

Memory, art and intergenerational transmission. Artistic practices with young people in memory sites in Argentina

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Abstract

This text analyzes recent experiences with young people from Middle Schools of the city of Buenos Aires (Argentina) in Memory Sites of this city. Our inquiry is interested in the intergenerational transmission referring to the traumatic past around the last military dictatorship established in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. With this interest, two experiences designed through artistic languages are analyzed: the Posters Project from the Memory Park and the use of poetry in the guided visits to the Memory Site at "El Olimpo", former Clandestine Detention Center for Torture and Extermination, both spaces of the city of Buenos Aires.

Key Words

Intergenerational transmission, memory Sites, narratives, traumatic legacy, young memories

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 1983¹. In all cases, these sites, whether former clandestine detention centers or memorial sites, 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 the 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

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

(Besse 2019). The incorporation of psychoanalysis as an interpretative tool, its circulation through magazines with a wide target readership and the configuration of a professional field² 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 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 article we will approach work experiences from and through different artistic expressions in two memory sites of the city of 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;

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.



Figure 1. Memory Park – Monument to Victims of State Terrorism, Buenos Aires City, Argentina. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

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.

Posters project: young people as producers of memories

The Memory Park is a space of remembrance located in the north of the city 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. 1)⁴, a group of sculptures commemorating State terrorism in Argentina and a hall for temporary exhibitions called PAYS Hall (this acronym in Spanish means: Present Now and Forever). As Patrizia Violi and Cristina Demaria (2017) 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 it is 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

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 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 (Vecchioli 2001).

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 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 meets 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 and/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 review, we will 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 (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 dictatorship⁵. On the other hand, it emphasized the repressive actions suffered by the LGBTIQ+ collective during those years⁶. 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. 2) was done 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 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,

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 (2015).



Figure 2. Poster by students from Secondary School N° 8 Juan Carlos Bruera (from Gregorio de Laferrere, Buenos Aires Province). Source: Memory Park Website.

in a country where the Catholic Church is one of the fiercest opponents of that legalization project⁷. 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 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

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

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



Figure 3. Poster by students from María Ana Mogas School (in Mataderos, Buenos Aires City). Source: Memory Park Website.

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 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 also 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).

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. 4) 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

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.

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.



Figure 4. Sector of cells, former clandestine detention center “El Olimpo”. Source: Paganini (2020).

of Victims of Enforced Disappearances Seen in this Former Clandestine Detention Center, ‘El Olimpo’”).¹²

In the lines that follow, we will analyze a selection of fragments of poems that the site guides use on the tours for the young. 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”, 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 (Ramírez 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 *Eliás-Horacio, Mariano, Inés, Pequi,*

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.

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

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 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 guardians./ It’s time,/ we break bread amongst

us/ not a crumb is missing,/ I imagine in everybody’s eyes/ a sparkle of triumph” (Ramírez 1986: s/n).

Thus, the poems allow for a more complex profile of the detainees, and not just as mere victims, and 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 cloth¹⁶/ 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...” (Ramírez 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 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

and those of the present.

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.

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

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).

Final thoughts

As we have seen, the Posters Project at the Memory Park depicts two of the main challenges that memorial sites should 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 Rapp 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 (Rouso 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.

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