



Res, Belgrano en el monumento (Belgrano at the Monument), 2009.

Politics of Representation. Art & Human Rights¹

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Abstract:

The migration of images from public space (the street, protests or newspapers) to art spaces has been a recurring phenomenon in Latin American post-dictatorship art. This essay reflects on that process of migration in a series of contemporary art projects, analyzing how new and latent meanings of such images are re-activated and re-circulated through their translation to the register of art. When politically iconic images associated with political repression—such as identification photos of the disappeared used by human rights organizations as proof of the lives they reclaim and commemorate—are translated into the art field, they are connected to the power of the incomplete and undetermined that art makes possible. This in turn may grant stagnant historical documents another political and aesthetic life.

What is the purpose of linking art and politics in the terrain of contemporary art production? If we acknowledge that the present draws heavily from the tradition of the avant garde experiences that reached their most radical formulations between the late sixties and early seventies, we must also acknowledge that contemporary practices of politicizing art appear languid and unraveled when compared to the consolidated and authoritative examples offered by this recent past. This can be seen in experiences that took place around '68, both as they directly influence present scenarios and in the ways they are remembered. Over the past twenty years, however, art's political discourse, the politicization of art practice, and political art studies have all multiplied to such an extreme that in one sense, they have consolidated into something akin to a new style. Art and politics (in their openly declared relationship, not in the political reading of works that do not have expressly political aims) constitute a central part of not only contemporary bodies of work, but of institutional agendas as well. The artist who ventures out into the street as if it were his or her canvas, paintbrush, and palette returns at some point, with greater or lesser regularity, to galleries and museums. These, in turn, declare themselves as arenas for institutional critique. Political art is classified, exhibited, collected, and sold.

This evaluation purports no more than to delineate the contours of the scene in which these images frequently circulate. In a certain sense, it is a gesture towards diluting political art's naively utopian air. At the same time, however, it also underscores the fact that the multiplication of these expressions and their consolidation into what might appear to be a healthy new style does not in any way imply a lack of depth in the meaning or significance. Furthermore, I would like to propose that a purpose has been achieved through the multiplication of images that position themselves between art and politics—a purpose whose program can be traced through an analysis of works and interventions from the past twenty years. The body of works tied to politics, which it continually articulates by taking, combining, and redrawing images from different registers of reality, has contributed toward the active visualization of certain issues. In spite of the marginal nature of erudite art, a field of expression that does not circulate with the same persistence and efficacy as the communications media, these representations have generated and reprocessed images that are reiterated in the communications media and in protests, while also forming part of the corpus of art representations. This rewriting—this form of granting images another, different life—renews representations that in some cases had become stagnant historical documents. In this essay, I propose to offer a reflection on

contemporary works of art that effect the reactivation of latent meanings in images that originate outside the art field.

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Página/12 newspaper, Buenos Aires, Argentina, January 4 1998.

They are photographed on their wedding day. Alicia, dressed in white, with her dark hair flowing loose, looks to the right in the photo, probably at her mother or a friend. Her expression is one of joy, and there is a certain complicity in her gaze. Hector's eyes, on the other hand, look toward the photographer. Serious and concentrated, he holds something in his hand that cannot be discerned due to the impasto in that area of the image. They are very young, it is a happy day, and they have been captured at a moment when they are fully immersed in projections toward the future. No violence can be perceived in the image. The text that appears to one side informs us that they were kidnapped when they had two small children, who were found by coincidence in an orphanage in the city of La Plata. They were kidnapped on December 6, 1977. Twenty-one years later, on January 4, 1998, their relatives publicly proclaim in the pages of a newspaper that they will never be forgotten. Another image of the same size appears beside it which shows sociologist Osvaldo Plaul—in a suit and tie, facing forward with a serious expression, and framed in a white background—looking at the photographer (and at us) from the close crop of an ID photo. The text specifies that he also disappeared in 1977, and that his relatives have not forgotten him nor forgiven those responsible for his disappearance. The photographs pertain to two different orders. Osvaldo Plaul's refers to

disciplinary society; it is an image intended to identify that is inscribed within a repressive grammar. Héctor and Alicia's pertains to the visual order of the family album. It has been removed and probably further cropped in order to place an image of the disappeared in the public eye. Both Memorials occupy a place on the sports page of a newspaper. Soccer players run in pursuit of the ball. In the margin there is a professional job advertisement for a Country Club Activities Director. The Memorials look like any other announcement. It is only when we read the phrases accompanying the photos and decipher the structure of the announcement (names, dates, circumstances) that we can rationally and emotionally begin to comprehend the dimension of the events that are being recalled and denounced. They tell of kidnapping, disappearance, and abduction. The contrast and compression between the weight of the memorials and the public realm is powerful; the articulation of the intimate (family and friends are those who remember), the public sphere (the state is responsible for these disappearances and the communication is with the newspaper's readers), and everyday information (a soccer game) is what produces a sensation of being stripped bare, of an abyss. In the overall context of this page, nothing allows us to anticipate the historical, social, and individual density or the onrush of emotion that this small rectangle is capable of unleashing within us, bringing us into close contact with the dimension of impotence. The images touch upon an area of ambivalence, of that which is no longer here (disappeared) yet remains present, situated within photography's ghostlike nature (Avelar 2006, 263).

The first Memorial was published by the current president of the Asociación Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Association of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo) on August 25, 1988, on the 10th anniversary of the assassination of her daughter, Laura Estela Carlotto, whose body was handed over to her family after disappearing for several months.² From the beginning, these Memorials have been published exclusively and free of charge in the newspaper *Página/12*, which was founded in 1987 by a group of independent journalists. The choice of this media outlet implicitly accounts for the suspicion that hangs over the other newspapers regarding their degree of complicity with the dictatorship.³ Faced with the publication of an increasing number of Memorials published (from 20 in 1988 to 160 in 1991), the newspaper set up a team of three people to handle the reception of the forms and the design of the announcements, assembling a database containing the photographs and disappearance dates (the same photograph is always published,

only the text changes). They also established that the Memorials could only be published on the anniversary of the disappearance date.⁴

As Celina Van Dembroucke points out, the Memorials participate in a double identity: they are similar to both obituaries and missing persons announcements. At the same time, their function is to keep alive the denunciation of the crime and the commitment of the victim's friends and family to the assassinated or disappeared person. Their purpose is to keep the memory of the event alive for society and at the same time to confirm the personal bonds that unite them to the person they are remembering. It is a powerful combination of historical events and personal commitment. The family album is opened to the public eye, making social memory more complex through the multiplicity of small narratives introduced by the texts. The enumeration of particular cases builds the density of a historical event whose data is not based exclusively on numbers—the location of detention centers, the names of those responsible, the number of disappeared—but also on micro-narratives that multiply the evidence of the event. Photos, faces, relatives, and texts perforate newspaper pages with particular episodes of an overall violence.

While the texts of the Memorials are fundamental, the images play the role of bringing us closer to their last remaining vestige. They function as a recognition and reconstitution of a certain degree of existence to the disappeared. At the same time, the tendency to recognize them exclusively as victims, which prevailed until 1996, has gradually been transformed into a growing manifestation of admiration for their ideals and militancy (this is expressed in concrete phrases and in the fact that in some cases the name of the organization to which they belonged and their noms de guerre are included alongside the real names). Van Dembroucke considers memorials to be a new, hybrid genre emerging from a specific context that shares elements from obituaries, missing persons announcements, and public demands for justice. While it is certain that the Memorials are tied to the idea of death (the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo rejects the practice because they consider it a form of publicity for death through which the social problem of the disappeared is individualized), the reiterated inclusion of the demand "Neither forget nor forgive. That they appear, alive. Trial and punishment for those responsible," also links them to the rejection of any policy that aims to close the issue of the disappeared.



Identidad (Identity), installation, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1998.

Photo: Andrea Giunta

The photographs are also inscribed in the search for children born in captivity. Once 20 years had passed since the 1976 coup d'état, the abducted children were approximately the same age as their parents were when they were kidnapped. Physical similarities between the two might well help to identify them. This was the point of departure for an exhibition that proposed to increase the audience's sensibility to the issue and to pursue efficiency at the same time. The exhibition—titled *Identidad (Identity)* and held at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in 1998—juxtaposed the faces of the disappeared in order to reconstitute family ties with those whose children had been born in captivity (in some cases there is testimony regarding births, and in others it is known that a child was expected at the time of the disappearance, but there is no information regarding birth). The faces were reproduced as life-size images in order to augment the effect of realism, and mirrors were placed between them, which provoked a chain of simultaneous effects. On the one hand, the images produced at eye level were multiplied, generating endless intersections of faces and gazes; on the other, they included viewers, whose faces were framed between those of the disappeared. They interrogated the public in two ways: by making viewers participate in (be a part of) an issue that involved society as a whole and not only the relatives of the disappeared, and by creating the possibility that young persons unaware of their true identity might recognize themselves among those faces as the potential sons or daughters of a disappeared couple. The photographs, exhibited publicly in an environment other than that of a human rights organization or public plaza, might serve as the point of departure for identification, or even self-identification. It is a fact that increased publicity in recent years of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo's search for children born in captivity has resulted in a greater number of young people who voluntarily participate in DNA analysis in order to dispel doubts regarding their identity.

The exhibition had a specific political agenda, articulated in an installation that not only documented events with texts and photographs, but also produced a profound visual and emotional impact. Images migrated from the plaza or newspaper page to an art exhibition space. They appealed to a different public, one that was not necessarily involved with the demands being made by relatives of the disappeared; the same public attending an art show could simultaneously become involved in the politics of identity restitution. In fact, the exhibition had precisely this effect: it served as the catalyst through which three persons re-established the story of their own lives.



Remembering the disappeared. Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 24 2008.

Photo: Andrea Giunta



Nicolás Guagnini, 30,000 (1998-2005), Parque de la Memoria, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Photo: Nicolás Guagnini

These were the same images that we see in the plaza or newspaper memorials, migrated to a different space, de-contextualized from their habitual sites. The demands that these images represent are hardly foreign to any of the artists who participated in the show. In different ways, they all actively participate in the demands of human rights organizations. Some represent torture and disappearances in their work and have family members who have been disappeared (like Carlos Alonso's daughter or Nicolás Guagnini's father or León Ferrari's son). The monument that Guagnini erected in the Parque de la Memoria (Memory Park) in the city of Buenos Aires is a powerful example. The title of the piece is 30,000 (1998-2005), and it

reproduces a portrait of his father, Luis Guagnini, a journalist who disappeared on December 12, 1977. The face that is distributed across a series of metal supports driven into the ground transforms as we move around it, as if it were a kinetic work whose formal aspect mutates in order to make the idea of identity-disappearance visible and more powerful: the photographic image is translated into extremes of contrast and is reconstructed again.

The everyday faces seen in the memorials are activated in a recent series of drawings by Daniel Ontiveros, *Rasgos* (Features 2010), which reproduce photos published in the Memorials. They reproduce not just one image in particular, with which he may have a certain familiarity or close connection, but the entire group of photographs that register and remember people, including those who are close to Ontiveros' generation. It is not the first time that his work refers to the disappeared. *Ay patria mía! (O Fatherland of Mine! 1994)*, an installation where the Madres de Plaza de Mayo's kerchiefs are arranged in the form of daisies, refers through its title to independence leader General Manuel Belgrano's final words (Buntinx 1998). The calligraphy, flowers, and "tidiness" with which the compiled material is organized recall a school project. However, a closer look reveals the names and dates inscribed on the kerchiefs. Delving into this information produces a contrast similar to the meanings unleashed when faces of the disappeared and soccer cleats in pursuit of a ball share the same page. It is a sensation of awe that represents the flip-side of the official account of events, that of heroes, which, through the *Punto Final* and *Obediencia Debida* (Full Stop and Due Obedience) laws and the ten decrees of pardon sanctioned by ex-President Carlos Saúl Menem, attempted to silence this parallel history at the moment when Ontiveros produced this work.



Daniel Ontiveros, *Rasgos* (Features), 2010.

Photo: Daniel Ontiveros



Daniel Ontiveros, *Ay patria mía (O Fatherland of Mine!)*, 2004.

But let us return to the drawings. As a whole they rescue the traditional technique of the street portraitist. They are portraits that are executed live and focus on fundamental traits, capturing a gesture or particular facial expression of the person who paused for a moment to pose for the artist. By recovering this technique and taking the Memorial as his point of departure, he symbolically restores the life of the portrayed person and of the image translated from photograph to drawing and activated in the transition from one form of facial register to the other. Here it is worthwhile to recall that Ontiveros produced these portraits "live" in 1982, during the Mar del Plata fair. By portraying them as if they had been present while he made the sketch, he re-establishes them at the age they were when they were disappeared: accessories and makeup situate us in the seventies. These drawings also evoke the police practice of creating identikits. As in the Memorials, the idea of restoring life and the story of the identity search are simultaneously activated. Many marginal facts become high-impact material that resignifies these faces by taking them beyond a simple transposition. They re-establish the temporal paradox of what is real and what is not at the same time. Past and present are, in this manner, fused together. These alterations also contribute toward giving a ritual dimension to these seemingly basic drawings. Ontiveros' work is the self-imposed task of repeating each face: it includes the decision to make them in dimensions larger than those of the real faces (the sheets of paper measure 75 x 100 cm) in order to transgress the idea of a simple tracing. The paper torn by hand creates a powerful effect that initially confirms the sense of immediacy that these sketches transmit, but at the same time it is rooted in literary quotes inscribed in a re-affirmation of life. It speaks simultaneously of being rushed, immediacy, and of an interrogation of the past. As Ontiveros points out, the torn paper refers to the poem that the mid 20th century Spanish writer Miguel Hernández dedicates to his friend, Ramón Sijé, who passed away unexpectedly.⁵ Apparently a careless, superficial gesture, this tearing off is in principle simply a material decision, but it reverts into a multitude of meanings linked to the search for life

among the earth that covers a body. Moreover, the term rasgo (feature) unfolds from the word rasgado (torn). As frequently occurs in his work, Ontiveros investigates and recovers the meaning that is pleated into words; he uncovers how a single term acts in different semantic fields. Both formal and technical aspects (a portrait on a torn (rasgado) sheet of paper) fuse together in the meaning that reactivates these images, which simultaneously represent memorials of faces and pressing demands. With practically the same degree of immediacy with which facial traits are restored, the demand "that they appear, alive" is re-established.

The last portrait: this is one of the tensions that permeate this accumulation of images. What is the last equivalent of the face of a disappeared person? The question remains open, unresolved; above all because there is a suspicion that records of these images do exist. There might be records in the hands of ex-detainees or members of the military. Some records have appeared on occasion, like that of Víctor Basterra, a prisoner at the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (Navy Mechanics School) who took photographs of the repressors for a document falsification service that had been set up at the ESMA. In 1983 Basterra extracted a hundred or so negatives of photographs of detainees that had been put aside to be burned, taking them out by hiding them inside his clothes. Those photos are the last ones or those that best represent the faces of that group of the disappeared.

The migration of images from public space (the street, protests or newspapers) to art spaces has been a recurring phenomenon in Latin American post-dictatorship art. The inclusion and simultaneous de-contextualization that Chilean artist Carlos Altamirano achieves in his Retratos (Portraits) series are direct and powerful. It consists of a concert of declassified images from original records that he reorganizes on a single plane, as if it might be possible from that moment on to produce some kind of internal order, as if it were a Neo Dada assemblage by Rauschenberg but one in which all contrast and juxtaposition is avoided in order to pass on to an absolute flatness. Processed in a computer, the images' traditions are smoothed away and they are compacted into reproduction's continuum. The repertoire refers to popular culture in Chile from the nineties. Portraits of the disappeared under the heading of the repeated question, always the same—"where are they?"—stand out against the printed pattern. In spite of the flattening effect of the medium, these portraits stand out due to their black and white format and because they are not subjected to cropping, superimpositions, and manipulations that might affect their legibility as is the case with other

images. Like a sustained interrogation, they are repeated throughout the length and breadth of the printed installation. It is precisely the banal repertoire against which they are displayed that reconfigures these portraits' power to become present once again in an unexpected or unforeseen environment such as the art world. The faces of the disappeared function as if they were an invasion, as if they had appeared there unexpectedly, as if someone had stuck them there. They capture the sensation of an urgent action. The chromatic leap and the contrast of being records set them apart and reactivate these faces, operating in such a way that the repetition does not wear out the demand. Yes, they do repeat, but in a different way. An entire group of images linked to the politics of the administration of life that at the same time contributes to the reactivation of the repertoire of images, gives visual form to the demand "that they appear, alive." The photographs represent the ghostly bodies of that suspended death and the suspense that is disappearance. In Puente Bulnes, in Santiago de Chile, photographers Claudio Pérez and Rodrigo Gómez constructed a Wall of Memory, using photographic portraits of 936 detained-disappeared people printed on ceramic tiles. Among these images, they included blank tiles that correspond to portraits that they were unable to find. The monument is located in a public space, amidst the tumult and noise of the street, overlapping with urban experiences from the present. In this sense, as Nelly Richard says, the isolation that results from the choice of a remote, separate place is avoided—as is the case for the memorial to the detained-disappeared in Santiago's General Cemetery, where there are even empty niches reserved, waiting to be occupied by the remains of the disappeared that have not as yet been identified. The void in the Puente Bulnes is not a material representation, but a symbolic one (Richard 2001).



Portrait of María Susana Ferreira, 1970.



Gustavo Germano, María Susana Ferreira, 2006.

Up to this point we have considered a politics of representation organized on the basis of the same portraits used by the relatives of the disappeared and by human rights organizations. However, what happens when art explores other forms of representing the absence that the disappeared leave behind? I do not refer here to the metaphoric route (for example, several series by Guillermo Kuitca come to mind that could be interpreted in that sense) but rather to that which investigates ways to grant visibility to the infinite dimensions of absence. An example is the visual archive that Gustavo Germano exhibited in March of 2008 in the Centro Cultural Recoleta, which reconstructed absence by way of a recreation of the locations and poses of old photographs. Germano displayed 14 pairs of large format photos that created a series of contrasts through the absence of each person who had disappeared (Van Dembrouke 2010b). Their siblings, parents, and relatives appear in the same position as in the photo where they had posed together; the following shot, taken thirty years later, has an empty space, the representation of he or she who is no longer. The exhibition graphics reiterated the absence on the basis of what appeared at first to be a typographical error. The title appeared as Ausenc·a, with the letter "i" obliterated (ausencia is the Spanish word for absence). The images revealed another aspect of these absences: the lives that the disappeared did not live. The production of these images demanded a particular commitment. Each person's relatives had to go back and relive the moment of the original photo, acting it out in a present marked by absence. It is not only showing, but recreating the presence of he or she who is no longer there with their own bodies, at a precise instant, recreating that fragment in the lives photographed, a particle of time, looking to replace positions and gestures. It involved taking their minds from an overall feeling of pain in the face of absence, to the particular moment when the photograph was taken. The archive demands a powerful performative exercise duplicated by the viewer when he or she casts their eyes upon the images with the capacity of

projecting a history, creating a temporal arc between the two timeframes photographed. It is important to highlight the performative instance in which the photo is reborn because it is acted out.



Res, Santucho en el monumento. Rosario, Argentina, October 24 2009.



Res, Belgrano en el monumento.



Res, Belgrano y Santucho dibujados en el Monumento.

This is comparable to the photograph that res created basing himself on the portraits of Mario Roberto Santucho, the leader and ideologue of the Revolutionary People's Army (ERP) who was assassinated by a task force on July 19, 1976, and Belgrano. Both Santucho and Belgrano shared similar ideas in their struggle against oppression and injustice. res convened people by way of a message distributed via e-mail and published in the newspapers La Capital and Rosario/12, inviting them to compose Santucho's face with their bodies at Rosario's monument to the flag, and indicating that the participants had to be dressed in black. On the night of October 22, 2009, he projected a stencil-like rendering of the faces of Santucho and Belgrano onto the steps of the monument, marking the contour with black tape. On the day of the action, people began to arrive prior to the agreed-upon hour and at 5:30 p.m., they were allowed to enter in order to

produce the photograph. The artist wrote that "historian Osvaldo Bayer, who traveled for the event, pointed out that Belgrano, like Santucho, fought for equality and the inclusion of native peoples. It occurred to me that [...] they had attempted to limit the role of one to that of the creator of the flag while the other remains twice-disappeared—once because his remains have not been found and twice because his ideas are rarely debated" (res 2010). This is a different form of biopolitics. It is not about reconfiguring an image from a family album, but about the standardized portrait that allows someone to be immediately recognized. It is also about assuming that visage collectively, granting new life to a regulated, set image by way of the movement and vibration of bodies. The image not only reconstructs facial features, but also the meaning of multitudes, groups, and collectives within which individualities are dissolved. It is about acting out an image to give it new, ephemeral, and collective life, based on a dual power: that of the collective experience condensed in a single image and that of an image that is born again when it becomes a performance.

Which are the politics of representation that are not based on the face of a disappeared person, but that do not eliminate individualization either? The disappeared are an issue for society as a whole, but they are also named and identified as specific people. In 2009, Luis Camnitzer produced *Memorial*, an installation about the disappeared in Uruguay. *Memorial* also deals with visually representing the unrepresentable: the status of those who are no longer present, but whose disappearance cannot be proven either. In other words, it deals with bodily absence. *Memorial* rewrites the Montevideo phone book, opening up spaces between the lines to include the names of 220 people disappeared during Uruguay's dictatorship, between 1973 and 1985. Framed in compact rows of three records each, it is difficult to differentiate the repeated, monotone pages. It is a reductive, minimalist installation whose device is expanded through its title and story. This work forces the official printing of the phone book (a state institution) to introduce absent lives, absent lives which the state, along with Uruguayan citizens, agreed not to submit to the justice system.⁶ *Memorial* recalls other memorials. The first of these is the memorial created by Maya Lin to commemorate those killed in the Vietnam War. It also recalls the Parque de la Memoria memorial in Buenos Aires where the names etched in stone are placed in chronological and alphabetical order according to a mobile system, so that they can be displaced every time a new disappeared person has been denounced.⁷ *Memorial* interrogates the absence-presence of those who are no longer in the telephone directory but whose existence

has not been annulled. It introduces a visual record of an unresolved question—as happens in Argentina, where many of the disappeared figure in the electoral registry and are counted as absentees instead of as disappeared, as human rights organizations demand ("Padron..." 2009). Memorial constructs an archive that remits, in one sense, to other archives that are assumed to exist but that remain hidden.⁸ Introducing names that have been eliminated once again is a way of forcing the mechanisms that administer life on the basis of agreement with one sector of public forces. As Camnitzer says, "The names I added will not answer our calls. They are, instead, names that will continue to call upon us to answer" (2010, 27).



Luis Camnitzer, Memorial, 2009.



Inscriptions of the names of the disappeared. Parque de la memoria, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

I have referred here to forms of representation that perform a counter-forgetting, images that bring the corpus reproduced in newspapers and protests up to date. As a whole, they constitute what Nelly Richard glossed as the "narrative of the wait", a partial, suspended history that makes memory a plural construction exercise (Avelar 2006, 266).

At the outset of this essay, I inquired about what reasons there might be for linking art in its most contemporary productions to politics. The critical strength of these images lies in their exploration of new ways of saying the same thing, but also in upsetting standardized parameters of representation and putting them into motion in order to broaden their previous scene of communication and expand the universe of awareness on the basis of different devices of representation. The photographs used by human rights organizations created a standardized image carried as a support of identification and as proof that the lives they reclaim and commemorate are still pending. The effect of their translation into the art field connects them with that power of the incomplete that art connects us to. This involves, as Nelly Richard put it, the "more than that" and the "never completely" aspects of art. Art's always incomplete nature combines with the always pending nature of social and political demands. These repeated images circulate in contexts that were not foreseen in the repertoire from which they came. They operate in a strategic role, unsheathed from their original environment, now active and in movement. In art, a space of non-determination is opened up, a space for escape. To change a people's consciousness regarding the past of the dictatorship is not a task that art can take on as its own, nor as a specific one. Nevertheless, this change requires all kinds of interventions and actions that might multiply the uniqueness of one face or of one motto that is always the same. Above and beyond the personal and poetic reasons associated with each group of works, these images have contributed to the ongoing reactivation of what every image related to the disappeared

purports to achieve: that they appear, alive; and that those responsible are brought to trial and punished for their crimes.

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Notes

¹Translated by Tamara Stuby.

² Although the military claimed that he had died in a confrontation, forensic tests carried out in 1985 demonstrated that she was killed by a shot to the head from close range. Laura was two months pregnant when she was kidnapped and taken to the "La Chacha" detention center (or concentration camp), on the outskirts of La Plata. Diverse testimonies reveal that she was taken to the Military Hospital in the city of Buenos Aires when she gave birth to Guido, who remains disappeared to this day. During the months that followed that year, twenty other announcements were published. Today, between 3 and 5 memorials appear daily (Van Dembroucke 2010a).

³ Ernestina Noble de Herrera is accused of having appropriated two children during the dictatorship and has resorted to many different strategies that have impeded, until now, that the justice system carry out the corresponding genetic testing to clarify the issue ("La jueza..." 2010). On the other hand, the Argentinean government has opened a court case to investigate the sale of the Papel Prensa company to the newspapers Clarín, La Nación, and La Razón during the dictatorship. The government report titled "[Papel Prensa: la verdad](#)", published in the Ministerio de Economía y la Secretaría de Comercio website http://www.mecon.gov.ar/basehome/informe_papel_prensa.htm, analyzes the sale of Papel Prensa under pressure by economic groups and the dictatorship.

⁴ As Celina Van Dembroucke explains, in recent years, the memorials have passed from one generation to the next. Since around 2005, it is the children of the disappeared who begin to write and publish them. In a compact summary, the Memorials have contributed to establishing a level of public awareness regarding the social magnitude of a history of violence that remains alive and active today. They are interpreted as obituaries, but, as María Eva Fuentes (quoted in Van Dembroucke 2010a, 68) points out, if justice had been done they probably would not exist. The demand for justice is a fundamental component. The memorials seek to keep alive the image of those whose whereabouts are unknown. It is a memorial (a reminder) that interrogates society's conscience in opposition to oblivion, one that denounces, demands trial and punishment for those responsible, and, of course, remembers loved ones who are deceased or disappeared.

⁵ A fragment of the poem, called "Elegía a Ramón Sijé," says "Quiero escarbar la tierra con los dientes / quiero apartar la tierra parte a parte / a dentelladas secas y calientes. Quiero minar la tierra hasta encontrarte / y besarte la noble calavera / y desamordazarte y regresarte." (I want to dig into the earth with my teeth / I want to remove it bit by bit / in dry, hot bites. I want to mine the earth until I find you / and kiss that noble skull / and untie the gag and bring you back.)

⁶ We should recall that during the democratic government of Julio María Sanguinetti, in 1986, the Ley de Caducidad de Pretensión Punitiva del Estado (State Punitive Pretension Expiration Law), was sanctioned and ratified by a referendum held in 1989, which firmly establishes impunity for those responsible for crimes against humanity.

⁷ The Varas-Lestard-Baudizone studio, which won the competition, was initially in charge of the Parque de la memoria project, and later, the Alberto Varas studio.

⁸ The existence of archives on disappearances in Argentina has been noted many times and the fact that they might be in the possession of repressors or ex-detainees or the disappeared. A presentation by Juan Carlos Clemente, ex-militant for the Juventud Peronista group who was kidnapped in July of 1976, made in the case against ex-governor of Tucumán, Antonio Bussi is recent evidence of this. There, he handed over a list of 293 names, alongside many of which figured the observation DF (Final disposition, that is, death). Clemente kept the documentation hidden during all these years under the floorboards of his house. "Terror, he indicated, is what made him keep his mouth shut until now". During all these years he received threats. The last one was one month ago. (Elsinger 2010).

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