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Alexia Richardson

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Traces of Terror: Photography and the Memory of Political Violence in  
Argentina and Peru

In recent years there has been an explosion of interest in memory and memorial activities in a range of disciplines. Photographs are key to many such discussions, yet they are rarely examined in a detailed way, often being taken as transparent 'windows' on the past. This thesis seeks to explore the contribution of photography, in particular iconic images, to the memory of state terror in two Latin American nations, Argentina and Peru. By undertaking close readings of photographs that might, in different ways, be considered memory icons, the thesis evaluates the visual legacy of the Argentine dictatorship (1976-1983) and the Peruvian violence of the 1980s and 1990s inflicted principally by the security forces and members of the group known as Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path).

Images of the ESMA, Argentina's largest clandestine detention centre, suggest a relationship of metonymy in which photographs of significant sites of memory stand in for the memory of the whole period. In an examination of an iconic incidence of the Peruvian conflict, the murder of journalists at Uchuraccay, it is suggested that photographic images may be misinterpreted and overshadow the wider history of the massacre. Re-workings of photographs of the same incident in painted form raise questions of a link between iconic appropriations and the enigmatic photographic quality of 'aura'. A further relationship between photographs and the haptic is explored through the work of Argentine photographer Marcelo Brodsky. Then, images of perpetrators are employed to problematise the issue of forgiveness and reconciliation; first, with reference to photographs of Sendero Luminoso's leader Abimael Guzmán, and then with regard to Marcelo Ranea's image of a mother from the Madres de Plaza de Mayo apparently embracing a police officer.

These case studies will seek to establish common ground as well as exploring nuances between the two nations, and will begin to draw conclusions regarding the development of iconic images in a post-conflict situation.

# Traces of Terror: Photography and the Memory of Political Violence in Argentina and Peru

**Alexia Richardson**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**Department of Hispanic Studies  
School of Modern Languages and Cultures  
University of Durham**

**2008**

**0 1 SEP 2008**



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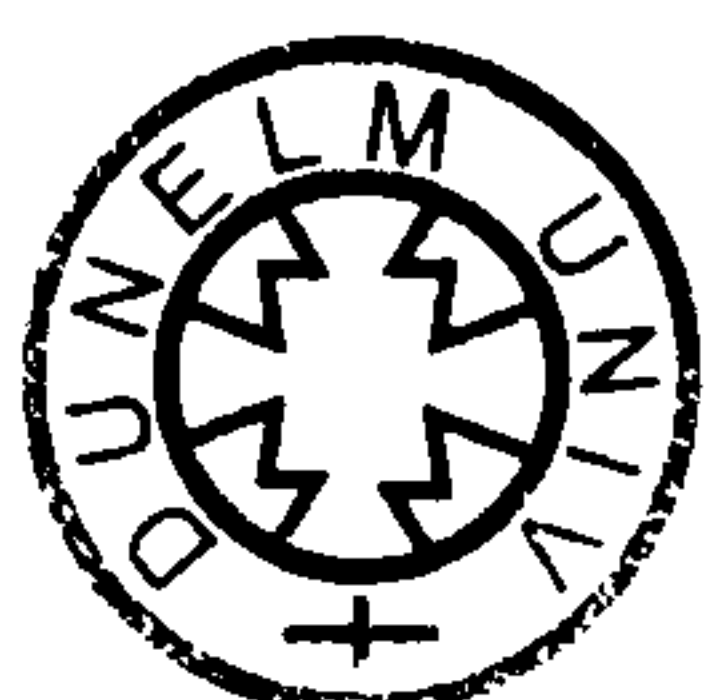
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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>AAA</b>	<b>Alianza Anticomunista Argentina; Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance</b>
<b>APRA</b>	<b>Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana; American Popular Revolutionary Alliance</b>
<b>CONADEP</b>	<b>Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas; National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons</b>
<b>CVR</b>	<b>Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación; Truth and Reconciliation Commission</b>
<b>DINCOTE</b>	<b>Dirección Nacional contra el Terrorismo; National Anti-Terrorism Directive</b>
<b>ERP</b>	<b>Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo; People's Revolutionary Army</b>
<b>ESMA</b>	<b>Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada; Navy Mechanics School</b>
<b>GEIN</b>	<b>Grupo Especial de Inteligencia; Special Intelligence Group</b>
<b>MRTA</b>	<b>Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru; Revolutionary Movement – Tupac Amaru</b>
<b>SIN</b>	<b>Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional; National Intelligence Service</b>
<b>TAFOS</b>	<b>Talleres de fotografía social; Social Photography Workshops</b>

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## **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge the financial support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council during the period of research for this thesis, and for funding a research trip to Peru in 2005.

In Argentina, thanks are due to María Laura Guembe of the Memoria Abierta photographic archive for help and information.

In Peru, I appreciated the time and information given by Susana Pastor of the TAFOS archive and PUCP in Lima, photographer Vera Lentz, and the staff of human rights organisation APRODEH and the Peruvian national library. In particular, I would like to thank photographer and curator Mayu Mohanna for her kindness and hospitality, without which my time in Lima would have been much less pleasant and fruitful.

Thanks are also owing to the staff and postgraduates of the University of Durham, especially Dr Peter McCardle, for helpful comments along the way. This thesis would not have been started, let alone finished, without the insights and support of my supervisor, Professor Andrea Noble.

## Traces of Terror: Origins and Legacies of Political Violence in Argentina and Peru

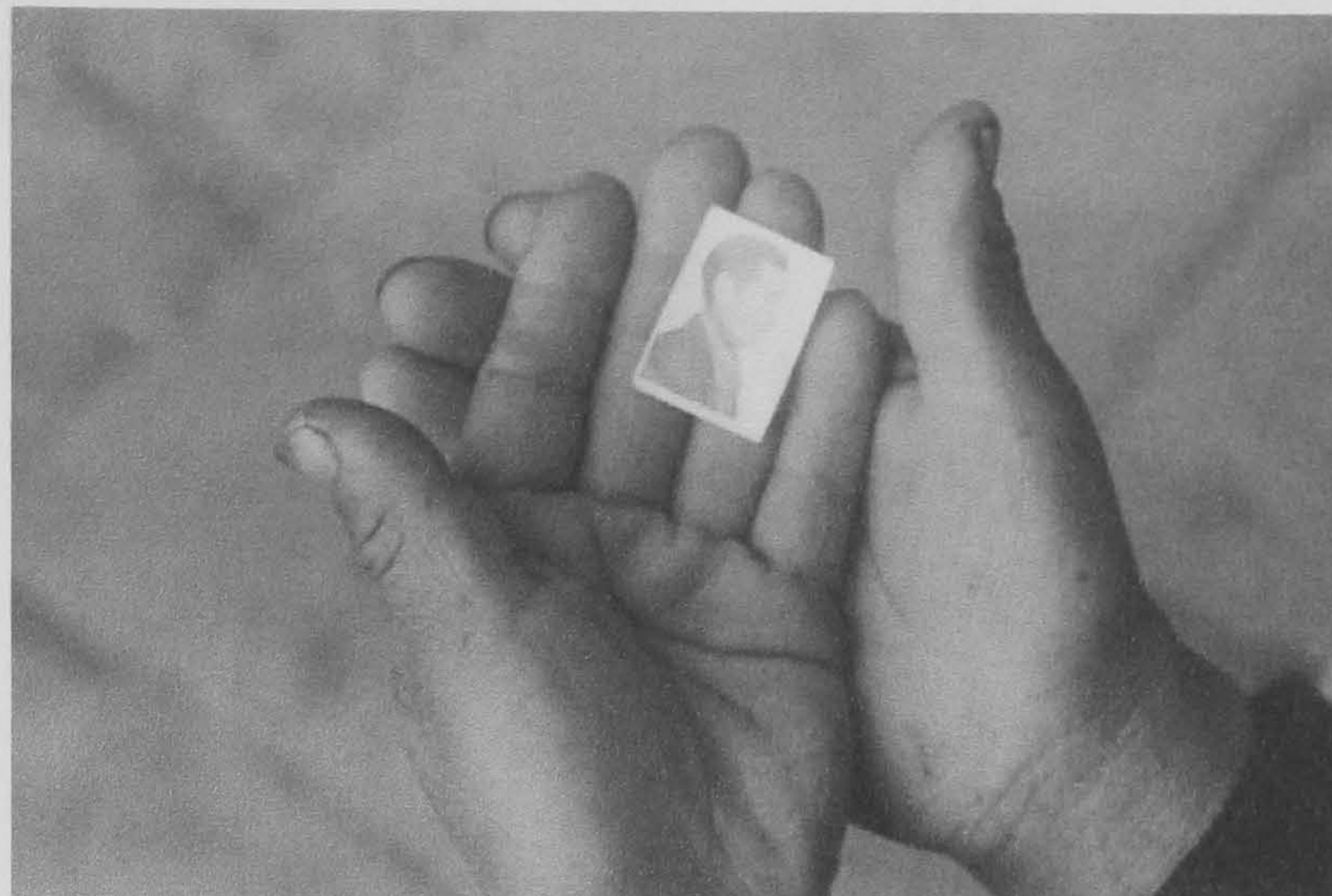


Fig. 1 Vera Lentz, *Woman shows the identity photograph of a disappeared relative in Ayacucho*, 1984<sup>1</sup>

The hands in this image are lined, worn and grimy, clearly accustomed to outdoor work, with short, strong fingers. Although at first glance the thickness of the fingers might lead one to assume that the subject was a male, they are in fact the hands of a woman.<sup>2</sup> The small image of a man in profile is cupped gently in the woman's hands, his face visible in secondary form while hers is not. In this way, the image implicitly invites us to adopt her point of view as she looks down into her cupped hands. The connotations of this image could be particularly suited to a reception in Catholic Latin America: the hands carefully cupping the photograph are reminiscent of the position adopted to receive the host during Communion. In fact, this close-up image by Peruvian photographer Vera Lentz of hands holding a small, passport-sized photograph, has become an iconic image, a form of visual short-hand for the remembrance of the devastation of rural Peru during the civil conflict that raged during the 1980s and 1990s, in part due to its close association with the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Truth and Reconciliation Commission; CVR) which investigated the events of the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Not only did it form part of the exhibition, *Yuyanapaq* (Para recordar, For Remembering), organised at the behest of the Commission, and was chosen as the cover image for the book of the exhibition catalogue; it has also been displayed in Lima and circulates in virtual form, appearing on a number of websites.<sup>4</sup> Both within and beyond Peru, it also features as the main publicity image for the



documentary film *State of Fear* (dir. Pamela Yates, 2005), which focuses on the results of the CVR. This image is a prime example of the importance of looking, identifying with the relatives of the disappeared in the vast visual culture connected to political struggle.

I suggest that a combination of factors contribute to the iconic value of the photograph, making of it such a potent vehicle for memory work related to political violence in Peru, and, indeed, beyond. Firstly, the subject of the image is generic. Although its provenance connects it to the violence in highland Peru in the 1980s, there is no visible evidence of, say, Peruvian landscape or subjects present within the frame of this particular photograph. Indeed, the image could come from any nation which has experienced the death or, especially, the forced disappearance of citizens in conflict. The face of the woman holding the image remains invisible to us, and therefore the hands can symbolise any person in that position. No specific knowledge of the Peruvian context is needed to understand the image; it clearly indicates that the man pictured in the small photograph is lost, whether dead or missing is unclear, without requiring an intimate knowledge of the background to this tragedy. While for those familiar with the Peruvian situation, Lentz's image has become linked to their own awareness, it does not exclude those 'outside'. On the contrary, its economy of design, clear and poignant message, and ease of circulation in both traditional and digital media make it appeal to broader values of family, grief and loss, and remembrance.

The particular currency of images of the disappeared in the legacy of violence is not limited to Peru. In fact, the genre of photographs within photographs, generally of family members holding up images of their lost loved ones, has spread across Latin America and beyond. Indeed, it seems that many of these images originate from the struggles of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) in Argentina since the 1976-1983 dictatorship, one of the most widely recognised human rights groups of the region, and their use of photographs in their early protests (Taylor 2003: 173). The Madres employed photographs as powerful visual aids in their appeal for information about their missing children, abducted by state agents. It is not by

coincidence that I open this thesis with Lentz's Peruvian image and an acknowledgement of its visual genealogy in the struggle of the Argentine relatives' movement. This is because this thesis will explore the photographic legacy of both the Argentine and Peruvian periods of political violence. While it is important to recall the specific contexts of civil conflicts and dictatorships, there are also links and fruitful comparisons to be drawn between nations. The issue of remembering such periods is still developing and current in Latin America, as evinced, for example, by the recent trial of former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori for human rights abuses. While photographs play an important role in this memory work, they are often taken for granted rather than being specifically analysed or discussed. Considering that photographs have such prominence, appearing not only in their national contexts but also in the global struggle for human rights, it is an opportune moment to give them the attention they deserve, and focus on the significance of the photographic image in the aftermath of violence. Before embarking on an exploration of the image cultures of the national spaces in question, therefore, it is first necessary to provide some contextualising information against which the images are to be understood.

### **Political Violence in Argentina and Peru**

'Latin America has a legacy of terror, of violence, of fear'. With this stark, yet familiar, judgment Dirk Kruijt and Kees Koonings (1999: 2) sum up the overarching challenge facing the American subcontinent at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Despite the national specificities which I will examine further below, Latin American nations from the Central American states to the Southern Cone share the task of coming to terms with a past which is saturated with violence and political conflict. Indeed, as Kruijt and Koonings remind us, colonisation, the turning-point in the history of the region that we now know as Latin America, was itself marked by bloodshed;

The European conquest of the region was mainly based on the destruction of existing social patterns and the systematic use of violence (in both physical and psychological terms) against the native population, in order to subject them to the new colonial order.

(1999: 5)

Later, wars for independence were succeeded by violent struggles 'between various pretenders to power: regional *caudillos*, political factions, insurgent groups, or contending elites and classes' (Kruijt and Koonings 1999: 5). In the case of Peru, for example, Deborah Poole has pointed out that violence has been a consistent feature of the maintenance of power in highland Peru since the Conquest (1994: 10). Neither the emergence of conflict between armed groups nor the repression of civilians, therefore, was a new phenomenon in the twentieth century; rather they were transformations of pre-existing violent structures.

In the past century, both Argentina and Peru, the countries which are the subjects of this thesis, have experienced political systems characterised by instability and punctuated by periods of military rule. In Argentina, the 1976-1983 dictatorship, which is under examination here, was the sixth of the twentieth century. Its armed forces have exhibited a marked tendency to authoritarianism and an involvement in government (Norden 1996; McSherry 1997). In Peru, by contrast, violence increased just at the moment of the return to civil rule in 1980. Important though this distinction is, the two nations have shared pressures on civilian rule and uncertain democratic governance. Furthermore, both countries were involved in the secretive transnational counterinsurgency organisation known as Operation Condor; Argentina as a founding member, and Peru as a more peripheral partner (McSherry 2005). The influence of geopolitical factors, the involvement of the United States (Gill 2004, McSherry 2005) and both explicit and covert cooperation between nations means it is not possible to view the conflicts of each country in isolation. While the bulk of critical literature on political violence has compared the military regimes of the Southern Cone (Corradi, Weiss Fagen, and Garretón 1992, Roniger and Sznajder 1999), other surveys have extended to include other Latin American nations, including Peru (Arnson 1999, Koonings and Kruijt 1999, Jelin and Degregori 2003).

One factor which cannot be ignored is the disparity between the ethnic make-up of the populations of Argentina and Peru. Much has been said about the categorisation of race in Peru and the problems associated with this, (de la

Cadena 2000), but the undeniable fact is that it was the indigenous inhabitants who were the primary victims of the violence in the 1980s and 1990s: according to the CVR, less than a quarter of the Peruvian population speaks a language other than Spanish as mother tongue, yet this sector made up three-quarters of victims (2003: 161). The particular marginalisation of non-Spanish speaking, rural citizens compounded the difficulties already faced by those under threat from military and paramilitary factions in countries like Argentina, where the indigenous population is far smaller and most victims came from urban areas. Similarly, Peru faces an extra task in its post-conflict society:

unlike many countries in the Southern Cone, postwar societies [in Central America and Peru] face the task of *constructing*, not reconstructing, democratic institutions such as electoral regimes and judicial systems, which if they functioned at all, served as factors of exclusion.

(Arnson 1999: 7)

This is not to say, however, that Argentina's road to redemocratisation has been a smooth one, since the persistence of military rule is not swept away in the first democratic election.

Above all, what Argentina and Peru have in common is the legacy of a society of terror. Rather than being an exclusively individual and private emotion,

Fear is the institutional, cultural and psychological repercussion of violence. Fear is a response to institutional destabilisation, social exclusion, individual ambiguity and uncertainty. In Latin America, a latent though sometimes open 'culture of fear' has obtained institutional characteristics, induced by systematic yet at the same time arbitrary violence, often organized from above by the state apparatus or by central authorities and reproduced within the *fuerzas del orden*.

(Kruijt and Koonings 1999: 15)

Living in a constant state of fear has long-lasting effects which continue to reverberate even when the threat of violence has largely receded, as Patricia Weiss Fagen explains;

The pervasive state violence and the psychology of fear caused citizens to turn inward, avoiding public contact. Not only were people likely to abandon overt political activity, but they also grew wary of social interactions that might have a political content and fearful of joining with others to make economic demands. Deprived of information, unable to predict who might be suspect, and aware that to

be suspect oneself could carry dreadful consequences, most citizens feared to complain or protest. This phenomenon was no accidental outcome of the widespread violence. It was the intended outcome of regime terror designed to inhibit collective action, diminish support networks, and depoliticize social interactions.

(Weiss Fagen 1992: 62)

It is with the consequences of such profound social disintegration, loss of trust, and alienation that countries such as Argentina and Peru must now grapple. It is my contention that the similarities, as well as the clear differences, between the Argentine and Peruvian nations form a particularly rich heuristic tool with which to explore the position of the photographic image in the legacy of political violence. This study does not treat Latin America as an undifferentiated mass, rather remaining aware of the variety within this geopolitical region, but considers that it represents a fecund terrain in which to investigate these issues. Remaining aware of such shared challenges, therefore, I will briefly sketch the individual circumstances which have brought both nations to the post conflict situations in which they now find themselves.

### **Argentina: Militarism, Instability, and State Terrorism**

During the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983 it is believed that up to 30,000 people were abducted by the security forces in Argentina; 8960 cases were officially documented by the investigatory commission in 1984, but it acknowledges that this was an underestimate (Fisher 1989: 70). These people became known as the *desaparecidos*, the 'disappeared', because they were taken from the street, their place of work or home, and for the most part, never seen again. The use of 'disappear' as a transitive verb, by now familiar to Latin Americanists, is in itself a euphemism for the illegal abduction, torture and murder of civilians; some prefer the term 'forced disappearance' to emphasise the agent of the offence (Weschler 2006: 8-9). They were not kept in legal jails or charged with any crime, no information about them was provided by the authorities and in the majority of cases, their remains have never been found.

How was it possible that the ruling powers of a country would commit such atrocities against their own people? Crucially, the junta did not initiate military

involvement in government, right-wing death squads, disappearance, imprisonment without due process or torture. All these practices had been used, albeit on a smaller scale, by previous governments. In fact, violence and state repression had become an integral part of society in a country which had once prided itself as being one of the richest and most 'Europeanised' in Latin America. This laid the foundations for the state terror which was to follow, and has impeded the creation of an accountable democracy since 1983.

In common with other countries in Latin America, Argentina was colonised by Spain in the sixteenth and achieved independence in the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, Argentina seemed to have a bright future, with a growing economy and a rapidly increasing population due to European immigration. Political life was, however, largely controlled by the landowning oligarchy, and the armed forces were already involved in civilian politics. In 1930 the government of Hipólito Yrigoyen, pressured by economic difficulties and exposure of corruption, was overthrown in a military coup which was subsequently upheld by the Supreme Court, a decision which was to set a precedent for future military interventions (Marchak 1999: 51).

Twentieth-century politics in Argentina have been dominated by one charismatic figure above all others. In 1944, following another military coup, Juan Domingo Perón became Minister of Labour in General Edelmiro Farrell's administration and began to introduce reforms which were designed to improve the conditions of the working class. This gained him popular support, but caused anger in the armed forces and the oligarchy. However he was quickly successful: 'As the first half of 1944 passed, it became clear that Farrell himself was little more than a figurehead, that the government's most powerful figure was Farrell's aide, Colonel Juan Perón' (Rock 1987: 252). By the time he won the Presidency with 54% of the vote in February 1946, 'Perón had forever altered Argentina's political equation' (Andersen 1993). Together with his second wife, Evita, who inspired adoration and derision in equal measures, he was to become the most powerful figure in Argentine

society, even during a period of exile (1955-73), with an influence extending after his death.<sup>5</sup>

Perón's second term, beginning the same year, proved a stark contrast to the first. His already uneasy relations with the armed forces and the Catholic Church turned into open hostility. This, combined with economic pressures, eventually led to a military rebellion and Perón's overthrow in September 1955. Perón went into exile, but his supporters remained and he continued to influence Argentine political life from abroad. In the decade after Perón's departure he and his followers were excluded from the political process, while the military retained their power with two further coups in 1962 and 1966.

Restrictions on the political activities of Peronists were relaxed for the March 1973 elections, paving the way for Perón's return. The General himself, however, in exile in Spain, was barred from standing on a technicality. The Presidency went to the Peronist puppet Héctor Cámpora, who stepped aside after just 49 days to make way for Perón's restoration. Perón's long-awaited return to Argentina on 20 June 1973 was hardly a glorious homecoming: leftists and right-wing paramilitary groups clashed at Buenos Aires' international airport and many, perhaps hundreds, were killed. It was a violent start to an era that would continue to be marked by repression, notably by the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance; AAA or Triple A), a right-wing paramilitary group allied to the Social Welfare Ministry (Andersen 1993: 96; Lewis 2002: 90-91). AAA death squads began to assassinate the left wing opposition, as Perón quickly turned against the Montoneros and the Juventud Peronista (Peronist Youth). It was at this time that the definition of subversion was broadened, there was systematic use of torture in prisons and bodies appeared in the River Plate – all factors which would become trademarks of the military regime in the late 1970s (Rock 1987: 363-64). Patricia Marchak maintains that 'The "Dirty War" began in 1973, under the government of Juan Perón [...] It was an escalation of the violence that had marked the whole period since the late 1960s, with the added component of right-wing terrorist groups organized by an agency of the state' (1999: 109).

General Perón died after less than a year in power, on 1 July 1974. His third wife, María Estela Martínez de Perón, known as Isabel, took over the Presidency, but proved weak and incompetent. In 1975 she ordered the 'annihilation' of subversive elements, giving the AAA and armed forces free rein to crush their opponents (Marchak 1999: 194). They began a policy of severe repression against the small guerrilla group Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army; ERP) in the province of Tucumán, which served as a test for future methods, even though the ERP was not a serious threat. Here the military co-ordinated the principal features of their repressive system: kidnapping, torture, including electric shock, and the use of clandestine detention centres (Andersen 1993: 135). The combination of sharply rising inflation rates with an escalation of violence provided, as Rock points out, 'the classic scenario for a coup d'état' (Rock 1987: 366).

Almost inevitably, the coup came on March 24 1976, led by a military junta from the three armed forces: Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla from the Army, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera from the Navy, and Brigadier General Orlando Ramón Agosti from the Air Force. Considering the preceding instability, military action surprised no one and, initially, relieved many. Nevertheless, as Rita Arditti powerfully argues, 'This was not just one more coup; the bloodiest and most shameful period in Argentine history was about to begin' (1999: 7).

The Argentine armed forces had long seen their role as one of paternalistic protection, and euphemistically called the dictatorship *el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Process of National Reorganisation, often shortened to *el Proceso*). It was also the military who coined the term 'dirty war' by which this period is known to many outsiders, and for this reason it is avoided by most Argentine human rights activists and problematised by many commentators, who prefer to emphasise the period as one of 'state terrorism'. They stressed the need to defend the Western and Christian values of the country and overstated the leftist threat. Some professions were particularly

targeted, including psychologists, teachers, students and journalists, but people from all walks of life, including priests and nuns, foreign citizens, and even children, were affected. Some were political activists, others were suspected of being so, others had dubious associations, while still others were taken in error, mistaken for someone else. Videla himself declared that 'The repression is directed against a minority we do not consider Argentine', excluding 'subversives' from citizenship (Feitlowitz 1998: 24).

With a mandate to crush all opposition, however slight, political violence was soon taking place on a scale unprecedented even in a turbulent Latin American country. By September 1976, there was an average of 30 kidnappings a day (Feitlowitz 1998: 25). These generally took place at night, in people's homes, but were sometimes conducted in the street, in broad daylight and in front of witnesses who were generally too terrified to do anything.<sup>6</sup> Members of the security forces using civilian clothing and unmarked cars carried out the abductions. Victims were taken to one of around 340 clandestine detention centres, of which one of the most notorious was the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (Navy Mechanics School, known as the ESMA) in Buenos Aires. An estimated 4700 Argentines were held in the ESMA, of whom the great majority lost their lives.<sup>7</sup>

In the detention centres, prisoners were routinely and severely tortured both physically and mentally. Andersen notes that 'Torture methods used by the military were meant to produce pain, collapse, a breakdown of resistance, fear and humiliation, a strong sense of imminent death, weakness, and physical alteration' (1993: 212). One of the principal means of torture was the *picana*, the electric cattle prod, which was used on the most sensitive parts of the body, sometimes for hours at a time. Another method, known as *submarino*, consisted of holding the victim's head under water for prolonged periods. Prisoners were generally forbidden to talk to each other and were forced to wear a hood or blindfold, keeping them in a state of total disorientation. They were frequently beaten and sometimes subjected to simulated firing squads. In some cases the camp doctor would supervise torture sessions and administer medical treatment, to prevent the prisoner

from dying. Some victims were also tortured in front of their spouses, parents or children, to force them to talk. Even pregnant women did not escape such treatment, including rape and electric torture.

Families searching for their relatives found the usual legal means closed to them, as the authorities suggested that the missing person must have simply left the country without telling them. Lawyers and journalists were generally either complicit with the regime, or too frightened for their own safety to investigate. In this atmosphere of generalised terror, some individuals began to organise and to resist, forming human rights organisations (Jelin 1994; Bonner 2005). Relatives of the disappeared also began to form groups, the most famous of which is the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo) is composed of women whose daughters or daughters-in-law were pregnant at the time of their disappearance, their babies being illegally given up for adoption, primarily to military families (Arditti 1999).

Photographs played a significant role in the work of some human rights groups. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo, most famously, carried images of their children in early demonstrations. The indexical and evidentiary status of the photographs, badges and posters acted as a counter to the military's acts of forced disappearance which sought to erase all trace of the so-called subversives. In later years, the focus of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association) led by Hebe de Bonafini, moved from indexicality – bearing the images of their own children – to iconicity, making displays of all the children and using the images of children other than their own genetic offspring (Fisher 1998: 136). The group of mothers known as Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo – Founding Line), who split away from the main group in the mid-1980s after differences surrounding the aims of the organisation proved insurmountable, continue to deploy the images of their individual children on badges, laminated cards, and posters, as well as embroidering their names on their headscarves. Clearly, the use of photographs is a sensitive issue and one which still bears an important symbolic weight.

However, little sustained critical attention has focused on the use of images in the context of human rights in Argentina, although Taylor incorporates the Madres' use of photographs into her work on social performance in the public sphere (1994: 275-305; 1997: 183-207). In related analyses, Catherine Grant (2003) examines the presence of photographs of the disappeared within documentary film on the period of state terrorism in Argentina, while Nelly Richard (2000a, 2000b) explores the significance of the photographs of the Chilean desaparecidos.

In April 1982, with the Madres' protests attracting ever greater crowds and the economy in a dismal state, the military government attempted to rally the people in patriotic union and invaded the Falklands Islands, or Islas Malvinas as they are known in Argentina, which Argentina had long claimed as its own. General Galtieri, by now junta leader, apparently believed that the British would not defend the islands and that the United States would side with Argentina (Andersen 1993: 300). He was wrong on both counts and the Argentine armed forces were quickly defeated. The military force that had terrorised its own population for so long had been shown to be incompetent, and it suffered a massive loss of prestige. Utterly lacking in credibility, the junta shortly afterwards lifted the ban on political parties and the country began moving towards democratic elections. Feitlowitz judges that the regime's downfall was 'not because of its record on human rights. Rather, it crumbled under the weight of its own corruption, economic mismanagement, and military mismanagement' (1998: 12). While at the end of 1983, however, Argentina was beginning the long challenge of democratisation, Peru was entering the bloodiest year of a conflict which threatened its shaky democracy.

### **Peru: A Population Caught 'between Two Fires'**

Almost two centuries after its independence from Spain, Peru remains a country divided geographically, linguistically and racially between the predominantly *mestizo*, Spanish-speaking population of Lima and the coastal regions, and the mainly Quechua and Aymara-speaking Indians of the

Andean highlands. The political sphere and much of economic life remains concentrated around the vast capital city, leaving the Sierra neglected and largely disenfranchised. The gap between rich and poor is also wide, with an estimated 67% of Peruvians living below the poverty line, the majority of them indigenous people (Holligan de Díaz-Límaco 1998: 93). For much of the twentieth century power has oscillated between civilian governments and military rule.

It seems paradoxical that just as Peru was freed from a military regime, in 1980, Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) should declare war. But the group, which officially calls itself the Partido Comunista del Perú – Sendero Luminoso (Peruvian Communist Party – Shining Path) had been waiting for its opportunity for some time, and seized the chance to fill the vacuum in the radical political sphere that had been left by the move into the legal political arena by the various left-wing organisations (Gorriti 1999: 10-11). The origins of Sendero were in the highland province of Ayacucho, one of the most isolated and impoverished regions of Peru. Its initial core was comprised of students and teachers – Abimael Guzmán himself, its supreme leader, had been working as a philosophy teacher at the university in Ayacucho city – who were receptive to radical ideals. They quickly began to build a support base of indigenous youth, who saw few opportunities in either their parents' traditional way of life, or the *mestizo* Peruvian state which discriminated against them. Indigenous people could sympathise with some of Sendero's aims and, in general, approved of their stern sense of justice and morality (Degregori 1998: 131). Sendero was characterised by its extreme dogmatism, refusal to negotiate even with other leftist groups, and emphasis on violence as a means to power (Poole and Rénique 1992: 2). In the early 1980s, as the country as a whole was still slow to grasp the significance of the new movement, the highland regions were already coming under its control. As the decade continued, growing violence would mean that Sendero could no longer be ignored by the country at large.

Sendero's first action was the burning of ballots boxes in Chuschi, a small town in the Cangallo region of Peru. Although at first news of the election

sabotage went almost unnoticed in Lima, the arson later became a symbol of Sendero's beginnings in highland Peru (Poole and Rénique 1992: 57). The significance of this relatively minor crime has grown after the event until it can now be described by analysts such as Gustavo Gorriti as beginning 'the fire of the millenarian war' (Gorriti 1999: 16). At the time, Sendero's early actions were ignored or severely underestimated by onlookers:

The war had begun, although few took it seriously. During most of 1980, the mere mention of the Shining Path provoked jokes in Lima [...] As the year ended, the accumulation of actions obligated the government to recognize the problem; yet it remained phrased as an essentially rabid effort at agitation by a hysterical group outside history and situated on the political and psychological margins, a group easily defeated once earnest action was taken against it.

(Gorriti 1999, 64)

Gorriti (1999) has analysed Sendero's activities during the period 1980-1982 in detail. This was the time in which Sendero was building its peasant support base and increasing its violent acts. The group was characterised in part by its strictly hierarchical structure, headed by Guzmán, who was known as 'Presidente Gonzalo' and elicited absolute obedience from his members, who were sometimes recruited by coercion or force. *Senderistas* had to accept the necessity of violence and be prepared to kill and die for the cause. The willingness to kill and be killed was a solemn oath known as 'the quota' (1999: 98-106). Gorriti explains that 'the orthodox Marxist line presents itself as guided by the hardened philanthropy of a surgeon who does not hesitate to cut, to chop off a piece if necessary, to bathe himself in blood, to save the patient in the long run.' (1999: 100).<sup>9</sup> Guzmán himself spoke of the need for a 'bloodbath' (Gorriti 1999: 98) and suggested that a million people might need to die in the course of the revolution (Degregori 1998: 255). Most victims were to be members of the non-combatant population, principally indigenous peasants. The reaction of the Peruvian government to initial atrocities was minimal, underestimating the danger and reluctant to involve the armed forces. The police, who were supposed to deal with the guerrillas, were largely poorly-trained and unskilled in counter-insurgency techniques. The authorities' reluctance to act can probably be explained in part by the institutional racism engrained in Peruvian society; as Carlos Degregori, (1999:

255) an expert on Sendero Luminoso, succinctly puts it, 'As long as Indians were dying, there was no real problem'.

By the mid-1980s, however, there was no disguising the existence of a conflict, and the military were finally sent in to deal with it. The army took harsh measures to crush Sendero guerrillas, but again, a stereotypical view of highland Indians was to prove problematic. Degregori (1998: 144) notes that the armed forces 'tried to reproduce in the Andes the same repressive strategy that had proved successful in the Southern Cone. They did not perceive nuances; when they saw dark skin, they fired.' Poole and Rénique (1992: 59) concur that 'The stage was set for an undeclared war in which Sendero's violence would be used by the armed forces and the police to strike back at the dark-skinned "*cholos*", "*indios*", "communists", "red priests" and "subversives" whom they saw as a threat to the established social order.' Soon indigenous people not connected with Sendero were dying in large numbers. As the military increased its aggressive tactics, Sendero also became less discriminating about its victims. The peasants, with no resources to protect themselves, were caught in the middle. Many fled to Lima and other cities in search of safety, leaving entire villages abandoned and swelling the shanty towns of Peru's urban areas. Such people, who often spoke little or no Spanish, were poorly educated and unused to an urban lifestyle, would face further discrimination in the cities, and were unlikely to find stable employment (Burt 1993).

In the late 1980s Sendero appeared to be successful, growing in strength and exercising influence over most of the country, including Lima. However, behind the scenes, they were losing the support of the very people in whose defence they claimed to be acting (Stern 1998: 4). Degregori (1998: 142) has characterised the early reaction of indigenous peasants to Sendero as one of 'resistant adaptation'; a position 'located somewhere between acceptance and open rebellion'. They accepted the presence of Sendero while benefiting from some aspects of it, but did not internalise guerrilla ideology. They understood the *senderistas'* logic of punishing wrongdoers, but drew the line at executions. Sendero also began to show its lack of respect for Andean

culture by interfering in the selling of produce in local markets, prohibiting religious observance and local fiestas, and installing young leaders in villages, ignoring the age hierarchy, which further alienated villagers (Degregori 1998; Hinojosa 1998). Some young people were forcibly recruited. The combination of these factors meant that fear and distrust of Sendero began to harden even while the numbers of supporters were apparently still rising.

This situation worsened in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1985 Alan García took over the Presidency. A young President, his period in office started in an optimistic mood as he vowed to defeat Sendero while defending human rights; 'The fight against barbarism,' he declared, 'does not require a fall into barbarism' (cited in Poole and Rénique 1992: 7). As the violence continued, however, he quickly fell out of favour, and the actions of the security forces during his regime continued to be repressive, yet failed to control guerrilla activities. Furthermore, Peru was plagued by hyperinflation and the government was widely acknowledged to be corrupt. Disillusioned, the Peruvian people faced a stark choice in the 1990 elections between two apparently very different candidates. One was Mario Vargas Llosa, famous novelist and leader of Peru's intellectual elite, who promised severe austerity measures to pull the nation out of its economic crisis. He was faced by a virtual unknown of Japanese descent, Alberto Fujimori, who seemed to lack a concrete political programme but promised to identify with ordinary people. Vargas Llosa, despite his powerful backers, could not make his proposed policies attractive to the masses, and Fujimori had a clear victory. Shortly afterwards, he went back on his election promises, employed Vargas Llosa's financial advisers, and implemented the neoliberal policies that the population had just rejected. This was to be an indication of his style of government from then on. 'Fujimori systematically alters the rules of the game whenever he deems it necessary – either by creating new laws and applying them retroactively, or by modifying old ones to suit his purposes' (Rochabrún 1996: 20). In April 1992 Fujimori conducted an *autogolpe*, or 'self-coup' – he dissolved Congress with the backing of the military and installed a 'government of national reconstruction' comprised of his trusted advisers.

After that, he changed the Constitution and removed legal impediments to run for a second, and then a third, term (Youngers 2000: 6). In the same year, Poole and Rénique (1992, 14) concluded that 'Under Fujimori, human rights abuses are no longer the exception but the rule'.

Fujimori introduced draconian anti-terrorist measures limiting the rights to legal defence and a fair trial. This legislation greatly increased the numbers of people jailed for 'terrorist' offences, in many cases after a summary trial with very little proof of guilt. Colette Youngers and Jo-Marie Burt judge that 'As early as 1993, there was growing evidence of a systematic pattern of arbitrary arrest, fabricated evidence and insufficient due process linked to the application of Fujimori's anti-terrorist laws' (2000: 44). Despite this, Sendero Luminoso continued its violent activities and brought the state to 'the brink of collapse' (Basombrío 1999: 206). Poole and Rénique (1992: 30) estimate that in 1992 Sendero had approximately 5000 combatants and many more supporters. McClintock (1999: 225) gives the figure of *senderistas* in that year as more than 25,000, with the support of around twenty-five percent of the population.<sup>10</sup> Suddenly and unexpectedly, its leader was captured and its ability to exert strong influence in Peru decimated.

On 12 September 1992, officers from GEIN (Grupo Especial de Inteligencia, Special Intelligence Group) a special intelligence group within DINCOTE (Dirección Nacional contra el Terrorismo, National Anti-Terrorism Directive), the police anti-terrorism agency, raided a house in Lima and arrested Abimael Guzmán and a number of his central committee members. This success came as a surprise to many, including President Fujimori, who had long been proclaiming the need for military strength and increasing the powers of SIN (Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional), the National Intelligence Service headed by his most trusted aide, Vladimiro Montesinos. In the event, SIN was not involved in Guzmán's capture (McClintock 1999: 230; Bowen and Holligan 2003: 140-141). The arrest was undoubtedly a major defeat for Sendero and a triumph for the security forces, but it was not immediately clear how it would affect guerrilla activities. It has since become clear, however, that the role of Guzmán was absolutely crucial in motivating and organising the party, and he

has not been effectively replaced. Analysts now agree that his capture was a turning point in Peru's fight against the guerrillas (Basombrío 1999: 208; McClintock 1999: 223).<sup>11</sup> Violence did not cease completely following September 1992, but it was greatly reduced, and Sendero has not regained its lost momentum.

### **The Aftermath of Violence: Legal Proceedings and the Work of Truth Commissions**

In common with other nations which, despite their specific contexts, share the burden of a traumatic past, Argentina and Peru have both attempted to deal with their conflicts through the creation of a truth commission.<sup>12</sup> Argentina's commission, the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, or CONADEP) was founded shortly after the return to democracy and published its report, entitled *Nunca más* (Never Again) in September 1984. As an early truth commission, it proved an example to other nations in the region. It did not, however, have judicial powers to compel witnesses and perpetrators to appear. Peru's Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, CVR) was founded at the end of 2000 and published its *Informe Final* (Final Report) in 2003. Despite the practical challenges of working in remote areas with large populations of non-Spanish speaking citizens, the commission almost doubled previous estimates of deaths in Peru's conflict, arriving at a figure of almost 70,000, of which some 54% of the killings were attributed to Sendero Luminoso, 1.5% to the smaller guerrilla group Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru (Revolutionary Movement – Tupac Amaru; MRTA), and the remainder to the security forces. Evidently, while the power of guerrilla organisations in Argentina was small and greatly exaggerated by the military regime, in Peru the state was facing a real and indiscriminately violent threat. It responded, however, with illegal atrocities and injustices. The commissions were important in establishing the concrete facts of both state-sponsored and guerrilla-led human rights abuses, but even more significantly, they gave an opportunity to witnesses to testify about their experiences, something which had previously been denied them. Despite these considerable steps, democratic regimes, balancing economic concerns

and pressure from the armed forces, have not always been quick to implement changes recommended by the commissions, leading to disillusionment on the part of victims and human rights organisations.

In 1985 the nine Generals who had led the three successive military juntas in Argentina from 1976 to 1983 were tried in civil court. They were, for the most part, defiant and justified their orders on the basis that they were necessary against the guerrilla threat. Massera, for example, declared that, 'I did not come here to defend myself. No one must defend himself for having won a just war. And the war against terrorism was a just war' (cited in Roniger and Sznajder 1999: 60). The prosecution, however, argued that, 'Either there was no war and we find ourselves faced with acts of common criminality, or there was a war, in which case we are faced with war crimes' (cited in Guest 1990: 388). Another excuse put forward was that of military 'excesses' by some individuals acting without the co-ordination and approval of the State. This is dismissed by Arditti, who points out that the violence was systematic, following a 'methodology of terror' and carried out by Task Forces staffed by the different branches of the armed forces (1999: 16). In the end, five of the generals were found guilty, but their sentences were lenient, with only Videla and Massera sentenced to life imprisonment. Human rights organisations were disappointed, while the convictions caused the armed forces to threaten rebellion for the opposite reason.

For the rest of his term in office Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín struggled to maintain the uneasy balance between the different sides of the debate surrounding the legacy of violence and the role of the military. Threatened by military uprisings, he introduced a law known as *Punto Final* (Full Stop) in December 1986, which set a deadline of 60 days to initiate legal proceedings against other military personnel. Human rights organisations worked frantically to submit cases and beat the deadline. In June 1987 a *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience Law) granted immunity to most of the military on the basis that they had been following orders. Only rape, theft, and the illegal abduction of children were excluded, and perpetrators of these crimes could therefore still be prosecuted. In August 2003 these laws were

finally declared unconstitutional, opening the possibility of further trials, which continue to proceed.<sup>13</sup>

In Peru, developments surrounding the fate of those in power at the time of the conflict continue to unfold. Despite the painful memories of his time in office, when he failed to check Sendero's extreme violence and presided over the notorious 1986 prison massacres, Alan García was re-elected to serve a second term as President in 2006. Alberto Fujimori, meanwhile, has fared less well, with periods in exile in Japan and Chile ending with his extradition back to Peru in September 2007, where he is, at the time of writing, standing trial on charges of human rights abuses committed during his time in office.

### **Collective Memory**

After the initial investigation of CONADEP, memory work in Argentina was muted, overwhelmed by the other challenges facing the nation. As Martín Abregú commented,

By the early 1990s, the human rights movement seemed defeated. With hyperinflation ravaging the country, few were interested in punishing the guilty for the crimes of the dictatorship, or in police violence, or prison conditions.[...] ours was an incomplete democracy in which institutionalized violence remained a serious problem and vast sectors of the population remained vulnerable to abuses by the state.

(Abregú 2000: 13)

Taylor confirms that by 1990, the flow of cultural productions dealing with the dictatorship had slowed and 'forgetting had become official policy, much against the wishes of certain groups that had vowed never to forget' (1997: 13). Recently, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in the memory of dictatorship, as President Néstor Kirchner has committed the government to maintaining human rights and founding a museum of memory in Buenos Aires. This phenomenon is not, in fact, limited to Argentina but has been prevalent throughout the region and, indeed, the world in the wake of significant anniversaries of the Second World War, the end of the Cold War, and new legal proceedings against human rights abusers (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2000, Jelin 2003, Huyssen 2003). The literature on this memory boom has noted the appearance of social performances, literary works and organisations devoted to the memory of traumatic periods in history. There

has, however, been a dearth of sustained focus on the role of photographic images in such discussions, despite the fact that photographs feature persistently in such memory work, as well as during the conflicts themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Several photography projects have highlighted the role of the image in the memory of conflict. In the case of Peru, the CVR provided the catalyst for the foundation of a photography exhibit called *Yuyanapaq*, which drew on a range of archival sources to create a visual history of the conflict. The Peruvian Talleres de fotografía social (Social Photography Workshops; TAFOS), founded in 1986, was one of these sources.<sup>15</sup> Although the central purpose of TAFOS was not explicitly related to political violence, it was designed to counter the powerlessness and marginalisation of ordinary people in the face of terror. The early TAFOS activists were focused on the recording of daily life, including, although not limited to, the persistent violence which affected all areas of the country, but particularly the Southern highlands. Put simply, the project consisted of providing photographic equipment and basic training to local people, facilitating the ability of local communities to photograph their own lives, and then assisting in the dissemination of the resulting images. These objectives always included a focus on revealing and condemning the abuses and injustices which faced the participants. For the founders of TAFOS, 'social photography' implied two basic principles:

Por un lado, las imágenes que, superando su origen muchas veces comercial, *llegaron a ser armas en la lucha contra la violencia e injusticia* y generaron denuncias y reivindicaciones. Por otro lado, *un grupo de fotógrafos que no son ajenos a lo fotografiado, sino partícipes directos del entorno.*

(TAFOS n.d., emphasis added)

On the one hand, those images which, superseding their origin, which was often commercial, *became weapons in the struggle against violence and injustice* and encouraged reports [of abuses] and claims. On the other hand, *a group of photographers who are not distanced from what they are photographing, but direct participants in their environment.*<sup>16</sup>

The mention of arms references Susan Sontag's (2002: 14-15) famous comparison between cameras and guns, but twists the analogy to portray this photographic equipment as acting not against, but in defense of its subjects.

The use of cameras as weapons in the struggle to portray poor urban and rural Peruvians not merely as victims, but as independent subjects, is a recurring theme in TAFOS' work.

While TAFOS centred on the possibilities for self-representation of Peruvians in collaborative projects, Memoria Abierta, a collaborative project of Argentine human rights organisations founded in 1999, is an organisation which is explicitly dedicated to dealing with the aftermath of violence.<sup>17</sup> Its aim is to educate the public and improve the level of publicly-accessible information about the period of state terrorism in order to strengthen a culture of democracy. The founding organisations felt that there was a need to bring together disparate materials which, in many cases, the original holders did not have sufficient resources to store adequately. Memoria Abierta has four main areas of work: a documentary archive, a collection of oral testimonies, a 'topography of memory' project which works to construct a database of sites of clandestine detention centres, and a photographic archive. The photographic archive comprises over 13,000 images loaned from human rights organisations, private individuals, and CONADEP, and is still growing. Despite the important work of organisations such as TAFOS and Memoria Abierta, however, photographs are for the most part taken for granted, used as simple windows on the past or as illustrations to texts. Rather than adding to such superficial interpretations, it is my intention to look critically at which images reappear in the memory of conflict, what their contribution is to such discussions, and ask why this is so.

### **Outline of Project Aims and Organisation of Thesis**

This thesis will seek to raise a series of questions surrounding the status of the photographic image in post-conflict Argentina and Peru, and particularly the group of images which in different ways might be designated photographic memory icons. On the one hand, a memory icon is an image, reproduced with great frequency and which circulates in a range of different contexts, so that it becomes symbols or short hand for the wider conflict. On the other, a photographic memory icon is an image that invokes the violence of the past, often indirectly, and that serves as a vehicle for active

remembrance. While identifying these familiar images, I will ask what kind of images have become icons of conflict and memory. What is the role of iconic photographs in post-conflict societies? How do such images contribute to memory debates and to the continued discussion of past events in society, including among succeeding generations who may not have experienced political violence first-hand, but whose lives are still affected by its aftermath? It should be noted that my intention is not to provide a comprehensive survey of famous photographs related to the Argentine dictatorship and the Peruvian civil conflict, but rather, to undertake close readings of a selection of such images in their specific contexts and through them to examine the continued significance in memory in both nations. This entails an awareness of the processes of archiving, circulation, and display which the images undergo.

At this stage it is also appropriate to offer a brief aside on the challenges of archival research in Latin America. Research trips undertaken to Argentina and Peru, while fruitful, on occasion posed problems which have in part shaped the resulting thesis. Visits to both TAFOS and Memoria Abierta helped greatly in my understanding of the image cultures of post-conflict Peru and Argentina. When I visited the Memoria Abierta archive in Buenos Aires in 2004, it was still under construction and the contents of the photographic archive were in the process of being catalogued. It is a sign of the rapid developments in the field that the number of photographs held in the archive is now around three times what it was when I was able to be there in person, and it is therefore fortunate that the staff members have also maintained a valuable web-based resource. The distances involved and the locations of most research institutions and other organisations also meant that the Argentine part of this thesis is unavoidably somewhat biased towards the capital city.<sup>18</sup> In Peru, I underestimated the bureaucratic hurdles which sometimes arise on visits to academic and state institutions and, thus, some valuable research time was lost. Despite great strides in information technology in recent years, electronic communication and services such as digital catalogues – even if officially available – could not always be guaranteed. In both countries, financial constraints were always evident in repositories of memory such as libraries, human rights organisations, and

archives. For practical reasons, there were times when research leaned more to an opportunistic than a systematic method, and the serendipitous nature of this approach has played some part in the images chosen for particular analysis. Nevertheless, given the opportunities I had for research in the respective countries, I am confident that the images represent significant memorial artefacts worthy of closer investigation.

This introductory chapter, therefore, will be succeeded by a second chapter in which I will look more closely at the concept of iconicity and memory and examples of iconic photographs. I will note that while there is a small but growing literature on iconic images, with the work of Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites (2007) standing out, this is primarily focused on the North American and European visual fields. The case for an examination of the modalities of iconicity and memory in the Latin American context is compelling; it is a region which is deeply involved in the memory of political violence, and its image culture is deserving of further attention. I will consider the general factors that contribute to the iconicity of an image, including its religious and artistic connotations, and the importance of affect, suggesting that attention to such aspects from the Latin American perspective may illuminate our understanding of the role of photographs in cultures of remembrance more generally.

Having established a working definition of the photographic memory icon, then, I will take an example of an iconic genre of images in the third chapter. The ESMA was one of the most notorious clandestine detention centres of the Argentine dictatorship. While the façade of the building is the most widely-recognised representation, photographs were also made of the interior during the CONADEP investigation. Various appropriations have also been made of the outside of the building, by attaching other images or objects. I will argue that images of the ESMA perform a metonymic function in which they stand in for the whole of Argentine military violence, and that in this way they exemplify the temporal disruption of the memory of traumatic events in which the past is brought into the present.

In chapter four, I will turn to one of the most notorious events of the Peruvian conflict: the murder of nine journalists by inhabitants of the highland village of Uchuraccay in January 1983. In the last moments of his life, photojournalist Willy Retto took a series of photographs of the attack on him and his companions, which were discovered months later. The resulting photographs have played an important role in competing interpretations of events in Uchuraccay and have become iconic in the memory of violence in Peru. Drawing on the work of Laura Marks (2000) and Vivian Sobchack (2004) on film, this chapter suggests that the unusual origin, discovery, and status of these images gives them a power to resist the distorting interpretations often applied to them. As iconic images, their influence goes beyond their status as passive objects to give them a kind of agency and cultural saliency.

The persistence of the images of Uchuraccay is demonstrated by their redeployment in subsequent artistic projects. In the fifth chapter I will examine the work of Peruvian artist Jesús Ruiz Durand, who has painted reworkings of famous photographs, including those taken by Retto. I argue that Benjamin's concept of the aura has a significant temporal aspect, and I also utilise the work of Mary Ann Doane (2002) on the connection between photography and time. Taken together, these approaches suggest that iconic images may be understood temporally, as endlessly repeated moments of time. I argue that in his paintings, Ruiz Durand attempts to claim both the aura of the unique work of art, and the indexicality of the photograph, in order to stake the affective claim of his images. Nevertheless Ulrich Baer (2002) warns against using photographs to construct neat, linear narratives of the past. I conclude, therefore, by suggesting that Ruiz Durand's paintings might lead us to return to the photographic originals with fresh eyes.

The investigation of Ruiz Durand's work will be followed by a study of another artist, Argentine photographer Marcelo Brodsky. This sixth chapter is attentive to the revival of interest in memory in Argentina, drawing parallels between the fields of artistic production, memory, and human rights through an examination of Brodsky's photographic work. While a violent dictatorship encourages denial and a turning away from atrocities, the human rights sector

strives to focus attention on perpetrators of abuses in a process that may be termed the 'mobilization of shame' (Keenan 2004). Here, I try to maintain an awareness of the blurring of sensory boundaries and emotional response through images of physical objects; archives, hands, and buried books. The work of video theorist Laura Marks (1998, 2000) will once again prove valuable here, as I suggest that Brodsky's images have a haptic quality which touches the viewer. However, I also warn against the dangers of over-identification with the victims of state terror. I connect the emotional and tactile connection of Brodsky's images with the sensory appeal of human rights organisations.

The final two chapters focus, in differing ways, on images of perpetrators and look forward to the future. In chapter seven I analyse representations of the leader of Peru's Sendero Luminoso, Abimael Guzmán. This includes a study of news coverage of his capture in September 1992 and the images produced during the press conference in which he was displayed in a cage to the watching media. I draw on work exploring the presentation of terrorists and other enemy figures whose representation tends to exceed the merely human to become symbol or icon. Looking at the contemporary portrayal of Guzmán in the Peruvian press, and at more recent considerations of him, I ask what it means for Peru when its central image of the figurehead of Sendero Luminoso is one of aggression and defiance, and what implications this has for the memory of the conflict and possibilities for reconciliation.

Finally, in chapter eight I engage in a close reading of Marcelo Ranea's 1982 image of an embrace between an Argentine police officer, himself implicated in human rights abuses, and a Madre de Plaza de Mayo. It is a well-known image which is unusual precisely because of the surprising juxtaposition of the representative of the state which perpetrated human rights abuses and the human rights activist which has been put forward as an image of reconciliation. My argument is that the image is more complicated than a reading which understands it as a symbol of affection between the two main subjects will allow. Rather, it may be useful as a means to understand the contest of public space which took place during the dictatorship and the

consequence of this during democratisation. The other figures in the image show us that it is the onlookers who will ultimately have responsibility for determining the memory of state terrorism in Argentina.

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<sup>1</sup> In cases where I have been able to ascertain that an image was given a title by its maker, I have provided this in italics. However in many instances the images in this thesis are untitled or the titles are unknown. In these cases I have given them an appropriate caption or taken a caption from a source, and these are not italicised.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with the photographer, October 2005.

<sup>3</sup> The report of the Peruvian Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hereafter referred to as CVR) may be accessed from the website <<http://www.cverdad.org.pe>> [accessed 30 January 2008].

<sup>4</sup> Lentz's photograph is designated one of the 'iconic photographs' which the CVR publishes on its website, <<http://www.cverdad.org.pe/apublicas/p-fotografico/t-fotosicono.php>> [accessed 2 October 2007], and as such also appears on the website Justicia Viva (Living Justice), 'Legado fotográfico de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación' (Photographic Legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission),

<<http://www.justiciaviva.org.pe/comision/fotocvr2.htm>> [accessed 2 October 2007]. The image also appears on numerous sites reviewing either the film *State of Fear* (Yates 2005) or the Yuyanapaq exhibition.

<sup>5</sup> See also Plotkin (2003) for more on Perón's Argentina. It is also worth mentioning the fictionalised account in *La novela de Perón* by the highly influential Argentine literary figure, Tomás Eloy Martínez (1989).

<sup>6</sup> Diana Taylor calls the terror which causes people to deny their status as witnesses to state terrorism 'percepticide', noting that the number, method, and visibility of disappearances makes it highly unlikely that urban citizens were completely ignorant of political violence (1997: 119-124). Marguerite Feitlowitz describes this phenomenon in detail, recounting an interview in which a woman claimed not to have any personal knowledge of disappearances, shortly before recalling an abduction she had in fact witnessed in the street (1998: 150-151). Antonius Robben has studied the breakdown of trust which occurs when the family home is invaded by a military taskforce (2000).

<sup>7</sup> ESMA: Registro de Secuestrados y Archivo de la Documentación, <<http://www.nuncamas.org/ccd/ccd.htm>> [accessed 12 October 2007].

<sup>8</sup> A significant body of work exists on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and their work. See in particular Fisher (1989), Guzmán Bouvard (1994), Malin (1994), and Mellibovsky (1997).

<sup>9</sup> The Marxist metaphor is, chillingly, similar to the doctrine used by the Argentine military junta, despite their otherwise polarised ideologies. Rear Admiral César A. Guzzetti, for example, compared Argentina to a sick body, infected by leftist groups, which needed to be dealt with by 'antibodies' [the security forces] (cited in Feitlowitz 1998: 33).

<sup>10</sup> This discrepancy may be due in part to the difficulty of determining the numbers of a clandestine organisation, and in part to the complexity of ascertaining which individuals fall into the categories of supporter, activist, and armed combatant (McClintock 1999: 243, n.7).

<sup>11</sup> The significance of Guzmán's capture is not to deny the existence of other important factors in the downturn of Sendero's success, namely the formation of peasant civil defence patrols, or *rondas campesinas* (Burt 1993; Degregori 1999; Starn 1999).

<sup>12</sup> References to the report of the Argentine Truth Commission are taken from its official website, CONADEP (1984), *Nunca más*, <<http://www.nuncamas.org/index.htm>>, [accessed 10 October 2007]. At the time of final editing, the website has been unavailable for an extended period; an alternative source of the full text of *Nunca Más* is <<http://www.desaparecidos.org/arg/conadep/nuncamas/nuncamas.html>> [accessed 31 January 2008]. On truth commissions, see Hayner (2001), Enwezor et al (2002) and the recent special edition of *Radical History Review*, *Truth Commissions: State Terror, History and Memory* (2007).

<sup>13</sup> At the time of writing, former Roman Catholic police chaplain Christian von Wernich was convicted for his involvement in murder, torture, and abduction, after the prosecution successfully argued that he passed on information obtained during confessions to the military

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regime, "Dirty War" Priest Gets Life Term', *BBC News*, 10 October 2007, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7035294.stm>>.

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, there is a limited body of work on photography and violence in Argentina (Grant 2003, Taylor 2003), but this is even rarer when focused on Peru. Deborah Poole's important book (1997) is a valuable analysis of Peruvian photography, but focuses on an earlier time period to the one which concerns this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> TAFOS is now housed at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Pontifical Catholic University of Peru) and around 6000 of its images can be viewed on the university web site, <<http://www.pucp.edu.pe/tafos/>> [accessed 12 October 2007].

<sup>16</sup> All translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>17</sup> The organisations forming Memoria Abierta are: Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (Permanent Assembly for Human Rights; APDH); Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (Centre for Legal and Social Studies; CELS); Fundación Memoria Histórica y Social Argentina (Argentine Historical and Social Memory Foundation); Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo – Founding Line) and Servicio Paz y Justicia (Peace and Justice Service; Serpaj).

<sup>18</sup> Shumway (1991: 22) notes that Argentines themselves 'have a long tradition of confusing Buenos Aires with the whole country' and it is regrettable that this thesis perhaps compounds such a view, although it is true that in contrast to Peru, more Argentine victims of violence were indeed urban citizens.

## **Iconic Images on the Periphery: Development, Circulation and Influence**

### **Contemporary Culture – Flooded with Memory**

The end of the twentieth century saw a phenomenon which shows little sign of abating, and has been variously described as a 'memory boom' (Huysen 2003: 18), an 'explosion of interest in memory' (Radstone 2000: 1) and an 'infatuation with memory' (Runia 2007: 323). Scholars from a range of disciplines including sociology, history, cultural studies, literature and psychology have displayed a concern with issues of memory, particularly traumatic memory, which has intensified since the late 1970s. The result has been a proliferation of publications on the subject, of which Radstone and Huysen's volumes are just two examples.<sup>1</sup> However, the attention paid to memory has not been limited to the academic community, but has manifested itself in an abundance of memorials, monuments, museums, archives, commemorative ceremonies, anniversaries and cultural productions. Indeed, Runia maintains, contrary to the prevailing scholarly assumption, that the preoccupation with memory was taken up by academics after having been already precipitated in the 'lay' community, rather than the other way around (2007: 314). But what is it about the current cultural moment that makes us so interested in memory?

While no single cause of the memory boom may be identified, several factors are symptomatic of, and central to, the growth of interest in memory since the 1970s, particularly in the West. These include the continuing preoccupation with the Second World War and its aftermath, notably the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries of significant events which have been marked with widespread commemorations (Huysen 2003: 12). The Holocaust and its legacy, which I will discuss further below, has become a fundamental aspect of memory discourse. Runia identifies 'two strands of commemoration: the "hot" desire to commemorate the Holocaust and the somewhat "cooler" desire to commemorate the First World War' (2007: 320). In addition, the end of the Cold War, and the subsequent re-examination of power and conflict in

Eastern Europe and between the former superpowers, has opened up new arenas of debate over the memory of conflict (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000: 5).

The Holocaust is generally agreed to represent a focal point in the examination of memory, and texts on this subject alone contribute greatly to the field of memory studies.<sup>2</sup> Although the Holocaust has been identified both as 'a unique loss and as an icon of loss for the world' (Feuchtwang 2000: 79) and has undoubtedly influenced the examination of memory in other contexts, there is a tendency to make use of the symbolism of this catastrophe and apply its lessons to other cases, without fully taking into account the specificities of each. Huyssen calls the Holocaust 'a universal trope for historical trauma' (2003: 13-14), and one wonders with him whether the Holocaust may not act as a screen memory, disguising the truth of other instances of genocide and horror, while Tim Cole has criticised the commodification of the Holocaust, stating that 'Shoah business is big business' (1999: 1). The impossibility of accurately representing the Holocaust, which has been frequently pointed out by commentators, complicates any consideration of it. Dori Laub (1995: 65) has characterised the Holocaust as an event with no witnesses, as almost all victims were killed, survivors are unable to articulate such an overwhelming experience, and outsiders are unable to comprehend its magnitude. Attempts to portray it fully are, therefore, doomed to failure, with even photographic images necessarily selective in their view. Yet the Holocaust is the most striking and emblematic example of collective trauma in the twentieth century, and it is from this period that many photographic icons date: Margaret Bourke-White's images of concentration camp survivors, for example, and the photograph of the little boy from the Warsaw ghetto.

Many other catastrophic events have also taken place, however, and it is since the Vietnam War that the phenomenon of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has been studied in detail. Psychic trauma is generally taken to mean the response to a devastating event, distinguished by 'repeated,

intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event' (Caruth 1995: 3-4). The nature of trauma, then, with its insistent gaps and repetitions, makes describing and analysing its origins and effects extremely problematic. The number of natural disasters, wars, conflicts and instances of massacre, torture, and genocide that have taken place in the modern world have now led some social scientists to speak of 'traumatized communities' in which individuals display features of common trauma while possibly being bonded together by their shared experience (Erikson 1995). In both the countries under study in this thesis, it will be apparent that groups of those affected have formed and participate actively in memory performances and debates. On another level, however, trauma also leads to a fragmentation within society. Antonius Robben has commented on the relevance of the concept of cultural trauma to the Argentine context and has summarised the symptoms of it as follows;

Massive trauma is more than the sum total of individual suffering because it ruptures social bonds, destroys group identities, undermines people's sense of community, and entails cultural disorientation because taken for granted meanings become obsolete. A massive trauma is thus a wound to the social body and its cultural frame.

(Robben 2005: 346)

Memory, then, is a broad concept with a wide variety of possible applications. I will use the term in the context of the fear and trauma which affected social groups, rather than as a purely individual concept.

It will be my contention that photography is one method through which nations such as Peru and Argentina may commemorate, with the possibility of coming to terms with, the collective trauma which their respective populations experienced. Images are used and in circulation during the conflicts and then are taken up again in post-conflict situations to do the work of memory in a variety of different media. Notably, some images gain salience both during and after the conflict and come to stand in for whole events, thus acquiring a

particular resonance. In short, they become photographic memory icons of conflict that are fundamental in coming to terms with the past. The chapter will first lay out some of the connections between photography and memory, opening up the disputed topic of whether images help us to remember, or commemorate, the past. It will then seek to establish a working definition of iconicity, before returning such concepts to the Latin American concept with some examples of photographs which fulfil the role of memory icons. This theoretical background will be important in creating a framework for the readings of specific images in subsequent chapters.

### **Photography, Memory, and Iconicity**

We may ask, therefore, what connects photography, and above all photographic icons, and memory. The essence of photography as a trace of the real gives it a peculiar link to its subject, frozen in a past moment, and it is therefore unsurprising that photographs are both connected to the concept of time and popularly considered to contain or facilitate memories. In the context of Holocaust images, Barbie Zelizer calls photographs 'vehicles of collective memory' and 'building blocks of remembering' (1998: 1-2), although she is also cautious about the possible overuse and abuse of such images, while Sturken has noted that, 'Memory appears to reside within the photographic image, to tell its story in response to our gaze' (1997: 19). This comment, however, reveals that while photographs may *appear* to be passive vessels of memory, in fact their meaning is mediated by both the medium and the spectator. Marianne Hirsch's notion of *postmemory*, which she uses in reference to the Holocaust but which may be usefully transferred to other contexts, also reminds us of the effects of traumatic events on following generations, 'who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated' (1997: 22).

Photography's much remarked on connection to death also has important repercussions in the examination of situations such as the legacy of state terrorism. As Susan Sontag famously remarked, 'All photographs are *memento mori*' (2002: 15). Roland Barthes asserted that the uniqueness of photography is partly due to its connectedness to death, its suggestion that its subject is already dead; '*that* is dead and *that* is going to die' (2000: 96). This is doubly significant in cases such as that of Argentina where family photographs of the disappeared carry an additional weight in the absence of the physical remains of the victims (Richard 2000a, 2000b). The Holocaust photograph, according to Hirsch, 'is uniquely able to bring out this particular capacity of photographs to hover between life and death, to capture only that which no longer exists, to suggest both the desire and the necessity and, at the same time, difficulty, the impossibility of mourning' (1997:20). Mourning is equally impossible in a country, such as Argentina, where victims were taken from their families with no explanation, no evidence, and no burial place. Photographs remain as the only evidence of their lives and yet as a constant reminder of their fate.

The question remains, however, of whether photographs, including photo-icons, facilitate memory. Barthes is adamant that they do not, declaring, 'Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory [...] but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory' (2000: 91). Zelizer, who, like Hirsch, is concerned with images of the Holocaust, believes that, 'we do not yet fully understand how images help us to remember, particularly in circumstances we did not experience personally' (1998: 2). Zelizer warns against the reduction of prolonged periods such as the Holocaust to a handful of recycled icons, and against the tendency to use images as general icons of an event rather than exploring their specificity. Returning to photography's mediated powers, Sturken asks, 'Does the photographic image allow the memory to come forth, or does it actually create the memory?' (1997: 22). While this question has no clear-cut answer, she highlights the role of photography in forming national narratives of key events. Sturken privileges photographs in the category of objects she calls 'technologies of memory',

alongside memorials, public art, literature and activism, for their important role in rituals of collective remembrance (1997: 10). She classes them as 'objects through which memories are shared, produced, and given meaning' (1997: 9). Sturken's categorisation will be significant in this thesis, as I proceed from the assumption that the evident close involvement that photographs have with commemorative processes merits further examination. With this in mind, I will seek to provide a working definition of iconicity as it is used in this thesis.

Among the innumerable photographs made since the invention of the medium, a select group have been reproduced so often that they are immediately recognisable to large numbers of people. The images themselves have become icons; defined by their repetition in disparate contexts, we know them because we have seen them before. Accepted as part of the background of everyday life, they may be inextricably tied to the memory of significant events, while at the same time symbolising broader historical periods or particular values. They provoke interest and are assumed to be influential, often long after the event they depict, yet their very common nature may preclude serious analysis. The consideration of significant images that has taken place tends to originate from a Western viewpoint which may be assumed to apply internationally; one only needs to glance through the contents of the various works on particularly well-known images with titles such as *Photos that Changed the World* (Stepan 2000), *Photographs that Changed the World* (Monk 1989) and *Photo Icons* (Koetzle 2005) to see the weight of material devoted to images from the U.S. and Europe. Commendably, Stepan attempts to broaden the scope of material covered and, out of a total of eighty-five images, includes nine from Latin America, but Monk includes none from this region, save for an aerial shot of a Cuban missile base made by the U.S air force. Those images which are from the so-called developing world are usually made by Western photographers and depict a relatively narrow range of subjects, often focusing on natural disasters and conflict.

Given the ubiquity and symbolic weight of icons, their status and origin merits closer examination. In the following section, then, I will survey work exploring the factors that make an image iconic. Paying attention to cultural specificity, I will first ask what relevance current scholarship on iconicity has for non-Western contexts, particularly regarding the portrayal of traumatic events and the emotional connection made with images.

### **Towards a Definition of Iconicity**

As the word icon comes from the Greek *eikōn*, meaning image, it is not surprising that the concept of an icon is indivisible from that of an image. In this sense all visual images can be said to be icons. More specifically, an icon referred in particular to a portrait or representation with a religious theme and sometimes carrying a memorial connotation (Goldberg 1991: 135). The history of icons can be summarised as follows;

Originally memorial images for deceased persons akin to Egyptian mummy portraits, icons were honoured by early Christians and later by the Eastern Orthodox Church as cult images. These pictures, which according to legend were not created by human hands, were regarded as authentic copies of the “original images” of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints or biblical scenes. A fair copy would keep the “true form” of the holy images. There seemed to be a direct causal relationship between the copy and the original image;

(Brink 2000: 139)

As Brink recognises, the religious origin of icons has implications for the study of contemporary significant photographs, or ‘secular icons’, as they are referred to by Goldberg. The connection with memory, the truth value, and belief in authenticity stemming from the physical relationship between original and copy, all speak to key issues in photography theory. Part of the legitimacy of icons stemmed from a belief that they were not made ‘by human hands’, just as the truth status of photography has often relied on its ‘objective’ creation by a machine and not by a subjective human being (Bazin 1980). Moreover, the religious aspects of early icons also have continuing relevance to iconic images today, despite their secular subject matter, a point to which I shall return below.

Unsurprisingly, the weight of icons as authentic representations and as vital links to God made them controversial, particularly in the light of the prohibition against idols in the Ten Commandments. At what point did an icon, an intercessor, become itself an object of worship and therefore an idol? The use of images in worship was an issue of longstanding division which contributed to the schism between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Put simply,

the Eastern Church tended to see the icons as “manifestations” of heavenly archetypes, where the sacred is actually present in the material images; the Western Church understood the images to be representations that aided in worship, but always pointed beyond themselves and are not to be confused with the true presence of God  
(S. Brent Plate 2002: 56)

Although the usage of icons was taken to its furthest extent in the Eastern Church, religious images remained powerful tools in the Roman Catholic Church as well, and were therefore transferred to Latin America during colonialism where they have also become influential cultural markers, intertwined with pre-existing indigenous spiritual beliefs. Tension over the proper function of religious icons surfaced again during the Protestant Reformation, and some Protestant denominations proscribed the use of any images in worship. However, even where images were condoned, as in Catholic tradition, their use tended to be freer than that laid down by doctrine and difficult to regulate (Brent Plate 2002: 57). As Brent Plate recognises, iconoclasts understand images to constitute real power:

They do not oppose images because they don't believe in them; to the contrary, they oppose them because they realise the power of images to incite religious devotion in ways not fully controllable and conformable to the institution of the church.

(Brent Plate 2002: 57)

The danger of icons was situated in their appeal to passion rather than reason and their position outside the fixed texts of the church. Recognition and suspicion of the power of the image, and a belief in its connection with the senses and emotions over the rational mind will continue to be significant themes in my consideration of contemporary secular icons.

Until recently, the connection of iconicity with photographs has more often been implied than explicitly analysed. For example, in *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed our Lives*, Vicki Goldberg (1991) describes contemporary icons as

secular images with so strong a hold on the emotions or the imagination that they have come to serve us as archetypes. I take secular icons to be representations that inspire some degree of awe – perhaps mixed with dread, compassion, or aspiration – and that stand for an epoch or a system of beliefs.

(1991: 35)

The description of the level of affect that Goldberg chooses to associate with iconic images, *awe*, is noteworthy because of the religious connotations that she draws on even while explicitly calling the icons secular. For Goldberg, then, iconic images have a strong emotional, perhaps spiritual, pull and a symbolic weight.

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites's recent work, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (2007) is an important contribution to the study of iconicity. The authors have analysed a range of the most famous photographic images that circulate in the United States cultural imaginary in detail. They define iconic photographs as

*those photographic images appearing in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics.*

(2007: 27, italics in original)

Further, Hariman and Lucaites hypothesise that 'the iconic photograph is an aesthetically familiar form of civic performance coordinating an array of semiotic transcriptions that project an emotional scenario to manage a basic contradiction or recurrent crisis' (2007: 29). Like Goldberg, they underline the affective reaction to the image. They also focus on the widespread dissemination of such images, so that the viewer is likely to come across them many times in a range of contexts, including book covers, newspaper

reports, memorial situations, exhibitions, postcards, posters, and so on, and can recognise them at a glance. Despite originating in a specific historical moment, a very famous image is likely to be adapted in different contexts, for example by cropping, use in parody or advertising. Hariman and Lucaites (2002: 366) also attribute a great deal of power to iconic images, such as that of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima, which 'reflect social knowledge and dominant ideologies; shape understanding of specific events and periods, influence political action by modelling relationships between civic actors, and provide figural resources for subsequent communicative action'.

To be sure, the authors' work is a valuable addition to the study of visual images which, however ubiquitous, have not been widely analysed. Nevertheless, one may suggest that the authors are overstating the case in some respects. The practical influence of the image on popular politics and citizenship is, as David Perlmutter (1998) points out, impossible to quantify. Furthermore, while it is implicit in their whole work, Hariman and Lucaites do not look explicitly at the question of memory and iconic images; memory does not even feature in the index to their work (2007). Rather than focusing on the political implications of photo-icons for a liberal democracy, my concern is with the contribution of visual artefacts to the commemoration of traumatic periods in history. If, therefore, photographic icons are central in the memory of trauma, what makes an image iconic?

### **Factors Contributing to Iconicity**

Notwithstanding their limited attention to the concept of memory, Hariman and Lucaites suggest an answer to the issue of why some images become so widely known, oft reproduced, and symbolic:

We believe that iconic images become so because they have strong economies of transcription: that is, such images coordinate "beautifully" a number of different patterns of identification, each of which would suffice to direct audience response, and which together provide a public audience with sufficient means for contending with potentially unmanageable events.

(2007: 34-35)

It is a question, then, of being the right image in the right place at the right time. Images can 'key in' to the public mood and come to symbolise the wider context. Of course, prosaic questions of reproduction rights and costs contribute to ease of circulation and undeniably also influence the ongoing use of an image. This alone, however, is not enough to explain the select group of photographs which appear again and again in a multiplicity of contexts; another factor may be the religious and artistic traditions upon which the image composition draws. Hariman and Lucaites specifically site their analysis of the cause of iconicity within a 'liberal-democratic culture', in their case the United States, and for this reason, their definition cannot simply be lifted into other contexts without an examination of its adequacy – nor do they claim this (2007: 28). Yet, the national context is a vector of their analysis which is a valuable consideration, and the clarity of their iconic criteria is a boon for critics in the field.

John Taylor analyses the cultural resonances that some images chosen for publication contain, maintaining that 'in some cases the photograph is not a sign of grief, but the sign of a sign, or the photographic trace of an artistic archetype (1998:105). His study indicates the possibility that editors select those images which depict conventional and aesthetically successful compositions which may trigger feelings of familiarity in the observer. The choice of caption and accompanying text are also significant in directing the reader's response. To go further, one could suggest that images which conform particularly well to cultural and aesthetic norms may be more likely to become iconic, that is, to remain in the public eye for a long period and be reproduced frequently in a variety of contexts. Therefore, Taylor proposes that iconic images are satisfying because they suggest comprehensible narratives in place of the extremely complex reality that tends to characterise news events, but he also warns that the symbolic resolution they appear to offer may be far from the whole story. Such references to aesthetic and religious norms must naturally be looked at within their region of origin,

without an automatic assumption that they can be transferred more widely with the same effect and meaning.

So, in concrete terms, what are these photographs that 'everybody knows'? A privileged group of images are insistently recycled in a multiplicity of global contexts. One category of icons is that of famous figures, many of whom are featured in one image that is reproduced above all others; one thinks, for example, of Alberto Korda's shot of closely-cropped shot of Che Guevara, or Matthew Zimmermann's photograph of Marilyn Monroe standing over the grating. By contrast, a major category of iconic images surround representations of war and conflict. These include Robert Capa's Death of a Spanish Militiaman; the photograph of the small boy with his hands raised in the Warsaw ghetto; shots of the liberation of the concentration camps, most particularly those by Margaret Bourke-White at Buchenwald; and Joe Rosenthal's image of the flag raising on Iwo Jima, although others could also be listed. The Vietnam War, in particular, produced a selection of images which came to symbolise the horror of that conflict: Eddie Adams' photograph of the South Vietnam Chief of Police, Nguyen Ngoc Loan, shooting dead a suspected Viet Cong collaborator, and most famously, Nick Ut's shot of the little girl running, naked and screaming, down the road after a napalm attack. Capa and Adams both captured the moment of death, which seems to be the crucial point of their image (and explains the controversy of the possible staging of the earlier photograph). The napalm attack and ghetto photographs draw on a seemingly clear-cut moral issue, that children are innocents and it is generally considered wrong to harm them, to make an emotive statement about the effects of war, while Rosenthal's image connects to feelings of patriotism and national pride. All of these images carry a moral weight which challenges the viewer to consider issues of national unity, the rules of war, and the violation of the rights of innocents, especially children. Because they endure beyond the news stories immediately following the event photographed, into history, they become integrated into societal memory and part of learning about the past. Iconic images are likely to appear and

reappear in discussions surrounding historic events, and in this sense their influence can extend beyond the generation of their making.

The image which has been discussed perhaps more than any other by scholars, and about which the term 'icon' is almost impossible to avoid, is Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*, made in 1936 for the Farm Security Administration.<sup>3</sup> Goldberg (1991: 136) states that, 'Migrant Mother is iconic in the commonly held sense of that term: a representative image of profound significance to a nation or other large group'. It has become the archetypal image of the Depression and the best known work of Lange's career. Most commentators remark on the composition of the mother and child and the importance of these roles in Western traditions. As Sturken and Cartwright (2001: 38) suggest, 'the image gains much of its meaning from its implicit reference to the history of artistic depictions of women and their children, such as Madonna and child images, and its difference from them'. In summary, this image plays on assumptions of the universal role of the Mother; a factor which is important in the consolidation of its status as icon, as we shall see in the Argentine and Peruvian examples which I draw on below. Attention to *Migrant Mother* has covered, on the one hand, its appropriation as symbol in diverse contexts, and on the other, individualising it by investigating the story of its subject, Florence Thompson, whose name Lange had never asked. Although many observers are interested in what happened to Thompson and other iconic subjects like Kim Phuc, the little girl with the napalm burns, the images of them stand alone without any reliance on a knowledge of their individual histories.<sup>4</sup> The photographs have a life of their own, apart from their original subject matter, and this is part of their iconic status.

### **Iconoclasm and Scepticism**

Despite the ubiquitous nature of photographic images, their pervasive influence may be hard to pin down. In a sceptical analysis, David Perlmutter (1998) questions the logic of 'visual determinism', which argues for the role of

images in policy decisions – the so-called ‘CNN effect’ which draws elected officials to the television set as they evaluate their ever-changing position in the public eye. According to Perlmutter, icons are selected and confirmed by a small section of society he calls ‘discourse elites’ – politicians, academics, and workers in the media. Because such privileged professionals work daily with images, control them, study them in broadsheet newspapers and believe in their effects, they tend to assume that the general public does likewise, often overestimating the familiarity of even the most famous images to the untrained or uninterested viewer. Choosing specific examples including Adams’ image of General Loan in Tet and other ‘icons of outrage’, he argues that the measurable effect of visual images is small and they do not usually overturn policy, although, by contrast, some examples of decisions influenced by images are given in Taylor (1998: 136). So, while many blamed photographs like those made by Adams for influencing public opinion in the United States against the war in Vietnam, Perlmutter argues for the reverse: that because public opinion was *already* turning against the war, it seized on the image of Loan as a confirmation of its new values.

Perlmutter’s warning against an exaggerated or naïve trust in the power of the image is important, and he is correct in stating that an objective measurement of the influence of images on policy decisions is hard to find. Nevertheless, his analysis does not preclude a more general awareness of certain regularly circulated photographs in society, and influence may also have more general effects than government policy decisions. Accordingly, Hariman and Lucaites (2001: 19) believe that, ‘visual practices have long been important yet undervalued constituents of democratic culture precisely because they are media for emotional representation that lead to performative identification rather than rational deliberation’. I would concur that the value accorded to written documents and the official archive of materials is often denied the photographic image which, nevertheless, is so regularly witnessed that its pull on the emotions should not be dismissed.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside his scepticism about the influence of photographs, another side of Perlmutter's critique is based on the premise that the term icon is sometimes used rather loosely to refer to group of images of important events rather than the single famous image itself. Icons of significant events may circulate widely, in the process losing captions and credits detailing the specificities of their making and becoming instead generalised symbols (Zelizer 1998: 98, 121). Perlmutter distinguishes between the *discrete* icons, the unique image (even though there may be many millions of copies of this image) and the *generic* icon. He expands on one obvious example, that of images of starving African children, to explain that there is no one photograph of malnourished children that sticks in the public memory, but rather it is a generic concept that is pulled out every time a famine appears in the news media. He explains, 'certain elements are repeated over and over, from image to image, so that varying subjects, times, and locations, the basic scene becomes a familiar staple, a visual cliché' (1998: 11). This form of selectivity has been widely recognised by commentators who have criticised the portrayal of Africa as a homogeneous entity known almost exclusively as a site of crippling poverty, disease and frequent natural disasters (Campbell 2003). This may lead to an inattention to the specificities of each situation, and tends not to focus blame on the possible causes of, in this case, the famine.

Discussion of multiple images often leads to questions about the possible negative effects of visual imagery, often expressed as compassion fatigue (as for example in the title of Susan Moeller's 1999 work on the subject).<sup>6</sup> Does repeated viewing anaesthetise the viewer against further feelings of shock, outrage and pity on seeing images of horror or pain? Perlmutter (1998: 81) speculates that 'icons of outrage' may lead not to moves to right the wrongs depicted, but to a weakened 'compassionspeak' that is merely a language of description rather than action. John Taylor (1998) refrains from blaming the media for compassion fatigue but suggests that a proliferation of imagery alone will not insure society against forgetting traumatic events, even quite soon after their occurrence. In a perceptive examination, Carolyn Dean (2003) notes the tendency to condemn graphic portrayals of dead, injured and

dying human beings as 'pornographic', implying that they present an eroticised view of pain and suffering which is morally reprehensible as well as hinting at a prior state of affairs in which the human suffering was treated more respectfully. The classic example of this is the Holocaust, long a subject of polemic over the possibility of its representation even while its key images, of skeletal survivors, do not cease to circulate. According to Dean, however, the usefulness of such blanket condemnations of images of horror as eroticised and commodified is limited.

Thus far, I have discussed the origins of icons in general terms, and picked up on the clearest examples of photographic iconicity. In a nutshell, key factors have been identified as the wide circulation of a select few images, their strong emotional pull, and possible religious connotations. I have also pinpointed the lack of attention to the regional which may prejudice the consideration of photographic icons. Where do these remarks take us when we return to Latin America, a region which, Che aside, has been largely absent from the canon of classic images? How do images interact with the issues of memory which, as discussed in the previous chapter, are crucial in post-conflict societies? In my own consideration of iconic images, I will draw on the theories outlined above. One concern, however, is that most examination of significant images has been from the viewpoint of the European or US-based observer. With few exceptions, most images were directed at principally European and North American audiences, and detailed analyses like those conducted by Perlmutter and Hariman and Lucaites are extremely valuable but focus specifically on the North American context, as well as neglecting issues of memory. While the work of Hariman and Lucaites (2007) is explicitly based firmly in the United States, it does cover famous images from Vietnam, Iwo Jima, and Tiananmen Square, but only insofar as they are viewed by and have an influence on an American audience, neglecting issues of their reception elsewhere. The relevance of their findings in Latin America must therefore be evaluated carefully, in part because there is not such widespread access in the region to television, print media and the internet. While there is a small group of images whose fame has reached

internationally, each country also has iconic images that are recognised in a national context but may not be well known beyond its borders. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a definitive framework for iconicity in as diverse a region as Latin America, but in my juxtaposition of Peru and Argentina and their points of convergence and divergence, I aim to draw some conclusions about the significance of the icon in the commemoration of violence in Argentina and Peru. Moreover, while each Latin American nation has a specific history and culture, many of them share issues of post-dictatorial development, and this project is thus a step towards an evaluation of memory images in the subcontinent.

### **Situating Iconicity in Latin America**

Firstly I would concur, with Hariman and Lucaites, that the right conditions come together to create an iconic image. A composition that is familiar and recognisable to the viewing audience, perhaps involving religious connotations; an emotional appeal and a relatively clear cut moral message all contribute to the strength of the image. Perlmutter (1998) adds another important factor: metonymy. The image must have the ability to stand in for the whole situation it represents: one starving child for the plight of millions in Africa, one heap of skeletal bodies for all Holocaust victims, and so on. It must also appear at an opportune moment and with the ability to be reproduced on multiple occasions, leaving room for an element of chance and the influence of the media and publishing industries. In fact, as will be examined in depth in chapter three of this thesis, Runia (2006) emphasises the significance of metonymy in memory debates, in which iconic images, sites, and people are made to stand in for a whole historical period. The ease with which photographs circulate, often unaccredited, and the ability to assimilate them in many different ways means that they often escape closer scrutiny. Yet if we are going to credit some images with the power to provoke emotions, influence decisions, and control memory discourse, they deserve deeper analysis.

While the existence of publications featuring internationally acclaimed photographs (Goldberg 1991, Koetzle 2005, Monk 1989, Stepan 2000) speak to the global reach of an elite of photographic icons, similar publications also exist within national contexts, and these indicate the presence of more localised networks of significant images. Argentine photographer Sara Facio's *La fotografía en la Argentina: Desde 1840 a nuestros días* (1995) is a survey of the development of the genre from its early years in Argentina, which sketches significant practitioners and influence up to the 1990s. As might be expected, Peronism and, above all, the lasting impression of Eva Peron, continue to be of vital importance in contemporary Argentine culture. Like other political icons mentioned in this chapter, Evita's physical attractiveness and early death seem to have contributed to her image cult (Navarro 2002, Taylor 1995). More recently, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have also gained worldwide recognition as women fighting for justice and social change. Their tireless campaigning, skilled use of the media and employment of memorable symbols, principally the white headscarf, has made them inspirational for other groups fighting injustice and discrimination, while images of them have become iconic of the period of state terrorism in Argentina and its legacy. They serve, then, as dual icons, both as abstract symbols of bereaved motherhood, pain, strength, and civil activism, and as specific documents relating to the concrete events and subjects portrayed.

In Peru, images, such as the one by Vera Lenz of hands holding a small photograph which opened this thesis, have become tools in remembering the civil conflict between the armed forces and Shining Path (Chávez 2003, Majluf and Villacorta 1997). Writing with respect to Peru, Deborah Poole (1997) gives an indication of how discussions surrounding iconicity may productively be transferred to non-Western contexts in her use of the term 'image world'. Poole explores 'the ways in which visual images and visual technologies move across the boundaries that we often imagine as separating different cultures and classes' (1997: 5), explaining that, 'it is a combination of these relationships of referral and exchange among images themselves, and the social and discursive relations among image-makers and

consumers, that I think of as forming an “image world” (1997: 7). The concept of an image world envisions a global network of images which circulate between developing and developed nations, permitting both an international elite of photographic super-icons, and regional icons which are recognised within their national or continental context. It is a framework which will prove valuable for this examination of photographic icons from two localities.

One important factor when considering the status of icons is the pervasive influence of Catholicism in Latin America, which provides a clear link to the religious history and symbolism of icons, as discussed earlier. All over the continent, images of saints and of the Virgin Mary are significant spiritual markers which have left their impression on popular as well as religious culture. In the Andean region, in particular, images play a major role in the dissemination of Catholic teaching to the masses (Marzal et al 1996). Manuel Marzal has examined the religious beliefs of Quechua-speaking people in Southern Peru, with their blend of traditional indigenous rites and Catholicism. He emphasises the importance of visual representations of saints to such populations, often in the absence of concrete facts about the saint's life, and notes that those saints significant in Quechua regions tend to be connected with miraculous visions and appearances of Jesus or Mary. The saints effectively become the object of worship; ‘although in theory the saints are inferior to God, in practice it seems to be the saints who grant the petitioned favour’ (1996: 72). A major annual social event in a rural village is likely to be the fiesta arranged around the celebration of the local patron saint, whose statue or image will be paraded through the streets in sight of the people.

While in some respects, therefore, the Quechua have adopted standard Catholic practice, in others they have reinterpreted the ‘new’ religion in line with their longstanding cultural and spiritual norms. According to Marzal, while in the official church Christ is revealed in the Bible, in the Quechua church it is through images which Jesus is found and revealed to believers.

In the Quechua church Christ is revealed principally in a particular image, such as the Lord of Huanca or the Lord of the Tremors (Cusco),

for it is through these that the Quechua know Jesus. Although they accept the authority of the Bible and even listen to it when read in church or on the radio, their experience of Christ is not focused on the Book but on the image. All this is explained by Quechua religious socialization itself; they either read little or are illiterate, so the church does not foster Bible reading but rather devotion to some images who listen, comfort and perform miracles.

(1996:107)

This indicates that theories suggesting the presence of religious symbolism in secular photographic icons could indeed be highly relevant in countries like Peru, where religious images have a major and familiar presence in cultural life. Images which trigger memories of traumatic events may also carry a burden that is more than simply documentary. Bearing this in mind, I now wish to turn to a closer examination of key images from Argentina and Peru which have come to the forefront of discourse about the legacy of conflict state terrorism. These images have been chosen, not so much for their uniqueness, but rather because they represent typical examples of relatives appealing for information, which have become central in the legacy of forced disappearance in Latin America. This kind of image forms a genre of memory photographs, generic icons, which complement those other outstanding and unusual images which may be termed iconic.

### **Iconic Images of the Disappeared and the Struggle for Memory and Justice**

As we have seen above, photographic images in the West play a major role in media reportage and historical considerations of significant social and political events, and a select group of them bear most of this burden. Likewise in Latin America, photography has emerged as a centrally important response to the violence, repression and impunity that have been a recurrent feature of recent political life, and a key element in the material culture of protest and struggles for justice. From Argentina and Chile to Peru, photographic images have emerged into the political arena of human rights struggles in the form of individual and individuated images, or vast photo walls composed of portraits of the disappeared, to the creation of objects such as 'photo-pendants'.

Relatives of victims of violence have developed a range of public demonstrations of anger and loss including a kind of photo-protest, where images of the loved one are displayed as a proof of their previous existence and a demand for information as to their fate. This has led to the circulation of images, such as Lentz's, which themselves depict images within the frame; photographs of photographs, and photographs of people displaying photographs.

The use of photographs has a particular poignancy in the case of the *desaparecidos*, people disappeared by state security forces. Making specific reference to Chile, but with relevance for other countries in the region, cultural critic Nelly Richard has stressed the importance of photographs in discourse surrounding the *desaparecidos*. Richard (2000a) notes the parallels that many theorists have drawn between photography and death, and the particular status of photography as a document stating the reality of the past, and a trace of the captured moment – in this case, one might say, an icon and an index according to Peirce's definition. According to Richard,

Si el dispositivo de la fotografía contiene en sí mismo esta ambigüedad temporal de lo que *todavía es* y de lo que *ya no es* (de lo suspendido entre vida y muerte, entre aparecer y desaparecer), tal ambigüedad se sobredramatiza en el caso del retrato fotográfico de seres desaparecidos. Por algo los retratos que los familiares de detenidos-desaparecidos llevan adheridos al pecho, se han convertido en el símbolo más denso de esta cruzada de la memoria que realizan las víctimas para recordar y hacer recordar el pasado.'

(2000a: 166)

If the condition of the photograph contains within itself that temporal ambiguity of that which *still is* and that which *is no longer* (of that suspended between life and death, between appearance and disappearance), this ambiguity is emphasised in the case of the portrait photograph of disappeared people. That's why the portraits which the relatives of the detained-disappeared carry stuck on their chests have become the most complex symbol of that crusade of memory which the victims make to remember the past and make it be remembered.

This symbolism, Richard believes, is compounded in the case of the identity photograph often used by relatives, where the public documents that

exemplify the disciplinary gaze of the state and its institutions are turned back upon this gaze when the family re-appropriates the image to testify at once to the missing person's presence and his/her absence. In a nutshell, in the display of identity photographs and family photographs as forms of political protest, the photograph's metaphoric abduction of its subject from the flow of time powerfully evokes the real practice of disappearance whereby human subjects were violently abducted from the flow of life. In both instances, for Richard the political charge of such photographic performances resides in this structural parallel between the photograph, its referent and the practice of disappearance. This makes the photograph of the disappeared an especially resonant object of memory with a vivid social biography which engages with debates of human rights and commemoration even though its subject has been forever silenced.

For Diana Taylor (1997: 140), as well, the role of photography has been a vital one in the case of Argentina, as 'The struggle to represent the absent bodies [of the disappeared] became central to the battle of images between the military and the Madres during the Dirty War'. Taylor analyses the use of photographic images by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo: the Madres themselves, and the symbolic weight of the objects they have used, principally headscarves and photographs, have become instantly recognisable emblems of the struggle for justice in Argentina, not only within the country, but in the rest of the subcontinent. Images of the disappeared relatives have shifted from having an indexical role of their particular subjects to bearing an iconic value which refers to all victims of state terror (Taylor 1997, Grant 2003).

The Madres' carefully staged protest performances incorporated the symbolism of traditional motherhood, tied to home and family, which had been promoted by the military junta. This harked back to the language of the Catholic Church and its veneration of Mary;

The Madres tried to overcome the limitations intrinsic to the role of motherhood by modelling themselves on the Virgin Mary, the ultimate

mother who transcends the public/private bind by carrying her privacy with her even in public [...] Thus, Christian and Jewish women alike initially played the Mater Dolorosa and exploited a system of representations and stereotypes that had so effectively limited most forms of visibility and expression.

(Taylor 1994: 294-295)

The Madres played on traditionally acceptable 'feminine' qualities such as self-sacrifice, suffering and love for children, with their leader, Hebe Bonafini, going as far as occasionally demonstrating in slippers to emphasise her 'homeliness'. In their search for sympathy and support, and in the (vain) hope of avoiding repression by the junta, the mothers drew on connotations of respectable motherhood of which their audience in the public sphere, including media sources, the military, and international supporters, would be well aware. In later years, the lack of satisfactory response from government sources and the Church led to a hardening of their stance into overt anger rather than maternal pleading. Nevertheless, many images of the Madres still draw on their symbolic role as mothers and its cultural and religious connotations. I will argue that photographic images may also play a performative role in the memory of state terror and violence.

One example is an image by Argentine photographer Eduardo Longoni (fig. 2), of a crowd of mothers, one of whom is holding up a photograph of a young woman, whom we must assume is her daughter. Several points become immediately clear on viewing this image: firstly, there is an impression of a large number of mothers. Although they are demonstrating, they seem to be "respectable", middle-aged and middle-class figures; their dress and hairstyles are neat and conservative, and they wear their customary headscarves. None of the women are meeting the camera's gaze, the mother in the foreground is wearing dark glasses, while the mother holding the photograph is turning away and looking downwards so that her eyes appear almost shut. Similarly, neither of the other two women visible is looking at the camera. This is in contrast to the figure in the image held by the mother; although it is small, it is possible to tell that the young woman, wearing a

short-sleeved dress, is turned to face both the original camera and, indirectly, Longoni's lens.



fig. 2 Eduardo Longoni, Madres de Plaza de Mayo, c. 1982

This image is not a dramatic display of emotion, the face of the mother with the photograph seems quite still and calm, yet it does appeal to the sentiments of the viewer. The women, bringing the family photograph carried here by one of them, have removed themselves from their traditional private sphere, the home, and been forced onto the street to look for their loved ones. Despite their presence in the public sphere, they seem ambivalent about pushing themselves forward for the camera. Longoni's photograph mirrors the impression cultivated by the Madres, above all in the early years of their association, of motherhood and the importance of family. This is not to say that this was the only way of depicting Madres; certainly, Longoni himself made another oft-seen image of two Madres being charged by mounted policemen which clearly displays the violence that they often faced, and chapter eight of the thesis will explore an ambiguous portrayal of the protesting mother. However, a large number of images do show the mothers in more standard appealing poses.



Fig. 3 Carlos Dominguez, Woman Showing Photograph of Missing Relative, n.d.

A different take on the mother-with-photograph pose by photographer Carlos Dominguez (fig. 2) is both similar to the iconic model analysed above and specifically Peruvian. The woman's hat and style of dress mark her as an indigenous person, and her breastfeeding infant, also wearing an Andean hat, is an overt symbol of motherhood and family ties. There is another young child watching in the background at the very edge of the frame. The subject matter of the image is clearly reminiscent of representations of the Madonna and Child, of which there are many examples which show the Christ Child nursing and one of Mary's breasts visible. Among the artists who painted the 'Virgen de la Leche' (Virgin of the Milk) was Pérez de Alesio, who was trained in Italy and worked in Lima in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, influencing Andean art of the period (Seldes et al 1999: 100). Sturken and Cartwright point to the specific cultural values expressed by such representations of the Madonna;

The sheer number of paintings created with a mother and child theme throughout the history of Western art attests not simply to the centrality

of the mother figure in Christianity but also to the idea that the bond between mother and child represented in images like this is universally understood to be natural, not culturally constructed.

(2001: 36-37)

Sturken and Cartwright rightly question the assumption of universality which these images draw on, yet contemporary images like Domínguez's continue to reference those assumptions and hint at a long history of shared iconography.

In their continuing discussion of mother and child images, Sturken and Cartwright write of Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* that 'It is famous because it evokes both the despair and the perseverance of those who survived the hardships of that time' (2001: 38), and such a description could also apply to the Peruvian mother. Like Lange's subject, she is not looking at her child; although unlike the migrant mother, she is looking directly into the camera. This could be construed as an appeal for information or a challenge to impunity analogous to that of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, yet it could also be a simple statement of fact, as the woman's expression is more resigned than demanding. The frontal pose was also a characteristic feature of religious icons which is believed to contribute to their connection with the viewer (Dyrness 2000: 30; Morgan 1998: 65), a factor which is relevant here.

A large majority of the victims of violence committed by both Sendero Luminoso and the state in Peru were male, indigenous, Quechua-speaking rural citizens, so this woman could represent a typical victim's relative. The photograph she is holding is tiny in relation to the rest of the image, the size used for an identity card or passport. In rural Peru, this could reasonably be the only photograph that a person possessed. The state's attempt at control, therefore, becomes the only memory of the missing or murdered relative. In Argentina, by contrast, while the frontal shots of identity photographs were also frequently utilised, the typically middle-class, urban families of *desaparecidos* were far more likely to own a collection of family photographs.

Domínguez's image is also a reminder of the double barrier of discrimination which indigenous women had to overcome to search for their relatives. While the Argentine Madres have movingly described their journey from housewives with no involvement in politics to public figures debating with prominent, often male, leaders (Fisher 1989, Guzmán Bouvard 1994), indigenous Peruvian women additionally faced racial discrimination. Many of them were illiterate and did not speak Spanish, further hindering their dealings with bureaucracy. The photograph of the woman movingly conveys this struggle, while its presence on the wall of the Centro de Información para la Memoria Colectiva y los Derechos Humanos (Information Centre for Collective Memory and Human Rights) of the Peruvian government ombudsman signals a new acceptance of the existence of indigenous victims of violence.<sup>7</sup> Both images under examination here play on universal assumptions of motherhood and the desire of the mother to ensure the safety and protection of her family. At the same time, they contain detail about the specific contexts and local concerns of their making. It is not possible to limit the influence of such photographs solely to their national background; rather, they illustrate the collisions and intersections of different national image worlds.

### **Conclusions**

It is indisputable that some images reach a wider audience and have longer staying power than others. This said, and bearing in mind all the caveats about the discourse elites who have helped to bestow such prestige on a select group of photographs, I have tried to illustrate the way in which images function in a variety of interconnected networks. The images considered here are well-known within the nations in which they were made. Yet this economy of images also extends beyond national boundaries; Argentina's human rights organisations, for example, have been influential among their Latin American neighbours, including Peru, and this involves activists, academics and publications travelling between countries and often taking images with them. Images by the photographers discussed in this chapter, and images of the Madres in general, have also reached other continents. The rise of digital technology, naturally, only facilitates this process. While I have argued that

attention to the localised origins of photographs is important, global circulation also provides a rich traffic in imagery from which many actors can benefit.

In returning to the question of *why* these images gain such currency, I follow Hariman and Lucaites in suggesting that they are required to provide an aesthetically and emotionally satisfying response to a complex situation. In this sense, the photographs 'tap in' to a public need. Therefore it is clear that their importance is magnified in post-conflict situations, where a period of trauma must be worked through. One can see an appreciation of this in the work of the CVR in Peru, which has actively involved itself with the investigation of archives and the setting up of a photographic exhibition. Many iconic images have some religious connotations which appear to assist in their popularity. I suggest that this is due to the unconscious familiarity which these images may provide, and that a sense of familiarity increases the belief in the authentic nature of an image. A strong emotional response to the image will also be an important factor in understanding the iconic appeal of some photographs.

The Latin American images focused on here play multiple roles in the memory of conflict. In Argentina, photographs taken during the dictatorship were potentially dangerous documents in a climate of fear and censorship. In many cases, they were destined for publication outside the country, in an attempt to provoke international support and pressure on the military junta. The Madres themselves used photographs to provide proof of their children and demand news of them. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the same images reminded viewers of the impunity which prevailed under a supposedly democratic government, as the perpetrators of human rights abuses were freed under amnesty laws. Now, the photographs become historical documents used in the education of a new generation who do not themselves recall military rule. They will in time become traces of the Madres, many of whom are now very old. Their representation of collective female strength, and the particular appeal of the images of the disappeared within the frame,

so far continue to highlight the ongoing relevance of this genre of photo-icons, within and without Argentina's borders.

In Peru, meanwhile, images have served to publicise the plight of a sector of a population which is too often ignored. The process of implementing CVR recommendations, bringing perpetrators to justice and improving the standard of living for the indigenous population is still very much ongoing, and with many competing economic pressures will prove a challenge for the Peruvian government. The photo-icons are reminders of the work still to be done, as well as ambassadors, educating citizens of other countries on the often-neglected Peruvian conflict.

Iconicity remains a fluid category, and while, for example, images of the Argentine dictatorship have maintained circulation for almost three decades, this is no guarantee of their future longevity. It is possible that the images discussed here may become to some extent divorced from their original purpose and context, and used as symbolic forces in other contexts; such is the fate of photographs. Among so many images, it is difficult to guess which ones will have a lasting influence. Nevertheless, I have identified certain aspects, such as cultural resonances, which are likely to affect the repeated transmission of an image. For a photograph to be iconic implies that it will circulate beyond the site of its origins; yet attention to those local origins may yield fruitful results. My first examination of iconicity will focus on images of the most notorious detention centre in Argentina, to explore how visual representations of the ESMA perform a metonymic function in the memory of the 'dirty war'.

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<sup>1</sup> An exhaustive bibliography of works touching on the significance of memory can hardly be provided here, but some notable examples are Antze and Lambek (1996), Assman (1995), Bal, Crewe and Spitzer (1999), Boyarin (1994), Connerton (1989), Huyssen (1995, 2003), Le Goff (1992), Hodgkin and Radstone (2003), and Terdiman (1993). See also the first edition of a new journal, *Memory Studies*, which in its opening editorial addresses the field and attempts to provide for the development of systematic methodologies (Hoskins et al., 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Select examples from the wide literature on the memory of the Holocaust include Carrier (2004), Hartman (1994), Niven (2002) and Young (1993); photography also has a role to play in this work, see Hirsch (1997, 2001, 2003) and Zelizer (1998).

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<sup>3</sup> Works covering *Migrant Mother* include Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 49-92; Rosler 2003; Stein 2003; Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 37-38, and Wells 1997: 35-45.

<sup>4</sup> A further example of an iconic image whose subject has been traced is Steve McCurry's *Afghan Girl* which originally appeared on the cover of *National Geographic* in 1985. Sharbat Gula's portrait was updated in the same publication in 2002 (see Edwards 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* focuses on the tension between primarily written sources, which she classes as 'the archive', and public, collaborative, performative acts which she calls 'the repertoire'. Taylor attempts to turn away from this privileging of the archival to concentrate on social performance and its importance to memory (2003: 16-33). While this thesis is concerned with photographs as archival documents, it is also interested in activities involving photographic images in the public sphere, and with Taylor's notion of performance informing memory.

<sup>6</sup> See also Sontag (2004) for an extended discussion of the effects of atrocity photographs.

<sup>7</sup> Domínguez's image can be seen in situ at the information centre on the ombudsman website,

<[http://www.ombudsman.gob.pe/DDHH/CIMCSECVR/CIMCSECVR\\_Ceinfo\\_03.htm](http://www.ombudsman.gob.pe/DDHH/CIMCSECVR/CIMCSECVR_Ceinfo_03.htm)>, accessed 24 October 2006. It is also noteworthy that this image has been valued for its aesthetic as well as its documentary achievement: it featured in an exhibition celebrating thirty years of photography in Peru at the Museo de Arte de Lima (Majluf 1997).

## The Past that Does Not Wish to Pass: The Persistence of the ESMA in the Memory of Argentine State Terror

Reading the newspapers in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, and Peru at the turn of the millennium may sometimes resemble travelling through a time tunnel. In addition to the obvious economic, political, and police problems of the moment, the news headlines include a number of stories that reflect the persistence of a past that is everlasting and does not wish to pass...

(Jelin 2003: xiii)

It is not only news articles, but other forms of cultural production and social performance which contain echoes of the past in Argentina. This temporal dissonance is, additionally, often translated into a spatial one, with certain sites being awarded a special significance in the representation of the past. The ESMA – Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (Navy Mechanics' School) – is one such site, and it plays a significant role in the cultural memory of the most recent Argentine dictatorship. The ESMA, as the clandestine detention centre with the largest number of prisoners, and one which was situated within the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, has remained a disproportionate burden on a nation with a traumatic past. The longstanding polemic over its use under democracy has included suggestions that it should be demolished, while more recently, the site has been set aside for a museum of memory, for which progress, at the time of writing, continues to be slow. The ESMA is a site of memory which stands for all the horror of the *Proceso*; the torture, the disappearances, and military repression in general. Nevertheless I shall contend that while the ESMA may be perceived as 'containing' memory, in fact it has become a photographic icon onto which issues of memory have been projected.

In this chapter, I argue that photographs of the ESMA, which are numerous and continue to circulate widely nearly twenty-five years after the end of the dictatorship, have a metonymic function in which they are made to symbolise the totality of the 'dirty war', much in the way that Brink (2000) has described in relation to images of Nazi concentration camps. During the CONADEP investigation Enrique Shore photographed the interior of the ESMA, a site

which few Argentines had seen and even fewer had survived to testify about. The iconic view of the ESMA, however – rather like the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ gate of Auschwitz – is its imposing, white, columned front, topped by the Navy insignia. Multiple, remarkably similar images of the outside of the building are in existence, to the degree that this striking façade has become a trope of memory work. In this instance, as is commonly the case, rather than one single image, the term icon refers to a generic group of images, in which ‘certain elements are repeated over and over, from image to image, so that varying subjects, times, and locations, the basic scene becomes a familiar staple, a visual cliché’ (Perlmutter 1998: 11).

Furthermore, this type of image has been appropriated in a variety of ways which contribute to the ESMA’s iconic status, many of which themselves involve the use of images. For example, by attaching photographs of the disappeared and silhouettes to the railings, the site has been ritualised, as in the work of practitioner Marcelo Brodsky, whose photographs will also form the subject of the sixth chapter of this thesis. Additionally, Argentine artist León Ferrari has created a collage of the façade of the ESMA superimposed on a detail of a painting of the Last Judgment by fifteenth century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. In the painting, demons and monsters are torturing and killing people, in an obvious parallel to the events that happened inside the ESMA at the end of the twentieth century, and clearly a reference to the complicity of the Catholic Church in state terrorism. The ESMA, therefore, functions as a backdrop for statements about human rights and the importance of memory in a process whereby meaning is mediated by the use of photographic images.

Photographs of the ESMA function as memory icons: Hariman and Lucaites have identified the tendency to reappropriate, redeploy and reinterpret these visual symbols as a key feature of iconicity (2007: 37). Moreover, they act as ‘nonverbal metonymies’, ‘fistulae or holes through which the past discharges into the present’ (Runia 2006; 16); they are directly linked to and stand in for the traumatic past, the past that does not wish to pass, as Jelin calls it (2003: viii). The ESMA images then, are not so much a piece of the past, but part of

the present in which the legacy of the dictatorship of the past remains unresolved. While there is no longer the threat of the physical entity of the ESMA being razed to the ground as part of former President Menem's strategy of 'reconciliation', there remains the question of the effect of its symbolic value.<sup>1</sup> This chapter explores a particular place of memory in Buenos Aires, and as such will be informed by, and at times pose a challenge to, the canonical work of Pierre Nora (1989) on such sites. While, for Nora, the attention focused on the site is a sign of the disappearance of 'true' memory, others (Huysen 2003; Runia 2006) seek to position such interest in the context of the contemporary preoccupation with remembrance, without necessarily mourning the loss of memory. How are images of the ESMA set up as icons and what do they stand for in the memory of the dictatorship? If the ESMA stands for state terror and in artistic and symbolic terms 'memory' or 'hell', does this erase the complex nature of the 'dirty war' and reduce it to one site, one version of the past? What is the role of photography in the mediation of significant buildings and the creation of meanings surrounding them? I will explore the metonymical function of images of the ESMA in the memory of the dictatorship, arguing that despite the dangers of collapsing the complexities of a traumatic period into one visual symbol, such representations may be employed as a graspable tool with which to remember the violence of the past.

### **The Iconic ESMA**

The ESMA, a naval training college, was founded in 1924 on ground ceded to the Navy by the capital's civil authorities and is situated on the Avenida del Libertador in the north of Buenos Aires. It is surrounded by a wealthy suburb and a wide, busy road. The main building, with its white columns, is the outward face of the Navy in Buenos Aires, but the property extends over several hectares of other buildings and ground, surrounded by fences (figs 4, 5). Simpson and Bennett offer a description of the appearance of the ESMA to outsiders, as well as commenting on its location in the capital city;



fig. 4. Alexia Richardson, exterior of ESMA building in Buenos Aires, 2004

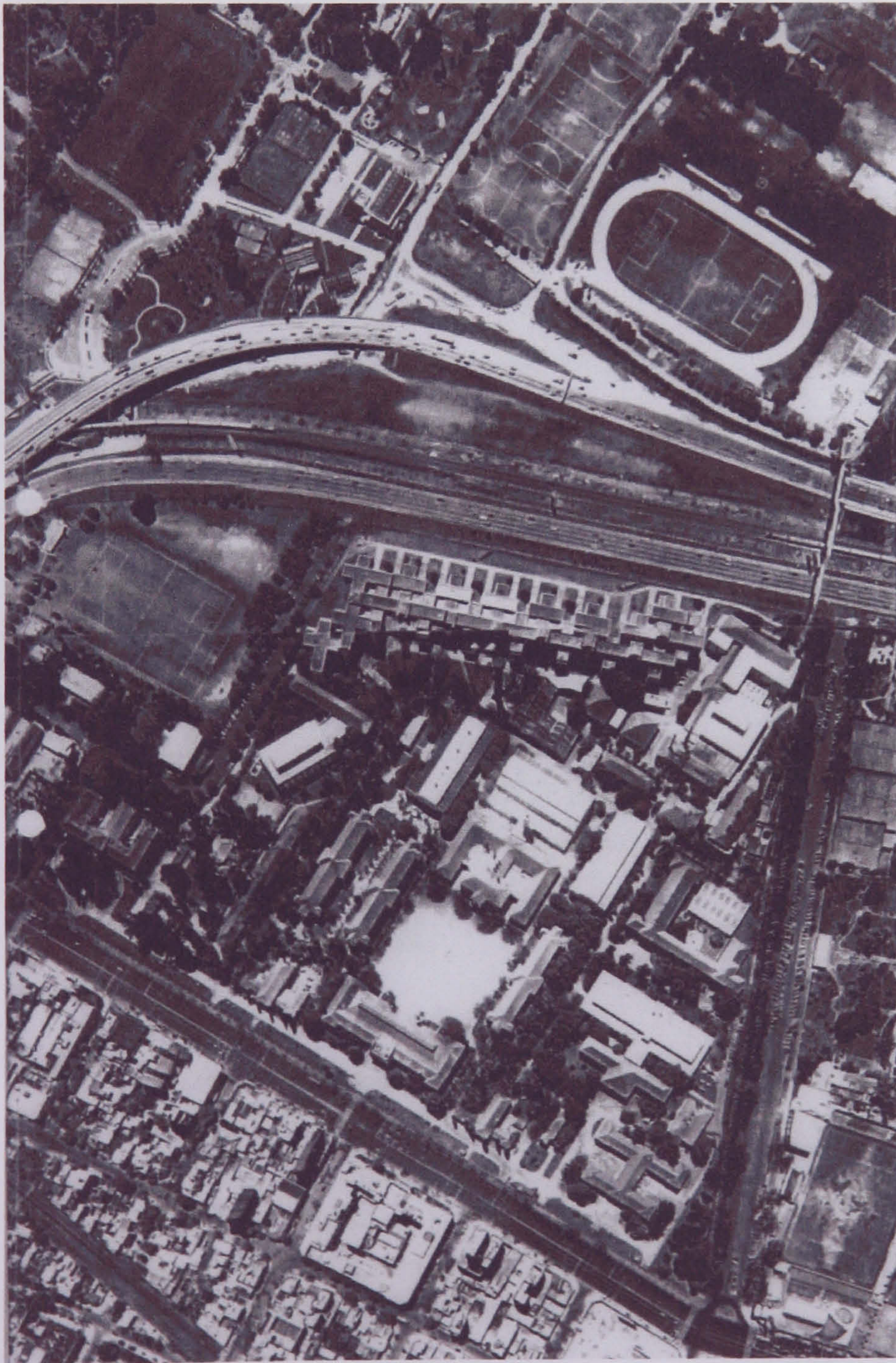


fig. 5 Aerial view of the ESMA, n.d. (from the Argentine government website, Espacio para la memoria [Space for Memory])

ESMA is a splendidly smart set of buildings in one of the better districts of Buenos Aires. Its white walls and brown shutters have an aura of intelligently applied discipline – very much the Argentine Navy’s self-image – and its trim lawns and pleasant flower-beds appear to indicate a greater sense of humanity than would be found at, say, an Army barracks.... It would make more sense in many ways if the Navy’s main training establishment were sited at one of its bases – Puerto Belgrano, for instance, or Mar del Plata. But since each of the Argentine armed forces has believed from 1930 onwards that it had a political persona as well as a purely military one, it is important to be represented in strength in the nation’s capital. ESMA was part of that representation.

(Simpson and Bennett: 1986: 91)

In this brief description we can also identify a parallel between the appearance and physical structure of the ESMA and the institution of the Navy. An outwardly respectable front was clearly a focus for the military, whatever practices took place behind closed doors.

Additionally, the CONADEP report describes the interior layout of the buildings in detail, based on the March 1984 visit of the Commission accompanied by survivors of the camp.<sup>2</sup> The principal areas relevant to the Commission were the ‘*salón Dorado*’ (Gold room), where taskforce planning took place, the ‘*Capucha*’ (hood) in the attic, where prisoners were kept with their heads covered, and the ‘*Pañol*’ (storeroom) where items looted from detainees’ homes were stored:

Posteriormente se reconoce a ‘*Capucha*’ donde el testigo Muñoz identifica el lugar efectivo de su reclusión y lo propio hace López. Anticipadamente se describen otros lugares, como la existencia de una escalera angosta de cemento y un tanque de agua, el ‘*Pañol*’ (lugar donde era depositado lo sustraído en las casas de los detenidos) y la ‘*pecera*’ (lugar donde [...] los detenidos realizaban distintas tareas).

(CONADEP 1984)

Later on they recognized the ‘*Capucha*’, where the witness Muñoz identified the actual place of his confinement, as did López. They described other places in advance, such as a narrow concrete staircase and a water tank, the ‘storeroom’ (where property taken from prisoners’ homes was kept) and the ‘*fish tank*’ (where [...] the prisoners carried out various tasks).<sup>3</sup>

The ESMA was the largest of the military regime’s clandestine detention centres and was under the control of the Navy. More specifically, it was the

domain of task force 3.3/2 headed by Admiral Rubén Chamorro. Detainees 'disappeared' into the ESMA from the beginning of the dictatorship, and by March 1978, according to CONADEP, over 4700 prisoners had passed through the centre, the vast majority of whom did not survive. *Desaparecidos* were given numbers and often hooded or blindfolded for long periods of time. Torture was routine for all detainees and began immediately after arrival. Most prisoners were, sooner or later, 'transferred', a euphemism for their murder, often by being drugged and thrown from aircraft into the nearby Río de la Plata estuary. The ESMA was also one of the detention centres in which pregnant women were held until they gave birth, when they were killed and their children given up for illegal adoption to military families; witnesses testified to the personal involvement of Chamorro, the School's director, in this aspect of repression (Arditti 1999: 24). Perhaps one of the strangest aspects of detention at the site was that a small group of prisoners with relevant skills were chosen to work on a 'newspaper', producing digests of the daily newspapers which were even sent outside the camp (Feitlowitz 1998: 46-47). The ESMA, then, formed the hub of the Navy's involvement in torture and the so-called Process of National Reorganisation.

Unsurprisingly, the iconic status of the ESMA itself is hardly disputed. Feitlowitz notes that, 'If one building can be said to symbolize the genocide, it is the Navy Mechanics School' (1998: 172). Marcelo Brodsky confirms that the ESMA 'se ha convertido en un símbolo de la represión y la violencia del Estado' ('has been turned into a symbol of repression and State violence', 2005: 44). The scenes of commemoration and protest that have taken place around the detention centre also confirm its symbolic status as the most important site in the nation where violence actually took place. Naturally, the Plaza de Mayo, with its central location, still wins out as the foremost political and civic centre, but along with the Plaza, the ESMA has been a focus of events in Buenos Aires marking the anniversaries of the coup on 24 March in successive years, and on that day in 2004 President Néstor Kirchner formally announced its conversion into a Museum of Memory on the site.<sup>4</sup> The notoriety of the ESMA; its reputation as a particularly deadly camp; the large

number of prisoners who were held there; and its imposing structure and location in the capital city all contribute to the emblematic status of the site.

Thus, images of the ESMA are frequently used as a 'shorthand' or iconic illustration of the 'dirty war'. The typical photograph of the ESMA shows the front façade of the main building: a tall, immaculately painted white columned edifice set in well-maintained grounds. Far from being itself a 'clandestine' site, the ESMA was the public face of the Navy in Buenos Aires; while the events within its walls remained, for the most part, unknown. As Brink (2000: 135) has pointed out with reference to images of Nazi concentration camps, photographs of such places incite strong emotional reactions and tend to be accepted as an unambiguous reality, rather than an interpretation open to analysis. The gates of Auschwitz, as Marianne Hirsch confirms, have become an unequivocal symbol of the entrance to horror, even though, after the expansion of the site, they were located in the centre of the camp, rather than at its boundary, and most Jews were not, in fact, taken through them (2001: 17). Brink's commentary is particularly pertinent given her assertion that the horrific, and widely disseminated, Holocaust images of 1945 are 'latently present' in all images of emaciated people behind barbed wire (2000: 143). There are few images of Argentine prisoners, not surprising given their 'disappeared' status, and none of crowds of skeletal victims; yet the significance of the places where they were tortured and killed parallels the images of the European camps. Gates and entrance ways illustrate symbolically the border of understanding for those not directly affected by torture, and show them where so many went in and did not return; or, in the words of Hirsch, 'gates are the thresholds that represent the difficult access to the narratives of dehumanization and extermination' (2001: 17). The border between inside and outside – the visible, acceptable exterior and the barely comprehensible events of the interior – is endowed with special significance in post-dictatorship Argentina.

Photographer Marcelo Brodsky, whose work has largely focused on the memory of Argentine repression, has taken pictures both inside and outside the ESMA. His images of the front of the ESMA building with photographs of

the disappeared and silhouettes, representing victims, tied to the railings (Brotsky 2005: 54, 113), are examples of an appropriation of the symbolic site to expose memory and human rights issues.<sup>5</sup> The images with the photographs of *desaparecidos* (fig. 6) combine two Argentine memory icons, as the latter images are already familiar from the protests of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and other human rights uses (Grant 2003). It is not made explicit if the people in the images were actually in the ESMA itself, or if they are rather 'generic' images of disappeared people who were perhaps held in other detention centres. The banner of images partially blocks the front of the notorious building, foregrounding its relationship to the issue of memory and human rights. Plus, the viewer is denied access to the threshold of the ESMA, being instead forced to confront evidence, in the form of images, of what went on inside. In this context, the ESMA provides a backdrop to memory actions in the city.



fig. 6. Marcelo Brodsky, ESMA with photographs of the disappeared, 2005

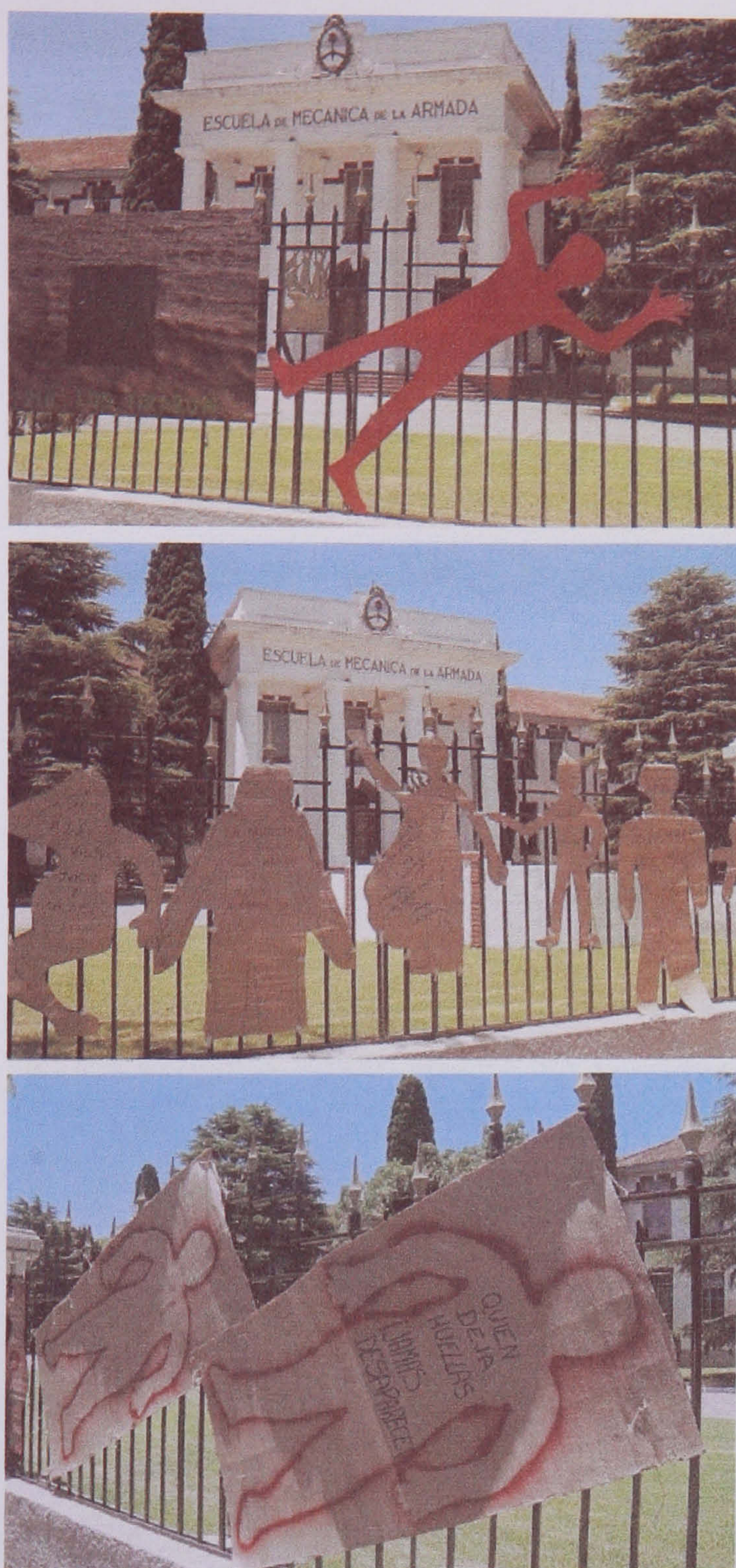


fig. 7. Marcelo Brodsky, *Silhouetazo* at the ESMA, 2005

The images with silhouettes also echo a famous protest, known as the *siluetazo*, which took place at the end of the dictatorship, in which human-size outlines labelled with the names of the disappeared were painted on walls in public places (fig. 7; Brodsky 2005: 112-113, Taylor 1997: 190). The cardboard silhouettes were a particularly resonant way to express the absence of the disappeared themselves which, to judge by the recycling of the idea in 2004, has not lost its power. Brodsky's photographs of appropriations of the ESMA building, therefore, are formed of layers of already-familiar memory objects with indexical qualities – that is, the silhouettes and the photographs both function as traces of the disappeared themselves and signal the traumatic events which happened within the

ESMA's walls. Moreover, the physical attaching of artefacts to the boundary of the ESMA was a form of social performance which would draw the attention of passers-by to the site and remind them of its connection to the disappeared and their fate, making strange this everyday building in their lived experience.<sup>6</sup> The performance is then given a further dimension through its subsequent circulation in the form of photographic images. In this way, the past is made visible through different interventions which add to the outward appearance of a building to signal what happened within it in recent history.



fig. 8, Marcelo Brodsky, *Los Campos II*, temporary urban installation at the ESMA, 2005

In a further image, Brodsky photographs the ESMA partially blocked from view by a sign in the extreme foreground (fig. 8; Brodsky 2001: 46-47). The sign is headed 'Lugares de Memoria que no debemos olvidar jamás' (places of memory which we must never forget), and this is followed by a list of the major clandestine detention centres in Argentina. It is a direct replica of the

sign which stands outside the Wittenburgplatz underground train station in Berlin, which reads 'Orte des Schreckens, die wir niemals vergessen dürfen' (places of horror which we must never forget) above a list of Nazi concentration camps. Although the German sign, which was erected in 1967, remains there to this day, while the Argentine one was a temporary installation which was later removed to the Centro Cultural de Recoleta, we can clearly see in Argentina the shadow of the Holocaust which, as Brink (2000: 136) indicates, tends to fall on discussions of violent memory in other national contexts. The installations emphasise the importance of remembering, naming, and signalling significant sites and add to their iconic status.

Both the material structure of the ESMA, and photographic images of it, are icons of Argentina's traumatic past, where the past itself inhabits the present. The images are one step removed from the building itself, so they are a link to the actual site, but on the other hand they are also easily circulated and therefore more widely viewed by a greater audience. Their portable nature increases the spatial and temporal disruption which memory artefacts bring to the contemporary preoccupation with the past, while their status as a trace of the real mirrors the physical connection of the ESMA site to the dictatorial past. Certain sites – which are not limited solely to the ESMA but also include, for example, the Plaza de Mayo as well as other major detention centres – have a particular resonance in memory debates.

For Pierre Nora, writing of French memorial practices, the contemporary preoccupation with memory which is partly expressed in the concern over memory places is fundamentally misplaced. He expresses a profound pessimism about memory culture, stating bluntly, 'We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left' (1989: 7). *Lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, are contrasted with *milieux de mémoire*, true environments of memory, which, according to Nora, have been lost in the modern age. 'These *lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiment of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it' (1989: 12). Memory, then, has

been replaced by history, which far from complementing it, is in direct opposition to it. 'History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it' (Nora 1989: 9). Rather than arising spontaneously and naturally, therefore, memory has to be artificially created through the obsession with museums, memorials, archives, commemorations, and other, in Nora's view, inauthentic memory rituals.

More recently, however, not all commentators have shared such scepticism, or are in accord with the view of memory slipping out of our grasp. Andreas Huyssen, for example, criticises Nora's nostalgic view of a previous 'golden age' of 'true memory' (2003: 96), although he agrees that the acceleration of history is a feature of a society which is increasingly reliant on technological advances. Although there is a tendency to perceive memory as in a state of crisis and threatened by technology, memory may also be seen as constantly renewing and re-enacting itself through the apparent crises (Sturken 1997: 17). Contrasting with Sturken's grounded interpretations of specific memory projects, Eelco Runia is a theorist working at a more conceptual level, whose insights will also be pertinent for this analysis. Rather than lamenting a lack of authenticity in contemporary memory places, it is my concern to explore the ability of photographs of such places to facilitate memory work within the context of Latin America, where both memory and history have at times been suppressed.

Huyssen and Eelco Runia concur on the significance of such artefacts and places of memory. For Huyssen,

Untold recent and not so recent pasts impinge upon the present through modern media of reproduction like photography, film, recorded music, and the Internet, as well as through the explosion of historical scholarship and an ever more voracious museal culture. The past has become part of the present in ways simply unimaginable in earlier centuries. As a result, temporal boundaries have weakened just as the experiential dimension of space has shrunk as a result of modern means of transportation and communication.

(2003: 2)

This, again, is the everlasting past. Photographs, which preserve an image of the past and allow for its continual reproduction and circulation, are one factor

contributing to this weakening. Runia (2006) is also concerned with the translation of crucial temporal events into the spatial plane and, as I will explain further below, he highlights the role of metonymy in understanding such sites. Runia locates the contemporary mania for memory in a desire for 'presence', which is defined as "being in touch" – either literally or figuratively – with people, things, events, and feelings that made you into the person you are' (2006: 5). Photographs are, both literally and figuratively, one way of putting people 'in touch' with the past, either that which directly affected them or, for example, part of the history of the region.

Huyssen and Runia appear to diverge somewhat in the tropes they use to illustrate their ideas of the temporal and spatial manifestations of memory, but they share basic concerns with the space of the city as redolent of memory discourses. Huyssen's metaphor of the palimpsest is significant enough to feature in the title of his 2003 work *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Taking Berlin as his example, Huyssen describes the palimpsest as follows:

a disparate city-text that is being rewritten while previous text is preserved, traces are restored, erasures documented, all of it resulting in a complex web of historical markers that point to the continuing heterogeneous life of a vital city that is as ambivalent of its built past as it is of its urban future.

(2003: 81)

Runia compares 'present-day reality' and 'the discipline of history' to a city, but notes, 'I wouldn't call such a city a palimpsest: a city is not *uniformly* written over, but locally, irregularly, opportunistically, erratically written over' (2006: 9). Yet Huyssen is also clear that changes in the city are not homogeneous or consistent, and nor is every building a palimpsest (2003: 7). There is a blending of their ideas, then, in the face of the physical and metaphorical expressions of memory in the contemporary city, and it is one which – whether palimpsest or metonymy – does not need to be limited to the textual, but also extends to the visual. The specific history of the ESMA and the knowledge of what happened there are allied to the symbolic legacy of the dictatorship, giving the ESMA an iconic value in which it stands for the memory of state terrorism in the present. I will turn, then, from Brodsky's

images, which visualise this dynamic, to other photographic representations of the ESMA which may illuminate the attempt to explore its lasting significance in Argentine collective memory.

### **Inside the ESMA**

While it is the façade of the ESMA which is instantly recognisable and tends to be used to illustrate at a glance the horrors of the dictatorship, a body of images of the interior of the site also exist. It is my intention here to contrast an example of an internal image of the detention centre with the iconic view of the outside, suggesting that the rarely-seen interior may be seen as standing in for the secrets of the period of state terrorism itself. The CONADEP commission conducted a visit to the ESMA on 9 March 1984 which is described in its report. The commissioners were accompanied by survivors who had been held in the ESMA, and a photographer, Enrique Shore, who recorded the inspection. The resulting images, undertaken as part of an evidence-gathering exercise for the truth commission, have also found their way into exhibitions and web sites, both as artefacts of cultural memory and as illustrations to the discussion of the future museum plans.<sup>7</sup>



fig. 9 Enrique Shore, ESMA interior, taken at the visit of CONADEP to the site, 1984

This image, an interior, depicts a young man sitting, clasping his knees, in an attic. The room is bare, with a sloping roof and light entering from long, low windows near the floor. The person in the image is situated at the furthest point from the photographer and is looking away, down, out of the window. The solitary figure, ignoring the camera, and apparently lost in thought, piques our curiosity. Who is he and what is his relationship to this space? It is probable that the man in the photograph is Víctor Bastera, who worked with photographs in the ESMA itself.

A graphics worker by profession, Bastera was used by the navy to falsify IDs and take photographs of both detainees and enforcers. From 1980 onwards, he managed to hide a great many pictures and documents, which he brought as evidence to the trial [of the junta].

(Feitlowitz 1998: 216)

Bastera himself testifies that he took photographs of the navy staff in order to make documents, but did not personally photograph the prisoners, who had their photographs taken by a military photographer. He found the photographs and began to hide negatives in his clothes and gradually take them out of the building on the occasions when, as a trusted prisoner, he was temporarily allowed out of the centre (Brodsky 2005: 31).

An article in the newspaper *Página/12* recalls the visit as Shore's images were used in a 2004 exhibition organised by Memoria Abierta:

En una imagen se lo ve al fotógrafo Víctor Bastera, quien estuvo detenido cuatro años en la ESMA y sacó algunas fotos de pruebas contra torturadores. Bastera se sentó en un costado de la "capuchita", para mostrar lo sucedido. "Quería mostrar cómo los tenían en el piso", cuenta Shore. "Las fotos son una forma de decir 'esto pasó, estos fueron los lugares', para la gente que no lo vivió", cuenta Shore.

('Cuando las imágenes lo dicen todo', 20 November 2004)

In one image the photographer Víctor Bastera may be seen, who was detained in the ESMA for four years and took some photos as evidence against the torturers. Bastera sat down in a corner of the 'capuchita' ('little hood') to show what it was like. 'I wanted to show how they were held on the floor', recalls Shore. The photos are a way of saying "this happened, it was in this place", for those people who didn't live through it themselves, says Shore.

In the same article, Shore emphasises the investigatory nature of the visit, and the status of his photographs as evidence; 'Si la gente había declarado en la Conadep, había hecho una descripción. Entonces, se iba a constatar físicamente si la descripción coincidía con el espacio físico. Era una prueba legal' ('If people made a declaration to CONADEP, a description was made. Then, they went to confirm physically if the description matched the physical space. It was a legal test'). Information in the *Nunca Más* report states that while part of the attic space was a storage area used for keeping goods looted from prisoners' homes, part of it was taken up by an L-shaped enclosure known as the *Capucha* (Hood) where prisoners were kept in tiny cells formed by hardboard partitions. A further corner of the attic was *La Pecera* (Fishbowl), where certain trusted prisoners worked on administrative tasks for part of the day. The attic, then, was crucial to the working of the centre and the image discussed here shows the aftermath of political violence for those with knowledge of the context.

It could be said that a view inside the ESMA is in itself a statement of opposition to the torture that took place there. During the dictatorship, all prisoners were hooded on arrival and remained so for the majority of their stay, unable to see their surroundings. Just as the majority of Argentine civilians and the outside world never saw inside the ESMA, neither did many of its inhabitants. Moreover, despite the location of the ESMA and other clandestine detention centres in metropolitan Buenos Aires, a culture of fear and pervasive self-censorship prevented acknowledgement of what was happening behind its barred exterior (Feitlowitz 1998:150-151, Guzmán Bouvard 1994: 28). The reaction of 'self-blinding', or 'percepticide', as it has been termed by Diana Taylor (1997: 259-60), was characteristic of the atmosphere of the *Proceso*. Taylor was referring to the atmosphere of terror which led to citizens denying all knowledge of disappearances and other human rights abuses, even when they took place within sight or earshot. Instead, too frightened to acknowledge what was happening, they accepted the thin veneer of normality presented by the military. Internal images of the ESMA share with their more famous counterparts a particular burden as

material traces of the site of torture, although they do not function as particular icons of the Argentine dictatorship. Rather, their importance lies in their evidential value, since not even the victims were familiar with the appearance of the interior of the ESMA, emphasising the need to open up its secrets to the outside. More widely, the history of the dictatorship in itself gradually becomes common knowledge and is more openly talked about, in part through the circulation of visual artefacts.

Even after the return to democracy, and despite the protests of relatives' groups, the atmosphere of denial continued and the symbolic value of the ESMA was repressed. Marguerite Feitlowitz (1998: 173-174) explains the continuing use of the ESMA as a naval training school under democracy, and the use of its playing fields and swimming pool by local schools, including those which had lost some of their own pupils in the dictatorship. For Feitlowitz, the continuance of the ESMA as a sports facility and military installation made it 'a bastion of cynicism, bad faith, and defiance' (1998: 173). It was a symbol of impunity and denial about the past; opponents of this view, naturally, spoke of reconciliation and pragmatism. Recently, as already stated, the state has publicly acknowledged the history of the ESMA and has committed to creating a museum of memory on the site. This slow process, which is participated in by various human rights organisations each with a slightly differing agenda, is described in detail by involved actors such as the representatives of the Memoria Abierta archive.<sup>6</sup> Until the museum is open to the public, images of the interior of the building will retain a unique evidentiary function. Nevertheless, while a view inside the ESMA may somewhat demystify the icon, it still places a strong emphasis on the significance of the site for the memory of violence in Argentina. In short, internal images of the ESMA have not overtaken the notoriety of the iconic view of the outside.

The CONADEP images open up sites about which Argentines were for many years in denial, literally turning away from, but which continue to surface in memory debates even thirty years after the coup. Shore's image of an empty room participates in debates about the future use of that material space by circulating as a rarely-seen insight into the interior of a torture centre. As

Runia has explored, such memory artefacts perform a metonymic role in representing a larger issue. Metonymy, a wording arising from the Greek meaning literally 'change of name', is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'a figure of speech which consists in substituting for the name of a thing the name of an attribute of it or of something closely related'. Common examples include 'the Crown' for 'the monarchy' and sayings such as 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. Yet, as Runia states, use of metonymy is deceptively simple, so widespread as to pass almost unnoticed, and not limited exclusively to the linguistic field (2006: 16). Rather, it is a feature of memory discourse in which iconic images, sites, and even people are made to stand for the whole history of a particular period. There is, therefore, a complex structural relationship between images, in this case of a clandestine detention centre, and the memory of the dictatorship.

Echoing Runia, Ewa Domanska writes of the 'past that is somehow still present, that will not go away, or, rather, of which we cannot rid ourselves' (2006: 346). She locates the absent bodies of the Argentine *desaparecidos* in this 'ambivalent and liminal space' (2006: 346). Domanska's recognition of the presence of non-human actors in the memory of violence chimes with the concern given to the physical artefact in recent work on photography and memory (Domanska 2006: 348; Edwards and Hart 2004), and her awareness of the Argentine context is also important. However, one could question whether this contextual grounding in fact forms a pretext for the more theoretically-inflected objectives in the essay, rather than being a true examination of the position of the *desaparecidos* as such. It is my intention to ground an analysis of material objects in the context of the lived experience of Argentines, rather than as an abstract concept. A variety of physical and visual entities, including buildings, but also illustrations and photographs, function as metonymies which stand for wider historical periods which continue to resonate in the present. They are, in Runia's words, 'places where history can get a hold of you... storehouses of "presence"' (2006: 13). Internal and external images of the ESMA reveal its position as a reflection of the military regime itself; concerned with outward show and respectability, but concealing hidden horror. As such, the status of images of the ESMA as

shards of the past in the present, makes it unsurprising that artists have redeployed them in memory works as symbols of the dictatorship.

### **Appropriating Images of the ESMA**

The iconic status of the ESMA is further solidified by reworkings of photographic images of the site, such as those produced by Argentine artist León Ferrari. Ferrari's career has spanned six decades and has been deeply engaged with political developments in his native country. He went into exile after the 1976 coup and lived in Brazil until 1991, when he returned to Buenos Aires. His personal connection to the traumas of the military dictatorship is further emphasised as his son was disappeared by the regime.<sup>9</sup> Ferrari's critique has not simply been levelled at the dictatorship itself; rather it extends to the ideological contexts of torture and repression. Indeed, criticism of religion, in particular the Catholic Church, has been a recurrent theme in his work and has at times led to threats and attempts to close or destroy his exhibitions.<sup>10</sup>

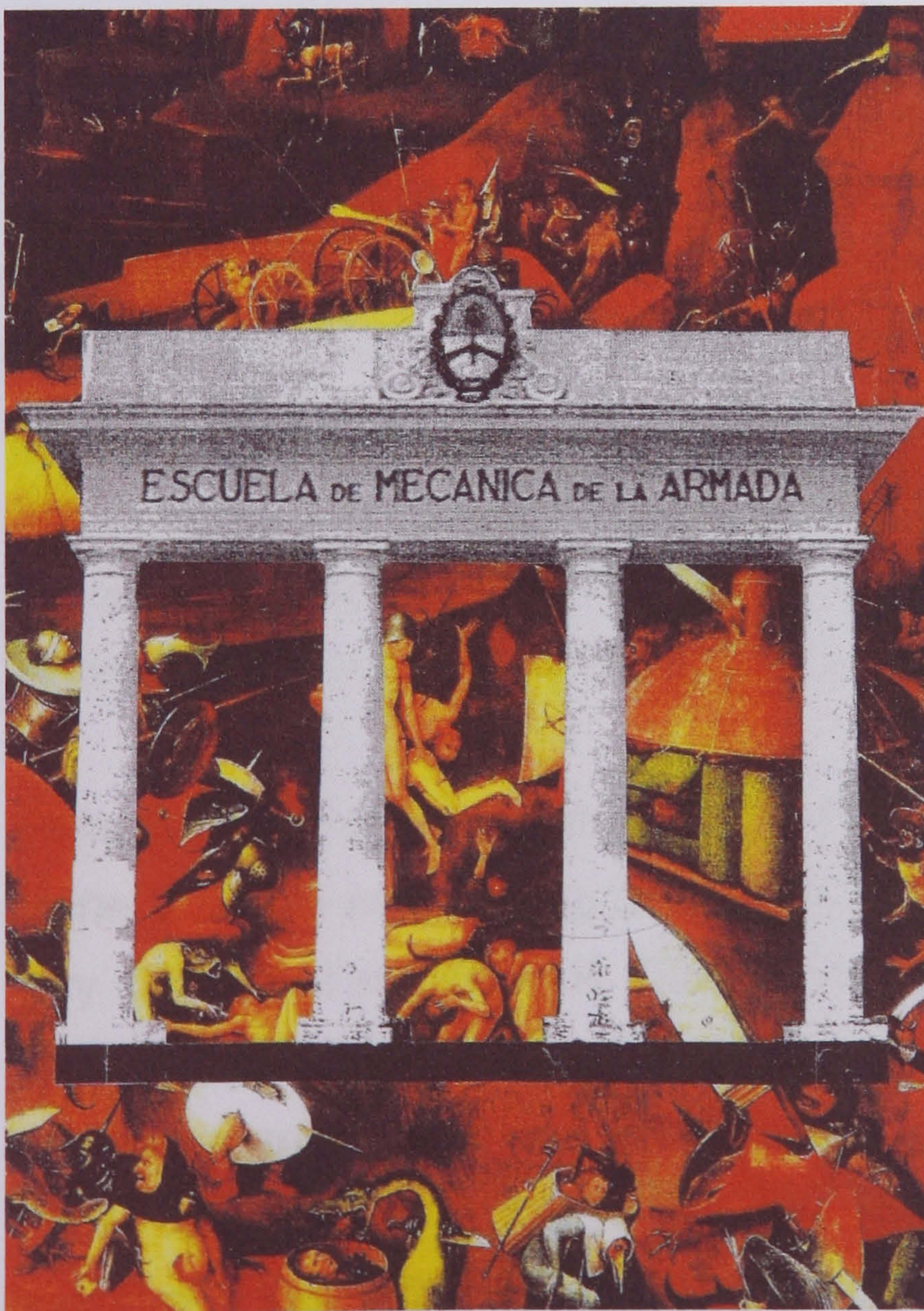


fig. 10. León Ferrari, *sin título*, collage, 1995

In one example, Ferrari's untitled 1995 work consists of the façade of the ESMA in the foreground, set against a background of part of Hieronymus Bosch's *Last Judgment* (Brodsky 2005: 120). The quality of the ESMA reproduction seems to be that of a photocopy, its slightly grainy appearance contrasting with the deep colours of the background. It could have been cut from one of the numerous newspaper articles dealing with the aftermath of the dictatorship. It is centred on the collage and the Low Countries' painting is visible between the white columns. The hellish reds, oranges and black tones of the painting form a sinister backdrop to the clean white columns of the detention centre. Bosch's image, here re-appropriated in a late twentieth-century context, depicts twisted human figures undergoing a variety of tortures practised by devils, humanoid and monstrous creatures with implements including a giant knife. Ferrari's collage makes a blunt commentary on the uses of the ESMA and on the 'dirty war' more generally, which illustrates and further perpetuates the ESMA's iconic status. In Argentina, there is little need for an explanatory caption or title, or for further images of detention centres; the front of the ESMA building stands in for all mistreatment of *desaparecidos* and for the 'hell' of torture. Such comparisons have been drawn by those involved in the repression itself; Arditti reports the testimony of a camp survivor who recalls how her captors told her 'We are God', emphasising their power over life and death and their ability to make final judgments in the detention centres (1998: 17). Additionally, the source of the older painting links Ferrari's image to criticism of the lack of positive action against state terror by the Catholic Church, a recurring theme in his work.

Ferrari's choice of a fifteenth-century work by Bosch to accompany an image of the ESMA is an intriguing one. At first glance, the contexts of the two are very different. Yet, Walter S. Gibson notes the corporeal emphasis in such works, which parallels the bodily torture of the Argentine dirty war; 'For Bosch, too, the agony of Hell is mainly physical...The variety of torments seems infinite' (1973: 55). In Argentina, also, the armed forces were horrifyingly inventive in their infliction of physical pain with instruments such as the cattle

prod. Charles de Tornay reiterates Bosch's concern with the earthly realities of pain and death in the *Last Judgment*; 'In the centre panel Bosch humanizes the iconography of the *Last Judgment*; the divine judgement loses its importance and the human theme fills almost the whole picture' (1966: 33). The parallel with human infliction of pain and suffering, then, is apt. Ferrari draws comparisons between the, in his understanding, violent nature of Christianity and the violence committed by the avowedly Catholic junta members and their followers.<sup>11</sup> In fact, his own website contains a page detailing his involvement with the group CIHABAPAI, 'Club de impíos herejes apóstatas blasfemos ateos paganos agnósticos e infieles' (Club of the impious, heretics, apostates, blasphemers, atheists, pagans, agnostics and faithless) which, in 1997, appealed to the Pope to repudiate the existence of Hell.<sup>12</sup> The gesture leaves no doubt as to Ferrari's opinion of mainstream religion.

How does a collage featuring the infernal gateway of the ESMA function within the Argentine present? Here it is helpful to return to the tensions between the view of Nora and that of Runia. Regarding the presentation of the past within the discipline of history, Nora states that 'From the chroniclers of the Middle Ages to today's practitioners of "total" history, the entire tradition has developed as the controlled exercise and automatic deepening of memory, the reconstitution of a past without lacunae or faults' (1989: 9). He opposes this modern historical memory, which he characterises as archival and highly concerned with the 'visibility of the image' (1989: 13) to 'true' memory. By contrast, Runia also draws on the notion of lacunae, but to suggest that these, far from being obliterated, are formed by the employment of material artefacts with a strong connection to the present. Images, then, function as 'a kind of "leak" in time through which "presence" wells up from the past into the present' (2006: 16). Going further, he stresses that 'all monuments have at least a metonymic strand' (2006: 16). The site of the ESMA, as former detention centre and future museum of memory, is necessarily a metonymy standing for wider concerns in post dictatorial Argentina.

In Ferrari's image, the ESMA is a hole opening onto the past, which is represented not in the form of a specific historical instance but as a tapestry of horror. Without permitting shades of grey, it depicts the depths to which human nature can sink despite an outward show of religious piety. The collage draws attention to the dichotomies inherent in the self-presentation of the military junta and the actual events of the dictatorship through an examination of one major symbol of this. In other words, the neatly presented outside of the ESMA site is contrasted with the knowledge of what happened inside the buildings. Similarly, the efforts of the junta to appear just and respectable in the eyes of the world – for example, by hosting the World Cup in 1978 and by imposing censorship on the news media – are juxtaposed with the concealed human rights abuses which were actually taking place there. If the ESMA, as it is transformed into a museum and memorial building, is evidently a key point in the memory landscape of Buenos Aires, images of it also perform a metonymic function. This is not to say that they are a straightforward window into the past, but that with their status as shards or fragments of the past they enshrine the persistence of the past in the present.

## **Conclusions**

The site of the Navy Mechanics' School is a clear example of the past that does not wish to pass in Argentina, and the circulation of images of it is one way in which the complex temporality of memory is expressed. The ESMA carries a particular symbolic and cultural weight which leads it to be regarded as a 'container' of memory or as an icon which stands for the whole of the period of state terrorism. Indeed, the concrete facts of torture and forced disappearance of persons which took place within its walls are enough to justify continued interest in the physical locality of the ESMA; nevertheless there were many such sites in Argentina in the last dictatorship. The prominent size and location of the ESMA seem to grant it the power to represent the rest, including in photographic form.

I have argued that images of the ESMA perform a metonymic role in which they act as particular temporal links to the past, that is, as objects of the past

in the present. While the images of the inside of the detention centre taken on behalf of the CONADEP Commission give an insight into the rarely-seen inside of the buildings, it is the typical photograph of the imposing front of the ESMA which is most easily recognised. As is typical with iconic images, it has been reappropriated in a variety of forms, including the placing of other images and the redeployment as a collage. At its extreme, the ESMA stands for hell, or differently expressed, for the unrepresentable aspects of repression which took place in the nation under the military junta. The continuing debate over the future of the ESMA suggests that the frequency of such image circulation is unlikely to diminish.

The iconicity of images of the ESMA, then, is one reason why reading about Argentina in the early twentieth century 'may sometimes resemble travelling through a time tunnel' (Jelin 2003: xiii). Such photographs are a constant reminder of the presence of the past in contemporary Argentina and the continuing legacy of state terror. While some, such as Barbie Zelizer (1998), would warn against the overuse of a limited number of photographs of key sites, which may reduce the complexity of the historical events discussed, I suggest that icons may assist in creating a visual and virtual topography of memory sites in the city. They also indicate that far from being irretrievably gone, elements of the past are very much present within the contemporary built environment and lived experience of many Argentine citizens, more than thirty years after the military coup. For Peru, memories of violence are even fresher in the public consciousness. My analysis will now move from an iconic site in the Argentine capital, to another iconic site far from Peru's metropolis which, nevertheless, has deeply affected the commemoration of political conflict in that nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Menem made the suggestion in 1998, to the outrage of human rights organizations, see for example the article in *Clarín*, 'Demolerán la Esma y colocarán un monumento por la unión nacional' (The ESMA Will Be Demolished and Replaced by a Monument to National Unity', 8 January 1998, <<http://www.clarin.com/diario/1998/01/08/t-00211d.htm>> [accessed 22 November 2007].

<sup>2</sup> 'Centros Clandestinos de Detención', *Nunca Más*, report of CONADEP available at <<http://www.nuncamas.org/ccd/ccd.htm>> [accessed 12 September 2007]. Floorplans of the ESMA may also be accessed at *Memoria Abierta*, 'Camino al museo',

<[http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/camino\\_al\\_museo3\\_planos\\_esma.php](http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/camino_al_museo3_planos_esma.php)> [accessed 12 September 2007].

<sup>3</sup> English translation of *Nunca Más* on the CONADEP website, <[http://www.nuncamas.org/english/library/nevagain/nevagain\\_048.htm](http://www.nuncamas.org/english/library/nevagain/nevagain_048.htm)> [accessed 27 September 2007].

<sup>4</sup> 'Kirchner en la ESMA: En nombre del Estado, vengo a pedir perdón' ('Kirchner in the ESMA: In the Name of the State, I come to ask forgiveness', *Clarín*, 24 March 2004, <<http://www.clarin.com/diario/2004/03/25/p-00301.htm>>, [accessed 22 November 2007].

<sup>5</sup> I have been unable to ascertain if the artefacts were tied specifically to the fence of the ESMA for Brodsky's purposes, or if he recorded the appropriation of the site which was taking place for other reasons.

<sup>6</sup> Public performances around sites connected to the dictatorship are, of course, closely linked to the form of protest known in Argentina as the *escrache* (Kaiser 2002), particularly associated with the children of the disappeared, in which people gather for a noisy demonstration outside the home of a torturer or other person seen as complicit with the former regime.

<sup>7</sup> Shore's photographs are accessible online on the Memoria Abierta website, <[http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/eng/galeria\\_conadep.php](http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/eng/galeria_conadep.php)> [accessed 10 September 2007], and at the government-run Espacio para la memoria website, <<http://www.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/espacioparalamemoria/#>> [accessed 15 September 2007].

<sup>8</sup> For more on the museum developments, see Brodsky (2005), and Memoria Abierta, 'El camino al museo', <[http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/camino\\_al\\_museo.php](http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/camino_al_museo.php)> [accessed 15 September 2007].

<sup>9</sup> Ferrari expands on the story of his son, a Montonero activist, in a 2004 interview with the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora* (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo – Founding Line), <[http://www.madresfundadoras.org.ar/declaraciones.shtml?sh\\_itm=a3fc8075ab7662d0a0136dc13de36171](http://www.madresfundadoras.org.ar/declaraciones.shtml?sh_itm=a3fc8075ab7662d0a0136dc13de36171)> [accessed 15 September 2007].

<sup>10</sup> See, for example news reports such as 'Atentan contra la muestra del artista plástico León Ferrari' ('Attack against the exhibition of artist León Ferrari'), *Clarín*, 31 May 2000, and 'Gas lacrimógeno, basura y pintura contra una muestra de arte pagano' ('Tear gas, rubbish and paint on pagan art exhibition'), *Página/12*, 31 May 2000.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of the role of the Catholic Church in the *Proceso*, see Mignone (1988), Arditti (1998: 26-29). Andersen (1993: 184-193) also examines the distinction between the complicity of the Church hierarchy and the resistance of some individual priests, and the subsequent persecution they endured.

<sup>12</sup> Personal website of León Ferrari, <<http://www.leonferrari.com.ar/cihabapai/index.htm>> [accessed 27 September 2007].

## **Representations of the 'Martyrs' of Uchuraccay: Revisiting an Iconic Event of the Peruvian Conflict**

On 14th May 1983, investigations ordered as part of judicial proceedings led to the discovery of a camera buried in the hills near Uchuraccay, in the province of Ayacucho, Southern Peru. The appearance of photographic equipment from the ground would be unusual anywhere, but in the desperately poor Peruvian highlands, where few would own a camera, it was a particularly strange find. Yet Uchuraccay was no longer a village that few outside the immediate region had heard of; for almost 5 months it had been the centre of intense media, political and legal scrutiny, and therefore it is perhaps most noteworthy that the camera was buried, unnoticed, for so long.

Furthermore, the film within the camera also survived its forced burial and was successfully developed to reveal nine images which gave some insight into the last moments of its owner and his companions. They were chaotic, badly framed images showing glimpses of a group of journalists from different publications who had travelled to the highlands to investigate the recent killings of some members of the guerrilla group Shining Path, and who were themselves then murdered by the inhabitants of Uchuraccay. These images, taken by photojournalist Willy Retto just before his own death, have become lasting traces of one of the most influential and controversial incidents to occur during Peru's conflict between the armed forces and Shining Path in the 1980s and 90s. It was one of the first acts of violence of the conflict to receive sustained national press coverage and has thus gained an important position in cultural memory. In an uncanny literalisation of the oft-remarked connection between photography and death, the images recorded the final moments of the journalists. Barthes famously highlighted this connection in relation to the image of the condemned Lewis Payne, 'He is dead and he is going to die...' (2000: 95-95).<sup>1</sup> But in the case of Uchuraccay, the link between death and photography was intensified, for the fate of the camera was linked to the victims in the images, who were also buried in shallow graves and later exhumed.

The literal unearthing of photographic evidence raises compelling questions – who buried the camera and why, what did the film reveal, and what do the images tell us about the circumstances of the burial? Moreover, since the images were brought to light, what light have they shed on events at Uchuraccay and on the memory of the Peruvian conflict more widely? This chapter will examine the significance of the images themselves in discussions surrounding events at Uchuraccay, and their importance to wider debates of memory in Peru, a country still dealing with the extreme violence that occurred between the Maoist guerrillas of Shining Path and the state counter-insurgency forces. It will ask what the continued circulation of these photographs can tell us about iconic images in post-conflict situations. Having first given some background to the Uchuraccay case, I will argue that the multiple attempts which have been made to mould the photographs' evidential status to serve conflicting theories about violence in Peru have only served to obscure awareness of human rights abuses in the area. In addition, the focus on one group of victims, namely the murdered journalists, has blocked the memory of another, the indigenous highlanders who also fell victim to the spiralling violence in the months following their own attack. The images have, in effect, been silenced, as their social effect has been diminished by the persistent misinterpretations foisted upon them. In contrast to the typical uses of these images, I will explore their iconic status through reference to the connection between photography and representations of death. In particular, I will draw on the work of film theorists Vivian Sobchack (2004) and Laura Marks (2000) which, I propose, is highly pertinent to the discussion of still photographs undertaken here. I suggest that, contrary to dominant readings of the images, the photographs' own agency is located in their resistance of such distorting interpretations.

### **Confusion in the Andes: The Killings at Uchuraccay and their Repercussions**

To gain some understanding of the Uchuraccay incident, it is first necessary to look further back, to the situation in Huanta which ultimately created the situation

leading to the journalists' deaths. As will become clear throughout this chapter, while the basic facts of the killings are generally agreed upon, there are important divergences in different accounts of this period which make it challenging to give a definitive account of events. I will largely rely on the most recent and thorough investigation, by Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR: 2003) to establish the framework of the incident, but will also consider the other, conflicting interpretations below.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Uchuraccay was a village of almost five hundred inhabitants, near the town of Huanta, in Ayacucho province. It had a church, town hall, and primary school, and around a third of the population were literate (CVR 2003: 123). Although the area was quite isolated, in the high Andes, it was also on an important transport link between the Amazon region and the valleys of Huanta and Tambo, making this a key zone for Sendero Luminoso as they expanded their activity. In mid-1981, strangers began to arrive in the village, apparently to trade with the local people. These new arrivals, who, it later became clear, were *senderistas*, slowly worked to win over the trust of the indigenous population. In this, they were partly successful, although the efficacy of traditional village hierarchies and the absence of a secondary school, in which to establish a youth base, impeded a thorough infiltration of the community.

In October 1981, an attack on the police station at nearby Tambo led to the abandonment of that post by the security forces, leaving the villagers more vulnerable to aggression. In 1982, the Sendero representatives increased pressure on local people by trying to found an educational establishment for women. This met with suspicion from local men, one of whom then burned a Sendero flag to emphasise his rejection of the plan. This man, Alejandro Huamán, was later murdered by *senderistas*. Following this and other acts of violence by Sendero Luminoso, the citizens of Uchuraccay rejected the involvement of the guerrillas in their village and organised to defend themselves. This pattern of partial acceptance of the presence of guerrillas, who exploited local needs,

followed by disillusionment with the extremism of Sendero, has been traced in other highland communities (Degregori 1998; del Pino 1998).

Towards the end of 1982, indigenous people from the villages of Huaychau and Macabamba killed seven members of Sendero Luminoso, and shortly afterwards Uchuraccayans killed five further *senderistas*. The latter incident was reported in the national press; *El Comercio* headlined the story 'Pueblo de Uchuraccai [sic] mató a 5 terroristas' ('People of Uchuraccai Killed 5 Terrorists', 25 January 1983), and explained, 'Siguiendo el ejemplo de la población de Huaychau, los habitantes de la comunidad de Uchuraccai, rechazaron ayer un ataque de treinta terroristas, y en desigual enfrentamiento dieron muerte a cinco de los atacantes' ('Following the example of the population of Huaychau, the inhabitants of the village of Uchuraccai yesterday rejected an attack by thirty terrorists, and although they were outnumbered, killed five of their assailants'). The newspaper's labelling of the guerrillas as 'terrorists' and the emphasis of the bravery of the peasants against a better-equipped force indicate a sympathetic response to the villagers' actions. In the editorial of the following day, there is no doubt of the approval in the title, 'El pueblo se defiende' ('The People Defend Themselves', *El Comercio*, 26 January 1983), and the opening sentence, 'Dos comunidades campesinas, entrañas vivas de la nacionalidad, han dado al país un ejemplo de viril reciedumbre en la defensa de sus derechos humanos y de sus libertades' ('Two peasant communities, the lifeblood of the nation, have given the country an example of strength in the defence of their human rights and freedom'). The piece goes on to laud the bravery of the indigenous villagers and back their repudiation of the rebel group in the strongest terms. Similarly, the local Chief of Military Police of the Emergency Zone, General Roberto Clemente Noel Moral, commended the actions of the civilians as 'una respuesta muy significativa del pueblo ayacuchano de desterrar el terrorismo' ('a very significant answer from the Ayacuchan people to banish terrorism', CVR 2003: 131). Even the Peruvian President at the time, Fernando Belaúnde Terry, praised the villagers in a television address. It was abundantly clear, therefore, that the killing of 'terrorists' by the local population, even in the absence of due process, met with official

approval. Moreover, the Uchuraccayan *comuneros* later insisted that they had been told by the military authorities to defend themselves against *any* strangers approaching the village on foot (soldiers would be travelling by helicopter) (CVR 2003: 132); advice which would prove fateful for the unwitting journalists.

It was apparently the incidents of January 1983, in which at least two groups of *senderistas* were turned on by the local people, which precipitated the investigation by the reporters. At this time, Sendero Luminoso was in its initial phase of violence and few details were known about it. The group comprised of Eduardo de la Piniella, Pedro Sánchez, and Félix Gavilán from *El Diario de Marka* in Ayacucho; Octavio Infante from *Noticias*, also an Ayacuchan publication; Jorge Luis Mendivil and Willy Retto from *El Observador*; Jorge Sedano from *La República*, and Amador García from the magazine *Oiga* (the last three publications all based in Lima). As far as is known, their itinerary went as follows: on the night of 25 January, the men stayed in the hotel Santa Rosa in the centre of Ayacucho, from where they had arranged transportation early the next morning. Some time later they made a brief stop in Paçlla for breakfast and photographs, arriving in Yanaorco around eight-thirty in the morning. From there, they continued on foot to the village of Chacabamba, where Octavio Infante, who came from the region, had relatives. They hired Juan Argumedo, Infante's brother, as a guide, and arranged a mule for the oldest of the journalists, Jorge Sedano, who was struggling to cope with the altitude (an early indication, perhaps, that the group's preparation for their trip was not as thorough as it might have been). The journalists eventually arrived in Uchuraccay that afternoon, where, unbeknown to them, local men had been having a meeting about the threat of Sendero Luminoso. Hearing of the arrival of strangers, they picked up tools to defend themselves. Despite the fact that three of the journalists spoke Quechua, and at least two of the Uchuraccayans spoke Spanish, it appears that the reporters were unable to convince the villagers that they were not terrorists, and were beaten to death.

News of the journalists' disappearance did not reach media sources for several days, and confirmation of their deaths was not made until 29 January. The peasants, however, never denied the killings, as they understood that they had acted in self-defence and with the approval of the armed forces, as explained above. They buried the reporters in shallow graves, but exhumed them to show to the authorities when they arrived. Media reports took a tone which was in complete contrast to those dealing with the deaths of *senderistas*. On January 31 *El Comercio* headlined its in-depth report on the subject, 'Masacre de periodistas en Huanta' (Massacre of journalists in Huanta), with the subheading, 'Responsabilidad es de comuneros' ('The Responsibility Is the Villagers'). In a smaller article on the same page, the newspaper declares, 'Uchuraccay [sic] se caracteriza por luchas entre comuneros' ('Uchuraccay Is Known for Battles between Villagers'). The events are described as tragic, and illustrations include a photograph of the widow of Amador García, obviously in a state of extreme distress. Before the official investigation was launched, then, Peru's largest-circulation newspaper was already speaking of a 'massacre' and making causal links to the supposedly belligerent nature of people from the highlands of Ayacucho. The weekly magazine *Caretas* remarked on the supposedly 'cold-blooded' manner in which the *comuneros* buried their victims in shallow graves, then exhumed them to show to the authorities, and added a historical information piece subtitled 'Larga tradición de violencia en las alturas de Huanta y La Mar' (Long Tradition of Violence in the Highlands of Huanta and La Mar) in which it suggested that violent disputes had existed in the area since the fourteenth century (*Caretas* no. 734, 7 February 1983: 18-19, 28).

The Peruvian government swiftly named novelist Mario Vargas Llosa as the head of the investigatory commission into the killings. The Commission visited Uchuraccay on 11 February, spending only three hours at the crime scene in total, (Franco 2006: 6) and published their report in March. They concluded that the villagers had killed the journalists, presenting the incident as a misunderstanding in which the journalists were unable to communicate with the traditional, Quechua-speaking peasants, and neglecting to consider the events preceding the

killings. The Vargas Llosa report has been the subject of much comment and scrutiny, which I shall examine further below.

The State then made attempts to initiate criminal proceedings against some of the alleged perpetrators; a drawn-out process which was characterised by irregularities, contradictions and procrastination. Many of the villagers could not be found, having fled Uchuraccay under pressure from both the security forces and Sendero Luminoso, although three men were eventually convicted of the murders (a far smaller number than had actually taken part in the attacks, as is widely accepted). It was during this investigation that the camera belonging to photojournalist Willy Retto was discovered, and the images revealed came to represent crucial evidence in the explanations for the deaths.

### **Retto's Photographs Employed as Visual 'Evidence'**

In total there were eight images in the buried camera, although I will focus chiefly on the five which are clearer in form and content. They are similar in composition, each showing groups of people apparently in some confusion, but nevertheless engaged in some sort of dialogue, which immediately puts paid to suggestions that the Uchuraccayans attacked without warning. In fig. 13 for example, four figures are crowded to the left of the frame, two journalists, clad in jeans, who both have their backs to the camera, and two villagers in traditional dress, one of whom is female, and whose face is visible. Three more indigenous people are approaching down the hillside in the distance. The journalist in the foreground, who appears much taller than the other figures, has his hands raised, perhaps in a gesture of appeasement, although it could also be frustration. In the next image (fig. 14) several of the journalists appear to be trying to converse with one of the *comuneros* from the previous image, who is holding a rope. In the foreground and slightly out of focus, a journalist is carrying bags, presumably of photographic and recording equipment. Fig. 15 is another scene of confusion and partially-framed bodies, with a journalist gesturing above his head. The subsequent photograph (fig. 16) is taken from a lower perspective and shows only the lower parts of the

subjects' bodies, further increasing the difficulty of interpretation. One of the journalists (identifiable by his blue jacket, jeans, and trainers) is kneeling, and while it is tempting to suggest that this is a pose in which he is begging for his life, once more, this cannot be confirmed. Finally, fig. 17 is even less clear, being unfocused and obviously hurriedly made. It simply shows a group of legs and feet, and several bags, against the background of grass. This image derives all its power from a knowledge of the circumstances of its making and from the preceding images; under normal circumstances, such a blurred shot of partial bodies would of course never have been published. But the images were published, firstly in *Caretas* on 20 February 1984, almost a year after the events they depicted.

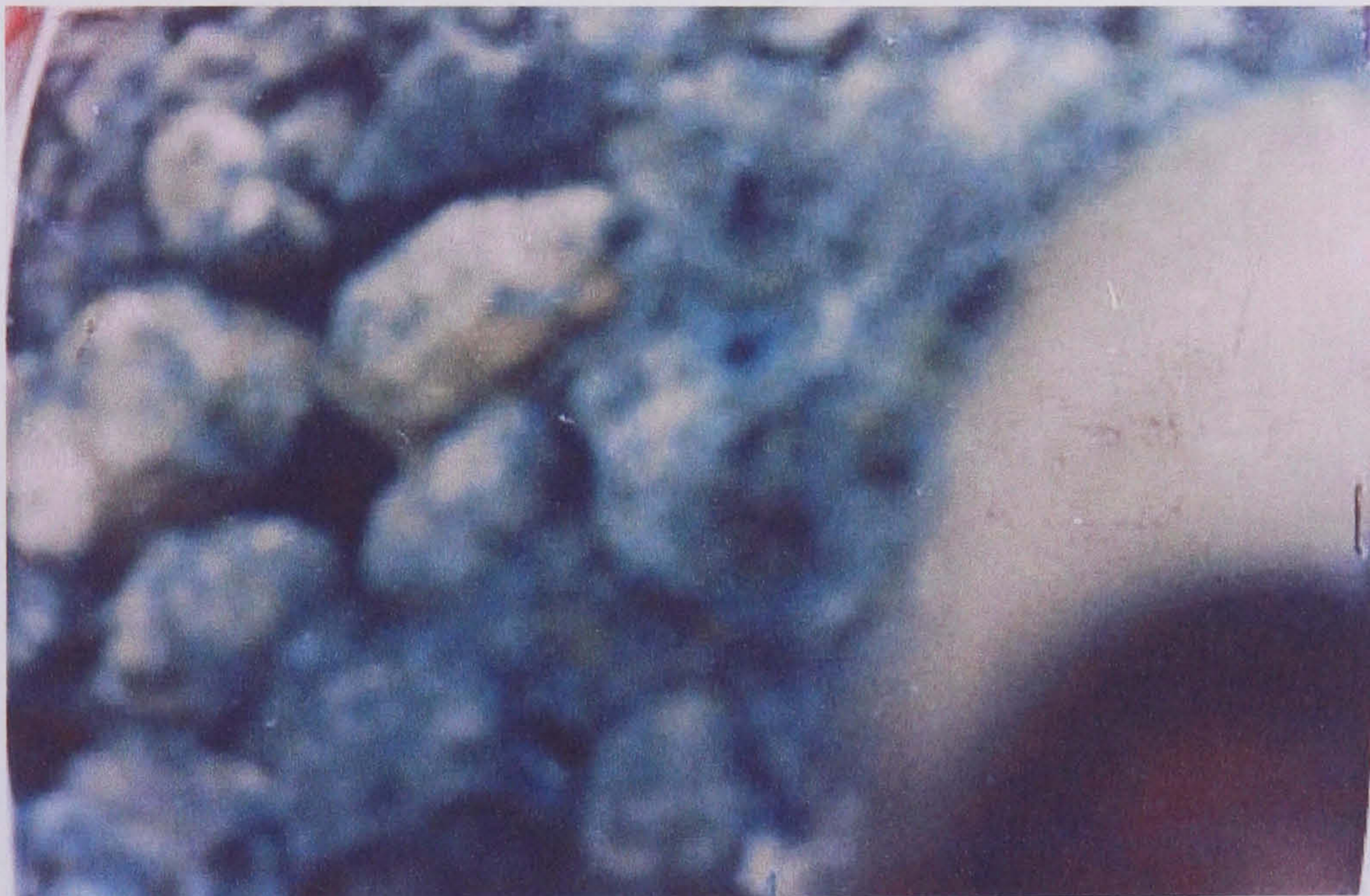


fig. 11. Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (1), 1983



fig. 12. Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (2), 1983



fig. 13 Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (3), 1983



fig. 14 Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (4), 1983



fig. 15. Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (5), 1983



fig. 16 Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (6), 1983



fig. 17 Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (7), 1983



fig. 18 Willy Retto, Uchuraccay (8), 1983

The images have been deployed as supporting visual evidence for three central interpretations of what occurred that day, 26 January 1983, in Uchuraccay. The first two of these are connected, in that they both seek to place blame on a particular group for the murders. One is the conspiracy theory put forward by certain sectors of the media and the Left to absolve the Uchuraccayans from responsibility for the deaths. This posits the indigenous people as unwitting stooges and the journalists as victims of a murder planned and orchestrated by the security forces. In this scenario, the photographs do not show journalists trying to communicate with Quechua-speaking peasants, but rather journalists trying to communicate with counter-terrorist police *disguised* as Quechua-speaking peasants. This line of argument came mainly from publications such as *El Diario de Marka*, *El Observador* and *La República*, all left-leaning newspapers which disputed official sources (CVR 2003: 56). They attempted to prove that the journalists had been killed by security forces, possibly to silence the news story they were researching. There were some suggestions that this was a meeting with one of the Sendero Luminoso leaders, perhaps even Presidente Gonzalo himself ('¿Buscaron a Sendero?', 'Were they looking for Sendero?', *Caretas* 734, 7 February 1983: 13-16). It is surely no coincidence that *El Diario*, the most vociferous in its claims, was the publication most affected by the tragedy, having lost three of its colleagues, and it is reasonable to suggest that this must have strongly coloured its response. The weekly magazine *Caretas*, for its part, mocked this stance, reproducing a front page of *El Diario de Marka* headlined 'Confirmado: ¡Son sinchis disfrazados!' (Confirmed: They Were Sinchis in Disguise) and captioning it, 'Grosero intento desinformador' ('A Deliberate Attempt to Deceive', *Caretas* 734, 7 February 1983: 28).<sup>2</sup> It, and *El Comercio* – neither of which had employees among the group of victims – were more prepared to accept official sources of information on the deaths.

This attempt to place the blame for the reporters' deaths on the armed forces, and to mobilise the photographs as evidence, is misguided for several reasons: Firstly,

it ignores the testimony of the people from Uchuraccay themselves, who never denied killing the strangers who, in their eyes, were terrorist suspects and an immediate threat to the village. Nearby villagers had previously defended themselves against aggressive Shining Path guerrillas and had been publicly praised for doing so, as we have seen. What is more, they had been advised to attack any strangers who might subsequently appear unannounced, advice which was to prove fatal for the reporters. Secondly, this theory misreads the images and witness testimonies, seeing glimpses of wristwatches and processed cloth as 'proof' that these are not 'real Indians' (CVR 2003: 155). This misreading is based on a perspective of rural Ayacucho as utterly isolated from urban, 'modern' Peru which is simplistic and inaccurate. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report states, inhabitants of Uchuraccay had access to primary education, traded in nearby markets, and appealed to local police for protection from *senderistas* (CVR 2003: 123, 130; Franco 2006: 9-11). They were by no means completely cut off from so-called civilisation, and therefore there is no reason why some of them should not have had access to Western-style clothing and bought goods. Nevertheless this is a persistent version of events which is also believed by some of the victims' families who remain unsatisfied by investigations into the murders.<sup>3</sup>

Alternatively, some used the images to confirm deep-seated prejudices about Peru's indigenous population and their tendency to violence. This viewpoint is most clearly expressed in the report produced by novelist and, later, Presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa, who headed the initial investigation into the reporters' deaths. In it, Vargas Llosa explained the attacks as the result of a misunderstanding, in which the naturally aggressive, ignorant and backward villagers turned on the unsuspecting men of the press. The official report, which had a restricted circulation (CVR 2003: 149) was supplemented by an article written by Vargas Llosa and published in the *New York Times* as 'Inquest in the Andes' (1983), and in *Granta* as 'The Story of a Massacre' (1983). This article, written in a literary style which speculates on the thoughts and feelings of the journalists as they set off on their mission, then expands on Vargas Llosa's theory

of 'two Perus' which clash, resulting in the tragedy of the killings.<sup>4</sup> The 'official' Peru of the state, with its capital in metropolitan Lima, is far removed from the 'deep' Peru of the highland Indians. As anthropologist Enrique Mayer summarises, 'according to Vargas Llosa there are two Perus, one official and the other profound, separated by an enormous gulf that has its origins in the brutal conquest of the indigenous population and that continues to keep them apart from the rest of the nation. The two Perus are separated in space and time' (1991: 478). Mayer points out that there are two central criticisms of the Vargas Llosa Commission and its report. On the one hand, it displays methodological weaknesses including the brevity of the trip to Uchuraccay, the absence of personal details concerning those who testified, and other omissions (Mayer 1991: 471; CVR 2003: 149). On the other hand, Vargas Llosa's choice of language has been called into question; in particular, the way in which his employment of anthropological theories attempts to mould the narrative of events to his own view of Peruvian society. He argued that the inherently violent nature of the indigenous population predisposed them to commit such an attack, while disregarding the fear and violence to which the Uchuraccayans had themselves been subjected in the months before the arrival of the journalists. He characterised all *comuneros* as ignorant and far removed from modern society, and picked up on dubious 'magico-religious' elements to the killings.

In addition to Mayer's detailed critique, cultural theorist Jean Franco has also examined Vargas Llosa's analysis (2006). She points out that Vargas Llosa presents himself 'as the rational modern man faced with the alien other' (2006: 6), while the indigenous community are depicted as behaving in ways which are mysterious, ritualistic, obscure, or absurd. For instance, he describes an odd incident in which an indigenous woman dances before the commission members, speaking in a language they do not understand, and hitting them on the legs with nettles. As Franco notes, 'The woman's actions are inexplicable, her words unintelligible, but nowhere does he suggest that his own ignorance of Quechua, a

language spoken by thousands of his fellow countrymen, may be part of the problem' (2006: 8-9).

Although Vargas Llosa did not have access to Retto's images during his initial investigation, because they were at that point still buried in the hillside, he later commented, for example, that 'the Iquichan women are no less warlike than the men. In the posthumous photographs of Willy Retto you can see them at the front of the crowd' (Vargas Llosa 1983: 82). This interpretation is, however, belied by the images themselves. His use of the word 'iquichanos' to describe the community betrays his ignorance; they 'were supposedly a pre-Hispanic group known for their warlike nature; in fact their reputation for violence was a nineteenth-century invention of the elites and not a historical reality' (Franco 2006: 10). There is, in fact, only one woman clearly visible in Retto's images, and another in the far distance, and neither is shown in the act of assaulting anyone. The CVR later identified the woman whose face is visible in the images as Teodora Soto Ticlla; she did not survive the violence which ensued after the journalists' deaths (CVR 2003: 161). It is interesting to note that Vargas Llosa is particularly concerned by the cultural differences which he perceives are displayed by the *female* members of the community, whether they are speaking words he does not understand, or displaying 'aggression'. Franco draws parallels between Vargas Llosa's focus on the gendered other in his accounts of Uchuraccay, and the cannibalistic attack he describes as being led by women in his fictional work, *Death in the Andes* (1997: 12).

Some sources further emphasised the ignorance of the Uchuraccayans as the reason for their violence. Shortly after the deaths were discovered, General Noel suggested that the *comuneros* could have confused the journalists' photographic equipment with weapons (Mayer 1991: 472). Again, this assumes that the Uchuraccayans lived in complete seclusion with no knowledge of modern technology; an assumption that, as an article in *Caretas* pointed out, was false;

Pero lo que sí resulta inverosímil es suponer que [los comuneros] hayan confundido las cámaras fotográficas con armamento. En primer lugar, más de uno de ellos es licenciado del Ejército. De otro lado, cuando Gustavo Gorriti y Oscar Medrano, de CARETAS, estuvieron en Huaychau – el jueves 27 – los comuneros posaron con entusiasmo y sin ningún temor ante Medrano.

(*Caretas* 734, 7 February 1983: 16)

But, what does seem unrealistic is supposing that [the villagers] had confused cameras with weapons. In the first place, more than one of them had completed military service in the Army. Moreover, when Gustavo Gorriti and Oscar Medrano, of *Caretas*, were in Huaychau – on Thursday 27 – the villagers posed for Medrano enthusiastically and without fear.

Whether it was suggested that indigenous people could not have been responsible for the killings, or that they were responsible because they were culturally backward and genetically predisposed to violence, the same underlying discrimination remains. Highland Peruvians were presented as radically different to and distant from 'modern' Peru. The images taken by Willy Retto shortly before his death were deployed to support such generalising tendencies.

Finally, the images were also pressed into service to corroborate a theory presenting the journalists as martyrs. Soon after the events of 26 January 1983, the victims were labelled as 'martyrs'. This is perhaps not surprising as the incident was headline news and several of the top Peruvian publications had just lost one or more colleagues. On 31 January, *El Comercio*, the top circulation daily of Peru, in an editorial headlined 'El periodismo está de luto' ('Journalism is in Mourning') wrote of the journalists that, 'ofrendaron sus vidas en cumplimiento del deber, a sabiendas del peligro que corrían' ('they offered their lives in the fulfilment of their duty, knowing the risks they ran'). The impression of a pseudo-religious sacrifice in the pursuit of truth is typical of the presentation of the journalists' fate, which has persisted until the present. Even the CVR, in an otherwise measured report, cannot resist proclaiming, 'Que en aras de la reconciliación nacional, es necesario mantener vivo en la memoria nacional el recuerdo de los periodistas asesinados, como mártires del periodismo y la libertad de expresión' ('For the sake of national reconciliation, it is necessary to keep the memory of the murdered journalists alive

in the national memory, as martyrs of journalism and freedom of expression' 2003: 170).

On the twentieth anniversary of the killings, *Caretas* published an interview with Gustavo Gorriti, one of the foremost scholars of Sendero Luminoso, in which he reflected on Uchuraccay and its legacy ('Uchuraccay 20 años despues', 'Uchuraccay 20 Years Later', *Caretas* 1756, 23 January 2003). The phrasing of both Pablo O'Brien's questions, and Gorriti's replies, leave little doubt as to the opinion held of the fallen journalists. O'Brien refers to 'la tragedia de Uchuraccay' ('the tragedy of Uchuraccay'), and in response Gorriti speaks of 'el inmenso sacrificio de un grupo de periodistas por obtener la noticia' ('the immense sacrifice of a group of reporters to obtain the news'), and 'estos heroicos hombres de prensa' ('those heroic men of the press'). Willy Retto is also described as embodying 'el ideal del reportero gráfico' ('the ideal of the photojournalist'). His actions in making the images, then, are the ultimate in professional courage, and the photographic images are the lasting evidence of this, even though the content of the images themselves is not what defines them as valuable.<sup>5</sup>



fig. 19. Octavio Infante, Journalists on the way to Uchuraccay, 1983

While the journalists were undoubtedly victims of a criminal and violent attack, all the evidence suggests that they were previously unaware of the extent of the risks involved in travelling to the countryside outside Huanta and if they had been, their plans would probably have been executed differently. This hypothesis is supported by another photographic image, taken on the way to Uchuraccay, presumably by Octavio Infante, who is the only member of the group not to appear in it. The photograph shows a casually posed and apparently relaxed group of men who could be on a pleasant day trip and have paused for a holiday snap, to remember their jaunt into the highlands. One of the group is in short sleeves, even though they were approaching high altitude where it was unlikely to be warm. There is no suggestion in this image that they were preparing to enter a region on the brink of civil war, and this hints at a certain naivety which is not surprising at this early stage of the conflict. Furthermore, the investigative mission they were undertaking, while important, was not a crusade in the name of freedom of the press. Nor, according to the strongest evidence, were they killed for the purpose of covering up the 'truth' about the Peruvian conflict, but rather because they were taken for senderistas.

The 'martyrs' label tends to obscure the complexities of the situation and also leads to a lack of attention to the other victims of Uchuraccay – the 135 villagers who were killed in the years following the events of January 1983. After the attack, some of the accused perpetrators fled to escape prosecution. Others suffered a series of assaults by Sendero Luminoso, while the armed forces also looted the village. By mid-1984, Uchuraccay was completely abandoned, with the whole population having left, many to the cities of Huanta, Ayacucho, and Lima. *Comuneros* would conceal their place of origin, and even in some cases change their own names, as the very name of Uchuraccay, and the suggestion of coming from the region, had become dangerous, notorious and shameful (CVR 2003: 146; del Pino 2003: 59). It was 1993 before attempts were made to return and re-found the community.<sup>6</sup> The existence of *images* of the journalists' last moments – in contrast to the indigenous people who died away from the camera's lens – and the



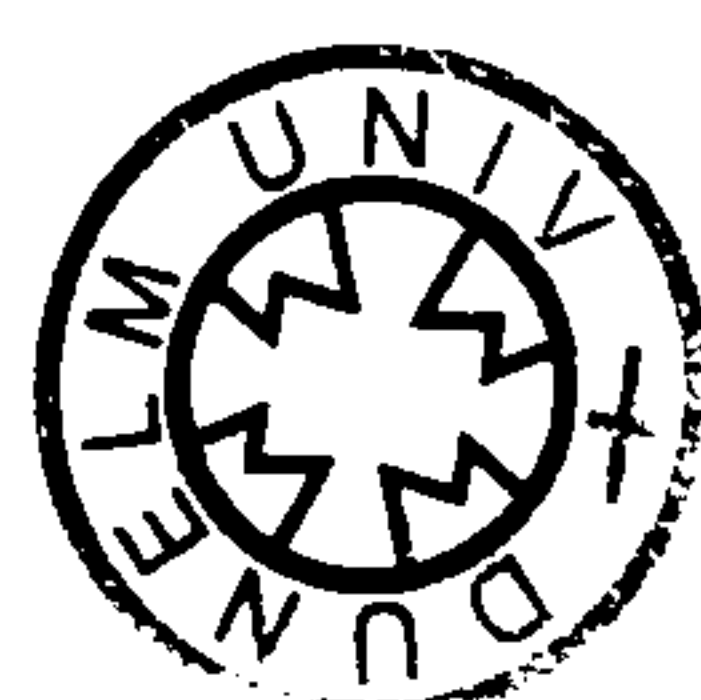
status of the journalists as urban intellectuals with media contacts, has tended to encourage the privileging of one set of victims over another in the national memory. It is worth remembering that Quechua-speaking citizens were overwhelmingly the worst affected group in the Peruvian conflict, and that this represents a further injustice in a long history of discrimination and repression in the Andes. Uchuraccayans were, therefore, among those disadvantaged by misappropriations of Retto's photographs, which were deployed as visual evidence to back up divergent theories about the deaths of the journalists.

### **Exploring the Iconic Status of the Uchuraccay Images**

While the events at Uchuraccay themselves have become significant in the memory of the Peruvian conflict, the images themselves have also become iconic markers of national collective memory in Peru. They are often called on to represent the whole of what happened on 26 January 1983, while the memory of Uchuraccay is also frequently expressed in visual terms, as evinced by the words of Peruvian historian Ponciano del Pino, who states: '[Uchuraccay] se convirtió en un referente emblemático de la violencia política y de las imágenes sobre el "indio" todavía dominantes en el país' ('Uchuraccay became a symbol of political violence and of the images of the 'Indian' which are still dominant in the country', 2003: 49). At the end of January each year, particularly on significant anniversaries, there are further commemorative ceremonies and articles, in which Retto's images are frequently recycled, and 26 January is now designated as Día del Periodismo (Journalism Day). *Caretas* reproduced one of the images (fig. 13) in its twentieth-anniversary article, with the caption, 'Imagen tomada por Willy Retto captura todo la tensión de los momentos previos al asesinato de los periodistas' (the image taken by Willy Retto captured all the tension of the moments preceding the murder of the journalists'). A subsequent image shows Gorriti holding up the photograph (whether the original or a reproduction is not stated), and this is captioned, 'Gustavo Gorriti recuerda y examina la fotografía que simboliza y refleja el trabajo y el sacrificio de los periodistas muertos en Uchuraccay' (Gustavo Gorriti

remembers and examines the photograph which symbolises and reflects the work and sacrifice of the journalists who died in Uchuraccay'). Three of Retto's images are also reproduced in the *Caretas* publication, *La Verdad sobre el Espanto* (2003: 36-37) alongside a predictable title, 'Los mártires' ('Martyrs'). In addition, the images appear on the Internet, in a memorial slide show on a site hosted by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Catholic University of Peru; PUCP), and on other sites including a blog.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, they have also been reworked by artist Jesús Ruiz Durand, clear evidence of their instantly recognizable status, which will be further examined in the following chapter. Del Pino has commented that Retto's photos are 'vehículos para activar la memoria' ('vehicles to activate memory', 2003: 76) but, as he points out, there are diverse interpretations of the incident. In fact the deployment of the images to prove the part played by anti-terrorist police, to back up the belief in the warlike nature of highland peasants, or to laud the selfless sacrifice of a group of reporters create tensions and contradictions which do little to clarify the events of Uchuraccay or to make a more general statement about the causes or consequences of the Peruvian conflict.

Why have these images remained in the collective memory and why is their reception so controversial? For one, the unusual status of images taken in the last moments of the photographers' life, witnessing murder, being lost and then found, makes them especially compelling. In a meditation on the relationship between death and the moving image, Vivian Sobchack notes that 'death presents a special problem in – and to – representation' (2004: 226). This problem is relevant to photography as well as film, and is pertinent here, not least because of the film-strip quality of Retto's images. In contexts such as the memorial gallery on the PUCP website, the images are displayed as a sequence with narrative quality. They were clearly taken in quick succession, and show first the villagers approaching down the hillside, then some sort of altercation, followed by two shaky images of the groups' legs, and finally two even more blurred images of a pile of stones. There is an emphasis on action and movement, and a progression from the beginning of a confrontation to the total confusion of an attack. Sobchack



reminds us of Roland Barthes' statement that 'Strictly traumatic photographs are rare, the trauma is entirely dependent on the certainty that the scene has really occurred: *the photographer had to be there*' (cited in Sobchack 2004: 234). In these images, not only are we convinced of the presence of the photographer, but we also know that he was about to die.<sup>8</sup> Of course, as Sobchack states, the actual moment of death is not recorded and this is also the case here, which only adds to the intrigue as the spectator tries to confirm the 'truth' of 'what really happened'.

Sobchack's work focuses on the taboo of representing death in contemporary Western cultures, which she believes has replaced sex as the principal forbidden subject. The act of framing, filming and viewing death is ethically charged, even in the case of fictional representations which, according to Sobchack, we are likely to experience as indexically real even when we really know better, and of course even more so in the case of documentary, culminating in the example of the so-called 'snuff' film which apparently shows a killing. She names a series of ways in which the practitioner attempts to justify him or herself against possible charges of immorality or complicity in watching the process of dying, particularly in an act of violence. These she denominates in terms of different kinds of gaze. The *accidental gaze* occurs when the death takes place unexpectedly and was not the original object of scrutiny, and is 'cinematically coded in markers of technical and physical *unpreparedness*' (2004: 249, italics in the original). Examples of this would include the amateur footage of the shooting of JFK. The *helpless gaze* is chiefly characterised by technical, physical, and sometimes legal, distance from the killing, and may include the recording of state executions, when intervention by the practitioner is impossible. The *endangered gaze*, by contrast, is coded in terms of *proximity*, where the filmmaker is explicitly near to and threatened by violence, while the *interventional gaze* reveals the practitioner's personal involvement with a confrontational vision. The *humane gaze* is marked by its extended duration and may be a response to atrocity or a permission to view suffering, as in a documentary that follows subjects with terminal illness. Finally and most ethically problematic, the *professional gaze* occurs when the practitioner faces a dilemma:

to involve oneself in the scene, possibly by saving a life, or to fulfil the professional role by remaining detached and capturing images.

Of these diverse modalities, it is the *endangered gaze* and the *interventional gaze* which are most useful for our consideration of Retto's photographs, although it must be said that there are aspects of other types of gaze at work here as well. The former 'is inscribed by signs that indexically and reflexively point to the mortal danger faced by the filmmaker in a particular and contingent situation, indicating a physical presence behind the camera and at the scene' (2004: 251). The endangered gaze is characterized by proximity, and the mortal danger faced by the practitioner, who 'pays for the transgression of breaking a visual taboo by visibly risking his or her own life to represent the proximate death of another' (2004: 251). This is often shown in camera shake and obstructed vision, both of which are clearly present in this case. In fact, the confusion captured is one of the defining points of these images.

Going a step further, Sobchack claims that the interventional gaze 'comes out of hiding' and 'in its extreme instance... ends up representing not only the death of another, but also its own' (2004: 252), which is often indicated by 'the urgent physical activity of the camera'. In this context, Sobchack cites Béla Balázs who analyses a rare instance when the recording of a documentary led to the death of the cameraman himself;

It darkens and the camera wobbles. It is like an eye glazing in death. The director did not cut out this 'spoilt' bit – it shows where the camera was overturned and the cameraman killed, while the automatic mechanism ran on... The psychological process is inverted – the cameraman does not shoot as long as he is conscious – he is conscious as long as he is shooting.

(Balázs cited in Sobchack 2004: 252)

Sobchack reflects,

Thus, although in this instance we do not ever see the camera operator's body, we nonetheless see the waning of his attention and consciousness. Here the visible image is inscribed with the loss of the human intentional behaviour that informs it, the very image of vision becoming random,

diffuse, and unconscious in relation to the world and its objects. The interventional gaze is the endangered gaze at its reflexive extremity.

(2004: 252)

It is notable that in this case, the categories of looking delineated by Sobchack, while a useful tool for understanding the ethics involved, begin to blur boundaries. Aspects of the accidental and professional gazes are also identifiable in Retto's work, in that he presumably did not anticipate the violence he was witness and victim of, and that his photojournalist training apparently played a role in his subsequent actions and attempt to record the incident. In Uchuraccay, Retto did not seek out the physical act of violence, but was rather looking to understand a previous violent event. Ultimately, he fell victim to the same attack which he began photographing, clearing himself of any charges of voyeurism by proving his absolute involvement in the scene. The fact that he kept making images when he must have started to realise the danger he was facing suggests a professional reaction and a belief in the significance of photographic witnessing, which has not been belied by the subsequent interest in his last, ambiguous works. As in Balázs' example, his consciousness of events is embodied in the pictures he produced. Although he does not appear in the frame of the images, his presence and the awareness of his fate, as hinted at by the shakiness of the camera and the spontaneity of the images, are central to the reactions of the viewer. The rushed, chaotic nature of the photographs lends them an apparent authenticity which frees them from suspicions about the photographer's motives and allows them to become iconic memory documents.<sup>9</sup>

The trace of the imminent death of the practitioner as it is inscribed in these images certainly makes this a singular sequence of photographs. So too, however, does the unusual manner in which the images were discovered, dug up from the earth, which is equally crucial to factor into our consideration of these images. Where Sobchack helps us to grasp the role of the photographer, the work of another theorist of moving images may also provide a rich background to this analysis. Laura Marks, in her work *The Skin of the Film* (2000), has developed

Deleuze's concept of images as *fossils* in a way which is pertinent here and worth quoting at some length:

A fossil is the indexical trace of an object that once existed, its animal or vegetable tissue now become stone. Consider how similar this is to the photographic process. Fossils are created when an object makes contact with the witnessing material of earth. Photographs are created when light reflected by an object makes contact with the witnessing material of film. In both cases, this contact transforms the material's surface so that it becomes a witness to the life of the object, even after the latter has decayed... when some earthquake happens years later or continents away, these objects surface, bearing witness to forgotten histories.

(2000: 84)

With regard to the partial and inexplicable recollection-image, Marks relates that:

When images cannot be made to represent, when they refuse to connect to memory, they float loose from history. Unearthed in the excavation of discursive history, the images stare up at us, like 'strangely active fossils, radioactive, inexplicable in the present where they surface, and all the more harmful and autonomous. Not recollections but hallucinations' (Deleuze 1989: 113). Such images are 'harmful' because they cannot be reconciled with either official history or private memory – but they are more harmful to official history, because they falsify it or reveal it to be incomplete.

(2000: 51)

The images under consideration here are significant both because of their indexicality, the physical connection on the surface of the paper to the moments before death, and because of their ensuing iconic status, in which they circulate repeatedly as symbols of violence in Peru.

Marks's comments are apposite for our understanding of the Uchuraccay images on a number of levels. In Uchuraccay, the camera, like a fossil, was literally uncovered from the earth and gave up its contents, the film, to be made into images which have become iconic in the memory of violence in Peru and which have an uneasy interaction with the official history of the Peruvian conflict. Furthermore, the notion that such images might be *radioactive*, that is, inexplicable, unsettling, dangerous and able to contaminate their surroundings, meshes with Ponciano del Pino's suggestions that the memories of Uchuraccay are *toxic*, with prolonged distorting effects. He defines these as 'memorias que

expresan una experiencia fallida y que prolongan en el tiempo sus efectos distorsionadores de la realidad y de la experiencia' ('memories which express a negative experience and whose effects, which are distorted from reality and from the experience, are long-lasting', 2003: 57). Significantly, del Pino also connects this to the site of memory-making, to the ground,

Las memorias del lugar, en este caso, quedan sedimentadas con las memorias del horror de la violencia; se monumentaliza el mismo paisaje geográfico como lugar de memoria y testigo de los horrores de la violencia. Asimismo, esta geografía se convierte en uno de los elementos de la fractura entre los procesos de recordar y de olvidar (Kaufman 1998) aquellos hechos 'duros', muy dolorosos, transformándose así el paisaje en sitio histórico y traumático de la memoria.

(2003: 57)

The memories of the place, in this case, remain deposited with the memories of the horror of violence; the geographical landscape itself is monumentalised as a place of memory and witness to the horrors of violence. At the same time, this geography becomes one of the elements of rupture between the processes of remembering and forgetting those 'hard', extremely painful facts (Kaufman 1998), turning the landscape itself into a historical site of memory and trauma.

As an aside, it is worth mentioning that del Pino spent a long period gaining the trust of and taking testimonies from surviving Uchuraccayans, and eventually broached the subject of the murders with those few comuneros still alive who personally remembered it. He showed them Retto's images as a trigger, 'para activar la memoria y ubicar mejor el contexto social, cultural y político de ese entonces' ('to activate memory and locate the social, cultural and political context of that time', 2003: 76). He comments, 'Sobre las fotos de Willy Retto hay que decir que sirvieron de referente para construir diversas interpretaciones sobre la matanza. De hecho, eran la única evidencia "objetiva" de esos sucesos' ('With regard to the photos by Willy Retto, it has to be said that they are used as references with which to construct different interpretations about the massacre. In fact, they are the only "objective" evidence of those events', 2003: 76). As del Pino accepts, the images are looked at in a way that is anything but objective. The relatives of the journalists, notably Oscar Retto, Willy's father and a photographer himself, use the images to support their belief in state-sponsored involvement in

the killings, an argument that Oscar Retto was still putting forward as recently as 2001 (del Pino 2003: 76). Del Pino does not discuss in detail the reactions of the Uchuraccayans to the images themselves, but it seems likely that they provoke a different reaction to that of the journalists' relatives; for the indigenous people, the memories are part of a painful narrative of external threats, persecution, bereavement, and internal migration.

Thus far, then, I have signalled that the images have powerful qualities; they are 'staring', they are 'autonomous', they are 'harmful' because they reveal the incompleteness of the official history with which they cannot be reconciled. In short, I have been alluding to the *agency* of these photographic images. In this context, Marks asserts, 'fossils are not cold stone objects but rather live, dangerous things' (2000: 84). They exceed the uses to which they are put and they confound expectations, contradicting the distorting interpretations into which they are forced. This is particularly relevant to the representation of death which challenges cultural codes and conventions (Sobchack 2004: 233). Just as death is a 'sign that ends all signs' (Sobchack 2004: 233), it is a commonplace that trauma defies language and representation.<sup>10</sup> To return to Barthes, 'the traumatic photograph (fires, shipwrecks, catastrophes, violent deaths) is the one about which there is nothing to say: the shock photo is by structure non-signifying: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have any hold over the process its signification.' (1985: 19). At the same time, the photographs are, in the words of Elizabeth Edwards, 'perceived as active in social relations, not merely passive and inert entities to which things happen and things are done' (2001: 13). The material form of the images, their persistent circulation, the multiple meanings they generate, and the different memories that they trigger, all coalesce to endow them with a form of cultural saliency.

Recognising photographic images, particularly iconic ones, as concrete objects with a social life of their own (Appadurai 1986) is a step towards locating the value within the image rather than moulding it to wider, and misleading, theories. Rather

than reading different versions of events into the photographs, as discussed above, it is important to face the challenges of these complex images. Edwards accurately points out the difficulty of viewing images, particularly ones connected to traumatic events; 'Photographs are very literally raw histories in both senses of the world – the unprocessed and the painful. Their unprocessed quality, their randomness, their minute indexicality, are inherent to the medium itself' (2001: 6). The strong emotions which an image may evoke and the complexity it reveals may contribute to the tendency to sidestep the image, and to discuss its context without a focus on content and form, but do not discount the possibility of fruitfully paying attention to the 'little narratives' (Edwards 2001: 3) it holds.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, then, the images under consideration in this chapter do not and will not give us concrete answers about the exact events of 26 January 1983, no matter how often they are reproduced. Still less will they reveal the 'truth' about the Peruvian conflict and the reasons behind it. If anything, the dominant readings of the images have tended to obscure as much as to reveal. As we have seen, there are clear losers in the hierarchy of memory of which these images form part, most importantly the indigenous victims of Uchuraccay who died at the hands of either Sendero Luminoso or the security forces, and those who faced an unfair trial for the murders. Indeed, we are so used to seeing images of atrocity that some would warn of the dangers of compassion fatigue (Zelizer 1998; Sontag 2004) and the suggestions of voyeurism that come from viewing subjects at the point of death. Nevertheless, as Carolyn Dean (2003) has demonstrated, this viewpoint is opposed to other, long-held, assumptions that a perception of proximity is a prerequisite for empathy, or sympathy. According to this argument, therefore, 'geographical, ethnic, and social distance may preclude or distort compassion' (Dean 2003: 2). The well-publicised urban victims of Uchuraccay were connected

to those in the media who were chiefly responsible for circulating information about their deaths, and they came from a space that was close geographically, ethnically, and socially, to those in power and to the city-dwelling Peruvians who had until then little knowledge of the danger of Sendero Luminoso. Analysts of the tragedy, such as Mario Vargas Llosa, only emphasised the huge gulf which they believed to exist between them and the indigenous Peruvians from highland Ayacucho who would, for the most part, not long survive the initial killings themselves. Indigenous people were effectively presented as citizens of another country altogether.<sup>11</sup> Sympathy was focused on the comprehensible, professional victims, while the darker-skinned victims were largely ignored.

If we also agree with Dean's statement that knowledge is perceived to come 'primarily through the eyes' (2003: 5), we can detect another reason why the photographed dead have been seen to matter more than those who died unphotographed, perhaps without leaving a single image behind them. Other analysts have confirmed this impression, such as Santiago López Maguiña,

Se me ocurre pensar que su lugar como no hombres contribuía a que tampoco aparecieron a menudo fotografiados. La noticia correspondía a individuos anónimos, que, en consecuencia no tenían rostro ni cuerpo... Los periodistas asesinados en Uchuraccay han entrado en la sucesión simbólica de los nombres que hacen la historia porque tenían un nombre, una identificación, una ubicación. Los comuneros de Uchuraccay, no.  
(2003, p. 272)

It occurs to me that their status as non-people was partly due to the fact that they were not often photographed. The news referred to anonymous individuals who therefore had no face or body... The murdered journalists in Uchuraccay had become part of the symbolic procession of names which make history because they had a name, an identity, a location. The peasants of Uchuraccay did not.

Retto's images have been accorded a privileged status due to their unusual provenance and intriguing content. What do we gain, then, from a viewing of these photographs, with their partial, crowded viewpoint? I suggest that the understandable reaction to these images is to search for contextual information to try to make sense of them, as alone they yield little information, intriguing though

these hints may be. Yet their iconic status is not in doubt; they continue to have a significant influence on discussions of memory and the recovery from trauma which are pertinent in Peru today. This influence may be considered pernicious, insofar as the lauded memory of the journalist 'martyrs' of Uchuraccay has obscured the remembrance of the indigenous victims from the area. Nevertheless, I argue that the agency of the images lies in their refusal to conform to the distorting interpretations which have so frequently been forced upon them. In many ways the contradictory dominant readings which circulate around these images are emblematic of the consideration of the Peruvian conflict as a whole, while the Uchuraccay photographs retain a power and an interest value connected to their unusual origin and discovery which means, as their 'radioactive' status suggests, they are likely to play a role in cultural memory for a long time to come. The next chapter will examine the work of an artist who has taken up the incidents at Uchuraccay, among others, and recreated significant photographic images in a painted form in his commemoration of the Peruvian conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> The photography/death connection has also been made by, among others, Sontag (2002) and Cadava (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Sinchis – common, colloquial term for the specialised counter-insurgency forces.

<sup>3</sup> For recent examples of family members calling for further investigations and doubting official conclusions to the case, see CVR 2003: 163, 168; 'Uchuraccay: la herida aún sigue abierta' ('Uchuraccay: Still Open Wounds', *La República*, 27 January 2001, available at <http://www.larepublica.com.pe/content/view/140400/30/>, accessed 1 September 2007); 'Recuerdan a los 8 periodistas desaparecidos en Uchuraccay' (8 Journalists Disappeared in Uchuraccay Are Remembered', *La República*, 27 January 2005, available at [http://www.larepublica.com.pe/component?option=com\\_contentant/task,view/id,66204/Itemid,0/](http://www.larepublica.com.pe/component?option=com_contentant/task,view/id,66204/Itemid,0/), accessed 1 September 2007).

<sup>4</sup> The origin of the 'two Peru' theory is often attributed to the Peruvian historian Jorge Basadre, who first used the phrase 'Peru profundo' (deep Peru) in 1943. However, as Mayer (1991: 477) explains, Basadre was making a distinction 'between the state (país legal) and the nation composed of its people (país profundo)...Nowhere in his writings does he reserve the term profundo to refer exclusively to aspects of Indian culture or identity or sense of nationhood'. For Vargas Llosa, by contrast, 'deep Peru' refers specifically to Indian Peru.

<sup>5</sup> The masculine ideal of the virile photographer-reporter, particularly in conflict situations, is partially predicated upon his willingness to undergo physical danger and risk to life in the course of his profession (Vettel-Becker 2005).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of the difficult process of return to Uchuraccay, see del Pino (2003), for a more general analysis of the return of Peru's internal refugees, see Burt (1993).

<sup>7</sup> For discussions of Uchuraccay on the Internet, see in particular Uchuraccay: la herida que aún no cierra', <http://www.uchuraccay.blogspot.com/> (accessed 1 September 2007); 'Tio Juan', the blog of Peruvian historian and journalist Juan Gargurevich, <http://tiojuan.perublogs.com/> (accessed 1 September 2007), and the gallery hosted by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú,

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[http://palestra.pucp.edu.pe/portal/general\\_htm/galeria\\_dossier2/escenarios/rostros\\_frame2.htm](http://palestra.pucp.edu.pe/portal/general_htm/galeria_dossier2/escenarios/rostros_frame2.htm)  
(accessed 1 September 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Barbie Zelizer (2005) has also examined the prevalence of the 'about-to-die' photograph in news coverage of the military campaign in Afghanistan. For Zelizer, such images of subjects who are not dead at the moment of making the photograph, but who were certain or presumed to die shortly afterwards, is an attempt to sidestep the moral ambiguities of photographing and publishing images of dead bodies. However, I wonder whether such images may not perform a more complex role, in which, despite the complete or near certainty of the subject's death, the viewer is left with the feeling that there is some possibility that the fate of the dying person may be changed or avoided. Such images, then, are more open to interpretation than a recording of death itself.

<sup>9</sup> The lack of formality or professional composition is reminiscent of Sontag's comment that 'people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or mere contrivance. Pictures of hellish events seem more authentic when they don't have the look that comes from being 'properly' lighted and composed, because the photographer either is an amateur or – just as serviceable – has adopted one of several familiar anti-art styles' (2004: 23-24). In Retto's case, of course, the lack of 'artistry' was of course inevitable in the fast-moving and extremely stressful situation.

<sup>10</sup> A vast body of literature exists on trauma, notably Caruth (1995, 1996), Felman and Laub (1992). With reference to the connection between trauma and photography, see Baer (2002).

<sup>11</sup> Vargas Llosa both states the existence of two nations within Peru and cites this as the true cause of the violence that took place at Uchuraccay; in an interview with *Caretas* (7 March 1983: 27-31, 34), he said 'El que haya un país real completamente separado del país oficial es, por supuesto, el gran problema peruano. Que al mismo tiempo vivan en el país hombres que participan del siglo XX y hombres como los comuneros de Uchuraccay y de todas las comunidades iquichanas que viven en el siglo XIX, para no decir en el siglo XVII. Esa enorme distancia que hay entre los dos Perú está detrás de la tragedia que acabamos de investigar' ('That there is a whole country completely separated from the official country is, of course, the great Peruvian problem. That at the same time there are men living in this country who participate in the twentieth century and men like the peasants of Uchuraccay and all the Iquichan communities, who live in the nineteenth century, or even in the seventeenth. This enormous distance between the two Perus lies behind the tragedy which we have just finished investigating', 1983: 29).

## Jesús Ruiz Durand: Painting Over Traces of the Past

Of the countless moments of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the 'snapping' of the photographer has had the greatest consequences. A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were.

Benjamin (1999: 171)

For me, the Photographer's organ is not his eye (which terrifies me) but his finger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens, to the metallic shifting of the plates (when the camera still has such things). I love these mechanical sounds in an almost voluptuous way, as if, in the Photograph, they were the very thing – and the only thing – to which my desire clings, their abrupt click breaking through the mortiferous layer of the Pose.

Barthes (2000: 15)

While it is the eye which has conventionally been associated with the practice of making photographic images, both Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes identify the movement of the practitioner's finger and the click of the shutter as defining the moment of photography. It is this brief action, this split second which encapsulates the influence of the photographic image on the lived experience of time itself, through its fixing of the event. And of course, Benjamin's much-discussed concept of the aura also has a significant temporal aspect. It is a commonplace that photography 'freezes' a past moment, but as the above quotation demonstrates, with its emphasis on the fixing of 'an event for an unlimited period of time', the relation between photography and temporality goes further than that. In fact, the structuring effect of the visual image forms a key part of the formation of narrative history and memory.

Indeed, I contend that one way in which photographs are central to collective memory is by means of selectively emphasising those events deemed 'iconic'. That is to say, these fleeting, contingent moments are snatched out of time and subsequently endowed with a narrative and memorial function that is not necessarily apparent at the time of their making. Icons are then given a

disproportionate responsibility for illustrating significant periods in national history and acting as triggers for memory. Although Benjamin's stance is that the technological capabilities of photography are opposed to the notion of aura, which for him is bound up in the uniqueness of the work of art, I will argue that iconic photographs have their own form of aura which is derived from their very pervasiveness.

If I have placed an emphasis here on the relation between the finger's action on the camera, photographic time and memory, it is because this chapter will have such concerns at its heart, even as it considers the output of an artist who works with the traditional medium of paint. Originally from Huancavelica, in the South-Central Sierra of Peru, Jesús Ruiz Durand is best known for his vibrant posters produced during the Velasco left-wing military government in the 1960s, promoting land reform, anti-corruption campaigns, and similar issues.<sup>1</sup> An artist whose influences span Andean iconography and North American Pop Art, Ruiz Durand has produced a number of paintings based on iconic photographs of the Peruvian conflict; among them, the last group portrait of the journalists of Uchuraccay and images of the El Frontón prison massacre. In this way, he invites the viewer to revisit key events in national history, which, he suggests, might otherwise be overlooked. These pictures follow the composition of their photographic originals faithfully and are recognisably copied from them, but diverge in their use of colour and form. It is my contention that in these paintings, Ruiz Durand seeks to affirm both the auratic power of the unique work of art, and the indexical authority of the photographic image. In so doing, the images have a redoubled claim on memory and affective power by appealing to both painterly authenticity and the photographic referent. Yet, despite the intention to maintain an interest in iconic images, their hypervisibility may eventually give way, paradoxically, to invisibility. By adding to an image culture already saturated by depictions of violence and trauma, can these works escape the possibility of desensitising the viewer still further?

In the 1980s Ruiz Durand's work was squarely grounded in Peruvian political reality. The *Memorias de la ira* (Memories of Anger) series, under

examination in this chapter, takes a selection of photographic images of high-profile events of the Peruvian conflict from news sources and transforms them into paintings which nevertheless remain faithful in composition to their originals. In other words, the artist selects images which have already been endowed with iconic significance. In contrast to his earlier re-workings of internationally renowned iconic images, the colours of this series are muted, principally blue, and earthy green and brown tones. Ruiz Durand himself expresses his intentions in *Memorias de la ira* in terms of a preservation of historical documents and an attempt to prolong the life of news images.<sup>2</sup> In this way, he participates in an ongoing process of repeated selection: by the photographer (who frames a slice of reality), editor (who is likely to choose from a number of images), viewers (who elect whether or not to cast their attention on a particular image), and the artist himself. What is more, this process is in part bound up with contingency, insofar as there is an element of serendipity in which images are chosen for particular attention. The result of this process is the persistence of a small group of images.

Ruiz Durand's works have been displayed in a range of non-traditional artistic spaces, such as trade union and community centres (Buntinx 2003: 323); although they have also featured in a retrospective of his career at the prestigious Centro Cultural de San Marcos in the heart of Lima in 2005 ('El artista y su época', *Identidades*, 19 September 2005). For art historian and curator Gustavo Buntinx, the series is an explicit attempt to reignite the compassion of the viewer, which has been quenched by repeated viewing:

Las fotografías originales son todas conocidas... Durante años formaron parte de la antología del horror con que cierto periodismo insensibilizó a la sociedad peruana hasta propiciar una generalizada sensación de hastío. En estos cuadros de 1987, sin embargo, otra vez nos conmueven y nos inquietan.

(2003: 315)

The original photographs are all well-known.... For years, they have formed part of the anthology of horror with which certain sectors of the media have desensitised Peruvian society, provoking a generalised sensation of boredom and disgust. In these 1987 pictures, however, they move us and worry us once again.

In analysing these images and thinking through their connection to the issues of photography, time, and the aura, I will firstly consider the fixing of the event by the click of the camera, and the significance of this in the creation of photographic icons. While Benjamin's work, which will form a backdrop to this chapter, was situated within European modernity and the rise of fascism, my argument maintains that it is nevertheless valuable for an examination of a distinctly Peruvian body of work. In this way, the fraught concept of the aura will be linked to a consideration of photographic iconicity. I will move on to analyse the techniques and effects in several specific images from Ruiz Durand's 1987 series, *Memorias de la ira*, connecting these to an artistic quest for aura. In conclusion, I will ask to what extent the connection of the images to both painterly traditions and photography influences their affective power and influence on the construction of cultural memory of the Peruvian conflict. I will suggest that, while it is important to heed warnings about the creation of smooth narrative outcomes from the employment of a select few photographic icons, the effect of these painted texts is to call for a considered return to the photographic images themselves.

### **An Abrupt Click: Photography, Time, and the Aura**



fig. 20 Jesús Ruiz Durand, One of the Last Photographs of the Journalists Murdered in Uchuraccay, 1987

For many Peruvians, as we saw in the previous chapter, the very name of Uchuraccay, unknown to most outside its immediate region before 1983, conjures up the image of the journalists murdered by its inhabitants, who mistook them for *senderistas*. Jesús Ruiz Durand uses this iconic event, and the photographs it generated, as the source for two images. The first (fig. 20) is clearly a reworking of the famous photograph taken by Octavio Infante on the way to Uchuraccay. It shows the group of journalists posing for a snapshot on the morning which, although they did not know it at the time, was to be their last. The men are casually arranged in a semi-circle, most with their hands in their pockets, and facing the camera. Each of the journalists is still identifiable, to those who know the original photograph, although the details of their clothes and faces have been replaced by flat, black and white tones. The black-edged figures of the reporters stand out against the pale hues of the landscape. Ruiz Durand's painting uses colour and style to distinguish itself as a unique work of art, yet its significance is also embedded in its employment of the iconic source image, one of the most famous photographs of the Peruvian conflict. In what follows, I wish to explore this dual claim on meaning through an investigation of Benjamin's concept of aura which, I will suggest, will help us to grasp what is at stake in this conjoining of the painterly and the photographic.

Writing in 1936, Walter Benjamin connected the age of mechanical reproduction to the loss of aura, and the camera to the suddenness of a shock. The concept of the aura has been so intensely debated as perhaps to have become overdetermined and uncertain in its utility (Briggs 2006: 115). Nevertheless, these notoriously slippery concepts – the aura and shock – have a strong temporal dimension that can illuminate an analysis of *Memorias de la ira*. According to Benjamin, the advent of mechanisation and the possibility of producing innumerable exact copies of images sapped the unique vitality of the individual artwork, leaving only a faded suggestion of its authentic past. Yet this familiar definition does not preclude the possibility of closer attention to Benjamin's words.

What exactly is the aura? Consideration of the term has been concentrated on Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (often known as the 'artwork' essay). However, it is introduced in his earlier piece, 'A Small History of Photography', first published in 1931:

What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be... And the difference between the copy, which illustrated papers and newsreels keep in readiness, and the picture is unmistakable. Uniqueness and duration are as intimately conjoined in the latter as are transience and reproducibility in the former. The stripping bare of the object, the destruction of the aura, is the mark of a perception whose sense of the sameness of things has grown to the point where even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness – by means of its reproduction.

(1997: 250)

The central themes – the permanence of the original work of art, the destruction of authenticity by the copy, a connection with time – are already laid out here. In 'A Small History', Benjamin permits early photographs, the result of careful planning and long exposure times, a semblance of aura: but with the increasing ease of reproduction, he claims, this is lost.

In the artwork essay, Benjamin describes his idea of aura in almost identical terms:

Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.

(1992: 217)

Again, there is an emphasis on the durability of the original work of art, compared to the fleeting nature of the copy. Significantly, critics working in a range of disciplinary contexts show little consensus as to whether Benjamin's attitude to the loss of aura is one of qualified affirmation of its liberatory possibilities (Buck-Morss 1992: 3), or one of resistance to 'the upstart photography' (Price 1994: 141), or of ambivalence (Hansen 1987: 187). Furthermore, the reputed power of the aura is wide-reaching:

In many instances the contemporary desire for auratic experiences expresses nothing other than the hope for structures of mediation that

negotiate the global and the local, restore meaningful spaces to the exploded topographies of postmodern culture, secure forms of individual agency and mimetic nonintentionality, and thus find remedies for the loss of memory in our fantastically unbound culture of channel surfers.

(Koepnick 2002: 11)

This citation illustrates exactly how much may be demanded of the aura, which is here sought after as a panacea for modern life. If the aura may take on even a fraction of this burden, however, it is perhaps still worthy of attention. Moreover, while in the Benjaminian sense the aura refers to a quality of the artwork, I wish to propose that aura may also be located in the iconic photograph. Snatched out of time, the iconic image becomes a strange object of veneration: that this is the case is amply illustrated by the Uchuraccay image, which, as we have seen in chapter four, was a casual group portrait, unlikely to be deemed of major consequence by its maker. And yet, despite its status as a photograph – that supposedly anti-auratic mode of representation – it went on to have a significant afterlife thanks to the death of its subjects. It is therefore necessary to look more closely at the relation between time and the aura.

Amid the extensive possibilities detailed above, I wish to focus in particular on the temporal registers of the aura, drawing and building upon the work of critics who have approached it from a range of perspectives, from photography through film studies. In this vein, Miriam Hansen notes that Benjamin's aura has a complex temporality:

Being contingent upon the social conditions of perception, the experience of the aura is irrevocably in decline, precipitated by the effects of industrial modes of production, information, transportation and urbanization, especially an alienating division of labor and the proliferation of shock sensations. Yet only in the process of disintegration can the aura be recognized, can it be registered as a qualitative component of (past) experience.

(Hansen 1987: 189)

Although the aura of the unique object is threatened by encroaching modernisation, therefore, it is only under duress that it can be valued.

Moreover;

The traumatic reorganization of perception that masquerades as modernity manifests itself most obviously in spatial terms, as an

uprooting of the subject from a human range of perception which Mary Ann Doane describes as a 'despatialization of subjectivity'. Since for Benjamin, however, time has conceptual priority over space, this shift is ultimately and more crucially a matter of detemporalization.

(Hansen: 1987: 189)

The destabilisation of aura reflects a shift in the perception and organisation of time itself. Hansen identifies both Benjamin's comparison with the natural world, and his connection of the aura to the external developments taking place in modernity. The aura is intimately related to the period of rapid change that Europe was undergoing in the 1930s, comprising new scientific discoveries, industrialisation and urban migration, the growth of mass communications media, and a general speeding-up in the tempo of life (Berman 1982: 16). As will become clear later in my argument, there is also a sense of the traumatic impact of such upheaval.

In a pertinent and perceptive analysis, film theorist Mary Ann Doane examines the photographic basis of early cinema and its relation to time. She points out that a feature of modernity was the standardisation and rationalisation of time (2002: 6-9). Yet this entails an apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the rigid control of time which was current in industry and new modes of labour, travel and transport, and, on the other, the 'fascination with contingency, indexicality, and chance... that which is beyond or resistant to meaning' (2002: 10) which *also* characterised modernity. Doane comments that 'time itself resists structure' (2002: 140), and that 'historical analyses of photography consistently demonstrate photography's inclination toward the contingent, the particular, the detail' (2002: 142). Taking a similar stand in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes wrote of 'the Sovereign Contingency' of the photograph (2000: 4), and emphasised the significance of small details forming the *punctum*. Benjamin himself also asserted, 'No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now...' (1997: 243). The essence of the camera, therefore, is twofold; it bases its authenticity on a direct indexical link to the referent (Barthes' That-has-been), and it freezes a moment in time. Yet the photograph occupies a precarious position, being at the same time a

result of new technology, and part of the ability to reproduce multiple identical copies, and additionally maintaining a connection to chance and contingency.

From the chaos of time, the camera plucks a moment and defines it as an event. 'The event may take time, but it is packaged as a moment: time is condensed and becomes eminently meaningful' (Doane 2002: 160). Meaning is therefore conferred on the event through the process of freezing it in the photographic image, by structuring particular moments as significant. As Barthes confirmed, 'Photography, in order to surprise, photographs the notable; but soon, by a familiar reversal, it decrees notable whatever it photographs' (2000: 34). The existence of photographic images is both cause and effect of events deemed noteworthy; photographs are essential in news articles and broadcasts, for example, while they also mark highlights of family life. For Susan Buck-Morss, however, the capture of isolated moments is significant, but bears an uncertain relationship to meaning: 'The motor responses of switching, snapping, the jolt in movement of a machine have their psychic counterpart in the "sectioning of time" into a sequence of repetitive movements without development' (1992: 17). So while photographs contribute to the marking of important events, they do not necessarily assist in the development of a coherent narrative version of history.

In his essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin himself identifies these sudden movements with the concept of shock, the assaults on the consciousness which take place with increasing frequency under the conditions of modernity (1969: 152-190). Doane notes that for Benjamin, shock is 'the dark underside' of the camera's relation to contingency, meaning that contingency is constituted as 'both lure and threat' (2002: 13). In the notions of snapping and shock inherent in the photographic process we can perceive a connection to trauma which is particularly present in the representation of violent events, such as those under consideration here. The relation of the image with time is therefore crucial, but not straightforward.

Balancing Doane's argument, Ulrich Baer warns against theoretical approaches which 'paste photography into the album of historicist

understanding' (2002: 1). He argues that critical discourse which ultimately adheres to a Heraclitean model of time-as-river – that is, as a constantly flowing, forward-moving entity – is insufficiently placed fully to take account of photographs of traumatic events.

When we think of the reality caught in a photograph as a “slice of time” or a “frozen moment,” we paste the image into a particular type of historical understanding. When viewed as frozen moments, photographs become flat, shiny squares lifted from an incessant current that surges ever forward beyond their borders. According to this understanding, photographs only artificially halt the flux of time that, in reality, carries us forward from event to event in an unstoppable stream.

(Baer 2002: 3)

For Baer, what is problematic in this view is the assumption that photography, ‘with the camera as totemic object of all that is disastrous in modernity, not only reveals the world’s inherently fractured constitution but, in fact, *causes* the world to shatter’ (2002: 8). By contrast, he calls for a Democritean perspective, recognising the inherent contingency and potential separateness of events in time. This viewpoint is more fully able to draw parallels between ‘the workings of the camera and the structure of traumatic memory’ (Baer 2002: 8). Trauma, by its very nature, is something which is unassimilable into normal experience and memory, while correspondingly, ‘photographs present their referents as peculiarly severed from the time in which they were shot, thus precluding simple recourse to the contexts established by individual and collective forms of historical consciousness’ (Baer 2002: 11). As I have suggested above, stressing the importance of the click and photography’s relation to time takes into account photography’s connection to the contingent, both central features of modernity.

The artist under consideration here is precisely concerned with re-awakening the attention paid to such images, fearing that they may be lost. Although I have indicated that Benjamin’s concept of the aura was developed under the particular conditions of European modernity, I wish to argue that it is still relevant for an analysis of a Latin American artist, with the proper respect to cultural specificity. It is by now a commonplace of Latin American studies that ‘what occurred [...] was the partial modernisation of infrastructure without the

social modernisation implicit in, for instance, the formation of a nation-state of citizens' (Schelling 2000: 10).<sup>3</sup> This uneven modernity puts Latin America in a different situation to the European one.<sup>4</sup> It does not, however, suggest that a consideration of modernity in the Andean region is totally redundant. Far from it: in an article on Peruvian art in the 1980s, art critic Gustavo Buntinx focuses on the period from 1980 to 1992. The democratic elections that took place at the beginning of the decade coincided with Sendero Luminoso's entrance into armed struggle. Meanwhile twelve years later, Fujimori's self-coup and dissolution of Congress took the country out of constitutional democracy. Buntinx calls this period 'the Peruvian Weimar Republic' (1996: 321). Signalling a window of time in which democratic development seemed possible, but was thwarted by the outbreak of violence and the subsequent mishandling of this by elected governments, he draws comparisons, despite the obviously significant differences, between the fragility of the Peruvian state and the pre-war Europe in which Benjamin wrote 'A Small History' and 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.

If Buntinx terms this period as the 'Peruvian Weimar Republic', it is significant to note that Ruiz Durand himself signals an involvement with the temporal disruption of photographs, as compared to the reputed permanence of paintings, which could be described as a desire to recapture the aura:

Todo lo que he pintado ha sido para prolongar la efímera vida de los medios impresos. Las imágenes de mis cuadros son sacadas de periódicos y revistas, donde viven muy poco, y estamos hablando de testimonios históricos. Soy simplemente un habitante de esta época, que ha visto estas cosas y ha usado esas imágenes para hacerlas más perennes.

(interview with Daniel Contreras, 'El artista y su época', *identidades*, 19 September 1995)

Everything I have painted has been to prolong the ephemeral life of print media. The images in my paintings are taken from newspapers and magazines, where they appear for a short time, and we are talking about historical testimony. I am just an inhabitant of this age, who has seen these things and has used the images to make them more permanent.

The artist clearly expresses an anxiety about the transitory nature of visual imagery in the news media which, I suggest, he overstates somewhat,

particularly in the case of the iconic photographs with which he works. There is an implication in his statement that the medium of paint is intrinsically better suited to the long-term preservation of memory documents. Although many of the images which appear daily in newspapers are quickly forgotten, Ruiz Durand chooses those images which so aptly depict important events that their circulation continues; in fact, they have a life of their own beyond their original contexts.

The Uchuraccay painting, then, a description of which opened this section, carries a particular burden of meaning as both a painting and a version of an iconic image. The aura, that 'strange weave of time and space' which Benjamin referred to (1997: 250), surely refers equally to the power of the frozen moment in the photograph, as both the aura and the photograph have a strong and compelling relation to time. In the following section, I will examine how Ruiz Durand's paintings contribute to an understanding of the relationship between photography, time, and the aura. I aim to demonstrate that in the case of iconic photographs, their auratic power lies not in their status as unique objects, but in their peculiar temporal significance. Iconicity, therefore, may be understood temporally as the continual circulation of selected, contingent moments of time, which will be exemplified in the painted appropriations of iconic photographs.

### **Painting Photo-icons of the Peruvian Conflict**

In the early 1980s, before the making of his series *Memorias de la ira*, Jesús Ruiz Durand described his style as 'una especie de pop *achorado*' (cited in Buntinx 2003: 318).<sup>5</sup> Gustavo Buntinx explains the term, and its related concept, pop *chicha*, as follows:

Two untranslatable slang terms: the former (*achorado*) is used to describe the uncivil and sometimes openly lumpen or 'wild' attitudes currently predominant among the pauperized urban population and the new generation of *mestizos* (men or women of mixed racial origin) who flippantly, almost frantically, appropriate all possible symbolic means of social mobility. The latter (*chicha*), complements the first one and refers to hybrid forms of cultural behaviour widely popular in those

cities where traditional ways of life clash and fuse with various cosmopolitan influences.

(Buntinx 1996: 302)

Emphasised here are the aspects of hybridity and appropriation in Peruvian culture, both of which are applicable to Ruiz Durand's later work. Buntinx uses the terms more generally in his assessment of two collaborative groups of artists in 1980s Peru, Huayco and NN, but notes that the phrase '*pop achorado*' was apparently coined by Ruiz Durand himself (1996: 323, n. 17).<sup>6</sup> When applied to his work, it highlights the influence both of international artistic movements and of the cultural diversity and specificity of Peru.

While Ruiz Durand's work is rooted in Andean culture, it is important to acknowledge that his earlier artistic work in particular is also informed by the pop art of Roy Lichtenstein and, to a lesser extent, Andy Warhol. Not only the superficial similarities of bright primary colours, thick black outlines, and a comic strip appearance, but also the selection of images from other print sources provide the parallels between Ruiz Durand's work and that of Lichtenstein. Michael Lobel has pointed out that Lichtenstein created an almost exact appropriation of images from comic books which led some critics to accuse him of a lack of artistry (2002: 9, 182), while in fact, his works bore a complex relation to the inspirational images and to the photographic process more generally (2002: 83). Of Lichtenstein, Lobel suggests that 'his work represents an uneasy relationship between photographic and pictorial models, with the pictorial tending to win out' (2002: 67-68). Presumably for Lobel, the pictorial 'wins out' because Lichtenstein in fact adapted details of the comics, rather than slavishly copying them, and always copied the original by hand before projecting it to a large size, to assist in the painting of the famous dot patterns (2002: 26, 47). In this way, Lobel refutes the idea that Lichtenstein's paintings were merely light-hearted and morally neutral. This dialectical relationship between the source image and the resulting painting will be relevant for this analysis of Ruiz Durand's pictures. Buntinx asserts that Ruiz Durand's aim is to produce images which '*radicaliza las premisas iconográficas del pop, reemplazando la imagen comercial por la de intención política*' ('radicalise the intentions of pop art, replacing the commercial with

the political', 2003: 316). And indeed, from 1968 onwards, Ruiz Durand began to turn his attention from the production of political posters to the transformation of key, high-circulation photographs.

In the first instance, several of these earlier paintings were based on iconic photographs which are widely recognised internationally, such as that of the 'burning monk' protesting against the oppression of Buddhism during the Vietnam War, and Eddie Adam's photograph of the execution of a Viet Cong guerrilla.<sup>7</sup> These have been identified as two of the most significant photographic images of the Vietnam conflict (Hariman and Lucaites 2003: 55). He also deployed the same distinctive style to paint 'La última vez que vi a Luis' (1969), of Luis de la Puente Uceda, leader of the Peruvian *Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR, Revolutionary Left Movement), a pro-Cuban, breakaway faction of the APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana; American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) party. All three paintings display Ruiz Durand's distinctive, fragmented style and use strong reds, blues, and oranges, with white highlights. By this means, Ruiz Durand presents the Peruvian icon, less well known to those outside the country, on the same level as the globally influential Vietnam images. He also participates in the appropriation and adaptation of imagery which is an important element of the establishment of iconicity (Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 38).

The 1987 series *Memorias de la ira* turns principally to the Peruvian situation, to focus on the violence which consumed the country during the period, and employs a more neutral, less strident use of colour. The complexity of the images lies in their relation to their photographic origins.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, they are copies of photographs published, as the artist notes, in newspapers and magazines. They are nevertheless paintings. But Ruiz Durand's use of form and colour is reminiscent of solarisation, a photographic method sometimes called the Sabattier effect (Buntinx 2003: 316).<sup>9</sup> In photography, this technique, which involves briefly exposing a photographic image to light during printing, results in a partial or total reversal of tones, similar to that more commonly seen in a negative. The effect is to reduce detail and accentuate form (Fuller 1976: 132). Its most prominent proponent is Man Ray,

but in his case the situation becomes even more complicated, for Man Ray described it as ‘a process of developing by which the contours of the visage are accentuated by a black line *as in a drawing*’ (cited in Fuller 1976: 132, emphasis added). The Peruvian images therefore, are paintings of photographs, painted using a style based on a photographic technique which itself harks back to the genre of drawing. Furthermore, the effects of solarisation are somewhat unpredictable (Baldwin 1991: 77) and Man Ray allegedly became aware of its possibilities by accident, when Lee Miller opened the darkroom door, not realising that it was in use (Wells 1997: 276). Rather than emphasising the technical regularity of photography, therefore, Ruiz Durand’s use of dark outlines and blocks of colour, reminiscent as it is of solarisation, seems more allied to the contingency which Doane (2002) and others have identified as an essential part of the photographic process. That is to say, Ruiz Durand uses a painterly technique that precisely attempts to get across a sense of the contingent of the photographic process as well as endeavouring to reclaim the aura of the original work.



fig. 21 Jesús Ruiz Durand, *Massacre in Uchuraccay*, 1987

I will attempt to unpick these tangled references through a detailed reading of a selection of the *Memorias de la ira* images, and in so doing I have chosen to focus on two pairs of images: two paintings of events surrounding the

massacre of journalists at Uchuraccay and two images of the prison massacre at El Frontón. The first of these, as I have already stated, is a version of the famous image of the journalists before their arrival in Uchuraccay. The second (fig. 21) resembles many of those images published in the immediate aftermath of the killings. A similar photographic image of the comuneros, for example, appears in the magazine *Caretas* (7 February 1983: 15), and an image of the helicopter is shown on the front page of *El Comercio* on 30 January 1983. In subdued hues of black, brown, grey and white, it nevertheless shows a scene of movement and action, frozen in time. In the foreground, six men in indigenous Peruvian dress are carrying a large bundle in a sheet or tarpaulin, which appears to be of considerable weight; they are working together to move their burden. Behind them is a large, pale helicopter, its propellers stretching the width of the painting, its costly technology contrasting with the traditional attire of the peasants and their physical labour. The confused aftermath of the murders is therefore condensed into an image which combines the *comuneros*, the body of a victim, and the presence of the armed forces.

Meanwhile, the painting based on the group photograph of the journalists insists on the photographic referent of the painting, linking it inextricably to its 'real' origins. Even though it is a painting and not a photograph, its power still lies in the identifiability of the journalists and the awareness that the original photograph was made by one of their group (the only one not visible in the resulting image, naturally). It is another step in the process of iconisation of the Uchuraccay victims, often, as we saw in chapter four, automatically termed 'martyrs'. By contrast, the indigenous men in the second image are not individually identifiable, and their features and dress are all very similar. The painting clearly makes a striking contrast between their traditional dress and their position, carrying a heavy object across rough terrain, and the technological prowess of the helicopter behind them. In these two images, Ruiz Durand retells the accepted narrative of Uchuraccay, already well established by 1987, but before its reinvestigation by the CVR in 2003. In it, the hopeful professionals set out to the countryside to discover the truth about highland violence, and fall victim to it themselves. In this account, the

peasants are unable to comprehend either the media scrutiny which their region had come under, or the normative power of the state expressed in the presence of the armed forces with their weapons and helicopters. There is no resolution in the paintings of the gulf between the so-called 'two Perus', but the incident is accepted as worthy of remembrance.

While Ruiz Durand states the importance of saving the media photographs from the transitory status that can be often be the fate of such images, the Uchuraccay group portrait is in no danger of being lost from sight. As we have seen, it is still in regular circulation, including in new digital contexts. This painting is just one of many re-workings of the Uchuraccay story, adding to its layers of iconisation. Perhaps part of the attraction of the image is its freezing of the moment of camaraderie and jollity before the imminent death that, as its viewers recognise, awaited its subjects. In this version, it is on the one hand a brief glimpse of a journey that could have been routine (an investigative mission into the mountains by a group of journalists) but instead became characterised as fateful, and fatal. It is, on the other hand, also a prolonged look at some of the most widely-recognised victims of the Peruvian conflict. Contingency and iconicity are both, therefore, exemplified in the painted image.

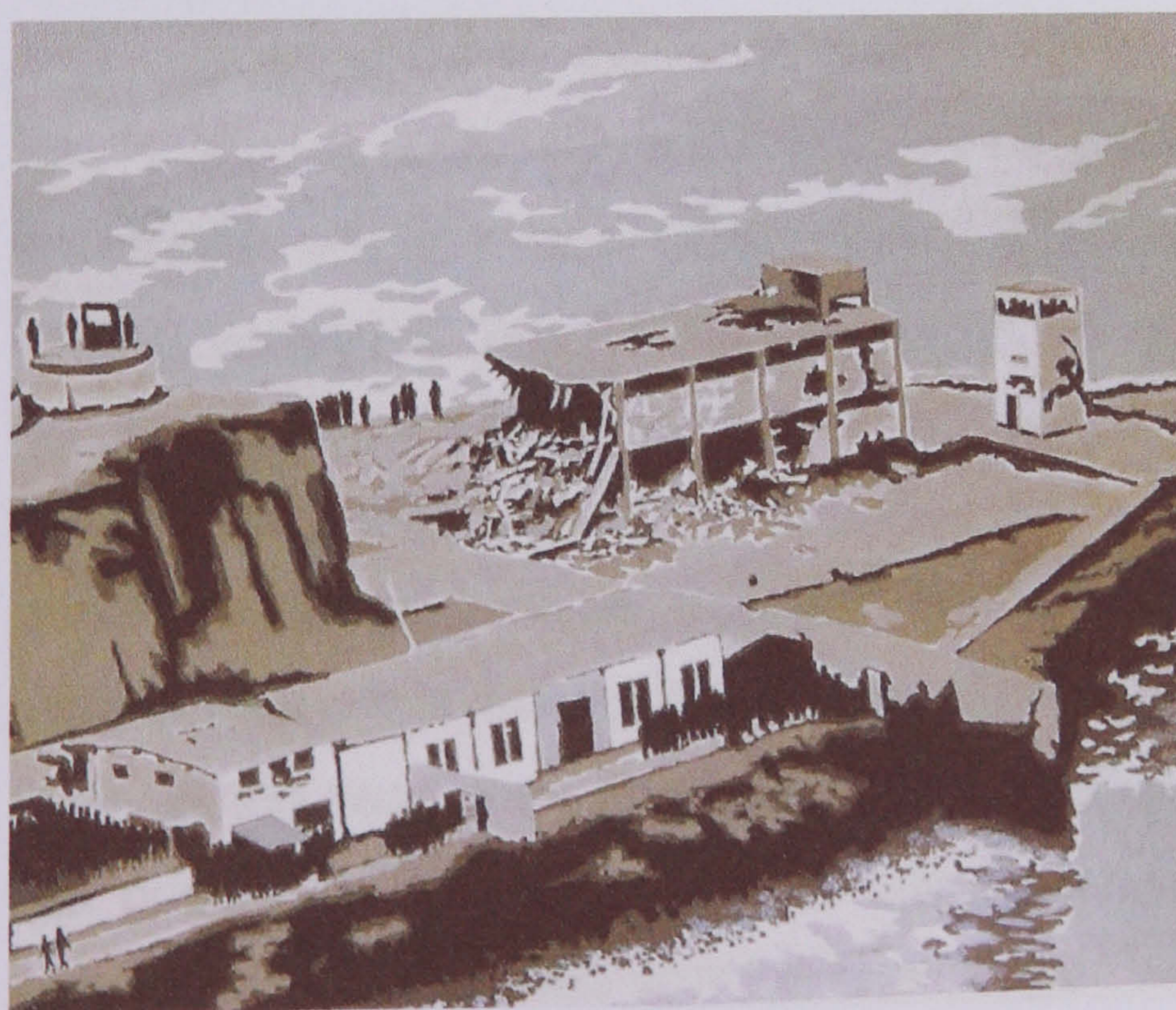


fig. 22 Jesús Ruiz Durand, El Frontón prison, Pabellón Azul, 1987

If the painting of the murdered journalists seems almost inevitable in such a project, due to the fame of the scene, the choice of the El Frontón prison massacre as part of the *Memorias de la ira* series is particularly noteworthy. While it is now an iconic event of the Peruvian conflict, it took place just a year before the creation of the paintings, and so could not have been as well-established in memory discourse as Uchuraccay. I have examined the events at Uchuraccay in detail elsewhere in this thesis, but a brief introduction to the uprising at El Frontón is called for here. The prison of San Juan Bautista on the island of El Frontón, just off the coast of Callao near the Peruvian capital, had been closed in November 1976 and fallen into disrepair, but was reopened in the 1980s to cope with the influx of *senderista* prisoners (Goritti 1999: 243). In common with other jails in Peru, it was overcrowded and underfunded, and Sendero Luminoso took advantage of this situation to continue training and indoctrination among inmates, to the extent that prison employees did not enter the *Pabellón Azul* (Blue Block) where the prisoners accused or convicted of terrorism were held.<sup>10</sup> The Sendero prisoners were even able to change the structure of the prison itself, strengthening walls and doorways, and stockpiling weapons (CVR 2003: 741). During 1985 Sendero Luminoso staged several prison uprisings, which were resolved relatively quickly. On 18 June 1986, however, inmates of three jails – San Pedro (Lurigancho), Santa Bárbara del Callao, and San Juan Bautista (El Frontón) – orchestrated simultaneous armed rebellions, including the taking of hostages. The three branches of the armed forces were brought in to confront the insurgents, with the Navy taking responsibility for El Frontón. They met with armed resistance, and three members of the security forces were killed. By the end of the confrontation, all but twenty eight of the prisoners were dead, totalling approximately 150 people (due to the lack of control in the jail, the exact number of inmates was unclear). In the prison at Lurigancho, there were no survivors among the rebels. The CVR confirms that in El Frontón, many of the dead were shot after they had surrendered, either in the patio of the prison, or in their cells. The extrajudicial executions were apparently ordered from above, and with the knowledge or complicity of the highest level of command.<sup>11</sup>

Ruiz Durand's painting (fig. 22) is apparently taken from an aerial shot of the *Pabellón Azul* of El Frontón such as the one published in *Caretas* (23 June 1986), in which the original photographer is not credited. There, it is captioned 'Semiderruido Pabellón Azul después de una batalla de 24 horas. Terroristas tenían tres fusiles automáticos y una ametralladora. Entre los muertos, 3 efectivos de la Marina. En la foto se cuentan unos 150 hombres' (The partially-destroyed Blue Block after a 24 hour battle. The terrorists had three automatic weapons and a machine-gun. Among the dead, three members of the Navy. In the photo there are around 150 men). The *Caretas* image is, therefore, an illustration for statistical information, in which it is possible, although difficult, to count the 150 small standing men. There is no actual violence visible from this distance. In Ruiz Durand's version, groups of tiny black figures can be seen, blending into one another so that it is impossible to count them. The sea surrounding the prison is a very pale, cold blue, and there is a hammer and sickle, typical of *senderista* graffiti, visible on the prison tower. Similarly, a photograph closely resembling the second image of El Frontón (fig. 23) features in the same issue of *Caretas*, although it shows only two standing guards, whereas the Ruiz Durand version has three. There are many, apparently male figures lying on the ground. One could assume they were dead, but for the caption of this and the photographic original in *Caretas* ('Estos son casi todos los sobrevivientes de la toma militar. Los muertos sumaron 266 personas'; 'These are almost all the survivors of the military action. There were 266 dead') makes clear that they are alive, but have been forced to lie down by their captors. They are in fact some of the few survivors of the prison massacre. There are three standing men, who must be prison guards or soldiers, one is wearing a helmet, while another seems to be carrying a weapon. No faces are visible; most of the lying men are facing away and down and there is little other detail in the room.



fig. 23, Jesús Ruiz Durand, El Frontón prison, survivors of the prison massacre, 1987

Events at both Uchuraccay and El Frontón are established, through their selection as inspiration for cultural productions, as 'peaks' of violence in the Peruvian conflict, and the series title, *Memorias de la ira*, would suggest that they loom large in the collective memory. A Peruvian viewer would be expected to recognise these scenes. From the history of the highland community and the prison island, and among all possible moments of time that passed there, the instants surrounding periods of multiple killings have overtaken all others. An element of contingency remains: in the apparently light-hearted decision of the reporters to gather for a group photograph before a day's work in the highlands, and in the uncertainty surrounding the facts of events in the prison and the identity of the subjects in both images drawn on by Ruiz Durand. With hindsight, the images assist in constructing iconic events around which discourses of memory in Peru are centred.

In summary, I have argued that photographic images contribute to the structuring of the memory of violence in Peru, by isolating particular moments in time. Through circulation in the press and through other means, some of these images become key in the representation of events designated as particularly notable in the conflict, principally, those occasions on which deaths have been especially numerous or shocking. Additionally, some of the

images themselves may be characterised as iconic through their repeated circulation and widespread recognition. The work of Jesús Ruiz Durand draws on photographs that fall into this category and uses them in the production of painted images which retain the basic format of the original photograph. In this way the paintings look to both their referential origins and their 'high' art status to find a privileged position in cultural memory. There are, therefore, two notions of the auratic at play: the auratic nature of the iconic photograph which is a moment of contingency that is then retrospectively endowed with cultural and historical significance, on the one hand; and on the other, the auratic quality of the painting, which Ruiz Durand claims give the ephemeral a more permanent status and quality. In the section which follows, I wish to ask whether such images may be formed out of a sort of 'painterly click', giving them a double authority, and what may be their claim to an affective response.

### **Conclusions: A Painterly Click?**

These painted photo-icons, then, seek to ground themselves in a double relation to time: that of the permanent, auratic work of art, and that of the contingent instant of photography. In this way, they construct a narrative about privileged topics of memory in Peru: Uchuraccay, El Frontón, and other incidents of massacre and uprising. The physical acts of the finger working the shutter and brushing paint onto canvas both contribute meaning to the iconic scenes depicted. What response do these pictures ask of their viewers, and how may we evaluate their contribution to memory? I wish to conclude by suggesting that the movement of the 'click' which encapsulates photography's relation to time also highlights a relationship to trauma.

Baer's warning, discussed above, against pasting 'the photograph into the album of historicist understanding' (2002: 1) is certainly apposite in the Peruvian context, when cultural productions are beginning to attempt to make sense of the violence of the past two decades and integrate it into some kind of coherent narrative (one thinks, for example, of the photographic exhibition *Yuyanapaq* organised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). From my

perspective, however, it is possible to think of photographs as capturing instants of time without necessarily perceiving them as grabbed from a flowing river of history. Rather, recalling Doane's comment about time's resistance to structure (2002: 140), and Buck-Morss' notion of the sectioning of time *without* development (1992: 17), I suggest that these images may identify and signal various extremes of traumatic event, without forcing them into a 'story' of the conflict as a whole. I agree, however, with two further cautions that Baer provides in his concluding remarks. Firstly, he warns that

Unless viewers suspend their faith in the future, in the narrative of time-as-flux that turns the photographed scene into part of a longer story (whether melancholic or hopeful), they will misconstrue the violence of trauma as a mere error, a lapse from or aberration in the otherwise infallible program of history-as-progress.

(Baer 2002: 180-181)

This sounds suspiciously like the excuses given on many occasions for human rights abuses in Peru, Argentina, and elsewhere; that they were simply isolated incidents, 'excesses' or the actions of a few criminal individuals rather than a state-orchestrated policy. It is certainly a valid concern and one which must cause us to look critically at our response to Ruiz Durand's work. Secondly, Baer returns to the question of time by calling for an acknowledgement that 'photography gives refuge to a time that is radically contingent, Democritean, unredeemed' (2002: 182). I have argued throughout this chapter that photography does indeed bear a fraught relationship to time.

The paintings of *Memorias de la ira* embody a complex relationship to time and the memory of the Peruvian conflict. Despite the admirable intentions that motivate their production – that is, to reinject with political energy the memory of the original events – I question if we can rely on their attempts to solidify the supposed transitoriness of the photographic image. In fact, the photographic originals have not, until now, been lost, but continue to circulate in a variety of printed and digital contexts, risking only a lacklustre reception through overexposure. In this regard, one is reminded of a comment by Barthes:

I always feel (unimportant what actually occurs) that in the same way, color is a coating applied *later on* to the original truth of the black-and-white photograph. For me, color is an artifice, a cosmetic (like the kind used to paint corpses).

(1980: 81)

In the case of Ruiz Durand's images, colour is indeed applied later on, as a coating to the form of the original photograph. Might not one valid reaction to these smoothly-coloured paintings be to turn away from them, return to the rawness of their photographic originals, and really *look* at those familiar surfaces? The paintings themselves reawaken a spark of interest in those iconic photographs which, perhaps, overcomes fears of 'compassion fatigue'. While not wishing to dismiss Jesús Ruiz Durand's artistic project, which meshes with a variety of concerns within Peru and beyond its borders, I suggest that a fruitful approach might be to take more seriously the element of the contingent, the possibly ephemeral yet strangely persistent space of the iconic photographic image. This might go some way to fulfilling the ethical imperative to remember past atrocities rather than becoming indifferent to the photographic traces of them.

This chapter has also drawn attention to the fact that artists and cultural practitioners play an important role in commemorative practices, taking up and remaking images and artefacts from particularly resonant aspects of history. Ruiz Durand is not alone in such projects, and in the following chapter I will examine the work of an Argentine photographer and conceptual artist whose 'memory art' engages with both the legacy of the Argentine dictatorship and with the continuing labours of human rights organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> A selection of Ruiz Durand's posters may be viewed online as part of the digital database of the Sam L. Slick Collection of Latin American and Iberian Posters, housed at the University of New Mexico, <<http://elibrary.unm.edu/cswr/collections/slick.php>> [accessed 7 June 2007].

<sup>2</sup> 'El artista y su época', Ruiz Durand interviewed by Daniel Contreras, *identidades*, 19 September 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Some important examples of work on Latin American modernity include Garcia Canclini (1995), Schelling (2000) and Rowe and Schelling (1991).

<sup>4</sup> One important difference, for example, is the conceptualisation of time by indigenous people, who do not necessarily share the Western view of a linear progress of time (von Barloewen 1995: 64-67).

<sup>5</sup> For more on the influence of Pop Art in Peru, see the informative multimedia special produced by *El Comercio*, which features images by Warhol, Ruiz Durand, and other practitioners, <<http://www.elcomercioperu.com.pe/especiales/andywarhol2007/portada.html>> [accessed 7 June 2007].

<sup>6</sup> Huayco was a group of 'young rebellious artists' (Buntinx 1996: 303) whose members included Francisco Mariotti, María Luy, Rosario ('Charo') Noriega, Mariela Zevallos, Juan Javier Salazar, Herbert Rodríguez, and Armando ('Sherwin') Williams (Buntinx 1996: 321, n. 9). The name refers to the mudslides that, as Buntinx explains, 'during the rainy season stormily descend from the mountains upon the Peruvian lowlands (Lima, for example) with a regenerating violence that leaves both devastation and fertility in its wake' (2003: 303).

NN, of course, refers to the unnamed graves of those killed in the conflict in Peru and not identified (Buntinx 2003: 309), and this knowledge is widespread enough for Buntinx not to explain the acronym. The same code is used to refer to the burial grounds of *desaparecidos* in Argentina. However there does not appear to be agreement about the exact origin of 'NN', with some suggesting it stands for the Spanish 'no nombre' and others referring to the Latin 'non nominatus', both meaning 'no name' (Feitlowitz 1998: 49). Others, however, connect it to the German 'Nacht und Nebel' (Spanish: 'noche y niebla', night and fog) (Arditti 1999: 19), hinting at a Nazi-inspired method of killing and disposing of bodies. Seductive though this connection to the Holocaust may be, the 'no name' label, in whichever language, seems more plausible, and is also relevant in the context of an artistic group whose members chose to remain anonymous.

<sup>7</sup> Ruiz Durand's version of the self-immolation of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc is reproduced in Hamann et al (2003), where it is entitled 'Documento VIII. Vietnam 1967' (1970). In fact the iconic image by Malcolm W. Brown was made on 11 June 1963 and won the World Press Photo of the Year in the same year.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that Jesús Ruiz Durand is not unique in reworking famous photographs in a Latin American context: other artists working on similar themes include Arnold Belkin (on the death of Che Guevara), Fernando Botero (on the Abu Ghraib photographs) and Vik Muniz (re-staging a variety of iconic photographs in materials as diverse as beans and chocolate sauce). Hariman and Lucaites (2007: 37-39) note that one of the features of an icon is its tendency to be reappropriated by different authors in a variety of contexts and for diverse purposes, including homage, parody and satire.

<sup>9</sup> The terms 'solarisation' and 'the Sabattier effect' tend to be used interchangeably, although as Baldwin (1991: 77) points out, true solarisation is usually the accidental result of overexposure of the photograph in the camera, while the Sabattier effect is a deliberate technique employed in the darkroom.

<sup>10</sup> Gustavo Gorriti (1999: 244-249) describes the conditions of El Frontón, parts of which were essentially a *senderista* training camp. An article in *Caretas* features photographs taken of female Sendero prisoners in the prison of Canto Grande; the walls are painted with murals of Abimael Guzmán and Marxist slogans, and the women are shown gesturing with red flags and putting on theatrical displays of armed combat ('Sendero en Canto Grande', *Caretas*, 30 July 1991, 34-39).

<sup>11</sup> Much information in this section is taken from the CVR Final Report (2003: 737-768).

### Exploring the Haptic: Re-seeing Argentina's Past in the Photographic Memory Work of Marcelo Brodsky

Photographic images of inanimate objects can be evocative connections to a traumatic past. In one series of images by Argentine artist Marcelo Brodsky, *Archivos*, (fig. 24, fig. 25), dusty bundles of files are tied together with string, their edges curling, and piled high. It is obvious the archives continue on further shelves beyond the frame. Once the evidence of bureaucratic organisation, and universally recognisable as the result of official and legal processes, they have deteriorated and if we were to touch them, now look nearly ready to disintegrate. The labels on the files such as 'cuerpos' ('bodies') and 'habeas corpus' are chilling proof of their sinister contents, which we cannot read although we are at eye-level with the shelves; so close, in fact, it seems as if we could almost reach out and pick them up.



*Expediente de Nando*. Buenos Aires, 2001. Impresión digital, 30 x 40cm. *Nando's File*. Buenos Aires, 2001. Digital print, 12" x 16".

fig. 24 Marcelo Brodsky, *Expediente de Nando*, 2001



Cuerpos. Buenos Aires, 2001. Impresión digital, 70 x 50 cm. *Bodies*. Buenos Aires, 2001. Digital print, 28" x 20"

fig. 25 Marcelo Brodsky, *Cuerpos*, 2001



fig. 26 Marcelo Brodsky, *Los condenados de la tierra*, 1999

In another instance (fig. 26), the image of an installation shown at a Buenos Aires book fair, a box, divided into quarters, is filled with rich brown earth in which nestle the crumbling pages of old books.<sup>1</sup> If we were to handle them, they would probably come apart in our hands. One of the books is recognisable as a Spanish translation of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* – a work considered too dangerous to own in Argentina in the late '70s – and this is also the title of the photographic works, *Los condenados de la tierra*. While the pages of the books are in pieces, and they are partially caked in soil, some of the text is still legible. As Brodsky explains with regard to the images of books unearthed from the ground after two decades, under a military dictatorship,

muchos nos vimos obligados a quemar nuestros libros, a quemarlos, a dejarles abandonados en bolsas de residuos en cualquier esquina, por miedo a ser descubiertos con ellos en nuestro poder [...] En la Argentina, no fue necesario que otros quemaran nuestros libros, aunque eso también haya ocurrido. Los quemamos nosotros mismos, por miedo.  
(2001: 75).

many of us felt obliged to burn our books, to burn them, to leave them abandoned in rubbish bags on a corner, for fear of being discovered with them in our possession [...] In Argentina, it was not necessary for others to burn our books, although this did happen too. We burned them ourselves, out of fear.



Entremanos II. Buenos Aires, 1999. Impresión digital, 50 x 70 cm. Hand to Hand II. Buenos Aires, 1999. Digital print. 20" x 28"

fig. 27 Marcelo Brodsky, *Entremanos II*, 1999

Thirdly, in a series of images called *Entremanos* (fig. 27), we see close-ups of hands passing round photographs of files; a shared viewing and sensory experience. There are piles of images on the table to be examined and other hands waiting to receive them. The soft brown tones of the files in the pictures complement the skin tones of the hands against the mottled grey of the table. The rest of the human subject of this image is not visible, but the viewer shares their vantage point. Holding the book *Nexo* in which this photograph is reproduced, I am looking at an image of photographs, and these hands could also be my hands.

In this chapter, I will first explore the link between seeing and the human rights movement, which is significant in the light of the ‘turning away’ from evidence of atrocities under a violent regime. I will go further, however, by connecting the photographs under examination not only to sight, but to *touch*, arguing that the images have a haptic quality which *in itself* dissolves the boundary of the frame. The relationship between the senses being fluid, rather than fixed and distinct as is often assumed, an analysis of the blend of sensuous response to the images is key to their meaning. In addition, the tactility of the images is pertinent to the relation between the embodied reaction of the viewer and the materiality of the photographs, as Edwards, Gosden and Phillips (2006) have argued. Drawing on the work of film theorist Laura Marks (1998), I will suggest that these sensory qualities encourage a relationship between the viewer and the image, promoting shared memories of the past – but I will close by warning of the ethical implications of such identification.

### **Human Rights, Cultural Production and a Revival of Memory in Argentina**

I will consider the blurred relation between artistic production, memory, and human rights in Argentina through the photographic images of Marcelo Brodsky. This analysis takes place against the backdrop of a regeneration in memory discourse since the mid-1990s. Immediately after return to democracy in 1983, a

series of measures were put in place, notably the CONADEP investigation and its publication *Nunca Más* (Never Again), followed by the trial of the leaders of the military junta. However such progress was later undercut by the laws known as *Punto Final* (Full Stop) and *Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience), which prevented further prosecutions of human rights abusers, and by the attitude of Peronist President Carlos Menem, who urged the nation to forget the past and move on (Feitlowitz 1998: ix, 87). For a time, despite the efforts of human rights organisations, it seemed that impunity would become the predominant state of affairs in Argentina.

Since 1995, however, various events have contributed to reviving the debate around the legacy of state terrorism and newly-expressed memories are emerging into the public sphere. One of the initial triggers for this memory turn was the publication of investigative journalist Horacio Verbitsky's book *El Vuelo* (1995), which recounted the confessions of retired Navy Officer Francisco Scilingo, who admitted his part in the killing of *desaparecidos* who were pushed, still alive, out of aeroplanes into the Rio de la Plata estuary.<sup>2</sup> Although most of the facts in the book were already known or suspected, their admission by one of the perpetrators was deeply shocking to an Argentine public accustomed to official denials of knowledge or complicity (Feitlowitz 1998: 193-206; Valdéz 2001: 71). In 1996, the period surrounding the twentieth anniversary of the March 24 coup became the occasion for numerous marches, protests and performances by human rights activists and victims' relatives and cultural productions, which signified a resurgence of interest in the dictatorship (Jelin and Kaufman 2001: 96; Valdéz 2001: 72). Brodsky himself cites the anniversary year as the catalyst for his own renewal of interest in the period (Brodsky 2001: 120). The thirtieth anniversary of the *golpe de estado*, in 2006, also an important one for human rights organisations and wider society, was declared a national holiday.<sup>3</sup> The late 1990s also saw the start of moves to construct a museum of memory, which, as we saw in chapter three, will be situated in the former ESMA

building, and a memory park, to include a monument to the victims of state terrorism.<sup>4</sup>

In the legal arena, the amnesty laws were eventually ruled unconstitutional, and moves continued to prosecute or re-try perpetrators. Moreover, the election of President Néstor Kirchner in 2003 signalled a further shift, to a style of government which was more prepared to admit previous errors and emphasise the importance of memory than was previously the case (Bonner 2005). Consequently, human rights organisations, including the previously fiercely critical Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, became more willing to engage with political actors. All in all, Argentina in the early twenty-first century is a nation which still struggles with its past, but has made clear progress since the low point of the early 1990s. Such advances have taken place against a backdrop of an international boom in what may be termed, using the apt German expression, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), with which the Latin American nations may also engage (Huysen 2003; Radstone 2000; Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2000:3-5).

Throughout this period, human rights groups have played a central role in the public sphere, from demonstrating during the dictatorship to coordinating plans for a museum of memory with government agencies (Jelin 1994). The most prominent of these organisations are composed of those directly affected by state terrorism; survivors of torture or relatives of disappeared people, including their mothers, grandmothers, and children. Consciousness-raising and publicity have always been a key part of their campaigns, factors which in recent years have become merged with the imperative to remember. The influence of human rights activists is connected with their public visibility and their ability to provoke a sympathetic response in their audience. Indeed, as Nerea Arruti comments, imagery has always been central to human rights in Argentina; 'The Human Rights movement in Argentina has used photographs as a political tool to denounce human rights abuses, but also from the very beginning as a practical

way of finding people' (2007: 105). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the field of vision is one which both human rights abusers and defenders have sought to control.

The work of Argentine photographer Marcelo Brodsky, which we have already seen with reference to representations of the ESMA, is located at the intersection of the artistic and human rights fields, due in part to his own experiences under the military junta. He narrowly escaped an attempted abduction, presumably orchestrated by agents of the state, in 1977, and went into exile in Spain. Two years later his brother Fernando was disappeared and subsequently killed in the ESMA. Though his photographs have been exhibited internationally, they have until recently received only a limited amount of critical attention. David William Foster (2007) has included Brodsky's *Buena Memoria* (Good Memory) project in his survey of urban photography in post-dictatorship Argentina, in which he highlights Brodsky's strategies of photomontage and sees in his work a focus on the anti-Semitic element of Argentine political violence.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, German theorist Andreas Huyssen has also turned his attention to Brodsky's 'mnemonic art', as he terms it, which for him, forms part of 'a marked rise in visibility of the Latin American visual arts, a boomlet of sorts' (2001: 7), while Arruti's recent essay (2007) covers his work in both *Buena Memoria* and *Nexo*.

Much of Brodsky's work focuses on physical artefacts of the past – photographs, souvenirs, and other types of evidence – to explore the significance of memory in the present. He has worked with the human rights organisation Memoria Activa (Active Memory), which is concerned with achieving justice for the victims of the bomb attack on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Jewish Cultural Centre) in Buenos Aires in 1994, and is also involved with the Parque de la Memoria (Memory Park) project. He explicitly connects the areas of cultural production and justice, believing in the importance of both legal and artistic action, and it is therefore worth citing his own statement of beliefs on the subject at some length:

Desde el campo cultural, no podemos administrar justicia. Para eso están los jueces. Y los organismos de Derechos Humanos vienen trabajando desde hace años en este sentido, como es público y notorio. No vamos a mandar preso a un asesino con una muestra de arte. Sin embargo, la batalla por la justicia no solo se desarrolla en los tribunales, sino ante la opinión pública, en los medios de comunicación, con los formadores de opinión de cada país en el que se ha iniciado una causa contra los desaparecidos y asesinos. Y ahí mi obra, junto con otras propuestas artísticas en las artes visuales, teatro, danza o literatura, se convierte en una herramienta para narrar lo que pasó desde un lugar más subjetivo; puede llegar a un público más amplio y contribuir a que las iniciativas por la justicia cuenten con un apoyo social y político mayor.

(2001: 124-125)

We cannot administer justice from the cultural field. That's what judges are for. And human rights organisations continue working in this way as they have for years, as is well-known. We are not going to send a murderer to jail with an art exhibition. Nevertheless, the battle for justice does not only take place in the courthouse, but also in the presence of public opinion, the media, those that form opinions in every country in which the cause against those who committed disappearances and murders has been taken up. And my work, together with other artistic projects in the visual arts, theatre, dance or literature, becomes a tool to relate what happened from a more subjective point of view; it can reach a wider public and contribute to the justice initiatives with greater social and political support.

For Huyssen, also, 'human rights activism in the world today depends very much on the depth and breadth of memory discourses in the public media. [...] Public memory discourse constitutes itself in different registers that ultimately depend upon each other and reinforce each other in their diversity' (2001: 9). I argue that Brodsky's images have a strong emotional and sensory pull which links them to other memory discourses in Argentina, and for this reason, I will focus on the intermingling of senses in the response which the images provoke.

'When almost every other aspect of human bodily existence – from the way we eat to the way we dress – is now recognised as subject to social conditioning, it is surprising that we should still imagine that the senses are left to nature' (Classen 1993a: 5). Constance Classen's observation is a timely reminder that the Western notion of five distinct senses is itself a constructed one, often

attributed to Aristotle, although even he was not consistent in describing the number and functions of the senses (Classen 1993a: 2-3). It was in fact not until the Enlightenment that the senses became firmly classified as distinct from the mental faculties (Classen 1993a: 3); while some cultures do not adhere to the five-sense structure, instead thinking of, for example, body temperature or speech as additional senses (Classen 1993a, 1993b). A further assumption is the ranking of the senses: in the West the hierarchy of the senses tends to be connected with their level of immediacy. Taste and touch, in direct contact with the world, are lowest, followed by smell, while hearing and sight, because of their link with philosophical content, are higher (Stewart 2005: 62). Other peoples may value the senses of touch or smell more highly (Classen 1993a), but in the West sight is particularly privileged and connected with notions of rationality and analytical thought (McLuhan 2005: 45). The 'lower' senses of smell, taste and touch also tend to be associated with the feminine. Yet, as Susan Stewart points out, this concern with classification, 'seems to reify our alienation from the senses and takes us farther and farther away from an understanding of their broader places in aesthetic activity' (2005: 63). Rather, the examination of interplay between the senses may be more fruitful.

Thus far, then, I have asserted that the revival of interest in human rights discourse in the past ten to fifteen years in Argentina has manifested itself not only in 'traditional' activities such as protests and consciousness-raising, but also in performance-related activities and cultural productions. Marcelo Brodsky is an active member of such circles whose work may illuminate the study of photographic memory icons by, I will argue, broadening the scope of human rights' association with sensory experience, which is often limited to the visual.

### **Seeing and Knowing under an Authoritarian Regime**

Before going on to consider the deeper sensory impact of Brodsky's images, I wish to establish the sensory background against which they may be judged.

The acts of seeing, looking, and making visible were particularly charged under a military dictatorship, facts which many commentators have acknowledged. There was of course censorship and self-censorship in the media about abductions and political killings, creating what Jerry Knudson (1997) has called a 'veil of silence' about abductions and political killings. With the two exceptions of the newspaper *The Buenos Aires Herald*, which had a circulation limited to those who could read English, and liberal *La Opinión*, until the arrest of its editor Jacobo Timerman in 1977, all the mainstream press became complicit with the Argentina military government, 'culminating in the see-no-evil attitude that made the dirty war possible if not inevitable' (Knudson 1997: 100). Those few individuals who made the attempt to uncover the truth, such as Timerman, became targets themselves. Knudson attributes this silence to a combination of fear, indifference, and a desire to maintain advertising revenue from government agencies.

Despite the press black-out, violence was not totally invisible. In fact, the logic of state repression was predicated on a degree of visibility, enforcing so-called order through an awareness of what happened to those who transgressed accepted norms. For example, many disappearances took place during the day, at places of work, in the street, or in the home, with multiple witnesses (Lewis 2002: 150-51) and on some occasions bodies were found in public places. The climate of fear, however, meant that most people made a great effort not to see, or to look away as quickly as possible – it was just too dangerous to get involved. This wilful ignorance has been well-documented: Feitlowitz has described several apparently paradoxical incidents in which those who had personally witnessed disappearances still insisted afterwards that they had no knowledge of state terrorism (1998: 149-151). Others went to great lengths to avoid filling the potentially dangerous position of witness;

Among those who witnessed the abductions were those who closed their windows or turned up their radios to mask the screaming, pretending that they had seen nothing and trying to distance themselves from such a terrible reality. In the staged display of the abductions, however, everyone

was required to be aware and present, to realise that whether one was abducted or not was merely a matter of chance

(Guzman Bouvard 2002: 28).

It has been noted that denial and fear of speaking of violence can continue long after the events (Kaiser 2005: 65-80). In her book *Disappearing Acts* (1997), performance theorist Diana Taylor describes this 'self-blinding' as follows; 'In order to qualify as "good" Argentines, people were forced to focus on the given-to-be-seen and ignore the atrocities given-to-be-invisible, taking place around them' (119). Significantly, Taylor terms this behaviour, which was common to a large proportion of Argentine society, as *percepticide* – a form of collective denial that was precisely couched in visual terms.

As part of the culture of fear they had constructed, the military regime attempted to monitor and manipulate all aspects of public space, transforming it into a militarised zone. The constant fear of surveillance and understanding that any civilian could become a victim distorted and fragmented communities. The security forces could shut down areas of Buenos Aires to carry out raids (Taylor 1997: 97-98). Certain professions, public gatherings, styles of dress and language associated with 'subversion' became dangerous (Taylor 1997: 104-107). The junta even instigated a public campaign supporting their actions and denying rumours of atrocities, in which women wore badges proclaiming 'Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos' ('We Argentines are human and right', Taylor 1997: 78-79). This action was in direct retaliation to the protests of the Madres, who entered the Plaza de Mayo, the heart of Argentine civic life, to call attention to their plight as mothers of the missing.

By contrast to the denial at the heart of the fear instilled by a dictatorship, the human rights movement is the antithesis of the looking-away which had become part of the survival mechanisms of many Argentines. Thomas Keenan has written of one of the accepted aims of human rights: the mobilisation of shame.<sup>6</sup>

Keenan states:

It is now an unstated but I think pervasive axiom of the human rights movement that those agents whose behaviour it wishes to affect – governments, armies, businesses, and militias – are exposed in some significant way to the force of public opinion, and that they are (psychically or emotionally) structured like individuals in a social or cultural context that renders them vulnerable to feelings of dishonour, embarrassment, disgrace or ignominy.

(2004: 435-36)

Of course, it is only necessary to shame those individuals, or institutions, which lack a conscience. Visibility encourages shameful feelings and shame links knowledge with action, signifying 'involvement in a social network, exposure to others and susceptibility to their gaze' (2004: 436); the latter being particularly pertinent for this analysis. Keenan states,

The pervasiveness of this consensus cannot be overstated, nor can its special relationship to the mass- and especially the image-based media. The concept gathers together a set of powerful metaphors – the eyes of the world, the light of public scrutiny, the exposure of hypocrisy – as vehicles for the dream of action, power and enforcement... Light brings knowledge, and publicity brings 'compliance', even if it works by shame and not reason or conscience.

(2004: 438)

While repressive regimes cultivate a deliberate blindness to atrocities, therefore, human rights organisations tend to focus on bringing crimes to light. In the early years of their struggle, the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo held placards and photographic images of their missing children to provide visual evidence of their existence and a demand for their return. While the state was 'disappearing' its citizens, their relatives were producing visual images of them and calling for their reappearance. More recently, the organisation of children of the disappeared, H.I.J.O.S., holds large, noisy, highly noticeable demonstrations outside the homes of torturers and other perpetrators. These protests, called *escraches*, are designed to bring the locations of human rights abusers into the open and allow them nowhere to hide (Kaiser 2002).

This visual struggle at the time of the dictatorship eventually gave way to an ongoing process of unearthing memory in post-dictatorship artistic interventions.

Brodsky's photographs are often concerned with artefacts and documents related to state terrorism. His earlier photo-essay, *Buena Memoria* (Good Memory, 2000) consisted principally of a re-working of his class photograph from his school days, updated with information about what his classmates were doing now; several had fallen victim to the dictatorship. In the book *Nexo* (2001), from which all images discussed in this chapter are taken, the themes of memory and the tangibility of the past are continued. Inside the front cover of the bilingual book is a definition of its title: 'Nexus: (from the Latin, "nexus", derived from nectere, to bind): bond, connection, union, link. Any thing that serves to unite other things, materially or morally.' This serves as a statement of intent for the mnemonic images and texts that follow.

The *Entremanos* series, for example, features images of secret intelligence files which were discovered in a police station in La Plata in 1999. Having heard of the documents' existence, representatives of human rights organisations were allowed to see the file once, when the initial photographs were taken, and then the files were taken to the Federal Court and locked away again, out of sight (Brodsky 2001: 49). Brodsky photographed a group of human rights leaders and artists who had found out about this and were discussing the incident, passing the images from hand to hand, as they paused in their task of judging entries for the Buenos Aires Memory Park project. He comments, 'aparecían documentos secretos de la represión que podían aportar luz sobre el destino de los desaparecidos. Memoria e historia, recuerdo y documento confluyen en estas imágenes de una coincidencia' ('Secret documents about the repression appeared, which could shed light on the fate of the disappeared. Memory and history, recollection and document came together in these images of a coincidence', 2001: 49). The archive images had risen in significance as they were now the only visible evidence of these files available to human rights activists, who have often struggled against the obstructive bureaucracy of the legal system. Brodsky's comment draws attention to the significance of the visibility of the documents, while his images focus on the importance of the

tactility of the evidence and the shared sensory experience of holding, examining, and handing on the photographs. The images are equivocal; while they refer to the difficulties and secrecy of the legal system, which uncovers evidence and then almost immediately removes it from sight again, they also depict efforts to maintain memory processes in the public sphere.

In a similar way, the *Archivos* series shows the physical records of the dictatorship, in which *desaparecidos* apparently disappeared without trace, but in fact left a paper trail of incriminating evidence. The files pictured contain material originating from the trials of the junta leaders in 1984 (Brodsky 2001: 59), including the piles of writs of habeas corpus submitted by the families of *desaparecidos* in a vain attempt to force the authorities to acknowledge their whereabouts. Another image shows the file labelled with the name of Marcelo Brodsky's brother, Fernando, reinforcing the connection between Brodsky's photographic work and his personal interest in the documents. For Arruti, 'His brother's file takes centre stage in this series' (2007: 115). In the image entitled *Expediente de Nando* (fig. 24), this is the case, but the accompanying images prove that, despite the significance of Nando to the artist, his name is only one of many on the overburdened shelves of the archive. The image entitled *Cuerpos* draws clear parallels between the visible files, piled up and neglected though they are, and the invisible bodies buried in mass graves or dropped into the ocean, and in most cases never found. The repetitive, faded orange of the files and red of the handwritten labels emphasise the mass of information and, by extension, lives of victims documented, and are also reminiscent of the laborious Argentine legal system which has failed to convict the majority of perpetrators for such a long period.

More hopefully, *Los Condenados de la tierra* speaks of fear receding, and the possibility of buried books being claimed and seen once more. Again, parallels may be drawn between the books buried in the earth and the victims of state terrorism: Brodsky notes that the tattered volumes, 'Gozaron de digna sepultura,

un privilegio que no tuvieron muchas de las víctimas de la dictadura' ('enjoyed a dignified burial, a privilege which many of the dictatorship's victims did not enjoy' 2001: 77). The owner of the books also reflected, after their reappearance from pits in her garden, 'Agradecí que los libros ocuparan ese lugar y no nosotros' ('I was grateful that the books occupied that place, and not us', Brodsky 2001: 79). While the graves or remains of the disappeared were in most cases never found, these memory documents have been brought to light and in their display, could form the basis for discussion of the dictatorship.

In summary, the repressive regime in Argentina enforced silence in the media and there was no official acknowledgement of human rights abuses. At the same time, however, glimpses of brutality instilled a climate of fear in the general population which encouraged collective denial and led to self-censorship, expressed in acts such as the refusal to witness crimes and the destruction or burial of possibly incriminating items, including books. Human rights organisations work against this fear of looking by deliberately drawing attention to injustices and shaming perpetrators of atrocities. They also seek to touch spectators with their campaigning, provoking action through an emotional response. Concomitantly, Brodsky's images complement this process by representing historical documents and the process of remembering.

### **Touching the Image**

Works such as Brodsky's, therefore, are, unsurprisingly, linked to the idea of looking which was so difficult during the dictatorship and so connected to human rights discourse. But there is something more at stake here. I wish to suggest that they also draw on other sensory experiences – specifically, that of *touch*, and in this I am largely influenced by the work of film and video theorist Laura Marks, which is also pertinent to the still images under examination here. In describing this concept, the term *haptic* is used in preference to *tactile* as the latter implies a rather literal sense of touch, in contrast to its use here. '*Haptic*

*perception* is usually defined as the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch on the surface and inside our bodies' (Marks 1998: 332). In haptic visuality, therefore, the 'eyes themselves function like organs of touch' (332). This way of looking draws from other forms of sense experience, involves the body, and encourages an embodied relationship between the viewer and the image.

While Marks' analysis of video imagery is particularly relevant to my argument, she is not unique in connecting a predominantly visual medium with the sense of touch. As Marshall McLuhan indicates in his essay 'Inside the Five Sense Emporium' (2005), art historian Bernard Berenson was keen 'to endow the retinal impression with tactile values' (cited in McLuhan 2005: 43) as far back as the end of the nineteenth century, apparently as a response to the new medium of photography, which he believed encouraged the separation of vision from the other senses. Sculptor Adolf Hildebrand concurred, arguing that 'true vision must be much imbued with tangibility' (cited in McLuhan 2005: 43). McLuhan himself, writing in the 1960s, believed that the act of viewing television involved all the senses to some extent, disrupting the separation between vision and emotion that had developed in the West. Television, according to McLuhan, transports 'the Western literate back into world of non-literate synesthesia' (2005: 46). Crucially, 'tactility is less a separate sense than it is the interplay among the senses' (2005: 46), a point which is at the forefront of my analysis of Brodsky's work.

The haptic may be analysed in opposition to optic visuality, although as Marks acknowledges, this is less a dichotomy than a question of degree (1998: 332). Marks sees haptic looking as offering a less hierarchical way of seeing; 'Haptic visuality implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing' (1998: 341). The haptic is by definition erotic because it deals with a close identification between body and image, but it is not limited to sexual or pornographic content. This is, according to

Marks, particularly appropriate in the realm of intercultural cinema which may reflect on the difficulties of seeing, categorising, and the ethnographic. I would like to suggest that haptic visuality may also be a fruitful form of examining images connected with human rights, both because of the emphasis on embodiment and because of the emotional connection between the viewer and subject of the image.

As Edwards, Gosden and Philips have emphasised, there are benefits in drawing attention to and refiguring the relationship between body, sensory perception, and cultural praxis (2006: 6). They maintain that, 'the over-determined concentration on visualism in contemporary cultural theory poses something of a stumbling block for understanding the full range of interactions with material culture' (2006: 7). Without denying the importance of the visual, they are keen to acknowledge its embeddedness within a wider sensory experience. This approach can, therefore, 'put vision in its place, as only one way of apprehending the world even if central and variously privileged' (2006: 8). This applies even in the case of photographic images, which are not comprehended exclusively through vision and 'pure' content, but as material objects, and which may be displayed in contexts which connect to other senses. At this point, it is therefore important to note that Brodsky's images were displayed in exhibition spaces where audiovisual material, video installations, and the proximity and discussion of other observers could contribute to the viewing experience. *Los condenados de la tierra*, for example – a work composed of books and images of books – was exhibited at the Buenos Aires book fair in October 2000 (Brodsky 2001: 80). As a book publication, the images can be held, touched and stroked and the pages may be leafed through. Additionally, on Brodsky's website, the sensory experience is different again.<sup>7</sup> While the tactile may be less accessible online, it is once again possible to watch and hear the video clips. Even when it is not possible literally to handle an image, is it possible to respond to it in a way which takes account of its physicality, and of the haptic quality of its content?

Bearing in mind the combination of sensory perceptions which contribute to our experience of cultural productions, I wish to look now more closely at some examples from Brodsky's work to explore how this idea of the haptic might work. Firstly, the *Entremanos* images are focused on the act of looking, holding and passing around photographs with hands and images being the central components. The close-up, cutting off the bodies at the wrists so that only the hands are visible, means that the human subjects of these images are not identified and, more importantly, dissolves the frame of the image. In this way, they involve the viewer in the experience of reviewing the document. Marks is also interested by images of hands which, not surprisingly, invoke a connection with touch. She remarks that, 'Getting a sense of touch by looking at hands would seem to require identifying with the person whose hands they are. Yet to the degree that the hands become characters in the story, the haptic bypasses such identification, being instead an identification with touch itself' (1998: 337); a point to which I will return. In an analysis of news images which nevertheless remains pertinent here, Hariman and Lucaites have suggested that images of hands (and feet) have become a visual trope with a particular emotional connection.<sup>8</sup> The corporeal familiarity, and complexity, of hand gestures, lend themselves to an metonymic representation of events, without the specificity of recognisable facial features.

In the second example with which I wish to explore this idea of haptic visuality, I take Brodsky's image *Los condenados de la tierra* in which materiality is an important component. The close range allows us to see – and almost, feel – the texture of the soil, the sense of depth in the box, and the fragility of the rotting paper. Undoubtedly, if we were to handle the crumbling pages, we would damage them further. The image's fascination is also based on the knowledge that these are really the same books which were buried, as their owners feared for their lives, and then left, until one day their teenage sons had the idea of finding them and went into the garden with spades (Brodsky 2001: 75-77). The social biography of these artefacts is one which speaks of the memory

processes taking place in Argentina, in which buried histories are slowly uncovered. In the absence of the bodies of the dictatorships' victims, physical evidence of human rights abuses and the culture of fear that prevailed during this time is particularly significant.

In *Archivos*, the extreme proximity of the files does not allow sight of the wider archive space, but sites attention narrowly on the papers themselves. The visible details of the curled edges and creases of the bundles emphasise to the viewer the tactile quality of paper. In much of Brodsky's work, he focuses tightly on memory objects, things that 'were there' at key points in his or others' lives or that record significant events – theatre tickets, souvenirs, coins, and more poignantly, goods looted from the homes of the disappeared, and archives detailing information about them. This evokes sensory memories which are not limited to the visual. In focusing on material objects from the past, photographs have the unique ability to dissolve (albeit from within the frame) the division between past and present – as if we can touch and be touched by objects from the past. Thus, as with photographic images of the ESMA, there is a strong sense of the past within the present, or, put slightly differently, of Runia's concept of 'presence' which was explored in chapter three of this thesis (2006: 5). I am not suggesting that photographs are a mere window on the past, but that they may be taken as such, and have a particularly strong connection with memory. In this respect, haptic perception can contribute to a wide range of sense experience concerning remembering and forgetting.

### **Possibilities and Dangers of Engaging with the Haptic**

Have I strayed far from the question of Brodsky's engagement with human rights? I think not, because human rights are also deeply concerned with reaching out, and with the breaking down of boundaries. While human rights organisations strive to call attention to human rights abuses, they also seek to provoke an emotional response in the public. Emotion, in turn, may lead to

action. This is often focused on drawing similarities between people from a diverse range of experiences, but nevertheless, sharing a common humanity – the very opposite of torture, as used by the Argentine military regime, which is centred around the dehumanising of the supposed subversive. Brodsky's photographs work well in this idiom, presenting viewers with artefacts, so the remains of the past will move them.

The making visible and bringing close to home of crimes committed by the state is concerned with the ethics of awareness and shaming into action. As these events recede further into history, many agents continue to stress the ethical imperative to remember – never again, or 'nunca más' as it is often expressed in Argentina (Kaufman and Jelin 2000: 90). Images work to draw us in, dissolving the boundaries between viewer and viewed object, and appealing to us at a level beyond the visual. This empathic viewing experience can *touch* us, we can be *touched* by it. Marks, as I cited earlier, is of the opinion that haptic visuality does *not* lead to identification with the image's subject, but to a dialectical relationship with the image and with touch itself. For this reason she suggests that the haptic look is one which is *less* hierarchical than the traditional gaze, and therefore an ethical alternative (1998: 341). Nevertheless, I am somewhat concerned by a viewing relationship which means, to cite Marks once more, 'being drawn into a rapport with the other where I lose the sense of my own boundaries' (1998: 331) and wish to add a word of warning about the dangers of this proximity.

When looking at these images of books and files, it is as if we could touch them, reach up and get them off the shelves... but of course we cannot, the photographic frame is always there. The images can touch us, but ultimately we cannot touch them. Susan Sontag's caution against an overidentification with the suffering of loss is apt here: 'No "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain' (2004: 6).<sup>9</sup> Similarly, however tempting it is to respond, 'we know how you feel', we cannot understand the pain of these memories which are not ours. Similarly, Carolyn Dean's study, 'Empathy,

Pornography, and Suffering' surveys the perceived dangers of compassion fatigue. Dean notes that while some have assumed that geographic, social and ethnic distance may preclude or distort compassion (2003: 2), and that therefore an awareness of proximity such as in these images may promote understanding, there is a wide belief that an overuse of images of atrocity will lead only to apathy and indifference (Moeller 1999). She suggests that a related danger is that of 'a lazy and false empathy in which we simply take the other's place' (Dean 2003: 5). Such warnings are timely in a period of interest in the commemoration of past atrocities, but they should not be overstated: it is my contention that it is possible both to accept the impossibility of experiencing another's grief, and still appreciate the empathic possibility of memory work. Consciousness raising of all kinds has, after all, always been a key feature of the human rights field and related areas.

Additionally, Jill Bennett (2002), in an analysis of the work of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, has brought up the possibility of internalising another's grief. Salcedo, who, like Brodsky, has employed familiar physical objects to explore the effects of the Colombian conflict, describes how she believes she takes over the pain of the victims of violence. As Bennett points out, this tendency to overidentify with the primary witness has been attacked by LaCapra in his work on the representation of the Holocaust (1994). In the case of Brodsky, it is worth mentioning that his own position as the brother of a disappeared person, and therefore as directly involved with the traumatic events, no doubt underpins his authority in depicting the memory of the pain of loss. Yet, even this does not make him a spokesperson for all relatives – something which I do not suggest he would claim, in any case. I merely suggest that the structure and form of his images may promote empathic looking while ultimately inscribing the limits of this kind of gaze.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have used the example of Brodsky's photo-memory work to explore the interaction between artistic production and human rights in Argentina. This relationship is not an abstract possibility but a vibrant and sometimes controversial dialogue taking place in the public sphere. In their study of war memory and commemoration, Ashplant, Dawson and Roper (2000: 8) noted a tendency to separate the work of remembrance shaped centrally by the state, on the one hand, and that performed by the agencies of civil society, on the other, 'as if the processes operating in each of the two domains were not inter-related and indeed constitutive of each other'. Indeed, there is much at stake in recognising the interdependence and dialectical possibilities of individuals, non-governmental organisations, and state institutions, in public memory performances. This is a point explicitly recognised by both commentators such as Huyssen, and artists themselves, and which will continue to influence the legacy of political violence in Argentina. Arruti suggests that Brodsky's evolution as an artist is traceable in the movement from personal recollections of his brother Fernando in *Buena Memoria* to a more politicised viewpoint in *Nexo*, a transition which reflects a wider tendency on the part of Argentine relatives in the past decade or so of activism and commemorative work (2007: 118). My examination of a portion of the works from *Nexo* supports this view, as the images of objects located on the boundary between the public and private spheres.

Concomitantly, I have endeavoured to recognise the dialectical relationship between the senses in responses to cultural productions, without exclusively focusing on the visual. Brodsky's work, with its haptic quality, brings material artefacts close to the spectator in a way which blurs boundaries between document, image and viewer. The presence of images of hands, in particular, contributes to this engagement with the tactile. With the caveat that simplistic responses to painful memories may not respect those personally affected by trauma, I argue that Brodsky's work crosses the border between human rights activism and the cultural arena. In this way, Brodsky's images fall into the

category of those which work for an acceptance of painful memories and an acknowledgement of the importance and complexity of commemorative practices. In the following chapter, however, I will examine what may happen in the opposite case: when images appear to support one stance so resolutely that they close down the possibility of debate. The presence of such differing categories of photographs will lead us further in our examination of the photographic legacy of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> *Los condenados de la tierra* was originally exhibited as an installation in wood, earth and paper in 1999. A video of the installation was also created by Marcelo Brodsky and Eduard Feller in 2001. Details of the installation, photographic images of spectators viewing it, and stills from the video are published in *Nexo* (2001: 74-85). The video may also be viewed at <[www.marcelobrodsky.com](http://www.marcelobrodsky.com)> [accessed 27 February 2007].

<sup>2</sup> Verbitsky's work was also published in English (1996) as *The Flight: Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior*, trans by Esther Allen, New York, New Press.

<sup>3</sup> David Schweimler, 'Argentina: Coming to Terms with the Past', BBC News, 24 March 2006, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4838538.stm>> [accessed 27 February 2007]. The commemorations were well covered by the Argentine Press, for example, Vicente Muleiro 'Listas negras y escritores desaparecidos' ('Black Lists and Disappeared Artists'), *Clarín*, 24 March 2006, <<http://www.clarin.com/suplementos/especiales/2006/03/24/l-01164155.htm>> [accessed 27 February 2007]; 'El deporte dice Nunca Más' ('Sport Says Never Again'), *Clarín*, 24 March 2006, <<http://www.clarin.com/diario/2006/03/24/deportes/d-07106.htm>> [accessed 27 February 2007].

<sup>4</sup> Information on the museum is available on the web site of Memoria Abierta, <[http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/camino\\_al\\_museo2.html](http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/camino_al_museo2.html)> (accessed 27 February 2007), and on the Parque de la Memoria at <<http://www.parquedelamemoria.org.ar/home/select.htm>> (accessed 27 February 2007). See also Huyssen (2000).

<sup>5</sup> See also Reuters (2006), the catalogue of the exhibition *The Disappeared/Los Desaparecidos*, in which Brodsky was a featured artist.

<sup>6</sup> As Keenan notes, although the term 'the mobilization of shame' seems to have been in use by charitable and human rights organisations for some decades, it is difficult to pinpoint the moment or source of its origin (2004: 436-37).

<sup>7</sup> For more on the experience of viewing photographs on websites, see Sassoon (2004).

<sup>8</sup> 'Boots and Hands: Visual Tropes and Visual Citizenship', plenary lecture at the conference *Locating Photography*, University of Durham, 20-22 September 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Susannah Radstone drew attention to Sontag's comment in her warning against the possibility of overemphasising the sensibilities and empathic abilities of the trauma analyst, in her keynote speech, 'Memory's Afterlife: Reparative Literature and the Historical Imagination', at the conference *Memory from Transdisciplinary Perspectives: Agency, Practices, and Mediations*, University of Tartu, Estonia, 11 January 2007.

## Representations of Abimael Guzmán and Memories of Violence in Peru



fig. 28. Caretas, Abimael Guzmán paraded before the press in a cage, 1992

On 24 September 1992 a group of Peruvian and international journalists, together with members of the security forces, gathered in Lima to witness the most important and carefully-staged media event of the Peruvian conflict. Since the capture of the leader of Sendero Luminoso almost two weeks previously, the possibility of a photo opportunity had been highly anticipated, with media sources having to make do with recycling a few archival images, which were years old, and grainy stills from a brief video released by the police. In the courtyard of the headquarters of the anti-terrorist police, DINCOTE, a large cage was covered with tarpaulin. In front of the assembled audience, the covering was dropped to reveal Abimael Guzmán, the mysterious 'Presidente Gonzalo', looking through the bars. The guerrilla leader was paraded before the flashbulbs and television cameras in a striped suit with the number 1509 emblazoned on the chest. The unveiling turned into a bizarre contest of wills, in which the watching journalists and members of

the security forces shouted and jeered at Guzmán, who responded with Marxist slogans and gestures of defiance. After about 15 minutes, he was taken away; the show over.

This brief presentation was a calculated move by the authorities to make clear their triumph over the guerrilla leader, and was a strong political statement. It was also an act of spectacle orchestrated in front of multiple cameras and witnesses. As such, I consider the incident theatrical in the sense set out by Diana Taylor:

By “theatricality” I refer to the aesthetic, political, and perspectival structure within which the characters are positioned and perform their prescribed roles... It’s more about artistic framing or political bracketing than about political agency. And unlike “performativity,” whose power to shape a sense of cohesive identity comes through the seeming naturalness and transparency of what Judith Butler, in *Bodies that Matter*, calls the “iterative and citation practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993: 2), theatricality (like theatre) flaunts its artifice, its constructedness.

(1998: 161)

The images made on that day remain the most frequently seen visual representations of Guzmán and are often used in material about the conflict in general, although analysis of them tends to be neglected.<sup>1</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, to look more closely at both the contemporary portrayal of Guzmán, and the role the images made of him continue to play in the memory of violence in Peru. This chapter will argue that the demonisation of Guzmán, exemplified by his display in a cage, was part of the attempts by state agencies to control the visual sphere. The leader of Sendero Luminoso is just one in a line of individuals in the international arena singled out as exceptionally deviant and an enemy of the state; Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden are obvious recent examples. Terrorists, as Jasbit Puar and Amit Rai (2002) have asserted, are shown in black and white, with no shades of grey. Nevertheless, I maintain that it is not possible to exert complete control over representations of violent actors in the public sphere; no matter how stark the presentation of Guzmán, his representation always exceeded the intentions of those directing the spectacle. I will draw on Foucauldian notions of punishment as spectacle to explore the essential role

played by the audience of such public rituals, and the risks run by the orchestrators of the performance.

Furthermore, I will ask what it means for Peru when its central image of the figurehead of Sendero Luminoso is one of aggression and defiance. What implications does this have for the memory of the conflict and possibilities for reconciliation? I will explore the tension between justice and reconciliation, when justice takes place from within the confines of a legal structure that puts perpetrators on display on a cage, arguing that while the iconic images of Guzmán may not positively contribute to a resolution of divisions in Peru, they also do not monopolise considerations of the period.

### **The Capture of Abimael Guzmán and its Coverage in the Peruvian Press**

The arrest of Guzmán in September 1992 marks a break in the history of the Peruvian conflict. Judging from the number of deaths and disappearances reported to the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there were particular peaks of violence in 1984 and 1989-90, with 1991-92 also being very violent (CVR 2003: 176). 1992 was a crucial year in the conflict for several reasons, most notably the *autogolpe* or 'self-coup' of President Alberto Fujimori, who announced the dissolution of Congress on April 5. This was ostensibly a means to improve the counter-insurgency campaign and aid a flagging economy through a more efficient decision-making process (i.e. one not hampered by needing the consent of Congress); its effect was greatly to increase the powers of the President and undermine the right of citizens to a fair trial (Youngers and Burt 2000: 43). In July, the Tarata bombing by Sendero Luminoso in the business district of Miraflores, Lima claimed twenty-five victims and brought the conflict home to those Limeños who had been hitherto complacent or indifferent to a distant war (CVR 2003: 667). This horror became a landmark of the conflict and highlights the fact that 1992 was an extremely tense and difficult time, even for more privileged members of society. For a time, it seemed that the state had been brought to 'the brink of collapse' (Basombrío 1999: 206), and certainly its democratic basis was

threatened. Although it was by no means the only factor in this decline (Burt 1993: 11; Degregori 1999), the capture of Abimael Guzmán would, with hindsight, indicate a turning point in the fortunes of Sendero Luminoso and the beginning of the end of the violence.

Abimael Guzmán had long been the most notorious individual member of Sendero Luminoso and the personality cult that surrounded him was well known, and only exacerbated by the secrecy which surrounded him (he had been underground since a brief period of arrest in 1979, and was therefore invisible to all but his inner circle). He systematically destroyed opponents within the organisation and loyal followers were prepared to die for him (Gorriti 1992: 169). It was clear that his hold on power was greater than that of many comparable Communist leaders over a long period: 'what distinguishes Sendero from other Communist parties is that it had an autocrat at the helm from the very beginning of the armed struggle' (Gorriti 1992: 150). This allowed for an efficient use of power but also made the organisation vulnerable to defeat should Guzmán be removed. His position as supreme leader was 'at once both Sendero's greatest strength and potentially its greatest weakness' (Palmer 1992: 9), making the stakes for capturing him very high.

On September 12 1992, officers from GEIN (Grupo Especial de Inteligencia) a special intelligence group within DINCOTE (Dirección Nacional contra el Terrorismo), the police anti-terrorism agency, raided a house in an affluent district of Lima and arrested Abimael Guzmán and a number of his central committee members. The capture was accomplished after a lengthy period of covert surveillance and without encountering any armed resistance from the *senderistas*. This success came as a surprise to many, including President Fujimori, who had long been proclaiming the need for military strength and increasing the powers of SIN (Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional), the National Intelligence Service headed by his most trusted aide, the now-discredited Vladimiro Montesinos. In the event, SIN was not involved in Guzmán's capture (McClintock 1999: 230); rather, it was 'a masterful stroke planned and

executed by a small police unit and its very capable leader, Benedicto Jiménez' (Gorriti 1999: xvi). Some commentators suggest that this angered Montesinos and Fujimori, who had been deliberately kept in the dark about the imminent arrest, possibly because Jiménez suspected that they might try to assassinate Guzmán rather than try him (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 140-41). Cynthia McClintock remarks that instead of being rewarded for their achievements, members of GEIN involved in the capture were soon transferred and effectively demoted (1999: 230; Chávez 2003: 155). This is an indication of clashes between state agencies, going to the highest level of command, which complicated counter-insurgency practice.

Following his capture, Guzmán was initially kept at the DINCOTE headquarters for interrogation. A short video made by the captors was released to the media, but there was otherwise no sight of him until the press conference organised for 24 September. Although the video is not the main focus of this chapter, it is interesting to note that it shows the dishevelled Guzmán stripping for the camera in what John Simpson termed 'a humiliating little ceremony' (1993: 122). Having been in hiding for many years, making him a mysterious, enigmatic figure, Guzmán was now totally exposed to public view. Recent parallels to this episode may be drawn with the video made of the bearded Saddam Hussein undergoing a medical examination shortly after his arrest in 2003.

Naturally, the arrest was the major news story in Peru and widely covered in all sectors of the press. This chapter does not seek to provide a complete analysis of newspaper coverage of the period, but will consider the relation between text and image in three key publications: well-respected traditional daily *El Comercio*, left-leaning tabloid *La República* and Peru's top circulation weekly magazine, *Caretas*. While there was little overt censorship in Peru, all news sources were heavily influenced by their editors and, above all, their owners (Acevedo Rojas 2002: 28), and journalism was not a safe profession during the conflict. Some practitioners experienced threats and violence as well as encountering the practical difficulties of covering violence in rural and

isolated areas. The death of eight journalists in Uchuraccay in January 1983, which has been discussed in detail in this thesis, was the most publicised occurrence of the hazards of reporting in Peru, but it was not the sole instance of journalists putting themselves in danger (Rospigliosi 2000; Instituto Prensa y Sociedad 2002). *El Comercio*, the best established of the Peruvian press, has been owned by the Miró Quesada family since its foundation in 1839. As Acevedo Rojas notes, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, it followed a policy of limiting all but the most prominent stories on terrorism to the inside pages and police section, effectively downplaying the severity of the conflict. The front pages and political sections, meanwhile, relied heavily on official sources of information such as government press releases and the security forces (2002: 57). Víctor Peralta Ruiz confirms that the newspaper typically devotes the majority of its news articles to information released by the authorities, restricting opinion strictly to editorials (2000: 229). Although it dedicated a far smaller proportion of its pages to stories of guerrilla activities than other newspapers, it did have a high level of credibility among the public (Peralta Ruiz 2000: 32). *La República*, by contrast, tended to devote a much greater proportion of space to articles on Sendero Luminoso (Acevedo Rojas 2002: 30). While it included serious editorials on human rights issues, weighty topics were often balanced by sensational use of headlines and photographs (Acevedo Rojas 2002: 58).

The Guzmán story broke on Sunday 13 September 1992, when *La República* used the single word headline '¡CAYO!' ('Fallen!') above a close-up image of Guzmán's face. The following day, it declared 'Está gordo y resignado' ('He is Fat and Resigned') on its front page, and went on to comment on his facial hair, his eyes, his age and his expression. Calling him 'el enemigo del Perú' ('the enemy of Peru'), the newspaper emphasises, 'Tiene barba y los ojos extraviados' ('He has a beard and wild eyes'). Guzmán's power and the fear he inspired are contrasted with his unkempt appearance, 'mucho más bajo de estatura de lo que se lo imaginaba' ('much shorter than you would imagine'), ('Un Abimael obeso, envejecido, sumiso y de mirada perdida apareció en la TV' ['An obese, aged and submissive Abimael with a lost expression

appeared on TV'], *La República*, 14 September 1992: 3). On the same day, it quoted Fujimori's speech calling Guzmán a monster, which is examined in more detail below. An article on the inside pages called 'Los rostros de Abimael' ('The Faces of Abimael', *La República*, 14 September 1992: 11) revealed old images of the Sendero leader from his university days and his previous brief period of arrest in the late 1970s: evidently, there was a shortage of images of Guzmán, since these few, some of which were poor quality, reappeared frequently. On subsequent days, the newspaper continued to show a particular interest in Guzmán's personal appearance and character, and returned repeatedly to the subject of the empty bottles of vodka that were discovered at the safe-house; after a week of front page headlines about the capture, finally claiming that he had been arrested during the course of an orgy ('Orgía perdió a Abimael', ['Orgy was Abimael's Undoing'], *La República*, 19 September 1992: 1). Such speculation also refers back to the video discovered in a raid on a *senderista* safe house the previous year, which showed top *senderistas* including Abimael Guzmán celebrating a birthday, dancing drunkenly, and incongruously, to the tune of 'Zorba the Greek' (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 139-40).

With a similar headline to *La República*, 'Abimael cayó con cúpula de Sendero' ('Abimael Fell with Sendero Leaders'), *El Comercio* (13 September 1992) illustrated the story of Guzmán's capture with three images; archival photographs of Guzmán and fellow *senderista* Laura Zambrano, also under arrest, and a picture of the outside of the building where they were found. The article concentrates more on the details of the military operation than a personal description of the Sendero leader, although it states that he was writing when the security forces broke in. Like *La República*, *El Comercio* remarks on the vodka bottles, but in addition draws attention to the Marxist literature and encoded documents. Its editorial emphasises the role of DINCOTE over that of Fujimori (Peralta Ruiz 2000: 230).

The carefully-staged presentation of Guzmán on 24 September was the first opportunity for photojournalists to take their own images of the prisoner since

his capture. Until this point, there were few visual representations of Guzmán in circulation, and many of these were very different to the caged photographs.<sup>2</sup> On 25 September, the day after the caged press conference, *La República* used the single word headline '¡Enjaulado!' ('Caged!') with a half-page close-up of Guzmán behind bars, in striped prison suit and sunglasses, and with clenched fist. Predictably, the caption describes him as defiant. Inside, the chosen images clearly recognise the overt theatricality of the event and the significance of the onlookers, with a wide shot of the members of the security forces standing stiffly before the cage, which is also described in detail. Other images show Guzmán gesturing with his hand and wiping sweat from his brow ('visiblemente agotado' ['visibly exhausted'] according to the caption, although his sunglasses suggest it may also have been a hot day). The article describes both reporters and police shouting insults at the guerrilla leader and there is also a small image which focuses on the crowd of journalists ('Abimael enjaulado no quiere responder por las 25 mil víctimas del terror', [Caged Abimael Does Not Want to Answer for the 25,000 Terror Victims] *La República*, 25 September 1992: 2-4).



fig. 29, *La República*, ¡Enjaulado!

By contrast, *El Comercio* maintained its usual style of multiple stories on the front page, even on 25 September when the cage images were published. Again, the chosen image was of Guzmán looking through the bars, but it takes up a relatively small proportion of the page. *El Comercio* does not show the Sendero leader with clenched fist, but rather pointing. Its main concern is to emphasise the ‘unconvincing’ nature of Guzmán’s tirade. It describes him as:

...sin capacidad de convencimiento, anacrónico en sus ideas y con una endeble personalidad... Su figura, después de los 10 minutos que dedicó a “explicar” las acciones de su desquiciada organización y “argumentar” filosóficamente su trasnochada y antihistórica ideología, decayó aun más, desmitificándose por completo el autodenominado “cuarta espada” del socialismo.

(‘Abimael Guzmán amenazó con seguir con crímenes terroristas’, *El Comercio*, 25 September 1992: 1)

...unconvincing, with anachronistic ideas and a weak personality... After ten minutes devoted to “explaining” the actions of his deranged organisation and philosophically “arguing” his obsolete and ahistorical ideology, his figure sagged still further, completely destroying the myth of the self-styled “fourth spade” of socialism.

(Abimael Guzmán Threatened to Continue Terrorist Crimes)

The article mentions that Guzmán ‘constantly’ raised his clenched right fist, but hid his left arm behind his back, presuming that this is to avoid showing his psoriasis. In its further article on the same day, the theme is continued, with a headline which repeats that Guzmán did not succeed in convincing his audience with his argument and show of defiance (‘Abimael Guzmán lanzó una perorata que no convenció a los presentes’ [‘Abimael Guzmán Launched into a Tirade Which Did Not Convince His Listeners, *El Comercio*, 25 September 1992: A12]). The newspaper describes his occasional difficulties in expressing himself, the reddening of his face and his apparent exhaustion when he finally stopped speaking. Evidently, its intention is to discredit Guzmán (Peralta Ruiz 2000: 238).

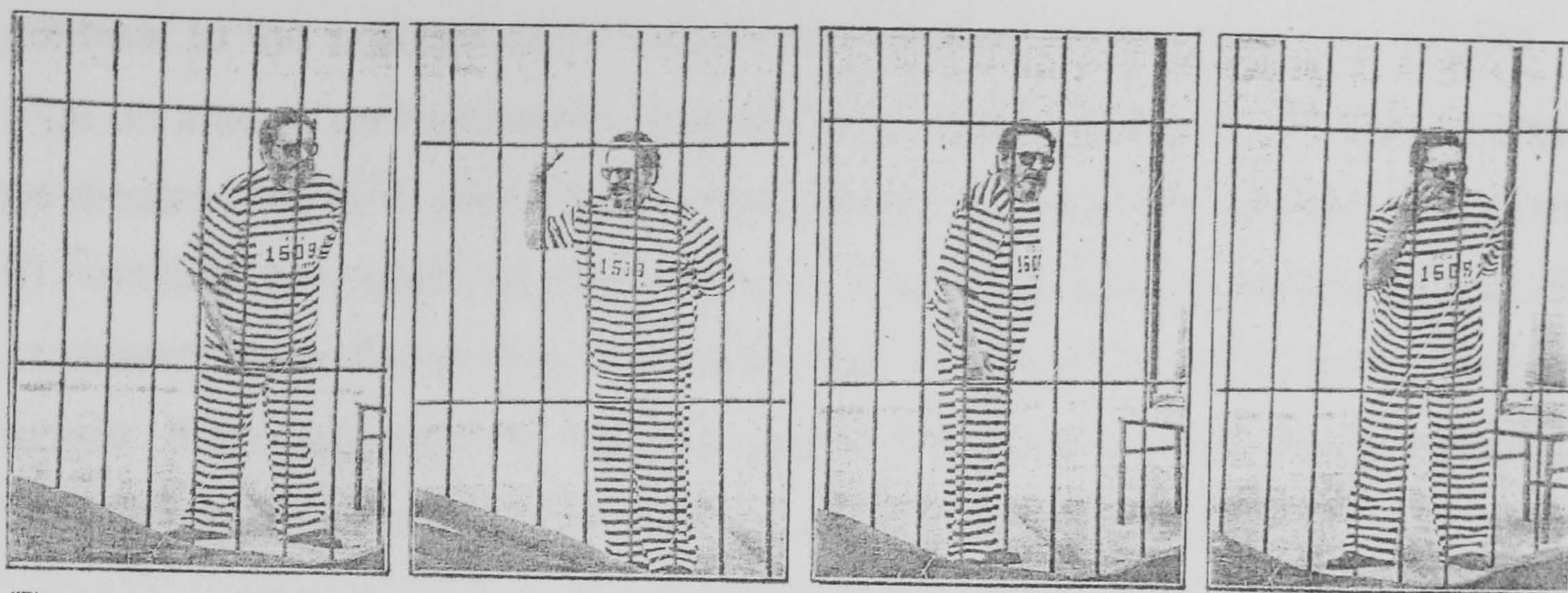


fig. 30 *El Comercio*, images of Guzmán, 1992

This aim is supported by the use of images by *El Comercio* in its coverage of Guzmán's presentation to the press. If the four small images chosen to accompany this article are isolated, it is easy to see the comic-strip quality of the row of images, with the prisoner in his striped suit. The photographs focus on the caged Guzmán making different gestures and are captioned with his own defiant words which, however, contrast with the stiff poses of the shots. The selection of the repeated photographs with the different gestures, framed by the tarpaulin at the bottom of the image, but with no sight of the large audience of media and security figures, gives Guzmán a cartoon-like, almost ridiculous appearance, supporting the main point that he is 'unconvincing', or somehow insincere, deluded, and unpersuasive.

For its part, the weekly magazine *Caretas* gave considerable space to the display of Abimael Guzmán in its 1 October edition. The image chosen to open the in-depth article, interestingly, does not feature Guzmán himself at all, but focuses instead on the several hundred watching photographers, cameramen and journalists. This makes the staged nature of the event fully evident. *Caretas* also chooses to highlight the importance of judicial process and the international attention that the incident will gain. On the following page, a photograph by Oscar Medrano of Abimael Guzmán apparently in full rhetorical flow, gesturing with his right hand and with his left hand hidden behind his back, takes up the whole page and is not given a caption. In its 2003 book of images made during the conflict, *La Verdad sobre el Espanto*, *Caretas* devotes twelve pages to the story of the capture of Guzmán. In

contrast to the position of *El Comercio*, *Caretas* believes that the caging 'Fue un intento de humillación que resultó contraproducente, porque Guzmán se mostró más fiero de lo que realmente era en custodia' ('It was an attempt to humiliate him which turned out to be counterproductive, because Guzmán appeared more fierce than he really was in custody', 2003: 147). In other words, the suggestion is that the public image of Guzmán was somehow strengthened by showing that he needed to be kept behind bars.

So, while the capture of the guerrilla leader was, obviously, a major story for all sectors of the press, their varying reactions to it indicate their differing interests. While *La República* tries to satisfy curiosity about Guzmán's personal life, *El Comercio* is more interested in backing the official line and discrediting the Sendero leadership. Consequently, the latter focuses more on official statements about events, with fewer photographs, while the former publishes numerous images of Guzmán and his associates. The style of *La República* was also to place more emphasis on images by using a large photographic image for most of the front page, with the remainder being taken up by headline and subheadlines, leaving the bulk of text for the inside pages. The focus of the day's news could be taken in at a glance, while *El Comercio* tends to feature far lengthier headlines, more news stories and much more text on the front page, reducing the impact of images. *Caretas*, without the need for daily updates, can try to take a broader view, and also prides itself on its photographic output, much of which is in colour, and which tends to be fully credited, unlike that of the newspapers. Despite these differences, however, there is a tendency for commentators across the media spectrum to characterise Guzmán as other than human, which deserves to be given closer attention.

### **The Representation of Guzmán as Terrorist-Monster**

The images produced during the cage incident evidently show a situation in which a stark binary opposition is drawn between the figurehead of Sendero Luminoso, and the law enforcement of the State. The presentation of Abimael

Guzmán in a cage is an example of public spectacle deliberately orchestrated to show off the fallen enemy to a national and international audience (a scene which 'flaunts its artifice', as Taylor [1998: 161] reminds us). There is no attempt to hide the constructed nature of the display, which posits Peruvian identity as necessarily opposed to the evil represented by Sendero. State agencies strive to present an image of Peru as successful in their 'war against terrorism', and Guzmán is given the role of a savage or monster, thus deserving his incarceration not just in a cell, but in a cage. The number on Guzmán's suit, 1509, is supposedly a reference to the anniversary of the founding of the Peruvian National Police, 15 September, and further marks him as a trophy prisoner, as well as hinting at the triumph of the police over the army in gaining this prize (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 141).

Nevertheless, Guzmán himself was not a passive captive; he also played his part, taking advantage of his moments in the limelight after years of hiding to show his own determination and resistance. Guzmán's display before the cameras necessarily gave him the opportunity to speak publicly to the Peruvian people. Both sides attempted to make the most of the overt theatricality of the photo-opportunity and aimed to influence an affective response from the viewers of the resulting images. Prominent BBC correspondent John Simpson, who was coincidentally in Peru when the capture took place, was of the opinion that, 'It was a ludicrous business... The authorities deliberately injected a sense of near hysteria and a desire for revenge into the proceedings' (1993: 123).<sup>3</sup> Ludicrous, perhaps, but hardly a unique event; the caging and public display of human beings has recurred throughout history in the face of the colonial other – especially significant in the Latin American context – or particular criminals considered to be extreme deviants, including those labelled 'terrorists'.<sup>4</sup>

Fujimori's response to Guzmán's arrest, quoted at length in *La República*, was unequivocal in characterising Guzmán as a monster and harbinger of death. He included the readership in his statement when he declared, '...sabemos lo que significa el grupo terrorista Sendero Luminoso. Significa

destrucción, muerte, narcotráfico. Y este siniestro personaje encarna muy bien los métodos y fines de esta sanguinaria organización' ('... we know what the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso means. It means destruction, death, drug trafficking. And this sinister personality embodies the methods and aims of this bloody organisation very well', 'Ahora más que nunca es posible derrotar a Sendero' ['Now More Than Ever It Is Possible to Defeat Sendero'], *La República*, 14 September 1992). Guzmán then, is the visible embodiment of Sendero's evil nature. Fujimori continues in emotive terms:

En suma un monstruo. Estamos ante un monstruo. Este es el hombre que ordenó, con una frialdad verdadera inhumana el asesinato de la señora Moyana, la matanza de la calle Tarata y quien ordenó muchas veces incursiones genocidas en pueblos jóvenes y poblaciones campesinas.

(*La República*, 14 September 1992)

In sum, a monster. We stand before a monster. This is the man who ordered, with a truly inhuman cruelty, the murder of Mrs Moyana, the massacre in Calle Tarata, and who ordered many murderous incursions into shanty towns and indigenous villages.<sup>5</sup>

Later, we are reminded that, 'Abimael Guzmán, hay que reconcerlo, es un genio diabólico' ('Abimael Guzmán, it must be remembered, is a diabolical genius'). Fujimori complains about foreign governments and international human rights organisations which, by opposing counter-insurgency methods in Peru, are in his view supporting terrorism, and comments, 'Han pasado 12 años para que la comunidad internacional se dé cuenta que estaba ante un criminal de Guerra, un genocida que nada tiene que envidiarle a los criminales de guerra fascistas de la Segunda Guerra Mundial' ('It has taken twelve years for the international community to realise it was dealing with a war criminal, a murderer comparable to the fascist war criminals of the Second World War'). *La República* printed Fujimori's statement next to an article with an image of Guzmán stripped to the waist for the police camera, and illustrated it with a contrasting shot of the President adjusting his glasses during a speech; clean-shaven, neat, in a smart suit and with a somewhat intellectual appearance. In three columns of copy, Fujimori has covered all the major points of reference which are repeatedly brought up in the discussion of enemy figures: Guzmán is compared to an animal, to a

monster, to the devil, to the personification of death, and to a Nazi.

Recourse to bestial and demonic metaphors was a typical response to the sight of Guzmán behind bars, even from non-politicians. Recalling the media spectacle in their work on Vladimiro Montesinos, *The Imperfect Spy*, Sally Bowen and Jane Holligan described the cage as 'similar to one a lion might be kept in at a circus' (2003: 142). Of Guzmán himself, they wrote, 'He launched into a long and barely intelligible political harangue, pacing the cage like a wounded beast,' (2003: 142-43). Their use of an animal metaphor is clearly a pat response to the sight of a being in a cage, and not an unusual one; Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, describing the differing forms of exhibiting humans in nineteenth-century Europe, calls the use of cages part of the 'zoological option' (1991: 403). Likewise, for Gustavo Gorriti, Guzmán took on the role of a 'queen-bee', without which the swarm of *senderistas* would be lost, leaderless (1999: xvi).<sup>6</sup>

The very word terrorist, as is well known, tends to be used in a context where the characterisation is black and white. Terrorist icons are described with extreme language and often in bestial, racial and sexual terms. As noted earlier, recent examples of notorious enemy figures in Western discourse are Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden; while going further back, Ayatollah Khomeini, Muammar Gaddafi, and Yasser Arafat received much the same treatment (Ottosen 1995: 104-105). As Jasbit Puar and Amit Rai have explained, with reference to the Muslim extremists which are the focus of so much current attention, 'In these invocations of terrorist-monsters an absolute morality separates good from a 'shadowy evil'... this discourse marks off a figure, Osama Bin Laden, or a government, the Taliban, as the opposite of all that is just, human, and good. The terrorist-monster is pure evil and must be destroyed, according to this view.' (2002:118). Puar and Rai note the language which tended to be associated with description of Bin Laden (2002:118); words such as 'monster', 'diabolical', 'fanatical obsession' – the same terms used in the reactions to the capture of Abimael Guzmán.

In self-consciously theatrical presentations of terrorists, this is further magnified: Baz Kershaw notes that 'the magnitudes of power at play in spectacle tend to expel the merely human, to objectify it, to replace it with emblems, ciphers, symbols, and other types of abstraction' (2003: 593). The enemy figure, then, is presented as a monster, an animal, a devil, an Anti-Christ, or perhaps a Hitler. Logically, presenting the enemy as entirely evil sheds a better light on the group or state which does the condemning (Zorn 1991). The State therefore situates itself in the role not of aggressor, but of protector. Obviously, the position of the enemy as animal or monster also justifies whatever is done to those individuals, since they are not regarded as fully human. Images, including film footage, still photographs, and cartoons, can support the caricatured presentation of enemy figures through the creation of visual icons of evil and are sometimes assumed to be transparent representations of personified evil.

Evidently, many examples of enemy figures given here are represented as racial and gendered bodies (Norton 1991). According to Puar and Rai, 'questions of race and sexuality have always haunted [the] figuration [of the monster]' (2002: 119). With regard to Guzmán, there is little discussion of his ethnic background by contemporary commentators, despite the importance of race in discussions of *senderista* combatants and their victims.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, a focus on his sexuality. Criticism of his apparent obesity and unprepossessing appearance runs alongside rumours about his mesmerising personality and the fact that women had significant roles in the inner circle of Sendero Luminoso (Tarazona-Sevillano 1992: 180-81). One point of interest is the angry defence of Guzmán during the time of the police raid by his partner and top *senderista* Elena Iparraguirre, while Guzmán himself put up no resistance.<sup>8</sup> The aggression of the female guerrilla is therefore contrasted with the passive reaction of the male leader. Some of this focus may be attributed to sexism, as if the only explanation for the presence of women in the Sendero inner circle would be the sexual desires of its leader. As has already been noted, the curiosity of journalists, particularly in *La República*, was also piqued by the evidence of alcohol at Guzmán's residence and there

were repeated suggestions of loose sexual morality.

It may seem contradictory that much consideration of Guzmán focuses both on characterising him as not fully human, and yet also shows much interest in the human details of his hairstyle, skin condition, and so on. It is understandable that after years of absence, images of Guzmán saturated news coverage at the time of his arrest, proving his presence and seeking to make visible his motivation. These traces of the real confirm and reinforce the accompanying verbal descriptions. Guzmán's psoriasis is the focus of much attention despite, or perhaps even because of, the fact that it is not visible in photographic images of him, and thus curiosity about its disfiguring capabilities cannot be satisfied. In fact, Puar and Rai point out that there is a broader tendency within 'terrorism studies' to present the terrorist as 'both a monster to be quarantined and an individual to be corrected' (2002: 121). They note that one body of opinion portrays terrorism as the result of defects or disorders in the personality structure of a main individual, often resulting from 'inconsistent mothering' or rebellion against the father (2002: 122-123). 'The personality defect model views terrorists as suffering from personality defects that result from excessively negative childhood experiences, giving the individual a poor sense of self and a resentment of authority' (2002: 123). Puar and Rai are critical of this viewpoint, which reduces political violence to the work of individuals troubled by unhappy childhoods, disregarding the complex social and political contexts which contribute to the outbreak of such conflicts.

Certainly, many critics have attempted to find an explanation for the violent actions of Sendero Luminoso in the character and history of its leading figure.

In 1992 Time Magazine told its readers,

Young Abimael was born out of wedlock in the provincial capital of Arequipa. He was rejected by both his mother's family and his middle-class merchant father; acquaintances remember a boy who poured his energies into books. At age 10 he was beaten by police breaking up a strike, and as a university student he came under the influence of a Communist philosopher and a painter who regarded Stalin as insufficiently revolutionary.

(*'The Myth of Guzmán'*, 28 September 1992)

These details are clearly intended to fill in the picture for curious readers about how Guzmán developed the beliefs he later did (are we to draw the conclusion that the police beating turned him against all members of the security forces as an adult?). Ilan Stavans, in a comparison of Guzmán and Mario Vargas Llosa, goes even further:

Born out of wedlock to a mother who is said to have twice attempted an abortion, Guzmán as a boy is remembered by teachers and classmates as a hardworking, unusually dedicated student. Rejected by his biological father, a small-time businessman in the provinces, he was educated by his mother until she died when he was twelve.

(1993: 21)

According to this view, the illegitimate Guzmán was set on the path to extremism by his mother, who first rejects him before birth, and then dies during his adolescence, and by his cold father. Stavans even draws a causal relationship between Guzmán's medical conditions and the policies and deliberate cruelty of Sendero Luminoso:

While Guzmán was never an invalid, his skin disease had a direct impact on his politics – and accompanied by a susceptibility to migraines, quick changes of mood, and a sense of vulnerability expressed in impatience and easy anger, it made him a more tyrannical figure. Because of his psoriasis, he had to restructure Shining Path to control its actions from a habitat benign to his health; otherwise he would have had to interrupt his strategy to 'descend' to a place where he could recover in peace.

(1993: 28)

Gustavo Gorriti confirms that Guzmán's health problems were likely to prevent long stays at high altitude, and, writing in 1990, he speculated – correctly, as it turned out – that the Sendero leader was more likely to be hiding in one of Peru's large lowland cities (1999: 192-197). Nevertheless, this is a far cry from attributing Guzmán's decision-making to the effects of his psoriasis and migraines. Unsurprisingly, Stavans' article is illustrated with an image of the caged Guzmán, although it is not specifically analysed. It is presumably intended to show the difference between the aggressive, driven Guzmán, and his point of comparison, the elitist Mario Vargas Llosa, but this glimpse of Guzmán is therefore given heavy significance without in fact being fully explored.

Puar and Rai argue convincingly that the spectacle of deviants is a way, not only 'to otherize and quarantine subjects classified as "terrorists", but also to normalize and discipline a population through these very monstrous figures' (2002: 126). They state that:

the monstrous terrorist, once quarantined in secret military courts, in prisons, in cells, in caves, in besieged cities or forts – this figure also provides the occasion to demand and instil a certain discipline on the population. This discipline aims to produce patriotic, docile subjects through practices, discourses, images, narratives, fears, and pleasures.

(2002: 130)

Now that the incarcerated terrorist is not secret, therefore, but constantly visible to the viewing public through the media, he (it is usually he) is a mechanism through which to control citizens. The terrorist is put on visual display, held up as so utterly bad that no right-minded citizen could criticise what is done to him, and must by extension support the policies of the current regime; 'in a moment of what is termed "national crisis", even platitudinous dissent is beyond the pale of the proper' (Puar and Rai 2002: 134). This leads to an infantilisation of the population in denying them the decision of whether or not to support the authorities and still be considered a patriotic citizen. Nevertheless, while the state may attempt to prohibit dissent, the use of spectacle also makes it vulnerable to revolt, as I will discuss below.

Additionally, Puar and Rai cite a comment by Sigmund Freud which is highly pertinent to the behaviour of the Fujimori regime;

...the state has forbidden to the individual the practice of wrong-doing, not because it desired to abolish it, but because it desires to monopolize it like salt and tobacco. The warring state permits itself every such misdeed, every such act of violence as would disgrace the individual man.

(cited in Puar and Rai, 2002:135)

Despite the fact that the capture of Guzmán dealt a severe blow to Sendero Luminoso, and that even before it occurred peasants had been turning against Sendero and forming *rondas campesinas* (peasant defence groups) to defend their communities, newspapers did not report fewer security alerts

in the period after the arrest. On the contrary, *El Comercio*, the newspaper which most closely followed the government line, ran 795 stories about senderista violence in 1993, compared to 706 in 1992 (Peralta Ruiz 2000: 33). Fujimori's grip on power was strengthened by maintaining a belief in the violent capabilities of rebel groups.

Peru in the 1990s is marked by the representation of powerful masculine figures leading, or claiming to lead, sectors of the population in contrasting beliefs of Peru's destiny. The 1990 elections became a battle between the cultured, intellectual figure of Mario Vargas Llosa, and the 'down-to-earth' Fujimori, who presented himself as an alternative to the white elite and to traditional politicians. Although his fame ensured a strong start in the campaign, the populace turned against the neoliberal policies of Vargas Llosa in favour of a virtually unknown candidate (Poole and Rénique 1992: 138-45). Fujimori played on the generalising possibilities of his ethnic background, adopting the nickname "El Chino" despite his Japanese parentage, and campaigning in an array of costumes, traditional Peruvian dress, and colourful headgear (as shown for example in the photo-montage on the cover of *Caretas*, 16 May 1996). Abimael Guzmán was a contrast to both of these; a shadowy figure who inspired fear and devotion in equal measures and demanded extreme loyalty, even a willingness to kill and be killed, from his followers (Gorriti 1999: 99-106). Tensions between these different viewpoints were played out in the public sphere and through visual images. Yet, as I will argue, there is no straightforward reading of images of Guzmán, which may be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways.

### **Looking back on Guzmán: The Icon of Sendero Luminoso and Implications for Reconciliation**

Despite the extreme portrayal of Guzmán in the cage, and the harsh views of him given by politicians and the media, it is not always possible to direct audience reaction 'from above'. When it is a question of 'winning hearts and minds', the public presentation of a defeated enemy may easily backfire; a fact acknowledged by the concern expressed by several commentators

about the possibility of 'Presidente Gonzalo' becoming a 'martyr' figure. Stavans suggests that Guzmán, 'caged in an underground cell and metamorphosed into a media artefact' *has* become 'a living martyr' (1993: 38). Mario Vargas Llosa concurs that the humiliating nature of the striped suit and cage 'sólo servirán para dotarlo de una aureola de martirio y galvanizar a sus fanáticos seguidores' ('only served to give him the air of a martyr and galvanise his fanatical followers'), ('El preso 1.509', *El País*, 4 October 1992), while *Time* magazine noted that the authorities would be concerned to keep Guzmán alive to *prevent* his martyrdom ('The Myth of Guzmán', 28 September 1992).

A survey by public opinion researchers IMASEN published in *Caretas* on 1 October 1992, which asked citizens about their feelings for Guzmán, suggested that these fears were not completely unfounded. In particular, *Caretas* highlighted the fact that about a fifth of Peruvians polled expressed compassion for the fallen leader. A slightly higher proportion – 22.9% - described their principal feeling towards him as 'revulsion', and significant minorities also expressed anger and hate, but 6.9% said that they felt 'understanding'. *Caretas* calls the results 'curioso y preocupante' ('curious and worrying'), ('Por Que Sonríe Abimael Guzmán' ['Why Abimael Guzmán Is Smiling'], *Caretas*, 1 October 1992:14). Analysing the results in the article, Giovanna Peñaflor of IMASEN specifically drew attention to the role of visual images and spectacle in provoking a public response:

Giovanna Peñaflor considera que obligar a Guzmán a sacarse los pantalones frente a las cámaras oficiales comenzó a promover compasión, aunque esa escena no fuera mostrada en su totalidad en el Tv. *Y peor ha sido presentarlo disfrazado en una jaula.*

('Por Que Sonríe Abimael Guzmán', *Caretas*, 1 October 1992:14, emphasis added)

Giovanna Peñaflor believes that forcing Guzmán to remove his trousers in front of the official cameras started to provoke sympathy for him, even though this scene was not shown in its totality on TV. *And presenting him dressed up in a cage was even worse.*

John Simpson reports that journalist Sally Bowen had the same response to the results, recalling her saying, 'The peasants here are used to being treated

badly [...], and it makes them instinctively courteous to one another. They don't like seeing someone being treated like an animal' (1993: 122). While this is speculation, it seems likely that the humiliation of the caged press conference was indeed unappealing to some viewers and therefore may have, to some extent, failed in its intention. In any case, it indicates that there is no guarantee of a united response to a major news event. Writing of the public spectacle of capital punishment, which relies for its power on an audience, may also incite sympathy for the criminalised figure and a denunciation of the actions of the state, as Michel Foucault states:

It was evident that the great spectacle of punishment ran the risk of being rejected by the very people to whom it was addressed... the people never felt closer to those who paid the penalty than in those rituals intended to show the horror of the crime and the invincibility of power; never did the people feel more threatened, like them, by a legal violence exercised without moderation or restraint.

(1977: 63)

The Peruvian people, as facts show, had every right to fear the unrestrained violence of their security forces, and it is therefore logical that for some of them, sympathy for Guzmán in the face of the caged images might not be far from their minds.

The images of the cage have become iconic, to the extent that they are re-circulated in almost every discussion of the period. In addition, they have recently been supplemented by a new set of images: Guzmán at his re-trial, shaking his fist and chanting Communist slogans almost fifteen years after his capture. Although clearly aged, thinner, and with his beard gone, his stance and gesture mirrors the earlier images, indicating a lack of remorse about the past. Indeed, his disruptions of the court managed to achieve the suspension of the trial. His outbursts were clearly directed to the watching cameramen, journalists and photographers who were initially allowed in the court, and the trial was eventually re-started without the presence of television crews.<sup>9</sup> This media awareness and exhibitions of righteous anger seem to show that, despite his disputed offers of peace, he has not mellowed during his imprisonment, and still reacts to a media opportunity. Therefore, the earlier images can be continually reprinted with impunity as they still apparently

show the 'true' Guzmán, 'Presidente Gonzalo', leader of Shining Path. Acts of violence by Sendero Luminoso may have dwindled to a tiny proportion of those committed during the worst years of violence, but Sendero's captured figurehead still represents the evils of that time.

Finally, then, I wish to ask what it means for Peru when its central icon of Sendero Luminoso is one of aggression and defiance, when Sendero Luminoso is represented as an unyielding foe needing, at all costs, to be contained, and when the State plays the role of avenging angel. What implications does this have for the memory of the conflict and possibilities for reconciliation? Earlier in this chapter, I signalled that the incarceration and public display of Abimael Guzmán was not a unique incident; in fact, the exhibition of live human beings has a complex history. A well-known artistic performance by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña played on traditions of capturing and exhibiting native peoples from colonial nations, when the artists themselves stood in a cage for the audience to stare at.<sup>10</sup> The performances took place in sites heavily implicated in colonial practices, including Madrid, London, Buenos Aires, and Washington, D.C. Despite the inclusion of 'traditional artefacts' which included sunglasses and laptop computers, some viewers were apparently taken in by the act and believed that Fusco and Gómez-Peña really *were* 'newly-discovered Indians' who, for money, would dance or even remove their clothes. With regard to this charged and complex piece of performance art, Diana Taylor has focused on the significance of the cage bars in creating the situation for such confusion. She even draws a direct comparison between the self-caging of Fusco and Gómez-Peña and the caging of Guzmán, reminding her readers of the double history of such incarcerations: the display of the colonial other, and the imprisonment of the criminal other (1998: 164). As Taylor states, the division of the bars 'mark the radical boundary between the "here" and the "there", the "us" and the "them", allowing for no inter-, no cross-, no trans-cultural-nada' (1998: 168).

The chasm between the being, or beings, inside the cage and those watching

outside is key for our understanding of the display of Guzmán: the spectacle allows for no grey area between those 'with' and those 'against' the state, whereas in reality, many Peruvians did fall into this area.<sup>11</sup> Taylor's analysis moves beyond the gallery itself, pointing out that 'several performances were taking place simultaneously' (1998: 166). Photographs were made of the couple, and Fusco and Gómez-Peña were also making a video documentary of the performances and audiences. 'So while viewers were tourists, consumers, dupes, or colonizers in one production, they were actors in another – in which, as the footage shows, they played tourists, consumers, dupes, and colonists, along with other roles' (1998: 166). The spectator is, therefore, brought into the frame, and the performance may be re-framed in a number of secondary contexts.

Similarly, the display of Guzmán was recorded by numerous cameras and television crews, and it is the photographs of this incident that continue to re-circulate to a secondary audience. The military figures and journalists who were present in 1992 are also shown in the resulting visual images, sometimes playing their role by heckling the caged guerrilla leader. The parts of defiant prisoner, controlled representatives of the authorities, media observers, and outraged patriots are re-played in these iconic representations. Without spectators, as Foucault makes clear, there would be no spectacle; yet,

the role of the people was an ambiguous one... Not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it.

(1977: 58)

In the media age, not all spectators saw Guzmán himself 'with their own eyes', but they can see the photographic images of his display. Taylor maintains that the troubling issue for the audience of Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance was the feeling that there was no 'right' way to respond to the cage and its inmates: those watching must implicate themselves in the performance, whether as gullible fools, self-interested colonists, or superior

spectators. With this in mind, what is the implication of Peru's cage spectacle for its national audience, struggling to come to terms with its past?

Just as with Fusco's and Gómez-Peña's bars, the unyielding presentation of Guzmán in the cage, together with the (accurate) portrayal of Sendero Luminoso as a particularly violent and uncompromising entity, create a stark binary opposition, in this case between those accepted and not accepted by the state. I suggest that these images of Guzmán-as-caged-monster, and the focus on Guzmán as flawed human which paradoxically go along with this, do not allow space for reconciliation but only serve to exacerbate divisions. Guzmán imprisoned and awaiting punishment may symbolise justice, but this is an unequal justice which parades a major perpetrator in a cage, and moreover, leaves other significant perpetrators unpunished. Nevertheless, this does not in itself preclude the possibility of reconciliation (although it may hamper it), as even the iconic representation cannot completely monopolise visual space, and may be challenged by other versions. The caged 'Presidente Gonzalo' will not be the only image of Sendero Luminoso to circulate in Peru, but it will continue to confront suggestions of forgiveness – debates which will be played out in the theatrical arena of the public sphere.

## **Conclusions**

I have argued that the use of spectacle to create visual icons in the public sphere (what Taylor [1997: 96] terms 'the theatre of operations') is a form of political and social control. Surveillance, and the public display of enemy figures, are means by which the state seeks to promote its own righteousness and ensure obedient, docile citizens. The presentation of Abimael Guzmán in a cage was a move 'to reverse the mystique' surrounding the general invisibility of Shining Path and the photographs 'were clearly meant to show that it was now the state that controlled what and who could be seen' (Poole 2001: 6). Nevertheless, such spectacle tends to exceed its own intentions. Just as Taylor (1998: 165) declares that Fusco and Gómez-Peña 'out-fetished the fetish' in their cage performance, the images of Guzmán in his cage broke

away from both their makers and their subjects. They were able neither to persuade the entire Peruvian public of the demonic nature of 'Presidente Gonzalo', nor to bolster the confidence of Shining Path supporters in their fallen leader. Instead, the icon is an instantly recognisable, but disputed sign – for some, a living martyr, for others, a pathetic middle-aged man, for others, a symbol of horror.

This tension is further complicated by the contrasting visual representation of Alberto Fujimori. In the 1990s, Fujimori went to great lengths to contrast himself with the urbane Mario Vargas Llosa and to distance himself from the image of a traditional politician (Sarlo 1993, Oliart 1996). After the capture of Guzmán, Fujimori attempted to contrast the 'firm hand' of his anti-terrorist strategy with the evil of Sendero's campaign, and naturally, Guzmán's downfall was presented as a major success, with Fujimori himself appearing on television to comment on the arrest. More recently, however, the image of the Fujimori regime has been irrevocably damaged. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has made clear that while Sendero Luminoso were responsible for the majority of deaths during the conflict, the armed forces were not far behind. The Fujimori government was revealed to be deeply corrupt through the exposure of video tapes showing Vladimir Montesinos, Fujimori's top security adviser, bribing opposition politicians and media bosses (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 385-392). The so-called 'Vladvideos' were made by the intelligence agency itself as a means to blackmail opponents and were a media sensation when leaked. The visual played a significant role in the demise of the partnership of Fujimori and Montesinos; as Deborah Poole comments,

One immediate reason for the fascination of the Vladvideos was most certainly the reputation of the National Intelligence System (SIN), for what we are viewing when we watch these tapes is a supposedly invisible and all-powerful intelligence apparatus that has turned its own weapons of surveillance on itself.

(2001: 5)

It follows that while the images of the caged Guzmán may suggest that justice is being done to the perpetrators of the Peruvian conflict, this is hardly a simple or closed issue. Guzmán is still in jail, but events surrounding the fate

of Fujimori continue to develop; after a prolonged period in exile in Japan and then awaiting extradition in Chile, at the time of writing, he is currently undergoing trial for his role in human rights abuses including the La Cantuta massacre, in which a university professor and nine students were killed. Clearly, the illusion of moral superiority which Fujimori had maintained over political opponents has been definitively lost. The Peruvian public would be forgiven for feeling deeply sceptical about all high-profile political figures; the recent re-election of Alan García, who presided over some of the worse human rights abuses of the conflict including the infamous prison massacres, is a further twist to the tale.

This chapter has dealt with a figure who, as the leader of Shining Path, was central to the events which occurred in Peru during the 1980s and 1990s. In the final case study, this thesis will scrutinise the image of an Argentine perpetrator. This time, he is not a leading figure, although he is implicated in serious human rights abuses. Rather, he was captured in a highly unusual visual image during a demonstration towards the end of the dictatorship, and it is the connotations and repercussions of this iconic image which I wish to explore.

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<sup>1</sup> To give just a few examples, images of Guzmán in the cage appear in Simpson (1993), Starn, Degregori and Kirk (1995: 337), Stavans (1993: 22), and feature in over a quarter of the first one hundred results in a Google image search for "Abimael Guzmán". In most cases, however, the images function purely as illustrations rather than objects for analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Gustavo Gorriti notes that 'In the few almost hagiographic propaganda posters Shining Path has produced, an idealized Guzmán leads endless columns of armed followers while clutching a book', although Guzmán himself was never depicted uniformed or armed (1992: 151).

<sup>3</sup> In fact, Simpson was annoyed by the entire scenario, as he had been hoping to gain an interview with the secretive guerrilla, and had made contact with Sendero representatives before learning that it was too late; Guzmán had been arrested. Nicholas Shakespeare, author of a novel dealing with the capture of Guzmán, also describes a failed attempt to locate and interview him (1988: 149-95).

<sup>4</sup> Coco Fusco provides a chronology of indigenous people who were exhibited as curiosities, performed in circuses or were preserved on display in museums after their deaths in 'The Other History of Intercultural Performance (1995: 41-43). For a consideration of exhibitions of humans, see also Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1991: 397-407).

<sup>5</sup> Fujimori is here referring to two key atrocities committed by Sendero; the murder of deputy mayor of the well-established Lima shanty town Villa El Salvador María Elena Moyana, who was a highly popular public figure, and the bomb attack in Tarata street in the centre of Lima's financial district, when twenty five people were killed and many more injured.

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<sup>6</sup> Immediately after Guzmán's capture, it was impossible to predict the response from Sendero Luminoso; Guzmán had created a cult of personality around himself, but it was to be expected that another leader would take his place. Indeed, this occurred, but the group was unable to recover from the blow of Guzmán's departure and never wielded the power it had at the beginning of 1992. See for example Harding 1992:ix-x.

<sup>7</sup> As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has emphasised, the severity of Peru's conflict was exacerbated by the institutional racism which led to the indiscriminate persecution of the indigenous population by the security forces, who suspected all dark-skinned civilians of 'subversion' (Degregori 1998, 1999). In one article, *Caretas* magazine even tried to explain the violence of Sendero in terms of the physiological effects of high altitude on adolescents, claiming that the lack of oxygen caused aggression (see Poole 1994:254). Three quarters of victims reported to the CVR were native speakers of a language other than Spanish, principally Quechua. (CVR 2003:161).

<sup>8</sup> This is described in detail by Simpson (1993: 114), although he does not expand on his sources, and also features in an article entitled 'Desde esta vivienda, Abimael Guzmán pretendió volar Lima a dinamitazos' (From this Dwelling, Abimael Guzmán wanted to Blow Lima to Pieces'), *La República*, 19 September 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Elliott Gotkine, 'The Day the Maoists Went to Court', BBC News, 6 November 2004, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3987741.stm>> [accessed 19 December 2007]; 'New Start for Shining Path Trial', BBC News, 27 September 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4283902.stm> [accessed 19 December 2007].

<sup>10</sup> For more details on the performance, entitled *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* and sometimes also known as *The Couple in the Cage*, see Fusco (1995: 37-63), Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998), Taylor (1998).

<sup>11</sup> Sociologist Lewis Taylor commented that during twenty years of research, he could encounter the same rural citizens in a variety of roles: as workers on cooperative farms during the Velasco regime, then as supporters or members of Sendero Luminoso, and later perhaps opposing Sendero as members of the *rondas campesinas*. Such apparently opposed positions were therefore actually quite fluid, when studied over a longer period of time ('Sendero in the Northern Highlands', paper given to the Americas Research Group, Newcastle University, 16 November 2006).

## A Complex Embrace: The Memory of the Argentine Dictatorship and the Future of Nationhood

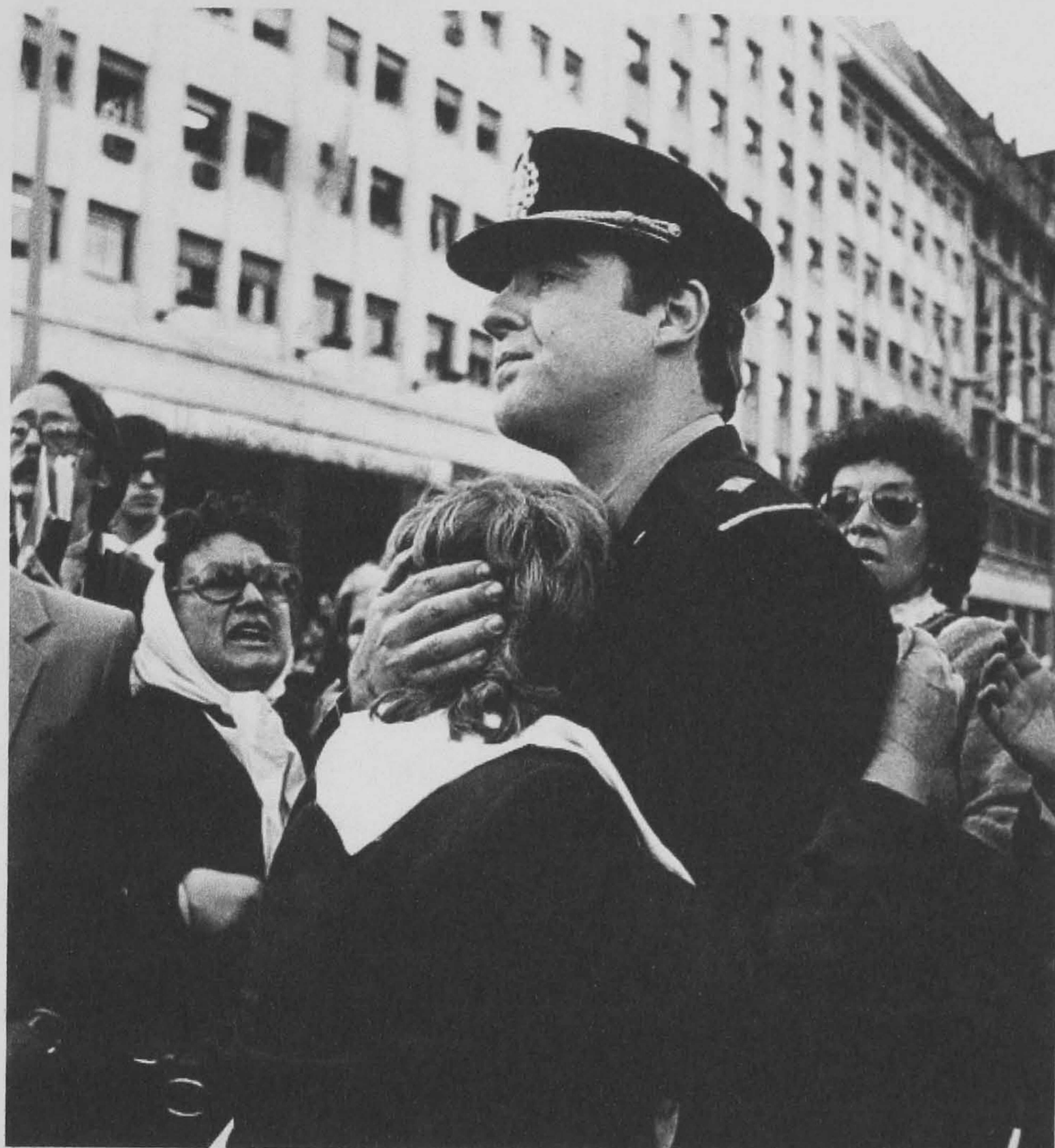


fig. 31 Marcelo Ranea, Madre de Plaza de Mayo being embraced by policeman, 1982

A man and a woman stand locked together in the midst of a crowd, her right arm reaching around him, his right hand cradling her head. The uniformed man stares over the head of the woman into the distance, while her face is turned away from the camera. The white headscarf which immediately identifies her as a Madre de Plaza de Mayo has slipped off her hair and is around her neck, resembling a sailor's collar. The warm emotional responses that might be triggered in the viewer by the sight of such an embrace are disrupted by the observation of the reactions of the spectators located inside the photographic frame. Behind the couple, two women watch the scene with expressions of shock, and perhaps revulsion. One of the women is wearing her white scarf, the other could have one around her neck, but it is difficult to say with certainty. Other members of the crowd are apparently unaware of the unusual scene, and in the background, a man is just visible leaning out of a window in the multi-storey office building.

This image, taken by photographer Marcelo Ranea during the *Marcha por la Vida* (March for Life) organised by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo on 5 October 1982, was widely circulated both during and after the dictatorship, and has become a significant marker of cultural memory in Argentina. While it is by no means ‘the’ iconic image of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo – no doubt due to its unusual and complex interweaving of visual symbols – I will maintain that it fulfils many of the criteria of iconicity laid down by Hariman and Lucaites in their useful definition. It will be recalled that Hariman and Lucaites give the general definition of an icon as

*those photographic images appearing in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics.*

(2007: 27, italics in original)

Above all, the image is a ‘moment of visual eloquence’, which encapsulates several key themes and symbols of the Argentine dictatorship, and functions therefore as ‘a mediation of important questions of public life’ (Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 19). In this case, such questions include: how does society function in a fractured public sphere after the trauma of a dictatorship? How do future generations remember the past when versions of what happened are so polarised? In a single shot, representing a split second of actual time, iconic photographs such as this one capture a scene which illustrates, in a satisfying manner, one or more of the inherent contradictions, difficulties, or emotional triggers of the period.

The struggle between the hypermasculine role of the military agents of repression and their opponents, the Madres, who draw on their position as maternal protectors of the family in their search for their children, is one which is played out in the tense arena of the Argentine public sphere and is visible in Ranea’s image. Several commentators have pointed out the gendered aspect to the contestation of public space under authoritarian rule (Rosenthal 2000: 51-61, Scarpaci and Frazier 1993, Taylor 1997: 91-117), and even under democracy, competing memories of the dictatorship are apparent in the

public and political arena. Evidently, Ranea's photograph is rich in such gendered and ideological connotations.

Despite the significance of a reading which pays due attention to questions of gender, my interest is not solely to reiterate the opposition of the versions of history put forward by the Madres, on the one hand, and the military, on the other, but to suggest what engagement those *not* directly affected by events of thirty years ago may have with the photograph and with debates about the representation of the past. This is because, as I shall go on to elaborate, Ranea's photograph continues to circulate in a variety of contexts that commemorate the period. What is at stake in this image for the future of memory in Argentina? Is it, as has been suggested, a sign of reconciliation between the perpetrators of violence and the human rights community, or is it in fact a radically unresolved and contradictory version of events?

I will suggest that the position of the viewer of this image raises questions of the construction of Argentine national identity going forward into the twenty-first century. In this context, it is worth recalling Diana Taylor's statement that, 'Public spectacle is a locus and mechanism of communal identity through collective imaginings that constitute "nation" as "an imagined political community"' (1997: ix). I would add, moreover, that the circulation of iconic images of particularly significant historical events is a further means to constitute the imagined political community of the nation. Here, my aim is to examine one aspect of these collective imaginings through a study of repeated viewings of Ranea's iconic photograph in the years since 1983, which in turn will be inserted into their socio-political context and in particular, the gendered dimensions of space during the time of the dictatorship.

### **Contested Space in the Time of Dictatorship**

The photograph of the mother and the policeman was made by Marcelo Ranea at the *Marcha por la Vida* (March for Life), one of the most important human rights demonstrations that occurred before the fall of the junta. As

such, it depicts a detail of a crowd scene, which was part of a series of open expressions of resistance to dictatorship which took place at the centre of Buenos Aires with increasing participation towards the end of the dictatorship. After the 1976 coup all public gatherings were outlawed, but in the 1980s the junta's grip on public spectacle had lessened somewhat, leaving open the possibility of visible mass protest. The *Marcha por la Vida* was, nevertheless, banned, but a large crowd gathered anyway, although it was prevented from reaching the Plaza de Mayo.<sup>1</sup> The reason given by the junta for forbidding the march indicates the anxiety of the military to control emotional public demonstrations in the face of opposition to their rule and, above all, the Madres' skilled public performance of their grief.<sup>2</sup> According to an article in Argentine newspaper *La Prensa*, the regime claimed that the protest;

aims to deepen the wounds caused by the terrorist war... [and] risks making political use of such a human and respectable sentiment as pain. And it is precisely that, the politicization of a sentiment, which no government can or should protect.

(cited in Robben 2005: 315)

The politicisation of sentiment was, indeed, precisely the aim of the Madres, who left their traditional domestic sphere of the home to protest the disappearance of their children in the Argentine public space *par excellence*, the Plaza de Mayo.

Anton Rosenthal (2000: 56-59) and Antonius Robben (2005) both emphasise in their work that the contest over the public sphere did not start in 1976, but was a feature of Argentine society since at least the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> For Robben, crowds of people were a recurring and deeply influential part of Argentine political life, and a means by which national identity was constituted; he especially identifies the Peronist crowds of 1945 onwards as encouraging a culture of mass public gatherings and political interaction (2005: 4-6). Emotions were heightened in crowds, which were associated with irrationality and actual or potential violence (Robben 2005: 10). This hysterical element to the masses also connected them to the stereotypical idea of the feminine. Despite the tradition of active political crowds in Argentina, people could be cowed by an extreme repression which superseded the 'routine' tendency to use force by the police (Robben 2005:

215), such as that which occurred in the aftermath of the 1976 coup, when 'public' space almost entirely vanished (Rosenthal 2000: 39). With public gatherings forbidden and bonds of trust between neighbours and colleagues broken in the face of seemingly random violence, citizens retreated into the home. Yet even there, the military forced their way into the sacred domestic space, associated with safety and privacy among relatives, to abduct their targets (Robben 2005: 209). A significant feature of protest-crowd photographs made during Argentina's most recent dictatorship lies in the fact that, by their very existence, they show a failure of the armed forces to be in full command of the public sphere (although on the other hand, images of military parades and marches are also accessible). Such events are also, just as the military feared, an opportunity to record emotional scenes and public spectacles which may oppose the regime. An abundance of photographs of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo exist, many of which show them participating in marches in and around the Plaza. Although in the image of the Marcha por la Vida there is a limited number of people actually visible, the photograph shows them on the street and engaged in an outward display of sentiment which, by its presence in the midst of an anti-dictatorship protest, is politicised.

The issue of space and the division between public and private are deeply connected to gender roles in Latin America, as indeed elsewhere. While David William Foster (1998: 102) posits that women in Buenos Aires enjoyed a comparatively greater degree of freedom of movement and professional opportunities than other women in the region, other critics emphasise the traditional boundaries on women's activity in the public sphere. Women were exalted as mothers and homemakers, while a female presence in public spaces was chiefly reserved for prostitutes; by extension, those women who did leave the home laid themselves open to a questioning of their morality (Malin 1994: 206-208). This was what made the campaign of the Madres at once so unusual and so powerful. If the military transgressed the border between public and private in taking the majority of disappeared people from

their homes (Robben 2000: 74-76), the Madres were transgressive in the opposite direction, by forcing their private grief onto the public sphere.

In an insightful analysis of spectacle during the dictatorship, Diana Taylor (1997) draws on the history of gendered repression and monopolisation of public space by the military in Argentina which was present long before the 1976 coup. The armed forces constituted, of course, a masculine space, whose members perceived themselves as upright males whose duty was to protect the nation (the feminine *Patria*) and uphold its Western, Christian values (Taylor 1997: 38). Taylor further notes that the representation of the female as a threatening and destabilising force left 'few good roles' for Argentine women, who were portrayed either as saintly mothers or dangerous whores (1997: 195). Taylor also indicates that, during the *Proceso*, female prisoners were singled out for particularly vicious sexual torture and rape (1997: 36). Elizabeth Jelin concurs, but adds that imprisonment and torture also had a 'feminising', or emasculating, effect on male captives, who were 'transformed into passive, impotent, and dependent beings' (2003: 79). Public space had long been contested between volatile crowds demanding political action and the security forces attempting to maintain order by whatever means, including violence (Robben 2005: 215). During Argentina's most recent and most violent dictatorship, the non-military population was feminised and pushed out of the public and political arena, either through disappearance and torture or through the fear of such repression.

Amidst this repressive and divisive atmosphere, parents searching for their children gradually began to recognise each other as they queued at government offices, waited outside police stations, or handed over writs of habeas corpus at the courts. According to the testimony of María Adela de Antokoletz, it was Azucena Villaflor de Devinenti, later to become the first leader of the Madres until her own disappearance, who first suggested that the women meet in the Plaza de Mayo (Mellibovsky 1997: 15). The small group of fourteen mothers started to gather in the most symbolic space of the Argentine nation, the Plaza de Mayo, synonymous with support for

democracy and the struggle for independence (Shumway 1991: 21) and the site where they would be most visible to other citizens. Faced with the ban on public gatherings, the mothers kept moving during their meetings, and this developed into the circular march around the Plaza for which they have become known. They could not, however, always avoid repression by the security forces and were sometimes prevented from even entering the Square; whereupon they would seize any opportunity to dash across it in what they termed a 'raid' (Taylor 1997: 188; Fisher 1989: 114). Ranea's photograph shows an occasion in which the Madres were not in the Plaza, but in one of the surrounding streets, indicating the dispute over the public spaces.

Commentators concur that the Madres' method of activism initially mobilised the stereotypical image of the grieving mother, the *mater dolorosa*, and, courageously, brought it into the public eye (Taylor 1997: 195-96, Malin 1994: 200, Robben 2005: 317), and this is frequently expressed in terms of the Madres' direct challenge to the hypermasculine body of the armed forces (Jelin 2003: 76).<sup>4</sup> The mothers appealed to the 'natural' maternal desire to care for their children. With crowds of people already thought to be volatile and threatening to military control, and women associated with irrational outbursts of emotion, a crowd of desperate women was bound to be particularly dangerous for the regime. It is hardly surprising that the junta attempted to condemn the Madres as 'crazy' and 'emotional terrorists' (Feitlowitz 1998: 33-34, Malin 1994: 207, Taylor 1997: 200). After initially trying to ignore the group, they responded to the Madres' protests by mobilising other women to defend the regime;

In direct retaliation to the use of spectacle by the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo, who pinned photographs of the 'disappeared' to their bodies, the military urged and coerced woman (many of them government workers) to wear signs punning on *human rights*. These female bodies announced that 'Argentines are human and right' ['los argentinos somos derechos y humanos'].

(Taylor 1997: 78-79)

Such notices also hint at the 'anti-Argentine campaign' which some members of the junta credited for rumours about disappearances and assassinations; in

this way opposing the military regime was characterised as non-patriotic. Public space in Argentina, therefore, was contested between the Madres, on the one hand, and the military on the other. This extended to the very definition of 'Argentineness'. High-ranking members of the armed forces had claimed that 'subversives' had forfeited the right to be citizens; the Madres, for their part, proclaimed that, 'Las Malvinas son argentinas; los desaparecidos, también' ('the Malvinas [Falklands] are Argentine, and so are the disappeared', as seen, for example, on a sign held up to the camera in a 1982 photograph by A. Becquer Casaballe; Monasterio 1988: 26). I do not wish to suggest that the two sides of this struggle were equally matched; evidently the junta had the upper hand in terms of physical force, political power, and sheer numbers. Nevertheless they underestimated the tenacity of the mothers and, eventually, the international support which they garnered, in part, thanks to their visibility.

Yet the gendered dynamics of the Madres' struggle were not clear cut. Taylor, for instance, also focuses on the contradictions of the mothers' movement, which were several. Firstly, although exclusively a women's organisation, the Madres did not identify themselves as feminists, a term whose connotations in Argentina were perhaps rather too militant for the group (Malin 1994: 203). Rather, they emphasised their homely, motherly identity. Secondly, they did not initially claim to be political and drew on their 'natural' status as mothers seeking to protect their children, although in fact they were clearly presenting a spectacle of motherhood in the public sphere in an appeal, and later a challenge, to the regime. In this sense they did not contest the tendency of the military to emphasise traditional gender roles, and even used similar tactics in stressing the universality of motherhood and the supremacy of the family.

The performances staged by each reconstituted the stereotypical binaries: the military acted, the Madres reacted; the junta's narrative had a linear progression while the circular, repetitive nature of the Madres' demonstrations suggested – from a representational point of view – that they weren't going anywhere. The Madres challenged the military but played into the narrative.

(Taylor 1997: 205)

Ranea's image of the Madre and the police officer both shows and subverts these binaries through its representation of the two groups and their unusual juxtaposition. By and large, and despite the Madres' major achievements in drawing attention to atrocities, they did not present a serious challenge to patriarchal society or truly break out of their traditional roles. They did, however, seriously damage the credibility of the junta and ultimately become beacons of the human rights struggle in Argentina and beyond, immediately recognisable through their white headscarves, which are now also permanently painted on the ground of the Plaza itself.

During the early years of the military regime, the initially small group of mothers put their own lives in danger to protest the disappearance of their children. Gradually awareness of their struggle grew, and the period of severe repression eased in the early 1980s, so that by 1982, the year the image of the embrace was made, the Madres claimed 2500 members (Malin 1994: 202). Ranea's photograph therefore shows a detail from one of the major demonstrations which took place towards the end of the *Proceso*, some of which attracted around 200,000 people. Such a large gathering may be represented by a variety of visual strategies, including aerial or high angle shots which give a sense of the sheer numbers of demonstrators involved. But, while such photographs may impress through their sense of scale, their emotional impact is diminished through the inability to render close-up human interest. A photograph in which a micro-scenario stands in for the wider perspective, therefore, can be more emotionally appealing. This image is arresting because it combines two opposing symbols of the 'dirty war' – a Madre and a member of the security forces – in a highly unusual form of interaction, in the public sphere in the centre of Buenos Aires, and because this is clearly visible in the midst of a crowd.

During the dictatorship, as we have seen, the military imposed strict controls on public spaces, and particularly symbolic ones such as the Plaza de Mayo. They also relied on repression and generalised fear to prevent people from connecting with others and demonstrating publicly. The mothers responded to

this with outward displays of grief and public protest based around their status as maternal protectors of their children, and they did so in the most iconic location of the nation, the Plaza de Mayo. The photograph under examination shows a representative of each side of this struggle in the street in the capital city. While the identity of the man does become known, and is indeed vital to one reading of the scene, the value of the photograph is not primarily located in the individual identities of the mother and the police officer, but in their status – clearly marked by the uniform and the white scarf, respectively – as representatives of a particular stance in the contested public sphere. Contrary to what we might expect, they are not shown in open conflict but in an ambiguous embrace. If, as the mothers argue, the scene is one of struggle rather than showing mutual affection or the act of giving solace, it is unclear who will gain supremacy. The image was immediately recognised as significant, as according to the Memoria Abierta archive it was widely published at the time.<sup>5</sup> The archive, founded as a collaborative project by a group of human rights organisations, includes the photograph in its online gallery entitled 'Fotos con historia' ('Photos with History'), with details of its making and reception. In this way the creators of the photographic archive signal the image as significant and worthy of comment. It was also awarded the Rey de España prize for photography in 1983 and is included in publications which survey Argentine photography and recent history (Facio 1995: 102, Monasterio 1988: 43, Cerolini 2006).<sup>6</sup> While Facio's work places Ranea's photograph in the company of Argentine artistic works, Monasterio's emphasises its place as a photojournalistic artefact significant to the memory of the dictatorship. Illuminating though this photograph may be to a consideration of issues of gender and space during the dictatorship, I will suggest that it can also be valuable to questions of memory after the return to democracy. As we shall see, it was even deployed by its military subject to support his version of events, further underlining its aesthetic and moral ambiguity.

### **Competing for Memory during Democracy**

Since the beginning of the process of redemocratisation in 1983, mothers' and other relatives' groups have continued to campaign for justice; by which they generally understand a full revelation of the facts surrounding the disappearance of their children, and punishment, through the judicial process, for the perpetrators. The aims and methods of the various human rights groups, while broadly similar, are not homogeneous, and indeed since 1986 the Madres themselves have operated in two distinct organisations. The split was based primarily on the issues of exhumations and cooperation with the democratic government. Some mothers felt that the time had come to recover the bodies of their children, where possible, and give them a proper burial. These women are also willing to work with state agencies to achieve their aims. The most uncompromising of the mothers, however, insist on the need to maintain open wounds in order to keep fighting, rather than beginning a process of mourning and, eventually, recuperation. They also believe that there is little or no qualitative difference between the weak democratic regimes and the previous military junta, and they have long refused to deal with the government.<sup>7</sup> Although it is evident that the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, headed by Hebe de Bonafini, has become increasingly politicised, their refusal to negotiate with government actors has limited their influence and led them to be regarded as anachronistic in some circles (Kaiser 2005: 186). In the last few years, however, concrete efforts by President Néstor Kirchner in the human rights field have at last encouraged the Asociación Madres to work with the government.<sup>8</sup> They also retain a prominent symbolic role as 'memory-keepers' in Argentina and have attained a recognition beyond their boundaries of their nation (Kaiser 2005: 126, Malin 1994: 211).

Meanwhile, the fate of perpetrators of human rights abuses has been a complicated story. The CONADEP report revealed the extent of state-sponsored terrorism to the Argentine public, but the commission's lack of judicial power led to its condemnation by some sectors in the human rights movement, including Bonafini's Madres. After the initial and highly significant trials of the junta leaders and other military figures, the *Obediencia Debida*

and *Punto Final* laws prevented the majority of those involved in the repression from facing trial. In the face of prosecutions and restrictions on their powers, members of the armed forces staged several uprisings, raising the threat of further military coups and crushing moves for justice, as examined in detail by Norden (1996). Those who had been convicted were later pardoned, and impunity had apparently won out. In recent years, however, the amnesty laws have been declared unconstitutional and annulled, and moves have been begun to try (or re-try) the perpetrators once again.<sup>9</sup> Aside from judicial channels, noisy protests known as *escraches* conducted by human rights organisations such as H.I.J.O.S., the organisation of children of the disappeared (Kaiser 2002), and media coverage may also act as means of expressing social disapproval.

Collective memory of the 'dirty war' may then be roughly divided into two opposing groups, that of the perpetrators, on the one hand, and of the direct victims and their families, on the other. A third group exists, of course, which we may provisionally term those taking a 'bystander' position. It is therefore understandable that an image such as Ranea's, with such potentially opposed readings, may generate controversy. It is generally agreed that after the furore over the trials and *Nunca Más* had died down, public debate over the memory of the dictatorship was muted until the mid-1990s and impunity became a key word when talking about the human rights situation. President Carlos Menem compared protests in 1993 to the 'subversion' which, in his view, had led to the 'dirty war', and even suggested that strikes and public unrest could lead to 'another contingent of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo clamouring for their children' (McSherry 1997: 75). After this low point in the examination of the past, a resurgence of interest was sparked by the confessions of retired Navy Captain Adolfo Scilingo, who admitted in a series of interviews that he had taken part in the so-called 'death flights', in which prisoners were thrown, bound and drugged but still alive, from aeroplanes into the sea (Verbitsky 1996). Although most of the facts exposed during this and other subsequent confessions were already known, their open expression by current and former members of the armed forces was astonishing to an

Argentine population well-used to secrecy and denials of atrocities from the authorities.

The struggle for an official history of the dictatorship is one way in which the oppositional stances of human rights activists and members of the armed forces, and their supporters on both sides, are communicated. If the armed forces seek public gratitude for, as they see it, fighting and winning a war against subversion and defending the Argentine way of life, then the Madres desire nothing less than penal sentences for all those involved in atrocities. Yet we are faced with an image in which a police officer and a mother of a disappeared person are shown in the act of embracing each other – is this not a symbol of reconciliation? Former police commissioner Carlos Enrique Gallone, the man who appears in the image, would certainly have liked to persuade the courts of such a view. In the trial in which he was accused of overseeing a notorious mass murder during the dictatorship, he appealed to the famous photograph as proof of his ‘good relationship’ with human rights organisations. In an article entitled ‘Truco como un abrazo de represor’ (‘Trick of Repressor’s Embrace’), the newspaper *Página/12* quoted Gallone as stating in court, ‘Yo tengo buena relación con los organismos de derechos humanos. Soy el que aparece en la foto con una Madre de Plaza de Mayo’ (‘I have a good relationship with the human rights organisations. I’m the one who appears in the photo with a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo’; 23 June 2004).<sup>10</sup> The case, known as the ‘Masacre de Fátima’, in which Gallone and two colleagues are accused of involvement in the disappearance and death of thirty individuals whose partially-destroyed bodies were found on 20 August 1976, attracted coverage in other news sources, but it is *Página/12* which repeatedly draws attention to the connection with Ranea’s photograph.<sup>11</sup> The newspaper’s comments about ‘una foto histórica’ (‘a historic photo’) and ‘la famosa fotografía periodística’ (‘the famous press photograph’) make clear that the image, which is reproduced alongside the text, needs little introduction and would be familiar to many readers. In fact, despite the headline of this and a further article (‘La verdad de un abrazo siniestro’, [‘The Truth about a Sinister Embrace’] *Página/12*, 11 February 2006)<sup>12</sup>, there is

little explicit comment on either the photograph itself or Gallone's comments on it, except to remark that his appeals were in vain. By resorting to the memory of the photographic event, Gallone attempts to move the image far from its original context; one image of one instance in a particular demonstration is hardly evidence of the good character of its subject or of a prolonged 'relationship' with any group, nor is it really relevant to his professional activities six years before the photograph was made. Clearly, in the news articles the photograph's evidentiary function is taken for granted; at the same time the fact that it does not stand up to scrutiny as proof of any longstanding collaboration between Gallone and the Madre is also assumed.

Human rights groups themselves have made attempts to enforce their own reading of the image: the archive Memoria Abierta features Ranea's photograph in an online gallery of iconic images and stresses that according to the Madres, the woman in the photograph was not hugging the police officer, but beating his chest in indignation and imploring him for help. The text notes that 'A pesar de su insistencia [de las Madres], la fotografía no fue leída en términos de confrontación y dio la vuelta al mundo portando una historia falsa' ('Despite the insistence [of the Madres], the photograph was not read in terms of a confrontation and has circulated with a false story attached to it').<sup>13</sup> Obviously, from this perspective there is only one 'right' way to read the image. The two versions are irreconcilable: the police officer's claim seems a cynical ploy to reduce his own culpability in the atrocities of which he is accused. Although the photograph was not taken by someone directly involved in repressive activities, but rather by a photojournalist, Gallone's interpretation is 'shaped by the broken look' of the perpetrator (Hirsch 2003: 21) and is unlikely to convince many. At the same time, the Madres cannot insist on a univocal response to a public icon which, by its very nature, may be subjected to a variety of different responses and readings. Because of its tendency to circulate without much contextual information, and because its subjects are themselves both controversial symbols of Argentina's past, people will naturally have different, and in some cases polarised, opinions about the image. While for many, the Madres are privileged 'memory-keepers'

of the nation, other viewers will naturally develop their own responses to images and other memory artefacts. This tension between opposing versions of the image's context and further use naturally raises questions about the 'politics of retrospective witnessing' (Hirsch 2003: 21).

Ranea's photograph lays claim to a unique space in this debate because its subject matter and composition are so unusual. The Madres are, as Feitlowitz has pointed out, 'photogenic' (1998: 162), and there are numerous images of their protests, including shocking photographs of their violent repression by police. Indeed, a widely-reproduced photograph by Eduardo Longoni of two Madres, clutching their banner and veering away from a mounted policeman, was made on the same day as Ranea's image, at the Marcha por la Vida of 1982. Surely, however, none is as arresting as the image of a police officer with his arm around a Madre, their bodies pressed together in the midst of an officially banned demonstration, in an action which seems entirely out of character for both of them. The woman may have been furiously beating his chest as the Madres claim, but this is not visible in the still frame. It seems that the mother in the picture was unknown to the leading mothers, and did not attend further activities of the group.<sup>14</sup> She remains anonymous, therefore, her face unseen, and her action and motivation can only be speculated upon; a fact which only serves to increase the important symbolic weight of the subject in the photographic image.

The respective 'uniforms' of the mother and the police officer immediately identify them and, in the case of the photograph, give them a symbolic status which goes beyond their individual identities. At a glance, the policeman's hat and the mother's scarf signal their respective positions in society so that the viewer recognises them immediately. This is one way in which the image works as an icon; the subjects are well known, and yet the rarity of their public embrace draws the viewer in for a second look. It is an embrace whose implications are unclear – is this a selfless act, an attempt to give comfort, or is there an ulterior motive? How should the spectator respond to it? At a compositional level, then, the photograph recalls paintings of the Betrayal, in

which Judas pointed out Jesus to his persecutors with a public kiss. With reference to Giotto's *The Betrayal*, Norman Bryson has stated that, despite the difference between the two figures, the painting shows a kind of symmetry, in which the opposition between the men is converted into 'a principle of *interchangeability*: Christ and Judas, diacritically or mutually co-defined, are now found to share a secret identity where the opposites meet and are negated; each participates in the identity of the other' (1983: 64). This, I suggest, is relevant for my examination of Ranea's image, not because the Madre and the police officer are themselves interchangeable, but due to their implications for Argentine national identity. How does the onlooker, who is neither a representative of denial and cruelty like the police officer, or part of an unstinting memory campaign like that pursued by the Madres, participate in the public displays of a nation which is so polarised? The scene then, embodies the meeting of dichotomies (male/female, violence/peace, memory/forgetting) in a way which is resonant for the future of social identity in Argentina.

### **Memory and the Future of Icons of the 'dirty war'**

While it ostensibly shows an affectionate scene, a closer look tells us that Ranea's photograph is less about physical closeness and more about deep divisions within Argentine society. As the distance in time since the end of the dictatorship becomes greater, and both the Madres and perpetrators age, they will gradually lose their grip on memory discourse, which will be taken over by new generations. Similarly, photographs of significant events tend to circulate with a loose grasp on the details of their making and contexts. This is particularly the case with iconic images: while the majority of photographs may disappear from public view, a select few are repeated almost obsessively, but often without important contextual information (Hirsch 2003: 24, Zelizer 1998: 98, 121). Although groups such as H.I.J.O.S. have a clear mandate to continue the human rights work begun by the Madres and others, the majority of young people will not have such direct and unequivocal connections to the period of state terrorism. As onlookers in the memory

debate, they nevertheless will play an important role in the future construction of national identity, which is partly based on their idea of a shared history. As they look at photographs made during the dictatorship from the distance of several decades, ordinary citizens may find themselves attempting to strike a difficult balance between moving on with their lives and not becoming fixated on the troubles of the past, remembering and honouring the victims of state terrorism, and deciding how Argentina wishes to see itself, and be seen, in the future.

In the image under examination here, the mother could be seen as showing forgiveness towards and seeking comfort from one of the perpetrators who caused citizens, including her own child, to disappear. The issue of reconciliation is, therefore, one which arises under these circumstances, potentially giving the nation permission to move on and allow the memory of the *Proceso* to fade into history. There is no such convenient solution in this photograph, however: the police officer, whose physical power is clearly greater than that of the unnamed mother, represents the many perpetrators whose crimes went unpunished after the return to democracy. What is more, the two other women do not give their blessing to a cosy scene of compromise, but stare aghast at the couple; the angle of their heads makes clear that their accusing gaze is directed at the man. None of the people visible in the frame is looking at the camera: the central Madre is turned away, Gallone is staring into the distance, and the other two women both have their eyes shielded by glasses. The image does not, then, draw us to identify with or easily read the emotions of the subjects, although it does provide visual cues which guide the reaction of the spectator. The female onlookers form two points of a triangle which encloses the embracing pair: the viewer is the third point. The reaction of the two women, in particular, directs the viewer to treat the embrace scene with caution. Ultimately, therefore, while the Madres may give their input on the 'right' way to read this image, and the Madre on the left of the frame most forcefully calls into question the 'reconciliation' which is apparently visible, the final responsibility rests with the spectator. Contradictions are inherent in this image, which will not allow the

viewer any easy answers, but carries forward the question of conflict and the memory of pain into the present.

This photographic icon is relevant to the themes of memory and forgetting which have weighty political implications in Argentina, as well as other countries which have suffered difficult pasts.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, it is particularly pertinent to note the controversy which any suggestion of moving on from a traumatic past tends to provoke. Writing of the case of South Africa, Alejandro Castillejo-Cuéllar has examined the 'scenarios of forgiveness' which can be set up by items of visual culture such as the documentary film *Long Night's Journey into Day* (dir. Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffman, 2002), which deals with the meeting of perpetrators of human rights abuses and their victims' families. Castillejo-Cuéllar points out the suspicion with which visual artefacts perceived as 'reconciliation propaganda' may be received in their native countries, even if they are praised internationally (2007: 14). There is a concern that 'too much attention on the light at the end of the tunnel trivialized and abstracted the suffering and the occluded historical conditions of such encounters' between victims and perpetrators (2007: 14). Obviously, such discomfort would be magnified in a context such as the one under examination here, when the victims' relatives do not accept that the scenario portrayed is one of reconciliation in any sense.

Moreover, Peter Digeser (1998) asks if it is ever appropriate for citizens to forgive wrongs done to them by their government. He notes that forgiveness allows people to move on with their lives, but has the possibility for short-circuiting justice, because it does not rely on the necessity for wrongdoers to admit or atone for their wrong. This explains the trenchant opposition to forgiveness expressed by groups such as the Asociación Madres and H.I.J.O.S., because the perpetrators of abuses have not been punished. Some believe that forgiveness is warranted when the wrongdoer has displayed what may be termed 'decency', through such acts as apologising, offering reparations, and promising not to commit the wrongful act(s) again (Digeser 1998: 707). The Argentine armed forces could arguably have fulfilled

this requirement through the public apology of General Balza, but the former junta members who still deny wrongdoing and call for public appreciation of their actions certainly could not. Carlos Gallone, by claiming a friendship with human rights activists during a trial for human rights abuses, seems to fall into the latter category. The Argentine government has maintained an ambiguous position, by making some progress into investigations, then granting amnesties to perpetrators, and now slowly turning its attention once more to human rights and public memory projects. According to Digeser:

Political forgiveness should not be performed unless the government has publicly acknowledged the wrong that it has done: victims and transgressors must agree on a history of what has happened. This acknowledgement is reasonable because some common understanding of who did what to whom is a minimal demand for justice. In addition, this requirement permits a conceptual distinction between political forgiveness and forgetting. Forgiving is not the same as forgetting.

(2007: 707)

Digeser emphasises the creation of a shared understanding of past events which is important for the purposes of this chapter. Finally, he suggests that in some situations, a compromise, and alternative to full forgiveness, might be to maintain what he calls 'an angle of coolness' to the state; that is, a studied coolness or scepticism towards state institutions. Such a position might, one presumes, be the logical result of continued disappointments as the state fails to fulfil its promises with regard to justice, as indicated, for example, by the low levels of social trust identified in Chile, a nation which also has a history of military dictatorship (Wilde 1999: 497).

Returning to the specific context of Argentina, Susana Kaiser's (2005) interviews with young Argentines reveal a range of attitudes towards the past, but with significant numbers of respondents expressing feelings of indifference, apathy, and resignation towards the wounds of the past, and a desire to forgive and move on. In several cases, young people drew comparisons, not always favourable, between their own opinions and those of human rights activists. One interviewee, for example, said:

I care about myself and two or three persons I love. I don't want any problem. No one cares about what happens with the rest. Because if you don't think this way you have to think like the Mothers of the Plaza

de Mayo and take to the streets for twenty years without achieving anything.

(cited in Kaiser 2005: 120)

Another stated:

I feel pity in seeing twenty-year-old kids who are blinded by hate. They cannot have a good life; they don't live in peace. And I feel sad about that. Take a guy from HIJOS; he has a terrible need for justice. He wants to capture the guilty. Someone like me wants to live in peace, as detached as possible from any confrontation or argument. My philosophy is to live and let live; let's not bother each other.

(cited in Kaiser 2005: 125)

Dwelling on the past is therefore perceived negatively as indicating an unhealthy degree of bitterness and hate. Criticism of the Madres within Argentina is hardly unprecedented; as early as 1990, Iain Guest wrote that they had become 'an uncomfortable reminder of a past that most people want to forget' (1990: 407). Although most young people had some knowledge of the human rights organisations, and in many cases a generalised admiration for their work, this did not necessarily translate into a desire to take action themselves. Rather, some saw themselves more as spectators than active agents in political circles:

I don't think I can speak out about it because I didn't go through the same and I don't have a kidnapped child. So, if they feel that this is the way to show their pain and their protest, let them do it. From my point of view I think it's exaggerated but I know that I don't have a say because I wasn't there during the *Proceso*, my child wasn't kidnapped, and I didn't lose a close relative.

(cited in Kaiser 2005: 127)

In this case, the speaker sees herself as not having an influence in memory debates in the nation, despite the fact that her generation will eventually outlive that of the parents of the disappeared. This suggests that the vocal, and highly visible, campaign of the Madres may have had the unintended consequence of silencing some of those not directly affected by violence. Kaiser identifies this tendency towards taking a 'bystander role' as a worrying consequence of the post-dictatorship period (2005: 129).

While young Argentines who are not close relatives of the disappeared may tend not to involve themselves directly in memorial activities, various critics

have suggested that the more subtle long-term legacies of the dictatorship are deep-rooted in the nation as a whole. Marguerite Feitlowitz (1998) identifies the consequences of terror and torture for colloquial language, while Kaiser (2005) points out the persistence of self-censorship, silences and fear of becoming involving in political (and therefore potentially subversive) activity. For Robben, the Argentine people as a whole have been affected by a collective trauma which strikes at the heart of the nation;

Massive trauma is more than the sum total of individual suffering because it ruptures social bonds, destroys group identities, undermines people's sense of community, and entails cultural disorientation because taken for granted meanings become obsolete. A massive trauma is thus a wound to the social body and its cultural frame.

(2005: 346)

Alongside these issues, the image under examination here is an indication of the rift in national identity in the aftermath of the military regime. The elements of the image are compositionally closely intertwined but ideologically very far apart, leaving tensions and contradictions in the minds of onlookers. What remains to ask, then, is whether the position of the Madre and the police officer in the image, and their respective stances in society, push the viewer into a space where their own political agency is denied, or whether the photograph may also draw people forward into a discussion of the future of the Argentine nation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has concentrated on one particular image which is part of that select group of photographs which recur in discussions of the memory of state terror. Taken at a protest against the dictatorship, it provokes memories of the contest for control of the public sphere between the ruling junta and their opponents, above all the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The ambiguous embrace retains its relevance under democracy as it captures some of the tensions inherent in memory debates in the past three decades, and raises questions of remembering and reconciliation which still face younger generations of Argentine citizens.

That Ranea's photograph features the characteristics of iconicity, within the Argentine context, is beyond doubt: it is reproduced frequently in the news media, on the internet and in books, and it has activated a strong emotional response. It is not 'globally' recognised, however, as a very small number of photographs are, but it is significant in its country of origin. Hariman and Lucaites suggest one important reason why visually eloquent photographs such as this one are significant in remembering traumatic events; 'Icons may be one means for resolving conflicts that are highly polarized and unlikely to be resolved through ordinary politics' (2007: 22). While there is no simple solution to the very different versions of history given by different sectors of Argentine society, this image is one way in which those sectors can be viewed simultaneously, albeit still in an unresolved way. Iconic images have

... a capacity for representing moral contradiction and trauma by reproducing repetitive behaviour in a single moment of time. Trauma involves fragmentation, and the napalm photo becomes a masterpiece in part because of how it provides aesthetic resources for registering and responding to war's terrible splintering of reality.

(Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 22)

Like the famous photo of the little girl burnt in a napalm attack, the photograph of the embrace is aesthetically harmonious yet deeply contradictory, and is a way of considering the affect of the 'dirty war' on Argentina's starkly divided public sphere.

Finally, it is fruitful to return to the widely-cited work of Benedict Anderson, who has observed that, 'All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives' (1983: 204). Anderson is referring to the narratives of a shared history which lead to the formation of national identity. It is important to remember that there will be no one single interpretation of events of the dictatorship or its aftermath, yet the process of agreeing upon even the basic facts of those years is continuing. Anderson continues to stress the significance of particular violent deaths for the story of the nation: '[...] the nation's biography snatches, against the going mortality rate, exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions,

wars, and holocausts. But, to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own' (1983: 206). The challenge for Argentina, then, is for the next generation to recognise as 'their own' the history of the disappeared, aside from the very public struggles of the Madres and similar groups. Perhaps it is those images that are multifaceted and ambiguous, and do not allow easy or simplistic access to the memory of the past, which are the most successful for the succeeding generation to utilise in the creation of a shared history. Rather than offering neat solutions to the uncomfortable legacies of the past, they capture some of the complexities of the situation and for this reason, persist in the national interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Arditti gives an estimate of 'over 10,000 people' attending the march (1999: 42), while Robben (2005: 315) suggests the figure was only half that; both indicate, therefore, that the crowd was a large one, but not reaching the estimates of over 100,000 who gathered to protest against the military regime in the subsequent months.

<sup>2</sup> In common with Diana Taylor (1998: 184-85), my use of the word 'performance' does not suggest the actions or emotions of the Madres were not genuine, but rather emphasises their use of public spectacle.

<sup>3</sup> See also Jones (1994) for an analysis of the Latin American city as contested space, and Scarpaci and Frazier (1993) for a comparative study of the gendering of landscapes under state terror in the countries of the Southern Cone.

<sup>4</sup> A large body of work now exists on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, their history and methods. See in particular Fisher (1989), Guzmán Bouvard (1994), Mellibovsky (1997), Vasquez (2003) and Malin (1994).

<sup>5</sup> 'Fotos con historia' (Photos with History), *Memoria Abierta*, <<http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/galeria.php>> [accessed 25 July 2007].

<sup>6</sup> The Premio Rey de España was awarded by the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana and the Spanish-language press agency EFE. For more information and a list of other winners, see <<http://www.efe.com/premios/rey/>> [accessed 25 July 2007]. The images from the book *En negro y blanco – fotografías del Cordobazo al juicio a las juntas* (Cerolini 2006) may be accessed online at <[http://argra.org.ar/new/nyb\\_fm.php#](http://argra.org.ar/new/nyb_fm.php#)> [accessed 25 July 2007].

<sup>7</sup> Matilde Mellibovsky describes the ideological differences which led to the split (1997: 178-179). There have also been suggestions, however, that class differences within the Madres' original organisation may have contributed to their disagreements (Peluffo 2007; Guzmán Bouvard 1994: 162-163).

<sup>8</sup> Bonafini's meetings with Kirchner have been well-publicised, for example, 'Kirchner no es como los demás', *Clarín*, 4 June 2003, <<http://www.clarin.com/diario/2003/06/04/p-00701.htm>> [accessed 19 December 2007]. The Madres have recently, and for the first time, expressed support for a particular political candidate: 'Apoyamos al gobierno del Presidente Néstor Kirchner y a Filmus', *Página/12*, 11 June 2007, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/ultimas/20-86414-2007-06-11.html> [accessed 19 December 2007]. Ana Peluffo (2007) has also discussed the strained relationship between the Abuelas, the Asociación Madres, and the Línea Fundadora Madres, and their respective cooperation with Kirchner's regime. Peluffo examines a very interesting image of President Kirchner embracing Estela Carlotto, President of the Abuelas, while Bonafini looks on in the background, which can be seen at 'Reencuentro de Carlotto y Bonafini', *Clarín*, 26 May 2006, <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2006/05/26/elpais/p-01001.htm> [accessed 19 December 2007].

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the involvement of human rights organisations with the trials of perpetrators, which primarily focuses on the situation up to 2003, but also notes the annulment of the amnesty laws in 2005, see Bonner (2005).

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<sup>10</sup> 'Trucho como un abrazo de represor', *Página/12*, 23 June 2005, <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-37102-2004-06-23.html>> [accessed 1 August 2007].

<sup>11</sup> For the CONADEP report on the Masacre de Fátima, see <[http://www.nuncamas.org/juicios/argentin/capital/fatima/resoluc/fatima\\_22jun04.htm](http://www.nuncamas.org/juicios/argentin/capital/fatima/resoluc/fatima_22jun04.htm)> [accessed 1 August 2007].

<sup>12</sup> 'La verdad de un abrazo siniestro', *Página/12*, 11 February 2006, <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-62955-2006-02-11.html>> [accessed 1 August 2007].

<sup>13</sup> 'Fotos con historia', *Memoria Abierta*, <<http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/galeria.php>> [accessed 27 July 2007].

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to María Laura Guembe of the Memoria Abierta photographic archive in Buenos Aires for relating this information.

<sup>15</sup> For a recent analysis of the aftermath of truth commissions, see the special issue of *Radical History Review*, *Truth Commissions: State Terror, History and Memory* 97 (Winter 2007).

## Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to bring a comparative approach to the study of the Argentine and Peruvian visual economies and violence. It is concerned with the work that images do in these contexts, both at the time of conflict, and particularly afterwards, as nations and people attempt to come to terms with the past and move forward into the future. Thus, it has sought to examine some of the ways in which images contribute to memory debates. In these concluding remarks, it is my intention to marshal the arguments introduced previously through the close reading of specific images and, in particular, to look at the features of iconicity within the Latin American context. I do not wish to suggest that the type of images which achieve prominence may be rigidly prescribed, nor do I propose that 'Latin America' may be understood as a homogenous mass in which visual practice is always the same. In fact, the comparative dimension of my study has precisely shown that this is not so. However, I maintain that there are fruitful aspects to the examination of the two national contexts which may shed light on memorial practices in the region.

I have attempted to identify a range of factors which contribute to the continued circulation, persistence, and ease of appropriation of certain photographs, even without undertaking an exhaustive survey of post-conflict imagery in Argentina and Peru. At this point it is worth reminding ourselves once more of Hariman and Lucaites' working definition of iconicity, which identified

*those photographic images appearing in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics.*

(2007: 27, italics in original)

Although in general terms I concur with these points, I believe that we must expand on and adapt them according to the specificities of each case under examination here. The authors' focus on the United States and its tradition of liberal democracy is not one which can be readily transferred to the South

American context, and in this regard, my emphasis is more on the emotional engagement with the aftermath of violence than with a measure of participation in traditional political processes as such. In short, memory, a broad and significant area which is only implicit in Hariman and Lucaites' work, is here explicitly the focus of the circulation of photographic icons in post-conflict situations. Within the chapters of this thesis, a number of points of comparison have arisen, which may assist in pulling together the issue of commemorating past violence through and with photographic images.

Firstly, a significant emotional engagement has featured in all of the images under discussion. Many of these, such as the photographs of relatives demonstrating in support of human rights, show scenes of deep emotion. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo have gained worldwide recognition, in part due to their awareness of the need for publicity and their deliberate construction of media events during their protests. Many images feature them holding photographs of their loved ones, as in Longoni's image in chapter two. Dominguez's portrait of a typically Andean mother and child, also holding a small photograph, transfers this recognisable photo-opportunity to the Peruvian highlands, drawing parallels in the appeals of relatives across the subcontinent. Such photographs typically represent feelings of loss, longing, grief, love, and anger at the forces which have caused such pain. Ranea's image, the subject of chapter eight, is an ambivalent blend of traditional 'motherly' qualities and the portrayal of conflict, which shows the Madres in a different light. In it, they become involved actors in the disputed process of establishing an accepted version of past events. I have suggested that while all images of loved ones are significant in the construction of the memory of forced disappearance, the photograph of the mother and police officer raises further questions about the difficulty of resolving such painful issues in the future.

Other significant images contain the urgency of hastily captured action; Retto's photographs taken during the final moments of his life are resonant of an incident which has become representative of political violence, danger and death in Peru. In addition, images of Sendero's supreme leader in a cage

before the waiting press, like Ranea's photograph, problematise the portrayal of perpetrators and the possibility of reconciliation. Both of these photographic events have continued to influence public debate long after their making. In all cases, photographs need to be in accord with current concerns and the prevailing emotional mood in order to remain meaningful.

The second parallel which I wish to draw is the way in which many of the images under discussion initiate and maintain a connection with their audience through a sensory association. While the link between the photographic image and the visual is obvious, there are also relationships to be made between photographs and the other senses. Several of the images in this thesis show details or fragments of physical objects and body parts. Brodsky's photographs of books and archives connect the tactile quality of stored information with the material status of the photographic image. Additionally, both Brodsky and Lentz have photographed close-ups of hands holding or examining photographs. Such images are suited to a form of circulation which may lead to iconicity; the close frames and anonymous body parts lend themselves to a symbolic or metonymic interpretation rather than a reliance on one specific context. Hands are also naturally linked to the sense of touch and may suggest a physical connection between the viewer and the subject. As Hariman and Lucaites have asserted, the visual public sphere is not solely visual, but is 'a visual intertext of mixed media' (2007: 296).

Thirdly, I have attempted to draw attention to the importance of time in the consideration of the memory of political violence. The act of making a photograph 'freezes' a moment in time, which in the case of the iconic image then circulates widely and indefinitely with a heightened significance. Particularly in the case of traumatic memory, the past is not confined to history, but remains actively open and important in the present, and is subject to discussion and reinterpretation. Images of buildings which have gained notoriety in the legacy of terror, such as El Frontón prison in Peru and the ESMA in Argentina, contribute to the infamous status of such sites. While such sites remain and their use evolves, their images continue to circulate, often symbolically standing in for a wider period in time and space. All

photography is endowed with a complex temporal relationship, but it is my assertion that this is heightened in the aftermath of internal conflict; both because of the continuing challenges of establishing democratic society, and because of the liminal position of the disappeared victims of violence.

Finally, several chapters have highlighted the varying and often ambiguous interpretations which can be drawn from, or at times foisted onto, the same image. Retto's images salvaged from the hillside of Uchuraccay, Ranea's capture of an encounter between a Madre and a representative of the military regime, and the multiple images of a guerrilla leader under arrest have all been read in many different ways. Evidently, this draws attention to the role of the spectator in viewing images, and reminds us that experience of looking at photographs is not an unmediated one. It could also, for some, point to the divisive possibilities of photographic icons, an issue which I shall touch on further below.

The images examined here come from contexts in which such close attention is rarely paid to the visual economy. It is my hope that a comparative approach between two countries which are not typically seen as being in similar situations has allowed relationships to emerge in rich and sometimes unexpected ways. It has not been possible, within the confines of this thesis, to cover all of the circumstances in which images feature in the commemoration of the Argentine and Peruvian periods of violence, and many fertile opportunities remain. Continuing projects in which the photographic image plays a major role include the transfer of the Yuyanapaq exhibition in Peru to a hopefully permanent home in the Museo de la Nación in Lima, and the establishment of a museum of memory in the former ESMA building in Buenos Aires. These are just two examples of the way in which state-sanctioned, NGO-directed, and private forms of commemoration complement each other, with photography featuring centrally within them. Furthermore, other nations in the region are facing similar processes of dealing with and commemorating divisive pasts. Poole's notion of 'image worlds' as interconnecting networks of images, image-makers, and consumers, is a

helpful tool to visualise these sorts of discursive relations within and between nations (1997: 7).

Many of the photographs in this thesis deserve the label of icon. As has been pointed out, there are drawbacks to the dominance of the icon. The comment that 'a photograph captures a tiny sliver of space and time yet can reveal in a flash the social order' (Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 287) expresses simultaneously both the utility and the dangers of the icon as a critical concept. A photograph becomes iconic when it has the ability to symbolise something of the period it comes from in a particularly captivating way; yet by doing so it can overshadow those aspects of history which were either not caught on camera or which were deemed, for whatever reason, less photogenic. Photographic memory icons, I would argue, are one way in which a nation constructs its own identity and self-image, and in this way they can both expose hidden depths and, conversely, reinforce hegemony (Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 298).

The role of photography in memory processes, then, is a disputed one. Indeed, this is hardly surprising when the state of memory itself can be a highly controversial one. Paul Connerton, himself a key figure in memory studies, has recently brought the issue of forgetting to the fore, noting that while most commentators take for granted the imperative to remember, in fact the situation is more complex (Connerton 2008: 59). Connerton notes that while repressive erasure was a central feature of authoritarian regimes such as the Southern Cone dictatorships, it and other, less violent but no less significant forms of rupture with the past are important in constructing new national identities, as is often necessary in a post-conflict context (2008: 60-62). Connerton assumes that contemporary culture is plagued by an excess of information which prevents complete remembrance, and in this his recent essay is reminiscent of both Nora's (1989: 8) and Huyssen's (1995: 3) concerns about the acceleration of time and loss of history. It is true that, as with the selection of iconic images, societies display what we may term a selective memory in their dealings with the past, and in this is manifested a certain amount of contingency and serendipity.

Nevertheless, it is my contention that the central nature of the iconic image, and of photographic images in general, to collective memory makes them worthy of attention. While I tend to assume a positive slant to the commemoration of the past, this is not because I am unaware of the controversies mentioned above, but rather because of the reluctance to address violent events by many state actors in nations such as Argentina and Peru, where the balance still needs to be redressed. It is my hope that an examination of significant photographic images does not add to the bland chorus of 'never again', which, however sincerely meant, has proved little guarantee against future atrocities, but rather seeks to ask, as Eelco Runia phrases it, 'who are we that this could have happened?' (2007: 316). As photographs feature in the commemoration of traumatic events, taking them seriously is one way of evaluating the import of the period in the present and, as Runia argues, may have the side effect of beginning to heal wounds. Of course, there is no easy solution to the problem of who exactly constitutes the 'we' who took part in political history, even during recent decades, or the 'we' who is now regarding the visual legacy of such events. It is fitting to remember Susan Sontag's warning that 'No "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain' (2004: 6), especially as the number of direct witnesses to human rights abuses in Argentina and Peru starts to decrease. Nonetheless, photographs contribute to the narratives of a shared history which form national identity (Anderson 1983), and for this reason, the concept of a collective 'we' is one that I consider useful. Visual networks, particularly in the digital age, mean that this 'we' can consist of multiple communities, local, regional, national, and global.

As the interest in memory and commemorative practices shows little sign of abating, the question of whether and how images help us remember remains open. Rather than working from a position of iconoclasm or scepticism towards the role of the image in memory culture, I see the prevalence of photographs as one of the richest aspects of commemoration which, given due consideration, contributes to a continued discussion of the events of the past and their meaning in the present. It is not possible, and may not even be

desirable, to predict the icons of the future or to be certain about which currently popular images will stand the test of time, but it is certain that, in the foreseeable future, photographs will continue to be some of the most meaningful artefacts in our memory culture.

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## Filmography

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