Counter-Amnestic Street Signs and In Situ Resistance Rhetoric: *Grupo de Arte Callejero*

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Abstract: During the 1970s and 1980s, several Latin American countries went through U.S.-backed military dictatorships. In Argentina alone the number of people who disappeared between 1976 and 1983 is estimated to be at around 30,000. In the late-1980s activist and artistic efforts to preserve, archive and make memory visible began to take shape alongside criminal prosecutions of military perpetrators of crimes against humanity. An ongoing city-wide network of memory projects in Buenos Aires continues to function alongside the pursuit of justice and human rights in the courts. In this photo essay, I explore the activist art project known as the *Carteles de la Memoria*, a series of 53 street signs created by the *Grupo de Arte Callejero* (Street Art Group). These unsettling street signs are designed to confront passersby at various points throughout Buenos Aires with active memories of dictatorship violence. Like sentries of memory, these signs now line the edge of the very river that served as a place of disappearance for thousands of people. This open-air archive joins the network of memory projects that make willful amnesia impossible.

Figure 1: Grupo de Arte Callejero sign at the Parque de la Memoria- Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado/Memory Park- Monument to Victims of State Terrorism, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

> First we kill all the subversives, then we kill their collaborators, then…their sympathizers, then… those who remain indifferent; and finally, we kill the timid.
>
> —Buenos Aires Governor Ibérico Saint-Jean, 1976

> The fault line between the mythic past and the real past is not always that easy to draw—which is one of the conundrums of any politics of memory anywhere. The real can be mythologized just as the mythic may engender strong reality effects.
>
> —Andreas Huyssen

> Every landscape is haunted by past ways of life.
>
> —Anna Tsing, et. al.

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Warning Signs

Signs have the ability to make us stop and think. They can warn us of impending danger or offer the promise of an alternate route.[1] Along a pathway that flanks Laguna Beach, near my home in Southern California, sharp-eyed strollers will notice an inconspicuous street sign directed at the flow of people rather than cars. The sign (which looks like any other mundane sign) is out of place and might be lost on the unobservant. It might also be lost on passersby looking at their phones rather than enjoying the scenery. The street sign lurks in the shrubs just off the walking path and commands strollers to take a breath and 'be in the moment'; a message that resonates with my home state's laid-back ethos.

Figure 2: Public Art Street Sign in Laguna Beach, California

In Argentina, where I have spent two months out of each year for the past 28 years, there are similar out-of-place street signs, designed to direct people's thoughts rather than traffic. However, these signs are political in nature and rooted in the context of the traffic of history. They have the power to block traffic, rather than help direct it; they resist the desire for halcyonic, amnestic historical narratives, favored by some in the wake of state-sponsored violent pasts. These signs disrupt and offer new visual vocabularies. They hint at other stories to be told. They show us how to read "landscape history" by implicating passersby in ghostly "multiple pasts" they help us to "get back to the pasts we need to see the present more clearly" (Tsing et. al., 2017, p. 2).[2] They also represent the creative capacity for social action in the present, just as they speak to a different type of claim on, understanding of, or title to, public lands. In this photo essay, I explore the post-dictatorship street signs created by the Argentine *Grupo de Arte Callejero*/Street Art Group as examples of resistance rhetoric found in the geographies of everyday life. Grupo de Arte Callerjero, is a collective of educators, artists, and professionals, bound by a shared commitment to challenge the boundaries between art and activism, and to seek out arenas "for visual communication beyond the traditional exhibition circuit" ("Memory Signs").[3] Bringing Michael Middleton, Aaron Hess, Danielle Endres, and Samantha Senda-Cook's (2015) notion of in situ rhetoric, as a field of rhetorical invention rooted in the everyday spaces of possibility, into dialogue with Lisa Yoneyama's (1999) concept of "counter-amnestic" politics, I contextualize the series of photos in this essay within the decades-long, ongoing struggle to archive the experience of the most recent dictatorship in Argentina.

Politics and Memory

The "active political struggle over not only the meaning of what took place in the past but over memory itself" (Jelin, 2003, p. xviii) has produced grassroots (such as the Baladosas flagstones project, or the Garage Olimpo memory space) and official, state-sponsored, archives of memory (like the *Parque de la*

Memoria/Memory Park, and the ESMA Memory Site) that can be found in the city-wide projects, memory spaces, and museums of Buenos Aires. Memory projects are highly valued in Argentina, as they remind the public that democracy is still very much under construction even decades after its destruction by the military dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s (Villalón, 2015).[4] Argentina's last dictatorship ended with a return to civilian rule and a truth commission between 1983 and 1984, followed by trials for military juntas in 1985. Legalized impunity for military perpetrators of state-sponsored violence was determined to be a condition for a peaceful transition to democracy between 1986 and 1987 and presidential pardons were offered for many perpetrators between 1989 and 1990). The presidential pardons angered many and ushered in 15 years of unending activist campaigns for justice. In 2005 the Supreme Court nullified the impunity laws, setting the stage for a new series of trials against former military perpetrators. These trials continue to this day, as do cultural and ideological battles over how either to memorialize, remember, or forget Argentina's tumultuous past. And as Anna Tsing et. al. (add date) point out, forgetting and remembering are often intertwined: "Forgetting, in itself, remakes landscapes, as we privilege some assemblages over others. Yet ghosts remind us. Ghosts point to our forgetting, showing us how living landscapes are imbued with earlier tracks and traces" (p. 6).

Visual forms, like street signs, murals, flagstones, protests, performance art, museums of memory and other forms of public remembrance to the 30,000 persons disappeared during the dictatorship, "have functioned in Argentina alongside the pursuit of justice and human rights in the courts to allow viewers/visitors to experience the materials, mindset, and geographical spaces of disappearance and torture" (Wilson, 2016, p. 126).[5] The Argentine street signs under consideration in this essay were designed by the Grupo de Arte Callejero and form part of an urban network of memory projects; or urban, activist art known as the *Carteles de la Memoria*/Memory Signs. The project consists of series of 53 street signs which exist in what Yoneyama calls the "counter-amnestic" political realm," a radical realm in which cultural politics seek to contest certain intentional gaps in recent historical knowledge in order to recuperate unsettling memories (Lisa Yoneyama, 1999). In the mid to late-1990s activist and artistic efforts to preserve and make memory visible, like the *Carteles de la Memoria,* essentially stood in for criminal prosecutions that would only begin to take place years later.

Figure 3: Human rights organizations like Amnesty International and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo estimate that 30,000 people disappeared in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. The numbers of the disappeared in Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil during these years also run into the tens of thousands, as there were coordinated dictatorships in these countries as well.

Historical Amnesia

The battle against historical amnesia continues to this day. According to a National Security Archive document dated July 21, 2020, on June 11, 2020 Argentine federal judge, Daniel Rafecas referred to a recently declassified CIA information cable ("Kidnapping and Assassination of Argentine Ambassador to Venezuela") that revealed the existence of a previously unknown clandestine center of detention and torture on Bacacay Street in the Floresta neighborhood of Buenos Aires:

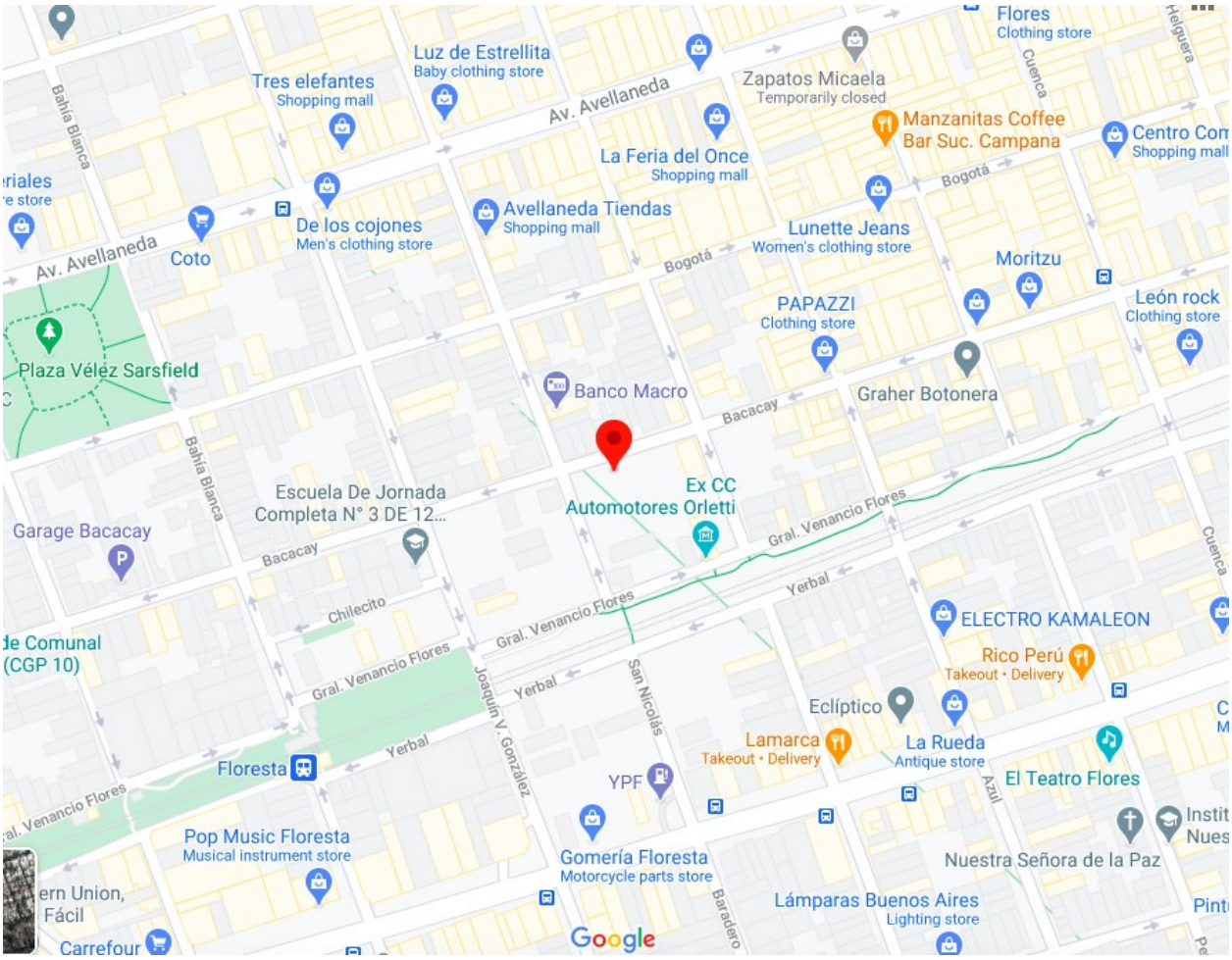

Figure 4: Google Map pinpointing the location of the Bacay Street clandestine center of detention and torture in the Floresta neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

This newly discovered clandestine center is one of over 500 similar centers that have been discovered and recorded in the post-dictatorship years in Argentina. Eventually, the house at 3570 Bacacay Street will make its way onto the ever-expanding map (below) of clandestine centers at the ESMA Memory Site and political genocide archive in Buenos Aires; housed at the infamous former naval academy/torture and detention center.

Figure 5: ESMA Memory Site's video wall map of clandestine torture and detention facilities during the last dictatorship.

In a previous essay entitled, "Building Memory: Museums, Trauma, and the Aesthetics of Confrontation in Argentina," I have written about the controversial development of memory spaces, museums and, essentially, living archives in former clandestine centers of torture and disappearance in Argentina. (Kristi M. Wilson, 2016). The memory spaces I explore in this earlier piece (the ESMA memory space and Garage Olimpo) offer what I call *in situ* experiences of resistance rhetoric in their own ways. I use Middleton et. al's notion of *in situ* (literally, in its original place) rhetoric to refer to the entire city of Buenos Aires as a field of rhetorical invention. Such everyday spaces of possibility "highlight the significance of the embodied, emplaced, material, visual, affective, processual, and vernacular dimensions of rhetorical practices that intersect in these places inhabited by activists, speakers, audiences, and observers" (Michael Middleton et. al, 2015, xiii) and in the political battle to preserve, archive, and display memories of the state-sponsored violence in Argentina, public space is just as important as institutionalized museum spaces, if not more so.

Herein, I articulate a different genre of *in situ* resistance rhetoric: uncanny street signs (or unexpected visual enthymemes in the road) that confront city dwellers with memories of the recent violent past. I refer to the street signs as visual enthymemes (Andrea Lunsford, 1978) because the unexplained premise lies in the rhetorical warning (about the future possibility of repeating the past, in this case) that all street signs contain, in their implicit directions for the movement of history. The *Carteles de la Memoria* effectively highlight "an opposition and hierarchy . . . [and are thereby representative of] the process and formula by which all counterhegemonic ideological practice inserts itself into the discursive field of an established order" (Abraham Acosta, 2014, 209). The memory street signs, which indicate violence and wrongdoing, compete for the attention of passersby with similar-looking traditional street signs, designed to ensure the smooth flow of traffic. In other words, the discursive field/genre of traffic signs has been penetrated by and infused with a counterhegemonic message of ongoing resistance to state-sponsored violence.

The street signs that comprise the "Carteles de la Memoria" series were originally designed, and are still used, as "Escraches," performative acts of denunciation designed to confront passersby with active memories of dictatorship violence. Escraches were implemented decades ago by H.I.J.O.S.—Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio ("Children for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence")—organization members who would often gather as a group in front of the home of a repressor and demand justice. A yellow "warning sign" in Mar de Ajo (an Argentine coastal town) that appeared outside of a perpetrator's vacation villa in December of 2018, for example, was created especially to bring attention to the villa's owner, military repressor and former medical doctor, Norberto Atilio Bianco (living at the time under house arrest for the appropriation of children and robbery). "Escraches" such as these can be understood as acts of *epistemic disobedience* (Walter Mignolo, 2011; Aníbal Quijano, 1991) in so far as

Figure 6: The sign above refers to the Ford Falcons used by the Argentine death squads to secretly abduct civilians and deliver them to centers of detention and torture.

they denounce allegiances among powerful elites who continue to benefit from the legacy of a genocidal apparatus which was, itself, central to the implementation of a neoliberal project in Latin America. Mignolo reminds us that neoliberal modernity is itself deeply intertwined within a racialized, religious, and economic matrix and thus, owes its power to a legacy of coloniality:

> Epistemic disobedience leads us to decolonial options as a set of projects that have in common the effects experienced by all the inhabitants of the globe that were at the receiving end of global designs to colonize the economy (appropriation of land and natural resources), authority (management by the Monarch, the State, or the Church), and police and military enforcement (coloniality of power), to colonize knowledges (languages, categories of thoughts, belief systems, etc.) and beings (subjectivity). (in Walter Mignolo, 2011, 45)

The Mar de Ajo sign was created as an act of epistemic disobedience in order to protest publicly a vacation permit that was added to former military repressor, Bianco's house arrest probation agreement. The sign read: "Norberto Atilio Bianco, genocide, theft of babies" and listed the villa's address. The sign both announces a series of crimes, names a perpetrator, and invites other protesters by offering their home address. Not surprisingly, Bianco gave up his plans to vacation in Mar de Ajo. This particular coastal town has a dark historical and geographical connection to the dictatorship. In 1977 and 1978, its beaches filled up with bodies of the dead who had been victims of the flights of death, where thousands of people were drugged and pushed out of military airplanes alive (Horacio Verbitsky, 1996).

Figure 7: The sign, which depicts "private debt" joining the stream of "public debt," references the economic restructuring and privatization of public resources that took place during the dictatorship. It stands as an ongoing warning about the dangers of neoliberal policies in Latin America.

H.I.J.O.S., which stands for Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (Children for the Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence), are a civic, activist organization formed in 1995 by the grown children of the disappeared. H.I.J.O.S. employs creative, often humorous performative tactics to make visible their parents' political struggles (i.e. to rescue them from the military's narrative about them as "subversives"), and to keep up the fight against impunity for former perpetrators of state sponsored violence. In November 2020, days after the 2020 U.S. presidential election, in which Joe Biden beat Donald Trump (who, as I write, refuses to accept the results of the election), the New York Times featured a prescient short Op-Ed documentary about H.I.J.O.S. members and their continued activism in Argentina (Atención! Murderer Next Door). H.I.J.O.S. members have played and continue to play an important, steady prosecutorial role in the some 1,400 ongoing military personnel cases in Argentina. H.I.J.O.S. activism involves a critique of what the group considers to be the predatory, murderous impulse of transnational capitalism. For example, the sign below connects a notion of predatory lending and the debt-relief policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to dictatorship violence.

The large collection of memory signs, which reference such atrocities as "flights of death" over the adjacent Rio de la Plata, electric shock torture, and disappeared persons, among other topics, was eventually installed as a permanent part of the Memory Park on the Rio de La Plata river in Buenos Aires. The Memory Park was intentionally designed to face the river where the flights of death took place.

Figure 8: A sign at the Parque de la Memoria, referencing the flights of death, sits adjacent to the very river which served as a graveyard for hundreds of Argentines.

Grupo de Arte Callejero

Figure 9: This sign refers to the approximately 500 children thought to be appropriated during the dictatorship. The rationale for the illegal appropriations lay in the military's ideology that innocent babies should not have to suffer for the "sins" of their parents.

The *Grupo de Arte Callejero* began their work in 1998 with signs that marked the sites of former clandestine detention centers. Their urban performance art demonstrates what Cecelia Sosa defines as "non-conventional acts of mourning," (9) acts that operate on many levels of memory and that invite wider publics into the circle of mourning than just the blood relatives of victims. And while memory theorists like Andreas Huyssen (2000), Ksenia Bilbija, and Leigh A. Payne (2011) offer valid concerns about commodification around histories of genocide and spaces of memory, I suggest that the signs project, in its lack of conventionality and commitment to ongoing activism, resists the type of gift-shop commodification that some memory museums have been accused of practicing at the expense of lives lost.[6] Shortly after starting their streets signs production the SAG connected with the H.I.J.O.S group, which led to an expansion of their project into a larger area of contested public space. Sosa argues that perhaps the most paradoxical heritage left by the violence of the dictatorship is a new form of public intimacy, characterized by alternative notions of kinship. Many H.I.J.O.S. members discovered, through the DNA database created in collaboration with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, that their appropriators were not their actual biological parents, but rather "adoptive parents" who were given a baby when the actual parents had been murdered by the military.

Figure 10: Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo still march each week in honor of their disappeared children and abducted grandchildren. While reparations programs have appeared in some Latin American countries (like Peru), in Argentina, the Madres' continue to demand aparición con vida (the live return of their children), which is to say that no amount of reparations money will ever be enough. In fact, nothing short of the live return of their children will be enough.

The signs project performs an ownership of public space that the Madres ushered in with their persistent, weekly marches around the plaza in front of the presidential palace during the

dictatorship. The Madres were not politicized as a group before the disappearance of their children. State-sponsored terror brought them together and necessarily blurred the border between motherhood and politics. Cecilia Sosa argues that "the Madres performed a type of sovereignty that goes beyond blood. . . the Madres evoked an idea of motherhood that became a perversion of the political sphere. . . their action was from the beginning attached to a public space" (17). The demand for visibility in public places has never left the struggle pioneered by the original Madres of the Plaza de Mayo. In fact, the battle against clandestinity, against memory oblivion rages on in ever more creative ways.

The transition to democracy out of a significantly restructured economy in Argentina has resulted in hard-fought complex memory agendas. Different memory agendas can be detected in a variety of projects dedicated to remembering dictatorship atrocities and the state has played a prominent role in their development. The sustained activism of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, human rights groups, and political administrations that value human rights and media access, have helped to cultivate a desire to maintain a strong democracy in the country (Marguerite Feitlowitz, 2011). However, governmental support for widespread human rights was not ushered in overnight and has been subject to the winds of political change. The cause for human rights, social justice and political ideology, as embodied by the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo during the dictatorship, was later organized later by activist and community groups and adopted officially by political administrations like those of Nestor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003 – 2015).

Figure 11: After the dictatorship, "historians and activists noticed a lack of documentary evidence about the lives of the political activists, intellectuals, union leaders and everyday people who were tortured and disappeared by their own governments, many of which worked together in a secret alliance known as Plan Condor" (Wilson, 113). The image above forms part of a video wall collage presentation at the ESMA Memory Site and features Argentine and Chilean Dictators Jorge Rafael Videla and Augusto Pinochet forming an "anti-communist" pact.

Today, we see the violent past encroaching on the present with the election of Jair Bolsonaro (referred to by many as the Trump of Brazil) to the Presidency. Bolsonaro's pride in Brazil's dictatorship and participation in Plan Condor is echoed in his embrace of extreme neoliberal economics and his recent installation of Milton Friedman's former student Paolo Guedes as part of his economic team. The original group of "Chicago Boys" provided the economic plan that helped usher in General Augusto Pinochet's military coup in Chile in 1973.

Reparations That Don't Repair

Figure 12: The sign above repeats Las Madres' demands for a "live return" of their disappeared children. Knowing that their children were probably tortured and eventually disappeared in the infamous "flights of death" over the Rio de la Plata, the mothers' demand for the live return of their children is a political stance and ethos against the erasure of their children's lives and progressive anti-imperialist politics.

As Martha Minow and Nancy L. Rosenblum (2002) point out, reparations do not only have to be understood in a monetary sense but can include broader social projects like monuments, streets, public tributes, parks or resignified buildings, with a view to contributing to a long-term social transformation. Such a transformative understanding of what amounts to a city-wide archive of memory nodes, resonates with Jacques Derrida's idea that "archives not only record events but also produce them" (Archive Fever, 17). Derrida suggests that the word "archive" (*arkhe*; origin, command, authority, actuating principle), embodies two primary aspects: an ontological principle of historical beginnings, and the principle of commandment or order (a nomological principle). He also defines archives as houses or dwellings (*oikoi*) whose primary function is to memorialize, conserve, inscribe, "put into reserve (store), accumulate, capitalize, stock a quasi-infinity of layers of archival strata which are at once superimposed, overprinted, and enveloped in each other" (20). In other words, the objects/items/memories in an archive delineate an historical event (the ontological principle), and require an *archon* (the guardian of said objects/items/memories [the nomological principle]) to classify archival documents/information and ensure that conservation takes place. Derrida describes what he calls an 'archival technique' (the making of an archive) as an act that anticipates a future: "[T[he archive has always been a pledge, and like every pledge [gage], a token of the future" (18). The token of the future comes with an internal contradiction, however; the possibility of a forgetfulness. The street signs, themselves a field of *in situ* resistance, keep a counter-narrative, or vernacular, about how to remember the past alive.

Anti-amnestic attempts over the years to archive and museumize the traumatic events of the last Argentine dictatorship years have produced their own form of resistance. For example, most family members of

disappeared persons appreciate efforts to preserve and display former clandestine torture and execution facilities (because the preservation of such sites provides important forensic evidence used even today in some trials against genocidaires, not to mention the purely educational value of the sites). That said, some Madres (like Hebe de Bonafini, one of the founding members of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) felt that creating a Memory Park was an insult to their claims to get their children back alive, as if an official museum would close the door on this particular chapter of history, rendering their political action null and void.

Pilar Calveiro wrote that torture camps like the ESMA and Garage Olimpo should not be considered aberrations, cut off from society as most of these facilities were located right in the middle of crowded neighborhoods (1998). The movement of bodies and screams of torture victims would have been hard to make completely invisible and/or inaudible. Susana Kaiser writes that "a terrified and paralyzed society chose not to see; everyone knew that something atrocious was happening…" (2005, 202). Thus, another unspoken premise of these enthymemes refers to the fact that all of the public was implicated in one way or another in the crimes of the dictatorship. This same premise underscores the public nature of the Memory Park. As a public place in the middle of the city, literally occupying a large tract of coastal land facing the river, the Memory Park does the work of involving everyone in the city in a collective sense of public guilt, by rendering publicly victims' private memories (Steve Stern, 2006), in a way that museums or memory spaces in former clandestine torture facilities cannot.

And yet, in spite of the success of large-scale spaces of memory like the ESMA Memory Space, the Memory Park, as well as hundreds of other smaller, localized community memory projects, memory itself is still a point of contention for many. According to Idelber Alvear, certain hegemonic political discourses in Latin America still strive to put a stop to what they see as fixating on the past. The Street Art Group signs, coupled with the ongoing activist work of H.I.J.O.S., reminds us that the present can be seen as

> … the product of a past catastrophe…[that] a transnational political and economic order repeatedly reaffirms its interest in blocking the advance of post-dictatorial mourning work—as the digging of the past may stand in the way of the accumulation of capital in the present…the free-market established by Latin American dictatorships, must therefore, impose forgetting not only because it needs to erase…but because the erasure of the past is the cornerstone of all commodification (Idelbar Alvear, 2-3)

Conclusion

When I began this photo essay in 2020, the U.S. under President Donald Trump, teetered dangerously on the brink of martial law. Mothers in Portland, Oregon, formed human walls to protect protesting youth, reminding me of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and their weekly in front of the Argentine presidential palace. In Portland, military police threw protestors into unmarked vans, just as young people were snatched from the streets and from their homes by secret police driving Ford Falcons in 1970s Argentina. The parallels seemed dizzying and what I took away from Timothy Snyder's 2017 book *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, was the idea that, with respect to where the U.S. was headed at the end of the Trump regime, progressives should hope and strive for the best but prepare for the worst. Even popular television personality Bill Maher joked darkly about the Trump regime resembling a "South American" dictatorship on his August 1, 2020 show *Real Time*.

Susana Kaiser posits that the struggle for memory in Argentina has its own important history. She argues that it grows out of the context of the last dictatorship (1976-1983), which "significantly restructured the economy and imposed a program of state terrorism aimed at eliminating political dissent." I leave readers of this photo essay with an image that speaks to the inevitable economic and ideological clash between post-dictatorial memory and a transnational economic order built on oblivion politics.

A translation of the sign reads:

> The discourse of "insecurity," which is manipulated by the media, contributes to the identification of delinquency to the poorest sectors. As the social State disappears (generating ever more hunger, unemployment, and exclusion), the penal State is created at an inverse proportion, upholding the theory that guaranteed security requires a strong hand. The State thusly adopts repressive measures in order to exercise major control, militarizing public spaces with the presence of guards, soldiers, and police.
>
> Additionally, the State makes possible the proliferation of the private security industry, into which the repressors and torturers from the last military dictatorship are recycled.

Sadly, the sign's text, which helps to position the entire street signs outdoor exhibit as a visual rhetorical response to the very oblivion politics referenced by the signs themselves, is eerily relevant to actions we have seen recently in the streets of Portland, Seattle and other U.S. cities. As we continue to see certain rights we have become accustomed to in the U.S. under threat (abortion rights, voting rights, the right to move about safely in a black or brown body, among others), and as we see a very public battle for anti-racist historical remembrance taking place in activist struggles to remove monuments to racists, to change racist names of military bases, and to challenge racist stereotypes in sports mascots, we might benefit from lessons learned from the hard-fought struggles to preserve spaces of torture from historical erasure, and to archive memories via a range of artistic and activist projects that have taken place in Argentina over the last few decades. The street signs join other memory-archiving projects such as flagstones that dot the sidewalks of the city, marking places where the disappeared once lived or were last seen, murals, and clandestine centers of torture and disappearance turned memory spaces, in a "ghostly radiance" that maintains a necessary connection between past and present in spite of ever-growing neoliberal pressures to "move on." One wonders what the long-term response will be to our own attempted coup in Washington DC on January 6, 2021 by right-wing hate groups. How will the moment be remembered? As one that resulted in justice in form of prosecutions, or as a series of neoliberal compromises (read amnestic measures) in the name of "unity" and economic recovery?

Figure 14: The discourse on insecurity.

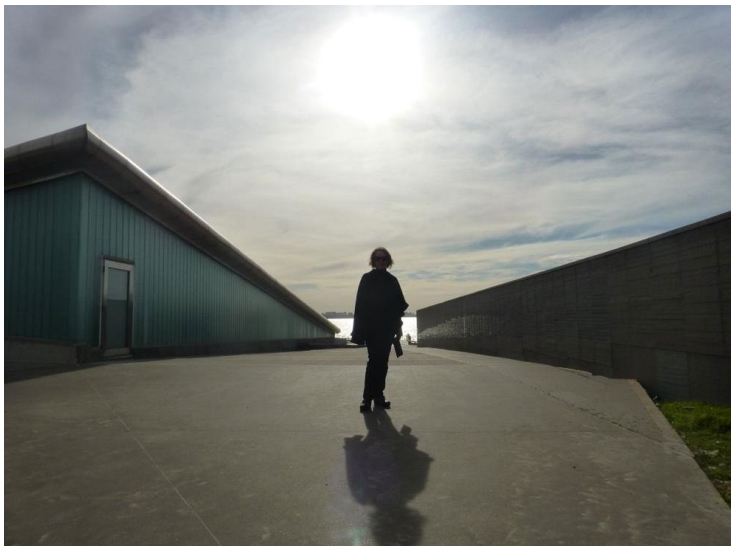

Figure 13: The author at the Parque de la Memoria, 2018.

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Notes

[1] The relationship between humans and sign-making is a complex one that has its origins in the earliest cave paintings. From Aristotle, who argued that signs represent mental concepts (*On Interpretation,*350 B.C.E.); to Augustine, who suggested that signs could lead (perhaps mystically) to the knowledge of something else (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 397); to Condillac, who drew a connection between signs, meaning, sensations, and memory (the *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* 1746); to C.S Pierce's argument that signs signify and represent ideas, and that they require interpretation (1883); to Jean Baudrillard's suggestion that signs indicate value (*The Consumer Society*, 1970), humans have striven to understand the relevance of signs for millennia. For more comprehensive discussions of signs in human history, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Signs*, 1964), C.W. Morris ("Foundations of the Theory of Signs," 1938), and Marshall Blonsky (*On Signs*, 1985).

[2] In "Axioms of the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," F. Pierce Lewis argues that "all human landscape has cultural meaning – no matter how ordinary that landscape may be" and that everything we can see constitutes a cultural landscape (6). Pierce Lewis offers 5 "Axioms" to help guide our reading of landscapes and suggests that, while not impossible, reading cultural landscapes is not as easy as it might seem. Accordingly, landscapes offer clues about culture, they demand attention to common things, they tell us stories about history, and they betray inseparable connections to geographical and ecological contexts.

[3] While 54 of the group's street signs have a permanent home in the Memory Park, and thus, could be said to have lost some of their activist cache, there are new signs created and deployed for political purposes regularly. The Memory Parks signs, thus, stand in concert with ongoing efforts across the country to identify and prosecute perpetrators of state-sponsored violence. And the fact that the Memory Park, itself, represents a victory in a hard-fought political battle against memory oblivion, counters any notion that the signs have been domesticated. Argentine anthropologist Ana Guglielmucci offers a detailed history of the decades long political battles (which sometimes saw the city government of Buenos Aires at odds with the Federal government) over a variety of large- and small-scale post-dictatorship memory projects. See Ana Guglielmucci, *La consagración de la memoria: una etnografía acerca de la institucionalización del recuerdo sobre los crímenes del terrorismo de Estado en la Argentina* (GIAPER, 2013).

[4] In her work on the ex-ESMA Memory Space project, Emily Parsons (2011) argues that, in the Latin American context of statehood and recent dictatorships, "the importance of developing a museum was and still is intricately linked to a culture of impunity that has been without reparations and punishment for criminals of the dictatorship, despite the fact that amnesty laws of the early 1980s were finally annulled in 2003. Many of the criminals are still alive and well in Argentina and have never been officially or legally held accountable for their crimes against humanity" (p. 84).

[5] Amnesty International defines the types of disappearance associated with dictatorial regimes as follows: "Victims of enforced disappearance are people who have literally disappeared; from their loved ones and their community. They go missing when state officials (or someone acting with state consent) grabs them from the street or from their homes and then deny it or refuse to say where they are. Sometimes disappearances may be committed by armed non-state actors, like armed opposition groups. And it is always a crime under international law. These people are often never released and their fate remains unknown. Victims are frequently tortured and many are killed, or live in constant fear of being killed. They know their families have no idea where they are and that there

is little chance anyone is coming to help them. Even if they escape death and are eventually released, the physical and psychological scars stay with them." (Amnesty.org)

[6] In "Present pasts: Media, politics, amnesia." *Public Culture* 12 (1): 21-38, 2000, Andreas Hyussen focuses on what he calls the 'global musealizing culture industry' and suggests that the traumatic memory of the Holocaust now exists as an umbrella trope that is linked to commodification (in films and museums) and is capable of absorbing other, unrelated global sites of memory. Ksenia Bilbija and Leigh A Payne express similar concerns about what they refer to as the 'memory market' in Latin American in *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America* (Duke University Press, 2011).

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