

Plain Things and Space: Metonymy and Aura in Memorials of Social Trauma

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A little thing: a ponytail holder. A place: the abandoned soccer field in an abandoned town. Representations of a common object and a place can effectively evoke tragic events and contribute to the collective memory of a country that is trying to come to terms with its violent past. These examples are taken from a photo exhibit by Domingo Giribaldi created as a cultural intervention in the wake of the report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which investigated the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Shining Path and by the country's armed forces during the 1980s and 1990s.¹ These two examples represent mechanisms frequently found in memorials to social trauma. By examining them I hope to shed some light on the way a community "remembers." Our understanding of cultural memory is reflected in aesthetic choices that, I will argue throughout this essay, consistently embody mnemonic mechanisms highlighted by current research on cognition. Interventions like Giribaldi's are able to produce vicarious memories in viewers by appealing to empathic responses to certain forms of representation.

The ponytail holder is from a mass grave discovered in the highlands of Peru. All that is found is a heap of undistinguishable bones and other human remains, but a woman sees the little hair accessory and breaks down in tears. A plain little thing evokes the enormity of her loss. There is a metonymic aspect in the way objects represent absence: a pink ponytail holder stands for the girl who wore it, and when told that this was all her relatives had left with which to identify her, somehow we understand; somehow we are moved. The empty courtyards, kitchens, and playgrounds of the town of

**Layers of Memory and the Discourse of Human Rights:
Artistic and Testimonial Practices in Latin America and
Iberia** *Hispanic Issues On Line* (2014)

Putis in Domingo Giribaldi's photos speak of the desolation of a town emptied by a massacre. What were once places of human interaction and communal life are now empty spaces. These examples illustrate two ways in which memorials of social trauma succeed in transmitting strong emotions through mnemonic mechanisms. Memorials of social trauma often attempt to awaken forms of identification between the general public and those who experienced the traumatic event themselves. Most visitors to public memorials do not have any actual "memories" of the events commemorated. Yet, I contend, memorials have the power to produce in us "memory-like" effects, and the fact that we feel as if we "remember" arouses in us powerful feelings about events we have not experienced firsthand. Among the different mechanisms used to produce these effects, I will focus on two that I consider particularly effective: metonymy and the use of space.

The present text takes as its premise the idea that there are cognitive operations similar to memory processes, which can be crucial in arousing empathy and understanding the pain of others. Although current research has not produced conclusive evidence on the cognitive aspects of empathy, many researchers believe that certain kinds of brain activity account for feelings of empathic identification: I can understand what somebody else feels because the parts of my brain that experience certain emotions become active when I recognize those emotions in others.² In this essay I will argue that because empathy seems to imply visualizing or imagining the feelings of others, the cognitive aspects of empathy appeal at least partially to the same mechanisms that are involved in recollection. After all, memory is a kind of visualization, a kind of replaying the past in my brain, which also creates neural activity in a vicarious way: the feeling that we are "reliving" an experience might be similar to the feeling of living someone else's experience.³

We commonly say that a society needs to "remember." After a community experiences social trauma, a public articulation of the past should allow the community to identify with those who suffered the most. To feel with others in this case would imply recognizing their painful memories as being painful not just for them but for the community as a whole. While the scientific evidence is still controversial, we can see how memorials of social trauma activate empathic feelings through mechanisms similar to those involved in the formulation of our own memories.

The word "empathy" itself entered the language of psychology through Edward B. Titchener's interpretation of the concept of *Einfühlung* described by Theodor Lipps, who was in turn elaborating on Robert Vischer's aesthetic theories.⁴ Although this etymology does not seem to be relevant for the current understanding of the term "empathy," it is significant that the word originated as an attempt to theorize the viewer's relationship to a work of art. Memorials of social trauma take on artistic forms that attempt to awake in viewers an intimate understanding of the pain of others.

The feelings aroused in us by a public memorial are not memories: I cannot “remember” something that I did not experience. If we consider the relationship between “actual memories” and “actual experiences,” however, we can see that the process of remembering resembles the process of imagining and understanding in ways that make the rise of empathic feelings toward the experiences of others almost a biological process. Empathy happens in our brains the same way that memory does. And if that is the case, we need to understand the mechanisms that succeed in stirring up our emotions about things that did not happen to us.

Many others have made extremely important contributions to the understanding of this feeling I am calling “empathy” in times when our world seems plagued by traumatic events. Works such as Susan Sontag’s last book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, and Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” reveal the need to conceptualize the position from which to address social trauma when we have not ourselves been direct victims of the events. Kaja Silverman coined the term “heteropathic recollection” to talk about “implanted memories” that might allow us to “participate in the desires, struggles, and sufferings of the other” (185). She writes about texts or images capable of “implanting in the viewer or reader ‘synthetic’ memories—libidinally saturated associative clusters which act like . . . mnemonic elements” (185). In a similar fashion, Alison Landsberg uses the term “prosthetic memory” to explain how one “sutures himself or herself into a larger history” (2). These critics reject the idea of appropriating the position of the victim, and it is clear that my feelings—as I am moved by the little ponytail holder—are not the feelings of a mother—or a sister, or an aunt—who has lost a child. But Hirsch’s intuition that “I can also ‘remember’ the suffering of others” (9) might be grounded in processes that occur in our brains.

Many scientists now see “recalling” as an activation of a specific pattern of neurons, but they see that pattern not as an imprint ready to be retrieved but as a sort of network that can be activated by partial cues (Nalbatian 139). When this network is activated, the same cells that first reacted to an experience seem to fire up again. This research offers an explanation of the feeling that we are reliving an intense experience when we remember it, but it also suggests that there might be mechanisms that activate our neurons in ways that are similar to the way they were activated in the original experience of others. From this perspective, empathy takes place in our brains and is awakened by stimuli familiar in our models of perception, such as our capacity to navigate space and to establish associations between, for example, part and whole, object and user, effect and cause.

The examples cited above, the picture of the ponytail holder and of familiar spaces now abandoned, speak of the intuition of the photographer in conveying a sense of loss, appealing to mechanisms often used in memorializing social trauma. Those two mechanisms can be found in other

forms of commemorations. In Berlin, for example, a city aware of its conflictive past, we find the use both of space and of metonymy to remember Holocaust victims. Space is used to evoke an aura, a presence that has been lost by displaying plaques in certain Berlin streets with the names and ages of those captured during the Nazi regime and taken to concentration camps: as we read the plaques, we realize they inhabited the space we are now occupying. We are in the space from which they were forcibly removed, turning a place of belonging into a site of violent alienation. The metonymic mechanism that refers to the user by the object used is also common. In the Jewish Museum in Berlin, quotidian objects, such as a toy or a diary, help the public imagine the lives of their owners, mourning their deaths as their lived experiences are invoked by the objects. Why and how can a thing or a street or a plaque with a name bring someone else's experience to mind?

Brain research tends to distinguish between emotional components and cognitive components of memory. In her study of memory in literature, Suzanne Nalbatian gives a clear and concise account of how neuroscience sees emotional and cognitive memories. The sensory-emotional component is usually associated with the function of the amygdala. Fact-based, cognitive memory is associated with the hippocampus (Nalbatian 135). However, even when studying emotionally charged memories, scientists tend to focus on the auto-associative network of the neurons of the hippocampus. Psychologists and neuroscientists use the term *episodic memory* to describe the autobiographical memories that are rich in associations to context, place, or environment, and which are activated by "retrieval cues." In Nalbatian's words, "this type of long-term episodic memory is characterized by a richness of phenomenological detail, a sense of reliving the experience, a sense of a travel through time, and a feeling of exact reproduction of the past" (137).

The fact that the firing of neurons in "episodic" memory occurs in the hippocampus is also relevant, as this area of the brain has been identified as being activated by navigation through space in the present, by the memory of navigating a space in the past, and by predicting the results of actions (Miller 1281). Remembering would therefore suppose both the connections made out of partial cues—which I see as a synecdoche of the mind, the fact that we can reconstruct the whole from the part—and it would be grounded in the perception of space. If what happens when we remember is that networks of neurons are connected in our hippocampus and respond to cues and space, it is possible to imagine that certain stimuli might activate similar processes in us, even if we did not experience certain events directly.⁵

To understand these mechanisms, I will examine a few examples of memorials of social trauma that succeed in creating empathy either by an activation of metonymic associations or by the perception of space they create in the public.

Metonyms

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *metonymy* as “[a] figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated” (1106). A word stands for another word. Yet even those who try to explain metonymy as a literary trope or as a linguistic phenomenon end up facing the fact that we are dealing with an extralinguistic reality. Hugh Bredin accepts that “we need to assume that metonymical relations are relations between things, not between words” (52). Anna Papafragou comes to a similar conclusion when trying to explain the way metonymy works: “I take it that metonymy is grounded in a more general human cognitive tendency, according to which an individual or object in the world may be identified through one salient property it possesses” (181). We see the substitution of a word for another word, but we establish a referent through a signifier not normally associated to it thanks to the fact that this previously unassociated object has a particular relationship to a first object that is in fact normally associated to that signifier. In memorials of social trauma, objects that probably can be described as relics present themselves as signifiers for that which has been lost and cannot be named.

Roman Jakobson’s classic paper on aphasia becomes particularly relevant when trying to understand the way objects fulfill a metonymic relationship to loss in the cases I am considering. Jakobson noted that some aphasics could produce grammatically correct sentences but were unable to select the right word, and would say *glass* for *window*, or *heaven* for *god*. He called this disturbance a “similarity disorder,” in opposition to a “contiguity disorder,” organizing aphasia around a metaphoric pole and a metonymic pole. Metonymical responses, Jakobson discovered, “combine and contrast the positional similarity with semantic contiguity” (91). When the “right word” cannot be uttered, another word—one that might be used in a sentence with the missing word—is used instead. But even then Jakobson was not only talking about words, but about representation in general. Jakobson himself established a link between his discoveries on these processes and psychoanalysis: for him, Freud’s understanding of displacement and condensation in the interpretation of dreams reveals metonymic processes of symbolization, while identification and symbolism are manifestations of a metaphoric pole (95).

When we talk about metonymy, we are using a linguistic mechanism to describe a very general way of representing and understanding the world. Perhaps we learn to represent like this because it is ingrained in the faculty of language. Or perhaps is the other way around: this is a linguistic mechanism, because language employs mechanisms that are common to a

general human way of understanding reality. Recent studies in neural processing of language show that “solving” metonymies seems to integrate semantic language comprehension with “world knowledge” (Rapp et al. 203). When a little ponytail holder evokes a dead girl and we understand loss and grief, we are experiencing a metonymic process that in turn activates a “memory-like” effect. The hair accessory stands—metonymically—for the person who wore it, and it works as a memory cue not just for the person but for the loss, for the absence of the body.

In 1996 Edmund Rolles suggested that a partial memory cue can contribute to the formation of long-term episodic memories in the auto-associative network of the hippocampus. I imagine this as a synecdoche in the brain. A certain understanding of memory sees it as dependent upon a network of connections, involved in a patterned activity of the brain. The psychologist James L. McClelland describes the reconstructive memory retrieval process in these terms:

It . . . involves contributions from background knowledge based on information acquired very gradually over the course of a lifetime of experience directly within the neocortical system. . . . [W]e cannot see remembering as recall, but as a synthesis of contributions from many different sources of information. (qtd. in Nalbatian 152)

We can conclude, then, that when we perceive a ponytail holder as a signifier, it also acts as a retrieval cue in our brains, activating a set of networks that is felt as a memory.

The vision of “plain things” is extremely powerful in memorials of social trauma. When the section of the Jewish Museum in Berlin dedicated to exile shows everyday objects left behind by those who had to flee it does not mention the pain and suffering they went through. The objects, however, allow the spectator to imagine the lives that were destroyed. The belongings of those who are no more seem to embody their absence and offer a material testimony to a body that is no longer there.

In Giribaldi’s exhibit a series of plain things reveal to us the material factuality of loss. A little boy’s garments, a religious medal, a sweater with a weathered pink ribbon, a ponytail holder—all these things were on children’s bodies. Those children were once real. They might have rejoiced at having a ribbon in a sweater or a medal of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and they are now indistinguishable human remains.



Chompita de lazo rojo / Baby Sweater with Red Ribbon



Pili Mili / Hair Elastic

Giribaldi's photos were taken in collaboration with the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team (EPAF), and the objects he photographed are considered evidence in the process of identifying the victims. Jose Pablo Baraybar, director of EPAF, writes eloquently about these objects and about how relatives of the disappeared react to them:

They caress their clothes, those they once made, washed and ironed. The threads whisper in their ears, the strands, the weave, the yarn, the stitches and the seams. . . . Is this the sleeve that covers this bone? Does this bone form this arm? Is this tooth the one this smile is missing? We have to reconstruct, paste and compose, but can we bring back life, the smile, the harmony of those shapes, the agility of that arm? (EPAF)

In a review covering the exhibit of Giribaldi's pictures in New York, Baraybar describes for the reporter the impact of seeing survivors identify the garments recovered from the mass grave in Putis: "It was incredible. A woman ran to a sweater and said, 'This is my weaving. I gave this fabric to my cousin for her wedding.' And one by one they recognized the garments of nineteen of the bodies" (Sterin Pensel) (my translation).

While forensic anthropologists struggle to reconstruct not just the identity of the victim but also the cause of death from meager remains, we find many testimonies of relatives for whom the flood of emotion of finally identifying the remains of the disappeared loved one derives from recognizing a plain thing they carried: a piece of garment, a watch, a shoe. In "La polera azul," Marta Dillon recounts the bittersweet relief of finally accepting that the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team had identified the remains of her mother, disappeared during the Dirty War, when she verified that the blue sweater they found was the one her mother had been wearing at the time of her disappearance.

Santiago Porter's photographic project, *La ausencia* (Absence), revolves precisely around the metonymic power of plain things to invoke lost loved ones.⁶ A graphic memorial to the victims of the bomb that destroyed the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in 1994, *La ausencia* confronts the viewer with sober black-and-white pictures of relatives of the victims paired with a photograph of a random object. Under each pair of pictures, a legend explains the relationship between the two images: "Aída is the widow of Abraham Jaime Plaksin. Abraham Jaime was 62 years old and worked in the Culture Department of the AMIA. Aída keeps his yarmulke." In some cases the objects are pieces of garments or accessories the victims were wearing when they were killed. In others, the object chosen by the survivor is a favorite thing the victim cherished, such as the porcelain cup that belonged to the grandmother of Dora Shulman de Belgoroski or the football of five-year-old Sebastián Barreiros, killed when he was walking by

the AMIA with his mother. The photographs were taken between 2001 and 2004.

In all these cases the survivors had held on to certain things as embodiments of their loss: the watch he was wearing, the little bottle of the perfume she wore that day, the paint brushes he abandoned, the college essay she was writing. Porter's work communicates the pain of the survivors by juxtaposing their grieving portraits with images of things invested with a power of representation through metonymic association. How can you represent that which is not there? How do you represent absence? *La ausencia* reminds the spectators that the massacre is not something of the past: by the tenth anniversary, nobody had been charged and brought to justice, but those killed are still gone. Through Porter's juxtaposition of the portrait of a middle-aged woman and the photo of a deflated little football, we empathize with the pain of a mother who has lost her son. We understand that the dirty old toy is a constant reminder of the absence of the child. We understand the memory and the pain.

Space

The idea that location and space are central to recollection is not new. In *De oratore* Cicero told the story of Simonides, who was attending a banquet when the building collapsed; he was able to identify the bodies that could not be recognized by remembering where his fellow banqueters were sitting (Yates 2). Our knowledge of the world is ingrained in spatial context, and the story of Simonides exemplifies how explicit recollection might be determined by spatial cues. On the other hand, the experience of space is fundamental to implicit, procedural memory too: occupying a space, moving about it, becomes part of "automatically" performing daily tasks. Our lives are shaped and limited by the ways we inhabit space. The examinations of the ways we experience space range from approaches such as Henri Lefevre's *The Production of Space* and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* to neuroscientific experiments comparing mental exploration of the representation of a space to its physical exploration.⁷ The relevance of places, landscapes, architecture, and space in our ability to represent and remember our experiences surfaces in a number of disciplines, from human geography to the cognitive sciences.

In his introduction to a special issue of *Representations* entitled *Grounds for Remembering*, Thomas W. Laqueur tries to elucidate the relationship of space with the memory of social trauma: "a place that at one moment was the venue for something—horrible, magnificent, world-historical—that cries out to be remembered, exists in time, which inexorably washes it of the marks it bore" (1). But it is the fact that place remains even when stripped of any signs of the traumatic event that seems to invest places

with a certain aura. The essays Laqueur introduces are wary of the “sacral, transcendental demands, that spaces seem to be making” (1), but they cannot extricate themselves from them.

To a certain extent, Laqueur is exploring the fact that, in the dichotomy between history and memory created by our current distrust of traditional historical methods for encompassing the experience of the past, spaces are seen as material witnesses to events.⁸ The term “site of memory” has become a recurrent trope in memory studies, but the notion itself is problematic.

When Pierre Nora uses the term “lieux de mémoire” or “site of memory,” he refers to places that crystallize and secrete memory precisely because historical continuity seems to be otherwise endangered:

These *lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it. . . . Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders—these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity. . . . It is the nostalgic dimension of these devotional institutions that makes them seem beleaguered and cold—they mark the rituals of a society without ritual. (12)

Nora sees an artificial will to remember in societies that are too concerned with change and transformation. The mere existence of *lieux de mémoire*, in Nora’s view, reveals that, without a “commemorative vigilance,” memory would be swept away by history.

Commemorative spaces work in a variety of ways that reflect our understanding of the power of the spatial experience to elicit either memory or empathic feelings. Spaces designated as sites of memory engage the public in different ways: by reminding us of the events that took place there; by recovering a traumatic site and reconfiguring it to foster communal life and collective memory beyond the traumatic events (traditions, festivals, etc.);⁹ and by creating a physical environment purposefully designed to provoke emotional reactions, either negative ones such as claustrophobia, agoraphobia, or vertigo, or positive ones, such as sense of direction, a sense of calm, a sense of peace.

The little plaques in the streets of Berlin informing us that here, for example, a young man was removed from his home and taken to a concentration camp turn the space into a site of memory: it happened here. The idea of aura that Walter Benjamin applies to that which is lost in mechanical reproduction—in the Benjaminian conception of the work of art—is linked to its uniqueness and permanence. Sites of memory aspire to the auratic. They require a presence, the physical experience of the space.

In that sense, spatial design is capable of creating an “aura” that is not necessarily historical or even referential. In the Jewish Museum in Berlin, for example, Daniel Libeskind, the architect, created a specific feeling through an experience of space that deliberately avoids reference. Libeskind explains his intention in a text right outside the Holocaust Tower: “Inside this place we are cut off from the everyday life of the city outside and from a view of that city. We can hear sounds and see light but we cannot reach the outside world. So it was for those confined before and during the deportation and in the camps themselves.” Libeskind wants the visitors to experience in their bodies those same feelings of loneliness and isolation that prisoners would have felt in the concentration camps. A similar principle guides the Garden of Exile in the same museum. Libeskind explains that his intention was to “completely disorientate the visitor” and to reproduce “a shipwreck of history.” The garden is on a twelve-degree gradient, and the space is filled with forty-nine concrete stelae that rise up and obstruct vision. The terrain feels unstable and one cannot see where one is going. Libeskind wants to foster empathy at a very physical level by eliciting in spectators feelings that the people in concentration camps and in exile might have felt. In this way he makes our bodies “remember” the pain of others.

In Peru in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report estimating 70,000 dead and disappeared during the internal war of the 1980s and 1990s, hundreds of memory sites have been created.¹⁰ However, an intense public debate arose regarding the construction of a museum of memory in Lima. Discussing the terms of this debate elucidates some of the ways we try to engage space in the articulation of social trauma.¹¹ This museum is still under construction, and even its name seems to be a contentious issue: in recent months the name was changed from El Lugar de la Memoria (simply “the place—or site—of memory”) to include the terms “tolerance” and “social inclusion”: El Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social.

The architectural project that won the public contest proclaims the need to express human dignity in a way that articulates the interaction of the users of the space with the building’s location and surroundings. The building will be located in one of Lima’s most impressive landscapes, the cliffs of Costa Verde in Miraflores. The project presents some ideas about the spaces it will create, such as the “esplanade of reconciliation” or “the site of grief.” But a complete museographic script is still not available, and it is not clear what kinds of exhibits will find a home in this museum. (See María Eugenia Ulfe’s note published in NoticiasSer, www.noticiasser.pe/print/2132). The official website for the museum tries to address some of these concerns and lists the following tasks for the organizing committee: designing the museographic script and its collections, programming temporary exhibits and educational workshops, constructing a network of memory sites in Peru, and, in connection with other international initiatives, coordinating its work

with victims' and human rights organizations. One prominent task, on which I elaborate below, is to designate a prominent, permanent, space for *Yuyanapaq: Para recorder* (Yuyanapaq: In Order to Remember), the photo exhibit that provided a visual narrative for the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

Although the museum presents itself as an attempt to create an auratic experience of reflection, it is viewed with skepticism by some who are suspicious that such gallery exhibitions are simply a way for privileged sectors of society to deal with feelings of guilt without pursuing real social justice.¹²

Yuyanapaq was the photo exhibit put together by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Peru with the intention of creating a "visual narrative" that would convey the findings of their report. The curators and museographers were intentionally "telling a story" using a photographic archive of the twenty years of violence documented in the report. But their use of space in their first installation in Lima was almost as relevant in the telling of the story as the images depicted in the photos. After searching for an appropriate site for the exhibit for six months, they decided on Casa Riva Agüero in Chorrillos. Casa Riva Agüero now belongs to the Peruvian Catholic University. It used to be the summer home of José de la Riva Agüero, a major figure in Peruvian conservative Hispanism in the early twentieth century. Chorrillos, formerly an elegant beach resort in the outskirts of Lima, ended up becoming a lower-middle-class neighborhood when the city started growing in every possible direction due to numerous internal migratory waves. In the last decades, those migrations were related to the displacement of populations under fire from both the Shining Path and state forces.

Without exception, reviews of the exhibit noted that the dilapidated state of the once luxurious building echoed the Peruvian national crisis. Whitewashed walls and dirt floors alongside marble hallways embodied the radical differences between Peruvian social classes. The exhibit was organized both chronologically and thematically. The pictures were framed by texts that contextualized them within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's narrative: charts of the main political events during the twenty years studied in the report, fragments of political analysis, videos. The *Yuyanapaq* exhibit consisted, above all, of an experience: it involved a presence, a material location, and a journey through a narrative. Visitors made a pilgrimage to this house that was almost in ruins, entered through the back alley, and were guided through rooms and hallways and courtyards, in order to remember the past.

The exhibit could not be maintained in Casa Riva Agüero, where it had been privately funded, so it closed there and reopened in Peru's National Museum.¹³ The effort to build a memory museum is in part a result of the search for a space to house these memories. The debates around the planning

of the museum show that memory sites are contentious articulations of the past.

The spaces captured by Domingo Giribaldi's photographs are quite different from official memory sites and embody the sense of loss in a different way. The photographs of Putis confront the viewer with landscapes and empty spaces that communicate precisely through the way they have been stripped of presence. These images convey the auratic because they stir in the viewer the uncanny feeling of spaces that should be inhabited and are, nonetheless, empty: the hearth, an improvised soccer field, a courtyard. To talk about aura in photographs seems inconsistent with the idea that mechanical reproduction gains in distribution range but loses "presence." Struggling to clarify the auratic sense we get from some photographs, when he had been theorizing about the way mechanical reproduction leaves the aura behind, Walter Benjamin referred to Eugene Atget's photographs of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century:

It has quite justly said of him that he photographed [Paris's streets] like scenes of crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. . . . They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way. (226)

In the case of Giribaldi's photographed spaces, the viewer is faced with lived spaces becoming *lieux de mémoire*, the scenes of social and political crimes. Though quite unlike the monument or the dedicated museum, by capturing a sense of space these images still convey the aura of presence that has been lost.



El juego de la vida / The Game of Life

Domingo Giribaldi's photos of the things recovered from the mass grave and of the empty spaces of Putis awaken in viewers forms of identification that build up a sense that the loss needs to be shared, that the trauma affects a society as a whole. Metonymy and spatial experience function as mechanisms that activate empathetic feelings and help us recognize the pain of others.



Partido sin final / The Endless Game

If we accept the need for collective memory, we need to understand the relationship between the ways the individual recalls his or her own experiences and the ways we remember with others. This implies establishing connections between memory and empathy and the different mechanisms that activate them. Metonymy and space are two of these mechanisms, and their frequent use in memorials of social trauma attests to the fact that people understand them as contributing to memory-like empathetic feelings. Studying these and other mechanisms displayed in memorials of social trauma will help us understand what we mean when we talk about collective memory.

Notes

1. An abbreviated version of the report is available under the title *Hatun Willakuy*. The pictures of objects retrieved from the mass grave were taken by Domingo Giribaldi. The photos in his exhibit *Si no vuelvo, búsqüenme en Putis* activate a sense of profound loss through the representation both of space and of common objects. The

catalogue of his exhibit can be found at www.hemi.nyu.edu/hemi/en/e72-putis-gallery-giribaldi. The recovery of these remains and many others in the country are the result of the work of the Equipo Peruano de Antropología Forense (EPAF, Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team). Ash Kosiewicz's note for *Upsidedown World* reports on this particular case, and information on EPAF's work can be found at their website: www.epaferu.org/. Rocío Silva Santisteban wrote eloquently about abjection in the treatment of human remains in mass graves at the time of this discovery in her weekly column *Kolumna Okupa*.

2. Most of the current research relies on fMRI evidence that observing or imagining someone else's emotional state produces neural activity corresponding to the direct experience of those emotions. On the one hand, however, the evidence is circumscribed by the limited formulations of the experiments, and on the other hand, defining empathy when observing neural activation itself becomes problematic: do observers feel distress for themselves, or do they actually "share" someone else's pain? Another recent line of research in neuroscience related to the idea of empathy has attempted to identify "mirror neurons" in human beings. While "mirror neurons," visuomotor neurons activated both by actions and by observation of these actions, have been identified in macaques, the evidence produced by research in humans is still inconclusive. Evaluations of the advances in the research on the cognitive neuroscience of empathy can be found in Gerdes, Lietz, and Segal; Singer and Lamm; and Nakao and Itakura. A review of the evidence for mirror neurons in humans is presented by Turella, Pierno, Tubladi, and Castiello.
3. In the last decade, numerous experiments have attempted to use imaging of neural activity to record the way the retrieval of memories simulates the processes used in encoding memories (what we register when we first experience them). An example of this kind of experiment can be found in Nyberg, Habib, McIntosh, and Tulving.
4. Gustave Jahoda's article "Theodor Lipps and the Shift from 'Sympathy' to 'Empathy'" gives a detailed account of the history of the term from its conception in the theory of aesthetics to its current use in psychology and behavioral studies.
5. The reports on experiments that I have found so far work with neural activation and memory on the one hand and neural activation and empathy on the other hand. I have not found reports on experiments equating activation during recollection with activation when witnessing somebody else's experience.
6. The complete set of photographs can be found at Porter's website: www.santiagoporter.com/ausencia.php.
7. A 2011 study by David C. Rowland, Yanovich, and Kentros, for example, finds that rats need to actually occupy a space to be able to have a stable hippocampal representation of it. They might have a representation of the space by seeing it, but this representation remains plastic until they actually explore it (Rowland, Yanovich, and Kentros).
8. Laqueur also notes the irony of the current debate in view of the traditional understanding of history: history was created to expand the limits of memory, to keep records of that which could not be remembered (1).
9. The research coordinated by Felix Reátegui and published under the title *Los sitios de la memoria: Procesos sociales de la conmemoración en el Perú* gives a nuanced understanding of the resemantization of spaces in the aftermath of politically charged debates on memory.
10. There are two websites that keep records of memory sites around the country: Espacios de Memoria en el Perú, www.espaciosdememoria.pe/index2.html, and Sitios de Memoria, www.aprodeh.org.pe/sitiomemoria/index.html.

11. These debates are common in transitional societies whenever a space is designated as a memorial of social trauma. Examples range from the discussions about Argentina's Parque de la Memoria and Espacio de Memoria y Derechos Humanos (ex-ESMA) to the debates over Ground Zero in Manhattan.
12. Among the many objections that Cynthia Milton and Maria Eugenia Ulfe express in their article is the fact that the museum is being built in a place disconnected from any real memories. They do not claim that all memory sites need to be located in places that actually witness traumatic events, but for them the place needs to have a connection with the public sphere to articulate the community. They find that, for example, the location of the sculpture *El ojo que llora*, which is built of stones carved with the names of the victims of violence, is more appropriate. The Campo de Marte, the space chosen for the sculpture, is frequently used for popular public events, and the fact that the sculpture has been vandalized several times is proof, for them, of how it engages the contentious memories of Peruvian society.
13. In a review of the new space that houses the exhibit, I discussed some of the issues created by the new environment for the show, especially the impact of the brutalist architecture and of the presence of the state in the presentation of the images.

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