which helped to enable the real crime.

In lieu of a more definitive conclusion to this discussion of the implicated subject in the museum, it is important to mention that the fluidity of this

context-dependent category is rendered in the last part of the site, which is dedicated to the early post-war period, Dutch colonialism, and the Indonesian War of Independence. An emblematic example is the story of Jan Kuiper, a young Dutch man who went to Indonesia after the liberation of the Netherlands to fight against the Japanese. When he arrived, Kuiper discovered that the Japanese had already retreated from the islands, and the celebrating Indonesian people were also fighting for the liberation from the Dutch coloniser. Through this person, the Verzetsmuseum makes visible and legitimises the Indonesian people's struggle for freedom and the trauma caused by Dutch colonialists, pointing out the contextual and complex dimension of the implication – i.e., that it can affect a person even when they have been a victim in a different situation. The box dedicated to Kuiper's thoughts and his story reads:

> "So then I went to Indonesia anyway, with the idea that we were needed to restore peace and order". But after a while, Jan began to have doubts. "Maybe I'm fighting on the wrong side?"
> When Jan arrived home in 1949, the street was festively decorated in his honour. But when he looks back himself, he says: "History will know us as war criminals."

The last section of the museum is entitled "And now?". The visitor enters a section where portraits of contemporary people are projected on the wall with a sentence summarising their idea of resistance. Some of these stories relate to the Nazi occupation, others to contemporary oppressive contexts. On the adjacent wall there are blank sheets of paper, on which the visitor can write something to answer the question written on the wall: "How about you?". At the end of the visit, after showing many lives of others the museum invites the visitor to have one's own say. It has a specific aim: although apparently only dealing with the synchronic implicated subject, the museum also invites the visitor (who, in most cases, was born after the Second World War) to reflect on their contemporary positionality, thus questioning their own diachronic implication, with a focus on the events of the past but also on those of the present.

Quoting the Perpetrator

Having seen how the museum enacts an interesting profiling of the subjects involved, I now turn to look at how it deals with the representation of Nazi

perpetrators and NSB officers. Those people in the museum who could be considered the highest ranking perpetrators with positions of power, including political power, during the occupation are the Dutchman Anton Mussert (1894 – 1946), leader of the NSB; the Germans Emil Rühl (1904 – unknown), agent of the Sicherheitsdienst, and Karl Berg (1907 – 1949), SS-Schutzhaftlagerführer of Kamp Amersfoort[5]. In this instance, I do not focus on the portrayal of Wim Henneicke, defined as the Jew hunter, or Gerard Mooyman, the 17-year-old indoctrinated by propaganda who signed up to fight against Russia, or Anton van der Waals, the collaborationist who sabotaged the operations of the resistance by pretending to be one of them. Certainly, this is not to suggest the violence they committed was unwilling or unintended. Rather, I believe they are to be considered as gears, voluntarily implicated subject, in a larger system of perpetration. They were "helpers" of the Nazis – if one wants to adopt this Proppian narrative category – who contributed to the consolidation of the perpetrators in power, ensuring that their position was nurtured and invigorated.

Following this reasoning, the remarks I propose regarding these perpetrators and looking at the example of the Verzetsmuseum are twofold. The first relates to the meaning effects produced by the syntagmatic relationship of victim-perpetrator in the museum space. In other words, how the meaning of both is modified (or compromised) when their stories are told in function of each other. The second concerns the risks inherent to narratively "treating" the perpetrator with the rhetoric of the point of view, as is provocatively done in the so of the implicated subject. Is it really the same thing, from the point of view of museum's meaning-making and cultural memory, to quote the perpetrator insofar as he is a collaborator, without sanctioning his statements? In the three perpetrators mentioned, the only one that seems to offer a way of developing these communicative risks, of this unintended "condescending" effect, is, from my point of view, the case of Emil Rühl. Before proceeding with this last case, let us see how the first two are represented.

Mussert is the first man to be presented in the museum. His display case includes, among other objects, official photos of him giving the Hitler salute, medals of honour, and the propaganda poster of one of his speeches in Utrecht. He represents an individual but also the expression of the pro-Nazi context of those years. He is presented as a great admirer of Hitler, as a leader

5 Although there is no display with his story, the commander of the Westerbork transit camp, Albert Konrad Gemmeker, is also represented in the museum. In the same section where the policeman I mentioned is located, a video commissioned by Gemmeker himself is screened, showing the commander at work with other Nazis.

of the NSB and as a man who is not highly esteemed by the Dutch and whom the occupiers never really made influential. In front of Mussel's display is a picture of Amsterdam after a Nazi bombing. The image is accompanied by the story of an 11-year-old girl, Tootje de Jonge, who lost a leg during one of the bombings. The relationship creates a correlation with pro-Nazi people and the Nazi destruction of their country.

Karl Berg's story, on the other hand, is told in relation to that of Loes van Overeem (1907 – 1980), a Red Cross volunteer who had many contacts among the German Nazi high-ranking, which allowed her to enter the camps in Vught and Amersfoort and help the inmates. The pictures and descriptions of Berg and van Overeem are presented as two parts of the same display, surrounded by barbed wire, to represent their close relationship and the context in which they acted. The syntagmatic relationship created by Berg and van Overeem does not follow the executioner-victim logic; rather it allows different dynamics present in the Dutch concentrationist universe to be included in the museum narrative, giving an account of one of the well-known commanders and one of the most discussed and implicated figures in the occupied Netherlands[6].

The part of the museum that I want to consider in greater detail deals simultaneously with Hannie Schaft (1920 – 1945) and Emil Rühl (1904 – unknown), respectively a Dutch law student who was an ardent opponent of Nazism and an agent of the German Sicherheitsdienst who hunted her down for months. In a dedicated room, on the left side of the black wall three photographs of Hannie are presented: a portrait showing her smiling, a photo showing her with black hair and glasses, both adorned in order to avoid recognition. The last photo depicts a scene with her friend and resistance fighter, Truus Oversteegen, who disguised himself as a man during anti-Nazi missions, pretending to be Hannie Schaft's partner, again so as not to be noticed. Symmetrically opposite to the portrait of Schaft is a profile photo of Rühl who appears to be looking in the direction of the girl, with his face caught in an expression of outrage (the source or the context of the picture is not mentioned).

At the bottom of the glazed display case, we see reconstructed sand dunes representing the place where Schaft was shot on 17 April 1945, after being interrogated for days by Rühl. Two objects are placed on these dunes: eyeglasses and a gun, objects-metonyms of the victim (Figure 32). The gun, in this case, could also correspond to the figure of the perpetrator, but there are reasons to think that this is a reference to the resistance fighter because in the display's narrative of her life it is specified that she was carrying a

6 It is important to note that the story of Loes van Overeem is also told in the Nationaal Monument Kamp Amersfoort.

Figure 32 The display that tells the story of Hannie Schaft and Emil Rühl (photo by the author)

gun when she was captured. Moreover, in the comic poster of the museum in which she is portrayed (used as publicity but also available in the gift shop), a similar gun is depicted, making us think that the object is exhibited in relation to her life as a fighter.

What is unconvincing about the construction of the responsibility of the Nazi perpetrators in this corner of the museum is the symmetrical operation that places the two sides as alternatives of the same story, leaving the perpetrator's statement without a sanctioning frame or without really problematizing his words. The text about the perpetrator reads:

> "Reports kept coming in about acts of sabotage – and later, liquidations – involving a girl, a woman with long red hair", said Emil Rühl, agent of the German *Sicherheitsdienst*, after the war. He spent months hunting for this "girl with the red hair": Hannie Schaft. One day, when she was stopped at the checkpoint on the street and found to be carrying illegal newspaper and a gun, she was recognized. Emil interrogated her for days and night on end. "To us she was a terrorist who shot and killed our people". Hannie admitted to her part in the resistance. On 17 April, three weeks before the Netherlands was liberated, she was taken to the dunes and shot.
> After the war, Emil Rühl was sentenced to 18 years of prison.

It is important, before proceeding, to read it in comparison with that of the young resistance fighter:

> Firm in her convictions, the red-haired law student Hannie Schalt chose the most extreme form of resistance: she joined a group of communist resistance fighters who shot traitors.
> Hannie often carried out her mission together with Truus Oversteegen. This photo shows them shortly after one such mission. "I had disguised myself as a man so that Hannie and I could pretend to be a couple in love", Truus explained. "Shooting traitors was a terrible thing. But it had to be done. After all, we couldn't put them in prison". After learning that the German were looking for a red-haired girl, Hannie dyed her hair black and began wearing these eyeglasses.
> But in March of 1945, Hannie was caught anyway. A German named Emil Rühl interrogated her.
> *During the occupation, at least 550 traitors, NSB members and German were shot and killed by the Dutch resistance.*

As can be gathered from the reading of these two texts, the museum on this occasion places the two stories in direct dialogue both visually and verbally, though it lacks excessive descriptive detachment. What it recounts places the visitor before an aseptic account of the facts: resistance fighters shot Nazis, Nazis shot resistance fighters. If this is true on the level of basic historical events, it is problematic from the point of view of the transmission of traumatic memory and Nazi complicity and culpability. The museum tackles the perpetrator by offering his perspective on the actions committed without, however, attempting to take sides or recount more generally (as it does with the girl's story) the torture and despicable actions committed by the Nazi secret service against the resistance fighters. The museum adopts a symmetrisation strategy that naively posits the two parties involved as two alternative voices of the same story, without problematising the perpetrator's statements and without legitimising correctly the memory of the resistance fighter, who is narrated only as a counterpart of her hunter. The phrase "to us she was a terrorist who shot and killed our people", while consistently following the laconic style granted to the subjects of other displays, fails to produce the same result or adopt the same pedagogical purposes.

As much as it is appreciable that the museum tends to investigate the nuances behind the choices of those involved, one cannot fail to recognise that perpetrators and victims need a less fluid narrative: one that is not stereotypical, but also not entirely free of judgement. Here, the risk, in my

view, is to go too far with the idea that everyone – even those who were accomplices and who practised violence in the name of a supposed ideology – can consider themselves legitimised by their ideas. If cautiously assessing certain actions as good or bad is an interesting experiment for more "ordinary" stories, which perhaps enable the visitor to reflect on its synchronic and diachronic implications, can this also be applied as rhetorical mechanism to the perpetrator? How much does this risk delegitimising the victims? Is there a risk of homogenising the parties involved? All the people involved in the story have certainly constructed a narrative to justify their actions, because they believed it or because it was convenient to think they believed it. Is this the same for a young resistance fighter and for a Nazi secret agent? Depicting the perpetrator in the museum is always a complex task, perhaps the most difficult one because it is necessary to create a balanced narrative that is not dehumanising (and potentially thereby corresponding to an unrealistic distancing of the visitor) but also not too condescending. Rühl will certainly assume he had his reasons to act like a perpetrator (like most of the perpetrators did during their trial); the challenge here remains how to mediate these motives in a museum, inserting them into a general frame in which the issue of direct responsibility, complicity and deplorable violence must emerge.

Conclusion

The Verzetsmuseum uses polyphonic stories in its narration of anti-Nazi resistance and Second World War trauma, proposing different meaning effects in relation to the issue of indirect responsibility for or complicity in acts of violence. As I have sought to argue, in this sense, the museum is an interesting example of how the figure of the implicated subject can be musealised as a main leitmotiv, not only to stratify the classical narrative opposition between victim and perpetrator but also to re-centralise the issue of responsibility in memory museums. The various stories the museum offers allow the visitor to reflect on the complexity of the grey area from both historical and personal perspectives, activating various emotions and reflections that depend on the visitor's situatedness. To aspire to achieve this effect, the museum guides the visitor along a path in which the main isotopy is that of the dilemma faced by some Dutch people, materialising the collective impact of personal, everyday life choices in the context of war and genocide. At theoretical level, if the representation of synchronic implication is particularly effective when dealing with "ordinary" people, this becomes more problematic for the representation of the perpetrator.

Presenting the perpetrator's point of view in a memory space is a very tricky and risky rhetorical practice. There are many memoirs that, in recent years, have decided to focus their reflection precisely on the forms of transmission of the negative memory of compromised personalities, such as perpetrators. This entailed a radical subversion of the classical imagery (cf. Anderson 2020), proposing a less demonised vision of the criminal and of power – certainly not seeking to deputise the actions committed, but rather to avoid an "othering" process in which violence and sadism are perceived as alien and non-human traits.

With respect to the construction of this complex national "we", which was (and is) resistant but also accountable, and the occupying "other", the museum is a medium not only devoted to representing the past, but challenging Dutch national representation in relation to the Second World War. By insisting more on the responsibility of an "us" than on the construction of an "other occupier", the museum puts the image of the Dutch as victims and as resisters in a different light, also offering examples of violent Dutchmen or those who made personal choices that contributed to the growth of Nazi power in the country. This evidently entails a necessary revalorisation of the past narrative, through which Dutch people in the present are also invoked. Within this narrative, heroism is thematised not as an attitude that was present but not widespread throughout the nation, but as something that is more nuanced. As Giensen writes, in relation to the trauma of the perpetrator for a community (in his case, the German community in relation to Nazism): "if a community has to recognize that its members, instead of being heroes, have been perpetrators who violated the cultural premises of their own identity, the reference to the past is indeed traumatic" (Giensen 2004, 11). Although the reference in our case is more to collaborationism than perpetration, this reasoning can be extended to the case study in this chapter, which is based above all on the problem of self-representation and emotional self-sanction for those who feel that they are heirs to and diachronically implicated with a difficult history.

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About the Author

Mario Panico is a lecturer and postdoctoral fellow at the University of Amsterdam and member of the Amsterdam School of Heritage, Memory and Material Culture (AHM). He deals with issues related to cultural heritage, memory space, nostalgia and representations of World War II perpetrators in trauma sites and museums. He is currently working on a research project entitled "Perpetrators' Heritage, Material Cultures and Imaginaries" and investigates the strategies of preservation and resemantisation of sites associated with the daily lives of perpetrators in Europe and Latin America. In particular, he is studying how perpetrators' houses and villas built near concentration and transit camps in Europe were musealised or monumentalised in order to critically discuss national accountabilities. He has published on the relationship between monumentality and conflict, nostalgia and urban practices, and family memories. He is currently editing the Italian translation of two chapters by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (on the relationship between post-memory and nostalgia) and his next monograph will be entitled "Nostalgia, Spatial Consolation and Conflict Heritage" (Palgrave Macmillan).

7 Entanglements of Art and Memory Activism in Hungary's Illiberal Democracy

Reka Deim

Abstract

This chapter explores how art contributes to the articulation of memories that counter the official historical narrative of Hungary's self-proclaimed political and ideological system, illiberal democracy. Amid deepening polarization between Europe's post-colonialist and post-socialist countries, the Hungarian government promotes a Christian conservative national identity against the "liberal" values of Western Europe. Systematic appropriation of historical traumas is at the core of such efforts, which largely manifests in removing, erecting and reinstating memorials, as well as in the re-signification of trauma sites. Insufficient civic involvement in rewriting histories generates new ways of resistance, which I demonstrate through the case study of a protest-performance organized by the Living Memorial activist group as a response to the government's decision to displace the memorial of Imre Nagy in 2018. I seek to understand the dynamics between top-down memory politics, civil resistance and art within the conceptual apparatus of the "memory activism nexus" (Rigney 2018, 2020) and "multidirectional memories" (Rothberg 2009). I argue that artistic memory activism has limited potential to transform the dynamics of memory in a context where a national conservative political force has gradually taken control over historical narratives, triggering inevitably polarizing responses in the society. Although profoundly embedded in local histories, the case-study may offer new ways of negotiating traumatic heritages through the entanglement of art and memory activism.

Keywords: Hungary, Illiberal Democracy, Illiberal Memory politics, Memory Activism, Multidirectional Memory

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Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH07

Introduction

In the aftermath of oppressive regimes and armed conflicts, societies face an enormous task to seek justice, evaluate their histories and work toward a future where such painful episodes can be avoided. Pierre Nora describes this sort of post-totalitarian transformation as "ideological decolonization," a process of re-evaluating the past, "which has helped reunite these liberated peoples with traditional, long-term memories confiscated, destroyed or manipulated by those regimes: this is the case with Russia and many countries in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Latin America and Africa" (Nora 2002, 5). Underlying the ideological decolonization of societies around the world the main driving force to rewrite fabricated histories that had served the interests of totalitarian establishments is "collective memory" (Halbwachs 1992 [1925]; Assmann 1995 and 2008) in the sense that it is "a matter of communication and social interaction" (Assmann 2008, 109). Commemoration of suppressed histories is critical to propagate agendas of accountability and transitional justice, therefore the duties of democratization and peace building are inextricably bound up with memorialization in such circumstances. Across numerous countries around the world, a growing number of museums and memorials are devoted to telling painful histories with the intention to build more cohesive and self-reflexive societies (Sodaro 2018; David 2020), which are often informed by the activities of various activist groups that struggle for a just re-evaluation of the past.

Memory activism – the propagation of alternative histories and counter-memories via political commemorations, demonstrations and other forms of civil initiatives – has predominantly been conceptualized in the frame of conflict studies, with regard to post-war and post-dictatorship societies that face daunting memories of war, genocide, repression, and conflicting interpretations of the past. Research in this respect has largely been focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Gutman 2017), the Yugoslav wars (Fridman 2015) and the aftermath of Latin American military dictatorships (Allier-Montaño and Crenzel 2015; Andermann 2015; Jelin 2003; Villalón 2017), and besides traumatic events, the memory of nonviolent struggles has also been explored (Katriel and Reading 2015). In many Latin American countries that recently underwent post-dictatorship transformations, there is a strong sense of ethical obligation to propagate the imperative of "nunca más!" (never again!) through distinct forms of memorialization. Addressing the crimes of the military dictatorship of 1976–1983 in Argentina or the ongoing internal armed conflict of Colombia is based on a shared will among academics, museum professionals and civil society to promote discourses

dominated by survivor testimonies, as well as produce evidence and identify perpetrators. Characteristically, art plays an important role in the expression and visualization of such traumatic heritages in public programs and in the creation of spaces of reflection, such as the Parque de la Memorial in Buenos Aires, a park to commemorate the victims of state terror through a memorial accompanied by statues of invited artists, including Claudia Fontes, Denis Oppenheim and William Tucker.

Although societies in East-Central Europe have also experienced oppressive regimes before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, their ideological decolonization and memorialization processes have been different from the Latin American examples in many regards. One of the major obstacles post-socialist countries are facing is that memories of multiple violent pasts – WWI, WWII, the Holocaust and crimes committed under the communist regime – had been suppressed or "absent" due to the lack of communicative frames (Van Vree 2013) for a long time, and their re-assessment has only been possible since the fall of the Berlin Wall. After four decades of totalitarian control, first-hand testimonies and memories are not easily accessible, and the fact that many victims, witnesses and perpetrators have meanwhile died further complicates seeking truth and justice. Like other East-Central European societies facing "too much memory, too many pasts" (Judt 1992, 99), Hungary has numerous untold and conflicted stories that re-emerge simultaneously in the aftermath of the communist era and remain contested and overlapping to this day.[1] Following the regime change of 1989, the memorialization of Trianon (the redrawing of Hungary's borders after WWI), the Holocaust and the 1956 Revolution has been dominating the Hungarian discourse on traumatic heritage, and since the illiberal turn of 2010 – when the Christian conservative FIDESZ-KDNP government took office – the history of deportations to forced labour camps in the Soviet Union has also been increasingly present on the level of public commemoration.[2] The main problem with the (indeed) urgent processing

1 For instance, the consequences of the Trianon Treaty, the persecution and extermination of Jewish and Roma people, the Nazi occupation and the violence of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, the siege of Budapest, sexual violence during the wars and the Soviet occupation, post-war forced displacement of the Hungarian-German population, deportations to the Gulag and retaliations after the anti-Soviet uprising of 1956.

2 The government established the Gulag Memorial Committee (Gulág Emlékbizottság) in 2015, responsible for creating publications, educational projects, conferences, films, oral history archives as well as for supporting commemorations, memorials and plaques throughout the country. A major memorial site was created at the Ferencváros Railway Station, including the Malenki Robot Memorial and a permanent exhibition inside a former bunker – as a side project of the Hungarian National Museum – entitled "The Circles of Hell. Malenki Robot – Forced Labor

of these histories is that research is increasingly being carried out in line with the government's victimizing and anti-communist agenda, which overlooks Hungary's complicity in these turbulent histories by focusing on victims and portraying the country as a victim to external powers. Such a perspective reinforces what Tony Judt calls "comparative victimhood" (Judt 2005: 826–830), an unproductive contest for recognition between the victims of the Nazi and the Soviet occupations. The politics of recognition, according to Máté Zombory, reaffirms the emergence of "societies of trauma" – a product of ongoing transformation of politics across Europe and beyond since the seventies – where memory politics overtakes class-based political representation, and the political representatives of various victim "status groups" compete with each other in the name of victims, which tends to renew conflicts rather than bringing reconciliation (Zombory 2019). In post-totalitarian societies like Hungary, where the memory of the communist regime and Western Europe serve as the main reference points determining political identities to this day, the rising right-wing populism framed as "illiberalism" significantly reinforces the politics of recognition, disabling the resolution of conflicts between different victim status groups and political identities.

The memory politics of the illiberal state foregrounded the importance of memory activism both historically and in the present. There is a growing interest in the history of the democratic transformations in the late eighties, when nonviolent demonstrations comprised the backbone of civil opposition to the Soviet oppression across East-Central Europe (Pfaff and Guobin 2001; Palonen 2008). In the case of Hungary, the "politics of symbols" (K. Horváth 2008: 249), especially political commemorations, were the main means to oppose the Soviet dominance in the late eighties. The Hungarian democratic opposition, which served as the basis of all the dominant democratic parties to emerge after 1989,[3] organized demonstrations on highly symbolic dates, including the anniversaries of the 1848 anti-Habsburg uprising (15th March 15) and the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising (23rd October), which generated considerable civil engagement. By means of expressing their disagreement with the falsification of history regarding the two major fights of independence, the protesters publicly opposed the Soviet political

in the Soviet Union." In 2018, Viktor Orbán inaugurated a black granite obelisk, the Memorial of the Victims of the Soviet Occupation in Budapest.

3 The democratic opposition included: the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Párt, MDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetséfe, SzDSz) and FIDESZ – Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ – Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége).

and ideological system in the frame of political commemorations. Above all, the most significant commemorative event was the public rehabilitation of the executed Prime Minister Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs, which symbolically marked the Hungarian regime change (Benzinger 2000; Harms 2017; K. Horváth 2008; Rév 2005). The framing of these events and the evaluation of the traumatic heritage of the Nazi and Soviet occupations are at the center of the illiberal memory politics as well as recent memory activism.

Besides specific historical experiences and memorialization processes, art has developed unique characteristics in post-socialist contexts, and continues to support a novel kind of memory activism within the illiberal state. As far as the current Hungarian state of affairs is concerned, Andrea Pető's analysis on the emerging illiberal democratic system is revealing. According to Pető, the "illiberal polypore state" is a successful form of governance that benefits from globalized (neo)liberal democracy and, at the same time, contributes to its decay (Pető 2017b: 19). While the illiberal polypore state appropriates liberal democratic institutions and funding channels, it builds an ideology to present itself as an alternative to liberal democracy, which counters the power of the "liberal elites" by emphasizing national sovereignty, Christian culture and traditional values. Besides supporting pro-government NGOs instead of progressive NGOs framed as foreign and dangerous to sovereignty, "[t]he illiberal counter discourse to the liberal human rights paradigm is nationalist familialism, accentuating the rights and interests of families over those of minorities and individuals" (Pető 2017b: 20). The interpretation of history from such a perspective is crucial to framing the illiberal ideology, therefore the government has gradually taken control over historical narratives by means of funding cultural and research institutions, museums and memorials. As a consequence, the function of political art is undergoing considerable transformation to counter the measures and narratives of the government (András 2013; Nagy 2015; Human Platform 2020). Unlike the artistic interventions that contribute to narrating and nuancing the past in a number of memorial museums in post-conflict societies, such as ESMA Memory Site Museum (Buenos Aires) and Museo de Memoria de Colombia (online, planned in Bogotá), which combine professional approaches with human rights activism, in Hungary it is the memorial museums that are targeted by activists – both directly and indirectly – for showcasing a state-controlled, unidirectional historical narrative. For instance, Budapest's well-known "trauma site museum" (Violi 2012), the House of Terror Museum and the yet-to-be-opened House of Fates Holocaust museum represent the same problematic approach to history as the one that currently characterizes the government's memory politics. In this situation, the articulation of alternative memories by creative and

artistic means takes place largely outside the state-sponsored institutions, and political art tends to serve as an aid of demonstrations to formulate and visualize counter-histories in opposition to the official narrative.

Insufficient civil involvement in the transformation of public spaces and memorials since 2010 has generated a specific type of activism evolving around memorials and museums, organized predominantly by the Living Memorial, a group of activists, artists and academics that has initiated demonstrations and discussions on a regular basis since 2014 to protest the government's memory politics. The context and objectives of these demonstrations are best understood through the conceptual apparatus of what Ann Rigney calls "memory-activism nexus":

> "This means examining the interplay between memory activism (how actors struggle to produce cultural memory and to steer future remembrance, as described in Gutman 2017), the memory of activism (how earlier struggles for a better world are culturally recollected, as described in Katriel and Reading 2015), and memory in activism (how the cultural memory of earlier struggles informs new movements in the present, as set out in Eyerman 2016)." (Rigney 2018: 372)

Building on these conceptual distinctions, I look at the creative methods applied by the Living Memorial to produce counter-narratives as a form of *memory activism* and, in order to explore *memory in activism*, I analyze the visual and cultural references the group's 2018 protest against the displacement of Imre Nagy's memorial applies to articulate their demands. The case-study also concerns the cultural memory of key historical events in Hungary: the anti-Soviet uprising of 1956 and the regime change of 1989. Besides shedding light on the ongoing contestation of the memory of these events in the current illiberal political system, the analysis raises further issues that challenge dominant Western European discourses on memory from an East-Central European angle. Although profoundly embedded in the local context, the case-study may offer new ways of negotiating the past through nonviolent memory activism with the tools of visual arts.

The Imre Nagy Memorial and the Contested Legacy of the 1956 Revolution

The Hungarian government's decision in 2018 to remove the Imre Nagy Memorial (Fig. 33) from the Martyrs' Square located next to the Parliament

building in the center of Budapest instantly sparked a wave of social resistance. Critics and protesters not only resented the authoritative decision that excluded professional and civic participation from the decision-making process related to the historically charged public space and trauma site, but also objected to the historical perspective the removal represents. Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister of the 1956 Revolution, occupies a central role in Hungarian collective memory as a symbol of the short-lived national unity both in the 1956 uprising and in 1989. The nationwide uprising was the first major disruption in the region to oppose Soviet-imposed policies after the communist takeover of the late forties, which shocked the public across the world and prompted many thinkers from Hannah Arendt and Jean-Paul Sartre, to Gabriel García Márquez, to rethink their views on the Soviet model of socialism (Arendt 1958; Sartre 1968; García Márquez 2003a; 2003b; 1983).[4] The 1956 uprising, however, remains one of the most contested events of the country's history due to the long suppression of its memory, its interconnectedness with the regime change, and because it has been subject of appropriation by various political parties, which transformed 1956 into "a source of extreme political polarization that fractured Hungarians' understanding of the 1989 transition" (Seleny 2014: 37). The recent, unexpected removal of the Imre Nagy Memorial indicates yet another radical shift in the memory of both historical events.

4 Hannah Arendt added the chapter "Epilogue: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution" to the second edition of *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Subsequent editions did not include this chapter but it was published separately in Arendt, *The Journal of Politics*. Jean-Paul Sartre's view of the Soviet Union considerably changed after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Although he wrote in a positive tone about the Soviet Union following his 1954 visit, he condemned the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and, consequently, broke with the French Communist Party. When Gabriel García Márquez visited the Soviet bloc as a young journalist in 1957 in search of the everyday reality of the socialist utopia, the situation in Hungary left the most sinister impression on him. He recounted his journey in a series of eleven articles, which appeared as "90 Days Behind the Iron Curtain" (original title: "De viaje por los países socialistas) in 1959. The journey through East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Poland, Russia and Hungary affected García Márquez' political ideas "quite decisively" (García Márquez 1983), as he grew critical about the Soviet model of Socialism. He depicts a depressing image of the Hungarian capital, which he finds heavily damaged due to the WWII bombings and the anti-Soviet revolution of 1956, and observes that a system of surveillance keeps everybody in fear. Recalling the strict itinerary and the continuous presence of "interpreters" who actually spoke only in Hungarian, he concludes about his hosts that "they did all they could to stop us forming any concrete impression of the situation" (García Márquez 2003a). According to García Márquez, his was the first delegation of foreigners that was allowed in the country following the crushing of the 1956 uprising and János Kádár's takeover only ten months prior to their visit. Although García Márquez clearly sympathized with Kádár and excused him by claiming that "circumstances are pushing him backwards," he condemned the execution of Imre Nagy as a politically motivated murder in 1958 (García Márquez 2003b).

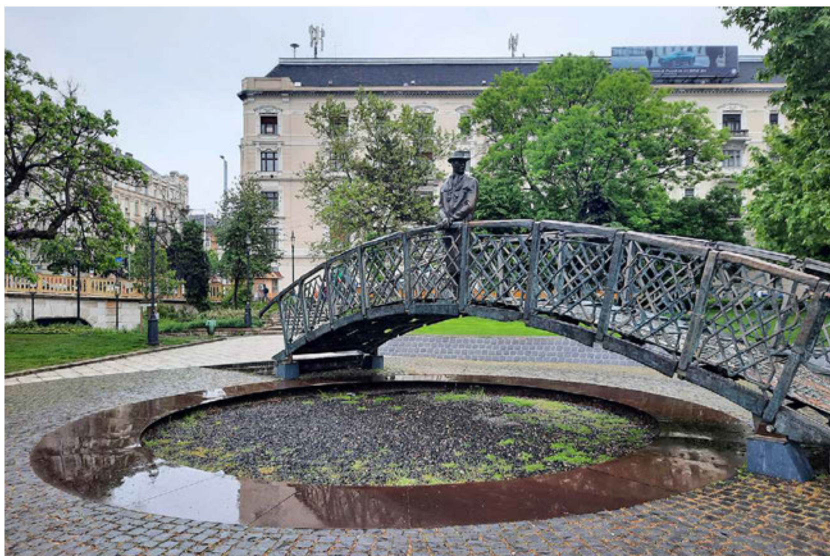

Figure 33 Imre Nagy Memorial in its current location, Jászai Mari Square, 2023 (Photo: Péter Pál Deim)

The systematic suppression of the memory of 1956 during the Kádár era (1956–1988) has largely contributed to its contestation (György 2000; Harms 2017, Pető 2017a). The uprising began as a workers' and student protest – inspired by the June uprising of Polish workers in Poznan – and after toppling the Stalin Monument and occupying the Hungarian Radio building to broadcast their demands, the protesters gathered in front of the Parliament on the morning of 25th October 1956 to call for a new, democratically elected government. This day went down in history as "bloody Thursday" because the State Security Police (Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH) shot into the peaceful crowd, killing dozens of people. The insurgences sparked disorder and violence, and self-organized militias began fighting in the capital's streets against Soviet troops and the ÁVH. The government collapsed and a new interim government of Imre Nagy was formed that pledged to re-establish multi-party system, free elections and to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, a military treaty set up against the NATO between the Soviet Union and seven of its satellite states. The uprising was quickly crushed due to the Soviet military intervention on 4th November, and a new government formed. Imre Nagy was found guilty of treason in a secret trial to be executed in 1958 and he was buried in an unmarked grave alongside other fellow victims. In the aftermath of the short-lived revolution, the new Soviet-backed government of János Kádár did everything to suppress the memory of the uprising, banned any sort of public commemoration and framed the event as a disgraceful

"counterrevolution." In Andrea Pető's words, "forgetting, omission, and amnesia were successful tools for depoliticizing Hungarian society after 1956." (Pető 2017a: 44) Thus, the working through of the trauma of 1956 was rendered impossible for decades.

The 1956 Revolution not only became the foundational narrative of the new, post-Soviet democracy as the flagship historical event to counter the Communist Party's historical narrative but it also provided the revolutionary moment of the regime change through the public rehabilitation of its victims. The Hungarian regime change was not a revolution *per se* – like, for instance, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia was more so – but a process of negotiations between the Communist Party and the democratic opposition. Furthermore, a number of scholars consider the regime changes of the former Eastern Bloc as an "unfinished revolution" (Mark 2010) due to its grave compromises, including support of "unwanted forms of western political and economic colonization" (Mark et al. 2015: 463) and the failure to execute transitional justice, especially in Hungary (Kiss 2006; Stan 2009; Stan and Nedelsky 2015; Ungváry 2017). Accordingly, the Hungarian negotiations – also known as Round Table Talks – carried out in meeting rooms far from the public eye did not provide a remarkable event that could be singled out in collective memory. In sync with the smooth political transformation, the re-signification of public spaces and memorials was also negotiated, and it did not crystallize into a singular event. The renaming of public spaces and the removal of communist era monuments were peacefully carried out in the early nineties – many of the monuments were transferred to the Statue Park Museum at the outskirts of Budapest – and symbols of the new democratic system gradually took their places (Boros 1997; Pótó 2003; Kovács 2005/2006; Palonen 2008). Once commemoration of the 1956 uprising was possible, numerous memorials popped up across the country, and Imre Nagy came to be honored as a national martyr. Nagy's main memorial inaugurated on the occasion of the Revolution's 40th anniversary on a distinguished location in front of the Parliament was not merely a compensation for decades of forced amnesia but predominantly a symbol of democracy and freedom affirmed by his public funeral in 1989. For the act of the reburial ceremony legitimized a completely new reading of the 1956 Revolution and, more generally, of the whole Kádár era, and it made the regime change into a visible and experienceable iconic event that stuck in the public imagination as a turning point in history.

Given Imre Nagy's outstanding symbolic role, the removal plan of his memorial came as a surprise, even though the physical and ideological reconstruction of the site around the Parliament started already in 2011, in

the frame of the Imre Steindl Program. The memory of 1956 has been playing an important role in FIDESZ's memory politics since the party's foundation in the late 1980's, for instance, many of the demonstrations organized by the democratic opposition – including the young FIDESZ – aiming to bring down the communist regime revolved around the commemoration of 1956. At the public rehabilitation of Imre Nagy the young Viktor Orbán famously demanded that Soviet troops leave the country and honored the late Prime Minister of the uprising for standing up against the dictatorship. The speech also underlined the connection between the regime change and the memory of the lost revolution by claiming that 1989 eventually fulfilled the objectives of 1956. Although Orbán's 16th June speech was preceded by the public proclamation of the democratic opposition's 12 points containing the same imperatives on 15th March in Liberty Square, another crucial demonstration in the transformation process, the reburial ceremony performed in the Heroes' Square in front of over 100,000–200,000 people and broadcasted nationwide has become a far more influential event in collective memory. Thus, the speech has become a key reference point in the legacy of 1989, and it returned in the 2018 demonstration, as well. For reasons just indicated, the Imre Nagy Memorial in the Martyrs' Square facing the Parliament represented complex histories in its original spacial context, recalling the momentous national unity through the memories of 1956 and 1989. The removal of Nagy's most important memorial, therefore, raises a number of questions regarding the appropriation of historical narratives and the memorial's site-specificity.

Art and Memory in Activism

When the decision about the memorial's displacement and transfer to the Jászai Mari Square was made public, signs appeared on it instantly with inscriptions, such as "Fascism is being built here" and "Did you know? Imre Nagy is a hero" reflecting the format that referenced the anti-immigration and anti-Brussels "Did you know" campaign of FIDESZ. Alongside the first emotionally and politically charged reactions, activists formed a group called Imre Nagy Stays! (Nagy Imre marad!) and issued a petition against the memorial's removal and the appropriation of history.[5] The signatories condemned the memory politics of FIDESZ, which manifests – among other

5 "Tiltakozunk a Nagy Imre-szobor eltávolítása és a magyar történelem kisajátítása ellen!" https://www.facebook.com/szabadahang/posts/256644234984839.

forms – in the Imre Steindl Program that aims at reinstating the pre-WWII image of the area around the Parliament to eliminate remnants of the communist past. The petition highlights that despite the controversial position of Imre Nagy as a member of the Communist Party who sided with the anti-Soviet revolution, he gave his life for his country and deserves national recognition in the site where Hungary's most important historical figures are memorialized. Additionally, the new location of the statue next to the former building of the ÁVH – which was complicit in crushing the uprising – insults the communist revolutionaries and abuses the memory of 1956, according to the petition.[6]

In line with the petition's arguments, the Living Memorial's demonstration on 23rd September 2018 addressed Imre Nagy's symbolic role in collective memory, in a format that combined the elements of protests, a public discussion on site and an artistic performance – a protest-performance or political performance, as one of the organizers, András Rényi defined it (Csillag 2018). In the first part of the event, invited guests[7] discussed Imre Nagy's legacy in the light of the regime change, and the transformation of FIDESZ from an underground liberal democratic student activist movement to a national conservative party (Fig. 35).[8] The second part included a performance, in which men dressed in black painted the water underneath Nagy's bronze figure black, and placed a coffin over the water (Fig. 36). Then the men

6 The ÁVH brutally carried out purges after the communist takeover of 1948 until Stalin's death and Imre Nagy's first appointment as Prime Minister in 1953, and is complicit in the crushing of the uprising. The building served as the headquarters of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party between 1956 and 1989. Between 1971 and 1991, a statue of Marx and Engels stood in front of the former ÁVH building, which is now on display in Budapest's Statue Park.

7 Discussants included Katalin Jánosi, artist and Imre Nagy's granddaughter; Anna Donáth, politician, MEP and granddaughter of politician Ferenc Donáth, who was sub-prime accused in the Imre Nagy trial; László Eörsi, historian at the 1956 Institute, János Rainer M., historian and head of the 1956 Institute; István Hegedűs, sociologist and former member and founding member of FIDESZ, member of Hungarian Europe Society; Rudolf Ungváry, participant in the 1956 uprising and founding member of the Historical Justice Committee (Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság).

8 FIDESZ (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, meaning Alliance of Young Democrats) was initially a party of young liberal democrats founded in 1988 to oppose the ruling communist regime. It got into the National Assembly in 1990 and its ideology gradually shifted from liberal centrist to a more conservative civic centrist position by 1993, when Viktor Orbán was elected as chairman of the party. In 1995 FIDESZ changed its name to FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Party, while still in opposition. During their first governmental term (1998–2002), FIDESZ joined the European People's Party, terminating its membership with the Liberal International. In the following years spent in opposition, their position strengthened both in the national arena and in the European Parliament, and FIDESZ won an outright majority at the 2010 elections with a national conservative agenda.

Figure 34 The rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and other martyrs in Heroes' Square, 16th June 1989 (Photo: Fortepan/tm)

Figure 35 Living Memorial's protest-performance at the Imre Nagy Memorial in Martyrs' Square, 2018 (Photo: Living Memorial)

Figure 36 Coffin with inscription: Third Republic – Lived 29 Years. Living Memorial's protest-performance at the Imre Nagy Memorial, 2018 (Photo: Living Memorial)

Figure 37 Banner referring to the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy in 1989. Living Memorial's protest-performance at the Imre Nagy Memorial, 2018 (Photo: Living Memorial)

spread out a banner behind the memorial to invoke the staged setting of the reburial ceremony of 1989 (Fig. 34), while the young Viktor Orbán's above mentioned speech was played backwards, evoking an uncanny atmosphere (Fig. 37). After the performance, three discussants representing three different generations – a young politician, a former member and co-founder of FIDESZ, and a participant in the 1956 uprising – expressed their strong opposition against the government's authoritative memory politics and politically motivated falsification of history. The event ended with the national anthem, which was also played backwards.

Besides expressing their disagreement with the oversimplifying and exclusory victim narrative propagated by the government, the Living Memorial's event enabled the articulation of silenced memories of 1956 and 1989 by making the memorial's embeddedness in the country's revolutionary heritage visible. While memorials are evident and efficient media to visually represent and "remediate" (Erll and Rigney 2009) complex histories, such potential of demonstrations is often overlooked. Ann Rigney underlines the power of protests as a form of cultural remediation that make the past re-imaginable, observing that protests are remembered largely due to their potential to generate a simplistic narrative about the "good struggle" versus suffering or the perpetration of violence by the police, like in the case of the Black Lives Matter movement (Rigney 2020). Characteristically, continues Rigney, a moment or a figure is singled out by the protesters, through which a moral imperative is formulated, and the event is fitted into a scheme that enables cultural remediation in the form of a meaningful and recognizable story, often by directly referencing previous demonstrations with different goals. In sync with the general dynamics of demonstrations, the 1989

rehabilitation of Imre Nagy not only legitimized the new political system but also enabled the remediation of the “story” of the regime change in the form of an emotionally and visually remarkable event, as I have demonstrated above. Similarly, the 2018 protest-performance aimed at remediating the “story” and imagery of the reburial ceremony and, in so doing, it visualized a counter-narrative to protest the illiberal memory politics. While several elements of both nonviolent protests of 1989 and 2018 fit into Rigney’s conceptualisation, it is nonetheless difficult to embed them into a global or at least European revolutionary heritage centred on the French Revolution and the protests of 1968 in many regards. This is partly due to the considerable differences between the Eastern and Western European historical experiences, and the lack of framing of post-socialist histories within the dominant (Western) European memory discourse. Regarding the 2018 protest, its fixed format and mixed genre (organized discussion, artistic performance, speeches) contribute to its complexity making it a unique example of memory activism, not to mention the fact that the performance mobilizes a very specific (and artistic) set of references that might not be easily decoded by the general, let alone the international public.

The choice of the performance’s designers provides a meaningful starting point for those who are familiar with the history of Hungary, as it underlines not only the mnemonic but also the visual and conceptual continuity of the 1989 funeral within the performance. One of the designers was the architect László Rajk, previously an active member of the democratic opposition and responsible for the concept of the reburial ceremony in 1989. It is also important to note that Rajk has suffered the consequences of the communist regime’s misdeeds because his father, Minister of Interior and Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1946 and 1949, was executed by the Stalinist Rákosi government in 1949 following a show trial based on fabricated charges, and his public reburial was an important demonstration against the injustices of the regime on 6th October 1956, shortly before the outbreak of the uprising. The other designer was the sculptor György Jovánovics, who also played a key role in the memorialization of the regime change as the designer of the Memorial to the Victims of the 1956 Revolution (1992), located in the cemetery where Imre Nagy and other victims were buried. The abstract design of Jovánovics’s “counter-monument” (Young 1992) embodied complex meanings, including a direct visual reference to the reburial ceremony. The sculptor explained in an interview that the white sarcophagus on top of his structure represents the staged funeral in Heroes’ Square in order to preserve the memory of the ephemeral “stage-like artpiece” in stone (Mihancsik 1994a). Beyond the participation of these two persons – the

third participant, Dávid Adamkó, artist and sound designer, represents a younger generation – that situates the protest-performance within the revolutionary heritage of 1956 and 1989, the visual elements, specifically, the coffin and the stage design of the public funeral play a crucial role in the remediation of memories. These powerful symbols have the potential to compress complex meanings and references since they are inscribed in collective memory as images directly associated with the regime change – often as "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg 2004) for those who did not have the chance to directly experience the event.[9]

The coffin, a common element of demonstrations worldwide, may be seen as a gesture towards a more general protest-culture but it has specific connotations in this context. It recalls the six coffins displayed in front of the Kunsthalle Budapest in 1989, containing the remains of five martyrs, and an empty coffin placed over the others for the unnamed martyrs of 1956. This element summons the personal traumas of 1956 that engendered collective grief over the loss of lives and the retaliations, which were publicly relieved for the first time in 1989. The coffin carries the core message of the protest-performance, according to which it is the three decades of democracy to be mourned this time, as the inscription on the coffin suggests: "Third Republic, lived 29 years." The statement proposes that the removal of the memorial marks such a radical shift as the regime change did when it turned the communist one-party system into the democratic Third Republic of Hungary. The action thus indicates the end of a social and political reality interrupted by the government's illiberal ideology and politics, and it reflects the worries of the political opposition about FIDESZ's authoritative tendencies. The re-enactment of the reburial ceremony in combination with the uncanny recording of Orbán's 1989 speech implicates his dissonant role in the legacy of the regime change, especially due to the memorial's removal from the Parliament area, which disrupts the legacy of the 1956 Revolution by erasing its meanings gained in 1989.

The banner depicting the stage design of the reburial ceremony set as the memorial's background as part of the performance signifies the momentous consensus and national unity the funeral represented regardless of the political pluralism of the times. The architects László

9 Although Alison Landsberg's concept was developed in the context of the United States' history, the potential of the media to make a historical event experienceable for those who did not live it through is also notable in this regard. The frequent circulation of the images of Imre Nagy's public funeral has largely contributed to them marking the regime change for those who had not been present as well as for younger generations.

Rajk and Gábor Bachmann entrusted to design and conceptualize the ceremony by the Historical Justice Committee (Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság) understood that they had to reflect on both the funerary and the revolutionary character of the event. For practical ends, they had to take into account the role of the media as the event would be broadcasted live, for the first time in case of an anti-communist demonstration. They chose the Heroes' Square, in front of the Millenary Monument and the Kunsthalle as location because the square could fit a large crowd, and they decided to cover the whole length of the Kunsthalle's façade in white, which served as a reflective board for the cameras (Mihancsik 1994b). The tympanum and columns were covered in black, the colour of mourning, and the stage was set as a rusty iron structure with a fire on the left side, a pulpit on the right, and the coffins in between. Over the pulpit a white flag was stretched with a hole in it, referring to the symbol of the 1956 Revolution: the flag with a hole in the place of the communist coat of arms. The unusual post-modern structure invited free associations according to the designers' intentions, and beyond the commemoration of martyrs, its visual language served to express both closure and hope. According to Rigney, hope, a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1970: 128–135; quoted in Rigney 2018: 370) is essential in activism, because it not only "informs civic action and motivates the struggle for a better life" but also "helps to *reframe* historical violence as a *struggle for a cause* rather than as a matter of victimisation; as a matter of civic engagement rather than of paranoia" (Rigney 2018: 370–371). Since the commemoration of the martyrs in 1989 provided a firm framework of victimization, the emphasis on the element of hope was crucial at the dawn of the new democratic era.

The hope and optimism regarding a pluralist, democratic dialogue based on civic engagement rather than paranoia amid the construction of the multi-party system echoes in a bitter tone in the protest-performance, and it becomes completely eradicated by the memorial that replaces Imre Nagy's statue. As far as visual symbolism is concerned, the funeral's creative stage design invoked the classic avant-garde art implying that the leftist political tradition (from which avant-garde art emerged) does not equal with the false ideology of the communist era but remains an important point of identification for many Hungarian citizens. Such emphasis on pluralism *and* national unity stands in sharp contrast with the current government's reading of history that divides society based on the empty signifiers of "right" and "left" by means of anti-communist, anti-liberal and anti-Brussels propaganda. The removal

Figure 38a and Figure 38b Memorial of the National Martyrs 1918–1919 in Martyrs' Square, 2019 (Photos: author)

of the Imre Nagy Memorial clearly indicates a shift in the official narrative in line with such efforts towards the anti-communist interpretation of 1956 and 1989, where the significance of the political left is gradually undermined, and the memory of the reform communist Prime Minister becomes incompatible. This shift is further enhanced by the reinstation of a highly debated memorial in the place of the Imre Nagy Memorial. Shortly after the statue's removal, the National Martyrs' Memorial (aka. Red Terror Memorial) was reconstructed in its place, based on a Horthy era structure that had stood there between 1934 and 1945, depicting the allegorical female figure of Hungary and a male figure defeating the monster of communism referring to the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1918–1919 (Fig. 38). The reinstated memorial attests to two problematic implications of FIDESZ's memory politics. First, it reaffirms nostalgia for the controversial Horthy administration (1920–1944), a Christian conservative regime complicit in anti-Jewish legislation, as well as in the persecution of the Jewish population under the Nazi occupation. Second, it reinforces anti-communism by commemorating the victims of the Soviet Republic of 1918–1919, contributing to the populist narrative that depicts Hungarian history as an imagined fight between "good" (Christian, national conservativism) and "evil" (external domination by communists or liberals), successfully used in Orbán's populist rhetoric.

The re-signification of the Martyrs' Square confirms that the revolutionary tradition of 1956 and 1989 is overwritten by a distilled version of history, where the oversimplified notion of anti-communism suppresses the actual pluralism of memories and (political) identities.

Due to the removal of the Imre Nagy Memorial, the reorganized Parliament area (Kossuth Square and Martyrs' Square) represents exclusively the traumas regarding the memory of 1956, therefore, the uprising's interconnectedness with the regime change's optimistic message is completely ignored within this symbolic space and trauma site. Memorials in this location have special significance not only because it is the "main square of the nation" but also because it is the site of the "bloody Thursday massacre," perhaps the most tragic event of the 1956 Revolution. Kossuth Square does not accommodate any visual evidence to the traumatic event other than the buildings that have since been renovated but the link between the past is visualized by the memorials commemorating the massacre. The subtle memorial dedicated to the victims of the "bloody Thursday" on 25th October 1956 represents symbolic bullets in bronze on the wall of the former Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on the corner of Martyrs' Square, designed in 2001 by sculptor József Kampfl and architect Ferenc Callmeyer, who himself was one of the survivors of the massacre. Since 2010, two more spectacular memorials were added to the square: a memorial pond with the inscription "Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:9) In Memoriam October 25, 1956" („Üldöztetünk, de el nem hagyatunk; tiportatunk, de el nem veszünk; 2 Kor 4:9 In Memoriam 1956. október 25.") and an underground memorial center, including a memorial and a permanent exhibition showcasing over sixty massacres across the country.[10] While the memorials to the massacre are legitimate due to the site's past, the removal of the Imre Nagy Memorial signifies the withdrawal of the narrative about the fulfilment of the Revolution's objectives in 1989 – an aspect emphasized by the young Viktor Orbán in 1989, paradoxically. The Living Memorial articulated this absence with the re-signification of the site in the form of a requiem for the diversity of memories and identities, and it reminded its audience of the indissoluble entanglement of 1956 and 1989. At this point, the question might be raised whether such a creative form of memory activism that propagates memory pluralism is able to bring more understanding and solidarity within a deeply polarized society.

10 In memoriam 25th October 1956, memorial and exhibition. See: http://inmemoriam1956.hu/

Memory Activism and Multidirectional Memories

In his influential book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) and subsequent article "From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory" (2011), Michael Rothberg offers a conceptual frame to understand the simultaneous upsurge of various memory traditions beyond the logic of the zero-sum game of competing victimhood as a productive process because "the result of memory conflict is not less memory, but more" (Rothberg 2011: 523). Rothberg argues that "public memory is *structurally multidirectional* – that is, always marked by transcultural borrowing, exchange, and adaptation," and accordingly, "collective memories of seemingly distinct histories – such as those of slavery, the Holocaust, and colonialism – are not so easily separable from one another" (2011: 524). Post-socialist societies have been experiencing a vast wave of competing victimhood since 1989, which did not only concern local memory discourses but also challenged the dominant (Western) European paradigm. The different experiences of WWII and its aftermath between countries of the former Eastern Bloc and Western Europe accumulated in heated debates in the European Union, such as the one around the Prague Declaration (2008) and the subsequent EU resolution (2009) that equally recognized the victims of communism, nazism and fascism as victims of human rights violations committed by totalitarian regimes, which led to ongoing conflicts between the memory of the Holocaust (especially regarding its singularity) and other traumatic heritages within Europe. The notion of "multidirectional memory" aspires to overcome such competition to enable difficult but necessary discussions in this regard; however, the post-socialist region remains underrepresented in Rothberg's investigation. Looking at the Hungarian discourse through the lens of Rothberg's concept, which assumes that more memory generates more understanding and facilitates solidarity between victim groups may add intriguing insights into the dynamics of memory from an Eastern European perspective.

Discord between various interpretations of the past has been exacerbated by FIDESZ's memory politics since 2010 but conflicts of that sort are more deeply rooted in the Hungarian society. Prior to the illiberal turn, the case of the House of Terror Museum (2002) provided an early example of conflicting historical narratives with regard to the representation of the Nazi and the communist regimes. The conflict has never been resolved but while the museum's widely criticized victimizing narrative represented FIDESZ's unidirectional approach to history, it also triggered a wave of intense debate, that is, a sort of productive multidirectionality. It was, in

fact, the museum's failure to produce a nuanced historical perspective that generated a wide range of discussions from the theorization of "comparative victimhood" (Judt 2005: 826–830, see also: Benazzo 2017; Turai 2009; Zombory 2019) to the critique of memorial museums (Creet 2013; Sodaro 2018), which greatly enriched our understanding of memory. While debates around the House of Terror Museum have been limited to professional and academic circles in this case, the open-air exhibition the museum organized on the occasion of the 1956 uprising's fiftieth anniversary in 2016 activated not only professional but also civil responses. The Living Memorial installed a guerrilla exhibition to complement the museum's installation with two further tableaus displaying political figures and groups underrepresented or left out of the official narrative, including Imre Nagy and other reform communist politicians, portraits of workers and texts about the communist Petőfi Circle that participated in the 1956 uprising. The list of suppressed elements indicates that it is largely histories related to the political left that are invisible in the museum's narrative, which is in line with the meanings attributed to the removal of the Imre Nagy Memorial.

Conflict generated by an exclusionary unidirectional narrative is often the very trigger of the emergence of multidirectional memories, as the Living Memorial's first action demonstrated (Munteán 2019). To commemorate the victims of WWII in the Holocaust memorial year, the government decided to erect the Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation (2014) in Liberty Square, the symbolism of which denied Hungary's responsibility in the Holocaust. The memorial represents Hungary as the allegorical figure of Archangel Gabriel holding the state symbol in his hands, with Germany above him in the form of the imperial eagle attacking Hungary – which in fact is erroneously not even the Nazi symbol, according to István Rév's observation (2018). As a response to the planned memorial that depicts Hungary as an innocent victim of the Nazi Germany, the Living Memorial organized a flash mob and invited people to place personal objects around the intended memorial. By means of the ongoing and ever-changing, ephemeral memorial consisting of objects, photographs, texts and other memorabilia, the activist group managed to transform the site into a memorial in its own right to counter the values of the planned state memorial (Fig. 39). The demonstrators addressed issues including the memorial's denial of Hungary's complicity in the Holocaust through its problematic symbolism (Erőss 2016; Kovács and Mindler-Steiner 2015; Kovács 2017; Rév 2018; Ungváry 2014) – a problem that has already been raised regarding the House of Terror Museum (Blutinger 2010; Sodaro 2018; Turai 2009). Alongside the counter-monument – not in the sense that it adopts "anti-monumental strategies,

Figure 39 Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation and objects placed in the frame of the Living Memorial, 2019 (Photo: author)

counter to traditional monument principles" but as a memorial "designed to counter a specific existing monument and the values it represents" (Stevens et. al. 2012: 951). The Living Memorial community has been organizing *in situ* public discussions to share memories the official narrative fails to represent, opening up discursive space to frame personal and collective recollections of the past. The juxtaposition of the two memorials reveals a conflicting dynamics of uni- and multidirectional memories, which László Munteán sums up as follows: "paradoxically, the governmental will that carried out the construction of the memorial to the occupation without public consent did not simply enact its own interpretation of the past at the cost of others but, inadvertently, it also initiated an ongoing movement of counter-memory that would have remained dormant had it not been awakened by indignation" (Munteán 2019: 80).

The subsequent demonstration of the Living Memorial against the removal of the Imre Nagy Memorial reaffirms the paradoxical dynamics of multidirectional memories, while it extends the discussion on different histories. In that case, the governmental will to remove a memorial generated public discussions on the memory of the regime change and the traumatic heritage of the communist era, which might have remained limited to professional debates otherwise. This echoes Rothberg's argument on productive multidirectionality that understands memory "as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not

privative." (Rothberg 2009: 3). The clash between different versions of history also activated personal recollections of the past alongside professional discussions, which underlines that memory is essentially a social practice and cannot be overwritten by top-down memory politics (Erőss 2018). The persistent memory activism of the Living Memorial thus highlights that conflicting memories triggered by top-down interventions in the public space may generate urgent public debates that would remain hidden or underexplored otherwise.

The activism of the Living Memorial, however, not only sheds light on the inherent paradox of multidirectional memories but also demonstrates that multidirectionality alone fails to create a form of "differentiated solidarity" (Rothberg 2011) in the context of the Hungarian illiberal system. Discussions enabled by the protests undoubtedly contributed to a better understanding of diverse memories and of the experiences of various victim groups, but they did not necessarily facilitate more understanding between the groups of society represented by the Living Memorial and the ones that identify with the official version of history. On the one hand, the demonstrations activated discourses on historical traumas and silenced memories by visually articulating counter-memories and -histories. On the other hand, despite the Living Memorial's indisputable merit in making distinct pasts imaginable and present in the public sphere, their activities could not escape reproducing conflict between official narratives and counter-narratives, and between (political) identities devoted to either side. In the light of the case studies, Rothberg's proposition about the positive impact of multidirectionality applies as far as cross-referencing, exchange and stimulation is concerned between various memory traditions, but the emergence of multidirectional memories alone cannot reinforce more solidarity in the overall society within the Hungarian context.

Conclusion

The nonviolent political demonstrations analyzed in this chapter concern different stages of memory in different historical and political contexts, including the democratic transformation and illiberal democracy, yet they both play a critical role in the articulation and visualization of memories with artistic tools. The public rehabilitation of Imre Nagy, including its monumental stage design, not only highlighted the element of hope in the context of mourning a national trauma but also contributed to making the revolutionary moment of the regime change imaginable and transmittable.

When the protest-performance recreated the funeral's design three decades later, it reflected the loss of hope in terms of the possibility of dialogue between memories and identities, indicating a disruption in the working through of traumas and painful histories within the illiberal system. At the same time, the action brought silenced memories back into the public sphere, and for a short while it re-signified the area around the Parliament – the trauma site of the 1956 Revolution – which has since been completed as the *par excellence* representative space of the official historical narrative. The case studies demonstrated that memory activism has the potential to create both physical and discursive spaces of memory that are able to transform the discourse on traumatic heritage, and they confirmed the role of art in making the past re-imaginable from diverse perspectives. However, while the 1989 public funeral is widely remembered as a moment of national unity, the potential of the protest-performance to promote memory pluralism remains limited to a relatively small group of society and it does not necessarily facilitate more solidarity between various political identities.

The complexity and specificity of the Hungarian examples of memory activism shed light on the difficulties of embedding Eastern European traumatic heritages in the dominant European memory discourse. Besides the considerable differences between Eastern and Western experiences and memorialization practices of historical traumas of the 20th century, the focus of Western (and Anglo-Saxon) art and academia has been placed on the memory of the Holocaust, slavery and crimes committed by colonial powers, therefore the conceptual and visual framework of memorialization has also been developed based on these contexts. Simultaneously, post-socialist societies continue to have discussions on their own traumatic histories, which make use of dominant theorizations of memory and trauma, yet they often necessitate distinct perspectives and novel conceptual apparatuses that are able to reflect on local experiences of multiple victim groups. The negotiation of the past by means of museums, memorials and memory activism continues to diversify the understanding of history in Hungary, yet it does not move beyond the politics of recognition that reproduces conflict rather than bringing reconciliation.

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About the Author

Réka Deim is a curator and PhD researcher at the University of Amsterdam. She holds MA degrees in Cultural Analysis (UvA, 2013) and Art History (PPKE Budapest, 2011). Her research revolves around post-war art and memory politics in Central- Eastern Europe. Her dissertation focuses on public remembrance in Hungary since 2010 through museums, memorials and memory activism. As a guest researcher in Argentina and Colombia, she also studied Latin American contexts in the frame of the Horizon 2020 European Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions project: SPEME – Spaces of Memory. Réka co-organized the conference Witnessing, Memory and Crisis at the University of Amsterdam and co-edited the related publication in 2022. Her most recent projects as a curator include two retrospective exhibitions (2022, 2023) and the accompanying exhibition catalog (2022) on the works of a prominent artist in the former Eastern Bloc.

8 Memory, Art and Intergenerational Transmission

Artistic Practices with Young People in Memory Sites in Argentina

Lizel Tornay, Victoria Alvarez, Fabricio Laino Sanchis, Mariana Paganini

Abstract
This text analyzes recent experiences with young people from Middle Schools in spaces of memory in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. These spaces of memory refer to the traumatic past related to the State terrorism imposed before and during the last military dictatorship (1975 and 1983). In particular, we examine the possibilities offered by artistic language for the elaboration of traumatic memories in order to facilitate the approach of new generations to this difficult past with which they coexist in one way or another.With this interest in mind, we analyse two experiences promoted by two spaces of memory that have proposed different strategies and initiatives. Both invite critical reflection on the recent past from sensitive experiences: the Poster Project of the Parque de la Memoria -Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado and the reading of poetry written by a survivor during guided visits to the site of memory "El Olimpo", former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination.We argue that intergenerational transmission is not a unidirectional linear transfer of an unmodified object (knowledge and memories of the past) from adults to young people, but a dialogue where there is elaboration and translation by the new generations, according to their contexts, interests and questions of the present.

Keywords: Intergenerational Transmission, Memory Sites, Narratives, Traumatic Legacy, Young Memories

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Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH08

Introduction

Memory sites in Argentina refer to events that took place during the period of State terrorism that was in force in the country between 1975 and 1983[1]. In all these sites, whether former clandestine detention centers or memorial spaces are related to that tragic period when an extermination mechanism was set in motion, a scheme based on its clandestine character, on the kidnapping of people, whose location and, eventually, whose murdered bodies were hidden, thus depriving them of proper burials, and on the systematic appropriation of children. This is about the horror that challenged the human condition by harming its ontological status.

> Such an outburst of experience [...] breaks the link with the thinkable [...] since horror surpasses the limits of language and a manifestation of the world as the annulment of the sense (González 2005, 72).
> Horror is pierced by the ineffable; it cannot be explained, to the extent that the very foundations of meaning of all narratives have been affected. "The victims of enforced disappearances are, literally, dead people without a burial site, and this state of uncertainty, of lack of ritualization, of suspension, produces a vacuum which is impossible to fulfill" (Violi 2020, 17).

The specific characteristics of the politicization that shapes the historical and cultural fabric in this territory enabled the construction of a broad human rights movement that, in the last thirty years, has even surpassed the organizations of family members and survivors, expressing themselves through diverse groups in the civil society. Faced with the impossibility of performing the usual funeral rites, they developed diverse practices to cope with the loss and mourning process, thus becoming the foundation for the processing of such difficult past times.

At the same time, the important presence of the psychoanalytic movement in Argentine culture since the middle of the 20th century (Plotkin 2003) has provided a generous contribution to local cultural and political debates (Besse 2019). The incorporation of psychoanalysis as an interpretative tool, its circulation through magazines with a wide target readership and the

1 In February 1975, the constitutional government entrusted the Armed Forces (FF AA) with the mission of "annihilating any subversive activities". On 24 th March, 1976, the Armed Forces took over the National Government through a military coup and established a dictatorship which lasted until 10 th December, 1983.

configuration of a professional field[2] generated widespread acceptance in various sectors of Argentinian culture. This phenomenon accounts for the possibilities of underlying prevalence, in spite of the repressive policies implemented by the dictatorship. During the 70s and the 80s, there was a significant circulation of reflections among mental health professionals (psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists), whether exiled or remaining in the country. They waged a fundamental semantic battle in order to place the consequences of such rupture of the bonds of the thinkable within the framework of a traumatic situation generated by State terrorism (Lastra 2019).

The CELS, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (Center for Legal and Social Studies), one of the main organisms advocated to the human rights defense during those years, claims that:

Since 1982, the CELS Mental Health Team has been working with people who have been victims of the State terrorism violence of the 70's and 80's decades [...]. The extreme trauma has been definitely characterized by the horror imposed [...]. The psychic trauma that these people suffer is the outcome of the impact that a social catastrophe has on the subjectivity. Theirs are paradigmatic testimonies of how a tragic collective history intertwines with each person's individual story (CELS 1996).[3]

This conceptual displacement – from the individual approach towards its consideration in the frame of a traumatic social situation – evidences an intense investigative work and exchange aimed at facing the challenge of understanding the effects of the experienced violence during the State terrorism beyond individual situations.

Considering the mediation of meanings that culture produces on the local reality, those contributions from the psychoanalysis field, in a dialogue with the work developed by the Human Rights associations – not only the mental health team from Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Square), but also the mental health team from the aforementioned CELS, among others, enabled, since the last years of the dictatorship, the attention, consideration and treatment of the extreme violence experienced by wide sectors of the population in the framework of a social situation understood as traumatic and managed as such, beyond the particular subjectivities (Tornay et al 2021). In this fabric, the construction of narratives of inter-generational

2 In 1942, the Argentinian Psychoanalytical Association was created, the first association member of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) within the Spanish speaking world.

3 Unless otherwise indicated, all verbatim citations are originally in Spanish and were translated into English by the article's translator.

memory and transmission are nourished and spread, in many cases boosted by ever-lasting searches for amplifying and delving into the elaboration of the traumatic situation.

All these specificities of recent Argentine history outlined a particular journey, recognized worldwide for its power and expanse in the elaboration of the horror. By focusing on the memory sites as constructions of this powerful journey, we are aiming at reflecting upon their narratives and the possibilities of transmission to the generations that have not had a direct experience of those years. As Régine Robin points out,

> What most museums or memorials lack in terms of "homogenizing" narrative is the shadows, an unspeakable part that is not disguised [...] What obstructs communication in those official buildings is the excess of images and explanations, the illusion of a possible contact with the reality of that past [...] These museums give information to us, but perhaps do not transmit anything (Robin 2014, 140).

Faced with this problem, different memory sites have proposed various strategies and initiatives that invite critical reflection on the recent past from sensitive registers. Can art at the sites of memory contribute to the elaboration of critical memories that facilitate the approach of new generations to these traumatic pasts? With the intention of encouraging dialogue within the framework of the arduous processing of such difficult social situations, in this chapter we will approach work experiences from and through different artistic expressions in two memory sites in Buenos Aires: the Posters Project from Parque de la Memoria –Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado (Memory Park – Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism) and the use of poetry in the guided visits to the Memory Site at "El Olimpo", former Clandestine Detention Center for Torture and Extermination.

In studies on the elaboration of memory by generations who did not undergo the traumatic situations, the concept of "postmemory" has become widespread. This term was coined by Marianne Hirsch (2012). However, this concept refers specifically to the universe of victims of the Shoah and, strictly, in family contexts (Violi 2020). Then, it was used by other authors in a rather vague and inaccurate manner. On its most ample definition the concept of "postmemory", matches in fact with that of "memory", on its working approach, thus leading to a merging of both concepts. For this reason, we will not talk about "postmemory" in this work, but rather about a process of memory elaboration and intergenerational transmission. As Patrizia Violi states:

> Transmission is then resolved in a chain of progressive enunciations which are written in layers, the new ones on top of the previous ones. This is exactly what takes place in postmemory: successive generations reclaim the memories of their fathers and mothers; they reinterpret them, transform them and retranslate them in other ways. The discursivity of the postmemory is a transformative one, and, in many instances, as was the case in Latin America, a strongly creative and innovative one (Violi 2020, 23).

Thus, we do not consider intergenerational transmission as a linear unidirectional transference of an unmodified object (knowledge and memories of the past) of adults towards the youngsters, but we understand that there exists a dialogue where there is elaboration and translation by the new generations, according to their contexts, interests and questions of the present. As we will see, these aspects are evidenced in the two experiences analyzed.

Poster Project: Young People as Producers of Memories

The Memory Park is a space of remembrance located in the north of Buenos Aires, on the riverbanks of the Río de la Plata river and estuary, the final destination of many victims of enforced disappearances, who were thrown into the river by their kidnappers in the so-called "death flights" (Verbitsky 1995). Its creation was promoted during the 1990s by human rights organizations, relatives of victims and survivors of State terrorism themselves. The Legislature of the city of Buenos Aires passed its creation in 1998, it was officially inaugurated in 2001 and it has been definitively open to the public since 2007.

This memorial site was created during the administration of former President Carlos Menem (1989–1999), which was characterized by policies of "forgetting" State terrorism crimes (Lvovich and Bisquert 2008). In this unfavorable context, it became the first governmental place to encourage awareness of such a traumatic past, and it occurred several years before many former Clandestine Detention Centers were recovered and transformed into commemorative buildings, when the time was auspicious to develop memory policies.

It is a public area of 14 hectares, with free access, which includes the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism (Fig. 40)[4], a group of sculptures

4 The monument is a wall with the names of those who disappeared and were then murdered by state violence and semi-official armed organizations from 1969 to 1983. While most of the victims

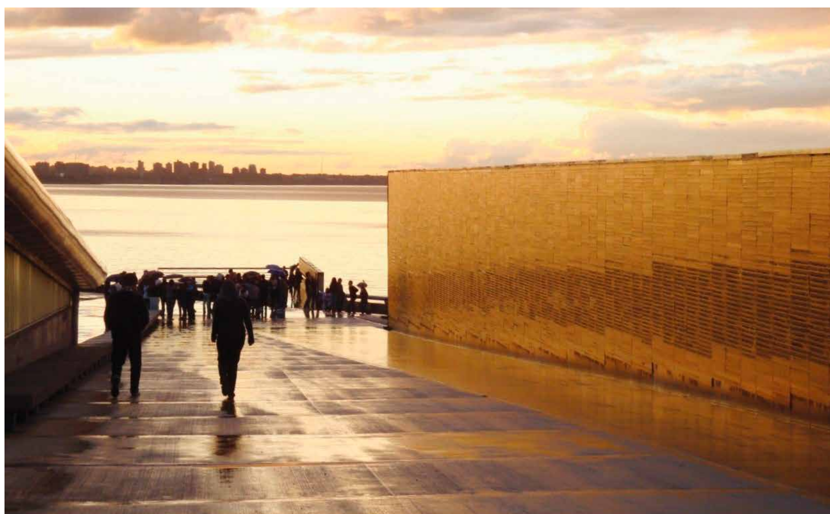

Figure 40 Visitors at the esplanade of the Memory Park – Monument to Victims of State Terrorism, Buenos Aires City, Argentina. Source: Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Parque de la Memoria. Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado (2017)

commemorating State terrorism in Argentina and a hall for temporary exhibitions called PAyS Hall (this acronym in Spanish means: Present Now and Forever). As indicated, even though the place represents certain official or specific meanings, it adds multiple senses depending on the diversity of practices and visitors, since it is a memory site, a mourning place for relatives and a means to explaining Argentina's recent history, but also a park, a recreational spot where many people simply go for a walk or to enjoy the river view.

In this memory site, art is entrusted with a crucial role, not only in its design but also in its narrative and pedagogical proposals. These are in charge of the education department and consist mainly of guided visits and workshops for students of different levels. One of the activities carried out in this area since 2012 is the project "Afiches – Pensar el presente haciendo memoria"("Posters Project- Thinking the Present by Recalling the Past"), a proposal that invites high school students (13 to 18 year-olds) to reflect critically on different problems related to human rights today. The final product is the creation of a poster or other graphic artwork. Some of the

are from the last dictatorship (1976–1983), the choice of the period is the result of serious discussions within the Pro-Monument Commission and intends to show State terrorism as a broader historical process that preceded the last military coup. See Vecchioli, 'Políticas de la memoria y formas de clasificación social ¿Quiénes son las "Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado" en la Argentina?'.

topics that have been discussed are genocide, gender violence, migrant rights, youth, institutional violence, gender and identity and indigenous peoples.

In each new edition, the project offers activities in several stages. First, after the announcement by the Park, the staff of the site meet with the teachers who register their students for the project. In this meeting, they work on the main guidelines to be considered, based on written material and activities proposed by the education team, who also seeks advice and articulation with governmental and non-governmental institutions engaged in the suggested topic for that particular edition.

After working on the topics with their teachers, the students of all the schools go to the Memory Park for a guided tour and a group workshop. The visit, although shorter than a regular one, aims to give young people a better understanding of the institution that organizes the activity, a basic knowledge of State terrorism and the reasons why the park promotes this type of project. As the members of the education area point out, young people enjoy this visit very much, since for most of them it is "quite a plan" since, after the educational class, they continue on their own with recreational activities. It is also a unique opportunity for them to go round the place and get acquainted with the topic, and this can create an interest to visit other memory sites (Interview with Rapp, Toytoyndjian and Vázquez Lareu, 2020). As for the workshop, the organizers of the project state that "the idea is for the students to get involved, even physically, to work in groups to encourage debate, the exchange of ideas and questions" (Eliano et al. 2019 3).

Finally, students turn their ideas into posters or comics, with the guidance of their teachers and the members of the Park's education team, who visit the schools for a follow-up. These productions are created in groups and the intention is that the students should be able to summarize their opinions on the topics using different artistic techniques. Then the posters are digitalized to be exhibited in the Park (and sometimes, in the PAyS Hall itself) for several months. In two opportunities, these productions travelled to other cultural sites in Argentina.

In this chapter, we focus on the 2018 edition, which proposed as a topic "Gender and Identities under Construction: rethinking the norms and ways of being". This topic proved to be a very appealing one, due to the growth of the feminist movement in Argentina, but especially due to the discussion on the legalization of abortion that took place that year in the National Congress. Although the project was rejected, the campaign in its favor generated a very strong process of mobilization among the youth. As a result, this posters' edition reached a record number of participants, specifically 21 schools.

The proposal for this edition was to work on three axes: gender roles, identity in the school and discrimination. The workbook prepared by the Park's education team included the main guidelines regarding gender studies and the existing approaches of the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements, such as the difference between sex, gender and sexuality, and the notion of gender identity. It also analyzed the forms of discrimination suffered by people who do not fit within binary heteronormativity. In addition, in its introduction, it sought to link the topics proposed with the memories of State terrorism in the Park's narrative frame. Thus, on the one hand, it highlighted the fight for acknowledgment of the Right to Identity brought by the organizations that sought to return to their real families those children who were appropriated during the last military dictatorship[5]. On the other hand, it emphasized the repressive actions suffered by the LGBTIQ+ collective during those years[6]. Finally, it proposed a series of activities with advertisements and journalistic reports for students to analyze and discuss gender stereotypes and different forms of discrimination. The aim was for them to develop a critical position on these issues based on debate and discussion by means of group work and role-playing exercises.

There were many different final productions, both technically and conceptually. Of the whole set, two posters stand out for their artistic value and for the process of research and reflection they expressed. The first one (Fig. 41) was by a group of students from a state school in Laferrere, a popular neighborhood in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. In a vanishing line, there is a path with the colors of the Diversity Flag, surrounded by fire, which seems to be guiding a group of people with green and orange handkerchiefs (faceless people, perhaps without a defined gender) to the National Congress. The building is surrounded by butterflies and fists high up in the air. Above, the words of the Argentinean LGBTIQ+ activist Lohana Berkins are quoted: "In a world of capitalist worms, you need to have some courage to be a butterfly". The poster cannot but be interpreted in relation

5 As part of the State terrorism regime, about 500 children, sons and daughters of those disappeared detainees, were appropriated by members of the suppressive forces. This practice consisted of the robbery and falsification of the identity of those children who were kidnapped together with their parents, and of those who were born during their mothers' illegal detention. Since 1977, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo Square) and other organizations have been working to find these children (now adults) to restore to them their true identities. On this topic, see Villalta (2012) and Laino Sanchis (2020).

6 For an overview of violence against LGBTIQ+ movement, see Insausti, 'Los cuatrocientos homosexuales desaparecidos: memorias de la represión estatal a las sexualidades disidentes en Argentina'.

Figure 41 Poster by students from Secondary School N° 8 Juan Carlos Bruera (from Gregorio de Laferrere, Buenos Aires Province). Source: Jones et.al (2022)

to the discussion of the legalization of abortion that was taking place at that time in the Argentine Congress. The green handkerchief is the symbol of the movement in favor of the legalization, while the orange handkerchief represents a demand for the separation of the Church from the State, in a country where the Catholic Church is one of the fiercest opponents of that legalization project[7]. However, the path with the diversity colors entering the Congress seems to give an account of a wider horizon of expectations, where the feminist perspective and the LGBTIQ+ movement enter the seat of one of the powers of the State to modify from the roots up a patriarchal society, while burning everything down with their powerful steps.

The second poster (Fig. 3) was designed by a group of students from a private Catholic school in the city of Buenos Aires. In this composition with different elements, Botticelli's Venus stands out, intervened with the Diversity Flag that covers her eyes. This canonical image of female beauty offers a contrast with the different body types (fat, skinny, with hairs and also with different genitalia) that can be seen in the background. In this poster, again we see the Congress of the Nation, the fire, the fists high up in the air, and the reference to different slogans of feminist movements and women's movements: "Not One Woman Less" (in relation to femicides), "It will fall" (in reference to patriarchy) and "No more transvesticides". It is interesting to point out that this poster was made by students of a private Catholic school. Even when the students were allowed to participate, and

7 In Argentina, this separation is rather ambiguous, since the Catholic Church receives funding from the State in preferential terms.

Figure 42 Poster by students from María Ana Mogas School (in Mataderos, Buenos Aires City). Source: Jones et.al (2022)

park workers were able to carry out their activities without any control, the possibility of some kind of tension at the school was likely to appear. However, the legitimate and independent voice of an external actor, the Park, in this case, allowed the teacher to go deep into matters that she could probably have not been able to develop as freely in a regular class (something similar might have happened to those teachers who, not having taken an active part in the Posters Project, still took their students to visit the Park).

Poetry at "El Olimpo"[8]: a Sensitive Approach to the Experiences of the Victims of Illegal and Enforced Disappearances

"El Olimpo" was one of the Clandestine Detention Centers for Torture and Extermination (CCDTyE, the acronym in Spanish) that operated in the city of Buenos Aires during the last military dictatorship. It is believed that in its five months' operation, between 16th August, 1978 and the end of January, 1979, 500 people were kidnapped there, of whom about 100 would survive (Messina 2010). In 1979, due to a visit to Argentina by the OAS's Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the site was dismantled by the oppressors; most of those who had been kidnapped were executed on the "death flights" (Verbitsky 1995) and a few others were resettled in other

8 Translator's Note: "The Olympus" in English.

clandestine centers. From that moment on, the place was passed effectively to the Federal Police as a Vehicle Verification Center.

Since the 1990s, several social groups began to make visible the human rights violations committed at this site, and denounced the presence of the Security Forces. This process was started by groups of organized neighbors, survivors, relatives of disappeared detainees, political militants and members of human rights organizations. After years of struggle, during which these groups introduced bills and organized acts, festivals, assemblies and demonstrations in the whereabouts of the site, in October 2004, former President Nestor Kirchner and former Governor of Buenos Aires City Aníbal Ibarra, signed an agreement, establishing the eviction of the Police and the "recovery"[9] of the place for the remembrance and promotion of human rights (Guglielmucci et al. 2008). After several controversies, the individuals and organizations that took part in this process decided that the site should be co-managed by a working and consensus commission, also known as "Mesa"[10] and the State. In addition, they created the "Programa para la Recuperación de la memoria histórica del ex CCDTyE Olimpo" ("Program for the Recovery of the Historical Memory of 'El Olimpo'"), where research projects, guided tours and other participative and cultural activities are carried out.

Among the different activities offered at "El Olimpo", the ones that are most in demand are the guided tours for students from secondary schools and from social and political organizations. Although no two visits are identical – since they vary according to when they are carried out, who coordinates them and the groups to which they are addressed – there are basic agreements among the workers of the site regarding the story to be transmitted. These include the importance of overcoming the "literal memory" (Todorov 2000), the one that only brings back the repressive practices and the horrors experienced at the detention centers; the need to explain the conditions that made State terrorism possible and which of them still remain; and also the commitment to turn the site into a place where life is now honored, a place to remember those who were seen there and to honor, not only their political and ideological values, but also their careers as militants and members of political parties (Working and Consensus Commission of "El Olimpo" 2011).

9 The term "recovery" seeks to evidence the process of resistance as well as the involvement of different social participants in the management of the sites.

10 Translator's Note: "Table" in English. A place for debates and management in which, by means of agreements, decisions are made regarding the site. At present, it is formed by survivors of such space, human rights organizations and different political, cultural and local groups.

Figure 43 Sector of cells, former clandestine detention center "El Olimpo" (Source: Paganini 2020)

Broadly speaking, the visits are divided into three moments: an introduction, which aims to contextualize "El Olimpo" – explaining the role it played within the repressive machinery and how it became a memory site – a tour to "El Pozo"[11] (Fig. 43) and a final stage of the visit at the exhibition named "Eso que no pudieron destruir: Historias de Vida de detenidos-desaparecidos vistos en el ex CCDTyE ´Olimpo´". ("What They Could Not Destroy: Life Stories of Victims of Enforced Disappearances Seen in this Former Clandestine Detention Center, 'El Olimpo´").[12]

In the lines that follow, we analyze a selection of fragments of poems that the site guides use on the tours for the youth. We decided to pay special attention to them because of their ability to narrate true detention experiences of the victims of enforced disappearances and the imprint they leave on visitors. As site workers claim, over the years, the poems became a key element to accompany young people on the journey through "El Pozo",

11 In the jargon of the repressive practices, the sector where the repressors held the abducted captive was called "El Pozo" (the hole). There were small cells, without natural light or ventilation. After the dismantling of "El Olimpo" in 1979, the police made changes to hide their crimes: they demolished walls and cells, covered windows, covered the floors with other materials, among other structural modifications. Today, vestiges still persist, which allows us to reconstruct, together with the testimonies of the survivors, the events that took place there.

12 The exhibition evokes the detainees seen at "El Olimpo" through the reconstruction of their biographies in folders/albums made by their loved ones. Each album gathers, in the form of a collage, different photos, documents, letters, anecdotes, etc., that account for the different aspects of their lives, such as their militancy, their interests and their affective networks.

because they allow visitors to move from the universal to the particular, to move them without causing anguish, generating empathy between the detainees and the visitors, and collaborating in the communication of their experiences in a resilient manner (Mendizábal et al. 2017).

The poems used in the visits are part of the book *Eso no está muerto, no me lo mataron* (*This Is Not Dead, They Haven't Killed It Off*) (1986), written and edited for the first time in exile by the survivor Roberto Ramírez, also known as "Viejo Guillermo" (Old Guillermo).[13] In the book, the author recovers some chunks of everyday life during his experience in the different clandestine centers where he was held hostage. Thus, the poems constitute, on the one hand, a contribution to the knowledge of what happened in the clandestine centers during the last dictatorship, and, on the other hand, it is a way to pay tribute to his fellow victims of enforced disappearances.

> We take a chance towards your cell/ to see the miracle/ caused by the agreement/ between nature and your willpower: / a green sprout with two small leaves. /We see it as a tribute/ To your newborn baby boy/ – they let you make a phone call – , / Like a song to life, / Like a song to the fight (Ramirez 1986, s/n).

Upon analyzing these verses, and this can be appreciated in this fragment, we notice, in general, that the poet builds a "poetic voice", which then unfolds. It fluctuates between the first person singular, as the subject who retrieves and shares some splinters of his own personal experience in the detention centers, and a first person plural which represents the acts of resistance carried out by their fellow victims of enforced disappearances.

Likewise, in the titles of the poems, we can notice the need to retrieve and retain the names of the fellow disappeared detainees.[14] *Elías-Horacio*, *Mariano*, *Inés*, *Pequi*, *Mori*, *Willy*, *Matías*, *Darío* and *Guarincho* are the protagonists of stories and life experiences that did not die. In fact, the "poetic voice" sometimes addresses them, it builds a "poetic you" that still prevails: that of the victims of enforced disappearances, who are made eternal with the written word.

In each poem, in turn, an effort to retell everything can be noticed, the intent for each story to condense everything that can be said about that

13 Roberto Ramírez, militant of the Marxist left, kidnapped and held in different clandestine centers. He was released in 1979 and exiled in Sweden, where he wrote and edited the poems.

14 It is interesting to point out that the guide uses the term "fellow", and in the present tense, to talk about the disappeared detainees. We believe this can be explained by the political and ideological proximity, and to honor their memory, to build a bridge between the party members of the past and those of the present.

person, that scene, that place. Through the use of inverted commas, the poet strives, on the one hand, to reproduce as faithfully as possible all the facts, to recover every word and gesture of the fellow disappeared detainees who are no longer with them. On the other hand, he tries to strengthen the polyphonic nature of the text, so that readers notice that these verses belong not only to him, but are also part of a larger group.

> …almost all of us sitting on the floor/ in a vigil/ that lasts for several hours, /and a hand/ softly touches my head/ to lift me up, /in passing, so as not to be seen. /I can tell who you are: /Pequi! /In months we will know/ The recently fallen/ Of your human greatness, / Of your militant integrity… (Ramírez 1986, s/n).

As with these verses, the anecdotes that the poems carry with them not only provide information and paint a picture of everyday life in the detention centers,[15] they also allow for a close-up on how the detainees managed to endure those situations: what they felt, what they thought, what they feared; but also, what they were willing to risk in order to help the others. All the poems begin with a description of some characteristics of the repressive system in general, and the everyday life in the CCDTyE, specifically. For instance, they tell us how the food was distributed, how the repressors tortured them, and how the transfers were made to another clandestine center, or to the final destination. However, the poems describe all this from a different perspective to that of the testimonies by the survivors before the justice system, where no room is usually left to express emotion, subjectivity and resistance (Mendizábal et al. 2017).

Although the poems shed light on the horror endured in the clandestine centers, we can also gain insight into the acts of resistance, care and support among the fellow detainees and the emotional bonds that were born there, as we can see from the fragments quoted here. Most of the actions retrieved in the poems are dangerous for them, since they amount to a direct challenge to their repressors:

> …there are 8 loaves of bread and 14 of us./ We will eat half/ and the other half, when hunger/ strikes./ How to store them,/ who to trust?/ It's unanimous/ -almost instinctive, a reflex-/ Elías and Horacio/ will be the

15 Inside "El Pozo" (The Hole), there was an area where those kidnapped remained isolated, but there were other spaces where people who had been detained much longer could move and meet with others, under the watchful eye of the repressors.

> guardians./ It's time,/ we break bread amongst us/ not a crumb is missing,/ I imagine in everybody's eyes/ a sparkle of triumph (Ramirez 1986, s/n).

Thus, the poems allow for a more complex profile of the detainees, not just as mere victims, but they recover their agency in the context of this repressive apparatus. If we take into account that one of the main objectives of the dictatorship was to erase identity and destroy any collective form of organization, these minor acts of resistance have a much deeper sense, politically speaking.

During the visits, the guides invite the young students to read these poems out loud in different "stations" of the route through "El Pozo". In general, this is done in the places that are more difficult to recreate, due to building transformations carried out by repressors. The same was done in the spaces where the interrogations were carried out, or where the cells used to be. Thus, the poems are a vehicle for the transmission of traumatic experiences, such as imprisonment or torture, but avoiding the paralysis, the distancing, and even a masochistic pleasure in new generations. Every shared verse reinstates gestures of humanity, and allows for flashes of light and life, in a past imbued by death and darkness.

> …I knew only pieces of you/ underneath the cloth[16]/ and we never exchanged/ but half a word, /almost carelessly/ by the door to the cell/ you take a chance and leave/ a whisper hanging: / Guillermo, careful with…/ I understood then/ that it was possible./ That behind the cloths/ the eyes survived,/ that in the muffled mouths/ words kept on fermenting… (Ramirez 1986, s/n).

The moments of reading the poems aloud are interesting, since they allow for the democratization of the word during the visit; they open up new ways of listening to the experiences of the subjects of the past and they enable the young to imagine them, and to make them their own. In a sense, this shared reading can be seen through the lens of a *performance*, since it brings about a special intonation given by the reader, a specific body language and it takes place in a specific setting. All these elements turn this into a unique moment for all the participants, just as memory presents itself: unstable, changing, an ongoing construction (Tornay et al 2021).

To sum up, the poems allow for a sensitive approach to the experiences of the disappeared detainees, and they offer a different way of looking at

16 Blindfolds or bags which covered the eyes of those kidnapped, and stopped them from seeing anything.

them. In the words of Belén, one of the eighteen-year-olds who took part in the visits:

> To me, it is a new way of looking at it. Because, just imagine… in a poem with so much feeling, so much emotion, it is… I cannot express it… it is like telling a story from feelings. It's the details that let us step into their shoes, so that we can feel empathy for the person who was, at that time, enduring all this (Interview to Belén 2017).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Posters Project at the Memory Park depicts two of the main challenges that memorial sites face over traumatic events in Argentina and other places around the world. The first challenge is how to attract and talk to the new generations. In different national contexts, there is a great interest in promoting the dialogue with those young people who have not experienced the traumatic events that are remembered in those sites. The second challenge, related to the previous one, has to do with the possibilities of connecting the past they discuss with the problems in the present day. In Todorov's terms, as we said before, it is a matter of transcending the "literal memory" of the events that are recalled in order to construct an "exemplary memory" so that "the past becomes the principle of action for the present" (Todorov 2000, 31).

Regarding the first aspect, this project encourages students not to be mere spectators or receivers of the Park's message, but to take an active role. Thus, students become the producers of meaning, which is reflected in their artistic creations. And what is more, sometimes students take up the proposals to express their own concerns and interests referred to existing problems. The two posters analyzed, for example, show the fight for the legalization of abortion, which was not one of the specific topics in the workbook, but it was undoubtedly one of the most important concerns for the young that year. The Park recognizes this active and creative position of the students by exhibiting their posters in the PAyS Hall.

In the Posters Project, the memories of State terrorism and its victims are dealt with as part of a plan of activities and topics, but they are not necessarily developed by the students in their productions. However, the project seeks to generate new relationships, to draw lines of change and continuities between that past and the present. As workers point out, one of the main purposes of the Park is to promote human rights (Interview

with Rapp, Toytoyndjian and Vázquez Lareu et al. 2020). In this sense, the reflection over human rights violations nowadays lets students recover the critical spirit of those young people of a similar age to them who, in the Seventies, were chased (murdered, disappeared or imprisoned) for standing up for their rights. Students concerned with their present issues can experience the closeness between those fights and their own pursuits. Simultaneously, it enables the dialogue with the tradition of activism by human rights organizations that promoted the creation of this memory site. Thus, the Posters Project helps young people to look beyond the commemorative aspect of the Park, by reflecting on the current problems they are worried about. It seeks to encourage the development of an active society capable of empathizing, from this critical reflection on the present, with the traumatic past caused by State terrorism. As the workers of the place point out, the intention is to "give students the possibility of perceiving the memorial site as a place where they can express themselves, where they can bring their own worries up for discussion to keep the ultimate purpose of the site always updated" (Eliano et al. 2019, 3).

In relation to the practices regarding the second aspect, the reading of the poems that are intertwined with the material footprints during the visits to "El Olimpo", the new generations might find here a new approach to the situation of the young people detained in this clandestine center. This is especially relevant if we consider the scarcity of images available in Argentina to represent illegal detention centers (Raggio 2009).

In this way, the poetic language triggers questions, appealing to people's sensitivity, about the experiences of these kidnapped individuals that had not been thought of until then. The images created by the poems truly move young people and prompt them to imagine their own reaction in a similar scenario. In so doing, they build a bond with those who are no longer there, and come to understand their intentions and motivations, even in a context of extreme vulnerability, while living in a clandestine detention center.

In short, poetic language can reach insightful places that cannot often be conquered through history. In order to learn, it is not always necessary to "see", but to "believe" (Raggio 2007), the experience needs to be believable. Literature, and, in this case, the poems by "Viejo Guillermo", allow us to elaborate reality and put it into perspective. By providing a singular description of the past and making it "believable", the poems operate as a powerful vector of remembrance (Rousso 2012).

It is important to consider the heterogeneity of the visitors' groups in both spaces. The production of reactions over the recent past has been profuse and diverse in Argentina: literary, theater and film works, performances,

political activism in public spaces. However, their reception depends upon multiple factors which involve the members of the new generations. In the cases analyzed, there are groups of secondary school students who have had different approaches to the construction of memory from the years of the Argentinian dictatorship, depending on the family, social, cultural and political backgrounds they have experienced. As we have seen, their teachers and the workers, project managers and guides of the memory sites have worked with them based on different proposals, and each student will have elaborated their reflections.

What must be highlighted in both cases is the effort, by those involved in the management of the memory sites, to reflect on the elaboration of memories as a dialogic process, with frameworks which allow the young to become personally involved, and which enables them to reclaim, translate and re-elaborate that past, based on their interests in the present."A work of art inspires the individual volition to see, in those who are helpless, their own odds" (Alemán 2003). The practices in both spaces, through a sensitive language, evidence a fruitful process that could direct our inquiries towards a wider, deeper dialogue with diverse sectors of the new generations in the process of elaboration of the memory.

Translation by Rosana Laura Canosa (University of Buenos Aires)

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About the Authors

Lizel Tornay is a historian and researcher at the Instituto de Investigaciones de Estudios de Género of the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. She has been a visiting professor at the Instituto J.M.Mora, Mexico City, and at the University of Valencia (Spain). She coordinates the SPEME/UBA team of the project "SPEME Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia", She has published articles in journals and books in Argentina and abroad. She coordinated the historical research of the documentary film Campo de batalla, cuerpo de mujer (Fernando Alvarez, 2013). She recently co-compiled the book Arte y Memoria. Abordajes múltiples en la elaboración de experiencias difíciles (EUFyL, 2021).

Victoria Alvarez holds a PhD in Gender Studies from the University of Buenos Aires, a Master's degree in History and Memory from the National University of La Plata, and is a Professor of Secondary and Higher Education in History from the University of Buenos Aires. She teaches at the University of Buenos Aires andshe is an Associate Researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) in Argentina. She was a doctoral and postdoctoral fellow of CONICET and made research stays in Paris, Bologna and Amsterdam. She is part of the project "SPEME Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia", and other research projects related to recent Argentine history and Gender Studies. She has published articles in journals in Argentina and abroad. She participated in the historical research of the documentary film *Campo de batalla, cuerpo de mujer* (Fernando Alvarez, 2013). She is the author of *¿No tehabráscaído? Terrorismo de Estado, violencia sexual, testimonios y justicia en Argentina* (UMA Editorial, 2019) and co-compiler of *Arte y Memoria. Abordajes múltiples en la elaboración de experiencias difíciles* (EUFyL, 2021).

Fabricio Laino Sanchís holds a Ph.D. in History from the Escuela Interdisciplinaria de Altos Estudios Sociales of the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Escuela IDAES-UNSAM) and a grade as Professor of Secondary

and Higher Education in History from the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras of the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA). He was a Ph.D. fellow of CONICET and made research stays in Paris, Bologna and Amsterdam. Nowadays he is a postdoctoral fellow of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) and assistant professor at UBA and at the National University of José C. Paz (UNPAZ). He is also a member of the UBA team at the EU project "SPEME: Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia". He has published works in journals and books in Argentina and abroad, and is co-compilator of *Arte y Memoria. Abordajes múltiples en la elaboración de experiencias difíciles* (EUFyL, 2021).

Mariana Paganini holds a Master's degree in History and Memory from the National University of La Plata, a grade as Professor of Secondary and Higher Education in History from the University of Buenos Aires and is a PhD fellow of CONICET. She made research stays in Bologna and Amsterdam and in 2019 was selected by the ICOM to participate in the international training programme "Museums for reconciliation: communities, pedagogies and memories" in Cali, Colombia. She worked in the Education Department of the Ethnographic Museum of Buenos Aires. Nowadays is assistant professor at the University of Buenos Aires and teaches post-graduate courses on museums and heritage at the University of Buenos Aires and the National University of Quilmes. She is also a member of the UBA team at the EU project "SPEME Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia" and other research projects related to history, heritage and didactics. She has published works in journals and books in Argentina and abroad and is co-compilator of *Arte y Memoria. Abordajes múltiples en la elaboración de experiencias difíciles* (EUFyL, 2021). Her research focuses on intergenerational transmission in museums and spaces of memory.

9 Representing the Trauma of Colonialism in Museum Exhibitions

Cape Coast Castle and the International Slavery Museum

Sarike van Slooten

Abstract
This chapter compares and explores how the trauma of colonialism is represented through slavery in two contrasting colonial geographies at Cape Coast Castle (Ghana) and the International Slavery Museum (England, UK). Through interviews with a representative of the museum and personal observations of the material displays in April and May 2018, this study shows that trauma was similarly represented, but narrated from a different perspective. The representation of trauma was evidently focused on the events and brutalities of slavery at the trans-Atlantic geography, as well as the impacts of slavery on society today at both museums. Both exhibitions include a significant contribution of resistance and human rights as connected to the trauma, and draw connections between the impacts of slavery and the makeup of both societies today through textual or material interpretation. Regardless of the different perspective from which the representation is narrated, both material displays seem clearly based on a trauma paradigm, including (audio)visuals, personal, powerful, symbolic and authentic objects, and personal storytelling. The material display at both exhibitions include counter-perspectives which focus on stirring an emotional visitor experience, but through dissimilar objects and interpretation methods. Cape Coast Castle typically includes authentic and replicated objects, and simulated social environments, whereas the International Slavery Museum employs more interactive techniques such as storytelling, audio clips and interactive displays. It has become clear that the combination of objects, interpretation methods and the authenticity of the site encourages a balance between a cognitive and emotional visitor experience.

Keywords: Colonialism, Trauma, Museum Exhibition, Representation, Slavery Narratives

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH09

Introduction

National accounts of colonial events have never been represented without some bias in the museum. In Western societies in particular, narratives of colonisation unswervingly include prevailing notions of civilisation and citizenship, whilst narratives of the trauma of colonisation are silenced.[1] How to represent legacies of colonial histories has become a prominent topic of debate in various Western societies. In the introduction to their book *Traumatic Memory and the Ethical, Political and Transhistorical Functions of Literature* (2017, 1-9), Susana Onega, Constanza del Río and Maite Escudero-Alías argue that when colonial histories have been considered by museums, their traumatic experience is mostly represented as a ramification of national history. However, a movement towards more recognition has become noticeable over the past decade through 'sites of counter memory' (Alderman, 2010, 90). In his article *Surrogating and the Politics of Remembering Slavery in Savannah, Georgia* (*USA*) (2010, 90-93), Derek Alderman argues that these sites enrich the official narrative with counter-memories, with the aim to acknowledge historical contributions of marginalised groups.[2] These groups are increasingly involved in the design of memory-scapes where counter-narratives have started to spark discussion about the validity and justification of national history as presented by the official narrative.[3] The development of 'trauma site museums' (Violi, 2012, 38) or 'terror scapes', as introduced by Rob van der Laarse in his book chapter *Beyond Auschwitz: Europe's Terrorscapes in the age of Postmemory* (2013, 71-88), further testifies to this movement.[4] In her

1 For a relevant study that confirms this claim, see Hamilton et al, 'Introduction: Slavery, Memory and Identity: National representations and Global Legacies'.

2 I see the official narrative as a notion of history perceived by the Western, colonial experience. It traditionally excludes other historic experiences but focuses on the European/Western experience established in archival history.

3 Examples are the removal or adaptation of street names, public parks and squares, or the demolishment of statues representing a passage from our colonial or imperial history or consider tour operators that offer organised tours to sites and attractions related to slavery and the colonial trauma; see Alderman, 'Surrogating and the Politics of Remembering Slavery in Savannah, Georgia (USA)'. Such tours can, academically, be classified as *dark tourism, roots tourism* or *slavery tourism*, which belong to the ever-growing variety of the niche of *heritage tourism* that remains a prevailing motivator for global travel. See Araujo,Welcome to the Diaspora: Slave Trade Heritage Tourism and the Public Memory of Slavery; Light, 'Progress in Dark Tourism and Thanatourism Research: an Uneasy Relationship with Heritage Tourism'; Gravari-Barbas, 'Tourism as a Heritage Producing Machine'.

4 'Terrorscapes' are places where the (hi)story of trauma, as a mass, collective suffering, is strongly present and acknowledged. See Van Der Laarse, 'Beyond Auschwitz: Europe's Terrorscapes in the Age of Postmemory'.

study *Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory* (2012, 37-44), Patrizia Violi states that trauma site museums play an essential role in this public acknowledgement. They promote an emotional understanding of the traumatic experience through authenticity and remember a traumatic past in two distinct manners. Some museums provide a literal representation of the past in which all elements of the narrative and authentic objects are conserved to provide an authentic experience. Other museums make use of replicated objects, or a combination of authentic and replicated objects, to create understanding in an interpretative experience. In contrast to Alderman's movement towards sites of counter memory, Ana Lucia Araujo argues in *Welcome to the Diaspora: Slave Trade Heritage Tourism and the Public Memory of Slavery* (2010, 145-173) that representations of the traumatic experiences of colonisation are frequently designed through simplified narratives and images to provide a unified understanding for a wide range of visitors.

Placing Trauma in the Museum Exhibition

The majority of studies in relation to trauma narratives revolve around the representation of trauma related to war, particularly the Holocaust, and terrorism, whereas only a small minority is devoted to colonial trauma and the memory of slavery in relation to representation and meaning-making in the museum.[5] Unlike the trauma of war and terrorism, the trauma of slavery and the slave trade around the triangular trading route in the trans-Atlantic geography, barely has direct victims and witnesses.[6] However, this trauma carries fundamentally contesting (post-)memories across generations and

5 For studies that confirm a present focus in studies around trauma related to war and terrorism, see LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* and *History and Memory after Auschwitz*; Hodgkin and Radstone, 'Introduction: Contested Pasts' and Onega et al., 'Introduction'. For specific studies about the colonial trauma and memory of slavery, see Caruth, *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*; Walcott, 'Pedagogy and Trauma: The Middle Passage, Slavery, and the Problem of Creolization'; Wood, 'Atlantic Slavery and Traumatic Representation in Museums: The National Great Blacks in Wax Museum as a Test Case'; Alderman, 'Surrogating and the Politics of Remembering Slavery in Savannah, Georgia (USA)', Araujo, 'Welcome to the Diaspora: Slave Trade Heritage Tourism and the Public Memory of Slavery'.

6 I see the triangular trading route as the trade flow in three directions across the Atlantic between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. On this route, slaves were shipped from Africa to the plantations in the Americas to produce raw materials that were used to fabricate goods in Europe. See Fatah-Black, *Slavernij en Beschaving. Geschiedenis van een Paradox*.

geographies and is believed to be a leading contributor to contemporary conflicts about power, racism, and (in)equality among cultures.[7]

In his doctoral dissertation *Telling memories: Al-Nakba in Palestinian Exilic Narratives* (2009, 19-22), Ihab Saloul discusses the notion of trauma as a 'signifier of loss' (p. 21), in which loss embodies an experience that can be signified by trauma; a traumatic experience.[8] Imperative to this experience is that loss is perceived by the person who carries the experience. It does not have to relate to traumatic extremities but turns traumatic for a person "when this person's symbolic order fails to provide consistent frames of reference in terms of which the loss can be experienced. As a result, trauma becomes legible on the level of discourse, where signification takes place or fails" (2009, 22). Saloul's concept of trauma builds on the work of Ernst Van Alphen who has suggested that the signified loss is a 'failed experience', which cannot be treated as a memory if the traumatic experience has not entered a discursive process of articulation.[9] Thus, although trauma and memory are used as adjectives and complementing nouns in much scholarly work, Van Alphen (1999. 24-38) and Saloul (2009, 19-22) consider them oxymorons that cannot exist simultaneously in the context of representation, since "if we can represent, then we are not traumatised" (Saloul, personal communication, 7 July 2021). This assumption becomes challenging with respect to representation, as it suggests that no trauma experience can be represented by the people who experienced trauma.

Trauma experiences include narratives and memoirs of traumatic historic experiences that have been disregarded in the European colonialising perspective; in the official narrative. In his book chapter *"Fighting Trauma": Silencing the Past in Alan Scott Haft's Harry Haft: Survivor of Auschwitz, Challenger of Rocky Marciano* (2017, 127-151), Rudolf Freiburg argues that trauma narratives include the experiences that are absent from official narratives, and that are inherent to multiple, personal, and individual perspectives and truths. In their discussion of trauma, academic debates emphasise how public mourning and commemorations can increase consciousness about injustices experienced by marginalised groups. It includes the concept of melancholia connected to everyday struggles with experiences of colonisation, migration, adaptation, and racialisation (Harack

7 For studies that discuss this claim, see Brown, 'Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy', 247-259 and Stein, 'Trauma and Origins: Post-Holocaust Genealogists and the Work of Memory', 294-297.

8 For a deeper insight into the relationship between trauma, absence and loss, see the study of LaCapra, 'Trauma, Absence, Loss'.

9 In his article *Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory and Trauma*, 24-38.

& Ibarrola-Armendariz, 2017, 279-310) that stresses "[…] radical questioning of modernity's notion of history as progress, nevertheless bring to the fore, for example, the (traumatic) micro-histories of the religious, sexual and ethnic minorities forced into silence or erasure by the master narratives of Western culture" (Onega et al., 2017, 8).[10]

As many European societies became engaged with anti-colonial and postcolonial struggle, museums needed to reflect on their role and meaning in contemporary societies, as well as their contribution to social change and cohesion. Consequently, museums increasingly incorporate traumatic experiences in their representation of history, which is largely supported by a trauma narrative, authentic material display, and personal storytelling.[11] However, scholars do not seem to agree as to how a traumatic experience should be represented and understood. Where Gutorow, Jarniewicz, and Kennedy (2010, 2-7) argue that representations defined by suffering, violence, and death are essential to the understanding of the traumatic experience, Harack & Ibarrola-Armendariz (2017, 279-310) and Stylianou (2019, 306-319) argue that this does not generate the feeling of melancholia that is needed to connect the traumatic experience with everyday struggle in the present.[12] Onega, et al. (2017, 1-9 and 311-313) imply that representations including traumatic experiences remain based on linear timeframes, in which the trauma experience is a ramification

10 I understand micro-histories as histories that are not represented in the official narrative. See Onega et al., 'Introduction', 1-9 and 311-313.

11 For relevant studies about trauma connected to representation, see Brown, 'Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy', 247-259 and Stylianou, 'Affect and Trauma in Museums: an Interpretive Framework for Understanding the *Real Thing* and its Political Potential', 306-319).

12 An example of Gutorow, Jarniewicz and Kennedy's representation of trauma is the interactive performance 'Whip it Good', by the Danish-Trinidadian artist Jeanette Ehlers. Circled by an audience, the performance starts with the artist, who is dressed in white and covered in white body paint, in front of a white human-sized canvas. She holds a whip in her hand, which she movingly starts to cover in charcoal before striking the canvas repeatedly. She starts slowly but speeds up and intensifies the lashes shortly after the first strikes. She frequently seeks eye contact with the audience throughout the performance until, at some point, she personally invites the audience to take over the whip and strike the canvas for her. Within a few minutes, the performance carries multiple layers of symbolism in which she aims to create a bodily and emotional understanding of the trauma of slavery carried by the Caribbean and African diaspora. The trauma is symbolically re-enacted, which is believed essential for an understanding, according to Gutorow, Jarniewicz and Kennedy, "'Beyond Trauma': The Uses of the Past in Twenty First Century Europe", 2-7, that aligns with new modes of commemoration. An example of Stylianou's representation of trauma is the NMAAHC. Although this museum employs a wide variety of representation methods that touches on various senses to steer an emotional understanding, and narrates trauma through pain, loss, death, and suffering as confined in the African-American memory, a large scope of the representation expresses trauma through narratives of hope, survival, strength, and community.

in the official narrative. Hence, a trauma paradigm from which exhibitions are designed is essential, since this paradigm requires a representation of individual and personal narratives in which the traumatic event is (in)directly experienced, which does not need to be linear or chronological.

Exhibitions that are approached from a trauma paradigm do not seek to generate a generally accepted understanding of traumatic experience, but consider each object as an individual and unique contributor to the experience. They embrace a pedagogy of trauma that engenders understanding through the connection of tangible objects and their significance to people who endured the trauma, which 'encircles' the trauma in the representation.[13] Encircling trauma, "[…] revives the enshrouded past of trauma through dialogue in the present, creating a holding witnessing 'other' that confirms the reality of the traumatic event. […]. Implicit here is the imaginative acts to be performed on the objective facts of history" (Onega et al., 2017, 8). Onega et al. confirm the belief of Yaacov Vertzberger who, in his article *The Practice and Power of Collective Memory* (2005, 117-119), asserts that representing trauma linearly is a contradicting act. The non-linear experience of trauma is presented in a linear manner to fit the chronological frame of the official narrative.[14] When trauma is encircled, the traumatic experience is accepted as the subject from which knowledge is produced whilst contemporary structures of hierarchy, power dynamics, and the collective identity are disputed.[15] Stylianou (2019, 306-319) argues that museums are only able to represent from a pedagogy of trauma if they explore the collection from a perspective that counters the memory of the official narrative as the material display can only then be understood and re-contextualised according to the trauma experience.

Representing the Trauma of Colonialism in the Museum

I will compare and explore how the trauma of colonialism is represented through slavery in two contrasting colonial geographies at Cape Coast Castle

13 For a relevant study that argues the pedagogy of trauma, see Onega et al., 'Introduction', 1-9 and 311-313.

14 Van Alphen, 'Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory and Trauma', 24-38, and Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*, 19-22, use a similar argument.

15 For relevant studies that discuss trauma in relation to museum representation, see Brown, 'Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy', 247-259 and Vertzberger, 'The Practice and Power of Collective Memory', 117-119.

(Ghana) and the International Slavery Museum (England, UK). Both ethnographic museums are situated at perceived authentic sites that underwrite colonisation; however, they represent a comparable history from a dissimilar colonial geography and with contrasting systems of representation. Both exhibitions include a signified loss, as presented by Saloul (2009, 19-22), in the representation and a "story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth, 1996, 7) that includes personal, individual, and collective experiences and memories of slavery. In May 2018, an expert interview with the Museum and Site Director of Cape Coast Castle was conducted to explore the perspective of the museum. The displayed objects were explored through a personal observation of the permanent collection of the Cape Coast Castle Museum and through a guided tour in May 2018. For the International Slavery Museum, the perspective of the museum is explored through an expert interview with the curator in April 2018. The displayed objects were explored through a personal observation in April 2018. These museum exhibitions serve as an example of how museums in Europe and Africa represent the trauma narrative and experience of slavery in their representations of colonialism from the perspective of the institution of the museum and the displayed objects. This comparison offers a reflective understanding of how trauma of colonialism can be represented in museum exhibitions in contrasting colonial geographies.

Despite the distinct colonial geographies, both museums showed significant parallels in the narrative, system of representation, and material display of the trauma of slavery in 2018. With respect to the narrative of slavery, the represented trauma in both museums is noticeably based on the events of the triangular trading route in the trans-Atlantic geography, and how these have impacted both societies. Cape Coast Castle largely focuses on the representation of the collective experience of trauma in relation to Ghana and West Africa, whereas the International Slavery Museum represents the alternating individual and collective experience from the Black British and Caribbean British diaspora. Both exhibitions used a chronological structure in their trauma narrative, and finished the narrative with an account of how the history and system of slavery and slave trade has impacted British and Ghanaian contemporary societies.

There were also differences between the narratives. While Cape Coast Castle emphasised the Ghanaian and African-American experience (Personal communication, 3 May 2018), the International Slavery Museum focused on the European and Black British experience as the narrative perspective (Personal communication, 13 April 2018). This was evident in the

museums' material and textual representations: the International Slavery Museum displayed, for example, a larger collection of European objects and goods that were used or produced by slave holders or other Western stakeholders. They also played various audio clips of the opinions of Black British people related to the system of slavery and its impacts and provided numerous textual interpretation panels about factual history of slavery and the slave trade. Cape Coast Castle mostly represented the experience of slavery and slave trade from the perspective of the African diaspora, apart from a small section that represented European goods, weapons, portraits, porcelain and ceramics and other objects. The accompanying interpretation that introduced these goods and objects was, however, narrated from the African perspective. For example, the following text supported the European goods on display in a glass showcase, stating:

> In exchange for gold, ivory, pepper, and slaves, African merchants received a variety of European goods, including linen cloth (as well North African fabrics), firearms, brass and copper kettles and other containers, stoneware, tools, clothing, chairs, umbrellas and liquor. Stoneware and porcelain dishes were imported by European merchants for their own use and from the 17th Century onwards became important trade items throughout the Dutch and British trading networks in Africa, Asia and the Americas. A variety of European bottles, inkwells, dishes, and other domestic ware have been found in excavations along Ghana's coast […] (Cape Coast Castle, May 2018, personal observation).

Another example of this perspective at Cape Coast Castle is a showcase of European weapons that referred to the trade networks between Europe and Africa before the slave trade, explaining how Ghanaians used these to defend themselves against slave holders.[16] These are examples of counter-narratives, as Cape Coast Castle clearly represented these objects from the perspective of Ghana and Africa.

Where Cape Coast Castle largely focussed on the events of slavery and the slave trade in Ghana and Western Africa – with an emphasis on the diasporic memory of Afro-Americans – the narrative in the International Slavery Museum was centred through a local (Liverpool), national (British) and international perception of the events of slavery and the slave trade, and their impact on British society. An example of the latter is a showcase of street names, which are based on figures, sites, or events in British

16 Personal communication, 3 May 2018.

Figure 44a and 44b Representation of the triangular trading route. Figure 44a deprecated wall panel, Cape Coast Castle. Figure 44b Interactive life-sized wall panel, International Slavery Museum

colonisation, or a depiction of the series of riots in the United Kingdom in 2011 where youth used violence against authorities in the wake of ongoing socio-racial tensions in the country. A showcase of a police helmet, that was worn during the riots, symbolises the connection between the country's slavery past and its legacy founded in racism and discrimination today.[17]

With respect to the system of representation and the displayed objects, both museums make use of authentic and replicated objects, personal storytelling, and contemporary art that reflect and symbolise the cruelties of the triangular trading route in the trans-Atlantic geography through various interpretation methods that present African culture before colonisation (i.e.: objects of torture, suffering and oppression, pictures and images of the environment and conditions of the enslaved, African artefacts and handicrafts, and 2D and 3D simulation of African village life before colonisation). Although the International Slavery Museum's representation is larger in terms of scope, and comprehensive in terms of interpretation methods and spatial design (Figure 44), both museums show significant contributions of resistance and human rights in their exhibition as a signifier of the trauma of slavery. They draw connections between the trauma of slavery and the construction of current societies, through a combination of material objects and oral and textual storytelling (i.e.: quotes, memoires and personal life stories of famous and ordinary people who were involved in this system). This is in line with Lord's (2006, 1-11) suggestion that exhibitions should reflect the traumatic experience, as this is more likely to steer a relational understanding and promote social change.[18] This reflection is further in line

17 Personal communication, 13 April 2018.

18 For other studies that align with Lord's perception, see Hall, 'The Work of Representation', 15-54, and Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 1-162.

Figure 45a and 45b Pictures of people from the Diaspora who were/are involved in resistance. Figure 45a International Slavery Museum. Bottom Figure 45b Cape Coast Castle Museum.

with the intentions of Cape Coast Castle and International Slavery Museum, as what is displayed is the experience of people of black origin, but not only the story of people of black origin. It is everybody's story and, therefore, it cannot be limited to one perspective.[19] This is, according to Karayilanoğlu & Arabacioğlu's study (2016, 84-86), what constitutes multiple meaning-making, which is perceived as vital for museums in contemporary societies, and in relation to the representation of trauma. What is remarkable about the representation of the significance of the transatlantic slave trade was that both museums largely used storytelling and intangible elements of slavery (i.e.: the origins of Rastafarianism, personal quotes, memoires, poems and experiences of racism). This coheres with Hooper-Greenhill's claim (2000, 1-162) that museums increasingly tend to move away from a solely tangible display, as storytelling and an interactive display invites understanding on an emotional level, which is key to the representation of trauma.[20] Another striking resemblance is an evident reflection of abolition and resistance at the end of the representations (Figure 45), such as noteworthy figures from the African diaspora, or expressions of African-American culture today in the wake of slavery and the slave trade. In this reflection, the International Slavery Museum incorporated a large variety in personal storytelling of known and unknown figures through interactive interpretation methods, whereas Cape Coast Castle's representation of abolition and resistance mostly included 2D objects and authentic artefacts (i.e.: audio ad video interpretation).

19 Personal communication, 13 April 2018 and 3 May 2018.

20 Stylianou, 'Affect and Trauma in Museums: an Interpretive Framework for Understanding the *Real Thing* and its Political Potential', 306-319, discusses trauma in relation to representation in more depth.

In terms of material display, both representations exhibited many powerful, symbolic, and authentic artefacts, combined with personal storytelling and several information panels that depict factual information related to the transatlantic slave trade. Altogether, this suggests an evident pedagogy of trauma. Within this pedagogy of trauma, both museums trigger multiple senses necessary to the understanding of the trauma of slavery. In doing so, they use various interpretation methods for which Cape Coast Castle employs more conventional methods than the International Slavery Museum. The former showcases a life-size replica of a slave deck that carried enslaved people from Africa to the Americas, and a 3D design of an auction block on a market square where slaves were sold. Through the use of light, space, textual interpretation, and a simulated historic environment, visitors are immersed in the traumatic experience of slavery and slave trade. However, Cape Coast Castle believes that this kind of immersive experience has not yet reached its full potential, as the use of sound and smell was absent which would engage visitors more in the trauma on a multisensory level.[21]

It has become clear from their material display that both exhibitions use a trauma paradigm that emphasises the experienced trauma of slavery, the slave trade and its aftermath on society through, mostly, individual experiences of trauma. This aligns with Brown (2004, 247-259) and Stylianou's (2019, 306-319) argument that trauma should not be narrated by a showcase of suffering, violence, or death, but through individual experiences that reflect personal and unique accounts of slavery and collective experiences and represent the scope and reach of the traumatic events.
Another clear resemblance between the two museums was the presentation of authentic and symbolic artefacts that represent the pain and suffering that the trauma inflicted on people, such as branding irons and shackles (Figure 46). Both museum perceived these as powerful for visitors' understanding of the trauma: not only are visitors confronted with the symbolic meaning of these objects, they also trigger awareness of the conditions of the people who suffered the trauma, which steers emotional understanding.[22] In line with the argument developed by Gaynor Bagnall in *Performance and Performativity at Heritage Sites* (2003, 88-93), the display of authentic objects related to the trauma of slavery is also powerful because it activates a bodily imagining of the experience, which produces empathy that is more sustained

21 Personal communication, 3 May 2018.

22 For example, torture, physical pain, and captivity (Interviewee 6, personal communication, 13 April 2018 and Interviewee 5, personal communication, 3 May 2018).

Figure 46a and 46b Branding iron (left, 46a), slave chains (right, 46b), Cape Coast Castle.

in emotional meaning-making.[23] This bodily imagining was activated at Cape Coast Castle in particular, where visitors were able to touch and feel the objects. It promoted an engagement and interaction between the visitor and the objects at Cape Coast Castle. Similar objects were on display in a glass showcase at International Slavery Museum creating more distance between the visitor and the object.

I would question the power and uniqueness of one of the object's, namely the "logbook" in relation to pedagogy of trauma for several reasons. First, it proved almost impossible to interpret the object because of the small and fading content of the logbook. The textual interpretation of the object was also greatly limited. Thus, without an awareness of its perceived uniqueness on the part of visitors, the object presents itself to them as a logbook from a slave ship that provides information about the slave trade from the perspective of the captain, which is neither a unique perspective nor in line with the pedagogy of trauma. Hence, the object chiefly represents slave trade from the European colonial experience instead of the trauma experience of the slave trade itself. In fact, it is doubtful whether such an object is capable of representing the trauma of slavery at all, for I assume that the captain has experienced slave trade but not endured the trauma. Furthermore, as visitors cannot engage or interact with the object, it becomes difficult to testify to its uniqueness, let alone its significance. In the words of Hooper-Greenhill

23 Bagnall's argument is later discussed in the studies of Brown, 'Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy', 247-259, and Dudley, 'Museum Materialities: Objects, Sense and Feeling', 5-27.

(2000, 1-162), this object speaks for itself as a logbook of a captain on a slave ship, but not in relation to the traumatic experience of slavery.

Next to a cognitive and verbal understanding of the material display at both museums, the material display evoked an overall emotional understanding.[24] This emotional understanding was not only perceptible through numerous authentic and symbolic objects, but also through the interaction and engagement of the visitors with the display. The guided tour through Cape Coast Castle will serve as an example. This interactive tour starts in the courtyard of the castle and takes the group of visitors through various places inside the castle, including the 'door of no return' and the cells where enslaved people were held captive.[25] The smell and absence of light inside the cells, combined with stories from the guide about the events and conditions inside these cells, cater for an emotional and multi-sensory experience. In this example, visitor engagement is further promoted through the practice of a short, religious ceremony inside the cell, after which visitors can pay respect to their ancestors who suffered here. Some visitors left the cell emotionally, while others seemed silenced by incomprehension.[26]

Conclusion: Encircling Trauma in the Museum

The core argument of this chapter is how trauma is represented at two contrasting colonial geographies. My comparative analysis of Cape Coast Castle and the International Slavery Museum has identified several discrepancies between the museums' exhibitions and academic literature about representation and trauma. These discrepancies can serve as insights for museums to connect better to contemporary debates of colonialism, and seek to contribute to the academic debate about the ways in which museums can represent the trauma of colonialism. Limiting these discrepancies enables museums to encircle trauma in their representation.[27]

24 For relevant studies about cognitive, verbal and emotional understanding, see Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 1-162, Gutorow, Jarniewicz and Kennedy, "'Beyond Trauma': The Uses of the Past in Twenty First Century Europe", 2-7, and Stylianou, 'Affect and Trauma in Museums: an Interpretive Framework for Understanding the *Real Thing* and its Political Potential', 306-319.

25 It is essential to note that this tour was executed for a group of mostly Afro-American tourists who visited the site and museum to learn about their ancestors. Depending on the background of the visitor, the tour might change its narrative, route, and visits.

26 Personal observation, 13 April 2018.

27 For studies that deal with encircling trauma, see Brown, 'Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy', 247-259, and Onega et al., 'Introduction', 1-9 and 311-313.

In light of the representation of trauma, several differences and resemblances between the museums are notable. It became clear that the represented trauma in both museums focused on the events and brutalities of slavery at the triangular trading route in the trans-Atlantic geography, as well as the impacts of slavery on society today. The representations consist of a similar material display, including African culture before European arrival, the events and brutalities of the triangular trading route in the trans-Atlantic geography, impacts of slavery and resistance, presented through various interpretation methods. Whereas the material display at Cape Coast Castle mostly consists of authentic and replicated objects, as well as simulated social environments, the International Slavery Museum employs more interpretation methods, including storytelling, audio clips, interactive displays, and simulated social environments. Trauma is narrated from different perspectives, but not from different experiences. Cape Coast Castle approaches trauma from a Ghanaian and African-American perspective, whereas the International Slavery Museum perceives trauma from a European colonial experience and Black British perspective. This difference is, mostly, evident in the displayed objects and textual interpretation. Here, Cape Coast Castle largely focuses on the events of slavery in Ghana and Western Africa, with an emphasis on the memory and experience of the Afro-American community whereas the narrative in the International Slavery Museum focuses on a local, national, and international perception of the events. Both museums emphasise the significant contribution of resistance and aspects of human rights in their exhibition as part of the trauma, and draw connections between the impacts of slavery on the present.

Furthermore, both museums represent an evident trauma narrative, as they include the experiences that are, in the case of the International Slavery Museum, absent from the official narrative. These are inherent to multiple, personal, and individual perspectives through a mostly emotional understanding.[28] Emotional understanding is primarily realised with personal storytelling through audio and video, and authentic objects at the International Slavery Museum, and largely through a display of authentic artefacts and a guided tour at Cape Coast Castle. Regardless of a similar representation of the trauma experience, Cape Coast Castle's representation is noticeably connected to the experience of the global African diaspora, with a focus on the Afro-American community in the United States of America,

28 For a thorough discussion on the trauma narrative, see Freiburg, "'Fighting Trauma': Silencing the Past in Alan Scott Haft's *Harry Haft: Survivor of Auschwitz, Challenger of Rocky Marciano*", 127-151.

while the International Slavery Museum emphasises global events of slavery and the slave trade, with their impact on contemporary British society.

Through the showcase of individual experiences and perspectives, especially at the International Slavery Museum, it becomes clear that both representations reflect a trauma paradigm, as they emphasise individual and personal voices of those who have (in)directly experienced the traumatic event and carry the memory of the trauma.[29] Through this paradigm, the narratives are predominantly represented through a selection of individual and collective experiences, that seek to provide a personal and unique account of the trauma of slavery. A substantial part of both representations focuses on the showcase of powerful, symbolic, and authentic artefacts, and, in the International Slavery Museum, on personal storytelling. According to Stylianou (2019, 306-319), this combination is necessary to realise a balance in cognitive and emotional understanding of the trauma experience.

Perhaps one of the most striking outcomes of this comparative analysis is that there seems to be minimal differences in how the trauma narrative is represented at both museums. From this, I assume that both geographies represent the trauma of slavery in similar ways and that visitors experience it in similar ways. This outcome contradicts Arlene Stein's argument in *Trauma and Origins: Post-Holocaust Genealogies and the Work of Memory* (2009, 294-297), that trauma includes fundamentally contesting memories across geographies. Despite the rich material display of authentic, powerful and some symbolic objects at both museums, there seems to be an overall absence of political objects that is needed to support a balance in interaction between the object and visitor, as Stylianou argues (2019, 306-319). The trauma of slavery is noticeably encircled in both museums' material display as a frame of reference from which the narrative is created.

What do these findings imply for museum exhibitions that deal with the trauma of colonialism in contemporary societies? It has become evident that it is essential for the museum to consider the experience of trauma in relation to slavery for the representation of slavery, as this counter-narrative enriches the official narrative and allows for multiple meaning-making. To understand the trauma experience, it is vital to include personal storytelling in the system of representation and use the narrative or site's perceived authenticity as input for interpretation, since this reinforces visitor engagement and emotional understanding. Material displays are typically consisting of

29 For a comprehensive insight into the trauma paradigm, see Stylianou, 'Affect and Trauma in Museums: an Interpretive Framework for Understanding the *Real Thing* and its Political Potential', 306-319.

a variety of symbolic, authentic, functional, and political objects, and the system of representation is diverse, interactive, and multi-sensory. Moreover, trauma is encircled trough a trauma paradigm. This paradigm boosts visitor engagement and visitor interaction with the material display (both of which are expected elements of the contemporary visitor experience). It suggests a main set of knowledge and understanding of the representation on the part of the visitor and activates an emotional understanding as part of the meaning-making process. With reference to the role of authenticity in the representation of trauma, museums are challenged to consider authenticity as a significant contributor to the visitor experience, whilst promoting digitalisation or improving interactive interpretation methods. This potentially affect people's meaning-making process and overall experience, respectively. When the museum represents a broader colonial narrative apart from slavery, a trauma paradigm may well be maintained vis-à-vis the paradigm of diversity and multi-perspectivity. Here, the trauma paradigm is maintained for the representation of the trauma of slavery in connection with the paradigm of diversity and multi-perspectivity to represent a broader perspective of colonial history.

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About the Author

Dr. Sarike van Slooten is a lecturer at the BA International Tourism Management and MA International Leisure, Tourism and Event Studies programmes at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, and a researcher at the European Tourism Future Institute (ETFI). Her academic background started in Leisure & Tourism Studies, for which she developed a personal

and academic appetite for heritage and museums connected to (post)colonial representations, identity formation and memory, inclusiveness and diversity, and Dark Tourism. She used her appetite for her doctorate research at the University of Amsterdam's research school Amsterdam School of Heritage, Memory and Material Culture. Her study explores of how museums can connect better to contemporary debates of colonialism through the perspective of the institution of the museum, the material display and the visitor experience. It argues that a better connection between museums and contemporary debates of colonialism can be found through the imagination of the (im-)possibility of the construction of a postcolonial museum.

10 The Dogma of Irrepresentability and the Double Bind of Holocaust Memory

Valentina Pisanty

Abstract
This chapter provides a brief analytical account of how we have arrived at the double bind of Memory that every artist, filmmaker or novelist who presents a new text on the Holocaust is faced with. On the one hand, the duty of memory, according to which the Holocaust must be constantly remembered, recounted, elevated to a paradigm of universal significance. On the other, the irrepresentability of the great trauma, according to which the Holocaust cannot be represented, least of all through images, since the experience of those who "were there" goes beyond the limits of human imagination. Curiously, the dogma of irrepresentability catalyzed a proliferation of discourses in which, by dint of imitations, the tropes of memory (including the profession of unspeakability) were stylized to the point of becoming perfectly replicable. How have these contradictions affected the current dynamics of Memory Culture?

Keywords: Memory Studies, Holocaust Cinema, Irrepresentability, Georges Didi-Huberman, Claude Lanzmann, Elie Wiesel

Every artist, filmmaker, novelist who presents a new text on the Holocaust is faced with two contradictory instructions. On the one hand, the *duty of memory,* according to which the Holocaust must be constantly remembered, recounted, elevated to a paradigm of universal significance, in order to avoid what happened from ever happening again.[1] On the other, the

1 Hence the proliferation of novels, films, TV series, graphic novels, etc., listed by Mazzarella, 8-17.

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH10

irrepresentability of the great trauma, according to which the Holocaust cannot be represented, least of all through images, since the experience of those who "were there" goes beyond the limits of human imagination. To deal with this double bind (in an attempt to "represent the unrepresentable"), for decades authors and filmmakers have resorted to enunciative filters and oblique shooting techniques, capable of evoking the most traumatic events without pretending to show them.

Each creative solution is subjected to the scrutiny of hosts of critics who pronounce themselves on its degree of ethical-aesthetic acceptability (which leads to heated controversies and, in some cases, to open excommunications and/or consecrations). For example, Claude Lanzmann, usually very reluctant to praise works other than his own, surprised the critics in Cannes in 2015 (who were hanging on his lips to understand which way to jump) by blessing László Nemes' potentially controversial movie, *Son of Saul*.[2] When asked why this time, contrary to all the others, he did not consider a fiction about the Holocaust abominable, he replied:

> What I meant when I said that there is no possible representation of the Holocaust is that it is not conceivable to represent death in the chambers gas". And he added: "*László* Nemes has invented something. He was sufficiently competent not to try to represent the Holocaust. He knew he could not and should not do it (Lanzmann, in Blottière 2015).

Notice the ritual formula, "could not and should not", symptomatic of the rhetorical device of sacralization. For it is one thing to admit that it is difficult to re-enact the trauma of Lager internment ("could not", in the sense of "cannot manage to"), and another to introduce a moral-ethical veto on the legitimacy of such an attempt ("should not", as in "must not, is forbidden to"). Not managing to represent something is a contingent limit that a film director may try to challenge. This is precisely what Nemes (and many others) tried to do and, if anything, one may discuss whether and to what extent each artistic endeavor has been successful. "Must not" is a prohibition

2 These, in extreme synthesis, are the reasons why *Son of Saul* might be considered controversial: (1) it is set in the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau; (2) it adopts the internal point of view of a Hungarian *Sonderkommando* (a category open to ambivalent judgments), without introducing distancing devices or didactic input intended to underline the problematic status of such men; (3) it combines fact and fiction – in the invented part of the plot, the protagonist, Saul Ausländer, tries to save the body of a boy from the mass cremations in order to bury him according to the Jewish tradition — with the attendant risk of unwarranted interference between the two levels.

handed down from above to protect an area of memory from unwarranted incursions, and it has something to do with the religious interdiction against the reproduction of sacred images.

It is with the shift from *cannot* to *must not* that the debate on the irrepresentability of the Holocaust was inaugurated. The origin of the debate is usually traced back to Theodor Adorno's famous 1949 line, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (Adorno 1949, 162). But this is a false start, because the quotation has nothing to do with what we are discussing and – whatever Adorno had in mind – he certainly did not intend to pass judgments on what one can or cannot say: it just wasn't in his style.[3] To understand this, it is sufficient to recall his gloss to Wittgenstein when, contradicting the *Tractatus*, he declared that "to say what cannot be said" is precisely the purpose of philosophy (Adorno 1965 [2008, 74]).[4]

The shift from *cannot* to *must not* was instead at the origin of some famous cinematographic diatribes that have gone down in history with titles that suggest boxing matches: Rivette vs. Pontecorvo, Wiesel vs. Holocaust, Lanzmann vs. Spielberg, Lanzmann vs. Didi-Huberman, Lanzmann vs. Godard, Lanzmann vs. all. The first memorable controversy (Rivette vs. Pontecorvo) appeared in the *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1961 with the title *De l'abjection* (Rivette 1961, 54-55), and targeted the famous sequence by *Kapò* in which a prisoner commits suicide by throwing herself on the barbed wire. The shot lingers for a couple of seconds on the electrocuted corpse, with her hands pointing upwards. What is the problem?, one wonders today. "There are things that should not be addressed except in the throes of fear and trembling; death is one of them, without a doubt; and how, at the moment of filming something so mysterious, could one not feel like an imposter?", wrote Rivette. Unlike Alain Resnais, who in *Night and Fog* had adopted a mindful and conscious enunciative regime, juxtaposing archive images with color footage with voiceover, Pontecorvo's sequence claimed to show death in its making and, to boot, it did so in a trivial way, with an aestheticizing and self-indulgent technique. Rivette's indignation did not have much to do with the Holocaust Memory as such (a concept that in 1961 did not even exist), but rather with the ethics of filming and film editing. As for

3 On the impact and the numerous misquotations (and misreadings) of Adorno's famous dictum, see Rothberg, 45-81.

4 Full quote: "I would maintain that Wittgenstein's statement that 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' is the anti-philosophical statement par excellence. We should insist instead that philosophy consists in the effort to say what cannot be said, in particular whatever cannot be said directly, in a single sentence or a few sentences, but only in a context".

Godard, for Rivette (1961, 54-55) "tracking shots are a question of morality"[5] and the filmmaker "*judges* that which *he shows* and is *judged* by the *way* in which *he shows* it".

The second controversy ushers us into the heart of our reconstruction. It is the criticism of the *Holocaust* miniseries published by Elie Wiesel in *The New York Times* in April 1978. Wiesel condemned the TV fiction, guilty of having shown "what cannot and must not be portrayed" (notice the familiar formula). "Untrue, offensive, cheap: as a TV production, the film is an insult to those who perished and to those who survived". But what is it, exactly, that cannot and must not be portrayed? In part, Wiesel's criticisms were motivated by an understandable ethical-aesthetic rejection of the American cultural industry and its "culinary" formats. The miniseries pretended to reproduce the horror of the concentration camps by means of cinematic artifices (with actors instead of the real victims), and moreover employed soap opera techniques, drawing on an over-coded repertoire of narrative clichés aimed at arousing facile cathartic effects that hardly suited the gravity of the subject matter. Similar perplexities were shared by many other critics, including Primo Levi (Levi 1978, quoted by Minuz 2010, 83), though Levi considered some degree of trivialization as the necessary price to pay in exchange for a widespread awareness of what happened to European Jews during WWII.

Wiesel's refusal, however, hinged on another, more radical objection regarding the existence of certain extreme experiences that human beings are not authorized to represent, or at least not through images. The Shoah – he wrote – is "the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery that can never be understood or transmitted. Only those who were there know what it was, the others will never know." It is not so much a question of tact or good taste, of aesthetic awareness or philological-historiographical precision. The reason why the Holocaust cannot and must not be represented has to do with the primacy of direct testimony over any other form of mediated knowledge. All those who weren't "there" have no right to comment on something that transcends their ability to imagine.

This, of course, is the limit of any mediated knowledge, all the more so when referring to deeply traumatic events such as the ones we are talking about. But that is not the point. For Wiesel, the primacy of testimony does not depend on the fact that – no matter what the maudlin proponents of

5 "Les travellings sont affaire de morale", famous declaration by Jean-Luc Godard during a round table on Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*: the transcription of the round table was published in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* 97.

prosthetic memories were to claim in the Nineties and Noughties[6] – no one is capable of transplanting the bodily and subjective qualities of other people's memories into their heads. It is the transcendent nature of the event that gives direct witnesses an almost messianic status: "The Holocaust transcends history… the dead are in possession of a secret that we, the living, cannot know and are neither worthy of or capable of recovering".

Wiesel's statement endorsed Emil Fackenheim's 1967 description of the Holocaust as "a messianic, and not a historical, experience. It is completely different in quality from all other histories" (Fackenheim, quoted in Chaumont 2002, 102), and popularized an enunciative posture whose underlying self-destructive statement could be summarized as follows:

1. *Of this we cannot talk about.*
2. *I talk about it.*

To get out of the impasse, a third proposition must be introduced:

3. *I talk about it because a force that transcends me* (*and that authorizes me*) *speaks in my place.*

Act Three: the definitive anathema launched by Claude Lanzmann in 1979: "The Holocaust is above all unique in that it erects a ring of fire around itself, a boundary that you cannot cross, because it is impossible to convey a certain absolute horror; claiming to do so is to be guilty of the gravest transgression. Fiction is a transgression; I am deeply convinced that there is a prohibition on representation" (Lanzmann 1979). Leaving aside such epic, Wagnerian overtones, Lanzmann's interdict radicalized the theory of irrepresentability that, in his view, affected not only dramas freely inspired by the history of the Shoah, but documentaries and archive footage, too. There is only one way to talk about the genocide, and that is through the voices of witnesses. Hence his later dispute with Jean-Luc Godard (1994) regarding what would be the right thing to do with a hypothetical period film showing death in the gas chambers. Lanzmann replied: I wouldn't show it, on the contrary I would destroy it. And then he added: "I can't say why. It's something that I take for granted". Paradoxically, as Georges Didi-Huberman (2003) pointed out Lanzmann's intransigence ended up rejoining the original Nazi project. Before it became a topos of Holocaust rhetoric, the unimaginability/irrepresentability of the genocide was encouraged by the Nazis themselves, who hid the Final Solution in every possible way, by forbidding the perpetrators to use words that explicitly referred to the reality

6 See for example Landsberg 2003.

of the "Final Solution", banning photographs, destroying the extermination facilities, killing witnesses, and – yes – destroying the archives.

Another motif that has been grafted onto the theme of the radical irrepresentability of the Shoah is that of its absolute incomparability. Back in 1974, Methodist theologian Roy Eckardt defined the genocide as a "uniquely unique" event in the history of humanity, "qualitatively different than all the other massacres in history" (Eckardt 1974, 31-35). In line with that concept, The US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHM) in 2019 released a statement regarding the museum's position on Holocaust analogies, which "unequivocally rejects efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary".[7] Yet, at the same time, the USHM Museum site (as do other memorial institutions) promotes a widespread campaign of early warning prevention against mass atrocities throughout the world, which suggests the belief in at least some degree of comparability between the Holocaust and other historical massacres. And indeed, Wiesel himself was a strong advocate of the universalization of the Holocaust as a polyvalent metaphor that speaks to the hearts of all: "Negro quarters are called ghettos; Hiroshima is explained by Auschwitz; Vietnam is described in terms which were used one generation ago", he acknowledged with more than a hint of satisfaction in 1967 (Wiesel 1967, cited in Chaumont 2002, 113).

Hence the short-circuit of an experience that is both uniquely unique (therefore extrapolated from the series of historical events) and paradigmatic: the Holocaust as a paradoxical prototype that does not admit other occurrences than itself. Let us dwell on this aporia. How can an event be simultaneously unique and universal? As an unrepeatable occurrence, the Holocaust should not be able to give rise to any concept: it is pure token, capable only of representing itself. As a universal type, it should conversely encompass all human experience, to make sense of an unlimited range of events (hence the argument of those who, like Christian Boltanski (2013), believe that "each of us sees their own personal Shoah"). From a logical point of view, it is evident that the two descriptions are incompatible. Either the Holocaust is uniquely unique, or it is a multipurpose metaphor that fits all purposes. Either it cannot be represented, or it is the object of a dutiful textual proliferation. Either it is incomparable, or it can be used as a term of comparison whenever – in the former Yugoslavia, in the Middle East, in Ukraine, and so on – the reference to Absolute Evil serves to shake the conscience in favor of whatever specific cause.

7 https://www.jewishexponent.com/2019/07/10/academics-holocaust-museum-statement/.

From the expanding archive of utterances on the irrepresentability and absolute incomparability of the Shoah, a very particular attitude emerged – based on the principle of the sacredness of testimony – which little by little dominated the rhetoric of memory, undermining the secular attitude of other survivors (such as Primo Levi) for whom the act of testifying was motivated by historical-documentary reasons. Curiously, the dogma of irrepresentability catalyzed the proliferation of discourses in which, by dint of imitations, the tropes of memory (including the profession of unspeakability) were stylized to the point of becoming perfectly replicable. And here is the gist of my argument. If the Holocaust were spoken of in profane terms, the various attempts to make an objectively extreme experience intelligible (and therefore representable, thinkable, comparable…), would be subjected to the scrutiny of the rules that a scientifically oriented community should give itself to select the most suitable representations: the ones that are historically more documentable, coherent, relevant, exhaustive, but also artistically denser and more interpretable.

Conversely, in a discourse that mimics the vertigo of the sacred, whoever assumes the posture of the iconoclastic prophet is also vested with the indisputable power of establishing from time to time which all-encompassing gaze should prevail over the others (a privilege that paradoxically places Lanzmann & co. in a position that previously belonged to the perpetrators), which visual trajectories are legitimate, which properties of the Symbol should be made pertinent. And – consequently – which comparisons may be authorized and which stigmatized as inadmissible profanations, with all the practical effects that follow: which causes to embrace, who to side with or even when to go to war.

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About the Author

Valentina Pisanty teaches Semiotics at the University of Bergamo. She has published articles and essays on Holocaust denial, Fascist racism, political discourse analysis, narratology, humour, interpretive semiotics, the rhetoric of memory-making and the semiotics of testimony. Her books include: *I guardiani della memoria e il ritorno delle destre xenofobe* (Bompiani, 2020; English translation *The Guardians of Memory and the Return of the Xenophobic Right*, Primo Levi Editions, 2021); *Abusi di memoria: negare, banalizzare, sacralizzare la Shoah* (Bruno Mondadori, 2012); *La Difesa della*

Razza: antologia 1938-1942 (Bompiani, 2006); *Semiotica e interpretazione* (with Roberto Pellerey, Bompiani, 2004), *L'irritante questione delle camere a gas: logica del negazionismo* (Bompiani 1998, new edition 2014).

11 Entangled Memories of Colonialism and Antisemitism

The Scandal of Taring Padi's "People's Justice" at Documenta 15 (2022)

David Duindam

Abstract

This chapter addresses the controversy that followed the unveiling of the artwork *People's Justice* at the art festival Documenta 15 in 2022. The large banner by the Indonesian art collective Taring Padi depicts Indonesia's communist in 1960s and Suharto's subsequent authoritarian regime. The discovery of two antisemitic figures led to international outrage and critique on the festival and its organizers. This paper argues that the reactions in German media are emblematic of the *Historikerstreit 2.0* and Europe's exclusionist memory politics and how it excludes both Jewish voices and Indonesian memories. It then considers the colonial roots of Indonesia's antisemitism to critically examine the underlying metaphor of traveling. Lastly, the work is analyzed in the context of Taring Padi's activist and collaborative method and a transnational visual culture that is not exclusively Dutch or Indonesian in an attempt to think about the proximity rather than radical distance of globally dispersed memory cultures.

Keywords: Transnational Memory; Indonesian Genocide; Taring Padi; Documenta 15; *Historikerstreit 2.0*

Introduction

The 2022 opening of Kassel's world-renowned art festival Documenta 15, curated by the Indonesian art collective ruangrupa, was quickly

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH11

Figure 47 Taring Padi, *People's Justice*, 2002, 800x1200 cm, acrylic on canvas

JUSTICE

RESISTANCE
CULTURE MOVEMENT
NO Chemi-cal
FERTILIZER
Taring Padi

overshadowed by a controversy revolving the artwork People's Justice from 2002 by the Indonesian collective Taring Padi (fig. 47). The installation consists of a 12 by 8 meter large banner and tens of human-size puppet figures made of cardboard on wooden beams in front of the banner. The work was unveiled during the opening of Documenta 15 at Friedrichsplatz, the central location of the festival. Soon, critics found two antisemitic figures and a scandal broke out (fig 48 and 49). The Israeli embassy called it Goebbels' style propaganda and German newspapers such as Die Zeit, Die Welt and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung called for a removal of the piece and remained critical throughout the duration of the festival. Michael Höttemann, a German expert in antisemitism, argues how these stereotypes are classic antisemitic reductions that stand in for complicated processes. Fig. 48 refers to geopolitical forces and the support by foreign secret services to the Suharto regime; fig. 49 is part of a group of grotesque figures and refers to the antisemitic conflation of Jews, capitalism and internationalism that threaten traditional community life (Höttemann 2022, 8).

Figure 48 Detail of Taring Padi, *People's Justice*, 2002

Taring Padi, in conversation with ruangrupa and other participating artists, decided to cover the banner with large black sheets. After the controversy did not dissipate, they issued an apology and removed the banner completely. In Germany a debate ensued in which Documenta 15 as a whole was accused of being anti-Israeli in its selection of participating artists who were associated with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and for not including any Israeli artists. As a result, the critique shifted towards Palestinian participants of the art festival. The German director Sabine Schormann continued to support ruangrupa and was forced to step down after unrelenting critique. German newspapers focused on the controversy and were not really interested in the central theme of the artwork: Suharto's military regime and the communist genocide of 1965-1966 in which between 500,000 and 1 million alleged communists were murdered without trial. Suharto repressed any form of historical, legal or moral justice during his reign until 1998 and until today, the genocide remains a vexed issue that divides local communities throughout Indonesia.

Figure 49 Detail of Taring Padi, *People's Justice*, 2002

In this paper I place the reactions in German media in the context of Europe's exclusionary memory politics that presents Germany as a beacon for other nations in how to deal with a painful past. This is tied to the Historikerstreit 2.0 that fends off any comparability between the Holocaust and other historical trauma's, in particular those tied to the histories of European colonialism and decolonization processes. I then examine the recurrent argument that Indonesia's antisemitism has its roots in Dutch colonialism in order to critically examine the underlying metaphor of traveling. Lastly, I analyze the work itself and the method of Taring Padi. In my conclusion I reflect on the entanglement of violent histories and how we can think of them in proximity of one another, rather than at a radical distance.

Documenta as a German beacon: an exclusionary European memory politics

Florian Cramer, a practice-oriented research professor at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam, made an analysis of the German media response to the controversy (fig. 50). The first accusations of antisemitism regarding Taring Padi's work came from a relatively obscure blog by the anti-German and pro-Israeli group called Bündnis egen Antisemitismus Kassel (BGA). This blog was picked up by other media and soon national newspapers joined in with critique on both the artwork and the organization of Documenta 15. Cramer argues however that the attacks on Documenta preceded the opening and the controversy around People's Justice. This is why he traces the controversy back to the so-called Historikerstreit 2.0 and argues that the real target of this debate was not Taring Padi but pro-Palestinian thinkers and artists with ties to the BDS.

In the original 1980s Historikerstreit, conservative historians were accused of relativizing the Holocaust in comparison to Soviet violence. Today, progressive thinkers are accused by conservative thinkers of comparing and drawing connections between the Holocaust and colonial crimes. The former argue that the underlying racist ideology of Nazism can be linked to Germany's colonial history and bring Germany's current support for Israel's anti-Palestinian policies into the debate. The latter argue that these arguments diminish the uniqueness of the Holocaust and claim

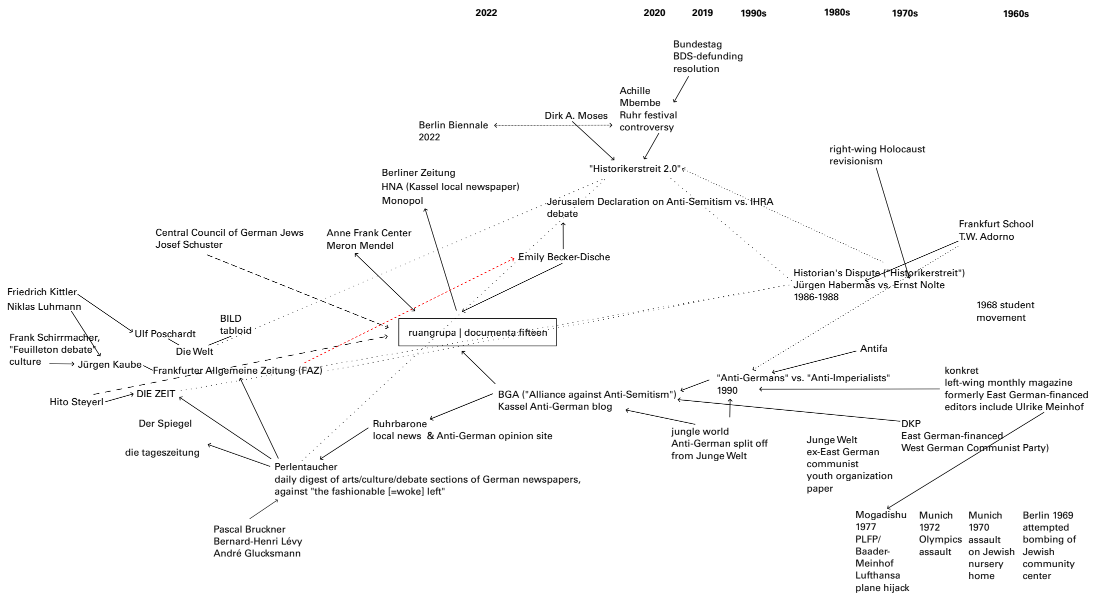

Figure 50 Florian Cramer, discourse map of German media responses around Documenta 15

that critique on Israel amounts to antisemitism. This conflation finds is political counterpart in the non-binding Bundestag resolution of 2019 that condemned the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) for being antisemitic. This made any person who criticized Israel vulnerable to claims of antisemitism[1]. In 2020 Cameroonian historian and thinker Achille Mbembe was accused of antisemitism for having compared apartheid in South-Africa with Israel's colonization of Palestine. The German-Israeli sociologist Natan Sznaider argues that this was a foreseeable scandal that drew much public attention. In the ensuing Feuilletonkrieg racism and antisemitism were presented as mutually exclusive positions. Postcolonial studies was criticized for not being a serious academic field but a cover for anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli feelings (Sznaider 2022, 12–13).

Taking this into account we can understand the position of the German cultural scholar Daniel Hornuff who responded to the controversy around Taring Padi in Die Zeit by arguing that the Documenta, it seems, has outlived its usefulness as the format of an alleged world art exhibition. It cannot at the same time be low-threshold, globally (de)contextualizing and politically

1 Florian Cramer was invited to speak at the conference "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on documenta fifteen" on 23 and 24 September, 2022, organized by Framer Framed. The author would like to thank Cramer for sharing his analysis.

controversial, and at the same time act as a German beacon [deutscher Leuchtturm]. There is too much public attention to allow for mistakes (Hornuff, my trans., 2022, 2).

The juxtaposition of a global approach and acting as a German beacon illustrates what is at stake. The former stands for including non-Western perspectives and is not explicitly described as universalizing (as that would imply a Western Enlightenment perspective). Instead this line implies that Documenta 15 includes art that deals with diverse historical traumas from around the globe, often but not always tied to the history of decolonization, and that these artworks must be understood both in their specific historical context. At the same, their alleged comparability as part of a "world art exhibition" as a decontextualizing effect. This then is placed opposite to the German beacon, which can be read in several ways: a beacon for locals, for an international audience and within a transnational memory politics. Documenta was established in the 1950s to educate and familiarize the people of Kassel with contemporary art. It did so on the rubble of a city that was destroyed in World War II for its ammunition production. As such Documenta acted as a beacon for locals, while it also gradually became an internationally acclaimed festival that addressed an international (if not global) audience that placed Germany at the center of contemporary art practices. Lastly, Germany acts as a beacon of critical engagement with one's own past and custodian of Holocaust memory. This made it extra painful when the Nazi past of one of its founders, art historian Werner Haftmann, was made public in 2021 (Bude and Wieland 2021).[2]

Curator and art historian Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes demonstrates how Documenta over time developed into an important force to recon with dictatorial regimes, historical traumas and human rights issues. "Documenta's location in history and geography make it a suitable vehicle and tool for comparative analysis, a project to honour and mourn those killed in the Shoah – and addressing the lived experiences of others, such as Palestinians" (Lerm Hayes 2022). It is precisely such a multidirectional approach that Hornuff and others criticize: the Holocaust cannot be tied to the suffering of others, and the idea of a world art exhibition is problematic in the first place as this does not take the historical or geographical context of Germany, and Kassel in particular, into account. This line of thinking is embedded in a European memory politics that installs the Holocaust as the original trauma, and Germany's dealing with its own past as a prime example.

2 I would like to thank Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes with her help translating and interpreting this quote, in particular the possible meanings of deutscher Leuchtturm.

Memory scholar Ann Rigney argues how Holocaust memory was central to the process of European integration after the devastation of World War II that made it difficult but also essential for neighboring nation-states that had been at war to work together. The Holocaust as a negative benchmark for European identity has also generated variations on a neo-Enlightenment narrative identifying Europe as a global defender of democratic values whose present and future investment in universal human rights is, and should continue to be, all the greater precisely because of the extent to which it had violated them in the past (Rigney 2014, 344) .

Especially West Germany's way of dealing with its Nazi past was a leading example for other nation states. Apologizing for your mistakes, asking for forgiveness and demonstrating your regret remain efficient political tools. West Germany's chancellor Willy Brandt's unannounced kneeling in front of the famous Warsaw Ghetto Uprising memorial in 1970 was a watershed moment. Standing on the rubble of the Jewish ghetto, Brandt was acutely aware of the significance of this location and later argued that with this gesture he demonstrated something language could never have done. As Rigney comments, "[it] is not without irony that this particular repentance-based identity has also been seen as expressing German hegemony within European memory culture, a mark of that country's success in providing a template for dealing with WWII" (Rigney 2014, 347) . The nation that was responsible for the Holocaust became a beacon for other nations and people for dealing with a painful past.

Chancellor Brandt was able to navigate the complexities because of his early resistance to the Nazi regime: he was not personally accountable but nevertheless apologized for Germany's regime he had suffered from himself. Brandt's kneeling was at once a personal, affective and embodied performance and a highly visible political act that was aimed at a normalization of the postwar ties between West-Germany and Poland. Such political maneuvering evokes the past for contemporary purposes. That such maneuvering also includes a looking away from certain parts of the past was aptly formulated by Winston Churchill who, promoting European integration in 1946, argued that "[we] must all turn our backs upon the horrors of the past. We must look to the future" (Churchill, qtd. in Rigney 2014, 343). The European memory politics are not about a complete and inclusive understanding of the past, but on a partial and fragmented view that is instrumental in shaping present and future.

It goes without saying that memory is never an objective representation of the past, and Churchill's metaphor of turning away from the horrors does not do justice to the way Germany has collectively reckoned with the memory

of the Holocaust. What it does highlight is how memory is often politicized to forge a sense of a common "we" that has a unified vision of past, present and future. The problem here is the implicit stability of a collective that Churchill called "we", Europe, and Brandt embodied himself where the I stood in for the nation state. Memory scholar Michael Rothberg rightfully argues that identity positions and memory work are always reciprocal: we shape our identities in relation to our understandings of the past, and vice versa (2009). Both Churchill and Brandt claimed to speak on behalf of a preexisting community and thereby deny the intricate workings of memory. This stands at the basis of a foundational and exclusionary memory politics that defines both what is at stake in politics, namely "never again Auschwitz", and the borders of Europe's political community that are policed by a politics of repentance and regret.

The paradox of never again is that it implies the possible repetition (and thus comparability) of the Holocaust, but at the same time prohibits any comparison because of its alleged uniqueness. This is precisely what happened in the case of Taring Padi: they were invited to show their work that deals with the communist genocide in Indonesia, but at the same time there was little interest in that historical narrative and their invitation was de facto revoked when the scandal broke out. As a result, both Indonesian perspectives and voices in the German public sphere were silenced through an exclusionary memory politics and an instrumentalization of antisemitism. A telling example was the Jewish diaspora organization Casa do Povo from Brazil who were referenced in a newspaper article as an Jewish organization banned from Documenta 15. Executive director Benjamin Seroussi plea for a rectification was not granted and his voice as a diaspora Jew from Brazil was silenced, testifying to the ultimately European and German-centric memory politics at play (Casa do Povo).

Antisemitism as a Colonial Boomerang

Taring Padi followed the script by issuing an apology after the first claims of antisemitism were made.

> We deeply regret the extent to which the imagery of our work People's Justice has offended so many people. We apologize to all viewers and the team of documenta fifteen, the public in Germany and especially the Jewish community. We have learned from our mistake, and recognize now that our imagery has taken on a specific meaning in the historic

> context of Germany. … As a collective of artists who denounce racism in all its forms, we are shocked and saddened by the media furor that has labelled us as anti-semitic. … The imagery that we use is never intended as hatred directed at a particular ethnic or religious group, but as a critique of militarism and state violence. We depicted the involvement of the government of the state of Israel in the wrong way—and we apologize. Anti-semitism does not have a place in our hearts and minds (Taring Padi 2022).

The apology did not neutralize the criticism and was taken as a further example of Taring Padi's unwillingness to accept the antisemitic content of their work, blaming it on the German context rather than an intrinsic problem. The argument that they never intended to use hateful imagery directed at any particular ethnic group was unconvincing for many commentators who argued that it was unbelievable that this work had been exhibited inside and outside of Indonesia for twenty years before these figures had been discovered. The problem here is two-fold. First, it reads the image and controversy within an exclusively German or European context. Second, it presents the Indonesian collective as an ultimately strange body that does not understand antisemitism, but nevertheless is antisemitic. It therefore fails to see how this artwork is embedded in a globally dispersed visual culture that ties the antisemitic imagery to Europe's colonial history.

The antisemitic figures in People's Justice do not evidence an inherent and purely Indonesian antisemitism. As Indonesian studies scholar Jeffrey Hadler argues, antisemitism was imported by Dutch colonialists and was translated under Suharto as an anti-Chinese ideology (Hadler 2004) . In a similar vein, Israeli architect Eyal Weizman argued in his comments during the Berlin Biennial that the antisemitism in Taring Padi's work demonstrates a boomerang effect that returns a colonial and racist ideology to Europe (Berlin Biennale). If we think about this traveling it is not enough to attribute the label of antisemitism to these two figures in order to point a finger at the Indonesian collective. Lerm-Hayes argues that iconography never works in splendid isolation, but is based on a network of meaning-making. "To sever connections, to insist on stable iconographic identification and clear, ever-lasting victim or perpetrator roles is to learn neither from art nor from (art) history" (Lerm Hayes 2022). She refers to the work of Aby Warburg who studied the migration of images to understand what changes images undergo when they travel through space and time. The scapegoating of Taring Padi externalized the antisemitism, placing it

within the (antisemitic) other and turning away from its European roots and implication.

In light of the Historikerstreit 2.0 it is understandable that this artwork is presented as a voice from the Global South pitted against a European sensitivity around antisemitism and Holocaust memory. However, such segmentation does not do justice to both the history of antisemitism and the cultural entanglement of Europe and Indonesia. As ruangrupa member Ade Darmawan argued when he spoke to the German Bundestag about the Documenta controversy, this is not about the Global South as something foreign to or different from a Global North. Europeans have been living door to door with the so-called global south for centuries, since colonialist and capitalist expansions. A false juxtaposition that sees documenta fifteen as an exhibition that represents the voices of the global south will only reduce the ideas and discussions that we have been addressing in the lumbung and in the exhibition (Darmawan).

One such effort to make Indonesia different was the attribution of the Islamic religious title to Suharto in an article of Die Zeit who introduced him as "einstigen Diktators Haji Mohamed Suharto" (Schneider 2022) . Though formally correct, Suharto is generally not referred to as Haji nor with his first name, but usually as general Suharto. Highlighting his Muslim identity is a questionable tactic that adds to the estrangement and othering of Indonesian history, society and visual culture.

Reading Content and Form: Taring Padi's Do-it-yourself Activism

Much of the critical commentators that condemn People's Justice focus solely on the two antisemitic figures. Höttemann admits that his analysis of the banner is limited is there is much more symbolism he cannot unequivocally make sense of. [3] His reading, as most critical readings of the artwork in German media, is symptomatic, a form or reading that looks for a hidden and deeper meaning as literary scholars Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus argue. According to them, such a symptomatic reading renders much invisible. We should instead focus on the surface of texts and artworks through critical description: texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves; what we think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them. Description sees no need to translate the text into a theoretical or historical metalanguage in order to make the text meaningful (Best and Marcus 2009, 11). There are several elements in the artwork we can analyze; here I focus on a description of what is depicted

in the banner and an element that is often missed, the cardboard puppets that are essential in the local activism that is at the core of this artwork and Taring Padi's method in general.

If we look at the artwork as a whole, we can distinguish three different parts (fig. 47). In the part on the left, we see president Suharto sitting on his throne in a red suit, surrounded by mainly greyish figures, machinery and weapons that conflate international militarism and capitalism in a cartoonish style. Western countries are clearly implicated in his regime through the use the American and UK flags and figures that stand for secret services such as MI-15 and Mossad. To the right of this part we find grotesque and humanoid monsters that stand for societal decay; here we find the antisemitic figure with sharp teeth and SS runes on a bowler hat. Below we see the graves of victims of these regimes, which is overlooked by a menacing skull that reads "the expansion of multicultural state hegemony". This references the paradoxical multicultural policy of Suharto that forced groups to be different but united and ties individuals to their community of origin. In the middle we see a black-and-white part that references the 1965 communist genocide. The shape of this part is a smoking chimney. On top we find a jury of commoners with the title of the work people's justice, and just underneath animalistic figures that are locked up. On the right we see a community of people eating, dancing, cooking, plowing the land, and protesting Monsanto and the world bank, among others.

The artwork clearly combines Indonesian and international symbols and references. Itreferences and reverts the triptychs of Netherlandish painters such as Lucas van Leyden and Hieronymus Bosch. The form of banner, where the middle panel sticks out, and the inclusion of clouds and idyllic elements such as the swan swimming in a lake opens the work to a comparison of Van Leyden's Day of Judgement (1526-1527) (fig. 51). People's Justice also reverts this painting: God is replaced with a tribunal of commoners, and the order of panels is reversed to suggest that first there is hell, in Suharto's regime on the left, but that through an act of justice in the middle we can move towards a more just society. This process is never done, as protest is still an essential and dominant element in the final panel.

Many, but not all, words are in English. The over-the-top style reminds of underground comix and the grotesque visual languages of wayang theater. As Rothberg argues, jagged teeth, red eyes, and even pig faces, among other elements of the banner, are generalized symbols of evil that derive from Javanese shadow puppetry, which predates Nazism by

Figure 51 Lucas van Leyden, *Last Judgment*, 1526 – 1527, 269.5 x 184.8 cm (center), 264 x 76 cm (2 sides), oil on panel. Collectie Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden

centuries. Thus, it appears that the most disturbing of the images represents a mixture of imported European and "domestic" visual languages (Rothberg 2022).

His insistence on the mixture of these two languages is important: we should not read the artwork as an exclusively Indonesian artefact, but we should also not discard the "domestic" references. However, I am not convinced we can separate these languages, as they impact one

another the moment they are put into contact. By differentiating Indonesian (domestic) and international elements, we set up a core of Eurocentric elements that are "borrowed" and can be easily understood, and "domestic" supplements that Höttemann simply ignores in his analysis because he cannot fully makes sense of them. Australian historian A. Dirk Moses argues that "one central point [of postcolonial studies] is to understand the metropole and colony as a single unit in which flows of information, people, and culture takes place" (Moses 2021). Also in a postcolonial context, it is impossible to understand Indonesian visual culture in isolation from European visual cues.

The carboard puppets are rarely mentioned as part of the artwork, but they are essential to the activist nature of Taring Padi's method. Indonesian historian and member of Taring Padi Alexander Supartono explained how

Taring Padi usually works. 4 Members of the collective visit a village or town and ask locals about pressing issues. Together with the local community they organize a protest march and create one large collective work that is visually and politically explicit. People's Justice was made during several days in a communal building. People would sometimes sleep on the canvas and others would paint around that person. Then, locals are invited to make their own personal cardboard puppets on wooden[3] sticks. These act, in Supartono's words, as a defense against the sun and police violence during the protest march. As a result, the artworks we saw at documenta were the outcome of a performance piece, made of inexpensive and locally available materials, and did not have an inherent value that we usually attribute to collectible artworks.

Conclusion

In the debates around Taring Padi's contentious use of antisemitic stereotypes, we see how the exclusionary European politics of memory, with Germany as a beacon nation, sets up a border between the European community and its outside. The memory of the Holocaust is placed at the core of that political community, feeding discourses on human rights and defending democratic values around the globe. By attaching the antisemitism to Taring Padi, Europe's complicity in the production and circulation of antisemitism is concealed. As a counterargument, some commentators pointed out that the antisemitism "traveled" from Europe to Indonesia and now returned as a boomerang to hit us in the face. The problem with those arguments is that it again separates Indonesia from a European visual culture and alienates "domestic" elements, rendering the actual memories of the Indonesian genocide invisible. Instead of reading for traces of European colonial culpability in the work of Taring Padi, we should look at the surface of the artwork to understand the syncretic nature of the underlying visual culture that is neither Indonesian nor global.

The European memory politics is partially founded on site-specific memory practices: standing at a specific location where part of history took place instills a moral responsibility, as illustrated by the kneeling of Willy Brandt. This is why commentators argued that Taring Padi's insensitivity was especially offensive in light of Germany's history and Kassel's wartime

3 Alexander Supartono was invited to speak at the conference "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on documenta fifteen" on 23 and 24 September, 2022, organized by Framer Framed.

destruction. This speaks to a broader insistence on spatial memory which is based on the basic semiotic principle of indexical contiguity or nearness (Violi 2012) . The meaning we attached to sites is not inherent to those sites, but the outcome of a performed, curated and imagined interaction between site and visitor that is naturalized through an assumed fixity of matter and location. The principle of nearness enables the proliferation of spatial memory where the borders of sites become porous and their meaning expands and takes over neighboring spaces (Duindam 2019). This points at two interlocked issues. First, the way memories are attached and fixed to locations is obscured which stratifies an essentially dynamic semiotic process. Second, this prioritizes events that took place at these sites and sets these apart from events and histories elsewhere, such as colonial crimes that were committed outside of what we commonly define as Europe. This is a structural problem attached to the broader difficulty memory studies has in dealing with postcolonial memories (Craps and Keightley 2019).

If we remain within the metaphors of sites and travel, we continue to uphold a model of center and periphery that departs from a Eurocentric mode of understanding how memory works. Rather than traveling from the metropole to the periphery, we can evoke Taring Padi's insistence on nonkrong, hanging out with people and talking about nothing in particular in order to forge unexpected friendships. This unnerves the tension felt by some commentators in regards to the togetherness and proximity of memories that are seen as incomparable and allow us think anew the entangled connections between memories of colonialism and the Holocaust.

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About the Author

David Duindam is Assistant Professor of Colonial Heritage and the Shoah in the Netherlands at the University of Amsterdam. He is board member of the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture and teaches at the department of Literary and Cultural Analysis. His research focuses on memory, sites of painful heritage and memorial museums. His monograph *Fragments of the Holocaust* investigates the postwar history of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, a former theater and deportation center that now is a Holocaust memorial site and museum in Amsterdam. He coordinated the European research network "Digital Memory of the Shoah," and organized the international conference "Materialities of Postcolonial Memory." Currently he is working on the entanglement of Holocaust and colonial memories in Indonesia in relation to his Indonesian and Jewish family history.

12 Objects Despite Everything

Testimonial Objects Between Memory and Trauma

Patrizia Violi

Abstract
This essay aims to analyse the memorial function carried out by objects belonging to people imprisoned in concentration camps. It refers to objects taken from the victims or sometimes laboriously constructed by them, that are now conserved and exposed in museums and memory sites. These objects can be classified as *serial objects* and *singular objects*. Serial objects are those that we often see in most Holocaust museums, characterised by the repetition of different items: masses of shoes, piles of glasses, mountains of used clothes. These are governed by a quantitative logic of accumulation that cancels all traces of their individuality. Singular objects, on the contrary, have a non-reproducible character, as fragile and precious uniqueness. These are not, as in the case of serial objects, things taken away and violently snatched from the victims, but objects that the victims themselves have kept, sometimes created, that they managed to conceal from the surveillance of the jailers. While serial objects de-subjectify victims, singular ones seek to re-subjectify them, as forms of resistance.

Keywords: Objects; Materiality; Memory; Creativity; Concentration Camps; Victims.

The Secret Power of Objects

Objects, in their concrete materiality, seem to be endowed with a strange and mysterious power, a power that stems from their contiguity with our person: they are close to us, silent but present, they accompany us in the course of time, they become part of our daily life almost without us realising it. We

Saloul, Ihab, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and Cristina Demaria (eds): *Questioning Traumatic Heritage. Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726856_CH12

become attached to certain objects despite their possible insignificance: one pen, similar to so many others and yet different, we want to write with only that one. That jumper, now shabby yet we do not want to give it away, and we continue to patch it up; that knick-knack, useless, even ugly, but a fond reminder of a particular moment in the past. Sometimes we establish a relationship with objects that can even become disturbing, as in the case of certain forms of manic collecting, when it is not so much the economic or aesthetic value of what is collected that is at stake, but an obsessive need for totality and an impossible completeness, as in the case of collectors of matchboxes or bottle caps. Objects are part of our identity and at the same time signs of a relationship not only with the objects themselves, but also with the people who are somehow connected to them – because they gifted the objects to us or were with us when we bought them. For this reason, we become deeply attached to some objects, endowing them with a special symbolic and emotional value.

There are many dimensions we can consider in the study of objects: the affective above all, but also identitarian, relational and perhaps above all memorial. Objects are anchoring points of memory; when they belong to those who are no longer there, they acquire for those who remain a very strong emotional charge that is difficult to describe, to the point of sometimes becoming forms of relics, which not only remind us those who are no longer there, but almost stand in the place of them, in a sort of metonymic relationship of contiguity. It is no coincidence that the Colombian artist Erika Diettes titled her beautiful installation, dedicated to the dead of the more than 40-year civil war that has bloodied her country, *Reliquarios*. The work consists of more than one hundred parallelepipeds of a special transparent resin, each containing an object that belonged to a victim, chosen and donated by family and friends in memory of their loved one. It is precisely this memorial relationship that I will deal with in this chapter, focusing mainly on the objects preserved at memorial sites, generally belonging to the victims who were imprisoned there. Objects taken from them, or hidden and laboriously preserved by those same victims, sometimes even constructed by them directly.

"Things That Are Not Things"[1]

Why talk of objects and not things? What is the difference between the two terms, and how can this be interpreted? It should be noted right away

1 The quotation is a sentence by Giacomo Leopardi in a strongly nihilistic page on evil in the Bolognese *Zibaldone*, 4174 of 22 April 1826, which has no reference to the question of objects. I

that the two lexemes, although evidently referring to the same semantic area and even being largely overlapping in current linguistic usage, do not have exactly the same meaning, nor the same etymology. *Thing* comes from Proto-Germanic *thinga-* "assembly"

> Old English *þing* "meeting, assembly, council, discussion", later "entity, being, matter" (subject of deliberation in an assembly), also "act, deed, event, material object, body, being, creature,"). [...] The sense "meeting, assembly" did not survive Old English. For sense evolution, compare French *chose*, Spanish *cosa* "thing", from Latin *causa* "judicial process, lawsuit, case"; Latin *res* "affair, thing", also "case at law, cause" (*Online Ethimology Dictionary*)[2].

Object comes from Latin *obiectum*, past participle of the verb *obicere* ("to present, oppose, cast in the way of,") meaning thrown against, placed before.

> late 14c., "tangible thing, something perceived with or presented to the senses", from Old French *object* and directly from Medieval Latin *obiectum* "thing put before" (the mind or sight), noun use of neuter of Latin *obiectus* "lying before, opposite" (as a noun in classical Latin, "charges, accusations"), past participle from *ob* "in front of, towards, against" (see **ob**-) + *iacere* "to throw" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*)

In the dictionary[3] we find the following definitions:

> Thing: 1. Some entity, object or creature which is not or cannot be specifically designated or precisely described or named. 2. An abstract quality or entity; that which is or may become an object of thought
> 3. Fact, event, circumstance, situation or state of affairs. 4. An action, deed, event or performance. 5. A particular respect or detail. 6. Aim, objective, motive, purpose. 7. Word, speech, statement.
>
> Object: 1. Anything that is visible or tangible and is stable in form. 2. Everything that can be perceived by the senses. 3. Thing obtained by

use it here in a completely different context and with a completely different meaning.

2 See *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=thing&ref=searchbar_searchhint.

3 The Random House Dictionary of the English Language: The Unabridged Edition.

> processing a raw material. 4. Anything with reference to the impression made on the mind or the feeling or emotion elicited in an observer. 5. Term to which feelings tend or which constitutes the purpose of an activity, behaviour and the like.

Even without a more detailed analysis, one can see how the two terms cover partially different areas: *thing* appears more generic and inclusive: it can be a situation, a fact, an event, a cause, a motive, a word, thus widening its semantic spectrum to almost any indefinite, concrete or abstract instance. Object is more specific and maintains a stronger bond with a precisely delimited material entity. But above all, and most importantly, the term *object* is defined in relation to its complementary term *subject*, in its grammatical and linguistic meaning but also in its more general, philosophical one. It does not therefore seem unfounded to think of a shift from things to objects, where the object not only defines a more determinate entity, but also implies a more precise relationship with the subject. In what follows I will consider objects as *things invested with an affective value for subjects*.

Of course, one may well give a different and even opposite interpretation: the Italian philosopher Remo Bodei (2009), for example, proposes an inverse path and reads things as that towards which one has an affective investment. The two interpretations are both possible and present in the literature on things/objects; however, I prefer to speak of objects precisely because it seems to me that they have a more definite bond with subjects than things do. Objects are the result of an action that someone has performed on them, transforming their original substance. Hence, they appear to be endowed with an intentionality that things do not necessarily have: a stone is a thing, but the moment it is transformed into the tip of an arrow it becomes an object. The intentionality that characterises objects derives from a subjective investment, from a certain work that someone has done on the material, an investment that is pragmatic but also affective. In this sense, one can speak of objects as "affectively invested things" by the subjects who enter into relation with them. It is precisely for this reason that objects play an important role in defining identity: they are imbued with elements that characterise the individuality of each of us to the point of constituting a qualifying intra-subjective dimension of a specific individual identity.

It is precisely this highly individualised and identity-driven aspect of objects – not by chance, referred to as "personal objects" – that underlies the spoliation rituals at the entrance to prisons and places of detention. In all concentration camps, from those constructed by the Nazis to those of Latin American dictatorships, prisoners are immediately stripped of

their clothes, shoes and anything else that belongs to them, as a ritual of degradation that takes the form of identity annihilation.[4] Personal objects are the material elements linked to individuality and they always differ, even slightly, from person to person; we choose them and we are often attached to and fond of them.

Serial Objects and Singular Objects

If we think of the objects of memorial sites, be they memorials or places of trauma (Violi 2017), the first image that comes to mind is that of the "serial object": the mountains of shoes that characterise almost all Holocaust museums, the piles of glasses, those of used clothes. An unavoidable suspicion accompanies their actual authenticity: are they "really" the original shoes or rather a carefully staged set-up? I will not address this delicate yet irrelevant issue here; it is more relevant to note how the form of accumulation has become a symbolic image in Holocaust representations. It is no coincidence, I think, that Christian Boltanski, perhaps the artist who has worked most on the relationship between objects and memory, has often used mountains of clothes for his most famous installations. In this sense, one particularly memorable installation is the one held at the Grand Palais in Paris, later resumed at the Bicocca hangar in Milan, in which enormous piles of used clothes filled the entire space.

Serial objects are *token-objects*,[5] i.e., occurrences that repeat an ideal type, namely *the shoe*, *the pair of glasses*, *the suit*: objects that are all the same, deprived of any specific singularity. What counts is not *that* pair of shoes, *that* jacket, *that* suitcase, but the status of being the representative, the *token* of a *type*, that is, of a general category. Their specific difference, the mark and sign of the individual, disappears in the process of accumulation: what counts is repeatability, not the uniqueness and difference of each individual object. And it is perhaps in this contrast between the singularity of the object and its accumulation that the symbolic power and emotional impact of the serial objects is hidden: they speak to us of the uniqueness of those who possessed, chose, wore those objects, and at the same time of the monstrous uniformity of the extermination that erased that uniqueness.

4 On degradation rituals in prisons, see Foucault 1975 and Calveiro 2014 for practices in the Latin American military dictatorships.

5 On the relationship between *token* and *type,* see Eco 1975.

Serial objects are at the same time also traces of their owners, to whom they refer by metonymic relationship with the body: they still bear its imprints, tiny fragments, even the smell. There is something profoundly perturbing in this double dimension, which is perfectly captured by Boltanski in the *Museo per la Memoria di Ustica* in Bologna, dedicated to the tragedy of Itavia DC-9 that exploded mid-flight, struck by a NATO missile, on 27 June 1980. Here, personal belongings of the victims that were recovered from the sea after the plane sank are not on display, but closed in eight large black boxes, similar to sarcophagi placed on the sides of the plane's wreckage and thus removed from the sight and curiosity surrounding the remains of the dead. Before they were closed, however, they were photographed one by one, in black and white, and reproduced in a booklet that is given to visitors at the end of their visit to the museum. The booklet groups them into thematic series: wallets, glasses, shoes and so on. This hence constitutes an operation of extraordinary and sophisticated intelligence, demonstrating the extent to which the artist has understood the dynamics, affections and emotions that invest the objects of those who are no longer there. Indeed, in the case of Ustica, they have been both removed from view in their unbearable concrete reality, and restored through the photographic image, hyper-realistic in its details and ghostly in the fixity of black and white. By consciously moving between concealment and representation, the Ustica Museum is exemplary of the emotional but also ethical and aesthetic complexity of our relationship with the objects of the dead, and not only the dead of massacres and traumas.[6]

However, memory sites do not contain just serial objects. Sometimes visitors can also encounter another kind of object, belonging to a category that I will call "singular objects", to indicate their non-reproducible character, as well as their fragile and precious uniqueness. Present above all in some memory sites in Latin America, these are not, as in the case of serial objects, things violently snatched from the victims, but objects that the victims themselves have kept, or perhaps created themselves, and managed to hide from their jailers. They are rare objects because – unlike the serial-objects governed by the quantitative logic of accumulation – the latter are specifically not numerous, since the nature of imprisonment allowed very little space for action and conservation. Anything discovered by the prison guards would be likely be destroyed. Unique, non-repeatable, non-serialisable objects: "singular objects" are small personal items like a handkerchief, a needle and thread, a few buttons, drawings, tiny books patiently made

6 On the Ustica Museum see Violi 2017.

from scraps of paper recovered who knows how, or small bread statuettes meticulously crafted and used as improvised pieces in a moving game of chess, formed with infinite patience. They are objects that were perhaps taken from jailers' searches and preserved, or hidden with shared cunning from cell inspections.

These objects were hence the result of an action that gave the victims back an, albeit minimal, active and creative position. The prisoners were often bound and blindfolded, unable to do anything; in such a condition, regaining even a miniscule action was a significant act of freedom that allowed them to escape, even momentarily, the concentrationary regulation that forced them into total sensory and praxic deprivation. It is precisely this active position, this *agency* we might say, that seems to me of extraordinary interest: in the face of the perpetrators' rituals of annihilation, these objects express a force of resistance even under the most extreme conditions. The techniques of degradation and de-subjectivation implemented in the concentrationary universe are opposed by strategies of re-subjectivation on the part of the victims, forms of identity re-appropriation that become true acts of resistance.

Objects are elements of sense density, where multiple meanings are stratified: small spaces of freedom removed from control, forms of regaining subjectivity, ingenious and creative realisations, practices that become claims of life and resistance. It is not necessary to think of these dimensions as intentionally conscious in the actions of subjects; *agency* can be distributed in the interaction between human beings, inanimate things and activities, as Lambros Malafouris (2013), introducing the concept of "material agency". His theory essentially traces how human cognition develops within a horizon in which brain, body, things and actions play equally central roles; however, we can also apply it with a relevant and connected extension to the case of testimonial objects, as they have been defined by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2006). This helps to understand more clearly how they play a role within the process of meaning construction of actions.

Singular objects are essentially relational objects, they establish a relationship between themselves and subjects, but also and especially between different subjects. Exchanged, circulated, used in a communal way, they are bearers of transformative relationships of great symbolic and emotional value. Emblematic in this sense is the story of a blanket on display at the *La Perla* site in Cordoba, a former detention and torture centre during the military dictatorship. The blanket was passed from one prisoner to the other, to cover themselves in the absence of clothes. When a prisoner was called to be led out, which meant death, that person would take off the

blanket and hand it to another prisoner so that he or she could in turn cover themselves. In this way, the blanket literally became the witness of a tragic relay, but also the living testimony of someone who was about to lose her life, and who donated that poor but precious object to those left behind.

We could define the blanket as an object that mediates between subjects, bringing it ideally close to those *faitiches* analysed, albeit in another context, by Bruno Latour (1996).[7] Confronting seemingly opposite terms such as fact and fetish, which refer respectively to an objective element of reality and to a subjective belief, Latour created the neologism *faitiche* that encompasses both by merging them. The *faitiche* is "the robust certainty that allows practice to move into action without ever believing in the difference between construction and recollection, immanence and transcendence". (Latour 1996: 66). If these words indeed seem somewhat obscure, their relevant lies in the nature of mediation between subjects that *faitiches* indicate, as hybrid objects that relate subjects to each other: a football among players, or money or a virus among people, to give just three very different examples. The story of the blanket has a particularly significant outcome. When the clandestine detention centre *La Perla* was finally closed, the last person in possession of the blanket was a prisoner who never wanted to part with it for over thirty years, keeping it close to her on the many journeys that followed her release. She agreed to donate it to the *La Perla* site,[8] where it is still on display today. She opted to do so only after she had testified publicly at the trial against her perpetrators, as if only speech could allow the "right" kind of distance from the object, something that was previously unthinkable. In the testimony given, her mute and painful emotion can finally speak and be shared, no longer embedded in an object that was previously at one with the woman's body; finally freed, the object could acquire its own autonomous existence. A radical shift at the level of enunciation transforms the form of memory and the very relationship with the object: the memory that was previously inseparable from the materiality of the object can now become discourse, and the blanket can be exhibited to the public in a museum, the place par excellence of a shared memory, the memory of all and not just of one.

The word that liberated the victim, however, is not just any word, it is a *public* word that takes shape in the scene of a trial, a legal testimony that will lead to the conviction of the perpetrators. It is the word-testimony

7 Latour created the term in his research on the notions of belief and knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, therefore extending a reflection that he had initiated in his infamous fieldwork at a Californian neuroendocrinology institute in 1979.

8 Today la Perla is a memory museum.

pronounced in a courtroom before judges who will sanction the violence with a sentence that will enable the transformation; it is the word that will finally bring justice. This story suggests to us that only justice can allow a distance from the painful memory of the body, from its inseparable relationship with the object. But perhaps it also helps us to better understand the emotional investments and multiple senses that "memorial objects", the true focal points of memory, can adopt: they are real objects, but also representations; they refer to the totality but can be invested with an absolute singularity; they are tangible proof of mass violence that cancels out all differences, and at the same time witnesses to the irrepressible individuality of each and every one. The mountains of shoes in Nazi concentration camps are still made up of individual, different shoes, the shoes of men, women and children that different human beings wore, unmoulded, modified, leaving their unique and unmistakable imprint; we can see them as an indistinct mass, or we can detect a singular trace in each of them.

The moving bread statuettes patiently constructed by prisoners and hidden with maniacal attention from jailers' inspections speak to us of imagination and creativity, of an irrepressible transformative drive of matter into form, and at the same time of the capacity of these objects to retroact on the subjects, creating relationships, affection and play. They are witnesses of a tenacious resistance to horror and death, and ultimately witnesses of life and freedom.

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About the Author

Patrizia Violi is an Alma Mater Professor at the University of Bologna and the founder of 'TraMe – Centre for the Semiotic Study of Memory' at the same university. She was director of the 'Centro Internazionale di Studi Umberto Eco' and PI of various European funded projects on trauma and urban space. She has published internationally on the relationship between trauma and memory, with a specific focus on Chile, Argentina and Colombia. Her latest publications include *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Space, History* (2017), and *Reading Memory Sites Through Signs: Hiding into Landscape* (2023).

Index

Activism 235
Affect 58, 207, 209, 212
Agency 37, 98
Alejandra Naftal 9, 14, 21, 36
Allegory 61
Amie Dicke 71, 73, 78
Amnesia 81
Ann Rigney 18, 232
Anonymity 99
Antisemitism 225, 233, 240
Architectures 81
Archive 37, 48, 58, 61, 69, 74, 78, 79, 96
Archive Fever 74, 78
Argentina 4, 7, 11, 21, 26, 28, 31, 32, 33, 36, 101
Argentinian dictatorship 21
Arnisa Zeqo 70
Art 8, 21, 26, 28, 30, 43, 47, 54, 58, 61, 69, 78, 79, 98, 101, 104, 105, 107, 108, 240
Art and Memory 8, 101
Art-based research 61
Artistic-political ritual 118
AURA exhibition 71

Black British 208
Body 81, 95
Bruno Latour 250
Buena Memoria (Good Memory) 37
Buenos Aires 14, 21, 32, 33, 36, 37, 99, 251

Cape Coast Castle 206, 207, 208
Castrum Peregrini 61, 62, 65, 66, 71, 77, 78, 79
Cauca River 15, 103, 104, 106, 107, 115, 116
Christopher Frayling 69
Claude Lanzmann 215, 216, 219, 221
Claustrophobic 71
Claus Victor Bock 71
Cold War 82
Collective Memory 18, 212
Colombia 4, 7, 13, 15, 58, 99, 101, 102, 103, 105, 106, 109
Colombian artist 12, 14, 39, 103, 244
Colombian Conservative Party 107
Colonialism 225
Comisión Histórica del Conflicto Armado y sus Víctimas 109
Communicative Interaction 107
Concentration Camp 90, 243
Conflict 18, 21, 58, 81, 211, 212
Creativity 243
Cristina Demaria 3, 7
Critique 222
Cultural Heritage 211, 212
Cultural Memory 18

Deportation 89, 95
Derrida 46, 69, 74, 78
Description 235
Dialogue 37, 78
Diaspora 210
Dissonant Heritage 18
Documenta 15 12, 225, 228, 229, 230, 231, 233
Doris Salcedo 11, 12, 14, 39, 42, 43, 47, 51, 57, 58
Double Bind 215
Dutch colonialism 229

Elie Wiesel 215, 218
El Olimpo 16
Empathy 40
England 58, 212
Epistolary Section 76
Ernst Gombrich 68
ESMA Museum and Site of Memory 14, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36
Espacio para la Memoria Ex ESMA 37
Ethics 222
European Research Project 7
Evidentiality 115
Exile 9, 18, 58, 70, 79, 212

Faitiches 251
Fanaticism 62, 78
Fashion 75
Festivity ritual 118
Fiction 61, 69, 77, 219, 222
Fiction-based art 77
Forgetting 82

Gaston Bachelard 71
Gender 251
Genocide 222, 225
Georges Didi-Huberman 10, 87, 215, 219
Georges Perec 84, 87
Germany 67, 79, 83, 90, 98, 228, 229, 231, 232, 233, 238
Geuzen 75
Ghana 17, 208
Gisèle 62, 64, 65, 66, 68, 72, 75, 76, 79

H401 15, 61, 63, 67, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 77
Hal Foster 74
Hans-Georg Gadamer 68
Haroldo Conti Cultural Center 37
Henk Slager 72
Herengracht 401 (H401) 14, 61
Hermeneutic gap 61
Historikerstreit 2.0 17, 225, 229, 235
History 18, 32, 52, 53, 57, 58, 64, 67, 98, 99, 211, 240, 252

Holocaust 11, 13, 17, 18, 58, 93, 98, 209, 211, 212, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 229, 231, 232, 233, 235, 238, 239, 240, 241, 243, 247
Holocaust Cinema 215
Holocaust memory 17, 231, 232, 235
Holocaust Memory 215, 217
Human Rights 14, 16, 21, 37
Hungary 16
Hypermnesia 81

Identification 222
Identity 58, 211
Ihab Saloul 2, 3, 7, 9, 44, 59, 70
Imagination 9, 18, 70, 79, 212
Indonesian Genocide 225
In Search of Lost Time 73
International Slavery Museum 17, 206, 207, 208, 209
Interpretation 207, 211
Inter-religious Dialogue 37
Irrepresentability 215

Juan Manuel Santos 109
Justice 17, 64, 113, 225, 227, 228, 229, 233, 234, 235, 236, 238, 240

Kathy Carbone 62

Latin America 101, 102, 246, 247, 248
Levy and Sznaider 110
Liselotte von Gandersheim 74

Madres de Plaza de Mayo 24, 26
Magdalenas por el Cauca 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 107, 108, 112, 113, 114, 116
Marianne Hirsch 2, 10, 13, 44, 249
Maritze Trigos 114
Materiality 243
Meaning-making 102
Mediation 18
Mediatisation 107
Melancholia 211
Memory 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 48, 53, 58, 59, 62, 75, 77, 78, 79, 80, 82, 85, 98, 99, 101, 103, 107, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 215, 217, 222, 225, 232, 233, 240, 241, 243, 251, 252
Memory Processes 101
Memory Studies 2, 10, 16, 101, 215
Memory work 77
Michael Defuster 65
Michael Rothberg 2, 10, 233
Michiel van Iersel 71
Mondrian Fund 72
Movement 45, 95
Multimodal 111
Museums 37, 206, 207, 209, 210, 211, 212, 240

Narrative 59
National Directorate of Museums 37
National Museum of Fine Arts 37
National Secretariat of Culture 37
Nazi occupation 14, 16, 61, 64
Netherlands 2, 11, 13, 16, 61, 64, 68, 241

Objects 45, 58, 206, 210, 243, 244, 246, 247, 249, 251
Oral Archive of Memoria Abierta 37

Palimpsest 44
Palimpsesto 14, 39, 46, 47, 50, 51, 57
Parque de la Memoria 37
Parque de la Memoria – Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism 37
Paterson 110
Patrizia Violi 2, 3, 7, 8, 17, 243
Peregrinación Trujillo 104, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111
Performativity 205, 210
Pierre Nora 8
Plegaria Muda 51, 52, 54, 55, 57, 58
Post-Conflict 81
Post-Conflict Memorials 81
Postmemory 18, 58, 212
Primo Levi 88, 218, 221, 222

Relationship 211
Religious ritual 118
Remembering 18, 81, 82, 83, 210, 240
Remembrance 212
Renée Turner 75, 77
Representation 18, 79, 211, 212
Research 7, 78, 79, 101, 211
Resistance 90, 98, 99
Robert Pfaller 70
Ronit Porat 73, 75
ruangrupa 225, 228, 235

Salcedo 11, 12, 14, 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58
Sculpture 45, 58
Second World War 61, 88, 91, 97
Semantic Tapestry 76
Semiotic Landscape 110, 112
Semiotics 222, 251
Serial Objects 247
Shoah 87, 93, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 231, 241
Singularity 56
Singular Objects 247
Space 14, 18, 71, 78, 107, 252
Spaces of Memory 3, 4, 7, 79, 101
SPEME 4, 7, 36, 59, 62, 79, 101
Spiritual and memorialisation ritual 118
State Terrorism 37
Suharto 17, 225, 228, 234, 235, 236

Survivor 208, 211
Symbolic Reparation 104

Taring Padi 17, 225, 227, 228, 229, 230, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240
Tension 82
Testimonial Objects 243, 251
The Poetics of Space 71, 78
The Warp and Weft of Memory 75, 80
Transmission 251
Transnational Memory 225
Trauma 18, 41, 59, 61, 64, 79, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 239, 240, 243, 252
Traumatic Heritage 3, 4, 7, 101

UK 17, 33, 78, 93, 210, 211, 236
Uprooted 39, 42, 43, 52, 55, 57

Valle del Cauca 108, 113
Verzetsmuseum 15
Vincent Weyand 64, 74
Violence 212, 240
Visual-graphic memory 118

Walter Benjamin 53, 67, 71
Witness 222
Wolfgang Frommel 62, 64, 65, 79
World War II 15, 33, 81, 231, 232

X Peregrinación Trujillo 104, 106, 107, 108, 111