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Absent Yet Still Present:

Family Pictures in Argentina's *Recordatorios*

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Absent Yet Still Present: Family Pictures in Argentina's *Recordatorios*

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2010

Dedication

Para mi tía Sylvia, que sobrevivió una época vertiginosa y apasionante.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my advisor, Andrea Giunta, for her kind words, thought-provoking comments to the manuscript, and smart suggestions. Also, thank you for your efforts in creating spaces for emerging scholars in meetings and debates and for treating me as if I were your colleague instead of your student.

I am also enormously grateful to Naomi Lindstrom, my second reader, without whom I could never have completed the task of writing in a foreign language. With her knowledge, intellectual guidance and fantastic editing eye, she enhanced this thesis in so many ways. Gracias!

Thanks to Elizabeth Jelin, who not only generously read the manuscript and gave me insightful feedback, but also accompanied me throughout this master from the very outset sharing her ideas and suggesting bibliography.

Thanks to all who let me interview them and shared their time and stories with me, even if some of them are not named in this writing: Aurora Morea, Enriqueta Maroni, Aída Sarti, Alicia Furman, Estela Barnes de Carlotto, Gustavo Germano, Virginia Giannoni, Carlos González, María Eva Fuentes Walsh (qepd), Ana Paoletti, José Luis Meirás and Florencia Amnestoy.

The artist and photographer Gustavo Germano kindly sent me the pictures that comprise his photographic exhibition, *Ausencias*.

My friends Lindsay Adams and Amethyst Beaver helped me with the translation of several recordatorios. Also, many thanks to Laura Schenquer, another friend of mine, for always being ready to answer all my questions and for sharing resources.

Thanks to Kimberly Terry and Henry Dietz from ILAS, for helping me solve several funding issues and for their support.

I am grateful both to Nicolás Casullo, who is no longer with us, for his generosity and to Alejandro Kaufman for his patience and advice.

I am also indebted to my aunt Sylvia Viscay, who keeps collecting the recordatorios for me in Argentina and to whom I owe my broader interest in the memories of state repression.

I owe special gratitude to my father, Daniel Van Dembroucke, for always supporting and helping me whenever I need it and to my mother, Mercedes Nuss, for keeping me updated in the field of literature, for her suggestions and illuminating comments.

Finally, my husband Manuel Balán helped me in more ways that I can begin to explain. Not only did he patiently read and edited every single word that I have written since I arrived to Austin, but he also discussed and shared ideas, underlined quotes for me, helped me organize my thoughts. Thank you for being so generous! During the writing of this thesis I enjoyed his company, love and laughs. He became my security blanket and made all the difference.

5 May 2010

Abstract

Absent Yet Still Present: Family Pictures in Argentina's *Recordatorios*

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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This study analyzes one of the most active memories of state repression during democracy in Argentina: the memorial advertisements (*recordatorios)* of those disappeared by the most recent military dictatorship (1976-1983), which are published on a daily basis in the newspaper *Página/12.* In this thesis, I focus on the pictures of the victims of state repression that appear within the frame of these memorials as the expression of both cultural and personal memory.

The leader of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Estela de Carlotto, published the first recordatorio on the tenth anniversary of her daughter's death, in August 1988. During that same year, 20 relatives of disappeared people went to the newspaper and followed Carlotto's footsteps, publishing advertisements themselves. Currently, more

than 20 years after the first advertisement was published, three to five recordatorios appear in the newspaper every day.

The emergence of the recordatorios inaugurates a new discursive genre as contradictory as the disappearance itself. On the one hand, they are connected to the announcements related to the search for missing people (serving the goal of finding a person alive). On the other hand, the recordatorios also resemble obituaries (making a tribute to someone that has passed away). The recordatorio thus emerges as an impossible reality, following the logic of both genres, thus performing both functions in a paradoxical way.

This study focuses on the family pictures that appear in the recordatorios and sheds light on how they illustrate the entanglement of the family and the public sphere, and contribute to the debate on the role of personal subjectivity in the construction of collective memory. From a multidisciplinary perspective, the present thesis aims to capture the complexity surrounding these texts and the familial imagery they include, looking at the inherent tension between the private tragedy of a family that has lost one of its members and the public character that stems from their publication in one of Argentina's national newspapers.

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Introduction[1]

The violence and loss of life generated by traumatic experiences such as genocides or periods marked by state repression leave long-lasting marks on people, both individually and collectively. The kidnappings and disappearances that went on during Argentina's most recent military regime (1976-1983) are no exception, as they left indelible marks and open wounds in society that are still very much present in everyday life.

Few representations of memories of this period are as everyday as the *recordatorios* (memorial advertisements) that are published day after day by families of the disappeared in one of Argentina's main newspapers, *Página/12*. These memorial advertisements are published for free on the anniversary of the day on which each victim was kidnapped. Their beginnings date back to 1988, when the leader of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Estela Carlotto, published the first one. Since then, these daily recordatorios are a visible part of Argentina's human rights struggle, and represent one of the most persistent exercises of memories of state repression. This research focuses on how the disappeared are remembered by looking at the pictures of the victims of state repression that appear within their frames as expressions of both cultural and personal memory.

Even though it can be argued that the recordatorios constitute one of the most spontaneous and proactive exercises of memories of state repression, they practically

[1] All translations to English from works in Spanish, French or Portuguese are mine except specified otherwise.

went unnoticed and were mostly forgotten by social scientists for over a decade. On the contrary, other manifestations that were born to express the phenomenon of the disappeared were generally recognized as significant in memorializing Argentina's recent past. Meanwhile, scholars from Argentina as well as from Europe and the US have produced numerous studies related not only to a historical revision of what happened during the dictatorship but also to other events and expressions such as The Silhouette (El siluetazo), Resistance Marches (*Marchas de la Resistencia*), the "escraches" (demonstrations in the houses of former torturers), among many others. Surprisingly, the recordatorios were overlooked until very recently. Only now, more than thirty years after the coup d'état, the recordatorios are becoming visible to scholars in Argentina.

Although I used to encounter the recordatorios for years while reading *Página/12*, I had never thought about them as a possible object of study until 2003. Back then I was approaching the completion of my undergraduate degree in Communication Studies while working as a press aide at the Senate of the Entre Ríos province for former Senator Daniel Rosas Paz. It was time to find a topic for my thesis. One day, working at the Senate, I was struck by the fact that Senator Rosas Paz carried a notebook where he pasted recordatorios from *Página/12*. Seeing these recordatorios out of context, being collected by someone who was not directly affected by the dictatorship, had a deep impact on me and I soon decided to explore them in more depth and to write my thesis on this very subject.

It was then that I started to conduct research on the recordatorios, only to find that they were scarcely mentioned in articles and that they were not yet conceived of as an

object of studies in their own right, at least in published works. The first article I found, *Tumbas de papel*, by the Argentine scholar living in Germany Estela Schindel, was published in 1997 in an Ecuadorean journal of Communication Studies, *Chasqui*. In this article, the author briefly explored the contradictory nature of these recordatorios in terms of discursive genre. The second article I encountered was by Gustavo Bruzzone, the editor of *Ramona*, an Argentine magazine dedicated to the visual arts. Bruzzone wondered whether these recordatorios deserved to be considered conceptual works of public art. The fact that they are produced by ordinary people who do not think of themselves as artists, the author argued, does not erase the fact that they create an specific aesthetic of the disappearance of important symbolic value. Ludmila da Silva Catela also included the recordatorios as part of her comprehensive study of several manifestations related to the disappearances in *No habrá flores en la tumba del pasado*, originally written in Portuguese in 2000 as her doctoral thesis for the Universidade General do Rio de Janeiro, but published in Spanish in 2001. Finally, a very brief and unsigned article was published in the bilingual Spanish design magazine *B-Guided* in 2002.

At the time, I was surprised that the recordatorios were not widely studied despite having been published for more than fifteen years at that moment. And once I started looking for a supervisor who would find these memorial advertisements a compelling object for analysis, I soon encountered a rather hostile environment. Shortly after, I realized that the recordatorios were in fact considered irrelevant by many people and that many thought that if the recordatorios were to be mentioned in a study, they would have to be considered only as part of a broader picture, but not as a single representation

deserving to be treated as an issue in their own right. I also found that many people, including professors, had at best mixed feelings about the recordatorios. Mainly, they saw these memorial advertisements as a disturbing exposure of intimate feelings in the newspaper, somehow part of a broader phenomenon of the *spectacularization* of pain.

However, it can be said that from 2006 onward, along with a change in the political scenario that brought a different politics of public memory and a general recognition and resurgence of the memorialization of the past, the recordatorios started to appear more frequently in academic texts. For instance, María Angélica Melendi's "*Tumbas de papel. Estrategias del arte (y de la memoria) en una era de catástrofes*" and Fernando Reati's "*El monumento de papel: la construcción de una memoria colectiva en los recordatorios de los desaparecidos*," both part of the same volume *Políticas de la Memoria*, were published in 2007. In 2008, Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone compiled *El Siluetazo*, which included an article by Estela Schindel in which she briefly referred to the recordatorios as one of the more innovative interventions developed by the families of the disappeared. They have also been analyzed as part of a larger phenomenon dealing with photographic strategies facing the disappearances in Natalia Fortuny's unpublished master's thesis for the University of San Martín, "Huellas de la desaparición y el terror" (2009). Most recently, Laura Panizo published in a Spanish journal an article entitled "Muerte, desaparición y memoria" (2009) in which she mentions the recordatorios. She is currently writing a doctoral dissertation for the University of Buenos Aires in which she compares the ritualistic negotiations of death put forth by the families of those who disappeared and the families of the Malvinas soldiers.

Separate mention needs to be made regarding Luis Gusmán's book *Epitafios: el derecho a la muerte escrita*, published in 2005, in which the author engages in a literary and cultural study of the genres dedicated to the dead, namely the epitaphs. He ends his journey wondering what happens when facing the nonexistence of bodies to mourn over and arrives at the recordatorios, as an attempt by the families of the disappeared to grieve and name those who have been deprived not only of their lives, but also in many cases even of their names and identities.

Not strictly in the academic field but equally important, Virginia Giannoni—a graphic designer—created a traveling exhibition composed of recordatorios that she selected according to their poetic value, published a book in 2007. Repeating the same title of the exhibition, the volume *Poesía diaria, porque el silencio es mortal*, includes 208 recordatorios from her collection, translated into English. These translations were the work of the Argentine poet Juan Gelman's official translator Joan Lindgren, who two years before—in March 2005—had organized a workshop in the San Diego Public Library in the State of California, in which participants were encouraged to translate recordatorios ("Nomeolvides"). At the same time, Giannoni constructed a website <www.poesiadiaria.com.ar>, where she uploaded recordatorios to be translated into either French or English by the readers.

Yet, despite these contributions, both the history of the recordatorios as well as their role in the strategies followed by families of the disappeared in order to deal with the past, remain to be told and published.

In order to provide a well-grounded analysis of the recordatorios, first I introduce Argentina's political context from the 1970s onward. My aim is to offer an account of the specific historical and cultural conditions in which the memories of the disappeared emerged and evolved through time. Since studying a given memory in isolation can potentially erase the social, cultural, and political universe in which it interacts even with contested memories (Confino 1399), this section pays special attention to the political scenario in which the recordatorios are printed. In doing so, I provide a general context of production and social atmosphere. Moreover, emphasizing certain significant moments that marked the Argentine struggle for human rights in the aftermath of the dictatorship allows me to identify the moments in which the ongoing struggle for symbolic power becomes reflected and embodied in social artifacts (Collier and Collier 29).

The second chapter revisits the history of the recordatorios: how was the first one published, who publishes them and when, why they are printed in this particular newspaper, and how the practice of writing and publishing recordatorios emerged as a public and visible representation of memory that is still evolving, since around two or three of these memorial advertisements continue to appear in print on a daily basis. This section traces the process that resulted in the emergence of these recordatorios and that continues through spontaneous repetition to the present day, helping to disentangle "the unfolding of social action over time" (Ronald Aminzade qted in Falletti 2). Additionally, this second section provides a broad spectrum of common practices in the production of recordatorios. Instead of dividing the recordatorios into categories, I describe the styles

and conventions generally used in their texts, as well as the common traits both in their claims and in the ways in which they portray those who have disappeared.

Chapter III focuses on the description and analysis of the pictures contained in a corpus made up of ten recordatorios. Focusing on their social function, we could initially group the pictures that appear in the recordatorios into two broad categories. On the one hand, we would have pictures that are individual portraits taken for ID documents, which originally had the social purpose of being carried as documents that confirmed individual identity to bureaucratic and governmental authority. On the other hand, we would have casual family pictures, which were taken in the private realm of the household and were meant to circulate among family members and acquaintances. However, in order to reflect the many existing variations among the pictures in a way that provides theoretical leverage for their analysis, I propose to divide the pictures according to a set of analytical categories and subcategories: a) their sphere of circulation: private or public; b) the situation in which the picture was taken: everyday or special event and; c) the posture of the photographed subject: candid or posed.

The point of looking at variations within the whole corpus is to capture the complexity around the recordatorios, where personal memory and public representation of the disappeared interplay with and overlap each other. While a long tradition of obituaries exists, these announcements do not fall entirely into its conventions. Rather, the intrinsically undetermined nature of disappearances has generated a new genre where the portraits are located in between life and death as those depicted are between dead and missing.

How does the appearance of everyday family pictures transform their original meaning by their appearance in a massive media? Why do recordatorio writers publish pictures of the disappeared? In what way does a personal picture acquire an iconic status? Are the recordatorios replacing the lack of graves for an unburied generation? How do these black and white pictures convey a sense of singularity and collectivity at the same time? An interdisciplinary lens provides a theoretical framework for this study, including notions such as *collective memory* (inaugurated by Maurice Halbwachs), photographic language, photography as a technique, and its relationship with familial aesthetics and the process of memory and forgetting; both from the inaugural standpoint of the Holocaust Studies as well as from the theoretical contribution to the analysis in the aftermath of traumatic experiences in the Latin American context, and Argentina in particular.

Finally, the conclusion points to the importance of conceiving of memories of traumatic pasts as dynamic processes that evolve through time, even when they may appear as repetitive or fixed. In short, although events in the past seem to be immutable, societal memories change and actually reshape their significance and meaning in the present. In addition, I review some of the issues raised in the preceding discussion and conclude by addressing the implications and potential academic contribution of my research.

Taking into account that—as was already pointed out—the recordatorios have not received much attention, I contend that they provide an effective entry-point in order to analyze not only the broader politics of memorializing the Argentine recent past, but also the constitutive tensions between individual and social memories. On the one hand, they

portray the private drama at the heart of each family that has lost one of its members, and, on the other hand, they depict the collective memory-making of the disappeared from their publication in a newspaper.

Chapter I. Argentina: Reconstructing the Political Context

Argentina's politics during the seventies were in tune with the rise of conservatism and the increase of violence in the Latin American Southern Cone, as dictatorships ruled the region. In these countries, the military used its coercive force in order to take over governments in crisis (O'Donnell 4). Except for Paraguay, under Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship since 1954, democracies were systematically overthrown by the military in Brazil (1964), Chile (1973), Uruguay (1973) and Argentina (1966 and again in 1976) in the late sixties and early seventies (Jelin, "Memories" 5-6).

Marked by the emergence of Juan Domingo Perón and the development of Peronism in the mid 1940s and 1950s, Argentina alternated between democracy and military regimes. After Perón governed the country from 1946-1955, a military Junta headed by Eduardo Leonardi—who was later replaced by Pedro Aramburu—took over the government, outlawing Peronism and sending Perón into exile. Paradoxically, the prohibition of Peronism actually helped make the movement stronger. Thus, by 1973, having been exiled for eighteen years in Spain, Perón returned to Argentina and shortly thereafter won the elections and assumed the presidency. However, not a year after his return to Argentina, Perón died at 79 years of age, and the first lady and vice president Isabel Martínez de Perón assumed power. Under her rule, the already existing conflicts between the Peronist left and right wing factions deepened and the social order rapidly

became less stable.[2] In this context, the AAA (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance), a right wing death squad led by the infamous minister of social welfare José López Rega and supported by Isabel's government, ignited an atmosphere of violence where dead bodies of alleged leftists and opponents of the government were found in the streets as "warnings."[3] Moreover, on November 1974 Isabel declared a state of siege and a couple of months later, in early 1975, issued a decree in order to 'eliminate' guerrilla activities in the province of Tucumán. Finally, in October 1975, she extended the power of the armed forces to 'eliminate' the guerrilla groups throughout the country (Guest 19).

The prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty and chaos contributed to the success of the military both in taking over power in a coup d'état on March 24 1976, and in rapidly establishing a new government. Representing the three branches of the military, the new ruling military junta was comprised of Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla—commander in chief of the Argentine Army—, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera—commander in chief of the navy—and Brigadier Orlando Ramón Agosti—commander in chief of the air force. Videla was proclaimed president of the three-man Junta and chief of state, but his executive power was to be shared with the others.

In this opening chapter, I succinctly describe the social atmosphere of the seventies and the social actors at play. Second, I explain the military regime's oppressive policy and trace some of its long-term consequences. Finally, I briefly describe the

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[2] As it is well known and documented, the Peronist movement was highly heterogeneous in the sense that, from the outset, it included people both from the right and the left as well as people from different social classes.

[3] According to the *Never Again Report [Nunca Más]* by the CONADEP the AAA killed 1500 individuals between July 1974 and the end of 1975 (xi)

existing contested memories around this conflictive past and conclude by addressing different manifestations and expressions of the disappeared, as a way of providing a general sense of how the disappeared are ubiquitous and present in today's cultural landscape.

1. THE DICTATORSHIP TAKES OVER POWER

The military's plot to take power was an "open secret" (Dinges 135), and in fact a large proportion of the population supported the military takeover. As illustrated by several newspapers' front-page coverage in those days, the coup was not covered as a violation of constitutional rights and abolition of democracy, but rather it was referred to with a blatant tone of normality: "Business as usual: Army Forces take office" (*Clarín*),[4] "The three commanders in chief take office" (*La Nación*), "The three commanders in chief took their oath in the Libertador Building: The Military Junta Takes Office" (*La Opinión*). The Argentine Junta was well received by foreign media and governments despite the widespread international outcry against human rights violations after Pinochet's takeover in Chile (Wright 108). In the United States, the *Washington Post* described Lieutenant General Videla as "the sort of military figure around whom few anecdotes grow. The word most often applied to him is 'moral'" ("Junta Chief" 1). Moreover, the *New York Times* reported that the United States "formally recognized the new military leadership in Argentina and expressed hopes for continual cordial relations

[4] "Total Normalidad: Las Fuerzas Armadas ejercen el poder" (*Clarín,* 25 Mar 1976), "Asumieron el gobierno los tres comandantes generales" (*La Nación*, 25 Mar 1976),"Los tres comandantes prestaron juramento en el edificio de Libertador: Gobierna la Junta Militar" (*La Opinión*, 25 Mar 1976)

between the two countries" ("Argentina Rulers" 4). In other words, both on local and international levels the coup was welcomed in some circles as "a legitimate intervention to restore order and stop the violence" (Dinges 138).

The military defined its own program as the "Process of National Reorganization," implying that they had taken power in order to put the country back on track. However, the innocuous-sounding title soon lost all credibility when, right after the takeover, the atmosphere of uncertainty turned into one of fear and terror. From the very outset, the military shut down Congress and empowered itself to designate a president, banned unions and students' or teachers' associations, and expelled deans from universities, replacing them with military sympathizers. Furthermore, there was a pervasive use of censorship, strikes and unions were declared illegal, and political parties as well as political activities were banned (Gillespie 228; Feitlowitz 7; Romero 288; Acuña and Smulovitz, "Adjusting the Armed Forces" 14). As an immediate consequence of the suppression of the rule of law, life and politics seemed to converge in a situation in which social institutions and rules were suddenly dissolved (Agamben 65). In turn, these rules were replaced by intermediate measures such as a curfew or *toque de queda*, state of siege or *estado de sitio*, and even *grupo de tareas*—death squads—, all of which represented a state of emergency that became and remained permanent. Moreover, following the National Security Doctrine (an ideology promoted by the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, a project of the U.S. Defense Department where communism was seen as a threat) the new Junta adopted and organized a secret plan to impose a massive system of clandestine detentions—which ended up being

disappearances and state killings—in order to deal with organized armed groups of leftists.

2. A SUMMARY OF THE ARGENTINE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATIONS

The history of Argentine revolutionary organizations is highly complex and deserves attention in and of itself, as the studies by Gillespie (*Soldiers of Perón),* Seoane (*Todo o Nada*), Giussani (*Montoneros: La Soberbia Armada*), and many others, suggest. The following paragraphs present a brief account of the scenario.

The most important armed organizations were the Peronist *Montoneros* and the Trotskyite ERP (People's Revolutionary Army). On the one hand, the Montoneros formed a Peronist urban guerrilla of Catholic origin that emerged in 1968, which by 1974 had come to encompass smaller and less powerful Peronist armed organizations such as the FAR (Revolutionary Armed Forces), FAP (Peronist's Armed Forces) and *Descamisados Montoneros* (Calveiro, *Política y/o violencia* 107). Led by Mario Firmenich, in the early days Montoneros were fully dedicated to bringing Perón back from his eighteen-year exile in order for him to create the '*patria socialista*' (socialist nation). In fact, their revolutionary warfare initially had Perón's approval to commit several terrorist attacks, including the well-known kidnapping and execution of former dictator General Pedro Aramburu, a figure who epitomized anti-Peronism. Later in 1974, shortly after assuming the presidency upon his return from Spain, Perón was cornered by the confrontations between far-right and far-left factions of his own party, and decided to favor the former by publicly expelling the Montoneros from the Peronist Party. This

confrontation with Perón, who died that same year, ultimately resulted in increased violence in the terrorist attacks claimed by the Montoneros (Vezzetti 66). As Calveiro points out, from the coup in 1976 onward, the Montoneros became more violent, increasing their number of military actions from 400 in 1976, to 700 in 1977 (*Política y/o violencia* 121). However, during that same time, members of the organization also suffered thousands of abductions, which drastically weakened their offensive capacity (Gillespie 236). As the largest urban guerrilla organization in Argentina, the Montoneros were as ideologically heterogeneous as the Peronist movement itself, ranging from radical extremists to critical intellectuals such as the journalist and writer Rodolfo Walsh, who ultimately withdrew from the organization, and who was disappeared just one day after sending the renowned *Open Letter to the Military Junta* (*Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar*), in 1975.[5]

On the other hand, the Trotskyite ERP, led by Mario Roberto Santucho, was born in 1970 as the armed branch of the PRT Party (Revolutionary Workers Party). Unlike the Montoneros, the PRT-ERP was not Peronist. On the contrary, its inspiration came from the Cuban (Guevarist) and Vietnamese experiences facing the imperialist power of the United States. In September of that year, ERP initiated its actions with an attack on a police unit, in which two men were killed. Years later, under the brief 1973-1976 Peronist government, the ERP focused its military action on attacking military headquarters. In 1975, following the '*foco*' theory of revolution, ERP established a rural

[5] The letter is contained in Walsh's journalistic articles' anthology *El violento oficio de escribir:obra periodística (1953-1977)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Flor, 2008).

guerrilla base in the northern province of Tucumán, which provoked the intervention of the Army in what was known as *Operación Independencia*. The ERP, outnumbered in resources, weapons, and soldiers by the Army, was swiftly annihilated. As Calveiro notes, the military seized this opportunity to debut a new repressive methodology, which set a precedent for combating armed organizations: to carry out massive kidnappings and disappearances followed by torture (*Política y/o violencia* 59). The ERP was finally defeated in December 1975, after attacking a military unit in Monte Chingolo. This time, the Army knew beforehand about the operation through intelligence provided by Jesús Rames Ranier, an undercover agent (Lewis 121). After this new defeat, ERP started its gradual dissolution. In 1976, the leader Santucho was killed while trying to escape from his apartment in Villa Marteli, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Buenos Aires (Seoane 294). By that year, there were only fifty ERP militants left, and they subsequently died away (Calveiro, *Política y/o violencia* 105).

3. THE DICTATORSHIP AND ITS REPRESSIVE POLICY

It is worth pointing out that, although they were still able to carry out several attacks against the military regime, these guerrillas were already decimated by the time the Armed Forces assumed power in 1976. In Wright's words, "it is clear that at no time after the coup were the guerrillas a threat to capture territory or overthrow the government" (102). However, although the ERP and Montoneros were already weak and posed no serious threat to the stability of the government, the military quickly broadened the practice of disappearing people right after the takeover. The new target of the military

was the "the subversives" (*subversivos*): an alleged 'internal enemy' who was ready to destroy the country's Catholic and 'Argentine' values from within, against which the military would fight in order to 'save the nation.' Under this broad category, the targets of clandestine detentions turned out to be almost everyone who looked suspicious, under the assumption that if they were not 'subversive' themselves, at least they were in contact with people that were.[6] In fact, for the military, the ongoing 'war' was not only over the eradication of the guerrilla organizations but also over ideological values: 'subversive' was a comprehensive and ambiguous category that included all those who opposed the dictatorship, whether this opposition was violent or peaceful. As Videla himself stated in an interview with the *New York Times* in January 1978, "a terrorist is not just someone with a gun or a bomb but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization" (qtd in Gillespie 229). As a matter of fact, "from the National Process of Reorganization's perspective (…) not actively supporting the dictatorship—either out of passivity or ingenuity—was considered subversive" (Frontalini and Caiati 25).

The broad terms of the aforementioned clandestine repressive policy had immediate consequences. In particular, clandestine detentions turned out to be massive, which generated a pervasive atmosphere of terror that ultimately spread through the entire society: "(s)ince there were no rules to separate proper behavior from deviant

[6] For more information on who were targeted as enemies by the military, see Frontalini and Caiati 21-6 and Gillespie 229.

actions, the vast majority of the citizens came to see themselves as potential victims" (Acuña and Smulovitz, "Militares en la transición" 30).

During the first years of the dictatorship, the harshest in terms of state terror, thousands of individuals—members of armed militant groups, simple dissidents, or just civilians unconnected with terrorist activities—were taken from their houses, the streets, or places of work without any official record and transferred to one of the 340 concentration camps all over the country (CONADEP 51). Once there, detainees would not only suffer from hunger, extremely poor sanitary conditions, and sexual violence but also, they inexorably went through harsh interrogations held in order to track down more supposed 'subversives.' Many of the officers who had been trained in counter-insurgency in the United States employed both physical and psychological torture—in its most sophisticated and macabre forms—as interrogation techniques (Lewis 135). During the long torture sessions, these abductees were chained and subject to the 'submarine' (suffocation provoked by immersion), mock executions, cigarette burnings, rape, and the *picana* (a type of electric prod introduced as a means of torture by an Argentine police officer)[7], among many other brutal torture techniques. More often than not, when using the picana, the participation of doctors ensured that detainees would survive several

[7] The police officer who invented the use of *picana* during police interrogations was one of the sons of the famous writer Leopoldo Lugones. Ironically, in the seventies, his daughter, Susana 'Piri' Lugones who was Rodolfo Walsh's partner for years and a Montoneros activist, suffered torture by means of her own father's invention. For more information see Marta Merkin, *Los Lugones* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2004).

'interrogations' by administering the exact electric shock voltage a human body is capable of withstanding.[8]

Once the interrogations were done, the prisoners were 'transferred,' a word used as a euphemism for 'execution'. In this last stage of the repressive methodology, creativity was as macabre as in torture sessions, as the military did not limit themselves to perform classic shootings or executions. Rather, one of the most common ways of getting rid of the prisoners was by drugging them and then throwing them into the ocean or into the Río de La Plata. Many years later, in 1995, a former navy officer—Adolfo Scilingo—troubled by hearing his former superiors lie about their involvement in the kidnappings and killings in the 1970s, decided to publicly confess that he had participated in these "death flights." In his interview with the journalist Horacio Verbitsky—who published the entire transcript in *The Flight* (*El vuelo*)—Scilingo recounted that every week during the dictatorship he would take drugged prisoners from the "Argentine Auschwitz" (the ESMA, the Navy School of Mechanics of Buenos Aires that functioned as a detention center) and throw them to the Ocean from an airplane:

> Scilingo shoved thirty individuals to their death: thirteen on the first flight, seventeen on the second. Among them was a sixty-five-year-old man, a sixteen-year-old boy, and two pregnant women in their early twenties. On his first flight, Scilingo slipped and nearly fell out of the plane with a prisoner who was struggling and would not let go. He survived only because a comrade grabbed him and pulled back. "It's a recurring nightmare," he testified, "one I'll have for the rest of my life." He is still tormented by "the heavy scrape and jangle of [the prisoners'] chains and

[8] Detailed evidence of the methods of torture used by the military soldiers during 'interrogations' is shown in Calveiro, *Poder y Desaparición* 63-72.

shackles ... the clothing left strewn on the floor of the plane after the 'cargo' was dropped" (Feitlowitz 196-7).

Scilingo's confession also put the Catholic Church in the media spotlight, as the former navy officer was explicit about how many priests had participated in the flights. "We sought advice in the ecclesiastical hierarchy in order to provide a Christian and non-violent death" (Scilingo qtd in Verbitsky, "La solución final"). Moreover, Scilingo added that these priests often drafted special prayers to provide relief to the military men in charge of executing the detainees, whose consciences were obviously affected by carrying out these killings. In spite of these strong declarations, the upper echelons of the church decided to maintain their silence, avoiding any reference to their complicity or participation during the dictatorship ("Silencio de la Iglesia"). In essence, the military regime acted with a blatant sense of impunity, which was made clear when Videla cynically explained on television that a disappeared "is an incognito (…) it is a disappeared, has no entity, he is nor dead nor alive, he is disappeared" (Videla qtd in Jinkins).

4. WHO DID THE DICTATORSHIP DISAPPEAR?

Before the disappeared became a memory, they were mostly young women and men (many of them almost children). The Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), a Truth Commission created in the first years of democracy in order to reconstruct the facts, investigated disappearances and identified 8,960 people killed. However, the secretive nature of the executions meant that many bodies were

never found, leaving a question mark on the exact number of victims. Moreover, it is widely known that many families never searched for their disappeared relatives; therefore excluding them from both official and unofficial counts of victims of state repression.

Although human rights organizations estimated that there were around 30,000 disappeared—a number that has become an icon up to the point that the disappeared are often mentioned as 'the 30,000'—there is still controversy over the exact number of victims.[9] In any case, and regardless of the exact number of victims, the magnitude of the Argentine tragedy may be measured, as film director Juan Mandelbaum has suggested, by the fact that almost everyone in Argentina has either a disappeared person within his or her family, or at least knows someone who has a disappeared relative or friend.[10]

Amongst the 8,960 disappeared identified by the CONADEP, 70% were men and 30% were women, of whom around 300 were pregnant. Many of them were members of the Montoneros or the ERP, yet many others just happened to appear in certain address books, or their names were randomly mentioned during torture sessions, or merely because—to the eyes of the military—they pertained to a "suspicious" category of people that included intellectuals, workers, or journalists, among many others.[11] The Argentine dictatorship did not carry out a 'Jew hunt' as such even though it is widely documented

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[9] See Vezzetti for a discussion on the number of disappeared people during the dictatorship. See also an article by Héctor Schmucler quoted in Vezzetti: "Actualidad de los derechos humanos," *Controversia*, num 1, October 1979. As an activist and former politician, Graciela Fernández Meijide also published a controversial book in which she puts into question the numbers of victims claimed by the human rights movement. See: *La historia íntima de los derechos humanos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2009).

[10] Juan Mandelbaum is the director of the documentary "Our Disappeared. Nuestros Desaparecidos." For more information on the film, see its website <http://www.ourdisappeared.com>

[11] According to APBA (Buenos Aires Journalists Association), 30, 2% of the disappeared were workers, 10,7% professionals, 21% were students, 5,7% professors and 1,6 % were journalists.

that anti-Semitic animosity was common-place within the military and that, once abducted, Jewish people were subject to 'special treatment' in torture sessions (Timerman 136; Calveiro, *Poder y Desaparición* 95; CONADEP 67-72).[12] Yet from the total number of disappeared people, 10 percent were Jewish. This was the case not due to a special persecution but because a large number of Jewish people were overrepresented in certain intellectual urban circles related to journalism, art, psychology and others that were considered 'suspicious' *per se* (Feitlowitz 106).

It is difficult to give a fair depiction of the actual scenario, as the atrocities committed by the military regime are difficult to overstate. As Jarausch and Geyer point out, "mass murder leaves marks on people and societies that are only slowly and hesitantly, if ever, overcome. Wounds and traumas may be healed, but the destruction of entire societies and cultures is not easily, if ever, undone" (19). In the case of Argentina, the traumatic past has had long-term consequences that are still very much present. For instance, as was already mentioned, hundreds of the detainees were pregnant women who gave birth while captive in concentration camps. Their babies were clandestinely adopted—or rather robbed—and raised by either military families or families of military supporters, without the children finding out about their real identity. To this day, even when *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Grandmothers of the *Plaza de Mayo*) have identified

[12] Feitlowitz brings up the issue of the Jewish institutions that kept on functioning during the dictatorship despite the abduction of several members of its community. For more information on this issue, see: Laura Schenquer "Detenidos-desaparecidos judíos: implicancias y desencuentros producidos alrededor del nombre" (V Jornadas de Sociología de la UNLP, La Plata, December 2008); Leonardo Senkman and Mario Sznajder; eds, *El legado del autoritarismo. Derechos Humanos y antisemitismo en la argentina contemporánea* (Buenos Aires: Nuevohacer, 1995); Edy Kaufmann and Beatriz Cymberknopf, "La dimensión judía en la represión durante el régimen militar en la Argentina (1976-1983)," *El antisemitismo en Argentina,* (Vol II y III, Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1986).

and recovered over 100 of these babies—now adults in their thirties—it is believed that there are over 400 people who do not know about their real identity as children of the disappeared.[13]

5. THE DICTATORSHIP'S LAST RASPING BREATH

At the end of the so-called 'Process of National Reorganization,' the country had to deal with the profound consequences and legacy of what is considered the most violent and conflictive period in Argentina's twentieth century history. The two supposed main objectives of the dictatorship—to eradicate the 'subversives' and to rebuild the economy—failed drastically. First, the flagrant violation of basic democratic and human rights on the part of the state generated a pervasive context of fear and terror, which has proven very difficult to overcome, remaining present in different realms of social life. Second, the military's economic and financial strategy, headed by businessman José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, was based on the over-devaluation of the peso, which led to the one of the deepest economic debacles in the country's history (Cavarozzi 45). By the end of the dictatorship, "the national debt had increased more than threefold to 30,000m dollars, GNP per capita was lower in 1980 than in 1974" (Gillespie 231).

The dictatorship ended in 1983, after a major military disaster led by General Galtieri—president of the Junta at the time—who decided to occupy the Malvinas Islands located in the South American coast. These islands had been controlled by Great Britain

[13] For more information on the children of the disappeared, see: Julio Nosiglia, *Botín de guerra* (Buenos Aires: Tierra Fértil, 1985); Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999), which has also been published in Spanish; Juan Gelman, *Ni el flaco perdón de Dios* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1995).

but claimed by Argentina since 1833. In 1982, the Argentine military declared war upon one of the most powerful armies in the world, sending thousands of untrained and ill-equipped young soldiers—who were recruited at the last minute—to an already lost war (Lorenz, *Las guerras* 96). As expected, Argentina was easily defeated by the British and suffered 650 casualties, a number that continued increasing in the postwar years given that nearly 300 former soldiers committed suicide upon their return from the islands (Lorenz qted in "News from Abroad" 22).[14]

After the Malvinas fiasco, the dictatorship lost what was left of its political credibility and was forced to call elections. The Argentine armed forces, much like the Nazis who tried to destroy all the evidence of their crimes prior to the end of the war, attempted to hide the record of their atrocities that provided "ground on which guilty conscience could actually be proved" (Arendt 249). The military tried to ensure its impunity through two legal documents. First, they passed an 'auto-amnesty' law in order to protect themselves from subsequent prosecutions during the upcoming democratic regime (Romero 134). Second, they issued a decree (n° 2726/83) stipulating the destruction of all documents related to state repression (Acuña and Smulovitz, "Militares en la transición" 47). In December 1983, Raúl Alfonsín—the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR) presidential candidate who defeated the *Peronist* (PJ) candidate Ítalo Luder—became president, and the first decision of Congress after the transition to democracy was to revoke the auto-amnesty law (Feld 13).

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[14] For more information on the Malvinas War, see: Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill, *Los Pichiciegos* (Buenos Aires: de la Flor, 1982), available also in English as *Malvinas Requiem:visions of an underground war* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007). See also: Federico Lorenz, *Las guerras por Malvinas* (2006) and *Malvinas: Una guerra argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2009).

6. THE TRANSITION AND AFFIRMATION OF DEMOCRACY

During the first years of democratic rule, the government seemed committed to the reconstruction of the facts, investigating what had happened to the disappeared. However, while on the one hand the government tried to punish the human rights violations in accordance with Alfonsín's campaign promises, on the other it attempted to avoid confrontation with the armed forces in order to keep them as allies or, at least, not as enemies (Acuña and Smulovitz, "Militares en la transición" 50-51). This dual strategy resulted in major setbacks in the search for truth and justice for the crimes committed during the dictatorship.

In 1983, President Alfonsín founded the CONADEP, *Comisión Nacional sobre la desaparición de personas* (National Commission on the Disappeared), an investigative commission formed by notables in order to gather information related to kidnappings and disappearances during the dictatorship. Given that most of the abductions were carried out without any official records and that the military destroyed any traces before leaving power, the report had to be based on taking thousands of vivid oral testimonies from relatives of the disappeared and from people who survived the detention camps.

As Elizabeth Jelin and Susana Kaufman point out in an article that goes through the different layers and levels of remembering and forgetting in Argentina, if CONADEP was "a way to discover what had happened, to find out and acknowledge the Truth," the next step was to "ask for Justice" (93). This goal was initially (and partly) accomplished by the Trial of the Juntas, held in 1985, where the nine commanders who had comprised the Juntas from 1976 to 1982 were put on trial and five of them declared guilty by the

Federal Appeals Court of Buenos Aires.[15] As Jelin and Kaufman note, the trial was at least controversial from a juridical perspective, as it was intended to try people who had not necessarily committed crimes with their own hands. Similarly to the controversies that arose in the Nuremberg trials and the case against Adolf Eichmann, the prosecution portrayed the military hierarchy as the so-called 'brains' of the dictatorship:

> they might have not given the order to kill individual victims, and yet they were responsible for crimes which they had organized. The strategy of the prosecution was to present evidence (there were more than 800 witnesses) that there was a systematic plan, carried out in all parts of the country following the same methods of illegal detentions, torture and disappearances. In spite of the difficulties, after five months of moving testimonies, testimonies of persons who had overcome fears of revenge and reluctance to reveal publicly shameful and humiliating personal experiences, five of the nine commanders were found guilty. (Jelin and Kaufman 94)

The trial soon became a strong statement for transitional justice. On the one hand, it set a precedent for actually trying the main former commanders responsible for state terrorism. On the other hand, it also broke new ground by trying these commanders in a civil court under the federal jurisdiction instead of in the Supreme Military Court. Furthermore, unlike most of the judicial proceedings in Argentina—which are written and non-public—, this was an oral trial attended by an audience comprised of members

[15] The following commanders were prosecuted: Jorge Rafael Videla—de facto President since 1976 to 1981—was given life sentence. Roberto Eduardo Viola—de facto president since March to December 1981—was sentenced to 17 years in prison. Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri—de facto President up until June 1982—was absolved. Admirals Eduardo Emilio Massera was given life sentence, Armando Lambruschini was sentenced to 8 years in prison while Jorge Isaac Anaya was absolved. Finally, Brigadiers Orlando Ramón Agosti was sentenced to 3 years and 9 months whereas Omar Graffigna and Basilio Lami Dozo's charges were dismissed (Feld 13; Jelin and Kaufman note 4; Acuña and Smulovitz 57; Lewis 220).

of human rights organizations as well as the general public.[16] In addition, the courtroom "had been refurbished to allow for the television coverage" (Lewis 207) and the proceedings were subsequently broadcast on television all over the country (Feld 16).

Nevertheless, rather than being an effective way of leaving the traumatic past behind as the Alfonsín administration would have expected, the Trial proved to be the opposite. From that moment on, the issue of human right abuses would be at the forefront of public debate, eventually triggering further indictments (Acuña and Smulovitz, "Militares en la transición" 58, "Adjusting the Armed Forces" 17; Jelin and Kaufman 94). In fact, the trial of the military juntas went beyond the sentences given to the high commanders, since it legitimized the demands for justice regarding the disappeared by exposing the shameless behavior of the military in front of the rest of society.

In a reversal that shows the power the military still had under the new democratic regime, Congress passed the Full Stop Law (*Ley de Punto Final*) and the Law of Due Obedience (*Ley de Obediencia Debida*), in December 1986 and June 1987, respectively. These laws were a clear attempt to stop the increasing number of indictments and prosecutions against the military. The Full Stop Law dictated that no more indictments would be received after a 60-day period—the deadline was 23 February 1987. This measure implied the end of the prosecutions and investigations related to people accused of political violence. As a response, federal courts all over the country unexpectedly

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[16] "The press boxes were situated against the side walls, while space in the rear was reserved for 75 specially invited guests, many of them leader of human rights organizations: Hebe de Bonafini, Adolfo Pérez de Esquivel, Emilio Mignone and Augusto Conte. Behind them was a gallery with another one hundred seats for the general public. The judges were on a platform in the middle of the room. To one side were a desk and chairs for the prosecution; opposite was a similar arrangement for the defense. There were two chairs facing the judges, one for the witness and another for a translator, if needed" (Lewis 207).

suspended their traditional January break in order to be able to collect more than 300 new indictments (Acuña and Smulovitz, "Militares en la transición" 61). The Law of Due Obedience was passed amid a protest carried out by military rebels known as the '*carapintadas*' (painted faces), who demanded a "'political solution' for the problem of the trials, which in Argentine jargon was a euphemistic way of demanding 'auto-amnesty'" (Acuña and Smulovitz, "Militares en la transición" 62). In a way, this law was a consequence of the carapintada crisis. The democratic government attempted to smooth things over with the military by absolving all subordinates who had committed crimes while carrying out orders. However, as Acuña and Smulovitz argue, this measure did not entirely eliminate the sentiment of discontent within the armed forces. Even if this measure did lessen the punishment of the crimes perpetrated during the dictatorship, in order to avoid punishment low-ranking officers had to admit that they had acted outside the law while following orders. Thus, the law did not justify the actions of the military, actually upholding the armed forces' lack of moral authority ("Militares en la transición" 65).

In October 1989, the newly elected president Carlos Saúl Menem followed the same path, issuing a series of pardons, which freed 277 previously convicted military men in the midst of social uproar and protest. Finally, in the following year president Menem issued a second round of pardons, which even liberated the former heads of the Juntas as well as civilians convicted for their participation in guerrilla organizations (Kaufman and Jelin 95; Wright 152-60; Acuña and Smulovitz, "Militares en la transición" 89). Paradoxically, it was during these years that the military finally lost

almost all its previous power as a political actor. As Levitsky and Murillo noted, this period "saw a dramatic reduction in the military's influence in politics (…) Unlike many other countries in the region, there were no military officers in the cabinet, no independent military political reclamations, and no military shows of force in the streets of the capital" (32).

The Menem administrations (1989-1995 and 1995-1999) were also marked by the confession of ex-navy officer Adolfo Scilingo. As has already been mentioned, the implications of his testimony were unprecedented: it was the first time that a member of the military admitted the use of horrifying methods of interrogation and execution during the dictatorship. Hence, the shock was threefold. First, it profoundly affected society, which was hearing for the first time in many years—and from one of the perpetrators—about the fate of many of the disappeared. On the other hand, Scilingo's confession also affected the core of the military, which felt forced to provide a counter-argument to the public opinion as a desperate attempt to salvage at least some of their already highly damaged reputation. Lastly, it also marked a key moment in the construction of the memory of the disappeared, who for the first time, were recognized as victims by one of the perpetrators.

In 1999, Fernando de la Rúa (UCR) assumed the presidency after defeating the Peronist candidate by virtue of a coalition of the UCR with FREPASO, which already was a coalition of dissenting Peronists and center-left political parties. Having received the legacy of a decade of neoliberal policies from the Menem era, President de la Rúa found himself dealing with the a severe economic, political, and social crisis. By

December 2001, less than a year after being hit by a major corruption scandal involving cases of bribery in the Senate, de la Rúa's presidency was brought to a sudden end in the midst of social uproar (Balán 15).

Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency in 2003, as Argentina was recovering from the economic crisis of 2001. Kirchner—who took office with only 22% of the votes—governed the country from May 2003 to December 2007, and from the outset he made clear that he would deal with human rights violations from a different standpoint than the ones held by his predecessors. In his inaugural speech, he mentioned that "we arrive without resentment but with memory" (qted in Granovsky), and only a couple of months later, he stated his intention to make Congress consider nullifying both the Full Stop and Due Obedience Laws.

Throughout August 2003, Congress debated several proposals to nullify the laws. Finally, after several controversies that made clear that significant political credit was at stake in the passage of the measures, on March 12 2004 the lower chamber of Congress approved the nullification of the laws. This decision was confirmed by the Senate on Tuesday 21, along with the constitutional recognition of the United Nations' definition of "crimes against humanity." This document specifies that these types of crimes include "acts which would constitute a crime when committed in a widespread and/or systematic manner, and/or on a massive scale, and/or on specified grounds."[17]

In March 2004, for the twenty-eighth anniversary of the coup, President Kirchner made another move that left a mark on the social imaginary. He organized a

[17] See: <http://www.un.org/icc/crimes.htm> (accessed 8 May 2009)

commemoration in the former concentration camp ESMA in Buenos Aires in order to announce that the building was to be converted into an official cultural center and place of memory. Additionally, standing in front of the audience, President Kirchner said:

> I come to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the state for the shame of having remained silent about these atrocities during twenty years of democracy. And to those who have committed these macabre and sinister acts, now we can call you what you are by name: you are murderers who have been repudiated by the people (Kirchner qtd in Ginzberg 2004).[18]

For the first time in almost thirty years, there was a sense that the version of the past and memories promoted by the human rights movement were finally becoming part of the official history. As Jelin notes, it is at this particular moment that "the government decisively entered the scene as a key protagonist and organizer of the main commemorative event. Two years later, on the 30th anniversary of the coup, the date was incorporated in the official calendar as a national holiday" ("Public Memorialization" 145).

7. TRACING MEMORIES' TRAJECTORIES AND DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE PAST

Since the transition to democracy in 1983, the trajectory of the memories of the disappeared has been inevitably intertwined both with the social atmosphere of impunity, fear, and injustice, as well as with other memories and accounts of the recent past.

Whereas families of disappeared people demand punishment for the perpetrators and actively promote remembrance and recognition, there is also a large portion of the

[18]The version in English appeared in Wright, *State Terrorism*, qted from NACLA, Report on the Americas 37, n°6 (May-June 2004) 44-5, *Los Angeles Times*, 25 March 2004.

population that is inclined to favor reconciliation through forgetting in order to move on towards the future (Jelin, "Public Memorialization" 139). Among this group, people do not necessarily deny what happened but prefer not to 'dwell on the past.' In addition, a large number of Argentine people continue their lives in denial, claiming that nothing out of the ordinary happened. Interestingly, instead of admitting the existence of a state of terror and acknowledging that there was nothing individual people could do, many people who experienced the dictatorship—consciously or unconsciously—never acknowledge that they were living under the pressure of fear. Instead, many insist that they "did not know" what was going on. During and after the dictatorship, "when convinced that someone had really disappeared, people commonly responded '*por algo será*' (there must be a reason)" (Wright 116). In addition, many people even think that the country actually fared better under the dictatorship. Finally, some grouped themselves in organizations such as AFyAPPA—Association of Families and Friends of Political Prisoners—arguing that the members of the military who were trialed due to their participation in the dictatorship are unjustly held in prison or house-arrest by "having served the sacred duty of defending the Nation against the terrorism of the seventies," as the organization's blog asserts online.[19]

In all, these different points of view reveal, as Jelin has pointed out, that contested memories that confront and intersect each other are still present. It is "unthinkable to find ONE memory, a single vision and interpretation of the past shared by a whole society"

[19] See AFyAPPA's blog: <http://afyappa.blogspot.com/>

("Public Memorialization" 140). The element that changes and evolves is the intensity with which certain voices are heard in certain specific historic moments and under certain conditions. In fact, it seems that during the Kirchner administration, the human rights organizations became part of the institutionalized version of the past provided by the state.

For instance, for many years the families of the disappeared were isolated from society, while the disappeared were considered guilty for having disappeared. An interpretation of the past that had a wide resonance was the "theory of the two demons," which was already popular before 1976 and may have originally emerged—as Vezzetti remarks—in one of Perón's speeches referring to the coup d'état in Chile (116). Later, during the first democratic years, President Alfonsín passed two decrees in order to investigate the illegal actions committed by both the military and the armed organizations (Crenzel 57-58). From the perspective of the "two demons," during the dictatorship there were two opposing and equally guilty sides that defined the political arena. On the one hand, there was the military that had committed "excesses" in their fight against terrorism. On the other hand, there were the terrorists, the disappeared, who, according to this view, deserved to be defeated but were subject to the aforementioned 'excesses.' Another implication of the sweetened version posed by the theory of the two demons was that society was depicted as an innocent spectator of the conflict, washing away its responsibilities. Moreover, and similarly to what the Nazis did in order to trivialize their crimes, the military questioned the number of victims (Pendas 280) and presented these disappearances and clandestine killings as part of an unconventional and necessary war.

In the end, this argument served the purpose of equating the responsibilities between the two sides, depicting the conflict as if it actually were a "dirty war," an expression that justifies and minimizes the importance of state repression.

Contrary to the implications of the use of terms such as "dirty war" and "two demons," Argentina in fact did not suffer a civil war. Rather, it went through a period of state repression and state terrorism. In other words, there was "a state apparatus that resorted systematically to terror and repression of citizens and civil institutions without any respect for existing national and international juridical norms" (Jelin and Kaufman 89).

8. A New Social Actor: The Human Rights Organizations

In spite of the initial support for the military by part of the population, there were also a number of responses to state repression from society and, more specifically, from the human rights movement. Within a context of censorship and terror, they developed concrete strategies to make their voices heard both nationally and beyond Argentina's borders. According to Jelin, "the fundamental lines of action were, on the one hand, the dissemination and public information and public denunciations of violations, including international actions to foster solidarity and support in the struggle against the violations of the military regime and, on the other hand, solidarity and support for victims and their relatives" ("Politics of Memory" 5). After the return of democracy, these organizations played a crucial role by participating in conversations with the government and by helping define the social agenda regarding the design and implementation of new human

rights policies. Moreover, human rights organizations also participated in protests and made their voices heard whenever there was an act of injustice or alleged violation of human rights. During the first years of democracy their task was focused on the search for truth, justice, and full punishment for the perpetrators (Jelin, "La política" 103-4). By the 1990s, the human rights movement was no longer at center stage and it was going through a deep process of redefinition regarding its role in democracy. Throughout these years, there was also a parallel concern regarding the politics of memory: to actively promote, by various means, memory versus forgetting.

As is widely known, out of the organizations that were created in the midst of the dictatorship, two of them became world-famous: Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* and *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*), whose leaders were—and still are—Estela de Carlotto and Hebe de Bonafini, respectively. The origin of these organizations dates back to 1977, a year after the coup, when a group of women gathered in Plaza de Mayo in front of the presidential palace, in order to demand the return of their kidnapped sons and daughters, and for the restitution of their grandchildren who were either kidnapped or born in captivity. Since there was a curfew in effect and any gathering was strictly prohibited, they started to walk in circles wearing white head scarves with their children's names embroidered, as a symbol of the diapers they used when they were babies. Some of these women were eventually

kidnapped and murdered,[20] but most of them—now between 80 and 95 years old—keep going to Plaza de Mayo every Thursday at 3pm in order to walk in circles.

In January 1986 Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo split in two when a group of twelve Mothers quit the organization. Annoyed by Hebe de Bonafini's leadership and her strong political stances, this group founded the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo—Fouding Line or *Línea Fundadora*—referred hereafter as "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo-fl."

Whereas the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo-fl were willing to work with the government in order to achieve their goals, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo led by Hebe de Bonafini carried a more radical approach as they have come to see themselves as heirs of their children's militancy (Guzman Bouvard 16). Both groups disagree on several key issues, as Bonafini's group disapproves of moves such as the exhumations carried out by the Forensic Anthropology Team, the economic reparations to the families of the disappeared, and the 'individualization' of the demand of justice. Indeed, as many have pointed out, their differing political positions may be due their different origins in terms of social class. Whereas the Madres led by Bonafini pertained to a working class, the Founding Line was part of a middle and high urban class (Sarner 127; Guzman Bouvard 16). Despite their differences, both groups still march together every Thursday.

9. ADDRESSING THE DISAPPEARANCES IN CULTURE

Not long after the transitional years, a multitude of artistic and symbolic manifestations, both collective and individual, were born in order to memorialize

[20] Such as Azucena Villaflor, Esther Ballestrino and María Ponce, disappeared on 10th December 1977.

Argentina's recent past. Just to mention a few: The Silhouette (*El siluetazo*),[21] where a group of artists in different parts of the country carried out an intervention in the public space by pasting life-sized human silhouettes on the buildings that had functioned as concentration camps; the Resistance Marches (*Marchas de la Resistencia*) to demand justice; the *escraches*,[22] demonstrations in front of former torturers' houses where people painted the walls with statements such as "here lives a murderer" in order to make clear that that person was living in freedom as an ordinary citizen; the "Theater for Identity," where a group of actors organized a festival to support the cause of the Grandmothers of the *Plaza de Mayo*; among many others.

In the first years of democracy, as freedom of speech and the press re-emerged, many popular musical bands started addressing the issue in songs such as "*Los desaparecidos"* interpreted by *Los Fabulosos Callidacs.* Even the Irish pop group U2 released a song called *The Mothers of the Disappeared* as part of their album *The Joshua Tree*, inspired by the Argentine activists. Countless movies exploring the issue of the disappearance and the violations of human rights have been released over time*: The Official Story* (*La historia official,* 1985), *Night of the Pencils* (*La noche de los lápices,* 1986), *Garage Olimpo* (1999), *Chronicle of an Escape* (*Crónica de una fuga,* 2006), *The Secret in their Eyes* (*El Secreto de sus Ojos*, 2009), etc. Literature has also made a

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[21] See Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone.

[22] See Susana Kaiser, "Memoria y Amnesia: How do Argentineans remember the Dictatorship." 24 September 1998. Web. 15 Apr. 2010. <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/lasa98/Kaiser.pdf> See also Diego Benegas (New York University), "The escrache is an Intervention on Collective Ethics." 2004. Web. 15 Apr. 2010. <http://hemi.nyu.edu/cuaderno/politicalperformance2004/totalitarianism/WEBSITE/texts/the_escrache_is_an_intervention.htm>

contribution in novels such as *Steps Under Water* (*Pasos bajo el Agua, 1987)*, by Alicia Kozameh, that describes her experience as a detainee during the dictatorship; *There's some Guys Downstairs* (*Hay unos tipos abajo, 1998*) by Antonio Dal Massetto, which describes the rushes of paranoia experienced when there is an ever-present fear of being followed; *My name is Light* (*A veinte años luz, 1998*) by Elsa Osorio that relates the story of an appropriated child who finds out that she is a daughter of a disappeared couple; Alicia Partnoy's *The Litte School* (*La Escuelita, 2006*), a novel based on the author's experience of being blindfolded in a clandestine detention center in Bahía Blanca or *The Rabbit House* (*Manèges,* 2007) by Laura Alcoba, originally written in French, which reconstructs the author's experience as a child of a disappeared couple who lived underground in the 1970s; among others.

In other words, there are many representations of the disappeared, materialized as symbolic and material *markers* of memories, as pointed out by Jelin (*State Repression* xv). These reverberations of the past in the present appear not only in commemorations, memorials, and marches, but also in the cultural industry in general. This study focuses on one of these representations: an act of memory that was—and still is—taking place, although with less visible effects on the urban space itself and no group identification or coordination. Spontaneously, people with a disappeared person in their family—but not necessarily active in the campaign for justice for the disappeared—have started publishing a series of memorial advertisements in the newspaper: the recordatorios.

Chapter II: The Recordarios

This chapter introduces the recordatorios and explores their origins, variations, and theoretical significance. First, I go back to the first recordatorio that was published and revisit the emergence and evolution of these texts. Second, the chapter attempts to provide a comprehensive description of the different variations within the recordatorios; acknowledging that the depiction cannot be exhaustive as recordatorios are ever evolving since they are in print every day. In the last two sections, I outline some theoretical issues unfolded by these memorial advertisements. In "The Recordatorios as a Contradiction in Terms" I explore the recordatorios' as a new discursive genre that combines two types of texts whose functions are opposed: obituaries and the missing people advertisements. Finally, the last section addresses another component of these texts—their demand for justice—and discusses whether the recordatorios may be considered as memorials or monuments of the disappeared.

1. THE FIRST RECORDATORIOS[23]

The history of the recordatorios dates back to 1988 when the first one was published. On the day before the tenth anniversary of her daughter's assassination, the leader of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Estela Barnes de Carlotto, "felt the need to do something" (Personal Interview, Aug 26 2005).

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[23] The information of this chapter draws on my unpublished undergraduate thesis "Requiem in the Newsprint. The *Recordatorios* of the Disappeared as a New Discursive Genre" [*Réquiem en Papel Prensa: los recordatorios de Página/12 como género discursivo*]. Undergraduate Thesis, Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos, Dec 2004.

Back in November 1977 her daughter Laura, a twenty-three-year-old Montoneros activist, had been kidnapped in the city of Buenos Aires while two months pregnant. The story of Laura's disappearance actually started months before in the city of La Plata near Buenos Aires, where the Carlottos lived. In August, the security forces kidnapped her father Guido in order to interrogate him about Laura's political activism. He was kept in captivity for twenty-five days, and he was only released after Estela Barnes de Carlotto paid a large amount of money as requested by his captors. Meanwhile Laura, who feared for her life, moved from La Plata to Buenos Aires, from where she regularly called her family. On 16 November 1977, the Carlottos spoke for the last time with Laura and after not hearing back from her in a long time, they assumed something bad had happened (Cohen Salama 169-70).

According to several testimonies gathered by CONADEP, she was held in the clandestine detention center of "La Cacha," in the outskirts of La Plata, Gran Buenos Aires. When she was about to give birth, she was taken to the Military Hospital in the city of Buenos Aires in order to deliver her baby boy, who was named Guido after Laura's father, according to information based on testimonies (Petraglia 122). As many testimonies pointed out, after giving birth she was taken back to La Cacha by herself, while her son's whereabouts remain unknown (although he was most likely given to another family). Two months after giving birth to her child, she was murdered.

Unlike many other cases where the body of the disappeared vanished in the sea or in mass graves, or were discovered in massive exhumations as Jane and John Doe, the Carlottos had the rare privilege of having Laura's corpse returned to them. Although on

that occasion the military claimed that Laura had been killed in a confrontation with the army, an exhumation of her body conducted in 1985, confirmed that she was not killed during a battle but by a bullet in her head from a gun fired at close range (Cohen Salama 173, Keck and Sikkink 94). In addition, the examination proved that Laura carried her pregnancy to full term or almost full term and that she was not pregnant when she was murdered (Cohen Salama 173).

On the tenth anniversary of Laura's assassination, after a few hours of thinking about it, Estela Barnes de Carlotto found herself in the entrance of the offices of a newspaper that had opened a year before in 1987, *Página/12*, founded and directed by a group of journalists that were deeply involved in the human rights movement. As soon as she stepped in the newsroom in order to publish a text next to a picture of her daughter Laura, there was a "revolution." The immediate reaction by the newspaper was to publish the advertisement for free. As one of *Página/12* representatives, Carlos González, once said in a personal interview, "there was simply no way we could charge Estela de Carlotto. That was an unspoken agreement" (Personal Interview, 18 Sept 2003).

As a result, the first recordatorio appeared in the left right corner of the page on 25 August 1988, sharing the space with the news on page 8.


SOLICITADA

LAURA ESTELA CARLOTTO

A diez años de su asesinato por la dictadura militar

Diez años es demasiado tiempo para no verte. Diez años es demasiado tiempo para que no vivas, amando y sufriendo entre nosotros, envejeciendo como es la ley de Dios.
Diez años de búsqueda de tu justicia (con memoria para la historia) es demasiado tiempo para no haberla obtenido.
Diez años buscando el hijito que te robaron es demasiado tiempo para que aún no nos acompañe el clamor general en la demanda.
Diez años no son demasiados para seguir tu ejemplo.

Tus padres, tus hermanos, tu familia, tus amigos y los demás (aunque no lo sepan) no te olvidamos.

25-8-88

LAURA ESTELA CARLOTTO

In the 10th anniversary of her murder by the military dictatorship

Ten years is too long for not seeing you.
Ten years is too long for you not to be alive, loving and suffering among us, growing old as God meant it.
Ten years searching for your justice (keeping history in mind) is too long to not yet have obtained it. Ten years looking for the baby that was stolen from your womb is too long to still not have a popular uproar demanding justice.
Ten years is not too long to follow your example.

Your parents, your siblings, your family, your friends and others (even if they do not know it) do not and will not forget you.

Figure 1: Rec. Carlotto, Laura Estela. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 25 Aug 1988. 8.

Two days later, on the Saturday issue of August 27, another recordatorio was published on page 4. Signed by Mirta Acuña de Baravalle, who promptly identifies herself as a member of Grandmothers of Plaza the Mayo, this one also included the name and portrait of the disappeared (Ana María) and a message addressed both to her and to society at large. Below the name of her daughter, one reads the date of disappearance that matches the date of publication.

ANA MARIA BARAVALLE DE GALIZZI
Detained-disappeared on 8-27-1976
She was 5-months pregnant
Our Ana!
How can we replace your absence? How can we fill the void that you left when murderous hands tore you out of our lives twelve endless years ago? How can we bear your misfortune? As you used to say, "There's a lacerating cry behind each victim that hits without halting. We cannot forget it."
That's why wherever you may be, my Ana, your presence is constant. And my search is permanent. Your thirst for justice, my thirst for justice.
Mother/Grandmother: Mirta Acuña de Baravalle
Grandmother of the Plaza de Mayo

Figure 2*:* Rec. Acuña Baravalle de Galizzi, Ana María. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 27 Aug 1988. 4

A couple of days later, on 29 August, another recodatorio appeared on page 6, in the form of a letter to the disappeared, Verónica María Cabilla:

> Woe to those who pretend that we have forgotten your sixteen years, when they took you full of love, anxious for justice and liberty. Today you turn twenty-five; my arms are more tired, but never halting; they keep rocking you and holding your hand into sleep. The love is too much to forget you and the strength too much to stop searching for you and one day make your brave child's dreams come true. I love you, Mom.[24]

[24] ["Verónica: Pobres de aquellos que pretenden que olvidemos tus dieciséis años, cuando te llevaron llena de amor, ansias de justicia y libertad. Hoy cumplís 25; mis brazos están más cansados, pero jamás

On 31 August, another recordatorio was published on page 6. It read: "Ricardo Luis Romero. Disappeared on 31 August 1976 at the age of twenty-one years old" (Rec. Romero)[25]. The next recordatorio, dedicated to Patricia L. Dixon, appeared on September 6, on page 6 (Rec. Dixon).

In all, in the year following the publication of the first recordatorio, twenty relatives of people that were disappeared went to the newspaper following Carlotto's footsteps, and published advertisements themselves. Each advertisement included a picture of their relative and a short message addressed both to the disappeared and to society as a whole, demanding justice. Since then, these recordatorios are published on a daily basis for free. During the next year, 1989, *Página/12* published forty-nine recordatorios. Then sixty-eight were published in 1990, and 140 in 1991 (Reati 160). Nowadays, there is an average of three recordatorios published every day. The pattern is clear in most cases: once families of the disappeared publish an advertisement on the day of the anniversary of their family member's disappearance, they keep doing it year after year.

2. Dealing with the Publication of the Recordatorios

Why did Carlotto choose *Página/12* to publish the advertisement instead of other more important national newspapers such as *Clarín* or *La Nación*? In a personal

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claudicantes; siguen acunándote y estrechando tu mano al dormirte. Es demasiado amor para olvidarte y demasiada fuerza para dejar de buscarte y lograr que algún día tus sueños de valiente niña se hagan realidad. Te quiero mucho, Mamá"]

[25] ["Desaparecido el 31 de agosto de 1976 a los 21 años."]

interview, she said she went there 'intuitively' (Personal Interview, 26 Aug 2005). Without making it explicit—and as she says, probably without consciously thinking about it—Carlotto was pointing out a difference between this particular newspaper and the rest. In some way or another, the most important and longstanding newspapers in Argentina ended up negotiating with the dictatorship. On the one hand, the owner of *Clarín*, Ernestina Herrera de Noble, is accused of having appropriated two babies during the dictatorship. On the other hand, *La Nación* explicitly supported the Junta. By choosing *Página/12*, Carlotto was making a statement of memory-making: 'we don't forgive, we don't forget.'

As this practice emerged spontaneously, from the outset there were no formal rules as to when to publish a recordatorio, the length of the text, the size of the frame, or other aspects. Thus, the newspaper editors felt the need to establish some boundaries and basic guidelines. In an attempt to control the publication of recordatorios, *Página/12* took two initiatives: it created a team that would handle the reception and design of recordatorios, and it established a clear set of guidelines stating in which cases it was acceptable to publish an advertisement (González Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003).

First, *Página/12* decided to set up a team of three employees in order to manage the recordatorios. From that moment on, there would be two designers and one person that would be in charge of receiving all advertisement submissions. Up until her death in 2008, María Eva Fuentes Walsh was in charge of receiving the recordatorios. She helped people who went to *Página/12* to fill out a form with the name of the disappeared, the picture, and the text.

By systematizing the reception and publication of recordatorios, over the years *Página/12* constructed a database with the photographs. Hence, when the next year the same person wanted to publish another recordatorio, the newspaper already had the picture and the name, and people only had to submit the text. Being herself the granddaughter and niece of disappeared people, María Eva Fuentes Walsh understood that writing a recordatorio was a moving—and sometimes tragic—experience: "imagine, a lot of people burst into tears. We have to comfort them for hours because they feel really sad. Besides, they come here two or three days before the anniversary of the disappearance of their family member. Most of them are elderly people. It is very sad" (Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003). Nowadays, a lot of people do not submit the recordatorios in person but via e-mail, fax, or even by calling the newspaper and reading the text they want to get published.

Second, the newspaper established that recordatorios should only be published on the anniversary of the disappearance. Before this rule, the families got their recordatorio published on other significant dates such as birthdays, the anniversary of the coup d'état, mother's day, father's day, and wedding anniversaries, among others. But in 1995, after Scilingo's confession that shook public opinion, there was a sharp increase in people wanting to publish recordatorios. The increased demand became a problem to *Página/12*, as the advertisements were taking up almost all the space designated for commercial advertisements (González Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003). Therefore, the newspaper editors finally decided to establish a restrictive rule in order to allow people to continue publishing recordatorios without interfering with *Página/12*'s commercial needs.

Furthermore, once the practice of writing recordatorios became a symbolic way of remembering the disappeared, an ongoing discussion emerged within the newspaper as to who should be able to request the publication: should they only be accessible for families of victims of the military dictatorship? Should families of all victims of state repression be able to publish them, including families of people like Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán, two young men who were killed by state repression in the 2002 protests held by unemployed picketers, under democratic rule?[26] Or should anyone in need of publishing such kind of text be able to do it?

3. DESCRIBING THE RECORDATORIOS

Although the recordatorios share a common structure that is fairly stable, the fact that they are in print every day makes them incorporate new elements, reiterate features, reformulate claims, and change unevenly over time. This section attempts to reflect the existing variations among recordatorios, within their common framework. Although the following paragraphs cover many different types of claims that appear in the recordatorios and the ways in which they portray those who disappeared, the reader should not expect an exhaustive description, which is simply impossible given the continuous evolution of these recordatorios.

Through the years, some of the basic traits of the recordatorios remained the same, while other additional details were added and modified. As time went by, the texts started to differ from each other, relying on several styles and discursive conventions. For

[26] Maximiliano Kosteki, 25 years old, and Darío Santillán, 21 years old, were killed by state repression in a demonstration held on 26 June 2002. Both men were militant activists—the former in *Coordinadora Aníbal Verón* and the latter in *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* ("Dos piqueteros").

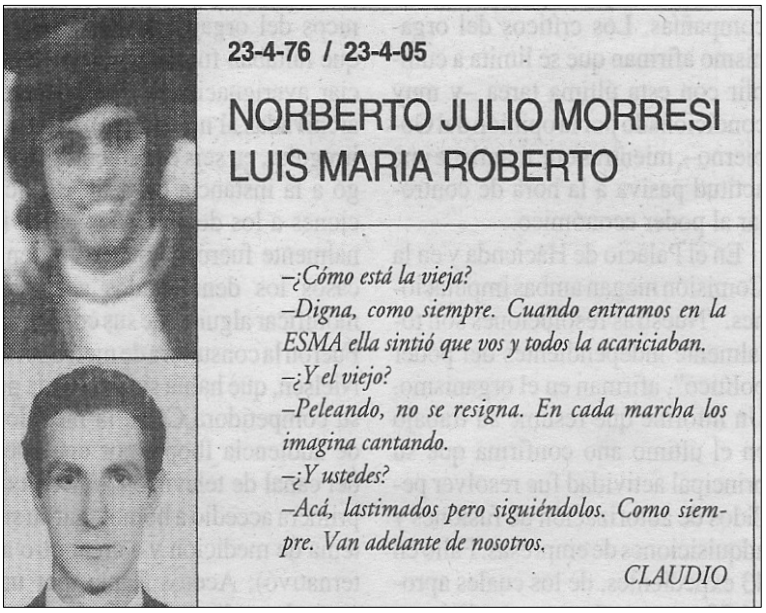
instance, some of them are addressed to the disappeared as a short letter using the recordatorio as a 'medium,' a way for the families to communicate with the disappeared, sometimes even informing on family news. "Dear Adrián…It's been thirty-two years without you and Susana…and the girls have grown up and given you five grandchildren" (Rec. Bogliano 2009 8);[27] "Dear brother, thirty-three years of your absence and you are always in our thoughts" (Rec Grimald 2009 10);[28] "*Queridos*, We didn't find him. He didn't look for us. That is the reason why we couldn't enjoy the presence and Ramiro's sibling's identity restitution. He was born thirty-three years ago and he still doesn't know who he is" (Rec. Lanzilloto and Menna 2009 25).[29]

Some recordatorios include 'imagined' conversations in the form of a dialogue between the disappeared and a remaining family member:

[27]["Querido Adrián…Van 32 años sin vos y sin Susana…y las chicas van creciendo y dándoles ya cinco nietos…"]

[28] [Querido hermano: A 33 años de tu ausencia, seguís presente en la memoria de todos"]

[29] [Queridos: No lo encontramos. No pudimos pore so vivir la dicha de la presencia y la restitución de su identidad al hermano/a de Ramiro. Nació hace casi 33 años y todavía anda sin saber quién es…"]



-How's mom?
--Admirable, as always. When we walked in the ESMA she felt that you and the rest were caressing her.
-- And dad?
--Fighting, he doesn't give up. He imagines you guys singing with him in every march.
--And you?
--Here we are, hurt but still following you. As always. You go ahead of us.
CLAUDIO

Figure 3: Rec. Morresi, Norberto Julio and Luis María Roberto. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 23 Apr 2005. 4.

Others quote poetry, a resource that now is so widely used that nearly two out of three recordatorios rely on it. The authors that are often cited are somehow associated with the campaign for human rights in Argentina or in Latin America or were extensively read in the 1970s (Melendi 302). Among the poets and writers who are currently quoted are Alejandra Pizarnik, Rodolfo Walsh, Juan Gelman, Pablo Neruda, Eduardo Galeano, and Paco Urondo, among others. As writer Luis Gusmán noted, someone who is blatantly absent from the recordatorios is Jorge Luis Borges (342), who might have been left out for having expressed sympathy for the Junta. Among those recordatorios quoting poetry, several include 'surviving poetry,' that is to say, verses written by the disappeared that were usually found by a relative after his or her kidnapping. That is the case of Taty

Almeida, a member of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo-fl, who went through her son Alejandro's effects the day after he disappeared only to find a poem that he wrote for her:

Alejandro Martín Almeida - 20 años

Detenido Desaparecido durante el gobierno constitucinal de Isabel Perón, el 17 de junio de 1975

Mi querido, como siempre estás con nosotros,
junto con los 30.000 detenidos-desaparecidos. ¡Verdad y Justicia!
Hijo querido: a pesar de los años transcurridos, cada vez te extraño más y trabajo para
"Que nunca tu nombre esté atado a la tristeza"

Si la muerte
me sorprende
lejos de tu vientre
porque para vos
los tres seguimos en él.
Si me sorprende
lejos de tus caricias,
que tanto me hacen falta.
Si la muerte
me abrazara fuerte
como recompensa
por haber querido
la libertad,
y tus abrazos entonces
sólo envuelvan recuerdos,
llantos y consejos
que no quise seguir...
Quisiera decirte, mamá
que parte de lo que fui
lo vas a encontrar
en mis compañeros;
la cita de control,
la última,
se la llevaron ellos,
los caídos, nuestros caídos,
mi control, nuestro control
está en el cielo,
y nos está esperando.
Si la muerte me sorprende
de esta forma tan amarga,
pero honesta,
si no me da tiempo
a un último grito
desesperado y sincero,
dejaré el aliento
el último aliento,
para decir
Te Quiero

Alejandro Martín Almeida

Mamá (Taty), hermanos Jorge, Fabi; Kary y Caco; tus sobrinos Ale, Manu, Nacho, Juli, Aitor, Martín; tíos, primos y amigos

If death takes me by surprise
Far from your womb
Because for you the three of us
Continue there.
If it overtakes me
Far from your caresses
That I miss so much.
If death´s strong embrace
Is recompense
For having loved freedom
And your embraces then only
Become memories,
Weeping and advice
Which I did not follow...
I would like to tell you, mom
That you can find
Part of what I was in my *compañeros*;
The control date,
The last one,
They were taken away,
The fallen, our fallen,
My control, our control,
There in the sky, waiting for us.
If death overtakes me
In such a bitter way,
But an honest way,
If it gives me no time for one last scream
Desperate and sincere,
I will leave a breath
One last breath,
to say,
I love you.[30]

Figure 4: Rec. Almeida, Alejandro Martín. *Página/12*. Part of Virginia Giannoni's collection.

Even though surviving poetry does not appear very often, it can still be considered a fairly recurrent element of the recordatorios. In fact, Virginia Giannoni, a graphic

[30] I have slightly modified the translation of this poem that appears in www.poesiadiaria.com.ar

designer who created a traveling exhibition made out of recordatorios, classified them in three broad categories: those with personal statements, those that quote poetry from well-known writers, and those that quote poems that were written by the disappeared in question (Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003).

Another characteristic of some of these advertisements is to enclose an e-mail address or telephone number in case somebody recognizes the person in the picture: "he was thirty years when he disappeared and we haven't heard about him since then. If you know something, please write to maximiliano1917@hotmail.com" (Rec. Fernández 2006 28);[31] "did you see her? did you meet her? Reach us at buscococacabelos@yahoo.com.ar" (Rec. Cacabelos 2009 26).[32] Yet others refer to the location in which those who disappeared were kidnapped or they provide an account of what they were doing right at that moment: "You were taken from your house, hands behind your back, in front of your nine year-old daughter" (Rec. Gargiulo 2009 7);[33] "Kidnapped on 9 September 1976, on his way to or in the Department of Architecture-University of Buenos Aires" (Rec. Flores 2006 11).[34]

Some quote political statements such as Che Guevara's famous '*hasta la victoria siempre*' (forever onward toward victory). Likewise, an element that appears in almost every recordatorio is the phrase, "we don't forget, we don't forgive," a politically charged

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[31] ["Tenía treinta años, desde su desaparición no hay ninguna noticia. Si sabés algo escribí a maximiliano1917@hotmail.com"]

[32] ["¿la viste? ¿la conociste? Escribinos a: buscocacabelos@yahoo.com.ar"]

[33] ["Te sacaron de tu casa, manos atadas a la espalda delante de tu hija de 9 años"]

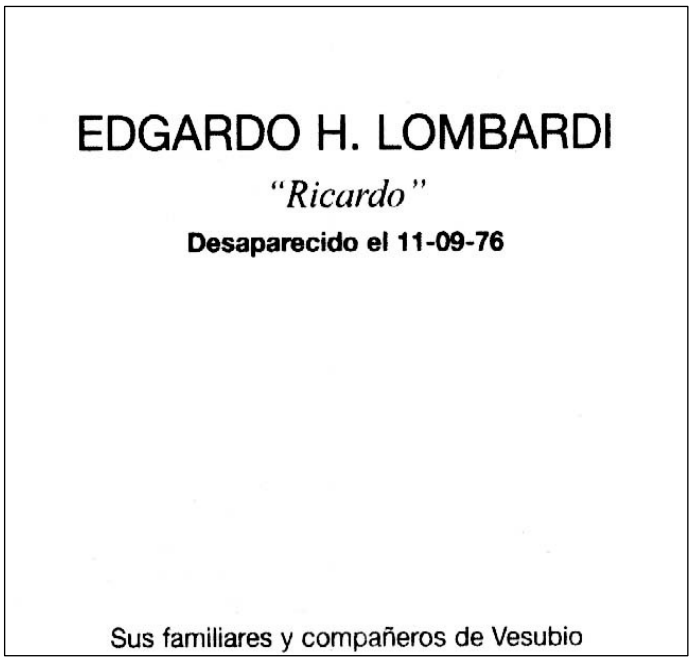
[34] ["Secuestrado el 9 de septiembre de 1976 camino o en la Facultad de Arquitectura-UBA"]

motto used by families in order to stress that they reject coming to terms with the past by pardoning the disappearances.

Whereas all recordatorios recall the disappeared by their absence, many also recall them through their political commitment. However, during the first decade after the transition to democracy there was a certain common unwillingness to acknowledge the political activism of many of the disappeared. Thus, it was quite rare to find an unequivocal vindication of the disappeared's political activism in the recordatorios up until the twentieth anniversary of the coup d'état in 1996 (Gusmán 345). It seems as though in order for society to conceive of the disappeared purely as victims, it needed to forget or 'put aside' their agency. So prevalent was this omission, that sociologist Héctor Schmucler challenged it through the following questions, posed in 1988: "Rodolfo Walsh was a Montonero activist and he was kidnapped and murdered due to his militancy. Why is it uncomfortable to admit it? For fears of appearing as if justifying a crime? For fears of being pointed to as an accomplice to the guerrillas by praising a Montonero writer?" (qtd in Cohen Salama 278). Currently, the disappeared are explicitly presented as victims of state terrorism, and the political commitment of many of them is far from forgotten. These recognitions are not expressed in terms of responsibility but are conveyed by explicitly stating admiration towards the disappeared's political militancy, by mentioning a *nom de guerre* right next to the person's real name, or by including the name of the organization to which the disappeared used to belong: "Néstor Antonio Meza Niella.

Montonero Peronist Militant" (Rec. Meza Niella 2004);[35] "They fought for Socialism and Freedom" (Tello and Tello 2004 8);[36] Regino Adolfo González—*Gerardo—El Barba*" (Rec. González 2009).

Most recordatorios include a typical ID portrait, and yet others include casual family pictures. Others, going against the general tendency, are published without a picture or a message. As they include only the name of the disappeared and the date on which he or she was kidnapped, they evoke the façade of a gravestone with a minimal inscription.



Disappeared on 09-11-76

His family and friends from El Vesubio

Figure 5: Rec. Lombardi, Edgardo H. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 11 Sept 2005.

35 ["Néstor Antonio Meza Niella. Militante peronista montonero."]

36 ["Lucharon por el Socialismo y por la Libertad."]

Another distinguishing feature of the recordatorios is that most of them make a reference to the specific social context in which they are produced and printed. As Estela Carlotto explained, "If one reads every text that I wrote one can see that mostly during periods of change or of discomfort there is an allusion related to the particular socio-political atmosphere of the moment" (Personal Interview, 22 June 2009). Indeed, she published the first recordatorio in the midst of a public discussion regarding how the Judicial System should deal with all the children who, having been identified as offspring of the disappeared, were being claimed by their biological families. This dilemma was first put in the media spotlight by the scandalous 'Juliana's case,' in which the judge decided that the child should stay with her 'adoptive family' ("Juliana" 36-37) These types of judicial decisions, coming less than a year after the passage of the Full Stop and Due Obedience Laws, highlighted the sense of impunity around the crimes committed during the dictatorship. Both issues at stake, the stolen babies and the sense of impunity were clearly present in the first recordatorio: "Ten years searching for your justice (keeping history in mind) is too long to not yet have obtained it (…) Ten years looking for the baby that was stolen from your womb is too long to still not have a popular uproar demanding justice." (Rec. Carlotto 1988 8)

Likewise, most recordatorios address the conditions in which they were produced. For instance, shortly after the pardon laws were repealed in 2003 many recordatorios included hopeful statements such as "and what seemed impossible now, to judge the

genocides, is finally a feasible hope" (Rec. Brodsky 2003 11),[37] and "let these new winds that are with us in our fight make the flame of this new hope grow" (Rec. Suárez 2004 6).[38] After Julio López[39] went missing on 18 September 2006 following his testimony in the trial of Miguel Etchecolatz, the police officer and torturer who organized the abductions in La Plata during the dictatorship, many recordatorios read: "bring Julio López back alive!" (Rec. Valenzi and López Mateos 2007 6);[40] "to Jorge Julio López" (Rec. Sala 2007 6);[41] "Jorge Julio López now" (Rec. Azar 2007 6).[42]

Another claim that reveals the political contexts in which recordatorios are published are those related to the judicial sentences given to the military. Even when the pardon laws were repealed, the majority of the oppressors were now more than seventy years old, which meant that instead of going to an ordinary prison, they were sentenced to house arrest. Given this situation, many of the memorial advertisements demanded "common and effective jail" for the military (Rec. Tagliaferro and Galzerano 2007 12).[43] As we can see, the recordatorios can convey current anxieties regarding the disappearances. In Carlotto's words, "I write a recordatorio year after year. And I'm

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37 ["Y lo que hasta hoy parecía imposible, juzgar a los genocidas, se abre, por fin, como una esperanza"]

38 ["Que estos nuevos aires que acompañan nuestra lucha hagan crecer la llama de esta nueva esperanza"]

39 Julio López was soon known as the 'first disappeared in democracy.' He was disappeared for the first time during the dictatorship. In 2006, he gave testimony against one of his torturers, Miguel Etchecolatz, a police chief who was sentenced to life imprisonment for having committed crimes against humanity and genocide. Julio López's whereabouts are unknown up to this day.

40 ["Aparición con vida de Julio López"]

41 ["Por Julio López!!!"]

42 ["Jorge Julio López ya"]

43 ["Cárcel común y efectiva a los genocidas"]

going to write one this year as well. It is about Laura's murder and the present" (Personal Interview, 22 June 2009).

In addition, usually the message that talks about the disappeared is written in the past tense, trying to show some kind of temporal contrast. On the contrary, both the signature and the closing statement invariably appear in the present tense: "Your parents, your siblings, your family, your friends and others (even if they do not know it) do not forget you." (Rec. Carlotto 1988 8); "your siblings and nieces, whom your absence still hurts" (Rec. Senar 2005 6);[44] "I kiss you, I hug you, I miss you, I love you. Your sister" (Rec. Barrionuevo 2005).[45] The present tense makes clear that memory is happening at all times and it projects itself into the future. Additionally, by stating this idea of "continual presence of the past" (Crane 1373), the recordatorios also reveal a current sense of responsibility and political commitment with the act of transfer, of memory-making.

By their publication in the newspaper, the recordatorios release each disappearance as if they were news. Like in the photographic series by the Chilean artist, Eugenio Dittborn –in particular those exhibited in Nelly Richard's book presentation *Margins and Institutions: Art in Chile Since 1973*—both the "conservation of a memory and the announcement of the disappearance" converge in the recordatorios (Richard, *Residuos y Metáforas* 98).

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44 ["Tus hermanos y sobrinos a quienes les sigue doliendo tu ausencia"]

45 ["Te beso, te abrazo, te extraño, te amo. Tu hermana"]

4. THE RECORDATORIOS AS A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

The domino effect generated by the first recordatorio and the consolidation of a new expressive practice that has lasted for more than twenty uninterrupted years, pose the question about the definition of the recordatorio as a discursive genre. In the last chapter of his outstanding book *Epitafios*, Luis Gusmán asked himself that very question. Troubled by the mere task of trying to define—and reduce—these texts in terms of a genre, he realizes that they go beyond the prayer or the public advertisement, and that they cannot be confined only to an expression of familial bonds. "To what discursive genre do these texts—that appear every single day with halting insistence—belong?" (338).

As I have argued in prior research,[46] the recordatorios can be analyzed as a new genre of publication that emerged owing to the specific historical conditions of Argentina. Far from being part of the long tradition of obituaries, the intrinsically undetermined nature of disappearances (the majority of the bodies were never found, leaving many families not knowing specifically what happened to their sons and daughters, life partners, siblings, parents, etc.) generated a new genre that is as contradictory as the conditions that caused it in the first place: a hybrid text that borrows elements of obituaries, advertisements for missing people, and a public demand for justice, all occurring within the frames of the recordatorios.

Several conventions of the obituary are present in the recordatorios, not only in stylistic terms (the frame, the name of the person in the first line) but also in their content

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[46] See Celina Van Dembroucke, "Requiem in the Newsprint. The *Recordatorios* of the Disappeared as a New Discursive Genre," 2004.

that stresses that the person will always be in their relatives' thoughts. Phrases such as the following can be easily be encountered in an obituary: "you are present in all those with whom you shared your life" (Rec. Merbilhaa 2006 8);[47] "we remember you on the 33rd anniversary of your disappearance" (Rec. Manachian 2007 8);[48] "always present in our memories" (Rec. Gertel 2004 4).[49] Even though, as Gusmán pointed out, recordatorios do not borrow religious iconography such as a Catholic cross or the Star of David (327), sometimes they do include a religious statement: "…friends and partners appreciate a prayer in your beloved memory" (Rec. Aleksoski 2007 12).[50]

Despite the many differences among recordatorios, they still share key similarities from their inception until now. All of these texts bear the name of the disappeared and the signature of those who are publishing them, both elements that can be also found in funeral epitaphs. What are the social implications of naming the disappeared?

Naming the disappeared has two concomitant effects: on the one hand, it can be said that it restitutes the identity that was suppressed when the disappeared was held in clandestine detention centers. As Calveiro pointed out, while being held captive everyone's name was substituted by a number. Thus, the act of referring to the disappeared by her real name and even adding her *nom de guerre* intends to be an affirmative act of enunciation that recovers the disappeared not only as a human being but also as a political actor (*Poder y Desaparición* 47). Therefore, while all recordatorios

47 ["Estás presente junto a todos los que compartimos tu vida"]
48 ["Te recordamos al cumplirse 33 años de tu desaparición"]
49 ["Siempre presente en nuestro recuerdo"]
50 ["…amigos y compañeros agradecen una oración en tu querida memoria"]

do name the disappeared, many also make a reference to the military's unsuccessful attempt to make people vanish. Although they were disappeared physically, they are still present in their families' memories: "The assassins who wanted to 'erase' you, failed" (Rec. Jarach 2005 18);[51] "They believe you died because they killed you (…) For they do not know that they have multiplied you instead" (Rec. González Gentile 2009);[52] "They disappeared you, but they couldn't take you away from our memory" (Rec. Mellibovsky 2006).[53] The dictatorship's strategy of removing all the traces of the disappeared was executed not only by suppressing and denying their identity but also by hiding their remains and later denying the disappeared's existence as 'non-entities' (Rotker 3). This attempt to suppress identities is challenged by the act of enunciating each name.

On the other hand, one of the contentious issues in naming the disappeared is that while it somehow restitutes an identity, by doing so it obviously brings out the individuality of the person who was disappeared, and in this sense may be said to reduce a societal trauma to a personal loss. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo— not the Founding Line but the Mothers led by Hebe de Bonafini—, who are explicitly against the particularization of their demands, support this argument and are point-blank against the practice of writing recordatorios, which they call "dead advertisements" (Madres "Seamos libres…"). In other words, for the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, to publish a recordatorio means not only reducing their collective fight to a personal level, but also

51 ["Los asesinos que quisieron 'borrarte' fracasaron"]

52 ["Ellos creen que has muerto porque te han matado (…) Porque ellos lo que ignoran es que te han, en realidad, multiplicado"]

53 ["Te desaparecieron, pero no pudieron apartarte de nuestra memoria"]

publicly admitting that the disappeared are in fact dead, which would be against their fundamental principles, epitomized by the motto "Bring them Back Alive" [*Aparición con vida*]. Adopted in 1984, the slogan reflects the Mothers' political stance on the disappearances: their opposition to accept their children's deaths, which is in line with their position against exhumations and reburials of any kind. If mourning suggests a secluded waiting until one's pain might be alleviated (Ariès 546), Mothers would make the commitment to keep their 'wounds open,' confronting Alfonsín's phrase "heal the wounds of the nation" which they interpreted as an attempt to forget the crimes committed by the dictatorship (Guzman Bouvard 152). Instead of accepting their children's deaths and therefore retreating to their homes in order to mourn, they would keep fighting for justice in the public arena. In sum, the complexity of the discussion around the social and personal aspects of this collective trauma is still today the object of irreconcilable differences between participants in the human rights movement in Argentina.[54]

Although the recordatorios do resemble obituaries, they also are connected to a genre just as old: announcements related to the search for missing persons (Schindel 69). While the obituaries are a tribute to a loved one that has died, the search for missing people serves the more concrete goal of trying to find the person alive. As futile as it may seem, even after more than thirty years, people still have not entirely lost hope and think that the disappeared may return.

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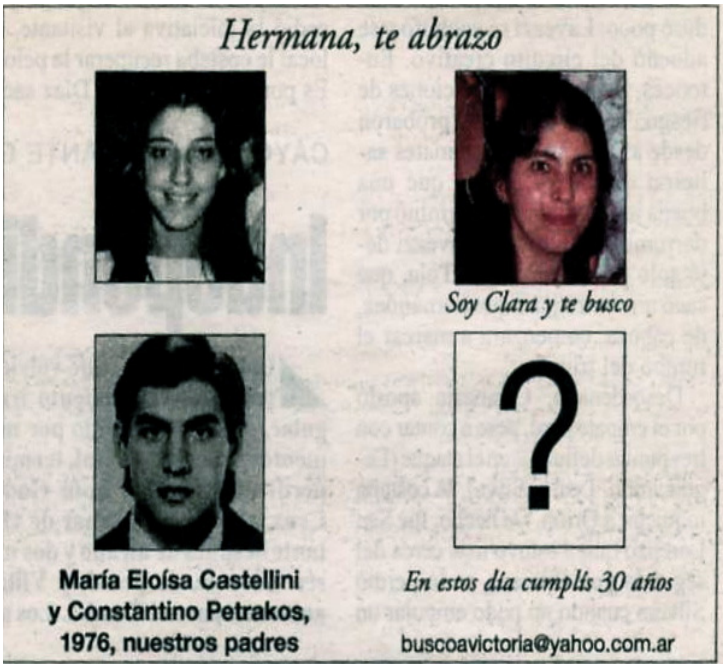
[54] The question about personalizing a more wide societal phenomenon is also present in the field of Holocaust studies. For instance, Marianne Hirsch wonders whether locating trauma in the space of family personalizes and individualizes trauma too much. "Does it not risk occluding a public historical context and responsibility, blurring significant differences…? ("Generation" 115).

The recordatorio as a means for looking for people has been extended in the last years in order to seek not only those who have disappeared and are presumably dead, but also those who are missing and are presumably alive, living under a false identity. That is precisely the case of babies or even children who were stolen from their families at the moment that their parents were being abducted. This recordatorio serves as an example: "You were eleven years old when you were kidnapped (…) you have turned into another disappeared of the dictatorship. Your sisters have never stopped looking for you (…). We publish our parents' pictures in order for you to recognize yourself" (Rec. Rivero 2009).[55] Similarly, this is also the case of babies born in captivity as well as those who 'must have been born' in captivity and are sought by their grandmothers or siblings (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo 13):[56]

55 ["Tenías ocho años cuando te secuestraron (…) y te convertiste en otro desaparecido de la dictadura. Tus hermanas nunca dejaron de buscarte (…) Publicamos la foto de nuestros padres para que te reconozcas"]

56 Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo made a distinction between babies that were effectively born in captivity and those who 'must have been born in captivity', depending on the level of information gathered in each case.



Sister, I embrace you. I'm Clara, and I'm looking for you. On this day you turn 30 years old

Figure 6*:* Rec. Castellini, María Eloisa and Petrakos, Constantino. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 15 Apr 2007. 7

From the missing-person advertisements, the recordatorios also inherited the peculiarity of physically describing the disappeared and of mentioning the place in which the disappeared was/were seen for the last time: "they were last seen in the basement of Police Station n°4, 2070 Balcarce Street, in Martínez" (Rec. Saez and Acuña 2009 16).[57]

This dialectic relation between genres rests in a contradiction regarding their respective discursive spheres. The recordatorio, a contradiction in terms, emerges as an impossible reality, following the logic of both genres, thus performing both functions in a paradoxical way. The uncertainty provoked by the contradiction of knowing that

57 ["Fueron vistos por última vez en octubre de 1976 en los sótanos de la comisaría 4ª de Martínez, calle Balcarce 2070"]

someone is probably dead but not being able to admit it is the direct result of the clandestine arrests that took place in Argentina when the disappeared's death is not confirmed or when the body has not been found. All in all, the recordatorios seem to provide a conflictive conciliation between public denunciation and a private expressive need. As much as they are public advertisements, these messages are still "all written from within the loneliness of what happened to each one of us," as Aída Sarti, a member of the Mothers from the Plaza de Maya-fl, once told me in an interview years ago (Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003).

5.A DEMAND FOR JUSTICE

Right after the 9/11 attacks, Nancy Miller wrote that "as the hope of finding survivors faded, the distinction between the missing and the dead began to blur" (40). However, in certain circumstances where the fate of those missing is not clear, families hold on to a life of searching for them. Such is the case of many families of missing in action soldiers of the Vietnam War, who still harbor the hope that their loved ones are not dead (Katz Keating xx). In the Argentinean case, the provisional and transitional character of the term "disappeared" in contrast with "dead" always leaves a space to keep a secret hope that the missing person can in fact be alive. Even if recordatorios serve as a way to negotiate an endless mourning, the victims' families still know that they will never achieve closure because, as Miller notes, it "can be satisfied only by the return of the body (or its identification through DNA)" (39). The fact that many mothers and relatives still nurture the hope that the disappeared is alive is captured in many recordatorios, in lines such as these: "Without knowing why they took you. Without

knowing if you had committed a crime. Without knowing if you were tried. Without knowing if you were condemned. Thirty-two years without truth. Thirty-two years of silence. We remember you with all our love. I am still waiting for you. Mom" (Rec. Almirón 2009).[58]

Conversely, as a consequence of the exhumations carried out by the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, which allowed reburying a number of disappeared in proper graves, some people have continued to publish recordatorios, but no longer use them as a medium to communicate with the disappeared. For those who have accepted the disappeared as dead, the recordatorios no longer serve as a means to practice closure over an unburied loss. Instead, they constitute only a public denunciation. In Aurora Morea's words, "when I write a recordatorio, I don't address it to my daughter anymore. I go to the cemetery in order to talk to her… Since her and her husband's remains were returned, everything has gotten worse in a way. Because when she was still disappeared, I always hoped that I was going to find her" (Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003).

The crossing of both these genres and the political denunciation embodied in the recordatorios are expressed in the questions that they seem to be asking between the lines. As Gusmán has accurately pointed out, it is as if in every recordatorio the reader can identify three questions: "'What did they do to you?' 'Why?' and in between exclamation and question marks, as if the punctuation were insufficient to express the sentiment, 'Where are you?!?!'" (331-2).

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58 ["Sin saber por qué te llevaron. Sin saber si cometiste un delito. Sin saber si fuiste juzgado. Sin saber si fuiste condenado. 32 años sin verdad. 32 años de silencio. Te recordamos con mucho amor. Yo te sigo esperando. Mamá"]

It is precisely this *liminal* middle ground, which lies in the tension between death and life, what makes these texts almost impossible to define in terms of a specific discursive genre. The disappeared whose fate is unknown are defined by this transitory stage; they are nor dead nor alive, "on the threshold between worlds, separated from the past and not yet accepted into the future" (Taylor 17). Therefore, the intrinsically undetermined nature of the disappearances and the will to remember seem to find in the recordatorios an adequate physical location, a *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 19), in which to put into practice a compensatory ritual for an unburied generation (Connerton 61). However, closure cannot be accomplished as long as the majority of the bodies are not restituted to their families, which is probably an impossible endeavor since the military hid or destroyed the bodies of the disappeared as well as those of people who died in confrontations with the military (Cohen Salama 32-4).

In addition to performing these two contradictory tasks—grieving someone and at the same time looking for them—the recordatorios are a demand for justice, a form of social protest. As memory is shaped not only by historical facts (the disappearance) but also by current concerns (most of the bodies still not being found, the lack of justice), the recordatorios mirror the contradictory conditions that caused them in the first place.

It is precisely the pervasive ambiguity of the disappearance what makes this phenomenon horrifying, for it condemns the living to "an object-less grief," as the early Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo explained (qtd in Cohen Salama 43-4). Thus, more often than not, one can find that the uncertainties around the disappeared's fate have had long-term effects on those families who are still either looking or waiting for the disappeared

to show up: "Little Quixote: We keep calling you with our soul, body, with everything we are. Little boy, he sleeps, without a gravestone, without a tomb, with no marble, no cemetery and no death. That's why we still hope you return with that smile of yours…" (Rec. Benítez 2005 10).[59]

Initially, mostly very elderly women were the ones who published recordatorios. Nowadays, more than two decades after the first recordatorio, they have started to die out, some of them without ever finding their demands fulfilled. However, the recordatorios are still in print and, through their lines, they are showing that a new generation has taken up the mandate of publishing the advertisements. Marked with regret for not having had the chance to know their parents, members of a third generation (children of the disappeared) have started to express their own anxieties regarding the traumatic past: "Even though I never met you I learned to love you; in spite of the silence I never stopped calling you my father. That's why I will never forgive the void that remained within me and I want you to know, Dad, that I will never stop remembering or loving you. Your daughter Martina Martínez" (Rec. Martínez 2005 10);[60] "It's been thirty-three years of trying to reconstruct you… imagining your gestures, the look in your eye, your smiles, your hugs, and from all the fragments of your history I am able to put

59 [Pequeño Quijote, Te seguimos llamando con el alma, con el cuerpo, con todo lo que somos. Pequeño, duerme, sin lápida, sin nicho, sin mármol, sin cementerio y sin muerte. Por eso esperamos verte llegar con esa tu sonrisa…"]

60 ["A pesar de que no te conocí, aprendí a quererte, a pesar del silencio, nunca dejé de nombrarte, por eso nunca voy a perdonar el vacío que me quedó y quiero que sepas, Papá, que nunca voy a dejar de recordarte ni de amarte. Tu hija Martina Martínez"]

together the father who was not there" (Rec. Busetto 2009 12).[61] "I am older than you ever were but I am still nostalgic for your hug, the curtain of your eyelashes, to say 'mom' and that you would come" (Rec. Taboada 2005 6).[62]

In keeping with the difficulty of classifying the recordatorios in a specific discursive genre, these advertisements also seem to be underrepresented by definitions such as *monument* or *memorial*. If, as has been pointed out by literature, monuments are stagnant and incapable of "changing and adapting to its environment" (Young 4), the fragile materiality of the recordatorios as opposed to marble or stone, together with their constant publication on a daily basis, seem to defy that definition.[63] In spite of an undeniable sense of repetition and immutability, the recordatorios entail a process of memory-making that requires active involvement every single day. Furthermore, even when they are published in only one newspaper, the recordatorios do share a space with the daily news, reminding the reader that the disappearances were meant to "extend state terror into the hereafter" (Robben 136). Similar to the memorial books kept by Jewish people after the Holocaust, the recordatorios can be seen as 'symbolic tombstones' for those who lack one (Young 7). The difference lies in the fact that the memorial books were written to be kept in the privacy of the family, while the recordatorios follow the

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61 ["Han pasado 33 años en los que sigo construyendo tu persona…imaginando tus gestos, tus miradas, tus sonrisas, tus abrazos, y de todos los fragmentos de tu historia consigo armar el padre que no estuvo"]

62 ["Soy más vieja de lo que nunca fuiste y sin embargo está intacta la nostalgia de tu abrazo, el telón de tus pestañas, decir mamá y que vengas"]

63 During a visit to Argentina, the German artist Horst Hoheisel referred to monuments as "masses of marble, bronze or concrete" that once installed become invisible regardless of their size (Hoheisel 13). In that same line, Christian Boltanski warned that the Second World War's victims' lists that are placed throughout France have acquired such a transparent materiality that they have condemned the victims to oblivion. (qted in Brodsky, "Memorias distantes").

fate of old newspapers: the very next day after they are circulated to the public, most of them will end up in the trash, and at best only a few of them will be part of a library's archive.

On the other hand, defining the recordatorios merely as memorials seems to conceal some of their purposes, which in fact exceed that of providing a place in which families can put in practice some sort of ritualized mourning over the disappeared. As explained above, the recordatorios not only seek to honor the disappeared but perform other practical functions, which range from being used in the search for people who were born in captivity to serving as potential ways of gathering information about the disappeared's fate or experience in a clandestine detention center.

Recordatorios are not only a commemorative act, but also a demand for justice. As such, they embody both a 'legacy of duty' (Nora 16) as well the need to remember. In María Eva Fuentes' words, "if there were justice, then the recordatorios probably would not exist. They would be obituaries. But in these conditions, they draw attention not only to the disappeared but also to the impunity, the injustice" (Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003). Thus, instead of provoking a reassuring effect by recalling a story, they denounce it. As a memory of impunity, they become a public incrimination that needs to be expressed as long as the demand for truth and justice is not fulfilled.

Chapter III: Family Pictures in the Recordatorios

Since the majority of the recordatorios include pictures within their frames, this chapter focuses on the analysis of these images, providing a theoretical and conceptual exploration of issues related to memory, photography, and family imagery. The selection of the pictures comprises a corpus of ten scanned recordatorios that attempts to echo the patterns observed in the whole universe of recordatorios. Finally, in the last section, the chapter goes back to the tension between individual and collective memory previously developed in Chapter II, a discussion that is at the core of many organizations of human rights in Argentina. In particular, I pay attention to this issue regarding the pictures and how the images cannot help but to evoke the disappeared both in their singularity but also at a collective level with the rest of the victims.

1.PHOTOGRAPHY: A MEDIUM FOR MEMORIES

The intervention of photography plays an important role in conveying the phenomenon of the disappearance and of absence in general (Déotte 156). Indeed, as several representations of traumatic pasts show, memories in general are intrinsically connected to images, in particular to pictures. In addition to photography's capability of freezing physical presence in a paper print, the photographic image holds the power of evidential force.

If photography has a strong capacity to capture someone's physical evidence, then the power of still pictures lies precisely in the emanation of what Barthes called the '*ça-a-été*', or 'having been there.' Hence, photography becomes the medium of memory par

excellence, as it both certifies the existence of a referent at some point in time (Déotte 156) while also acknowledging it in the present time. In particular, with relation to facing the secretive phenomenon of Argentine disappearances, in which the perpetrators have denied the very existence of those who disappeared, the usage of photography as a document prevails in almost every memory of state repression. Pictures became a proof of existence based on the belief that the image constitutes a "trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask" (Sontag, *On Photography* 120). As a realistic response to denial, pictures of the disappeared are initially meant to be read as evidence of existence

The fascination generated by the mimetic nature of photography has inspired countless authors to define its implications in relation to both personal and cultural memory in the aftermath of the Holocaust as well as in war contexts in general. For Marianne Hirsch, photography is "a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable" ("Generation" 108), as it constitutes the instrument that bridges the gap between the generation that experienced the Holocaust and following generations. In *Tangled Memories*, Marita Sturken points out that "memory appears to reside within the photographic image…" (19). Meanwhile, Annette Kuhn and Kirsten McCallister argue that photographic images are unique in that they are visual media that have many culturally resonant properties shared with no other medium (1). Going further, Carol Zemel asks herself how is it that a pictorial story can define the "'shape' and 'texture' of memory" (78). The possibility of reproducing "what could never be repeated existentially" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 4) suggests that the tie connecting photography

and memory is also based on how it provides a "new way of dealing with the present" (Sontag, *On Photography* 130). Although pictures have often been used in order to distort or misinform,[64] when it comes to commemorating a disappearance the images certainly rely on the evidential force of photography as a way to provide proof that the person in question really existed.

Notwithstanding the illusion of truthfulness that photography establishes between its image and reality, it has also been identified as a medium that establishes both an existential and a spiritual connection with the real (Gibbons 37).[65] In between the certainty of the real and the mystery of a spectral co-presence that defies the mimetic analogy, the photographic image is an 'emanation of the referent,' and as such it establishes a metaphysical bond with the beholder (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 80-84). Photography goes beyond its mimetic task, adding a surplus of a spiritual or magical nature that translates the specific 'air' of someone into the image. "The air expresses the subject insofar as that subject assigns itself no importance. In this veracious photograph, the being I love, whom I have loved, is not separated from itself: at last it coincides" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 109). If photography has something of a 'resurrection,' as Barthes put it, then each picture acts as a 'reappearance,' visually defying a part of the

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64 See, for instance, the study *Reading National Geographic*, where it explains how the pictures of people from foreign countries were shown. Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins; eds. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1993)

65 Cynthia Freeland states that photographs have also been read as an "apparatus that might steal something or take something away from them—perhaps a little bit of their soul. The early photographer Nadar described the fear that even some educated people had of this new device, for example, Balzac" (103).

generalized plan of obliteration. Image here serves as a way of achieving visibility, thus becoming the "eye of history" (Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All* 39).

The disappeared in Argentina only exist in their representation. Thus, the insistence upon naming them and displaying their faces acts as a document of proof out of the everyday family narrative. A 'biographical space'[66] that reaches across the intimacy of the familial in order to interpelate the individual in a public space is then actualized each time a reader encounters a recordatorio in the newspaper. But what do this images look like?

2.FAMILIAL AND BUREAUCRATIC IMAGES

The recordatorios published by *Página/12* include two types of images: portraits, mostly originally taken for ID documents, and family pictures. There are three sets of distinctive features within the family pictures that are of special interest for this study. The first categorization refers to the pictures' original *sphere of circulation*, distinguishing between photos which were taken in order to circulate publicly and those that belong to a private experience, meant to be appreciated in that context (Berger, *About Looking* 51). The second distinction concerns the *situation* in which the picture was taken, which can either be a special event, or an image depicting everyday life. Finally, the third category concerns the *posture* of the photographed subject, who can be explicitly posing for the camera, or rather carrying out his or her life normally, in what is

[66] I borrow this term from Leonor Arfuch, who following Philippe Lejeune, used it in order to address the pervasive testimonial elements present in the mass media and in the public space in general. See, *El espacio biográfico* (2002). In another volume that includes an article entitled "Album de Familia" [Family Album], she analyzes Christian Bolstanki's homonymous exhibition drawing a parallel with pictures of the disappeared (*Crítica cultural* 43-56).

generally described as a candid shot. With the objective of analyzing the whole range of images that appear within their frames, this section relies on a corpus of scanned recordatorios that illustrates the different kinds of pictures according to their sphere of circulation, the situation that they depict, and the posture of the photographed subjects.

A cursory look at the complete universe of recordatorios shows that most images contained in them are portraits—whether ID or familial. In fact, many of these images have been widely used in human rights demonstrations in Argentina, in particular ID pictures. Therefore, since a number of studies have already analyzed this type of pictures,[67] I decided to turn this study's attention to a kind of images, family pictures, which is mostly overlooked in the Argentine case. In the last few years, more and more recordatorios have included family pictures, which were almost absent in the first ones. This shift can be explained by a generational turn: newer generations have taken up the task of publishing these texts, subsequently changing the images chosen by their predecessors.

As Ludmila da Silva Catela observed, sons and daughters of the disappeared always prefer to carry candid family pictures during human rights demonstrations, as opposed to the iconic ID portraits traditionally displayed by the generation of their grandparents ("Lo invisible" 350). This trend reappears in the recordatorios, to the point that today candid family pictures constitute a large repertoire of images, which construct

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[67] See, Nelly Richard, ed. *Políticas y Estéticas de la Memoria (2000);*Ludmila da Silva Catela, *No habrá Flores en la tumba del pasado (2001)*; several essays in Claudia Feld and Jessica Stites Mor, eds. *El pasado que miramos. Memoria e Imagen ante la historia reciente* (2009); Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena Memoria=Good Memory (*Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2003).

meaning in a special manner through their appearance in a newspaper, a non-traditional and rather uncommon context.

3.PORTRAITS

As said before, recordatorios have included individual portraits from the very outset. Most of these pictures appear to have been originally taken as IDs, with the social purpose confirming individual identity to bureaucratic and governmental authority. In other words, these pictures are part of a specific visual economy whose main purpose is to serve as a "means of surveillance, control, and, in itself, a commodity purchased for a fee from the state in some way or another" (Doy 183). As such, ID pictures play the role of keeping record of a person's 'documented existence' as a citizen and are meant to circulate and be shown in different institutions where identification is required, such as at universities, in libraries, memberships to sports facilities, among others (da Silva Catela, *No habrá flores* 234).

According to Alan Sekula, the first evidence of the bureaucratic use of the portraits dates back to the Paris police in the Commune of 1871, when a record of survivors' faces was kept. During the late nineteenth century, the bureaucratic use of photography then extended to similar state endeavors; "solemn portraits of American Indians were made as the race was exterminated; French imperial conquests in Egypt were memorialized" (94-95). This new use coincided with a general change in society that was witnessing not only the development of novel disciplines and sciences—such as psychiatry, criminology, anatomy, among others—but also the emergence of a new

conception of the exercise of power to control the social body (Tagg 5-6). In this context, ID pictures as a form of evidence would became an essential piece of Western legal and governmental systems (West 58).

In other words, as a realistic genre whose essence is based on the notion of 'likeness,' the portrait photograph has become, from its earliest days, the 'paradigm of visual objectivity' (Gage 121) and a device crucial to proving one's identity. Eventually, the emergence of DNA testing provided a new scientifically reliable tool to settle disputes over identity issues.

As in Argentina the suppression of identity affected not only the disappeared but also their descendants; anyone born between 1976 and 1983, "has the reasonable right to suspect that her identity is fake" (Kaufman 17). Thus, it is not exceptional for a person to discover his or her real identity based on the recognition of common traits in a picture of a disappeared person. The portrait's powerful capability to reflect faces as they were at the moment the pictures were taken has allowed many people to discover that their identity was based on lies and deception. This was exactly the case of Sebastián José Casado Tasca, who had suspicions that he could be the son of a disappeared couple. Surfing on the internet, he accessed a database of portraits of *desaparecidos*, only to find a striking resemblance between himself and one of the disappeared: "I realized when I looked at the picture for the second time; I realized that he looked really like me. It was shocking" (Casado Tasca Interview *Página/12* 2006). Soon thereafter, he was announced

as the 83rd grandchild found by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo.[68] The story of Marcos Suárez Vedoya also provides evidence of the power of photographic images in shaping our representations of the self, and therefore, of self-recognition. One day in 2006, Marcos was waiting for the DNA test results in order to know whether he was a son of the disappeared. Watching "Montecristo" on television—the first Argentinean soap opera that addressed the topic of the misappropriated children during the dictatorship—he saw, right there on the screen in front of him, a picture of himself as a baby. In a given scene of "Montecristo," the starring actress—Viviana Saccone—goes to the headquarters of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo looking for her sister, who was supposedly born in captivity. In the following scene, she starts going through pictures of stolen babies, in search of her sister. Watching this episode, Marcos recognized himself in one of those babies and realized that his recent DNA test result had to be positive.

During the dictatorship, ID pictures were initially used in order to search for the disappeared. Mothers would carry them in order to show their children's faces in different institutions in the hopes of finding someone who would recognize them. Making use of ID pictures as a common search technique, "Mothers thought that the face imprinted in those photographic papers would ensure the localization of the person more than just the name and last name" (da Silva Catela, "Lo invisible" 343). Later on, as human rights associations emerged in order to advocate for the disappeared, portraiture

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[68] As Barthes noted, "the photograph sometimes makes appear (…) a genetic feature, the fragment of oneself…" (*Camera Lucida*, 103)

started to be used in all kinds of demonstrations. ID portraits have turned into the emblem of loss par excellence as they appear in multiple spaces. For instance: the mothers who put pictures against their chest hanging from a cord, the flag with the faces of the disappeared (each of them photocopied and glued together by the legendary human rights campaigner, Mabel Gutiérrez, who passed away in 2009), the billboards used in marches, the ID portraits displayed in the Plaza San Martín of La Plata, the recordatorios, and many others (da Silva Catela, *No habrá flores* 135-39). Pictures have become such a symbol through the force of their "informative function" (Sekula 95). On the one hand, people appropriated the photographs as tools in the task of searching for people. In the case of the recordatorios, the inclusion of ID pictures had—at least at the beginning—the practical goal of looking for someone. On the other hand, taking advantage of the original purpose of ID pictures, they act as legal evidence justifying a social denunciation, as a proof that the disappeared actually did exist.

Taken in a studio, ID pictures borrow their austere style from painted portraiture: monochromatic backgrounds, lighting that makes visible individual features in detail, frontal face pose; and the apparent notion that the essence of individuality can be captured by photographing head and shoulders only. Moreover, ID pictures and portraits also share the aim of achieving an ideal 'likeness' or resemblance with the subject they depict (Gage 123). In IDs, this goal is achieved by prompting the subject to pose, for a few seconds, in a gesture-less manner in the belief that by doing so, the camera would capture the sitter's neutral expression and features in one take. Thus, instead of informing the viewer of the subject's personality or mood through the exposure of the subject's

characteristic gestures, ID pictures erase them in an attempt to produce an 'objective shot.' Like a police booking shot, the aim of ID portraits is, precisely, to make someone identifiable, enabling us to recognize a person in a crowd (Freeland 100). Since their main purpose is identification, ID portraits go hand in hand with names, for they "pose one obvious question: whom does the image represent?" (Welch 97).

An aura of remoteness is conveyed in the recordatorios' confrontational portraits, an effect which is ultimately intensified by the fact that they are printed in black and white, increasing the poignancy and asking for "the contribution of the self more, in order to explain their attraction, to provide additional details (…) to verify that they are really authentic even though they do not actually look realistic" (Doy 148). The monochrome prints portray spectral presences and provide connotations of death, emphasizing the stubbornness and complementariness of memory and oblivion. The lack of color centers on the idea of history and loss (Tierney-Tello 93) and adds to the idea of death by erasing a key "signifier of vitality" (Gibbons 40). In M. Hirsch's words, "photography's relation to loss and death is not to mediate the process of individual and collective memory but to bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability" (*Family Frames* 22). However, death is irreducible also to the technology of photography. For starters, the still image is nothing but the "the corpse of an experience" as suggested by Walter Benjamin (qtd in Cadava 128) and, in the act of taking a photograph, one is freezing a moment in time by a click that separates the original pose of the sitter and the final print (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 92). As Christian Metz puts it, the image is "immediate and definitive, like death

(…). Not by chance, the photographic art (…) has been frequently compared with shooting, and the camera with a gun" (qtd in M. Hirsch, "Surviving Images" 22). In fact, many of the recordatorios' photos—in particular ID pictures—somehow reenact the vulnerability of the victim in front of the camera.

He was 20 years old.
Allegedly, he met his death in Ramos Mejia (Buenos Aires Province), that day at 7.30pm, at the corner of 25 de Mayo and Av. De Mayo.
Nancy, Debora, Valeria, and all those who love you and remember you; we are still looking for you. To send us any information about him, please write to: fellinipato@yahoo.com.ar

Figure 7*:* Rec. Dricas, Benjamín Isaac. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 30 Oct 2007. 7.

In black and white, a sense of bereavement increases the poignancy of his gaze, looking at us from the other side of the camera. He confronts the camera, he confronts us, he confronts death. Since we can see his frontal features, we are side by side with the executioner, who ultimately remains unseen to us.[69] His facial gesture is suspended in a

69 Analyzing pictures that were taken right before victims were executed, M Hirsch writes: "In the brutally frontal image, the camera is in the exact same place of the executioner who remains unseen" ("Surviving Images" 24)

neutral expression. A shaft of light intrudes in his forehead. Somehow, his physical evidence is condensed in those minutes, as a reference that he existed at some point in time. His image resists an educated reading in the pages of a newspaper. He unexpectedly disturbs the reader, emotionally piercing her. In fact, he looks straight out at her, directly into *her* eyes, openly confronting her each time she stares back, in an attempt to avoid his sad look. The poignancy of this image is condensed in his dark eyes, which at first reveal pity and at the end convey more than just nostalgia: they communicate sheer sadness.

> Torn between its obviousness, which reveals too much to the eye, and its mysteriousness, which reveals too little to our understanding, we sense a strange unease, a sort of split. Here we have an object which simultaneously conveys both its strangeness and its specificity: it is at once particular in terms of its plastic values and individual in its reference as a portrait. (Didi-Huberman, "The Portrait" 165)

His silhouette framed from the neck up exists at the level of pure *punctum*, present and absent, dead and alive (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 25). Only when the reader is finally able to escape from his incriminatory look, can she really see the details of his entire face. At first glance, this photograph looks almost like a painting, allowing the lighting to project a flat and two-dimensional perspective. In an apparent collage, this portrait engages different aesthetic languages. Part film, part picture, part chalk-drawing, the picture seems to perform the act of bearing witness from the newspaper page.

Even though portraits obey ascetic stylistic conventions that seem to be timeless—for they ultimately depict faces—, there are still markers in tension with a lost past. They depict the faces of young people, with noticeable traces of the fashion of the

time they disappeared. Certain traces, such as anachronistic hairstyles, makeup, or moustaches, clearly reveal that these pictures were taken in the seventies.

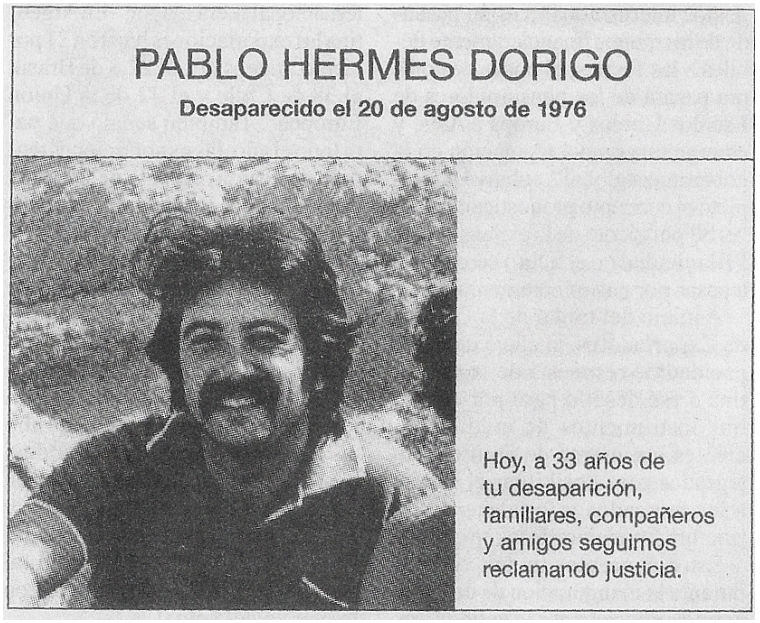
Present. We don't forget, we don't forgive. Justice and Punishment.

Figure 8: Rec. Goldstein, Mónica Liliana. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 6 Oct 2007. 6.

It is worth noting that ID pictures were so prevalent when searching for the disappeared that many families, possibly for lack of actual ID pictures, have cut out the face of the disappeared from a family picture into the standard ID picture size. This type of picture appears not only in the recordatorios but everywhere else, especially in legal documents such as the *habeas corpus* and petitions for the disappeared that families issued during the dictatorship, and also in the well-known flag with the faces of the disappeared that wraps the pyramid in the Plaza de Mayo during most marches. The process of adapting the family snapshot to the standardized aesthetic of the ID picture is

rich in paradoxes. For, as Ludmila da Silva Catela noted, "these pictures [IDs]—initially used to record citizens in identity cards—had been symbolically efficient to represent [these people] in the opposite condition, that of being disappeared, denied by the very same state which instituted and registered them with a picture in their ID documents" ("Lo invisible revelado" 347).

The pictures that were originally conceived as IDs retain several noticeable differences from those that initially had a different purpose. First, the expression of the photographed subject: whereas ID pictures present the individual in a particularly stiff pose, other pictures often show the subject smiling or not looking directly at the camera. Second, in ID photographs the background is not "any human or social environment" but a one-color fabric: "they exist only in and for studio time, studio space" (Hall 156). Conversely, in these cut-out pictures one can usually see either an outdoor setting, an arm that is embracing the disappeared from behind or an image of the like that has been left out on purpose in order to highlight the face of the disappeared.



Disappeared on 20 August 1976

Today, in the 33th year of your disappearance, family, comrades and friends are still demanding justice.

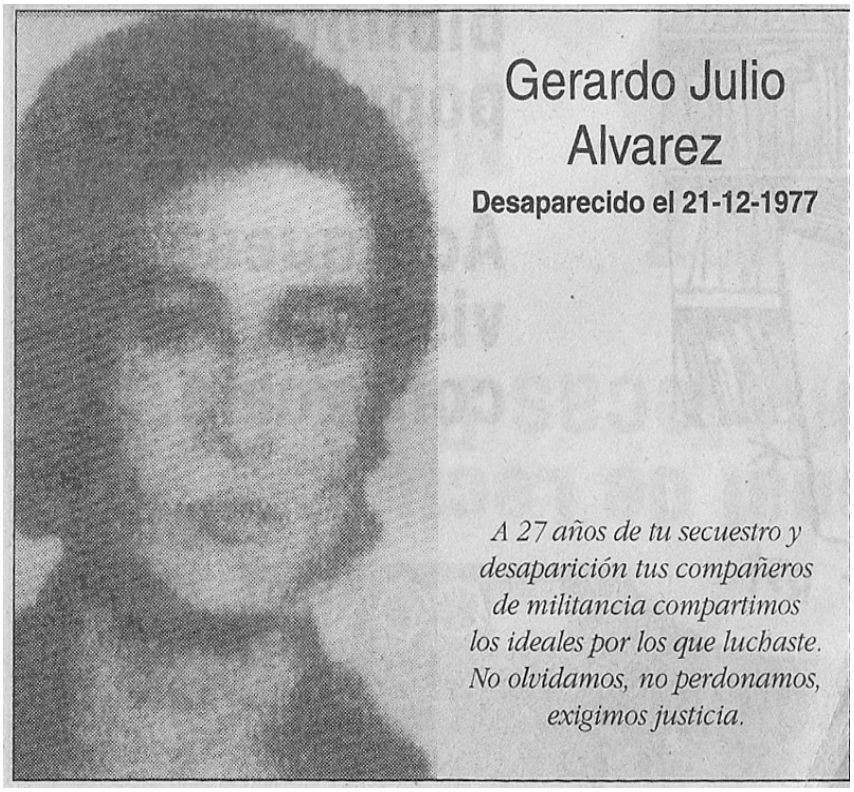
Figure 9: Rec. Dorigo, Pablo Hermes. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 20 Aug 2009.14.

Faces and more faces are reproduced within the frames of the recordatorios, as a reminder that it is in these frontal features where we locate the essence of identity. Faces are, as Elias wrote, the "showcase of the individual" (qtd in da Silva Catela, "Lo invisible" 342). Confirming Deleuze and Guattari's critique to the tendency of Western societies of overcharging faces with meaning (115), the recordatorios exhibit faces as if in each of them the uniqueness of a person were condensed. In Rushton's words, "the face represents or expresses the inner feelings of a person; it expresses something that is hidden" (219). When looking at recordatorios, the viewer cannot help but notice that each of them shows a youthful face, which signals a premature death. As in the obituaries of children or young people, where the disclosure of the age of the deceased is bestowed with dreadfulness (Ferrer 209, Gusmán 329), in the recordatorios the tragedy is

crystallized in the disappeared's fresh expressions. "There is something important about looking at a recordatorio," said Enriqueta Maroni—a mother of the Plaza de Mayo-fl—"To see their faces frozen in that moment (…). Seeing them in the recordatorios with the same little faces with which they took them is really shocking for us. That is what has remained in our hearts" (Personal Interview 18 Sept 2003).

As the "primordial object and surface of mimesis" (Mitchell 81-82), the publication of pictures of the disappeared is extremely important for those who publish recordatorios. However, as pointed out by Ana Paoletti, who designs the recordatorios for *Página*/12, "working here, you realize that there are a lot of people that do not have the opportunity of having an image of the disappeared or that many have a few of very poor quality" (Paoletti Personal Interview 12 June 2009). That reality determined that, in the last years, *Página/12* decided to publish pictures even though one can barely see the subject's features. As a result, many pictures are scarcely distinguishable.[70]

[70]As Ana Paoletti explains, "for the pictures to be published, we needed them to be of a certain quality. In the last years we decided that even when the quality of the picture was really poor we would publish it anyway because it is really important for the relative who is going to see it. Sometimes people bring photocopies; we publish them all the same" (Personal Interview 12 June 2009).



Disappeared on 12-21-1977

On the 27th anniversary of your kidnapping and disappearance, your militant comrades share the ideals for which you fought. We don't forgive, we don't forget, we demand justice.

Figure 10: Rec. Álvarez, Gerardo Julio. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 21 Dec 2004. 6.

In this picture, the effect is similar to the images of Holocaust victims in *Chases High School*, 1988 by artist Christian Bolstanski, where the images are distorted by being enlarged, to the point that each face loses its singularities (van Alphen, "Nazism" 38). In her series *Immemorial*, Brazilian artist Rosângela Rennó also worked with the notion of distortion by poor definition, displaying pictures of people who died while working in the construction of the city of Brasilia (Stein and Sonnenberg 46). By the same token, the reader who faces an illegible image in a recordatorio is able to guess a silhouette by the contours of the image, but the portrait is blurred and grainy, evoking the ephemeral

materiality of a ghost. Moreover, the fragile materiality of the paper on which the recordatorios are printed intensifies the effect of erasure of details, which ultimately produces an effect of sameness that equates all the faces, make them interchangeable. In other words, "the return of what was there takes the form of a haunting" (Cadava 11). In a twofold operation, the blurry surface evokes both the act of disappearance itself and also the risk of and resistance to oblivion, as if the picture were progressively becoming more and more illegible with the passage of time. It is as if the reality of the paper print were actually fading away.

4.FAMILY PICTURES

Sphere of Circulation

While ID pictures serve as documents that confirm individual identity for bureaucratic and governmental control, family photos are taken in the private realm and are meant to circulate among family members and acquaintances. Traditionally, family pictures end up in family albums or randomly kept in shoeboxes or drawers. In these days of digital innovation, the practice of taking pictures has changed, enabling amateur photographers to experiment and take as many photographs as they want to. Moreover, the media for storage have broadened to include cell phones, computers, and even online albums hosted in the Internet "cloud." In addition, the divide between private and public has also been redefined through the massive sharing of images in social networking sites such as *Facebook*, *Myspace*, and many others (Lasén and Gómez-Cruz 206). Yet, in terms of the recordatorios, the pictures of those who disappeared were taken and printed

in the seventies, and many elderly people conserve them. Therefore, most of these images are still archived in an old-fashioned way (in albums or boxes) and are reproduced in traditional photocopies for the marches. However, some other images—particularly if in the possession of younger generations—have been digitalized and circulate in e-mail chains and blogs.

Whatever their fate—an album, a shoebox, a computer—family pictures still follow persistent conventions that seem to be defined by social expectations regarding what a family should look like. Interestingly, even when these pictures are not meant to circulate outside the private sphere, they are intrinsically influenced by "'public' modes—in particular advertising and publicity photography—which, unlike the snapshot, aim to be understood by as wide an audience as possible" (Holland 5). As family pictures seem anchored in the projection of a family ideal and social imagination, they frequently embrace positive images and reject less perfect recorded moments. Even if they are rarely exposed outside the family unit, the positive spin of the family album persists. What explains this phenomenon? Is it, as Patricia Holland asks, because pictures are meant for future generations? Or is it that the intended viewers are precisely the protagonists of the snapshots, who are in need of their own collection of ideal imagery? (7).

From its earliest days, when family pictures were taken in professional studios, the version of the family narrative proposed by photographs had already created a set of optimistic codes that were to be reproduced, although with changes along the way, until nowadays (Jonas 106). As a result, even when cameras became an affordable and popular consumer good (since 1888 with the invention of the Kodak camera) that enabled the

chronicling of family occasions, photographs still excluded and even concealed illnesses, divorces, and bittersweet events that were not considered worthy of being remembered in the future (Holland 7). Even experiences such as one's daily job, which undoubtedly usually takes up most of our day, is patently absent from family depictions, as if picture taking were "about high points, not mundane routine" (Stanley 64). Power relations, inequalities, domestic violence, and addictions are not part of familial decorum. In between the myth of the perfect family and the actual reality, family photographs often create, as Marianne Hirsch noted, a contradictory image that shows us "what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently, it is not" (*Family Frames* 8).

The ideology and aesthetics of family pictures are, in consequence, marked by the 'agreeable,' and as such, by the eagerness to filter family life through that perspective, therefore setting aside many zones of everyday life.[71] Instead of registering the real conditions of life, what "must or must not be seen" is a key premise in familial documentation (Roberts 202). As the optimistic narrative par excellence, family pictures are marked by their goal of keeping a code of "propriety," producing, as a result, "stereotyped behaviors, ready-to-wear social clothes, whose function is to make it possible to recognize anyone, anywhere" (de Certeau et al 17).

If "popular family photography is about universals," as Leanne Klein wrote, then its highly codified nature has resulted in a repetitive uniformity that makes all family photographs very much alike (144). Despite their private nature, family pictures tend to

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[71] Photographer Jo Spence is known for having 'deconstructed' the family album getting it closer to avant-garde notions. Through her album, Spence not only questioned the traditional values in which the traditional family album is based but she was fundamentally criticizing society (Roberts 200-7).

share a common aesthetic, themes, preponderant subjects, and environments which ultimately make them predictable. Through their ancient rules and patterns that can be traced back to the Renaissance family portrait —where, as Julia Hirsch noted, the family first appeared as a 'self-contained' unity (35)—family pictures nourish our memories with visual representations of the past.

Special Occasions and Everyday Images

Most family pictures contain a number of stereotypes that provide information regarding each snapshot, which allows people to build logical and sequenced series that follow different criteria. Pictures can be ordered in a chronological and linear way. They can also follow cyclical repetitions of "climactic moments" such as births, birthdays, gatherings, vacations, and weddings, among others (Kuhn 19).

Among these special occasions, weddings are, undoubtedly, the most recorded events (Poister 91). As Holland noted, "wedding pictures, perhaps the commonest of professionally made family photographs, must show certain symbolic moments and certain significant people to the best effect, or their point is lost" (4). In fact, documenting and performing for the adequate recording of such moments has become an important part of the event itself, (Holland 4) making it extremely unlikely that photography will be completely eliminated from any wedding (Chalfen 87).

Whether taken by a professional or by an amateur photographer (a family member, a guest), creativity out of the book is generally not well received (Holland 4). The purpose of wedding pictures "is not to document reality, but to create a memory that

lives up to certain expectations" (Poister 106). Going through the pictures of almost any of these celebrations, one can confirm that they adjust to the norm of showing certain moments in particular: the permanent focus on the bride and groom, the picture of the newly-married couple leaving in a car, the toast, the first dance, the cutting of the cake, etc. Although a comparative study has shown that these widely employed symbols are "adopted by people worldwide and perpetuated in their photo collections" (Poister 103), it is worth noting that this is a western practice marked by class conditions.

Many recordatorios include pictures of disappeared couples on the day of their wedding celebrations. Looking at a young happy couple getting married next to the date of their disappearance highlights the unfairness of their fate, and complicates the connection between their private or personal memory with a public or cultural memory. Since these celebrations are settings in which to share happiness or achievement with friends and family, the individuality of the disappeared appears to be already part of "larger communities, (…) attachments that go beyond, even foreshadow the personal lives of those pictured" (Kuhn 73).

"It will be said that madness became the vogue. It will be said that people are bad and do not deserve any better, but I will continue innocent mischievous dreaming (maybe multiplying loaves and fishes)" Silvio Rodriguez.
You have made history. We will preserve it. We don't forget, we don't forget. Truth and Justice.
Always… with a smile.
Mom, Siblings and Children.

Figure 11: Rec. Maddalena, Patricia Rosana and Romero, Juan Ramón. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires]. Part of Virginia Giannoni's exhibition.

Consider the picture above. She is wearing a white wedding gown, looking at the camera with a smile on her face. He is wearing a suit, smiling while looking at someone, family member or friend, who is most likely toasting to the couple's future at the moment the picture was taken. Because of shared wedding symbols, it is probably easy to guess that the image was taken at the couple's wedding reception. Their hands are interlaced; she is offering him a sip from her glass, he reciprocates the gesture.

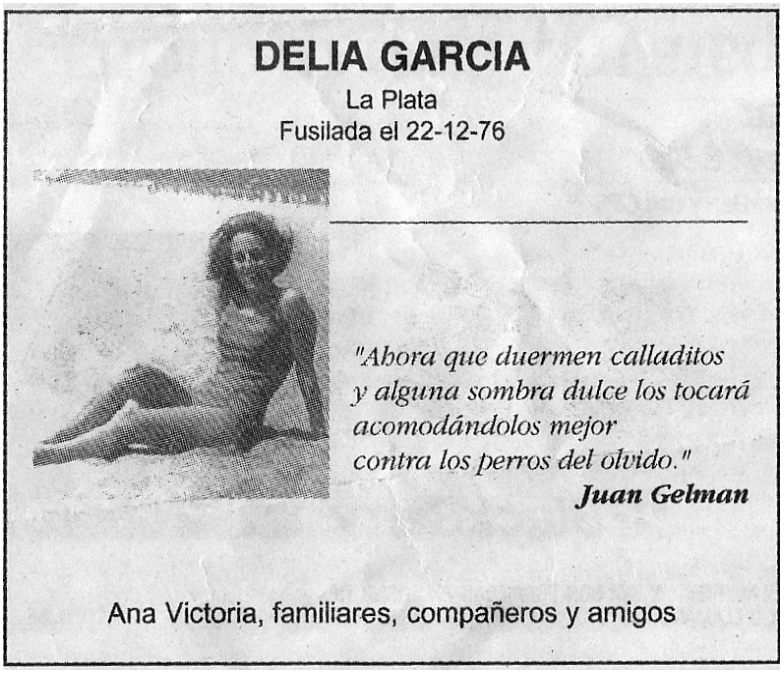
When one of these pictures is disseminated to the public framed in a recordatorio, it means that it was literally yanked out from the story that the family album was telling. The picture, which was not supposed to be seen by outsiders, acquires a different

meaning when published in the newspaper.[72] As Holland states, "an 'outside' interpretation, an assessment of someone else's album, moves into a different realm: of social history, ethnology or a history of photography" (3). While the picture acquires a social status, it still holds its private nature, forcing the reader to identify with the image. Almost anyone can sympathize with the young couple precisely because the image fully embraces conventions that are shared by most wedding pictures. In fact, at least part of the family pictures' emotional power and poignancy lies on the sameness generated by the standardization of these images. The shared code of symbolic images reaches the collective experience through an appropriation of the commonplace because everyone can relate to them (Rancière, *The Politics* 36). Borrowing photographic curator Peter Galassi's words, we are able to identify ourselves with family pictures "because all of us have snapshots of our own, and thus know the habit of understanding them, we are all equipped to imagine ourselves in the snapshots of others, into the dreams and the passions they conceal" (qtd in Willis 117-118).

Pictures taken during vacations, depicting family members at leisure, comprise another set of photographs, which are also anchored in an idealistic perspective. Related to the aesthetic of the postcard, these images are as stereotypical and constrained to their social function as the family pictures described above. Referring to the holiday picture, Bourdieu wrote that "(f)ar from being of a different nature from the traditional disposition, is simply an extension of it: in fact, a practice that is so strongly associated

[72] Unlike in the US where people often publish wedding pictures in the newspapers, especially if the bride and groom are from prominent families or are themselves well-established figures, in Argentina is not a common practice.

with extraordinary occasions that it could be seen as a festive technique is naturally reinforced in a period which marks a break with the everyday environment" ("The Cult of Unity" 35). Even though they are not the most common images within the recordatorios, scenes at the beach or in the mountains are also present in some of them.



Executed by a firing squad on 12-22-76

"now little sleeping ones some/sweet shadow silently touches you/preparing your stand/against the dogs of oblivion"

Juan Gelman[73]

Ana Victoria, family, companions and friends.

Figure 12: Rec. García, Delia. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 22 Dec 2007. 10

Performing a Pose

Amateur photographic practices within the family have changed together with the notion of family itself. A major reconfiguration of the traditional model of family took place steadily throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as women entered the labor force.

[73] This translation was taken from an English edition of Juan Gelman's verses, *Unthinkable Tenderness: Selected Poems* (29).

Moreover, the feminist movement challenged the notion of the patriarchal family in Western societies (Radford Ruether 132). While the redefinition of the role of women in the family was taking place and people started obtaining divorces or having children outside of marriage, the positive tone of the narrative of family pictures remained essentially the same. Perhaps the sole difference was a clear tendency toward images of affection. "Modern families," observed Henri Peretz, "favor personal, affective ties over those dictated by traditional hierarchy" (7). As a consequence, amateur family pictures that were formerly almost exclusively focused on celebrations or gatherings in social settings broadened their scope to record the small scenes that compose everyday family life (Peretz 6). The informal snapshot started to dominate photographic practice within the family after 1945 (Halle 225). That is to say, photography became a family rite "just when, in the industrializing countries of Europe and America, the very institution of the family starts undergoing radical surgery" (Sontag, *On Photograhy* 6).

This transformation of the social perception of the family implied a change in direction in the practice of photography, inviting the camera to depict intimate moments of a particular family. Moreover, in the 1970s, once photography had already fully conquered the domain of the household, it was also welcomed in museums, galleries, and the artistic market in general as a creative means of expression (Lemagny and Rouillé 195).

Simultaneously, and contrary to both early family pictures taken in studios with a serious expression and those modern pictures wearing a posed smile, a parallel convention took place. Not so long ago, happiness and well being had to be accompanied

by a smile in order to show that the family's 'emotional health' was in good stand (Jonas 107). Through the years, the smile kept its importance, but added a new value: the candidness of the depicted moment. Even if the pose is still widely performed, there is a current notion that the picture is more 'real' or 'honest' if the subject appears to be unaware that someone is taking a picture. The cooperation between photographed subject and photographer seems to erase spontaneity provoking rigidly posed pictures, ultimately revealing a certain artificiality that draws on the premeditated intentionality of the shot. Conversely, candid photographs give the impression of catching the protagonists in a living moment. If, in addition, the subjects bear a non-posed smile, this "testifies to a natural will to beam and, therefore, to well-being" (Jonas 107).

Within the recordatorios, it seems as though the reenactment of the aesthetics of the natural brings about certain poignancy, perhaps because it draws on the humanity and everyday life of an ordinary subject who was torn from his own routine. When the cooperation with the photographer is not apparent, the stage or the atmosphere of candid pictures seems to project a closed meaning that the viewer experiences from the outside. In contrast, confrontational photographs generate a cross of gazes between photographed subject and viewer, implicitly including the latter as part of the picture.

Disappeared in Cipoletti on 07/04/77 at the age of 17.

It's been 30 years of missing you.
We love you
Your family and friends.

Figure 13: Rec. Veraldi, Leticia. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 4 July 2007. 6.

Mesmerized in an activity at home, the photographed woman seems to be unaware of the fact that somebody was taking a picture of her. She appears to be doing something that was part of her daily habits, reading the newspaper as she usually did.

The value of the 'natural' is present not only in family pictures but also in photojournalism and artistic photography,[74] and it is also a goal in premeditated photographs. Interestingly, when posing, the subject attempts to be photographed with a 'natural' expression, as if the mere act of posing would not in fact deter from that idea.

[74] For instance, the San Antonio Museum of Art is currently exhibiting a well-known picture of two identical twin sisters taken by famous photographer Diane Arbus: *Identical Twins*, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967. In spite of what Susan Sontag said about Arbus' pictures, that she "instead of trying to coax her subjects into a natural or typical position, they are encouraged to be awkward—that is, to pose" (Sontag, *On Photography* 29) the caption behind the picture read: "Seeking an honest portrayal in photographing her subjects, Arbus always waited for them to assume natural poses before snapping the picture" San Antonio Museum of Art (March 2010).

Under the premise that the 'natural' can be created beforehand (Bourdieu, "The Social" 81) people ordinarily prepare themselves to confront the camera in a relaxed posture.

Whereas the seemingly non-posed image may acquire a "more informative and expressive value" (Silva 82), the act of overtly posing has a different quality, which is that of producing a statement for posterity. Regardless of the fact that posing is usually equated with fakeness (van Alphen, *Art in Mind* 45), the act of preparing oneself for future viewers (Silva 124) makes an interesting assertion of the individual's relation to time and to potential viewers. Furthermore, posing implies consent; that is to say, an agreement with the act of being photographed, which is considered 'a right' in certain non-western societies such as the Chinese. As Susan Sontag's explained, taking pictures in China always implies an agreement. Otherwise, one would be "depriving people (…) of their right to pose, in order to look their best" (*On Photography*, 134). Following this thread, one could think that Leticia, the girl in the above recordatorio's picture, knew that she was being photographed. Reading the newspaper, she shows that instead of being a shallow adolescent, she is interested in what is happening in real life. By choosing to publish this picture, her family is also telling society that she was an intelligent and caring human being. In the context of the recordatorio, the picture stresses that the military eliminated someone with intellectual capacity and a promising future.

As some argue, there was a point at which babies and children turned into the most photographed subjects within families (Silva 66; Sontag, *On Photography* 5; Chalfen 75-80, Gardner 86). In the evolution of the family album, "the child grows as the new hero, the king of the house (once, the father) whom receives all the visual space and

on whom all the family's hopes are grounded" (Silva 66). Nowadays, the lack of pictures depicting one's children is taken as an indication of indifference on the part of the parents (Sontag, *On Photography* 5). Since babies are unaware of cameras, they are generally incapable of posing, which fills their pictures with candid freshness (Silva 124). However, as time goes by, children eventually are forced to learn how to pose as they get used to their parents' demands to look at the camera.

Also partly due to the tendency of marking 'beginnings' in the trajectory of a family (Chalfen 75), pictures of newborns proliferated, depicting images that pertain to a very profound intimacy of the family. However, the visual narrative of the family and its propriety is almost always kept in place. As Chalfen noted, "clean children will consistently be preferred over dirty ones, and the appearance of blood is generally not snapshot material" (76-7). In the same vein, not everybody considers that breast feeding is an image worthy of being captured. The most common picture according to Chalfen's study (1987) was that of a parent holding a baby in an outside setting, an image that, not coincidentally, has become customary in the recordatorios.

Detainee-disappeared on 19 July 1976
PRESENT

We don't forget
We don't forgive

Trial and punishment for the guilty.

Diana, Guillermo, Silvia, Natalia

Figure 14: Rec. Gertel, Fernando Mario. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 19 July 2009. 27

Picturing babies is part of the album's will of recording "the stages at which new members are integrated into the family—through marriage or birth—and reinforce the sense of belonging to a group" (Peretz 6). At the same time, they are a statement of the passage of time through the arrival of new generations. In these cases, the reader knows that these lives have been cut short and the process of aging was interrupted, condemning the disappeared to bear his youthful features for all time, whereas the baby in the picture is now older than his own father.

Watching your family members growing old, one of the deepest frustrations of the families of the disappeared, was precisely what first motivated Argentinean photographer

Gustavo Germano to create *Ausencias* [Absences],[75] a novel photographic exhibition that forms part of the 'wave' of the arts addressing the traumatic past that I referred to in Chapter I.

Inaugurated on 26 February 2008, in the *Centro Cultural Recoleta* (Recoleta Cultural Center) in Buenos Aires, the project's main idea was simple and yet categorical: Germano reconstructed family pictures in which the people disappeared were present. By putting the old picture side by side to the artificially reshot picture, two elements stand out: the passage of time and the absence of the disappeared. Not having had the chance to watch his older brother Eduardo growing old resulted in an attempt to express that sentiment through the photographic language. Following there is one example of the sixteen pairs of pictures that comprise *Ausencias*.

75 This information is drawn on an unpublished paper that I wrote on *Ausencias* for Prof. Andrea Giunta's class, Biopolitics of Artistic creation, Fall 2009: "The Absence Made Visible: *Ausencias*, Gustavo Germano's photographic exhibition."

Figure 15: Part of the photographic exhibition *Ausencias*. Courtesy of Gustavo Germano (the size of the picture is altered).

In *Ausencias*, the photomontage makes evident that the natural continuity of life has been altered; as if the spectator is "bearing witness to a reality marked by antagonisms" (Rancière, "Problems" 90). Lately, the same technique that superposes realities is used in some recordatorios. In *Ausencias*, the causality between a past where the loved one was alive and the present in which he or she is disappeared is emphasized by the emptiness of the very same place that was formerly occupied with the physicality of the person (in this picture, the chair). By contrast, in the recordatorio shown below, the authors' frustrated desire to share a picture with their disappeared parents results in the encounter of both testimony and fiction.

DARDO JOSÉ
TOSETTO

11 de diciembre de 1975

Ay papi que difícil se hace enfrentarme al papel en blanco para poder escribir algo que demuestre lo que sentí siempre, lo que siento ahora. Es difícil ponerle palabras a tantas ausencias impuestas, tanto dolor, tantos sueños rotos, el encuentro más esperado por nosotros dos truncado por asesinos y como contrapunto hubo tanta fidelidad, tanto compromiso, tanto amor de ustedes que trascendió sus propias vidas. Quisiera saber tantas cosas ¿qué te gustaba hacer? ¿te gustaba la música? ¿tomabas mate? ¿fumabas? ¿cómo era tu carácter? ¿el mío es parecido al tuyo o al de mamá? ¿en qué me parezco a cada uno de ustedes? ¿qué nombre habían pensado ponerme? ¿llorabas ante la injusticia o te hacía enojar? ¿llegué a ser la mujer que querían que fuera? Me faltaban 3 meses para cumplir mis 15 años la primera vez que vi tu foto y pude verme en vos, mi corazón se puso feliz porque supo que vos eras mi papá que ya no tenía que seguir buscando tu nombre aunque el destino fue caprichoso ya que tuve que aprender a buscarte, a rearmar tu historia porque habían querido borrarte pero se olvidaron que yo era tu presencia, que yo seguiría tu lucha, que voy a seguir peleando por vos, por mi apellido porque yo soy tu bebé, tu hija, tu Victoria. Te amo papi.
Josefina .

(josefinatosetto@yahoo.com.ar)

Oh Dad, it's so hard to face the blank page in order to write something to demonstrate what I always felt, what I feel now. It's hard to put in words so many imposed absences, so much pain, so many broken dreams, the most eagerly awaited encounter between the two of us frustrated by murderers; and by contrast, there was fidelity, commitment, so much of your love that transcended your own lives. I'd like to know so many things; what did you like to do? Did you enjoy music? Did you drink mate? Did you smoke? What was your personality like? Does mine take after yours or mom's? In which ways do I resemble each of you? What names were you thinking of for me? Did injustice make you cry or did it make you angry? Have I become the woman that you wanted me to be? I was three months away from turning 15 years old the first time I saw your picture and I could see myself in you, my heart was happy because I knew that you were my father, that I didn't need to search for your name any longer although fate was stubborn because I had to learn to search for you, to reconstruct your history because they wanted to erase you but they forgot that I was your presence, that I would continue your fight, that I will keep fighting for you, for my last name, because I am your baby, your daughter, your Victoria. I love you dad, Josefina.

Figure 16: Rec. Tosetto, Dardo José. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires] 11 Dec 2008.

In this recordatorio we can see how two ID pictures have been superimposed in order to create a new one where we can see a family of three in the same shot. It could be said that among the sons and daughters of the disappeared the technique of montage has turned out to be a valid method of creating an image in which they occupy the same

space with their disappeared parents. Facing a total lack of pictures in which they are indeed present, many rely on photomontage techniques in order to create the illusion of having shared a photographic image with them.[76] On the one hand, the ID pictures above bear the marks of the empirical fact. It is as if by putting herself in the middle of her two parents, the author would in fact restore the linear natural sequence of what should have been the next picture had her parents not disappeared. However, on the other hand, the artificiality of the collage makes evident that the natural continuity of life was altered in ways that cannot be corrected.

5. The Displacement of Once-happy Memories

Argentina's dictatorship did not leave significant photographic documentation, given the secretive nature of its actions. The erasing of evidence was effective and, as a result, there are only a few snapshots related to the conditions in which the disappeared were kept captive. Among them, several images were taken by photographer Víctor Melchor Basterra, who was detained at ESMA during the dictatorship and was liberated after the restoration of democracy. While he was disappeared, the military made him take pictures of other detainees in order to produce forged documents to be used in clandestine operations. Basterra hid the pictures in photosensitive paper and was later able to make them public in a book compiled by Marcelo Brodsky, *Memoria en Construcción*

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[76] See for example, *Arqueología de la Ausencia* [*Archeology of Absence*], a photographic traveling exhibition by Lucila Quieto. By means of the technique of montage, Quieto created pictures in which she appears with her disappeared father. For a critical assessment of this exhibit, see: Valeria Durán, "Representaciones de la ausencia. Memoria e identidad en las artes visuales." Leonor Arfuch and Gisela Catanzaro; eds. *Pretérito imperfecto. Lecturas críticas del acontecer* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2008): 129-143.

(Memory in Construction). According to Ludmila da Silva Catela, there is another photographic archive that was not released to the public and is in the power of the Federal Justice. Collected by the police of the province of Córdoba, the archive contains nearly 10,000 portraits that were used in order to register the detainees, many of which pertain to disappeared people (da Silva Catela, "Lo invisible" note 4, 342). Other than that, in the Argentine case, there are no pictures recording kidnappings, torture sessions, or detention centers:

> There are thousands of people disappeared in Argentina and there is not one picture documenting how this occurred, obviously due to the illegal nature of state terror. There are photos of the before (individuals, events), but a disappearance in itself could not be photographed. There are no pictures of the dead flights. There are no pictures of torture sessions… (Langland 87-88).

Thus, in contrast to events such as the Holocaust, Vietnam, and other contemporary catastrophes where the images "speak for themselves" and are very explicit about the atrocities they depict (Zelizer 203), the images included in the recordatorios are not violent per se. On the contrary, taken out of the frame of the recordatorios, the photographs usually portray pleasant images.

Despite the apparent casual nature of the pictures, they can still be read as clear references to state repression. To begin with, even if they do not depict violence, the pictures are violent themselves, as they "fill the sight by force and (…) in [them,] nothing can be refused or transformed" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 91). The sensation of impotence generated by looking while staying on the sidelines, and the "retrospective irony of every

photograph, [makes them] more poignant if violent death separates its two presents…" (Marianne Hirsch "The Generation" 115). Consequently, the meaning of a picture changes in relation to its context of reception as well as each time it is observed, particularly when looking at candid snapshots which are typical milestones that seize the image of an ordinary moment in life. Just like the pictures of Chilean victims of state repression described by Nelly Richard, the disappeared of the recordatorios seem to be

> naturally confident in the normality of everyday life that, soon after, will be suddenly intervened by military violence. Nothing in the undefended pose can presage homicide interruption. The picture of the victim portrays a 'before' that is unaware of the evil and is charged with an aura because it designates the 'one' and 'unrepeatable' moment in which these subjects thought they were safe (Richard, "Imagen-recuerdo" 168)

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It's been 27 years of your absence, and I've known you for only four months. Mom, we disappeared together, you from life and I from my identity. But they could never take from me that outpouring of love that you fed me for five months. You left your face tattooed on mine, you left my father's name in mine demonstrating the love that you shared. It's unfair that today is the first year I can remember you on the day of your death. Soon those responsible will get what they deserve. They robbed me of your presence, but I know that you were and are present, accompanying me on every step of my life. I love you and thank you for leaving me such an example.
Horacio Pietragalla-Corti. Last grandchild found by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, to whom I also give thanks.

Figure 17: Rec. Corti, Liliana. *Página/12* [Buenos Aires]. Part of Virginia Giannoni's exhibition.

The picture in this recordatorio is linked to everyday life and refers to a seized happy past. In Liliana Corti's recordatorio, published on 5 August 2003, the woman is holding her baby. The picture seems to be taken unexpectedly depicting the mother's profile and a frontal image of the baby's face. By reading the text next to the picture, we understand that the baby, now a man, was the one who wrote the message and that the woman who was carrying him was his mother. As he says, he only found out about her

four months before the publication of this recordatorio. The text illustrates the picture, rationalizing the image (Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* 25).

While the picture portrayed happiness in its original context of production—the family—, now it presents a different scenario. Then, as the picture becomes tragically marked by its displacement, it no longer tells a story; now it denounces a story. Indeed, the new context of reception signals a different intentionality and changes the meaning of the picture: in the newspaper, the image becomes a public denunciation. Consequently, the viewer now sees the interrupted maternity and is exposed to the uncertainty of that baby's future given that his mother was almost surely murdered.

By means of a certain background knowledge that gives meaning to the picture—*studium* (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 26)—the viewer now recognizes the demand for justice and is able to place the remembrance in a political and ethical context. However, these images resist an educated reading and unexpectedly disturb the *spectator*, emotionally *piercing* her from the bottom corner of the page. The people portrayed in the recordatorios, the disappeared, look directly into the *spectator*'s eyes, openly confronting her each time she looks at the picture. The uneasiness of the image also resides in the connotations of the abrupt absence of the maternal body due to the intrusion of the state in the core of a family. In this setting, the images promptly obtain symbolic status. Thus, what persists behind this image, in Bourdieu's terms, is the *allegory* ("The Social" 91-92). Anyone looking at this picture now sees the interrupted motherhood and the uncertainty that the former baby, now a young man, suffered until recovering his identity.

The image depicts horror, even when there is no element in it that explicitly reveals the suffering of the family of the disappeared. As Marianne Hirsch points out, referring to the photos included in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, they "look just like yours and mine," but as they are inserted in a bigger narrative "they become eloquent witnesses of an unspeakable history, in themselves stubborn survivors of cultural genocide" (*Family Frames* 13).

Just like the portraits that the Saturday Mothers take on their marches in Turkey, the ones displayed in billboards in protests in Chile, or those that adorn the AIDS quilt—among many other examples—, the pictures in the recordatorios have also suffered a displacement that imbues them with meaning. Therefore, the break provoked by a historical and collective traumatic experience is materially reflected in the family album. One of its elements is no longer in the private medium that it belongs to, but rather exposed to a far wider audience: society. In other words, there is an interruption in the social function of the family picture as an object that captures a moment in order to reproduce it within the family (Kuhn 70). This is exactly the case with the pictures published in the recordatorios: their original, intimate sphere of circulation is now broadened by their exposure to the public. In sum, family memories that were essentially personal are gradually integrated into a collective narrative, formed by public evocations (Ricoeur 38).

6. THE ONE AND THE MANY

Photographic images, as historical or familial objects that serve the purposes of documenting public events or intimate moments, belong either to the public or the private realms.[77] As we have seen, nevertheless, the boundaries between public and private are far from clear-cut. On the one hand, in the aftermath of collective trauma and also of dire and disturbing events of all types, these limits seem to become particularly porous. Personal tragedy becomes part of a collective catastrophe, and representations involving trauma tend to blur the conventional distinctions of private and public. On the other hand, as Arendt stated, society's common sense about what should or should not be shown in public is so powerful (78), that when an incompatible element is identified, we suddenly feel disturbed. The dislocation is far from unnoticed. No wonder then, that "the most poignant of photographs are those that were created within personal or familial contexts yet have since acquired a cultural, legal or historical status" (Sturken, "The Image as Memorial" 179).

In particular in the cases of portraits where faces are distinct, the disappeared seem to return a melancholic and incriminating look, as if they were saying, "look what the human beings are capable of doing." Both types of portraits, the ones taken by a professional photographer in order to be used in the legal system, and the ones taken as candid family pictures, highlight the self, increase the being (Gadamer, qtd in van

[77] As Barthes points out, the explosion of photography coincides in time with the first incursions of private images becoming public. Instead of generating a mixed public-private sphere, the emergence of photography added a new value to the private realm as the only space where people can move freely. "I must, by a necessary resistance, reconstitute the division of public and private"(*Camera Lucida* 98).

Alphen, "Nazism" 35), and the irreplaceable (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 75). Since the process of mourning implies death, working through the disappearances seems to require a constant repetition of the figures that reaches the illusion of presence—or at least the visual existence of the body. In the recordatorios, as Ernst van Alphen asserts referring to one of Christian Boltanski's photographic installations, "[o]ne is confronted with the absence of the presence of unique human beings" (van Alphen, "Nazism" 38). This is not to say, as many intellectuals such as André Bazin asserted when explaining the 'power' of photography, that families of the disappeared are under the impression of being in the actual presence of their loved one when holding her portrait. As one recoratorio reads, "not a picture but some sign of my brother alive is what I'm looking for" (Rec. Valetti, Claudio Roberto 2007)[78]. Needless to say, a picture will never be the same as somebody's presence:

> There is no such illusion. Only in the most exotic circumstances would one mistake a photograph for the objects photographed. The flatness of photographs, their frames, the walls on which they are hung are virtually always obvious and unmistakable. Still photographs of moving objects are motionless. Many photographs are black-and-white. Even photographic motion pictures in "living color" are manifestly mere projections on a flat surface and easily distinguished from "reality." Photographs look like what they are: photographs (Walton 249).

Although this is undeniably true, it is also clear that pictures have become central in instances where mourning and grief are at work. In Argentine society, the process of mourning was not only complex owing to the lack of bodies to grieve over, but also

[78] ["No una foto, un registro de mi hermano vivo es lo que busco"]

because, as Robben has pointed out, mourning was immediately considered a synonym of "abandoning the disappeared and surrendering to the conditions created by the military junta" (138).

As I pointed out in chapter II, the recordatorios participate in the well-established debate over whether individualizing the disappeared actually restricts a societal trauma to a personal loss. Some argue that naming the disappeared and publishing their faces transforms a general claim for justice into a personal one. On the contrary, I argue that including the individual perspective of collective trauma, instead of simplifying, actually does justice to the complexity of the disappearances as a social phenomenon. In terms of discursive or political strategy, the inclusion of the individual perspective does not obstruct the social and collective component. The recordatorios' obsessive repetition of the same pictures and the publication of over three recordatorios every day blur the distinctions between one disappeared and the other. In a way, what ultimately debilitates the claim for justice is to erase the singularities of each particular person who was pulled out of her life. Hence, instead of simplifying the issue to a sum of personal tragedies, the individual perspectives within a collective trauma actually reinforce the complexity of the memories of the disappeared as a social phenomenon.

Once a recordatorio is published for the first time, it usually continues to be published every year on the same date with the same picture. Additionally, the same picture is repeated not only in the recordatorio but everywhere else: manifestations, memorials, and artistic urban interventions, to name a few. Over the years, repetition has conferred pictures such a symbolic status that even when people cannot match face and

name, it is clear to everybody that those faces go with the label "disappeared." In this way, the recordatorios not only rely upon the practice of repetition, through which eternity and fixity are symbolized (Halbwachs 92), but also appeal to the fundamental characteristic of family memory, highlighting the uniqueness of an individual. Within the family space, the act of naming each member of the family signals his or her specificity. In the recordatorios, this practice serves the goal of linking a person to a particular name, attaching it to a particular face and role, thus generating a "fixed and irreducible position" (Halbwachs 72).

Every single image becomes representative of the other 30,000, the iconic number of estimated victims. In other words, the images—in particular the portraits—ultimately concentrate "memory images into a single, transcendent entity; they consolidate many possible, even legitimate, representations into one…" (Brilliant qtd in van Alphen, "Nazism" n6). Following Marianne Hirsch, repetition does not necessarily mean stagnation or paralysis, but rather a generational response to trauma: "compulsive and traumatic repetition connects the second generation to the first, *producing* rather than *screening* the effect of trauma that was lived so much more directly as *compulsive repetition* by survivors and contemporary witnesses" ("Surviving Images" 8). The collective nature of memory is manifested and realized in individual memories (Halbwachs 40). Or, put differently, "'the past is in fact multiple pasts" (Crane 1376). Hence, the dialectic relationship between the one and the many emphasizes both the part and the whole in which these memorial advertisements are both cultural and personal, both ordinary and special.

Closure

Memories are not, as one would be tempted to assume, cohesive and lacking in contradictions. Rather, memories are complex, paradoxical, and shifting narratives where different temporalities (past, present, future), and levels (personal, collective) coexist and, more often than not, are in conflict with each other. After traumatic historical events, memories function in even more complicated ways. If representations of the past are tied to concerns of the present (Halbwachs 80), then collective memories evolve through time, as political events and contexts redefine the meanings of the past and reframe how traumatic events are remembered and memorialized. Moreover, rather than being a static element of societal life, memories are in permanent disagreement with each other and in fact constitute the terrain of ongoing struggles around how to portray the past.

It is not rare that immediately after historical traumatic events, there is a period in which social conditions—which of course vary over time—are not conducive to talk about or listen to stories about the past (Pollak 56, 78). The aftermath of the Holocaust was one such case, as many survivors had to deal with the hostility of a postwar society that was pervasively in denial of their prior life in the camps, not at all ready to hear about the tragedies they had experienced (Greenspan 34). In Argentina, although those directly affected by the dictatorship continued to raise their voices in the public arena, it can be said that society as a whole also went through a process in which silence often surrounded the conflictive recent past (Huyssen 173). These difficulties in dealing with the past were evident in the first half of the 1990s. The passage of Menem's presidential pardons despite the international pressure to put perpetrators behind bars resurfaced the

theory of the two demons as an argument that justified, at least partially, the abuses committed by the military government (Verbitsky, *Robo para la Corona* 361).

Even in moments where it seems that a general consensus has been achieved regarding the past, there is never a single and unique interpretation at the societal level. Indeed, as Jelin acutely observed, once there is some time-distance from the traumatic historical event, distinct memories become more visible and engage in a public debate that defines the personal and collective identities that play important roles in society (*State Repression* xviii).

In that sense, the enduring after-effects of the military regime are so much in the present that its pervasiveness is patent on a daily basis in the news. In Jelin's words, it is as though when reading the newspaper one has the sense of witnessing "the persistence of a past that is everlasting and does not wish to pass" (*State Repression* xiii). Indeed, as I am writing this conclusion, the former dictator and commander of the Campo de Mayo detention center, Benito Bignone, has been sentenced to 25 years in prison for having committed crimes against humanity. By the same token, the Noble-Herrera siblings, the alleged adopted children of the owner of the powerful multimedia *Clarín,* resisted submitting their DNA samples to be matched with all the families of those who disappeared in the National Genetic Databank, as established by law. The past week, the Noble-Herrera siblings—Marcela and Felipe—published an advertisement in the main Argentine newspapers and released a television spot denouncing, among other things, that they think that their identity should not be made a public matter and that they feel threatened by the current government, which is in conflict with the *Clarín* Media Group.

This case serves as an example of the intricate relationship between a conflictive past that remains present, where memories are continually being challenged and contested. In fact, one cannot help but notice that the process of giving meaning to the controversial past is so complex that even the dictatorship's victims, pure and simple, such as the potential children of those who disappeared—who not only lost their parents but also their identity—are caught in a difficult position. On the one hand, they face the fear of losing those whom they have always considered as their family and many times they feel guilty or ungrateful to their 'adoptive' parents for acknowledging their recovered identity. On the other hand, there is the fear of realizing that their adoptive parents may have been accomplices in their biological parents' murder. Thus, even twenty-five years after the transition to democracy, when the discourse of human rights has prevailed in the public arena, moral condemnation of the dictatorship is by no means a position shared by all throughout the country.

As Nora and Jan Assmann would suggest, concrete objects and sites embody collective memory as such, often presenting a uniform and monolithic narrative that is meant to be fixed in monuments, memorials, and museums, among other commemorative forms. Indeed, when thousands of people remain missing after more than thirty years, impunity mobilizes familial and societal expressive needs and different types of "imagetexts," or markers of memory arise among the public in order to materialize these absences. Since 1996, on the 20th anniversary of the coup d'état, many attempts to memorialize the traumatic past arose in Argentina. Many of them had a shared goal of marking real sites in which repression had taken place. These commemorative initiatives

usually included turning former clandestine detention centers into cultural centers, such the cases of *El Olimpo*, *Museo de la Memoria Nunca Más*, *Club Atlético* and *ESMA* (Jelin and Kaufman 96-97).

Like the family album in which every snapshot is arranged so as to erase or overlook the inherent tensions within family life, individual and collective memories also tend to offer a consistent account that defies their own complex nature. When dealing with memories marked by omissions and gaps, what is left unsaid is often as important as what it is verbalized. Despite having something predictable or repetitive, these emerging expressions of collective memories are inevitably intermingled with the historical and present conditions in which they are produced or reenacted. In this way, the most recent dictatorship in Argentina and its worst legacy, the figure of the disappeared, generated unprecedented ways of coping with a traumatic past. The recordatorios, the impossible-to-define texts that have been published since 1988 in the newspaper *Página/12*, constitute one of these distinctive and innovative ways.

On the anniversary of the disappearances, each recordatorio honors an individual, or a couple that disappeared together, or even entire families that were eliminated by the dictatorship. Even though they resemble obituaries, they also borrow stylistic conventions and functions from other genres. The recordatorios combine two tasks performed by two distinct genres that belong to the newspapers. On the one hand, they are used as missing-people advertisements, searching for someone (the disappeared herself or her daughter, a baby born in captivity) or for information to reconstruct the story of the disappeared. On the other hand, they are public announcements that include a denunciation and a demand

for justice. In sum, in terms of discursive genre, the emergence of the recordatorios inaugurates a new genre as contradictory as the disappearance itself.

Even though recordatorios can be repetitive and homogenous, both regarding their texts and images, many of them stand out due to their originality. Within this complex and clashing discursive mission that fluctuates between an assumption that the disappeared is dead and the enduring hope that he or she may still be alive, the recordatorios manage to provide a forum for an array of expressions: imagined dialogues with the disappeared, poetry, humor, confessions, letters, poems that were written by the disappeared, among many other elements. Over time, two elements seem to be present in all of them: from the beginning, every recordatorio has included the name/s of the disappeared and a signature of the party or parties publishing it.

Still absent from a traditional historical archive but surreptitiously present in the repertoire of everyday actions put forth by some families of the disappeared, the task of writing and publishing recordatorios is actually being taken up by a new generation that expresses its own concerns, ideas, and remembrances. In many cases, these new social actors write recordatorios asking questions about relatives they barely knew, or in many cases did not know at all. Those who did get a chance to meet their parents—because they were already toddlers when their father and/or mother were kidnapped—generally choose to display pictures in which they are with them, perhaps as a way of reenacting a sense of belonging. As Ana Paoletti from *Página/12* asserted, "a lot of times, children of the disappeared bring pictures in which they are with their parents. And they ask you:

'please try to publish the entire picture. Do not cut the part in which we appear'" (Personal Interview12 June 2009).

From the classical ID portraits that illustrate almost every event related to the disappeared, to the candid family pictures depicting happy people living a life that has been interrupted, this third generation is leaving an imprint into the ways in which the disappeared are honored and remembered by means of photographic images. In most cases, these pictures are in fact the way that children of the disappeared actually 'met' their parents, or the only representation that they have of them. Julio Pantoja, a photographer whose work dwells upon the pictures of disappeared in the province of Tucumán, overheard a dialogue between two sons of disappeared parents, which I think illustrates the specific relationship and attachment to pictures of thousands of young people in Argentina: "—My father's color is sepia. What is yours? –Long live black-and-white pictures! My dad's picture is an ID"[79] (Pantoja).

To be sure, recordatorios are part of a long history of using still pictures as a visual resource in the representation of the victims of state repression. As pointed out earlier, from the very outset mothers would carry typical ID pictures in order to find out something about their children's whereabouts. After years of being publicly displayed in weekly marches and at every other event, these images became paradigmatic in representing the disappearance as a social phenomenon. In the present day, these portraits have started to share the space of memorialization with candid family pictures, showing

[79]["—Mi viejo es color sepia, ¿y el tuyo? –¡Aguante el blanco y negro! La foto de mi viejo es la del documento."]

not just the face of the disappeared, but also their bodies in motion, bearing vivid expressions. This is apparent not only in the increasing use of family pictures in the recordatorios but everywhere else, as suggested by Ludmila da Silva Catela ("Lo invisible" 350).

It is interesting to note that the visual representations of the recent past in Argentina are composed of many images of the 'before,' but there are almost no images of the 'during.' No images of detention centers, no images of the clandestine maternity centers where hundreds of women gave birth, no images or records of the detainee-disappeared in such circumstances. Thus, one might say that the social imagination of that aspect of the dictatorship is constructed merely of portraits initially intended as state records and of pictures documenting family life. The latter, collections of family pictures, only depict victims within their own family: as sons and daughters, as siblings, as husband and wife. However, they usually fail to document the individual's political commitment or militancy. In the long term, family images together with an initial politics of memory based primarily on the CONADEP's report released in the midst of the transition to democracy, established a romanticized notion of the disappeared as agent-less victims (Vezzetti 97). This narrative strategy, Andreas Huyssens argues, was necessary in order to "gather around a new national consensus" that would clearly divide victims from perpetrators (172). Years after the transitional period, in 1995, the confession of the former navy officer, Scilingo, highlighted the atrocious nature of state repression, opening the path towards social recognition and consciousness. In other words, a large part of society needed to forget or at least overlook the responsibilities of

some of the victims who had participated in armed organizations, in order to acknowledge the extent of the horrors committed by the military dictatorship. It seems that this forgetting was a necessary condition for the state to be able to transcend the powerful, apologetic, and misleading version posed by the theory of the two demons, which simply equated the actions of the guerrilla with the response from the military representing the state. Only with time is the figure of the disappeared leaving behind such Manichaeism, allowing society to acknowledge that the fact that many of the disappeared were part of armed organizations does not attenuate the crimes committed by the military.

Facing a total lack of photographs of actual disappearances, the images that come to mind when thinking about the horrors of the dictatorship are those selected and displayed in public by family members. As a result, the construction of a visual memory regarding the disappearances of 1976-1983 ironically depicts, as I previously pointed out, either portraits or joyful scenes of young people having fun, holding a baby, or reading the newspaper.

Through a familial language based on kinship relations regulated by social conventions, family pictures also share the quality of being an inherently private expression shared socially. Thus, while the family as a group is an institution whose recollection highlights the uniqueness of an individual, it is also evident that these recollections are profoundly predetermined by society. Even when generational transmission and mediation does not occur solely at a familial level, this imagery has the powerful impact of reaching the viewer in an emotional yet political fashion, somehow subverting the traditional assumption that the domestic realm is opposed to politics (Jelin,

Familia 10). As is often said, in the aftermath of genocide, personal and collective experiences seem to be more cohesive and intertwined than ever before, precisely because the state—emblem of the public realm—has intruded by force into the very core of many families. Ironically, at the same time that thousands of families were shaken by the disappearances of one or more of their members, the dictatorship framed its nationalist propaganda on the metaphor of the family as the foundation of society. For instance, a voice-over in a well-known official television spot of 1976 asked "do you know where your son is at this very moment?," a way of indirectly labeling parents—especially mothers—of disappeared children as bad parents, blaming them for not having raised their children properly (Tarducci 119; Jelin, *State Repression* 79).

Whereas many recordatorios are conceived in the most solitary and intimate singularity—that of a mother who lost a child (Loraux 39)—in publishing them, families of the disappeared decide to take pictures from the family album and publish them in a newspaper. Because disappearances were "intensively private," (Robben 137) their enunciation in a mass medium such as the newspaper guarantees not only a subjective personal communication with the reader but also the possibility of reaching a social range of incidence. In a personal interview, Aurora Morea, Mother of Plaza de Mayo-fl, made this point clear: "I write recordatorios for everybody to know how my daughter was. I speak to her, but I publish the message in the newspaper because I want everybody to find out…" (Personal Interview 18 September 2003). The individual act of reading the news is, thus, interrupted by an unexpected look that stares at the reader in a naïve way, as if the picture had been able to seize a moment of complete ignorance "about events to

come" (Sturken *Tourists of History* 184). Still, the record of that instant is as ephemeral as the stock on which newspapers are printed: ungraspable as the difficulty of conceiving the disappearances. Since it is only in the public realm that the demand for justice makes sense, the recordatorios attempt to achieve a wider acknowledgement of the social figure of the disappeared. In other words, the denunciation in the recordatorios acquires its weight only by being displayed out in public. Otherwise, by keeping these expressions in the dark of privacy, they risk their demand losing substance for the rest of society. Paraphrasing Arendt, these types of discourses need to cross over to the public sphere in order to exist (78). Or put it differently, the public transmission of experience entails the exposure of the intimate trauma of each affected family in the public eye.

The passage from press photograph to the family album is not new, for sometimes press photographs do become family pictures. That is the case of a picture of an African immigrant lying dead at the shore of a beach, considered by Yeon-Soo Kim in her book *The Family Album.* The victim's mother cut the picture from the newspaper and kept it as a record of the last moment of her child (216). While sometimes press photographs cross over to the family album, this study observes the opposite trajectory: that of the family picture becoming somehow a press photograph, a journalistic record whose validity lasts only for the day of its publication. The delocalization, that is, the fact that these family pictures do not belong to the photojournalist medium, is apparent by their happy tone. Of course, by appearing in the newspaper, the pictures acquire a new ulterior meaning, evoking bittersweet nostalgia and enhancing their symbolic force as emblems of loss and premature death.

Essentially, the recordatorios show these tensions in a contradictory way precisely because they actually constitute a contradictory expression. Bringing together public, private and cultural elements, the pictures in the recordatorios are disturbing images that challenge the notion of time in several forms by being "firmly situated in the present yet look[ing] toward the future; it is the encounter of the 'self' of the portrait and the space that resonates with history" (Hirsch and Smith 7). They give a version of the past, also locating past images in the present and asking, between the lines, how future generations will deal with such a legacy.

The density of these images lies first in their spatial displacement from their original conditions of reception; second in the knowledge of the specificity of the particular political and cultural context (also disclosed by other elements in the recordatorios such as the labels, the messages, the date of disappearance, etc); and finally in the iconic status that these images have acquired through the years. Indeed, the iconic power of these photographs points to their enduring force as motifs that visually shape and define memories of state repression in Argentina.

Collective memories evolve through time as they are shaped by current events that define how societies remember and forget a collective traumatic experience, such as the most recent dictatorship in Argentina. By analyzing the recordatorios I argue that, as everyday and permanent expressions of these struggles, they deserve to be looked at and analyzed as representations that participate in the broader politics of memorializing and historicizing the past. Now, thirty-four years after the coup d'état and almost twenty-two years after the first recordatorio was published, I consider this study as another

contribution to the visibility of the recordatorios, in the hopes of drawing more academic attention to this lacuna and encouraging further research to include them as sources in analyzing the ongoing discussion on memories of state repression in Argentina.

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This thesis was typed by the author.