

“Me gustaría saber más. Me gustaría saber todo”:

The Duality of Memorializing Argentine State Terrorism

Emily Gatehouse

12/10/2010

Abstract

Between 1976 and 1983 Argentina experienced a military dictatorship, and State Terrorism, wherein thousands of Argentine citizens were disappeared, taken to Clandestine Detention Centers (CDCs), tortured and frequently murdered. Those who were kidnapped are referred to as los desaparecidos (the disappeared). Following these events the subsequent Argentine governments enacted laws and created memorial spaces in order to facilitate the reconciliation process. There are two very distinct issues regarding the memorialization of the genocide: the duality of the known and unknown. The known is comprised of disappearances, CDCs, torture and murder. In contrast the unknown is related to the lack of exact number of desaparecidos; estimates range from 9,000 to 30,000, along with the ambiguity surrounding their resting places. To deal with the duality of fact and ambiguity there must be two different types of memorials. I argue that the known and unknown are reflected in two distinct memorials: la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (the Naval Mechanical School, ESMA) and el Parque de la Memoria. I analyze the use of space, location, art, personal experience and tours, employing Hugo Vezzetti's theory of memory. Vezzetti contends that there are two types of memory: memoria literal (literal memory) and memoria ejemplar (exemplary memory), the former, the recovery of an event as a singular fact, which does not transcend what happened, and the latter, is able to transcend the event, through the individual relationship or subjective. I discuss ESMA in terms of memoria literal and the Parque in terms of memoria ejemplar, arguing that the two memorials are crucial in the construction of different types of memory. While these two memorials differ in the types of memory they evoke, they both allow Argentines to remember the same event in different ways.

Introduction

Between 1976 and 1983 Argentina incurred a military coup, dictatorship, genocide and State Terrorism.¹ In these seven years an estimated 30,000 people were “disappeared:” tortured and subsequently murdered.² In the aftermath of such blatant human rights violations, Argentina has struggled to reconcile with its past, especially when there is such a stark contradiction between what is known and unknown with regards to the *desaparecidos*. There are concrete facts such as the use of Clandestine Detention Centers, where people were unlawfully detained, tortured and generally murdered. However, at the same time there is an essence of ambiguity regarding the *desaparecidos*; there are still many *desaparecidos* unaccounted for, what exactly happened to each individual is still unknown and the resting place of the vast majority of victims (named or unnamed) remains shrouded in mystery.

I argue that the known and unknown are reflected in two distinct memorials: *la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada* (the Naval Mechanical School, ESMA) and *el Parque de la Memoria*. I examine the ways space, location, art, tours and history embody both the facts and ambiguity of the *desaparecidos* and State Terrorism. Toward this goal, I utilize numerous theories on re-democratization and memory, most importantly Hugo Vezzetti’s classification of *memoria literal* and *memoria ejemplar*. *Memoria literal* is the recovery of an event as a singular fact, which does not transcend what happened. *Memoria ejemplar*, on the other hand, transcends

¹ The time period is between 1976 and 1983 is often referred to as the “Dirty War.” However, I have chosen to use the phrase “State Terrorism” to address this time period. I believe that Dirty War implies that both sides, the civilians and the military, were engaged in combat of equal participation, skill and resources, which simply was not the case. State Terrorism lays the emphasis on the fact that it was the *State* that was systematically carrying out these crimes against its civilians.

² Disappeared in this context extends beyond the actual kidnapping of a person but also the general unknown surrounding what happened after their disappearance, including where they were detained, for how long, what happened to them there, whether they were killed or not and where their final resting place is.

Emily Gatehouse

the event; it does not deny the individual relationship or reflection to the event. I contend that ESMA is aligned with *memoria literal* because it addresses the concrete facts about what happened under the military dictatorship, while the Parque exhibits characteristics of *memoria ejemplar* because it offers a means in which the individual can personally reflect on their experiences of what happened. My analysis of both memorials demonstrates the importance of the acknowledgment and representation of duality in the reconciliation process.

Memorials and Memory

This paper is based on an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on research from sociology, political science, anthropology, psychology and Latin American studies. These areas provided me with the tools necessary to fully and accurately assess all aspects, from the historical to the emotional to the political. Moreover, I have had a lot of personal experience with both ESMA and the Parque de la Memoria. While studying abroad in Argentina I had an internship at the Parque. This personal and participatory experience allowed me to fully understand the purpose of the Parque. While there I also took a tour of ESMA, which gave me firsthand experience at ESMA. In addition, I conducted an interview at both ESMA and the Parque, wherein I was able to better understand what each memorial hopes to portray and evoke. My research includes the analysis of literature not only about both sites, but also produced by both sites, including the guestbook from the Parque as well as *Proyecto de la Memoria*. These primary sources have afforded me the ability to see, experience and understand ESMA and the Parque from multiple viewpoints, including; visitor, intern and researcher.

Crucial to my analysis are Hugo Vezzetti's theories of memory and Susan Crane's ideas surrounding different aspects of museum exhibits. Crane argues that emotions play an imperative role in the experience of museums and what they display. Moreover, she contends that there are

Emily Gatehouse

non-documentable items of memory, which engage an emotional connection which people have to certain events. Crane explains that the use of art is vital to the interaction between the personal and the public, the event experienced by all and the event's affects on the individual. The analysis of non-documentable items of memory will be particularly useful considering Argentina's complicated and conflicted history.

How can a country, which has had such a complex and conflicted background, create a collective memory? Is it better suited for a collected memory? Or is it possible that both can function in Argentina? First we must define and differentiate collective and collected memory. As Olick states in his article, collective memory is based on plurality, there are shared memories which the vast majority of society has in common. In contrast he states that collected memory is based on the individual, there can be a core event which people remember, but each memory is unique to that person.³ With regards to memorials in Argentina the idea of collective memory can be applied to ESMA, while collected memory can be utilized when thinking about the Parque.

Related to collective and collected memory, but more specific to the experience at ESMA and the Parque are the ideas of participatory and observed memory. As I define them participatory memory is when one actively participates in the creation of memory. In contrast observed memory is when one is told the collective memory as fact. Participatory memory is related to collected memory because they both directly involve the individual and prompt the creation of their own thoughts, opinions and memories of a certain event, in this case the desaparecidos and the State Terrorism. Observed and collective memory are linked because they both present one history as the accepted fact. Participatory and observed memory offer more detailed analysis for ESMA and the Parque since both play into the specific types of memories.

³ Trinkunas, "Crafting Civilian Control,"

Emily Gatehouse

Much along the same lines are the memory theories of Hugo Vezzetti, which propose the differences between memoria literal and memoria ejemplar. Memoria literal is the recovery of an event as a singular fact, which does not transcend what happened.⁴ For Argentina this was the concrete fact of State Terrorism and the desaparecidos. Memoria literal in this context refers to the known such as the thousands of desaparecidos, tortured and murdered. However, memoria literal does not involve any kind personal reflection of these facts, which can be seen in ESMA as well as collective and observed memory. Memoria ejemplar, on the other hand, transcends beyond the event, it does not deny the individual relationship or reflection to the event. Moreover, due to its ambiguous nature memoria ejemplar can surpass the event at hand and be used in a broader context where other events may be understood and addressed.⁵ This is very similar to the aforementioned collected and participatory memory as well as the Parque. All of these theories, especially that of Vezzetti will be crucial in the understanding and analysis of the duality of ESMA and the Parque.

The Years Following State Terrorism

Re-democratization and Legal Movement towards Reconciliation Disappearance, detention, torture, *vuelos de la muerte*, murder; these five actions were commonplace under the military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976-1983. Many human rights organizations, such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, estimate that 30,000 people were disappeared during this time. Buchanan argues that approximately 10,000 people died by the hands of the military, 15,000-30,000 were disappeared and are presumed dead and about 25,000 were subjected to torture.⁶ Other estimations are that 9,000 to 15,000 were disappeared or murdered, 30,000 were imprisoned and

⁴ Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado Y Presente: Guerra, Dictadura Y Sociedad En La Argentina*. Buenos Aires(Sigo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2002), 31

⁵ Ibid, 31

⁶ Paul G. Buchanan, "The Varied Faces of Domination: State Terror, Economic Policy, and Social Rupture during the Argentine "Proceso," 1976-81." *American Journal of Political Science* 31.2 (1987): 371

Emily Gatehouse

tortured and 500,000 were forced into exile.⁷ The official government report estimates substantially fewer victims with 4,000 murdered and 10,000 total disappeared.⁸ The disparity between estimations sets the background for one of the greatest ambiguities surrounding the desaparecidos, how many were there? If the number is unknown then the exact victims are also unknown. If the exact victims are unknown then what happened to each person (imprisonment?- torture?- murder?- release?) is also unknown. In the face of such glaring unknowns there are some concrete facts about State Terrorism and the desaparecidos.

One fact which is undeniable was the military's use of Clandestine Detention Centers (CDCs). Argentina had more than 350 CDCs in operation between 1976 and 1983.⁹ Once imprisoned in a CDC captives were tortured both physically and psychologically.¹⁰ Some people were then freed, while others were detained for years. The most unlucky prisoners were forced on to Naval planes, drugged, stripped and pushed (still alive) into the Atlantic Ocean to drown in the infamous vuelos de la muerte.¹¹ One ex-Navy officer explained they ran flights from ESMA every Wednesday from 1977 to 1978. He also believes that between 1,500 to 2,000 people were disposed of in this manner.¹² How can a country possibly move forward and attempt to reconcile such a violent past with such blatant human rights violations?

⁷ Niel J. Kritz, ed. *Transitional Justice How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*. Vol. 1. Washington (D.C.) (United States Institute of Peace, 1995. Print. General Consideration), 84

⁸ Calvin Sims "Argentine Tells of Dumping "Dirty War" Captives Into Sea." *The New York Times* [New York] 13 Mar. 1995.

⁹ Terence Roehrig, "Executive Leadership and the Continuing Quest for Justice in Argentina." *Human Rights Quarterly* 31 (2009): 728

¹⁰ Physical torture included beatings, electric shock, mutilation, rape, burning, immersion in unsanitary water (including bodily fluids and fecal matter). Psychological torture involved being forced to watch other prisoners being tortured (generally friends or family members), exposure to extreme temperatures and noises long periods of solitary confinement, simulations of their own execution. For a more in depth look at the power of the military dictatorship refer to Buchanan "The Varied Faces of Domination"

¹¹ Sims "Argentine Tells," Buchanan "The Varied Faces of Domination," 370

¹² Sims "Argentine Tells"

Emily Gatehouse

People cannot assume that these atrocities of State Terrorism can simply be swept under the rug with the democratic election of a new president.¹³ This was certainly not the goal of Radical Party candidate Raúl Alfonsín who was democratically elected in December 1983. Alfonsín ran on the platform that he would seek justice for those accountable of human rights violations. What was lacking from Argentine society during the years under the military dictatorship was civilian control, where the nation's populace has a greater role and presence in the running of a country than the military does. Strong public participation and authority permits a system of checks and balances wherein the military does not gain too much power by overstepping its duties.¹⁴ This power of the civilian people was what Alfonsín had to carefully bring back to the forefront. He needed to appease the public's desire for retribution, while not completely discrediting the military. In order to restore this vital balance between civilian control and military compliance (without agitation) Alfonsín began the healing process. His first act was to nullify, with unanimous support by Congress, the Law of National Pacification.¹⁵ Not only does this give the civilian government more control, but it also demonstrates that Argentines want those guilty held accountable for their abusive actions. However, Alfonsín also had to consider the military and keep them from retaliating. To accomplish this, he decided to only allow to formal prosecution of the top nine military officers. His reasoning behind this was that these were the nine men directly in command of every other officer; therefore, the other members of the military were merely following orders from their superiors.¹⁶

¹³ As define don pg 60 of *Proyecto Parque de la Memoria*, State Terrorism is "When the public forces of the State commit crimes against [its] citizens without restraint and by means of an organized system."

¹⁴ Harold A. Trinkunas, "Crafting Civilian Control," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* Fall 42.3 (2000): 79

¹⁵ The Law of National Pacification was a last ditch effort by the military to try and ensure that they could not be prosecuted for their actions between May 1973-December 1983, by granting all servicemen amnesty. Krtiz, 91

¹⁶ The nine men formally accused for the acts of State Terrorism were: "Generals Jorge Videla, Roberto

Emily Gatehouse

The prosecution of the leaders did not satisfy the population's desire for individualized consequences and retribution for their own personal complaints against lower ranking officers. By 1986 there were approximately 3,000 pending cases, many of which were brought to court by various Human Rights Organizations. As a reaction to this influx of personal cases Alfonsín created the *Punto Final* (End Point) Law which stated that all current cases would be tried, but that no new cases could be brought against officers after a 60 period (from the passing of the law).¹⁷ This, Alfonsín hoped, would put an end to the personal cases, however very much the opposite was true. Within those 60 days an estimated 400 more cases were pushed through the courts. This shows that Argentines were determined to gain as much justice as they could, through one of the only mediums available.

The election of Carlos Saúl Menem ushered in a new process for reconciliation. Shortly after being elected Menem put an end to all trials versus military officials, allowed military officials to hold political positions (which had been revoked under Alfonsín) and pardoned 277 military officials. Following these changes in 1990 Menem pardoned the junta leaders as well as many guerrilla leaders. Menem made these changes for political reasons as well as social reasons. Politically he needed the military to have faith in the government, thus the allowance of military officials in political positions and the pardons. Socially he was moving Argentina away from "getting even" by court cases to reconciliation by moving on.

Viola, and Leopoldo Galtieri; Brigadiers Orlando R. Agosti, Omar Rubens Graffigna, and Basilio Lami Dozo; and Admirals Emilio Massera, Armando Lambruschini, and Jorge Anaya." At first the trial was left up to Military Supreme Court, however, it soon became clear that the Military Court would not come to the verdict necessary. The Court came back acquitting all nine citing that there was "insufficient evidence." Alfonsín, knowing that this was an unsatisfactory outcome turned the trial over to civil courts. The civil courts came back with the verdicts that follow in 1985: Videla and Massera received life sentences, Viola was sentenced to 17 years, Lambruschini received 8 years and Agosti was sentenced to 4.5 years, the other four men were acquitted. Roehrig, "Executive Leadership," 730

¹⁷ There was a clause to this law, that new cases could be brought against new officers in cases involving children. Roehrig, "Executive Leadership," 732

Emily Gatehouse

How can a society with such a violent history with so many unanswered questions “move on”? One answer which has become a central theme in Argentine reconciliation is *nunca olvidar* or *never forget*. This concept is a simple one based on the idea that “la memoria ES la vida” (memory IS life), the memory of what happened, the memory of the violence, the memory of those who were disappeared, all of these memories create life which must move forward while simultaneously never forgetting.¹⁸ One of the best ways to eternalize memories is through museums and memorials. This was the exact route that Argentines decided to take. A petition was created by ten Human Rights Organizations to create a memorial to the “Victims of State Terrorism.” On December 10, 1997 they presented their petition to the Legislature in Buenos Aires. The group soon gained approval by the passing of Law 46, which called for the construction of el Parque de la Memoria. Since then there has been the *Comisión Pro Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo Estado* (Commission for the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism) which is made up of representatives from different Human Rights Organizations, the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and government officials.¹⁹ This diverse group of people shows that many different people in Argentina wanted to see the creation of the Parque and that it had to be a multi-organizational process. The government provided another memorial space in 2004 when Nestor Kischern signed an agreement to make ESMA a memorial space for the promotion of justice and remembrance.²⁰

La Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada

History

¹⁸ Guestbook pg 12, entry 6. This source comes from Parque de la Memoria. I contacted someone who works at the Parque, explained my project and asked if they had a guest book that I could have a copy of some pages. I wanted to see the entries in the guest book as a gauge of what impact the Parque had on people. Through these pages I found that people felt that the Parque was a unique and important step in the direction of reconciliation.

¹⁹ Gabriel Alegre, comp. *Proyecto Parque De La Memoria*. Trans. Florencia Battiti (Buenos Aires: Comisión Pro Monumento a Las Víctimas Del Terrorismo De Estado, 2001.), 17

²⁰ Roehrig, “Executive Leadership,” 733

Emily Gatehouse

Between 1924 and 1976 ESMA functioned as the mechanical school for the navy. However, with the installation of the military dictatorship, ESMA became one of the most influential and notorious Clandestine Detention Centers in Argentina.²¹ In 1984 CONADEP (*Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*) estimates that approximately 5,000 people who passed through ESMA have “remain[ed] disappeared.”²² The victims held captive here included, men, women (pregnant and not) and in rare occasions children. The people who were in direct control of the prisoners were naval students who were generally between the ages of 17 and 25, the same age as the majority of their prisoners.²³ Not only was ESMA one of, if not the, largest CDCs during this time, it was also the central point of intelligence. Some of the military junta, such as Emilio Massera, frequently held intelligence meetings in the *Casino de los Oficiales* (Officials Casino).²⁴ After the State Terrorism ESMA returned to serve its original purpose as a mechanical school. However, it would not remain as such for long. In January 1998 Menem signed a decree which would make ESMA and its land into a “green space” as a public “symbol of national union.”²⁵ This decree called for the demolition of the buildings of ESMA. Many Human Rights Organizations and family members of the desaparecidos appealed this decree and in October 1998 won. By 2000 laws were set in motion to create a “Museum of Memory” at ESMA.

Location

There are many aspects of the ESMA which make it one of the most important memorials in Argentina for state terrorism. There are obvious aspects such as its function as a main CDC between 1976 and 1983 or its undeniable link to the desaparecidos and often times to their death.

²¹ *Memoria Abierta*. 2005-2010. <<http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/principal.php>>.

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Tour*

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ *Ibid*

Emily Gatehouse

Another aspect which is less obvious, but just as important, is its location. ESMA is located in Barrio Norte in the Argentina's capitol, Buenos Aires. Not only is ESMA located in Buenos Aires, but it is also located on one of the main roads, *Avenida Libertador*, in plain view. The citizens of Buenos Aires drove past, walked by and saw the location of thousands of unlawful detentions, tortures and murders. This adds to notorious nature of ESMA, because these gruesome human rights violations were not taking place in some remote location, far away from the capitol, but rather in the heart of the country. Another important aspect of ESMA's location is its proximity to Rio de la Plata. This closeness to the water will always conjure up memories of the vuelos de muerte.

Space

Very similarly to the importance of the location of ESMA is the importance of the physical space itself. One of the reasons that ESMA evokes such strong emotions from its visitors is because they are allowed to walk around in the very places where their husbands, wives, children, brothers, sisters, friends, whoever they knew were held captive, tortured and murdered. Even if people have no relation, such as myself, to someone directly it is still an incredibly emotional space to walk through. The areas which are most important are *el Sótano* (basement), *la Planta baja* (ground floor), *Primero* and *Segundo Pisos* (First and Second Floors) and *La Capucha/Capuchita* (The hood/little hood), which are all found in the Casino de Oficiales (Officials Casino).

El Sótano was the area where prisoners were taken first, due to its close proximity to the automobiles bay.²⁶ Here they would be interrogated and tortured. Today when one enters el

²⁶ The desaparecidos were often captured and put into cars then driven to detention centers like ESMA; in this case the automobiles bay was right next to el Sótano, which made it a logical first stop.

Emily Gatehouse

Sótano they see an empty room with white washed walls and poster boards displaying the changes that el Sótano went through. There were no changes from 1976 until 1979, when reforms were made for the *Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos* (Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, CIDH).²⁷ Before the changes el Sótano was filled with small cells which formed the torture rooms. The changes made in time for the CIDH included the removal of such cells and the installation of bathrooms, office containing documents, mini-hospital, darkroom and small dining area among others.^{28 29}

Not only is it amazing to see the place where thousands of desaparecidos were tortured, but also to feel the power of the room. El Sótano is devoid of human characteristics; the walls are white, the air is stale and the room as a whole echoes. It is almost impossible to be in el Sótano and not imagine what the screams of the tortured reverberating off of the concrete walls would have sounded like. Even the voice of the guide filled the room with hollow echoes.

The room directly above el Sótano is la Planta Baja or the ground floor. This area was not used as a place of torture, but rather the headquarters for intelligence. Frequently meetings would be held where Massera and other leading officials would plan their next move. This area was also often used for the entertaining of guests. Massera and others would hold parties or shows here with family members.³⁰ This is an exceptionally eerie use of this space considering it is located directly above the torture cells of el Sótano, which had limited noise control. Above this

²⁷ Marcelo Brodsky. *Memoria En*

. Buenos Aires, Argentina (La Marca, 2005),

50

²⁸ Brodsky, *Memoria en* , 50

²⁹ The original and changed layout of el Sótano and other areas are known through the testimonies of surviving victims.

³⁰ Tour

Emily Gatehouse

floor are the Primero and Segundo Pisos. These were the sleeping quarters for the soldiers who were in control of the desaparecidos.

Directly above the sleeping quarters for the soldiers are the floors with the detention cells for the desaparecidos, la Capucha and above that la Capuchita. Like el Sótano, la Capucha and Capucha underwent changes in layout for the investigation of the CIDH. Prior to the reforms for the CIDH la Capucha was the area where the desaparecidos slept and la Capuchita had a few cells and a few more areas for torture.³¹ These cells were barely big enough for the prisoners to lie down in. All of the windows had been painted blue and there was no heat, cooling or means of ventilation in general.³² As one walks up the stairs to la Capucha they can either turn left or right, to the left were the cells for the detained, to the right were the “habitaciones par las embarazadas” or “the rooms for the pregnant.”³³ The rooms were where the pregnant women would be detained after their sixth month of pregnancy (when it was no longer okay to torture them).³⁴ Here the women would be kept alive until they had their child, they were then killed and the child was given up for adoption.

This area, much like el Sótano, was overwhelmingly emotional. The roof was tin and sloping, so it would have been next to impossible to stand all the way up in the cells. The walls were barren and there were metal supports running through the area where the cells used to be. All of the windows were covered and there was no fresh air at all. It is hard to begin to fathom those conditions in the heat and humidity of a Buenos Aires summer day or during a cold and

³¹ Brodsky, *Memoria* , 51

³² Ibid, 51

³³ Ibid, 51

³⁴ Tour

Emily Gatehouse

rainy night. Again the sounds of prisoners and torture would have echoed through the area. All of these elements combined with the general abuse from the guards would have been unbearable.

Experiencing ESMA

As visitors walk through the Casino de Oficiales they have a guide present who tells them the history of ESMA, the details of its use as a CDC and specifics concerning each different floor as well as some well known individual stories. The tours are mandatory and generally conducted in a large group. The tours are important because they tell the specific story of ESMA to the visitors. The guided tour is much more informative than if visitors went through on their own and had a pamphlet or plaques to relay the history. At each area the tour stops and the guide recites the history of that space. This historical portion of the tour is what makes it so valuable, without it, ESMA would be devoid of its painful and detailed context. Another beneficial aspect about the tours are the guides, who are experts on ESMA and the time period, which allows the visitor the opportunity to ask questions if they so choose. The drawback that I noted was that the requirement of the tour meant that my experience was less personal. I was in a tour group with two other people I knew and a group of teenagers on a high school field trip; this meant that some people were not paying attention or being as respectful as I felt they should have, which was distracting. On the other hand the chaperons had some very insightful questions and comments which enhanced the tour.

Art

The last aspect of ESMA that I am going to elaborate on is of its use of art. ESMA does not have as much art and the art that it does have are not masterpieces, but in their simplicity they tell a big story. The art that I am referring to are human shaped figures on the fence in front

Emily Gatehouse

of ESMA. No two figures are exactly the same, in shape, color or material, this can be seen as a representation of the fact that many different kinds of people were disappeared, lawyers, professors, students, parents, etc. There are some specific figures which I think are especially thought provoking.

One of the most intriguing figures is in the shape of a person and is made out of a mirror. I think that the mirror can represent two things: responsibility and self. Regarding the first representation, the visitor looks into the mirrored figure is confronted with them self. This can be seen as a symbol of the amount of responsibility everyone has regarding the State Terrorism. In the second representation a visitor can look into the mirror and see their reflection in the body of the disappeared. This symbolizes the direct or indirect relationship that everyone has to the military dictatorship. Another figure is, again in the shape of a man, outlined in red paint with pictures of the faces of some of the desaparecidos. The red can be interpreted as a representation for blood or the death of many. The body in its entirety is representative of all of the desaparecidos while the faces demonstrate that individual people were disappeared. The last figure I am going to discuss is the silhouette of a pregnant women with names written in red and white on her. This one does not leave much to the imagination, it is clearly a representation of the women disappeared while pregnant.

ESMA: Memoria Literal and Collective Memory

The history, location, space, mandatory tours and art link ESMA to both Vezzetti's ideas about memoria literal as well as Olick's ideas on collective memory. The history of ESMA combined with the space and mandatory tours exemplify the ways in which this connection is viewed. First the history of ESMA is in and of itself a representation of Olick's collective

Emily Gatehouse

memory theory. ESMA, the most notorious CDC in use at the time, stripped people of their individuality. The stories of those who passed through ESMA were all more or less the same: kidnapping, torture, confinement, death or freedom. This history is something which the vast majority of Argentines have some connection to; therefore it is an overarching memory which is not individualistic. In addition, the history as well as the space of ESMA are concrete, known, unambiguous facts, which lends them to Vezzetti's *memoria literal*. The memories associated and experienced at ESMA do not transcend what occurred there.

The use of mandatory tours, in the context of concrete facts, fits in with both types of memory. The guides explain a specific history which is not up for personal reflection. This creates an atmosphere where the visitors are observing rather than participating. The guides at ESMA generally answer questions about facts rather than personal observation. In addition, this correlates with an assertion made by Crane; that people are less likely to engage in conversations regarding personal reflections or emotions provoked by a certain memorial experience if the curators, historians or guides are visible or present.³⁵ I believe that the use of guided tours at ESMA is important due to its strong historical background, space and focus on the use of collective memory and *memoria literal*. However, not everything is completely concrete at ESMA. There is an element of *memoria ejemplar* which is seen through the use of the art on the fence. This art allows people, before or after the tour, the ability to personally reflect on experiences or memories about ESMA as a CDC, naval school or any other relation they may have to it. The concrete and known aspects of the State Terrorism are undeniably important, however, memories are comprised of more than just the facts.

Parque de la Memoria

³⁵ Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum." *History and Theory* 36.4 (1997): 48

Location

The location of the Parque has no inherent connection to the State Terrorism committed by the military dictatorship; this in turn facilitates an open atmosphere for remembering. The Parque is located next to Ciudad Universitaria (University City), the section of UBA where design and sciences are located. The close proximity to UBA is significant due to the large number of faculty, staff and students who were disappeared in the mid 70s and early 80s from UBA. The Parque is also located right on the river banks of Río de la Plata, which leads to where bodies were dumped out of naval planes. Both aspects of its location signify that the people of Argentina know what happened at each place and that they will not forget.

Space

While the location of the Parque denotes the acknowledgement of certain realities of State Terrorism, the actual physical space on which it is located on has no ties to the military dictatorship or their human rights abuses. Because this land is “pure” or devoid of any direct connection to the atrocities committed makes it, for lack of a better term, an easier place for the reflection on memory. The fact that the Parque is a public space is equally as important as its purity. As previously mentioned, people were often taken from public spaces; this then created a general fear of public spaces, especially congregating in public spaces. The Parque is a means by which the Argentine society is able to reclaim public spaces. Here people can come and go as they please, with whomever they want to openly discuss and reflect on the State Terrorism and those who were murdered, without fear of persecution.

The Art: Selection and Pieces

Emily Gatehouse

As of the publication of this paper there are seven art installations at the Parque de la Memoria. Each installation serves to evoke different thoughts, reflections and emotions about what happened under the military dictatorship. However, there is more to the art than the physical installations and the reactions they create. Everything about these installations was carefully planned and picked by a hand selected group of people.³⁶ In order to select the sculptures there was a worldwide contest which led to the submission of 665 works of art from 44 countries.³⁷ While the subject for the installations is specific to Argentina, the number of submissions from so many countries demonstrates that the violence of state terrorism is an experience which is shared worldwide. In the following sections I will explain 3 pieces, please see attached photographs as well.

³⁶ The judges included an artist, sculptor, the president of the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, Nobel Peace Prize winner and curator from Argentina; curator from the United States; curator at the New York Modern Art Museum from Brazil; director from the Stockholm Modern Art Museum from England; and a curator from Cuba. For more information on the judges and the selection process please refer to Alegre, *Proyecto*, 17

³⁷ Alegre, *Proyecto*, 8

Emily Gatehouse



Sin Titulo (Without Title) is a sculpture by Roberto Aizenberg, of Argentina.³⁸ *Sin Titulo* consists of three geometrically shaped bodies which are in the form of a man, woman and pregnant woman. The bodies of the figures are empty, while their heads are filled in. This is symbolic of the idea that while you can eliminate the body you can never eliminate the mind.³⁹ The mind was considered one of the most subversive attributes. The lack of body and presence of mind is also symbolic of the fact that there are thousands who will never be recovered, yet their thoughts and ideas will live on.

³⁸ Alegre, *Proyecto*, 22

³⁹ The idea about the filled heads representing the inability to erase thoughts and ideas was said by an 11 year old boy during a tour, the guides liked this interpretation so much they added it into the tour, this is a prime example of the engagement and participatory environment created by the Parque.



Argentine artist Claudia Fontes' *Reconstruction of Pablo Míguez* is perhaps one of the most striking sculptures.⁴⁰ Míguez, was fourteen, the same age as Fontes, when he was disappeared and held captive at ESMA. Fontes creates a life size sculpture of Míguez from reflective stainless-steel, which allows for the waters to reflect in the figure. Positioned off the bank of the Parque in the waters of Rio de la Plata, the figure appears to be walking on the water toward the horizon.⁴¹ The reflective nature of the stainless steel suggests the memory of those whose bodies have been lost at in the waters. The positioning of Pablo on top of the water walking towards the can be interpreted as rising above the past and moving toward a new future.

⁴⁰ Alegre, *Proyecto*, 16

⁴¹For more information on this sculpture please refer to Alegre, *Proyecto*, 16.



Grupo de Arte Callejero is a group of graduates from the Fine Arts Academy who created the *Carteles de la Memoria*.⁴² Their work consists of a myriad of “road signs.” These “road signs” are in the shapes of stop signs, yield signs and other common shapes and colors. However, their symbols and messages are not as mundane as “railroad crossing.” These signs have images such as a pregnant woman behind bars, a military officer kicking down a door or *iglesia complice* (compliant church). Each of these has a relationship, obvious or not, to the military dictatorship and the human rights abuses committed at their hands. Under each of these signs is an explanation of what they mean.

The Monument

The Parque de la Memoria does not only consist of artistic means of reflection and remembrance, but it also has a memorial monument. The monument is comprised of four walls that contain 30,000 plaques to pay homage to the estimated 30,000 desaparecidos, an aspect of the unknown. Not all of the plaques have names, approximately 14,000 names are actually on the monument, those known to have been disappeared and murdered. Their names appear in

Emily Gatehouse

chronological order of disappearance as well as alphabetically. Next to the names are their ages and the word *embarazada* if they were pregnant. This monument is itself a representation of the duality of the known and unknown of the State Terrorism. The monument's importance reaches beyond the facts of names, dates and ages of the desaparecidos and extends into a symbolic scar. The monument forms a "zig-zag" pattern which represents an open wound. The open wound is symbolic to the history of Latin America, Argentina and those who lost their lives in the state terrorism. Even the material used, concrete, can be seen as a vital symbolic element representing that these are the known desaparecidos and their names, memories and existence can never be disappeared.

Experiencing the Parque

In contrast to ESMA visitors are not required to have a tour at the Parque. If they wish to have a tour the guides will explain the general meaning of each piece, then ask for individual reflections or emotions. The other option is no tour, wherein the visitors can view each piece at their own speed and come to their own conclusion about its meaning in the context of State Terrorism or personally. Again, with or without a tour the visitor is able to come to their own conclusions about the art. With a tour the guide will explain the general meaning and symbolism of the piece, but then will often ask the visitors to engage and express their own thoughts and feelings. The optional tours are very important in the healing process, allowing people to choose how much of a personal experience they want to have.

Memoria Ejemplar and Collected Memory

The Parque de la Memoria is, at its core, a place where people are able to explore their personal connections, emotions, experiences and memories about the State Terrorism and

Emily Gatehouse

military dictatorship. The location and space of the Parque are connected to memoria ejemplar because there is no obvious link between them and the State Terrorism. This is an example of the event transcending its physical manifestations, such as ESMA. More importantly than the space and location is the art. The very essence of art is for the viewer to create some kind of personal emotional connection to the piece. This is no different at the Parque. Yes the general meanings of each piece are related to the State Terrorism, but it is up to the visitor to decide what that individual piece means to them. This is again imploring Vezzetti's memoria ejemplar and Olick's collected memory; where the individual is reflecting on personal emotions and memories, which do not necessarily have to do with concrete factors. Through the different art installations the Parque humanizes and individualizes State Terrorism and the desaparecidos.

In addition the optional tours create an atmosphere where people can choose the type of experience they want. A major difference between ESMA and the Parque is that the tour groups are much smaller, which fosters a more individualized experience. The tour guides talk about the meanings behind the art, rather than simply telling you what they are. This dialogue helps both the guides and the visitors understand the personal meaning behind each sculpture. In a different light the Parque also emulates an aspect of memoria literal and collective memory through the monument. The monument is filled with the known names, dates and ages of the desaparecidos. This, much like the art at ESMA, demonstrates that neither memoria literal and collective memory nor memoria ejemplar and collected memory can function properly without the other.

Conclusion

As we have seen during the mid 70s to mid 80s Argentina was devastated by the military dictatorship, disappearances, tortures and murders of thousands of civilians. Both memorials aim

Emily Gatehouse

to address different aspects related to the same event: the State Terrorism. ESMA, which is based on concrete facts, aims to relay the known to the public. The known consists of the function of ESMA as a CDC, the treatment of the desaparecidos and the fate of some. However, historical fact is not the only aspect that needs to be acknowledged here, which is where the Parque comes into play. The Parque is focused on creating an atmosphere where the ambiguities of the military dictatorship are addressed. There are so many unknown aspects: the names of each desaparecido, what happened to each desaparecido, the resting places of each desaparecido, among many others. The Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada and the Parque de la Memoria are two very different memorials which evoke and foster two different types of memories. ESMA is a proponent of its history and the history in general between 1976 and 1983. This creates a factually based memorial which implores memoria literal in order to make a collective memory. In comparison the Parque is an individualistic memorial which utilizes memoria ejemplar to create a collected memory. While these two memorials differ greatly in a variety of aspects they are both absolutely necessary to aid in the reconciliation process. Will Argentina ever be able to completely suture the wound on its history created by the military dictatorship? Probably not, but, different types of memorials, such as ESMA and the Parque, are one way to remember what happened and make sure it never happens again.

Bibliography

- Alegre, Gabriela, comp. *Proyecto Parque De La Memoria*. Trans. Florencia Battiti. Buenos Aires: Comisión Pro Monumento a Las Víctimas Del Terrorismo De Estado, 2001.
- Barber, Bernard. "Place, Symbol, Utilitarian Function in War Memorials." *Social Forces* 28.1 (1949): 64-68. *JSTOR*.
- Brodsky, Marcelo. *Sobre La ESMA*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Marca, 2005.
- Buchanan, Paul G. "The Varied Faces of Domination: State Terror, Economic Policy, and Social Rupture during the Argentine "Proceso," 1976-81." *American Journal of Political Science* 31.2 (1987): 336-82. *JSTOR*. Web.
- Burchianti, Magaret E. "Building Bridges of Memory: The Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo and the Cultural Politics of Maternal Memories." *History and Anthropology* 15.2 (2004): 133-50. *JSTOR*. 26 Sept. 2010.
- Concurso De Esculturas "parque De La Memoria": En Homenaje a Los Detenidos-desaparecidos Y Asesinados Por El Terrorismo De Estado En La Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Momumento a Las Victimas Del Terrorismo De Estado, 1999.
- Crane, Susan A. "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum." *History and Theory* 36.4 (1997). *JSTOR*.
- Espacio Para La Memoria: ESMA*. Derechos De La Nacion, 2004. Web.
<<http://www.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/espacioparalamemoria/>>.
- Huyssen, Andreas. "El Parque De La Memoria: The Art And Politics of Memory." *David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies* 2001. Print.
- Kritz, Neil J. ed. *Transitional Justice How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*. Vol. 1. Washington (D.C.): United States Institute of Peace, 1995. Print. General Consideration.
- Memoria Abierta*. 2005-2010. <<http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/principal.php>>.
. *Patrimonio: Centros*
, *Tortura Y Exterminio Y Sitios De Memoria*. Buenos Aires,
: Instituto Espacio Para La Memoria, 2008. Print.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." *Sociology Theory* 17.3 (1999): 333-48. *JSTOR*.
- Roehrig, Terence. "Executive Leadership and the Continuing Quest for Justice in Argentina." *Human Rights Quarterly* 31 (2009). *JSTOR*.
- Sims, Calvin. "Argentine Tells of Dumping "Dirty War" Captives Into Sea." *The New York Times* [New York] 13 Mar. 1995.
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=990CEFDD1030F930A25750C0A963958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1>>.
- Tour, refers to information provided by the tour guides at ESMA
- Trinkunas, Harold A. "Crafting Civilian Control." *Journal of Intermaericn Studies and World Affairs* Fall 42.3 (2000): 77-109. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 Nov. 2010.
- "Un Proyecto Para La Memoria." *Parque De La Memoria*. Buenos Aires: Gobierno De La Ciudad. <<http://www.parquedelamemoria.org.ar/home/index.htm>>.
- Vezzetti, Hugo. *Pasado Y Presente: Guerra, Dictadura Y Sociedad En La Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Sigo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2002.