of people coming together in the same place at the same time. At least since John Locke, political theory, and later sociology, has insisted on characterising that mass in terms of irrationality, disorder, lack of discipline and even criminality.[7] But Elias Canetti's crowd, or Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde's *foule*, even if necessarily short-lived, impulsive, paranoid, driven by emotions and in constant need of discharge, is also the modern political subject — one that comes together in a specific context and as a response to a specific situation, in order to actually change it.[8] The crowd is one of the few instances in which differences disappear, and, as Canetti writes in *Crowds and Power* (1960), within it, at a certain point, all who are part of it feel equal.[9]

The two contextual essays printed in this issue discuss examples of group activity that show how this collective political subject can form and operate. Marion von Osten's essay on the 'project exhibition' examines new forms of interdisciplinary exhibition practice that consolidated during the 1990s and which might shift our understanding of work within the artistic and, by extension, cultural arena.[10] That moment of equality that Canetti points towards is perhaps most radically present in the essay that opens this issue, in which Ana Longoni examines the visual strategies adopted by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and other human-rights groups in Argentina in their fight to raise awareness about the crimes committed by the dictatorship in power during the 1970s and early 80s, and to reclaim the return of those who had disappeared during those years. The activist groups that emerged during that time and which continued once a democratic system was reinstated — a system that for many years failed to recognise the crimes of the military regime — were formed as a response to a political system of annihilation of dissent or resistance. The Mothers and those around them reactivated that resistance through visual strategies that encapsulated the modern tension between the recognition of the individual (the missing person, through the passport or family photograph) and his or her incorporation within the mass acting together as a body of political significance. In their actions, the Mothers embraced that ideal of authenticity that, as Berman writes, articulates men and women's 'deepest responses to the modern world and their most intense hopes for a new life in it'.[11]

7 Louis Chevalier, in *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la moitié du XIX siècle* (Paris: Editions Perrin, 1958), maintains that there is such a similarity between the dangerous classes and the working classes that it is difficult to tell them apart.
8 See Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (trans. Carol Stewart), New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984; Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 1963; and Gabriel Tarde, *L'Opinion et la foule*, Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2008.
9 E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, *op. cit.*, p.17.
10 This essay is also the first of the series of texts that Afterall will be commissioning during the next three years as a contribution to the FORMER WEST project.
11 M. Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, *op. cit.*, p.312.

Photographs and Silhouettes: Visual Politics in the Human Rights Movement of Argentina

– Ana Longoni

'They wanted to be seen. It was an obsession. [...] They realised that their own image as mothers was, in its own way, imposing a different reality.'[1] This quote is taken from the comprehensive history of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an association of mothers that formed in 1977 to draw awareness to the disappearance of their sons and daughters during the Argentine dictatorship of 1976–83.[2] The excerpt, from a history of the movement by Ulises Gorini, makes explicit how crucial the visual dimension was to their strategy from the outset — that is, the production of symbols that would identify and unite the Mothers as a group, and at the same time grant them the visibility to appeal to other families whose relatives had also disappeared, to Argentinean society and to the international community. The quote also signals the distinct will and awareness that were put into play when it came to conceiving these symbolic resources of visibility. In the midst of the 'concentrationary' terror,[3] during which the state's terrorism established nearly 500 repression and extermination centres, where about 30,000 people disappeared — and even before a collective name had been assumed for the group — the first Mothers recognised each other by carrying a carpenter's nail in their hand. Soon afterwards, they started wearing the white headscarves that became their emblem. Later, they started embroidering these headscarves with the names of their loved ones and the fateful dates of their disappearance.

Among the different creative strategies developed by the Mothers and other relatives within the human-rights movement under the dictatorship, we can identify and compare two matrixes in the visual representations of the disappeared: on the one hand, the photographs; and on the other hand, the silhouettes, outlines of hands and masks.[4] These matrixes emerged (almost) in parallel, and each possesses a long history that I will try to summarise here without setting them in opposition to each other. Instead I will focus on the meanings mobilised by their different resources and modes of symbolic production, and will try to recover the historical coordinates in which these visual elements gained the status of signs that, both inside and outside Argentina, refer unequivocally to the disappeared — as they have now become, for many people, 'part of a universal symbolic language'.[5]

Ana Longoni looks at the aesthetic implications of the visual strategies of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, in their protests and remembrances of those who disappeared under the Argentinian dictatorship of the 1970s and 80s.

Photographs

The Mothers first took recourse to photographs to represent the disappeared in the early days of the dictatorship, when they visited police stations, hospitals, government offices

1 Ulises Gorini, *La rebelión de las Madres*, vol.1, Buenos Aires: Norma, 2006, p.117.
2 This military dictatorship, which called itself the 'Process of National Reorganisation', carried out the selective killing of their political opponents.
3 This is a direct translation of the term '*concentracionario*', which Pilar Calveiro uses to refer to the paralysis that took hold of Argentinean society when state terrorism was activated, spreading its semi-clandestine activity well beyond the nearly five-hundred concentration camps where thousands of people disappeared. See Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición*, Buenos Aires: Colihue, 1997.
4 In Ana Amado's words, 'the relatives of the victims of the genocidal dictatorship made use of creative forms of expression in their public interventions in order to combine agitation and denunciation of the crimes with intimate images of pain and the work of mourning'. Ana Amado, 'Órdenes de la memoria y desórdenes de la ficción', in A. Amado and Nora Domínguez, *Lazos de familia*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2004, p.43.
5 Victoria Langland, 'Fotografía y memoria', in Elizabeth Jelin and Ana Longoni (ed.), *Escrituras, imágenes y escenarios ante la represión*, Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2005, p.88.

and churches searching in vain for news of their sons and daughters. In these quests the Mothers capitalised on the function that photography has performed for over a century within the family realm — that is, to document family life — while also using photography as many have done in the spontaneous search for any lost person.

Very soon after their formation, the Mothers made small posters with these photographs, wearing them on their bodies or holding them up as they demonstrated around the Plaza de Mayo or on their visits to officials. In this way, the Mothers inaugurated a prolific genealogy for the public use of photography in the struggle of the human-rights movement against the official denial of the killings. These images of the disappeared reaffirmed the existence of a biography that predated these subjects' kidnapping, an existence that was categorically negated by the regime. Those who disappeared had a name, a face, an identity, as well as a family who were looking for them and reclaiming their appearance. The photographs (usually an individual portrait) possessed a proof value — they are 'that minimal proof of existence in the face of a growing incertitude'.[6] Paraphrasing Roland Barthes's famous proposition, the photograph declares *that this was, this took place: this person existed*.[7] As Nelly Richard points out, 'if the photographic apparatus contains this temporal ambiguity of what *still is* and what *no longer is* (of that which is suspended between life and death, between appearing and disappearing), such ambiguity gets over-dramatised in the case of the photographic portrait of the disappeared'.[8]

In their use by the Mothers, these images departed from their intimate use as family remembrances and moved towards mass exhibition in a public space. In that shift, each individual image left behind 'its private rituality to become an active instrument of public protest'.[9] The photographs of the faces became a collective sign, each one of those traces of a singular life metonymically representing all of the disappeared. The shift from intimate to public use began with the Mothers' decision — at the beginning of their organisation, during a still spontaneous and decentralised stage — to wear the photographs of their beloveds on their bodies during the demonstrations, thus denoting the strength of the family tie that linked the missing with the one wearing his or her portrait. The photograph also condensed in an image the reason for the Mothers' being there, and (re)generated the bond between those who dared to demonstrate in the midst of terror.[10]

In April 1983, the parents of a disappeared young woman, two committed human-rights activists who had a small photography laboratory at home, came up with an idea, a mammoth task that they undertook and financed on their own:[11] to gather all the photographs of the disappeared, blow them up to a considerable size (70 by 50 centimetres) and to mount them on cardboard over a T-shaped wooden plank for public viewing. Taken on by the Mothers, this simple procedure turned each photograph into a placard, onto which they wrote the name and the date of the kidnapping and sometimes information about the person's profession. In some cases, the information pertained to the person's family — for instance, that someone was the 'mother of two babies'. Other photographs had no information printed on them. In a few cases, the placards were made up of a collage of several photographs: individual pictures of a couple and their children, all of whom missing.

This idea initiated a crucial moment: the photographs were removed from the intimate (familiar) body in order to become a collective device. The photographs were literally raised to a height from which they could possibly address and interpellate an even larger number of people. Moreover, a *collectivisation* of the resources for exhibiting the photographs took place. For, from then on, both the production and the carrying of placards in demonstrations extended beyond the personal circle of the victims who were represented

6 Jean-Louis Déotte, 'El arte en la época de la desaparición', in Nelly Richard (ed.), *Políticas y estéticas de la memoria*, Santiago de Chile: Cuarto Propio, 2006, p.156.
7 See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (trans. Richard Howard), New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
8 N. Richard, 'Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras', in N. Richard (ed.), *Políticas y estéticas de la memoria*, *op. cit.*, p.166.
9 *Ibid.*, p.168.
10 Nora de Cortiñas, a mother from the Plaza de Mayo recalls: 'When we first began carrying a photograph with a name on the marches, we found that lots of friends of our children came up to us, they were not even aware that they had disappeared. [...] This is because their friends used nicknames to refer to them, so it was only when they saw the photograph with the real name that they found out. [...] That's how they identified us, they knew then "that is the mother of such and such boy or girl".' Unpublished interview with Nora de Cortiñas by Cora Gamarnik, Buenos Aires, 2009.
11 They were Santiago Mellibovsky and Matilde Saidler de Mellibovsky, whose daughter Graciela, a young economist, had disappeared in 1976.

in them. This shift had two important consequences. The first was a practical one: the production of a more-or-less centralised archive of photographs of the disappeared. The second was the definition of a visual politics: the sharp awareness of the impact that these faces — as they march among the crowd, or rather, above it — would have on the viewers.

Provenances

The photographs the mothers marched with were either photographs taken from family albums or blown-up versions of photographs from national identity or institutional cards. These two provenances have given rise to contrasting readings of the images. The photographs taken from family albums showed happy individuals in the midst of highlights in family histories (a wedding, a birthday, a holiday trip, the birth of a child, the beginning of a courtship, a friends' gathering, etc.). When they were chosen, they not only signalled the family ties that linked victims to those who demanded their reappearance, but also gave a glimpse of what had been a domestic order, before it was shattered by the violence of the state. As Richard has pointed out, in these photographs 'the latent tension between the past carelessness of the face that remains unaware of the imminent drama at the moment when the photograph was taken, and the present time from which we look tragically at the picture of someone who has subsequently become a victim of history, generates the desperate *punctum* that makes these photographs from the album of the disappeared so moving'.[12] On the other hand, she points out that those images taken from official documents isolate the missing person's identity, blurring his or her personal ties and placing him or her in an impersonal register.[13] While family photographs show a person protected by the preserved atmosphere of his or her private life, images with a bureaucratic origin show bodies that have been forcefully and unwillingly exposed to the violence of the state machinery. These photographs, says Richard, are evidence of the way individuals had been numbered, registered and prejudged by the mechanism of the state apparatus before, during and after the dictatorship. In them, she finds 'a matrix for the mass production of death that makes the subject "disappear" by deleting everything unique that he or she possesses (his or her life, face, name), making it identical to that which is repeated and standardised about the undocumented crowd of No Names'.[14] Therefore, 'the faces of the arrested-disappeared [...] have stamped on them the subjectification to the photographic and bodily apparatuses of social control that, after identifying and watching them, erased all traces of identification so that violence could not leave a trace of material execution nor authorship'.[15]

In their use by the Mothers, the photographs departed from their intimate use as family remembrances and moved towards mass exhibition in a public space. In that shift, each individual image left behind 'its private rituality to become an active instrument of public protest'.

However, I believe that when the Mothers and other relatives chose those photographs they subverted them, distancing them from their origins in state bureaucracy. This has the unexpected effect of interpolating the very state that ordered the disappearances, for it was the same state that had earlier fulfilled an identifying function, registering those individuals whose disappearance was later arranged and whose existence was now denied. The fact that the relatives used those photographs as evidence served to reveal and dramatise the paradoxical overlap between the state's control machinery and the state's machinery for the extermination and disappearance of its subjects, between identification and destruction, control and denial.[16] In this sense, the identity photographs belonging to

12 N. Richard, 'Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras', *op. cit.*, p.168.
13 'De-individualisation is a feature both of legal photography and social repression.', *Ibid.*, p.166.
14 *Ibid.*, p.167. Translator's note: The original uses the expression 'N.N.', as standing for the Latin *Nomen nescio* or 'name unknown'. In Latin America 'N.N.' is often used to refer to the nameless victims of dictatorial regimes.
15 *Ibid.*, pp.166—67.
16 This paradoxical logic was present as well inside the Argentinean concentration camps, where they carried on systematically photographing the prisoners and registering their confessions in writing (confessions that had been obtained by torture) in spite of the fact that the camps were illegal and clandestine. One can get a sense of this from the handful of secret documents that escaped the destruction of the archives ordered by the dictatorship before it withdrew from power.

Protesters tracing each other's silhouettes as part of the *Siluetazo*, Buenos Aires, 21 September 1983. Photograph: Eduardo Gil

the disappeared 'resignified the traditional uses of the type of photography that had been introduced in the country in the 1880s in order to identify criminals, which was later extended to the totality of citizens'.[17] Moreover, they contained 'a rare probative principle, characteristic of photography, of the "document" that bears witness, certifies and ratifies the existence of that individual'.[18] On the other hand, in some cases, it was not possible to choose which photographs would be used. Those photographs were the only ones the family had kept, due to the destruction and plundering of the raids on their homes, or to the fact that the undercover life of many militants in the years that led up to their disappearance had prevented the photographic register of their everyday lives. Thanks to the wide public circulation of these photographs, thousands of black-and-white portraits of generally young men and women, sometimes with recognisable features of the time (certain clothes, make-up or hairstyles — in particular, moustaches), have become clearly identifiable symbols. We might not remember most of the names, we might remain unaware of specific biographies, but in certain contexts those faces take us inexorably back to a historical time, to a feat and to a tragedy.

The Silhouettes

While some Latin American exiles used silhouettes in Europe at an earlier date in order to denounce the dictatorships' atrocities, the widespread use of life-size silhouettes to represent the disappeared can be traced back to the events of 21 September 1983, still under the dictatorship, in what has come to be known as the *Siluetazo*.[19] Within the hostile and repressive atmosphere of that time, a (temporary) space for collective creation was liberated — something that can be thought of as a redefinition of artistic and political practices. The *Siluetazo* was an event in the fullest sense of the word: an exceptional moment in history in which artistic initiative coincided with demand coming out of social movements, and which gained momentum thanks to the support of a multitude. The protest involved a vast, improvised, outdoor workshop that lasted until well past midnight, in which demonstrators lay down in the Plaza de Mayo, offering their bodies for others to trace and outline. The resulting silhouettes were pasted onto walls, monuments and trees, despite the threatening police presence that surrounded the participants.

The making of these silhouettes reclaimed a simple technique used to teach children to draw — the simple tracing onto paper of the empty shape of the human body. These were later fly-posted throughout the city centre as a way of representing 'the presence of an absence'. As the silhouettes were left on street walls after the demonstration had finished, those who were missing acquired a public presence, until the dictatorship made them disappear again. The key to this gesture is quantification: pointing to the empty space that the 30,000 absent bodies left among us.[20] Moreover, the silhouettes articulate a visual apparatus that returns representation to that which has been negated, hidden or forced to disappear. Eduardo Grüner conceives of the silhouettes as *attempts to represent the* disappeared:

> *that is, not simply what is 'absent' — for all representation is, by definition, a representation of an absent object — but rather, what is intentionally* made absent, *that which has been made to disappear through some form of material or symbolic violence; in this case, the representation of the bodies of the disappeared by a systematic policy or a conscious strategy.*[21]

The logic that underpins this gesture, Grüner concludes, is that of the *restitution* of the image as *substitution* for the missing body. With the production of silhouettes, the subject

17 Emilio Crenzel, 'Las fotografías del Nunca Más: Verdad y prueba jurídica de las desapariciones', in Claudia Feld and Jessica Stites Mor (ed.), *El pasado que miramos*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2009, p.285.
18 Ludmila Catela, 'Lo invisible revelado: El uso de fotografías como (re)presentación de la desaparición de personas en Argentina', in C. Feld and J. Stites Mor (ed.), *El pasado que miramos*, *op. cit.*, p.349.
19 In Argentinean history, the augmentative suffix '*-azo*' is used to refer to a whole series of popular uprisings: the *cordobazo*, the *rosariazo*, the *viborazo*, the *argentinazo*, etc.
20 This is the number given by the Mothers.
21 Eduardo Grüner, 'La invisibilidad estratégica, o la redención política de los vivos: Violencia política y representación estética en el Siglo de las Desapariciones', in Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone (ed.), *El Siluetazo*, Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2008, p. 285.

returns to the body, even if this is a different subject — a broader subject, cohesive and multiple: the multitude that gathered to support the Third Resistance March initiated on the 21 September by the Mothers.

The *Siluetazo* was conceived by three visual artists — Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel — while the Mothers, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and other human-rights organisations and political activists took part in its material realisation. The initial proposal that the artists offered to the Mothers did not speak of 'art', but rather of 'creating a *graphic fact* that will have an impact thanks to its large size and its unusual construction, serving to renew the attention of the media'.[22] The idea was accepted and reformulated by the Mothers and materialised by the demonstrators, who made the procedure their own. According to the three artists, the 'initial project included the personalisation of each of the silhouettes by detailing clothes, physical features, sex and

Protest of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, taken at the crossroads of calles Lavalle and Uruguay, Buenos Aires, 1983. Photograph: Daniel García

age, using collage, colours and portraiture.'[23] The idea was to produce a silhouette for each missing person. However, the Mothers pointed out that this posed a problem, as the lists of victims were incomplete at the time (as they still are). The group instead decided to keep all the silhouettes identical, without any inscription that could distinguish one from another. The artists took 'countless rolls of Kraft paper, all kinds of paints and spray-paints, paintbrushes and rollers' and some 1,500 silhouettes already made. They also took some stencils so that a uniform silhouette could be reproduced. The Plaza de Mayo became, for several hours, a giant improvised workshop for the production of silhouettes. The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo pointed out that children and pregnant women should also be represented, so Kexel, one of the artists, placed a cushion on his belly and they traced his silhouette in profile. His daughter was the model for the child's silhouette. The babies were simply drawn freehand.

The original plan of uniformity was modified by the process of collective construction. Aguerreberry's testimony narrates a massive and spontaneous participation by the demonstrators that, from early on, made the artists 'redundant'. 'I reckon that we could

22 Guillermo Kexel, Julio Flores and Rodolfo Aguerreberry, 'Propuesta presentada a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo', in A. Longoni and G. Bruzzone (ed.), *El Siluetazo*, *op. cit.*, p.63.
23 Carlos López Iglesias, interview with the group in A. Longoni and G. Bruzzone (ed.), *El Siluetazo*, *op. cit.*, p.333.

have left just half an hour after getting there,' he is quoted as saying, 'as we weren't needed at all.'[24] Despite the decision not to give the silhouettes any identifying features, some demands were made to differentiate or individualise them, to endow them with a specific feature, that is, qualities of actual existence. Some demanded to be able to find *their* silhouette amidst the sea of silhouettes — that of their missing father, mother, child, friend, brother. A boy walked up to one of the draughtsmen and said, 'Make my dad'. They asked, 'What does your dad look like?', and the draughtsman drew him with a beard and a moustache. The participants made couples, mothers and children, a group of factory workers, drawing 'what they want or what others ask for in a process of collective construction'.[25]

Throughout this process, the silhouette became the trace, the index of two missing bodies: one belonging to the person who lent his or her body so that the silhouette could be traced and, through a process of transferral, the body of the disappeared. In this way, as Roberto Amigo Cerisola has written, 'the broken ties of solidarity are reconstructed in a powerfully moving symbolic act'.[26] The gesture of lending one's body carries a certain ambiguity, as to take the place of the missing person is to accept that anyone could have taken the place of the disappeared, that anyone could have suffered the same uncertain and sinister fate. On the other hand, a corporality, a body and a life — however ephemeral — is returned to the disappeared. The condition of subject is also returned to the missing, a condition that the perverse repressive methodology of disappearance refused to grant them. The body of the demonstrator taking the place of the disappeared as a live support for the construction of the silhouette makes it possible to think of the silhouette as a 'breathing trace'.[27]

The *Siluetazo* involved the appropriation and occupation of the Plaza de Mayo and its surroundings.[28] The Plaza de Mayo not only is centrally located, but also is of strategic importance to the network of political, economic and symbolic power of Buenos Aires and Argentina. Amigo understands this event not only as a political 'taking over the square', but also as an 'aesthetic takeover' — an offensive move towards the appropriation of urban space. What was produced there had an impact not just on those who took part in its making, but on many others, thanks to the silent scream projected the next morning by the silhouettes covering the walls of nearby buildings, which remained for a short time until they were torn away by the police. The media pointed out that passers-by voiced their discomfort or surprise at being interpellated, *stared at* by those faceless figures. A journalist wrote that the silhouettes 'seem to point from the walls to those who are to blame for their absence, silently demanding justice. Through a scenic effect, the families, the friends, the portion of the public that reacted to it and those who were taken away appeared together for the first time.'[30] The silhouettes made evident that which the public opinion ignored or would rather ignore, breaking a pact of silence about the repression and those who were guilty of it, which had installed itself in Argentinean society during the dictatorship; something that could be summed up by the familiar disclaimer: 'We did not know.'

The symbolic effect of the *Siluetazo* turned the production of silhouettes into a powerful, recurrent and public visual strategy. Silhouettes became a distinctive symbol for representing the disappeared. As with the photographs, the silhouettes have had a prolific and varying existence since 1983. The procedure was socialised and disseminated throughout the country and even outside its borders; unplanned *siluetadas* (the public use of silhouettes) took place without any direct links to the original event or direct control by the Mothers or the artists. The silhouettes are often understood as the visual manifestation of the slogan 'Aparición con vida' ('Appearing alive') that the Mothers chanted from 1980

24 Quoted in Hernán Ameijeiras, 'A diez años del Siluetazo', in the journal *La Maga*, Buenos Aires, 31 March 1993, in A. Longoni and G. Bruzzone (ed.), *El Siluetazo*, *op. cit.*, p.189.
25 C. López Iglesias, interview with the group, *op. cit.*, p.309.
26 Roberto Amigo Cerisola, 'Aparición con vida: Las siluetas de detenidos-desaparecidos', in A. Longoni and G. Bruzzone (ed.), *El Siluetazo*, *op. cit.*, p. 275. See also his essay 'La Plaza de Mayo, Plaza de las Madres: Estética y lucha de clases en el espacio urbano', in *Ciudad/Campo en las artes en Argentina y Latinoamérica*, Buenos Aires: CAIA, 1991, pp.89—99.
27 See Gustavo Buntinx, 'Desapariciones forzadas/resurrecciones míticas', *Arte y Poder*, Buenos Aires: CAIA, 1993, pp.236—55.
28 The term 'appropriation' is used by Fernando Bedoya y Emei in 'Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Un espacio alternativo para los artistas plásticos', in A. Longoni and G. Bruzzone (ed.), *El Siluetazo*, *op. cit.*, pp.149—86.
29 See R. Amigo Cerisola, 'Aparición con vida', *op. cit.*, p.265.
30 Anonymous, *Paz y Justicia Bulletin*, September 1983.

(in addition to the chant 'Con vida los llevaron, con vida los queremos', or 'Alive they took them, alive we want them'). The slogans responded to the rumours circulating at the time about how the regime was keeping the missing detained in clandestine camps.[31] However, the relationship between the images and the text is slippery, and has given rise to opposing readings even among thinkers sympathetic to the Human Rights Movement. Amigo points out that the silhouettes 'made present the absence of the bodies in a *mise en scène* of state terror',[32] while Gustavo Buntinx understands them as proof of the fact that the Mothers were still hopeful about finding the missing alive. 'This was not a mere artistic illustration of a slogan, but its live actualisation,' he says.[33] Conversely, Grüner writes that the silhouettes contain an element that 'unsettles those who look at them: they reproduce that familiar police procedure in which a dead body that has been taken away from the scene of the crime is drawn in chalk on the floor'.[34] This could be read as 'a *political* gesture

The Siluetazo, Buenos Aires, 21 September 1983. Photograph: Alfredo Alonso/ CeDInCI

that appropriates the investigative methods of the enemy — of the so-called "forces of law and order" — creating a continuity that seems to be saying, "It was you"'. But it is also 'an *unconscious* gesture that accepts, sometimes contradicting a discourse that would rather keep talking about the "disappeared", that those silhouettes stand for *corpses*'. Therefore, 'the (conscious or unconscious) attempt to *represent* the disappearance is carried out in order to *promote* the death of the material body'. Aware of the likely association between silhouettes and death, particularly via police procedures, the Mothers rejected the initial artists' proposal to glue the silhouettes to the floor (which was presented among other options) and demanded that the silhouettes always be kept upright. As soon as they were finished, the demonstrators pasted them on the buildings lining the square.

31 The expectation that some of the disappeared might still be alive began to evaporate as time went by, with the discovery of mass graves with the No Names and the increasing number of testimonies from the very few survivors about the cruelty of the extermination procedures. Pilar Calveiro has reflected on the social difficulty of taking on board the dreadful truth the survivors revealed: they did not speak of the disappeared, but of the dead, of bodies that had been systematically devastated. See P. Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición*, *op. cit.*
32 R. Amigo Cerisola, 'Aparición con vida', *op. cit.*, p.203.
33 G. Buntinx, 'Desapariciones forzadas/resurrecciones míticas', *op. cit.*, p.253.
34 E. Grüner, 'La invisibilidad estratégica', *op. cit.*, p.285.
35 F. Bedoya y Emei, 'Madres de Plaza de Mayo', *op. cit.*, p.149ff.
36 G. Buntinx, 'Desapariciones forzadas/resurrecciones míticas', *op. cit.*, p.253.
37 E. Grüner, 'La invisibilidad estratégica', *op. cit.*, p.285.

Thanks to its dynamic of collective and participatory creation, the *Siluetazo* also allowed, if only for a brief moment, for the effective collectivisation of the means of production and distribution of art, inasmuch as the demonstrators were incorporated as producers, and images had a free and public circulation. The visual fact was 'made by everyone and belongs to everyone'.[35] This radical participatory practice — for which no special knowledge of drawing was required — was made evident in the dissemination of an idea or concept, in simple but effective artistic forms and techniques, in the repetition of an image and in the very act of producing it.

Buntinx reads in this collectivisation of the means of artistic production a 'radical liquidation of the category of modern art as an object-of-pure-contemplation, an instance-away-from-life', as well as the recuperation of a 'magical-religious dimension of art that modernity had taken away'.[36] This restores auratic charge and thaumaturgic and

The *Siluetazo*: silhouettes in Buenos Aires, 21 September 1983. Photograph: Daniel García

prodigious value to the image. Buntinx is not the only author who proposes a reading of the silhouettes in terms of a restitution of the aura. Grüner also points out that 'the idea of an objectified form that contains a vacuum that *looks at us* is related to (or at least, *can be* related to) Walter Benjamin's concept of auratic art', defined by 'the expectation that what one is looking at is looking back at one'.[37] Buntinx goes even further:

> *the occupation of the square clearly possesses a political and an aesthetic dimension, but it is also a ritual, in the most charged and anthropological sense of the term. It did not just attempt to raise awareness of the genocide, but also tried to reverse it: to reclaim the loved ones trapped in the phantasmagorical borders of death for a new life.* [... it became a] *messianic and political experience where resurrection and insurrection merge* [...] *The idea is to turn art into a force that can act in the concrete reality. But there is also a magical gesture in that direction. Against the renewed political power of empire, an unsuspected mythical power: a ritual pact with the dead.*[38]

37 E. Grüner, 'La invisibilidad estratégica', *op. cit.*, p.285.
38 G. Buntinx, 'Desapariciones forzadas/resurrecciones míticas', *op. cit.*, p.253.

The hundreds of demonstrators who took part in that action had no artistic conception of their actions, and, in fact, for several years the memory of the artistic origin of the initiative was lost.[39] We are faced with a collective action whose becoming dilutes (or even forgets) its 'artistic' origin. The distinctions between the socially allocated roles of the artist, the activist and the spectator were radically undifferentiated, not just through the simple participation in somebody else's initiative, but by turning everyone into a 'maker' of a common imaginary.

It is not relevant whether the *Siluetazo* was understood in its time as an artistic action or not. What is important is that the *Siluetazo* achieved the socialisation of a visual tool that opened a new 'social territoriality'.[40] Although it was born in the midst of the human-rights movement and under the leadership of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, its irruption was far from assimilated into a prefixed political project.[41] It is precisely that indeterminacy which grants the *Siluetazo* its singularity as an event.[42]

Hands, Masks

It is possible to establish a clear continuity between the silhouettes and two other strategies promoted by the Mothers in the first days of democracy: the hands and the white masks. The campaign 'Lend a hand to the disappeared' travelled all over the world and managed to gather almost a million hands in the Southern Hemisphere summer of 1984–85. The procedure was similar to that of lending one's body to trace the silhouette; part of the gesture was lending one's hand so that a Mother or another activist could trace it on paper. Afterwards, the participant would write something on the paper – a name, a slogan, a letter. Thousands of hands were hung on string, creating long garlands that waved over the Plaza de Mayo during a march held on 24 March 1985, the ninth anniversary of the coup. The hands were also fly-posted across different urban spaces. During the March of the White Masks, on 25 April 1985, thousands of white masks, all identical, were distributed among the demonstrators. This procedure made the demonstrators – each carrying a mask and thus becoming anonymous – once again stand in for the missing persons, lending his or her body and life to the disappeared. Hands and masks reinforced the associations that the silhouettes had already established: the crowd put its hands or faces in the place of the missing ones. 'Like the silhouettes, the tracing of hands multiplies the individual trace and turns it into a multitude; like the silhouettes, the masks evoke the anonymity of the figure of the No Names and interpellate the spectator, silently and crudely.'[43]

This strategy received contrasting assessments from the Mothers and some political groups, who felt that it denied any political identity to the disappeared.[44] Hebe de Bonafini, one of the leaders of the Mothers,

> *explains at that point – and subsequently – that the use of masks tried to produce an effect. For her and for other mothers, the mobilisations should not become routine* [...] *they had to be a* mise en scène *that made an effort to introduce a high-impact novelty* [...] *Some other mothers did not agree with the use of the masks because they 'erased' the individual identity of each one of the disappeared. They compared this resource with the use of placards bearing the photographs, names and dates of disappearance of each one of the missing children. Those placards, like photographs with similar inscriptions they used to carry on their necks, or the white scarves bearing the names and dates of disappearance of their children, had been used under the dictatorship. Aside from signifying a clear and precise denunciation about the identity of the victims of the repressive regime, the placards established with each one of the mothers a powerfully affective force.*[45]

Gorini sees in this position a resistance to leaving a stage behind, in the path towards adopting a 'collective motherhood'. 'With the identical masks [...] a *new stage* was acknowledged: the disappeared was no longer one's own child, or, at least, all the disappeared constituted a single child with the same face. Collectivised motherhood *transcended* that singular motherhood that was expressed by the individual photographs in the placards.'[46]

Counterpoint

The two matrixes of representation sketched above cannot be thought of as consecutive or opposing alternatives, for both of them coexisted and unfolded at the same time. At times, they even overlapped. Rather, the discrepancies or distances between both strategies signal different political positions within the same social movement. While photographs emphasise life before the disappearance, the biography (that this person existed), the silhouettes, the hands and masks emphasise the circumstances of the kidnapping and disappearance (30,000 people disappeared), foregrounding the emptiness, the massive absence generated by that violence. In line with this, we can also distinguish a different emphasis on *individualisation* on the one hand and *quantification* on the other.

Although, in practice, it was not realised in this way, the initial idea of the *Siluetazo* was to produce identical silhouettes, without faces, specific features or names, so as to reinforce the anonymity of the victims. The same can be said about the masks that erase the face of the living, levelling them with the disappeared. But the photographs set out from a strong sign of individualisation within the history of each of the disappeared (although they became a collective symbol when thousands of these photographs are brought together) in order to activate the possibility of recuperating an individual biography, an unrepeatable face, a singular history. As Ludmila Catela has written: 'These photographs bring back an idea of personhood, the one that in our societies condensates our most essential features: a name and a face [...] they remove the anonymity of death in order to recover an identity and a history.'[47]

While photographs emphasise life before the disappearance, the biography (that this person existed), the silhouettes, the hands and masks emphasise the circumstances of the kidnapping and disappearance, foregrounding the emptiness, the massive absence generated by that violence.

If the silhouettes insist upon the quantification of victims – through the physical space that their absent bodies would occupy, were they still among us – the photographs proceed from the particular identity of each victim, in order to compose a collective sign amidst the magnitude of the tragedy that was inflicted upon Argentinean society by state terrorism. Both speak of the mourning of families, of their battle against the erasure that a disappearance imposes. They speak of specific subjects, fathers, brothers, partners, children: of a life before the kidnapping, of a family that is still searching and does not forget, demanding justice.

On the other hand, silhouettes, hands and masks fuse in the transference between the demonstrators and the disappeared. They share the constructive procedure of the *body*

39 In order to avoid using the term 'art actions', Roberto Amigo proposed that the *Siluetazo* and other similar strategies could be called 'aesthetic actions of political praxis'. R. Amigo Cerisola, 'Aparición con vida', *op. cit.*, p.203. The artist León Ferrari used similar arguments: 'the *Siluetazo* [was a] masterwork, formidable, not just politically, but also aesthetically. Several elements were at play: it was an idea proposed by some artists, but developed by a multitude that carried it out *without any artistic intention*. We were not coming together to do a performance, not at all. We were not representing anything. This was a work that everyone felt, whose material was inside the people. *It was irrelevant whether it was art or not*.' Unpublished interview with León Ferrari, Buenos Aires, 24 May 2005.

40 This is a term proposed by Juan Carlos Marín in *Los hechos armados*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones PICASO/ La Rosa Blindada, 2003.

41 This socialisation of the production of the imaginary is allied to the notion of 'post-avant-garde', as used by Brian Holmes in reference to contemporary versions of artistic activism: 'I am not interested in avant-garde movements, but in post-avant-garde ones; these are movements that are diffused, allowing a large number of people to take part in the construction and dissemination of images and new languages.' Quoted in 'Entrevista colectiva a Brian Holmes', *ramona. revista de artes visuales*, no.55, October 2005, p.9.

42 This reflection derives from a text I wrote in collaboration with Jaime Vindel, 'Fuera de categoría: La política del arte en los márgenes de su historia', *Tercer Texto: Conceptualismos del Sur: Antagonismos desde el arte y nuevas formas de la política en América Latina entre los 60 y los 80*, no.4 (ed. Miguel A. López and A. Longoni), 2010.

43 Estela Schindel, 'Siluetas, rostros, escraches: Memoria y *performance* alrededor del movimiento de derechos humanos', in A. Longoni and G. Bruzzone (ed.), *El Siluetazo*, *op. cit.*, p.411.

44 Instead, they proposed the opposite strategy: 'to unmask the disappeared so that everyone knows who they are, to disseminate their goals and struggles'. U. Gorini, *La rebelión de las Madres*, *op. cit.*, vol.2, p.386.

45 *Ibid.*, p.385.

46 *Ibid.*, p.387. Italics the author's.

47 L. Catela, 'Lo invisible revelado', *op. cit.*, p.341.

of the demonstrator put in the place of the missing body. They share a common act (both intimate and collective), a performative or even ritual act that involves a commitment of the body, the decision to put one's self in the place of the absent one, lending him or her a breath of life. The silhouettes, hands and masks become a trace of two absences: that of the person who is represented and that of the person masked or traced in the place of the absent. The photographs, on the other hand, are traces of another time, taken by different hands and for different ends, now reinscribed in a new context, where they have become a public concern.

Finally, it also is possible to perceive in this visual politics the tension between different positions among the Mothers: basically, the difference between a *private mourning* and a *collectivised motherhood*. From 1980 onwards, debates took place within the organisation regarding certain political definitions, especially regarding their attitude towards the state.

Masks worn by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Photograph: Domingo Ocaranza Bouet

A portion of the mothers, led by Bonafini, was opposed to the exhumation of the No Names mass graves, to economic compensation for relatives and to any act of mourning that individualised the victims.[48] Needless to say, those disputes had an impact upon the symbolic strategies used by the Mothers. In the name of a 'collectivisation of motherhood', no individual's name could be worn on the scarves, be noted in the memorials that were published daily in the national newspaper *Página/12*, or inscribed into any plaque or monument. From this perspective, the photographs could be considered an individualising element that worked against the collectivising logic of the silhouettes, the hands or the masks. The following paragraph from an interview with Bonafini illustrates this position:

> *one day, we met and talked with other comrades, and said that we had to socialise motherhood and become everyone's mothers.* [...] *We took our children's names from the scarves and stopped wearing the photographs bearing their names* [...] *In this way, when anyone questions one of the mothers, she can reply: 'Yes, we have 30,000 children'* [...] *When we arrived at the square, we exchanged our children's placards* [...] *Afterwards we decided we should not carry their picture on their chest, as they bore a name, and journalists tended to focus on them. We say that we are socialising motherhood because, like our children taught us, we are all equal and all children are equal, but there are so many children with no photographs! So many mothers who don't have a photograph of their children! This is why we have to be identified with all of them: with no name or anything like that. All of them means all of them.*[49]

In demonstrations, when the mothers and other relatives could not find the placard of their loved one among the hundreds that had been made, they were happy to carry others'. Many relatives of missing persons often have spoken about the strangeness and emotion they felt when they stumbled upon a picture of their loved ones being held up high by a complete stranger. In this sense, when hundreds of people were preparing to produce the silhouettes, they did not remain anonymous. In fact, and regardless of the initial plans and guidelines, the crowd that took part in the *Siluetazo* brought the silhouettes closer to the photographs. Bearing the photographs as a response to the anonymity and denial imposed by the state revealed an impulse similar to the one that spontaneously made the demonstrators add particular features and names to many of the silhouettes in that historic day: even in a protest about 30,000 missing people, the pain of friends and family has a specific face and name.

Photographs and silhouettes, hands and masks. These two recurrent strategies for the representation of the disappeared can be compared in a series of oppositions: collective vs. particular; anonymous vs. named; violent disappearance vs. previous biography. At the same time they overlap, contaminate and reinforce each other. Neither of them turned out to be more appropriate or effective than the other. Rather, their disagreements help us think about different paths in the collective and intimate elaboration of this difficult mourning and this ongoing struggle, and perhaps of other struggles against state crimes.

48 These debates eventually led to the division of the Mothers into two groups in 1986, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora.

49 Interview with Hebe de Bonafini by Graciela Di Marco and Alejandra Brener in Nathalie Lebon and Elizabeth Maier, *De lo privado a lo público: 30 años de la lucha ciudadana de las mujeres en América Latina*, Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2006, n.p.

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