

Summer Field Research Terminal Report
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Project Title: Memory in the Public Space in Buenos Aires, Argentina
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During my three week field study in Argentina I gained access to a great amount of information unavailable to me in the States. I started my project by conducting preliminary background research at the archive center run by the human rights organization *Memoria Abierta*. There I was able to view several videos from the series entitled “El Juicio que cambió el país” which documented the truth commission trials that took place in Argentina in 1985. I also viewed “ESMA: Museo de la Memoria” which addressed the ongoing struggle to create a space for memory at the Navy Mechanics School which functioned as a clandestine detention center during the military regime of the 1970s and 80s.

After consulting the materials in the archives, I began to look at specific public places and what manifestations of memory connected to the Dirty War remain or have been created. I recorded all of the graffiti at the Plaza de Mayo, the majority of which makes explicit reference to the years of dictatorship. I visited the Iglesia Santa Cruz where the bodies of three disappeared *Madres* have been buried after their recovery and DNA-identification.

Prior to my trip, I plotted the locations of all of the known detention centers within central Buenos Aires. After my arrival it became apparent that there would be no manifestations of memory to study at any of the detention centers called “comisarías” because those locations are still functioning police stations within the city. The larger and

more prominent detention centers were those with names instead of numbers, the largest five of which I visited. During my stay, I visited the Orletti/El Jardín, the Garage Olimpo, the Club Atlético, the Garage Azopardo, and the ESMA. At each of the centers, with the exception of the ESMA which is a slightly different case, I recorded all of the graffiti and murals surrounding the outside of the detention centers. The Orletti and the Olimpo are located within the automotive district of the capital and are now abandoned garages that have been officially and unofficially claimed as spaces for memory. Official signs from the city mark the location (although no other formal action has been taken) and the outside of each location has been appropriated by human rights organizations and individuals who graffiti words and pictures of remembrance and resistance.

The Club Atlético is located under a large highway which now runs overhead and is still in the process of being excavated. Once a vibrant project for memory, the Atlético has met with financial trouble and the side that had been excavated fairly thoroughly has fallen into ruin. Memory benches that once lined the side of the site have now been covered by groups of Buenos Aires's homeless who have taken up residence living under the shelter of the highway. Also, the artwork marking the support columns of the highway has weathered and not been restored.

The ESMA is the most prominently discussed location revolving around memory and the dictatorship within the city. The site of the Navy Mechanics School was officially turned over to human rights organizations and victims' families by President Kirchner and Buenos Aires Jefe de Gobierno Aníbal Ibarra in 2004; however, the ongoing struggle to decide how to use the site remains fierce. The ESMA is still not open to the public and

remains empty. Outside the structure, however, artwork has been put up along the gates of the facility marking the spot as a site of torture during the military regime.

I also visited the Parque de la Memoria, the officially sponsored memory park located along the bank of the Río de la Plata. This park is another site for memory that, in my opinion, has not achieved what was intended with its construction. This site highlights one of the most contentious issues around the preservation of memory in society because of the choice of a significant space for the placement of the park; however, the marginal location of the site inhibits its ability to function because it is removed from the center of society and is not visible to most citizens and, unless specifically searched for, is invisible to almost all tourists.