GRAFFITI, MEMORY AND CONTESTED SPACE: MNEMONIC INITIATIVES FOLLOWING TRAUMA AND/OR REPRESSION IN BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

BY

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ABSTRACT

Graffiti, Memory and Contested Space: Mnemonic Initiatives Following Periods of Trauma and/or Repression in Buenos Aires, Argentina

This thesis concerns the popular articulation of memory following periods or incidents of trauma in Argentina. I am interested in how groups lay claim to various public spaces in the city and how they convert these spaces into mnemonic battlegrounds. In considering these spaces of trauma and places of memory, I am primarily interested in how graffiti writing (stencils, spray-paint, signatures, etchings, wall-paintings, murals and installations) is used to make these spaces transmit particular memories that impugn official versions of the past.

This thesis draws on literatures focused on popular/public memory. Scholars argue that memory is socially constructed and thus actively contested. Marginal initiatives such as graffiti writing challenge the memory projects of the state as well as state projects that are perceived by citizens to be ‘inadequate,’ ‘inappropriate,’ and/or as promoting the erasure of memory. Many of these initiatives are a reaction to the pro-reconciliation and pro-oblivion strategies of previous governments. I outline that the history of silences and impunity, and a longstanding emphasis on reconciliation at the expense of truth and justice has created an environment of vulnerable memory in Argentina. Popular memory entrepreneurs react by aggressively articulating their memories in time and in space. As a result of this intense memory work, the built landscape in Buenos Aires is dotted with mnemonic initiatives that aim to contradict or subvert officially sanctioned memories. I also suggest that memory workers in Argentina persistently and carefully use the sites of trauma as well as key public spaces to ensure official as well as popular audiences.

The data for this project was collected in five spaces in Buenos Aires, the Plaza de Mayo, Plaza Congreso, La República Cromañón nightclub, Avellaneda Train Station and El Olimpo, a former detention centre from the military dictatorship.
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The System

Extermination plan: destroy the grass, pull up every last little living thing by the roots, sprinkle the earth with salt. Afterward, kill all memory of the grass. To colonize consciousness, suppress them; to suppress them, empty them of the past. Wipe out all testimony to the fact that in this land there ever existed anything other than silence, jails and tombs.

It is forbidden to remember.

Prisoners are organized into work gangs. At night they are forced to whitewash the phrases of protest that in other times covered the walls of the city.

The steady pelting of rain on the walls begins to dissolve the white paint. And little by little the stubborn words reappear.

(From Days and Nights of Love and War by Eduardo Galeano)
La memoria es como un obrero que trabaja para establecer cimentos duraderos en medio de las olas / Memory is like a laborer who works to lay cement in the middle of a torrential downpour.

(Marcel Proust)

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1 On the wall of Rosario’s Museum of Memory during the Fernando Traverso exhibit, September 2005.
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SPANISH TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo: Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

ALCA: Área de Libre Comercio de las Americas (Free Trade Area of the Americas – FTAA). Free trade zone which would unite thirty-four nations of the Western Hemisphere, or all of the countries of the Americas with the exception of Cuba.

AMIA: Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires. The AMIA was the site of a deadly explosion in 1994.


Argentinazo: See also ‘caserolazo.’ Large uprising in December 2001 in response to economic crisis.

Callejeros: Literally means ‘those of the street,’ however it is also the name of a popular Argentine band. The band is from the Buenos Aires area and is now infamous because it was playing at the República Cromañón nightclub on December 30, 2004 when a flare set off by a fan caused the building to catch fire. The fire killed 194 young people. However, because the victims of the fire were Callejero fans, in death, they have come to be referred to by the band’s name.

Casa Rosada: The pink-coloured government house that faces the Plaza de Mayo. Along with the plaza in front, the government house was bombed by the military in 1955 in an attempted coup d’état against Juan Domingo Perón. The President of Argentina lives in a separate residence.

Caserolazo: The ‘caserolazo/Argentinazo’ of December 2001 follows a long list of ‘azos’ in Argentina beginning with the Cordobazo, the Santiagazo and the Rosariazo. Pablo Pozzi refers to these uprisings as ‘social explosions’ characterized by “their spontaneity, massiveness, focused violence and neighbourhood or civic rather than class character” (2000: 68). Caserolazo refers not to a particular uprising but to large demonstrations in general, especially those of December 2001, where protestors made noise using pots and pans. (Caserolaz e is the word for pots and pans).


Corralón or Corralito: Literally means “small enclosure” or “playpen.” This term was applied to former Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo’s December 1, 2001 decision to limit withdrawals from private bank accounts to $250 AR per week. (At the time, the peso remained pegged to the US dollar in a one-to-one ratio) (López Levy 2004: 11). Later that month, the government devalued the peso, converted savings in dollars to pesos, and devalued savings trapped in the Corralito.

Desaparecidos: Literally ‘the disappeared ones.’ This term is used commonly to refer to people made to disappear by the state. The term is recognized worldwide.
Escrache: The escrache is a protest tactic developed by a young human rights group, H.I.J.O.S (Daughters and Sons for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence). Escrache is used to point out and humiliate. Escraches are “campaigns of public condemnation through demonstrations that aim to expose the identities of hundreds of torturers and assassins benefiting from amnesty laws” (Kaiser 2002: 499). The primary and solitary aim of escrache, is according to H.I.J.O.S, justice. They suggest the escrache “creates another idea and another practice of justice that is opposite and antagonistic to formal justice” (Situaciones 5 Genocida en el Barrio: Mesa de Escrache Popular 2002). H.I.J.O.S also remarks “Si no hay justicia, hay escrache,” “if there isn’t justice, there’s escrache.” In this project, I use the term ‘escrache’ to refer to graffiti which function in the same way. These messages point something out about someone or someplace, particularly when there is a feeling of injustice.

ESMA: Escuela Mechánica de la Armada (Navy Mechanics School). The most notorious and brutal detention centre in Argentina, and one of the most hotly contested spaces of former trauma. The ESMA detention centre is part of a very large military complex on Libertador Avenue in Buenos Aires.

Gatillo Fácil: This term is commonly used to refer to the ‘quick triggerness’ of the Federal Police in Argentina. The term conveys the sense of vulnerability of the average person.

H.I.J.O.S: Radical young human rights group made up of the third generation affected by the dictatorship (not the grandparents or the parents but their children). This generation matured around the 1996 anniversary (20 years) of the military coup. This period of time marked a shift or increase in human rights work. H.I.J.O.S stands for Children for Identify and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence. The techniques of the H.I.J.O.S group are more radical than those of other groups. H.I.J.O.S developed the ‘escrache’ technique.

Juventud Radical: Radical Youth, a branch of the Radical Civic Union (UCR) political party in Argentina. Raúl Alfonsín belonged to the UCR.

Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Organization of mothers of children ‘disappeared’ during the 1976-83 dictatorship. During the dictatorship, a small group of mothers decided to march demanding answers about their children around the rotunda at the centre of the Plaza de Mayo. They continue today to march in the same space, at the same time each week. Although the two groups are often conflated, in 1986 the original group split because of internal differences into the Asociacion Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Association of Mothers) and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora (Founding Line). The image of an aging mother wearing the typical white, embroidered ‘kerchief’ is one of the most recognizable symbols in Argentina. The two groups claim to reject any political affiliation, but as a group, they have incredible influence.

While these institutional differences can be found in virtually all memory struggles, the division of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is particularly relevant here. This large group of Mothers of disappeared from Argentina’s 1976-83 dictatorship divided in 1986 because of deep institutional divisions over styles of leadership, differing goals for the future of memory and human rights work in Argentina, and over styles of commemoration (Bosco 2004). In addition to other divisions, Bosco (2004) outlines how
the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Línea Fundadora Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Founding Line) differ over how to recall the disappeared. The Línea Fundadora supports the construction of memorials for the victims, working with anthropologists to unearth remains of the disappeared and using the names and photos of individual victims in temporary and permanent memorials. The more militant Asociación Madres led by Hebe de Bonafini suggests memorials place the emphasis on death rather than life, as does identifying human remains and that these strategies accept the deaths of their children and effectively put an end to their struggle for human rights (Bosco 2004: 384). The two groups are often treated as one, but demonstrate very different and conflicting views on the effective transmission of memory to future generations, and on the strategies of human rights work in Argentina and Latin America as a whole. The Asociación Madres no longer wear headscarves embroidered with the names and dates of their children and their disappearances. The Línea Fundadora continues this tradition. Both groups wear the white headscarf, but those of the Asociación are embroidered with more collective messages emphasizing life and struggle rather than death. While I have included a photograph of the Piramide monument in the Plaza de Mayo covered in photos of the disappeared during the annual March of Resistance (see figure 11), the Asociación no longer participates in activities such as this which temporarily remember the disappeared in the sites of trauma and key public spaces. It also opposes more permanent memorials that inscribe memory in the landscape (Bosco 2004: 391).

Monumento a los dos Congresos: Large monument that directly faces the National Congress, located in Plaza Congreso. While the front of the Congress is protected by police and metal barricades and almost completely free of graffiti, the large monument is usually covered with (mostly social and political) graffiti.

MTD: Movimiento Trabajadores Desocupados – Movement of Unemployed Workers. MTD groups often take the name of martyred members such as the MTD Teresa Rodríguez or MTD Ánibal Verón.

Nunca Más: One can trace the lifespan of the phrase “Nunca más – Never Again!” While it was used in the military’s final report in 1983, Feitlowitz explains how the phrase was originally a Warsaw Ghetto cry (1998:90). Only a few years later, the term was re-appropriated by the CONADEP and was used at the name of their final report on the disappeared. The phrase continued to circulate in human rights circles in Argentina (and neighbouring countries which experienced brutal dictatorships). Its significance as ‘nunca más’ to subversion’ was short-lived, and continues as ‘nunca más’ to the human rights violations of the dictatorship. In 2001, the phrase was again renewed to express ‘never again’ to police repression and the economic violence of the currency devaluation and corralón. In 2003, the phrase could be found both on the sides of the Bank Boston in Buenos Aires and in the Plaza de Mayo where it referred to the dictatorship. Elizabeth Jelin (1998) says the phrase has become a “continent-wide slogan for the struggle against impunity.”

Obediencia Debida: Law 23.049 passed on February 14, 1984 during the administration of Raúl Alfonsín. Despite the precedent of the Nuremberg trials, this law limited the number of people tried for crimes committed during the dictatorship. Those who could claim to have been ‘following orders’ were not tried following the enactment of the law. There were exceptions for the gravest of crimes such as torture, rape and murder. However, Feitlowitz (1998: 14) points to the contradiction that those who participated in
the kidnappings could be protected under the Due Obedience Law, even though the original kidnapping made the later torture, rape or murder possible in the first place.

**Pibes:** Slang term used in Argentina to refer to youth such as “Los Pibes de Cromañón” (the Children of Cromañón) or ‘justicia para nuestros pibes’ (justice for our children.)

**Pintada:** Political wall painting usually extending the full length of the wall. *Pintadas* tend to be painted in the colours of political parties and are used heavily around election time.

**Piqueteros:** Protesters, specifically picketers in Argentina who block major roads and bridges in order to satisfy a particular end, such as increased salaries, employment opportunities or to signal resistance to state policy, such as the closure of a factory. Picket groups are often movements of unemployed workers (MTDs).

**Piquetes:** Paralysing roadblock protests designed to draw state attention to particular issues.

**Piramide:** The tall, white statue in the centre of the Plaza de Mayo, in the centre of the large rotunda commemorating Argentine independence, May 25, 1810. The *Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* march around this statue. In fact, the ashes for one of the original Mothers of Plaza de Mayo were recently interned here.

**Porteños:** Residents of the port city of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

**Pozo:** Literally translates as ‘hole,’ but ‘pozo’ was the euphemism used by military and police to refer to clandestine detention centres during the 1976-83 dictatorship.

**Presente:** Literally means ‘present.’ This word is often combined with the name of those who have died or been killed in unjust situations in order to signal a resistance to forgetting and to signal the deceased continues his/her struggle. For example, “Darío y Maxi Presente!” or “Los Pibes de Cromañón Presente!” (Darío and Maxi are Present! And the Children of Cromañón are Present!)

**Punto Final:** February 23, 1987 was the last day for trials related to the 1976-83 dictatorship. Like the Due Obedience law, *Punto Final* was created by the Alfonsin administration. The *Punto Final* law meant that any confessions made by military or police after the ‘final point’ could not be prosecuted. The only exception to this law is baby trafficking, which was not covered by either Due Obedience or the Final Point laws.

**Quebracho Movement:** Officially titled the Patriotic Revolutionary Quebracho Movement. An ultra-radical anti-imperialist group blamed for violent demonstrations in Argentina.

**Represores:** Literally translates as ‘repressors.’ This term is commonly assigned in Argentina to those who facilitated and carried out the terror of the dictatorship. However, it is often assigned in present times to people (such as police) who are seen to be contributing to the ‘quick-trigger-ness’ of the state.
Secuestro/Apropiación de Niños: The kidnapping and appropriation of children born to detained women during the dictatorship. Women were kept alive until they gave birth. The mothers were usually murdered and the newborn babies were given to families involved in the military or police, or to accomplices. Children’s names, dates of birth and places of birth were changed. The Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo/Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo advocate for the identification of these children and for the punishment of these crimes.
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2 All photographs and diagrams are my own unless otherwise specified.
CHAPTER 1

Represión, Impunidad y Gatillo Fácil: An Introduction

The point of this introduction is not to offer a history of contemporary Argentina; it would be impossible to engage it all in one chapter, and many historical texts already exist including López Levy’s (2004) *We are Millions: Neo-liberalism and New Forms of Political Action in Argentina* and Lewis’ (2002) *Argentina: A Short History*. Indeed, in the last five to ten years many texts have been published on the history of the military dictatorship, the construction of memory and human rights in general in Argentina. Some of the most interesting include Feitlowitz’s (1998) *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*, Brodsky’s (2005) *Memoria en Construcción: el Debate Sobre la ESMA*, and Dussel, Finocchio and Gojman’s (2003) *Haciendo Memoria en el País de Nunca Más*. There is an astounding amount of scholarship in both Spanish and English on the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, and in Argentine bookstores, one can find entire shelves devoted to books on demonstrations and a wealth of literature specifically about the *piquetero* movement including Di Mauro’s (2003) *Qué se Vayan Todos: Crónica del Derrumbe Político* and Kohan’s (2002) *A las Calles! Una Historia de los Movimientos Piqueteros y Caseroleros de los 90s al 2002*. The point here is to provide context for this thesis to a Canadian audience. The acts of memory and struggles over public spaces that I discuss here do not and have not occurred in a vacuum. They are the products of their social context. It is this that I hope to highlight here.

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1 Repression, impunity and ‘quick-trigger-ness’
My thesis concerns the popular articulation of memory following periods or incidents of trauma and repression in Argentina. I am interested in how groups lay claim to various public spaces in the city

Map 1. Location of Field Sites in Buenos Aires, Argentina. All sites are located in the Federal District (city) of Buenos Aires with the exception of Avellaneda Station which is located just outside the F.D. in the Province of Buenos Aires. (Map by L. Gasparotto, 2006)

and how they convert these spaces into places of memory. I am interested in the mnemonic battles where the dominant group has failed to address the past injustice to the satisfaction of marginal groups, and specifically, to those most closely related to the victims of trauma. In considering these spaces of trauma and places of memory, I am primarily interested in how graffiti writing (stencils, spray-paint, signatures, etchings, wall-paintings, murals and installations) are used to challenge the dominant meanings of these spaces and to make the
spaces more conducive to the transmission of particular memories. Graffiti writing, as a common and generally accepted method of marginal expression in Argentina, is used by groups of ‘memory workers’ to transmit their version of the past, and in doing so, to lay claim to the particular site of trauma in which they work.

Although memory work and disputes over the past are found in all parts of the world, I suggest that memory struggles in Argentina are the result of a perceived ‘culture of impunity.’ The ‘culture of impunity’ is a belief that those responsible for past trauma will go unpunished and an accompanying sense that the traumatic past will be passed over in collective memory or that it will be remembered based on the narratives of “the winners.” The beginning of this ‘culture of impunity’ was the 1976-83 military dictatorship during which 30,000 people were ‘disappeared’ by the military and police. The slow process of getting answers about the dictatorship and the failure to punish many of the military and police personnel responsible for the violence established a sense of widespread injustice among common citizens. However, it is the continuation of repression and lack of punishment in the years since 1983 that has reinforced the feeling that those responsible for violence, especially state violence, get away without punishment. This perceived sense of injustice and the fear of societal forgetting that accompanies it, in my opinion, contributes to the pattern of numerous groups rallying for (appropriate) justice and (appropriate) memory in public spaces.

The sites of my fieldwork reflect the span of the ‘era of impunity’ from the dictatorship up until the very recent past. They also reflect the different spaces of collective memory in Buenos Aires from highly visible plazas (Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Congreso), to actual sites of

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4 Feitlowitz (1991) explains the “the age of impunity” and the “politics of amnesia” are charges levelled by the opposition press, human rights groups and many private individuals in Argentina.

5 “Appropriate” justice and memory is of course, determined by the various groups in society. What is appropriate to one group may not be for another. What is considered ‘appropriate’ by the government or the military may not be considered ‘appropriate’ by human rights groups or victims’ families.
trauma (Estación Avellaneda, El Olimpo and La República Cromañón). My field sites include two of the most widely known plazas in Argentina, both of which are located in the downtown area, connected by the Avenida de Mayo (see map 1 and map 2). This route is frequently travelled during mass demonstrations during which automobiles are forced to take a detour. These two plazas face important government buildings (the government house, the Ministry of the Economy, the Bank of Argentina and the City Legislature in one case, and the National Congress in the other). They are not the sites of trauma, but highly visible public spaces important for the transmission of particular collective memories. Estación Avellaneda is a small train station located just outside the Federal District of Buenos Aires in the province of the same name. Here, on June 26, 2002 two protesters were pursued, shot and killed by police. El Olimpo is a former clandestine detention centre from the dictatorship, located in the Buenos Aires neighbourhood of Floresta. The final site is the República Cromañón nightclub near Plaza Miserere and Once Train Station (see Map 1). On December 30, 2004, a fire killed 194 people (mostly youth) who were attending a rock concert. According to the media coverage following the fire, the crowd had exceeded capacity and the building had been long overdue for fire inspections; but the owner had paid bribes in order to avoid building capacity rules and costly fire inspections (see Cromañón 2006 and Rodríguez 2006). There are two parallel memorial spaces for the victims located outside the nightclub. One is an unofficial space created by victims’ families while the other is a newer space created by the government.

It may appear that my grouping together of memory/justice struggles from the dictatorship, the police repression of 2001 and the present, and the 2004 fire at La República Cromañón nightclub is somewhat awkward, three chunks of time and history, unrelated yet tossed together. It is, I think, quite dangerous to view these incidents in isolation, particularly the
military repression of the past and the police repression of the present. Some may have difficulty seeing the links between the military dictatorship, and the images of police violence and public protest in Argentina that were cast around the world in December 2001. But again, we should consider, that the economic collapse in 2001 and the police repression that coincided with it, did not rise out of nothing, but have their roots in the most recent military era and the Cold War. Because corruption and injustice continue to exist, and are often carried out with impunity in Argentina, demonstrations, struggles for memory and militant quests for justice continue to leave their marks on the landscape.

The Beginning of the Dictatorship

The brutal dictatorship from 1976-1983 left an indelible mark on the Argentine psyche and it continues to cast a shadow over present day. Military leaders had little difficulty taking power from the late Juan Domingo Perón’s successor and wife, Isabel, in 1976. Massive unemployment and high inflation in the early 1970s as well as conflict between guerrillas on the left and on the right contributed to the unrest. During this period, the Triple A, the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance was formed by José López Rega, the Minister of Social Welfare. The ultra-right wing group was made up of off-duty police officers and military personnel (Merrett & Gravil 1991: 280-1). The Triple A preceded the dictatorship as Isabel Perón was still officially in power. The years before the dictatorship were also brutal. There were 200 murders in 1974 and 850 in 1975 that have been attributed to the Triple A. Most of the victims were leftists (Merrett & Gravil 1991: 281). Merret & Gravil (1991: 281) explain, by the beginning of the dictatorship, “Argentina had a political killing every five hours, and a bomb attack every three.” In 1975, one year prior to the official fall of democracy, the government sanctioned and began the
“eradication” of “subversive elements” (Feitlowitz 1998: 6), the military’s euphemism for leftists and communists. The existence of the militant left provided the basis for the military’s declaration of a “process” that would eradicate terrorism. Feitlowitz (1998: 6) suggests there were no more than 2,000 guerillas in Argentina and that of that 2,000, only 400 had access to weapons. In other words, the military exaggerated the threat posed by the radical opposition.

The military officially took power on March 24, 1976. This began an era of fear, disappearances and economic troubles. The Generals were granted massive loans from international lenders to support the war. The military, lead by General Rafael Videla, called its plan for Argentina, The Process for National Reorganization. One of its main goals was to eradicate communist ‘subversion.’ Through ‘the Process,’ 30,000 people vanished after being detained. An unknown number of the detained survived the torture in the more than 340 clandestine detention centres around the country. The disappeared included left-wing militants, but the 30,000 figure includes a large number of civilians from an educated class, as well as poor and indigenous people. Many were professionals or students. Their disappearance nearly wiped out an entire generation of educated citizens.

Many asked, and continue to ask, how such a thing could happen. How could people be kidnapped on the street or in the middle of the night, taken to detention centres, tortured, and never be seen again? In retrospect, we ask, how could nobody have seen this? But even in 2005, when I took a cab to the opening of a former detention centre (El Olimpo) in the Buenos Aires barrio of Floresta, the driver made a point of saying to me, “This was a detention centre; that is true. But in that time, nobody knew.” The kidnapped disappeared. There were no bodies and there were no explanations, and for this reason, the missing came to be called desaparecidos, the disappeared ones. General Videla’s assumption of power was hardly a coup by traditional
standards and after more than two years of incompetent governing by Isabel Perón, the coup was both expected and somewhat welcomed (Feitlowitz 1998: 20). It even had the support of the International Monetary Fund (Feitlowitz 1998: 7). The effective dispersal of fear, and rhetoric explaining the military’s moves were for the good of the country helped to explain why the kidnapping continued without being seen. Citizens were encouraged not to report violations of human rights or disappearances, but to assist with the fight for the fatherland and the fight against (communist) ‘subversion’ by reporting suspicious activity and ‘subversives.’ The military leaders were also masters of communication and their rhetoric was published in dailies and magazines. It is no surprise, then, that following the return to ‘democracy,’ many Argentines who had not been directly impacted by the military’s crimes were unable to believe that the disappearances and torture had even happened. The widespread denial of what happened, and the imposed blindness and silence during the military period contributed to the difficulties victims and victims’ families have had in having their testimonies and their memories heard and accepted. This silence and blindness helps to explain why memories of the dictatorship were/are dismissed and why it has taken more than twenty years to work through memories of this period.

Silence is also explained by blindness. It is not that there were no witnesses to the military’s actions, but that during the dictatorship citizens were afraid to talk to each other about what they had seen. Those who spoke out against the military were terrorized or killed. One of the graffiti in Plaza Congreso picks up on this idea, linking blindness of the past to blindness of the present when it says, “A society that didn’t see 30,000 disappeared. A society that doesn’t see 193 [sic] dead.”6 Syra Franconetti, the Mother of three disappeared children says, in response to those who say they did not know what happened: “People had a lot of fear because they knew

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6 This refers to the fire at the Cromañón nightclub.
what happened. Because of this, I get angry when many people say that they didn’t know anything. The whole world knew what happened” (Proyecto de Recuperación 2005:16).

During her interviews with victims and family of victims, Feitlowitz (1998) was shocked to discover that many citizens at once saw but did not see what took place under military rule. Abductions took place in private homes. They took place in the street, from places of work, from buses in front of numerous witnesses. The successful cultivation of fear by the military ensured this blindness. Public kidnappings furthered the internalization of fear. This process of internalization is best illustrated by a passage from Feitlowitz (1998), in which she describes a poster from this era, which read, “Silence is health”:

Silence is health – el silencio es salud – is an expression that numerous Argentines recalled for me as a slogan of that time. They are both wrong and right. The phrase was coined in 1975 by the Municipality of Buenos Aires in a campaign to reduce the din of traffic by prohibiting the use of horns except in emergencies. ‘Silence is health’ originally had an ecological, communitarian ring, and gratified porteños (inhabitants of the port city of Buenos Aires) enjoyed the stylish posters, engaging ads, and aural relief. After the coup ‘silence is health’ took on a different meaning, and it was that which lodged in people’s memory. Interestingly enough, the generals did not use this expression. They didn’t have to: The translation they wanted was made for them – reflexively – by the people whose minds they had set out to conquer” (Feitlowitz 1998: 34).

By 1982, support for the dictatorship sagged. As a means of renewing public opinion of the military, General Leopoldo Galtieri attempted to draw on Argentines’ sense of patriotism, by claiming the Islas Malvinas/Falkland Islands off the Atlantic coast. The war with England was a disaster, and following this, the military was obliged to relinquish governing power to an elected government. They did not, however, admit defeat or acknowledge guilt. On the contrary, they declared ‘the Process’ had been successful. In its final report, the military pardoned itself of any “excesses,” but that was the closest it came to admitting mistakes had been made. There was no accounting of the people who had disappeared between 1976 and 1983. The salt in the wound was the statement made by the military claiming that there were no clandestine detention centres
(Feitlowitz 1998: 13). Before handing power over to an elected government in 1983, the military boasted that “never again” would subversion rule in the fatherland (Feitlowitz 1998: 90).\footnote{One can trace the lifespan of the phrase “Nunca Más – Never Again!” While it was used in the Military’s final report, Feitlowitz explains how the phrase was originally a Warsaw Ghetto cry (1998:90). Only a few years later, the term was re-appropriated by the CONADEP and was used at the name of their final report on the disappeared. The phrase continued to circulate in human rights circles in Argentina (and neighbouring countries which experienced brutal dictatorships). Its significance as ‘nunca más to subversion’ was short-lived, and continues as ‘nunca más’ to the human rights violations of the dictatorship. In 2001, the phrase was again renewed to express ‘never again’ to police repression and the economic violence of the currency devaluation and corralón. In 2003, the phrase could be found both on the sides of the Bank Boston in Buenos Aires and in the Plaza de Mayo where it referred to the dictatorship.}

‘Democratization’ and ‘Memoropolitics’\footnote{Memoropolitics involve “a struggle around knowledge or claims to knowledge” (Frederick Crews 1995, cited in Kenny 1999: 421).}

The transition from dictatorship to democracy was not without its problems. The dictatorship had eradicated a generation of intellectuals, artists and activists. Thirty-thousand people had disappeared. Close to five hundred children were born in detention centres. They were taken from their mothers (many of whom were later killed) and adopted by military families. There were ten thousand political prisoners and three hundred thousand people were forced into exile for political reasons. Fifty thousand small and medium sized businesses had been closed. There were seven hundred thousand fewer workers, and an overwhelming fifty million dollars in external debt (All figures from Proyecto de Recuperación 2005: 16). The latter was a legacy of the dictatorship that would flare-up many years later in the 2001 debt crisis. By 1983, the military project of ‘national reorganization’ had failed. There were problems of inflation, pressure to investigate human rights abuses as well as the military’s disastrous loss in the Falklands/Malvinas war with England. The return to democracy in Argentina did not mean the automatic re-examination of the past. The first president, Raúl Alfonsín implemented the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) and
it was during his administration that the initial trials of military personnel took place. However, Alfonsín also implemented the Due Obedience and the Final Point laws. His successor, Carlos Menem, however, was the biggest advocate of the need for “reconciliation,” a term many consider in such a context to be synonymous with oblivion and amnesia. When Menem assumed the presidency in 1989 several repressors were in jail including General Rafael Videla and Admiral Emilio Massera who had been sentenced to life in prison. In 1990 Menem granted an executive pardon, freeing the repressors. It was an act Menem viewed as “necessary for the healing of Argentina” (Feitlowitz 2000: 87). In human rights circles, Menem is blamed for imposing reconciliation in the form of societal amnesia. In a national address, Menem warned, “Argentina will not be possible if we continue tearing apart the old wounds, if we keep fomenting hatred among conationals, on the basis of false grounds of discord and distrust” (Roniger and Sznajder 1998: 148). In another pro-oblivion, pro-reconciliation move, Menem announced plans to demolish the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA), the most notorious detention centre, the building most synonymous with the horror of the military period, and one of the most contentious sites following the dictatorship. Menem’s announcement took place in 1996, the year of the twentieth anniversary of the military coup. Elizabeth Jelin and Susana Kaufman (1998) in their discussion of the controversy surrounding the announcement recall that the headline on one of the dailies was “Menem to Bulldoze Memory.”

There were two aims to the ‘Process of National Reorganization:’ to eradicate communist ‘subversion,’ and to restructure the economy and establish Washington’s neo-liberal model. The debt assumed during the military years had dire consequences for the economy in Argentina and led to a period of unsustainable dependence on funding agents. Servicing the debt became

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9 Due Obedience prevented the prosecution of military personnel who were ‘following orders.’ The Final Point law was implemented to limit the time frame of the trials, meaning that many cases were never tried.

10 These two points were brought to my attention by Ana Isla.
increasingly difficult and Argentina grew increasingly dependent on the stabilization program of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and increasingly bound by the application of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the World Bank (WB). It is not illogical to conclude that the ‘economic restructuring’ of ‘the Process,’ led to the infamous economic restructuring of the 1990s in Argentina. To curry favour with the IMF in the 1990s, President Carlos Menem began rapid state sell-offs of social security, water, gas, electricity, sanitation and railroads and became one of the developing world’s biggest subscribers to the neoliberal model. Menem served two terms as president (and later ran for but lost his bid for a third term). Over the course of his administration, charges of institutional corruption brought Menem’s ten years in office to an end. During Menem’s two terms, the debt soared from $61,337 million to $140,190 million (López Levy 2004: 39).

Unmanageable debt was not all that Argentina inherited from the dictatorship. The lack of restraint by police and the agents of the military repression was another unsavoury left-over of the military period. The partiality of justice (followed by Menem’s executive pardon) meant that kidnappers and torturers were free to live amongst those they had terrorized. It is no surprise that there are multiple incidents of victims encountering their torturers in public, either in person or through the media (see Feitlowitz 1998, “The Schilingo Effect”). The partiality and failure of justice has also caused a ‘recycling’ of repressors. Military men received promotions. For example, before 1992, promotions in the Argentine military were not public. In 1990, during Menem’s first administration, the Senate promoted Lieutenant Colonel Guillermo Antonio Minicucci to full Colonel. Minicucci’s involvement in the dictatorship was substantial and deserves mention. According to Feitlowitz (1998: 202),

during the dictatorship, Miniucci was director of two clandestine torture centers [in
Buenos Aires], El Banco and El Olimpo. It was he who had named the latter camp, which had this sign over the main torture chamber: ‘Welcome to the Olympus of the Gods. Signed: The Centurions.’

The former director of El Olimpo received his promotion even though he had been previously charged with one hundred and five criminal acts. He is an example of a person who benefited from the Due Obedience Law (Feitlowitz 1998: 202). For the most part, those responsible for crimes under the dictatorship ended up living ordinary lives once the state returned to democracy. Many lower ranking military and police continued in their positions; others moved to the private security industry. The life of General Antonio Bussi illustrates these points. Bussi was notorious for his brutality (even during the dictatorship) and although accused in 1983 of kidnapping and torture, he was saved from punishment by the Punto Final law. Bussi then entered provincial politics. In 2003, he was elected mayor of Tucumán in the Argentine north. Bussi narrowly won the election; he defeated Gerónimo Aignasse. Aignasse’s father had disappeared on the day after the 1976 military coup in Bussi’s Tucumán (Rohter 2003).

The Breaking Point and Emergence of Piquetes

The soaring debt of the 1980s and 1990s eventually led to a breaking point in 2001 when President Fernando De la Rúa (Menem’s successor) struggled with the decision to make payments to the IMF and to reduce unemployment. Eventually he was forced to default on the external debt. The economic crisis of 2001 was the culmination of tough austerity measures, privatizations and years of fiscal mismanagement under the strong arms of the IMF and the WB. The banking crisis in December 2001 made things worse for the average citizen.
Many people had to find new ways to make ends meet. One such method was *trueque*, a system of bartering and trading within communities.\textsuperscript{11} The *piquetero* movement also began in this period during the sweep of privatizations under Carlos Menem. The first protest dates to 1996 and took place in Neuquén. The movement continued to grow from an estimated 140 roadblocks nationwide in 1997 to a peak in 2002 of between 2,300 and 6000 (estimates vary significantly; see Lopéz Levy 2004: 81). *Piquetes*, or pickets and *piqueteros*, picketers, stage their protests in areas where they will be noticed. In other words, the protests do not take place necessarily inside communities; rather they stage roadblocks along major arteries and bridges, stopping traffic dead for long periods of time. The media portrays the *piqueteros* negatively, as violent and aggressive even though many protests are non-violent. *Piqueteros* have clashed with police since the beginning of the movement in 1996. Their members have been arrested and held in jail without charges or with trumped up charges; others have been shot by police.

**Resisting Societal Amnesia**

The failure of justice and the lack of appropriate institutional treatment of the past were catalysts for the radicalization of the younger generation, particularly the group calling itself H.I.J.O.S. (the Spanish word for ‘children’) standing for Children for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence. The radical youth movement is best known for the ‘*escrache,*’ its shaming demonstrations that followed Menem’s executive pardon. The *escrache* tactic developed as a direct consequence of the failure of official justice in Argentina. Members of the group claim, ‘if there is no justice, there is *escrache*’ (Genocida 2002). *Escraches* point out and shame individuals from the military period in order to inform neighbours and coworkers that they are living and working in the presence of a ‘*represore*’ from the military period. Literally and

\textsuperscript{11} Personal communication with Gonzalo Compañy.
symbolically, these protests leave their mark. They mark the memories of *escrache* witnesses with the ‘truth’ of the repressors’ crimes, and they leave visible marks on the landscape in the form of graffiti, posters, banners and stencils. Signs resembling yellow and black road signs are affixed to telephone poles with messages such as “400 metres from here lives war criminal Ricardo Scifo Modica” (Brodsky 2005: 174).

*Escrache* is popular and not formal justice, and exists so long as the latter fails. H.I.J.O.S follows and documents the movements of former repressors claiming, “Wherever they go, we will go and find them” (Proyecto de Recuperación 2005: 19). One of their posters for instance, traces the work history of Luis Juan Donocik, a former soldier who went on to work in private security. From 1976-83 he was the Commissionaire of the Federal Police and involved with several detention centres including *Garage Azopardo, Club Atlético, El Banco* and *El Olimpo*. By 1997 he was the commissionaire of police department #48. By 2002, he had made the transition to private security. The H.I.J.O.S poster not only makes links between the military dictatorship and the freedom of repressors, but also implies a relationship between the dictatorship, the impunity that followed, and neoliberalism. The bottom of the poster outlines that the security firm that employs Donocik is responsible for security at numerous multi-national corporations including Wal-mart, Shell, Carrefour and BASF.

**Recent Events**

Over the course of my research, a number of things relevant to my five field sites have transpired. This project will always be ‘dated’ in this way, as every time I sit down to write, there is something new to consider. In December 2005, for instance, *El Olimpo* where I had documented graffiti on the exterior walls in July of the same year opened to the community for
the first time. Following the dictatorship, *El Olimpo* had remained under police operation, and continued to be used as a vehicle registration office by the federal police. The only civilians allowed to enter the building between the end of the dictatorship in 1983 and late 2005 were survivors, family of victims, and officials connected with the truth commission, all of whom visited the site during the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons or CONADEP). Only two months prior to beginning my fieldwork, *El Olimpo* was transferred from the federal government to the city government. It was then transferred from the city to human rights groups.

Sometime between my fieldwork in July 2005 and a visit to Buenos Aires in late October 2005, the Ministry of the Interior opened a memorial plaza for the victims of the fire at *Cromañón*. The plaza was opened in a vacant space beside the burnt remains of the nightclub, and beside Mitre Street, closed and blocked with the makeshift and unofficial memorial space (see figure 37). The opening of the official plaza was the official response to the victims’ families’ occupation of Mitre Street. By opening the official mnemonic plaza, the city had hoped that the unofficial memorial would disappear. However, the opening of the plaza only exacerbated the dispute between some victims’ families and the city. A small group of parents, friends and relatives refused to dismantle the sanctuary and transfer the memorials and personal mementos to the ‘official’ space until there was justice for the fire victims.

In January 2006, an article in the daily *Página/12* outlined proposed changes to the memorial space at *Cromañón*. These proposals take into account some of the strides families of victims have made in their attempts to inscribe memory on this space. One of the major critiques of the “official” memorial space is the way the space is controlled and confined. The memorial wall is hidden by another wall, effectively concealing ‘memory’ behind a cement barrier. One of
the proposed changes is to open up the memorial space. A second proposal seeks to permanently change the name of a section of Mitre Street to “Los Pibes de Cromañón” (The Children of Cromañón). If this proposal is passed, it would mean making ‘official’ one of the ‘unofficial’ changes families have made to the landscape since the December 2004 fire.

Before I returned to Canada in December 2005, the municipal government began the process to suspend the chief of government in Buenos Aires, Aníbal Ibarra. On Friday, November 11, 2005, the first day of the proceedings, families of the victims overwhelmed the legislature. Every time a member of the legislature referred to the fire as the tragedy of Cromañón, the family members shouted “Masacre de Cromañón!” During the proceedings, whenever anyone referred to Ibarra in a positive light, the crowd chanted “los chicos presentes/ahora y siempre” (the young people are present, now and forever) (Rodríguez 2005: 2-3). The initial process missed suspending Ibarra by one vote. Three members of the legislature were absent. The absence of the legislators and the inability of the opposition to suspend Ibarra enraged the families and the proceedings were suspended until the following Monday. Families spent the interim days staging demonstrations in front of the offices of the absentee legislators urging them to attend the proceedings and to suspend Ibarra. Despite pressure from Ibarra’s party to prevent his suspension, the opposition received the necessary votes to suspend Ibarra and begin the investigation into his responsibility for the Cromañón disaster.

One of the main effects of the graffiti writing in these spaces associated with trauma or memory of trauma is that groups lay claim to a public space and attempt to link it to an alternative narrative. This recurring trend continues to be present in events since the end of my fieldwork. As I mentioned above, an official proposal has been submitted to change a section of Mitre Street to “Los Pibes de Cromañón” (The Children of Cromañón).

12 These proceedings were designed to determine Ibarra’s responsibility for the Cromañón fire, as he was responsible for overseeing fire inspections.
the Mitre Street to reflect the name family members have stencilled on official street signs in the vicinity of Cromañón. Likewise, I noted in my field research that graffiti writings had similarly claimed Estación Avellaneda as belonging to Darío and Maxi, the two protesters that were killed by police in that same station on June 26, 2002. Also in January 2006, coinciding with the criminal trials of police involved in the shooting of Darío and Maxi, a petition was circulated by members of MTD Ánibal Verón (an unemployed workers group) and other movements to have the name of the station changed officially to Darío and Maxi Station (Próxima 2006). Around the fourth anniversary of the shootings, several members of parliament led by Eduardo Macaluse and Claudio Lozano presented the proposal in the National Congress (Estación 2006).

Also in January 2006, Police Commissioner Alfredo Franciotti and Colonel Alejandro Acosta (his driver on the day of the shootings) were sentenced to life in prison for the murders of Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki at Estación Avellaneda. The judges at the trial determined that Franciotti and Acosta were the “co-authors” of the murders. They also decided that it was not only the person who fired the fatal shots who was responsible, but that all those who had fired at protestors that day were guilty (Vales 2006b). Another six police officers were given sentences ranging from a suspension of ten months to four years in prison.

Perhaps the most dramatic change that came about after I returned to Canada was an announcement by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo at the end of January 2006. During the twenty-fifth Resistance March in as many years, Hebe de Bonafini of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo announced that the 2006 march would be their last. Unlike the weekly marches by the Mothers, the March of Resistance is an annual event that takes place over twenty-four hours, and involves various other social movements. The march dominates the Plaza de Mayo and neighbouring spaces for that entire time. The weekly marches of the Mothers will continue,
as Bonafini remarked that there are still things the human rights group needs to achieve, but that they will retire from the March of Resistance because “the enemy is no longer in the Casa Rosada; the enemy lives [instead] in the multinational companies” (Dandan 2006). Bonafini’s announcement came following various pro-human rights and pro-memory initiatives of President Néstor Kirchner, that stand in stark contrast to the oblivion-reconciliation policies of former president Menem. The ‘enemies’ Bonafini referred to in her announcement were the agents of imperialism and their “local” supporters, including Menem. The end of the resistance marches also comes at a time of electoral change in South America, with a rise in left and left-of-centre governments including the governments of Uruguay, Argentina and Hugo Chavéz’s government in Venezuela, as well as the more recent election of Evo Morales in Bolívia and the election of Michelle Bachelet in Chile. Bachelet is the first female president in Chile and her socialist politics reflect the opposite of former dictator Augusto Pinochet. Bachelet’s father was killed during the Chilean dictatorship and she along with her mother, were kidnapped and tortured under Pinochet’s regime at the most notorious Chilean detention centre, Villa Grimaldi. Her election, like that of Néstor Kirchner in 2003 in Argentina, signals an important change in administrations of South America’s Southern Cone in terms of remembering and investigating the military past. The perspectives of these administrations are far more closely aligned with those of the memory entrepreneurs than those of the previous governments. Outsiders are often taken aback by the freedom the ‘popular’ memory entrepreneurs have to alter the urban landscape. At times, it must seem that they can do as they please and that there is very little opposition to their alternative narratives of the past. However, the recent abduction of Jorge Julio López indicates that tension around the military dictatorship is still high and that among some Argentines, there is intense resentment of the new trials of military personnel. During the
dictatorship, Julio López was kidnapped. He survived, but in September 2006 he mysteriously disappeared again, after he testified against Miguel Etchecolatz, a former chief of police during the military dictatorship. In September, Etchecolatz was sentenced to life in prison for the crimes of murder and torture. Etchecolatz’s trial sets an important precedent. It is “the first major trial of the leaders of that military government since the Argentine Supreme Court last year [2005] overturned amnesty laws that had allowed them to walk free” (Schweimler 2006). Julio López’s eerie disappearance has enraged human rights groups and given rise to a new wave of demonstrations, but also a new wave of fear.
CHAPTER 2

Relevant Literature

The sites chosen for this project, La República Cromañón, Estación Avellaneda, Plaza de Mayo, Plaza Congreso and El Olimpo demonstrate struggles over memory and space. While any one of these sites could serve as the basis of my thesis, I felt it necessary to include a range of different sites representing sites of trauma over the last thirty years. This allows me to use a variety of examples to demonstrate the links between mnemonic battles, the contestation of public spaces, and a perceived sense of injustice in contemporary Argentina.

There are important connections to be drawn between the various injustices in the last thirty years in Argentina. Similarly, there are links between the various sites of this study. In some cases these connections are visible in these and other public spaces. For instance, one of the fibreglass installations in Plaza de Mayo (this image is also pasted to the wall in Estación Avellaneda) consists of a long list of names filling in the shape of Argentina. The names represent victims of repression past and present. Beside the shape of the nation, it reads: “They live in our struggle. Twenty years of democracy.” A similar stencil-like image pasted to an exterior wall of a community centre and cafeteria under worker control in Rosario reads: “1976-1983 Repression. 1983-2004 Quick Triggers. 1976-2004 Impunity” (see figure 23). On the one year-anniversary of the Cromañón fire, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, winner of the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize, linked the victims of the dictatorship and the ‘Pueyrredón Massacre’ with the victims of Cromañón in his oration condemning impunity by saying: “We cannot forget the 30,000 killed and disappeared during the dictatorship; we cannot forget the murders of (Maximiliano) Kosteki and (Darío) Santillán; we cannot forget that there are children dying of hunger and preventable diseases; we cannot forget about Cromañón” (No se puede 2005).
Mnemonic struggles in Argentina do not occur in complete isolation from one another; (marginal) memory entrepreneurs, those individuals who seek to advance their versions of the past (Jelin 2003), often support the memory and justice struggles of other marginal groups. The history of silences and impunity, and a longstanding emphasis on reconciliation at the expense of truth and justice has created an environment of vulnerable memory. Memory entrepreneurs react by aggressively articulating and disseminating their memories in time and space, as they are conscious of this history of oblivion, repression and impunity. It is perhaps for this reason, that there is support from groups associated with memory of the dictatorship for groups associated with the Avellaneda massacre and the Cromaño Disaster. For instance, when the verdicts for Alfredo Franciotti and Alejandro Acosta were announced, the groups associated with Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki were supported by members of various human rights organizations including Nora Cortiñas and Mirta Baravale of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Graciela Daleo of the Association of Ex-Detained and Disappeared and Emiliano Huervilo of H.I.J.O.S (Vales 2006b).13

Memory work, and the scale and intensity of its projects in Argentina exists, I have argued, because of a history of impunity and unchecked corruption, especially with reference to the period from 1976 to the present. As a result of this intense memory work, the Argentine landscape is dotted with mnemonic initiatives aiming to transmit particular memories. A recent editorial cartoon in Página/12 illustrates the commonness of ‘sites of memory’ in Buenos Aires (Tragedialandia 2006; see figure 1). The comic identifies Cromaño, the Pueyrredón Bridge (instead of Avellaneda Station), the AMIA Jewish community centre, an unspecified building relating to the 1976-83 ‘genocide’ and the 1955 aerial bombing among other sites of memory.

13 Police officers Alfredo Franciotti and Alejandro Acosta were found guilty for their roles in the murders of Maxi Kosteki and Darío Santillán.
The only character in the comic explains that one gets used to all the sites that make up "Tragedyland."

![Figure 1. Editorial comic from Página/12 (national daily) from early 2006. The comic exaggerates the concentration of spaces of memory in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The character in the bottom left corner drinks his typical 'mate' tea and says, “And...one gets accustomed to all of it.”](image)

**Power, Discourse and Memory**

Battles over narratives of the past occur because various groups and individuals disagree about what they feel to be ‘true.’ Each of the locations in this study demonstrates this struggle over the ‘true’ story. In many cases, these struggles have multiple parties vying for the central position.

The ‘correct’ narrative of the past is largely determined by the “régime of truth” (Foucault 1980) where the “régime of truth allows one to judge what is ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable.’” Foucault (1980: 131) explains:

> Each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

The popular or unofficial memory entrepreneurs challenge the ‘Truth’ produced, circulated and defended by the powerful, especially the narratives of past trauma – or the narratives that eviscerate past trauma, articulated by certain politicians, the military and the
police. For Foucault (1980: 133), "'Truth is very closely related to systems of power [and] 'Truth' is produced and sustained by power."

Discourse is the tool used by the powerful to disseminate 'Truth' and to familiarize others with the régime of 'Truth.' For Gill (1996: 142), language is used in order to achieve a particular end. Discourse is used to "do things" (Gill 1996: 142). But language is a tool of both the powerful, the marginal, and all that lies between. While language is used to support and express power, it is also used in challenges to power (Wodak 2004: 199). In the sites of this study, language is used to make claims to space, to question dominant narratives of the past and articulate new ones, to challenge authority and rally support from others, and to advance campaigns for justice.

Dominant narratives of the past and their structures that concretize these stories reflect the dominant political agendas and ideologies of the day. For this reason, discussions of memory are very difficult to separate from those of power. Even the most mundane aspects of daily life such as commemorative street signs are tied up in questions of power. The goal of memory entrepreneurs and political elite alike is to "establish/convince/transmit" (Jelin 2003: 26) their narrative of the past, and as such, mnemonic initiatives are often didactic, and instruct a particular reading of the past (Young 1992: 274). However, although monuments and memorials and other forms of concretizing memory attempt to capture and fix memory, and although they solidify particular narratives in material form, such memories cannot be eternally fixed. There is no guarantee that the initiative will be 'read' the way its authors intended, and there is no guarantee that such a reading will transcend time. Owen Dwyer (2004: 425) remarks that monuments are targets for activists and for those 'outside' the dominant memory they represent because they are "at once authoritative and yet susceptible to rewriting and appropriation."
Similarly, as we will see, Cresswell (1996) demonstrates how this process of ‘rewriting and appropriation’ transpires.

**Memory and Street Art**

The literature on collective memory and memory of trauma is rich, and refers to group memory as collective, social or public memory. A distinction must be made between group and individual memory. Although individual memories may contribute to the development of a collectively-shared memory, the process of group memory is dialogic and results in a pastiche of memories, filling in gaps and privileging certain details over others. Collective memory is produced and articulated to counter the fear of oblivion, and actors involved in memory struggles are concerned with collective rather than individual forgetting (Jelin 1994: 49).

Distinctions are also made between memory and history, although they are often conflated. Roniger and Sznajder (1998: 133-4) remind us of Pierre Nora’s (1989) distinction between the two, suggesting “whereas the concept of history implies an image of the past clearly distinguished from the present, the concept of memory places the past within the present, as an integral and continuously reformulated part of it.” Jelin (2003: 96) suggests that memory is not simply a robotic repetition of the past. Because memory, as well as history, involves the past in the present, there must be efforts to reinterpret and resignify the past. Thus, the meaning of the past over time has the potential to change and be interpreted differently. The key here is the reformulation of memory in the present. Collective memory is not concerned with the preservation of memory where memory is static and unchanging, but rather with the continued articulation, transmission and reworking of memory relative to the social and historical context. Karen E. Till’s (2005) reflections on memory of the Holocaust in contemporary Berlin are also
relevant here. She recalls an interview with James E. Young, a juror for the second memorial competition in Berlin in 2000 and 2001 in which Young remarked that memory should not only be preserved, but that it had to be created, because, “if Germans only preserve historic sites of National Socialism, then the process of remembering in the present is defined by the historic Nazi plan and structure only” (Till 2005: 166). Till (2005), like Young, suggests a new memorial, in a symbolic and central location would provide a contemporary interpretation of the past. The pair implies that memory of trauma should be revisited in different eras, and memory appropriate to the social context should be facilitated by contemporary mnemonic initiatives. They also imply that the general public should be encouraged to and capable of reinterpreting the past. The past and the recollection of the past, remains an active part of the present and is reinterpreted and rearticulated at various key junctures. Similarly, Jelin remarks that while the past itself cannot change because it “is gone, it is already de-termin(at)ed” (Jelin 2003: 26) but what can change are interpretations of that ‘de-termin(at)ed’ past. Again, these reinterpretations are closely linked to changes in the social and political context of the times.

The terms ‘collective,’ ‘social,’ or ‘public’ are used to describe commonly held memories because what and how we remember people and events is largely determined by our ‘social environment’ (Zerubavel 1996: 283) and by “social rules of remembering” that suggest what ought to be remembered or forgotten (Zerubavel 1996: 285). It is through these “mnemonic lenses,” provided by others, that we view the past (Zerubavel 1996: 285-6). In fact, as Zerubavel (1996: 289) reminds us, many of our shared ‘memories’ do not come from first-hand experience, rather, they are events or figures that we recall as members of specific “mnemonic communities” (ethnic groups, or families for example). That said, collective memory is not simply the
accumulation of personal memories in a sum total rather, the “weaving together of aspects of personal pasts into one single narrative” (Zerubavel 1996: 290-294).

Collective memory involves more than the common sharing of memories with others. Rather, it also involves the simultaneous recollection of the past amongst members. Memories are ‘synchronized’ through holidays and the calendar, and commemoration is also done ‘in sync’ with others (Zerubavel 1996: 294). The past is recalled at specific intervals (annually, for example) on anniversaries of past events (Zerubavel 1996: 294). The fixity of the calendar facilitates the “co-memoration” of past events (Zerubavel 1996: 294). The synchronization of memory is part of mnemonic socialization, a process that can be very influential. Zerubavel (1996: 294) uses American history to illustrate this point. When asked to list important figures in American history (the same can probably be said for many countries), Americans generally have the same “free” associations and draw up similar lists of figureheads in American history. The process of mnemonic socialization leads members of various mnemonic communities to recall the past at the same time (synchronization and co-memoration) and in the same way. For instance, in Canada we wear poppies on Remembrance Day, Christian children make palm crosses for Palm Sunday, and we do not shop on Christmas Day. This socialization process takes place in museums, classrooms, but also occurs through more subtle practices such as the printing of prominent figures on currency, commemorative street signs and the closing of stores on certain holidays. Through this process people are socialized to the “socially appropriate narrative forms for recounting the past as well as the tacit rules of remembrance that help separate the conventionally memorable from that which can – or even ought to – be relegated to oblivion” (Zerubavel 2003: 5).
Memory and forgetting are often mistakenly thought of as opposites. However, Todorov (2001: 12) suggests that rather than being memory’s opposite, forgetting is a necessary part of remembrance. Neither collective nor individual memory is ‘total memory’ and memory involves both omission and preservation. Memory cannot be distinct from forgetting because “memory itself is necessarily a selection” (Todorov 2001: 12). Groups and individuals use recall to serve their own interests (Todorov 2001: 14) and actors in the present make decisions about what will be (and how it will be) remembered, and thereby what will be forgotten (Todorov 2001: 18). We also often hear about our ‘duty to remember.’ To this, Todorov (2001: 21) clarifies that this is not simply a question of remembering or recovering the past, rather, “the defence of a particular selection from among these facts, one that assures its protagonists of maintaining the roles of hero or victim when faced with another selection that might assign them less glamorous roles.”

For examples of this, I turn to Ted Swedenburg’s (1995) work on Palestinian memory. Aspects of Palestinian history since the 1936-39 rebellion have been weeded out through intense repression by Zionist movements (Swedenburg 1995). Israeli identity is inscribed in the landscape while Palestinian memory, identity and history are erased or removed from the same spaces (Swedenburg 1995: 8). For example, Palestinian places of memory were bulldozed and removed and then given Hebrew names (Swedenburg 1995). Palestinian memory is also shaped by the Israeli mnemonic gatekeepers through control of school curricula and tourist travel in Israel. However, the ‘forgetting’ of Palestinian memory is not strictly something imposed by Zionists. The national narrative erases unfavourable aspects of the [Palestinian] past and erases internal differences (Swedenburg 1995: 21-3). Above all, narratives of the Palestinian past overlook evidence of Palestinian collaboration with Zionists and the British (Swedenburg 1995: 25). In particular, Palestinian narratives of the past tend to obscure details around Palestinians
who sold land to the Zionist movement (Swedenburg 1995: 98-9). Admirable aspects of the past are recalled by Palestinians, while less favourable details are ‘actively forgotten’ (Swedenburg 1995: 103). Also, the positive recollection of a popular and noble martyr (Qassâm), permitted the forgetting of negative aspects of the 1936-39 Palestinian Revolt (Swedenburg 1995: 106).

Memory is not steadfast and unchanging (despite claims of monument builders to ‘stand for all eternity’). Rather, all memory is selective and changeable, and is affected by never-ending “acts of recovery and processes of suppression or forgetting” (Pohlandt-McCormick 2000: 24).

Collective and individual memory are composed of two kinds of information, the original perception of an event, and the information about that event which is supplied after the event takes place. Over time, the two tend to blend together into a seamless narrative (Pohlandt-McCormick 2000: 39) as mnemonic discourses “[smooth] over the past’s jagged edges and [even] out its irruptions, serving up a national conformism” (Swedenburg 1995: 21). Collective memory then is susceptible to the influence of its designers and planners and things are not always recorded faithfully in the versions that get passed on (Kenny 1999: 423; see also Swedenburg 1995). Although Jelin (2003: xviii) notes there is never one sole memory, more dominant memories can become more ‘natural’ than others. Despite such claims, Kenny (1999: 425) explains, “the transmission of historical memory is […] contextual, partial, and subject to self-interested manipulation and obfuscation.” Similarly, while past events are preserved by a process of ‘chronicling’ (described by Schwartz (1992: 355) as the “direct recording of events and their sequence”), the events that are selected to chronicle are all weighted differently; we remain indifferent to some, while others get commemorated at regular intervals. Those that are commemorated attain a somewhat ‘sacred’ status (Schwartz 1992: 377).
Recollections of the past, although greatly facilitated by language (oral histories, written records of the past and so on) (Zerubavel 2003: 6), are also in part shaped by the labels groups attach to people and events of the past. For instance, we remember an event differently if it is labelled an ‘event,’ a ‘riot,’ a ‘happening’ or ‘disturbance, ‘revolt’ or ‘rebellion’ (Swedenborg 1995: 13). Similarly, people are recalled differently if they are ‘saints,’ ‘heroes,’ ‘martyrs,’ ‘villains,’ ‘revolutionaries,’ ‘war criminals’ or ‘tyrants.’ Dominant groups that wish to control the recollections of marginal groups attempt to belittle their protagonists by reducing them to ‘delinquents,’ ‘terrorists’ or ‘subversives’ (among many other derogatory terms) instead of memorializing them as ‘heroes’ or ‘martyrs.’ For unemployed groups in Argentina, Dario Santillán and Maxi Kosteki are recalled as martyrs and are recalled through various stencils, by using their names in the title of various movements, and through the unofficial renaming of a train station. The police and elite groups on the other hand, recall the pair as violent protestors and delinquents.

It is misleading to speak of collective memory in the singular as memories of the past are multiple and even conflicting, particularly in cases of recent trauma where debates over differing memories of the recent past are more controversial and heated (Jelin 2003: 26-7). Collective memory and the materialization of memory are very much linked to power, and it is crucial to recognize that there are multiple versions of every past no matter how cohesive the official memory seems (Jelin and Kaufman 1998; Jelin 2003: xviii). The various actors in memory work attempt to establish their narrative, convince others of its validity, and transmit it to future generations (Jelin 2003: 26). These actors are best described by Jelin’s (2003) term, the ‘memory entrepreneurs,’ which she originally derived from Howard Becker’s ‘moral entrepreneurs.’ What the two phrases share in common is their focus on one issue and their ability to rally support for
it from the public. The memory entrepreneurs “seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one (their own) interpretation or narrative of the past” (Jelin 2003: 33-4). Jelin remarks that the initiatives of memory entrepreneurs (monuments, plaques and other markers) “are the ways in which official and nonofficial actors try to convey and materialize their memories” (Jelin 2003: 38-9). It is crucial to note that memory entrepreneurs represent different and sometimes conflicting interests. Jelin (2003), although she does not make this distinction, refers to the more marginal memory entrepreneurs. However, the state is also a memory entrepreneur and one with considerable power.

As I have outlined, social memories are multiple and although different from individual memory, they encompass (and suppress) aspects of individual testimonies. Memory is a dialogic process, and as such, requires not only speakers, but also willing and both responsible and “response-able” witnesses (Oliver 2001). In addition, Yerushalmi (1996) suggests ‘societal remembering’ requires both transmitters and willing and capable receivers. Whether in Argentina, Germany, Japan, South Africa or elsewhere, memory entrepreneurs are concerned with the transmission of memory and with preventing social forgetting. Yerushalmi (1996) suggests that a society ‘forgets’ in a three ways. A society ‘forgets’ when the generation that witnessed the event does not transmit it to the next. Secondly, ‘forgetting’ is possible when the generation (or group) receiving the ‘memory’ rejects it. Thirdly, ‘forgetting occurs when and if the receiving party fails to pass on the memory (Yerushalmi 1996: 109). Following this, “when we say that a people ‘remembers’ we are really saying that a past has been actively transmitted to the present generation and that this past has been accepted as meaningful” (Yerushalmi 1996: 109). Memory then, requires both willing receivers and willing and capable transmitters. Yerushalmi (1996) underscores that a people cannot be said to forget something it has not
received in the first place. It is this role of ‘transmitter’ that is assumed by the many memory entrepreneurs. The ‘willingness’ of receivers can also be said to vary over time as there are periods both favourable to the transmission of memories, and periods of ‘saturation’ that are less hospitable to this transmission (Jelin 2003: 75).

Pierre Nora (1989) refers to the lack of real environments or climates of memory (milieux de mémoire) and their substitution with places of memory (lieux de mémoire). These ‘sites’ of memory include sites fixed both in time and space, such as monuments and museums, but also anniversaries and other commemorative dates (Nora 1989; Roniger and Sznajder 1998, Jelin 1994 and 2003; Jelin and Kaufman 1998). Mnemonic initiatives, both in time and space operate by ‘marking’ the temporal and physical landscape. These sites are where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 1989: 7). The idea that memory is ‘crystallized’ temporally and spatially is also addressed by Till (2005: 13) who defines social memory as “[…] an ongoing process whereby groups map understandings of themselves onto and through a place and time.”

Our discussions of collective memory must not overlook the spatial aspect, as social memory is very much tied up with ‘place’ (Till 2005:17). Groups of memory entrepreneurs debate the meaning of public spaces and through this process, “debate their understandings of the past and contemporary social relationships to that past” (Till 2005: 17). Till (2005: 17) also notes that memory is not just ‘there’ in places of memory, or that places of memory do not just exist on their own, but are constructed, the result of a social process of building public memory. The construction of social, collective or public memory is a social process, and objects or ‘sites’ of memory such as monuments, memorials and museums are built to ‘give shape to’ memories of the past. These memories are not material, but are made tangible through various mnemonic initiatives, the idea being to capture memory in the present, to make it stable and to contain it
(Till 2005: 10, 13). However, as we will continue to explore, memory, even when materialized in the landscape, cannot be secured for all time.

**Memory and Place**

Place is important in the transmission of collective memories. Place can act as a witness to the past (Jelin 2003; Till 2005) and along with collectively held memories of the past, place can help shape group or even national identity (Till 2003; Bennett-Farmer 1995). According to Foote (1997, cited in Raivo 2004) "[...] memory and identity almost always have a geographical dimension." The past, according to Foote (1997), is recalled by binding narratives and memories to "specific places and points in time." Place is important in identity formation, and members of mnemonic communities often make 'pilgrimages' to places of symbolic memory as a means to get closer to their past (Zerubavel 2003: 42). To speak of 'place' is to speak of space invested with emotion and attachment. Specifically, Osborne (2001: 42) writes, "it is the actions of humans at specific locations that turn objective space into subjective places constructed by human behaviour." Space takes on different meanings through both everyday life and specific traditions or rituals. In relation to collective memory, "formalized rituals, commemorations and preservations impart meaning to place and develop identities with place" (Osborne 2001: 42). Place also evokes a variety of sentiments, none of which are universally held; feelings about place, whether positive or negative are referred to as a 'sense of place' (Cresswell 2004: 7; 116). For instance, places of trauma such as the site of the World Trade Centre, Columbine High School and the *Cromaño* nightclub "become the 'shadowed ground' of negative remembrance" (Foote 1997, cited in Osborne 2001: 44; see also Doss 2002).
The meaning of place (much like the meaning of the past) is not fixed (Till 2003: 290) and as such, various groups attempt to inscribe their meaning in place and to displace the meanings of others. Undifferentiated space becomes ‘place’ when it has been invested with meaning (Cresswell 2004: 10) However, the meaning of place can change. For Cresswell (1996), the meaning of place can change through challenges to an existing ‘sense of place.’ Through this process, the place in question is linked with a different group and different meanings, and if this process is allowed to continue, the particular space will become that of the challenger, and the new meaning of that place will be his/hers as well (Cresswell 1996: 60). Places, such as those discussed in this project, “are never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming – in process” (Cresswell 2004: 37). Also, because place means different things to different people, spaces are susceptible to co-opting by different groups. Regardless of authorial intention, spaces, monuments and memorials “are open to reinterpretation by the literate and illiterate, the custodian and the vandal” (Von Henneberg 2004: 41). Despite a unifying dominant narrative, places are interpreted in different and conflicting manners. For instance, “the man who sleeps on a monument sees it differently than the one who photographs it. The war widow and the campaigning politician frequent the same cemetery for entirely different reasons” (Von Henneberg 2004: 41).

Like Cresswell (2004), Tuan (1977: 6) also distinguishes between space and place, noting, “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it and endow it with value.” However, as Cresswell suggests, altering the meaning of place requires sustained effort. Place matters in terms of the location of monuments and memorials, not only because of the ‘sense of place’ associated with sites of trauma, but also because memorial place markers as opposed to place makers are more successful in transcending time. Turning meaningless space
into a significant place in the history or collective memory of a population is challenging. Von Henneberg (2004) notes that place markers, that which mark the actual site of trauma, as opposed to place makers, monuments or memorials located elsewhere, have a far easier task. Monuments as place makers lack obvious ties to that which they commemorate; such ties are important for “[proving] or [sustaining] its story” (Von Henneberg 2004: 59).

Place Names and Memory

Attaching a name to a given location is one way abstract space can become meaningful place (Cresswell 2004: 9). Official naming, however, is very strongly linked to authority. Street signs, for example, represent a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life and their familiarity effaces their political roots. Commemorative street names are ideologically loaded strategies, indicative of the political climate of their inscription. Azaryahu (1996: 321) writes, “the utilization of street names for commemorative purposes enables an official version of history to be incorporated into spheres of social life which seem to be totally detached from political contexts or communal obligations and to be integrated into intimate realms of human interactions and activities.” Street signs and other commemorative designations reflect political agendas (Azaryahu 1996) and present the “authorized” historical narrative in the street (Azaryahu 1996: 312). Von Henneberg (2004: 42) outlines how following the end of World War II, Italian cities, places and streets were renamed, replacing names such as Hitler and Mussolini with those of “Resistance heroes or democratic politicians, from Antonio Gramsci to Alcide De Gasperi.” These changes, “were intended to forge a new republican and democratic consciousness, didactically informing citizens whom to admire, what to remember and forget, and which dates and battles to consider part of Italy’s new national history” (Von Henneberg 2004: 42).
Museums and monuments appear as very deliberate attempts to inform the public of a particular reading of history but common street signs such as 11th of September in Chile, Martin Luther King in the United States or streets named after the disappeared in Argentina make even the most mundane aspects of daily life political. As Von Henneberg (2004) suggests, commemorative street signs and street (or place) renaming function as political statements signalling profound changes in the dominant ideology or a regime change (see also Azaryahu 1997: 481). These (re)namings of streets and other places ‘erase’ that which conflicts with the historical narrative of the new regime (Azaryahu 1997: 484). However, like the debates over the location and form of other mnemonic initiatives, the designation of commemorative streets is not without conflict. Alderman (2000) discusses the renaming streets after Martin Luther King in the United States. He contends that the strongest opposition to the renaming of streets came from businesses that complained about costs of changing their address on forms, stationary and advertising, as well as those who complained about “the economic impact of having their street identified with King and, as they perceive it, the black community” (Alderman 2000: 673). Street signs serve a very obvious practical role in facilitating our movement through space. It is their political role that generates opposition. While places, such as buildings and neighbourhoods may also be (re)named for commemorative purposes, the renamed street sign may be more conducive to disseminating a particular narrative of the past to a larger audience as Yvonne Aikens (1990, cited in Alderman 2000: 674-5) suggests

A street touches more people than if they had just named a building after [King] downtown … People who wouldn’t go to a building or a park named for King drive on a major thoroughfare such as Buffalo (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.) for business or personal reasons… They see the name at intersections, on signs pointing to the road, on maps. It pops up on addresses, letters, business cards, constantly keeping King’s name before the public… More people come in contact with it (ellipses in Alderman 2000).
While commemorative street signs seem to make their way covertly into the spaces of everyday life and tend to be the initiatives of those in power to subtly (or not so subtly) naturalize dominant beliefs, the apparent effectiveness of street (re)naming has not gone unnoticed by more marginal groups. The unofficial renaming of street signs (and other spaces) in Argentina is fairly common. During the eleventh anniversary of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in July 2005, I noticed that the intersecting streets near the AMIA on Pasteur Street had been renamed with large stickers matching the font, colour and size of the official street signs to read *Anti-Semitism Street* and *Impunity Street*. Similarly, these black stickers had been used on Mitre Street, renaming the section near the nightclub where 194 had died in a fire with *The Children of Cromañón Street*. The same tactic was used in Chattanooga, Tennessee when the city council rejected a plan to rename a street in honour of Martin Luther King. A group of 300 protested the decision and used bumper stickers reading “Dr. ML King, Jr. Blvd” to unofficially rename the street (Alderman 2000: 673). Similarly, in 1989-90, communist street signs in East Berlin were unofficially repainted with more traditional names as public pressure to change the names exceeded the will of city officials (Azaryahu 1997: 485).

While commemorative street signs facilitate the incorporation of dominant beliefs into the spaces of everyday life (Azaryahu 1997; 1996), there is little in the renaming (official or unofficial) of streets or other places to ensure that the intended narrative is transmitted through the new place name. While such names stem from particular political agendas and particular narratives of the past, names alone “do not specify which stories should be told or what one should think about them” (Von Henneberg 2004: 61). Place names lack the guarantee that they will be interpreted as the elites intend; and they certainly lack the guarantee that audiences will embrace and be enthusiastic about or knowledgeable of that which they commemorate (Von...
Henneberg 2004: 61). Till (2003: 287) reminds us, “although elites have had more control over the establishment of places of memory in public settings [be they entire streets, monuments, memorials or museums], they cannot control how they are perceived, understood, and interpreted by individuals and various social groups.”

**Memory and Ideology**

Memory is something that is “used, misused and exploited” rather than something that is inert and merely possessed by individuals and groups (Said 2000: 179). As we have seen through the example of street and place names, mnemonic initiatives concretize specific memories in the landscapes of everyday life. This process leads to a ‘naturalization’ of certain memories where memories in place come to be severed from their political and ideological roots. This process is advantageous to dominant groups seeking to make their versions of the past hegemonic (usually the state). For this reason, Azaryahu (1996: 319) notes, “spatial commemorations in particular, which merge history and physical environment, are instrumental in the naturalization of the commemorated past.” For Dennis Cosgrove (1989: 125, as cited in Whelan 2002: 509), “all landscapes are symbolic … reproducing cultural norms and establishing the values of dominant groups across all of society.” Collective memory therefore, is not passive; it is linked to action and it is something that is socially produced rather than something that naturally occurs. Socially produced memory means that “past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning” (Said 2000: 185) by various groups. These various groups include historians, and organizations and all memory entrepreneurs who have some influence in a given period (Kenny 1999: 431). The stories told by these groups are always shaped by an ‘interpretive approach’ affected by whoever tells or packages the stories. As such, narratives of
the past are related to policies and political aims and beliefs at the time of their articulation. Narratives that are dominant in one era may be discredited in another (Kenny 1999: 435). The way narratives of the past are told or received depends on the temporal context. For instance, Kenny (1999: 431) explains that "the [residential] schools [in Canada] have come to mean something very different in the 1980s and 90s than they could have in the 1940s or 50s."

Commemorative projects have specific (political) goals for the present and the future. As such, commemorative projects should be seen as, "political projects whose goal is to cultivate and promote specific understandings of the past as part of an on-going political agenda [...] and not only as projects for 'social solidarity'" (Gills 1994: 163). For instance, in France following World War II, the French government passed a law to preserve the site of the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre (the Nazi massacre of an entire rural town) for eternity; as part of the legislation, a new town was built overlooking the ruins. Bennett Farmer (1995: 30) explains, "the framers of this legislation intended for the ruins, as an image of 'France which had been ravaged,' to gather power and meaning from their proximity to the new town which, in turn, would provide an image of 'France being reborn.'" Another goal of this project was "to mitigate the humiliation of defeat and French passivity during the [Nazi] occupation [...]" This emphasis in the Oradour national historic site "played a key role in the reconstruction of French national dignity" (Bennett Farmer 1995: 33).

The Oradour historic site can be used to illustrate how commemoration and collective memory are selective. For instance, in order to reinforce the pure victim-hood of those killed at Oradour, the commemorative efforts emphasize the horror of the massacre instead of framing the commemorative activities around World War II or the German occupation of France. By
isolating the massacre from French resistance, the slaughter of an entire village is recalled as even more disturbing because the event is then judged as an unwarranted act of barbarity.

Monuments (and other mnemonic initiatives) are highly symbolic and ideologically charged (Whelan 2002: 508). While they commemorate individuals or events, they also serve far more than a strictly-ornamental function. Rather, they are, “highly symbolic signifiers that confer meaning on the city and transform neutral places into ideologically charged sites” (Whelan 2002: 508). Mnemonic initiatives serve particular functions, one of the most common of which is to unite disparate groups of people. Elite groups recognize the power of monuments to unite people, and during the peak period of monument building from the mid-nineteenth century to World War II, “statues served to strengthen support for establish regimes, instilled a sense of political unity, and cultivated national unity” (Johnson 1994, paraphrased in Whelan 2000: 509). In terms of national unity, we erect monuments to certain figures because

memory, both individual and collective, is deeply important to us. It locates us as part of something bigger than our individual existences, perhaps makes us seem less insignificant… Memory locates us, as part of a family history, as part of a tribe or community, as part of a city building and nation-making (Sandercock 1998: 207, cited in Whelan 2002: 509).

In this process of uniting disparate groups of people, aspects of the past are selected, manipulated and suppressed in order to construct the version of the past that corresponds with the political aims of the present. For Said (2000: 179), traditions use and manipulate memory in such a way that memory “is not necessarily authentic but [is] useful.” In addition to situating us within a larger group, constructions of the past serve to legitimate the present and reduce heterogeneity by cultivating consent around past events and suppressing “dissent and difference” (Osborne 1998: 436). Both Gillis (1994, cited in Osborne 1998) and Bodnar (1994, cited in Osborne 1998) distinguish between elite/official memory and popular/vernacular memory. The official variety is
decidedly more homogeneous than the vernacular, and is “committed to social unity, the continuity of particular institutions, and cultivation of loyalty to them (Bodnar 1994, cited in Osborne 1998: 432). Popular or vernacular memory differs in that it “represents an array of specialized interests that are diverse and changing and which threaten the attempted universality of the official expression of identity and memory” (Bodnar 1994, cited in Osborne 1998: 432-3).

The desire to remember the past, as well as the desire to advance particular ideological projects (Till 2003: 297) results in the creation of places of memory including monuments, museums, memorials, historical plaques and commemorative street signs to name but a few. In considering sites of memory, we can distinguish between the traditional and official sites of memory, and the unofficial sites, as well as the official but unconventional sites of memory, often referred to as counter-memorials. I will begin by reviewing the literature on traditional (and official) monuments before moving to the latter.

Memory in the Landscape (Conventional, Official, Unofficial and Unconventional Initiatives)

The most commonly cited characteristic of conventional sites of memory (especially monuments) is that they are didactic and instruct particular readings of the past (Young 1992: 274; Osborne 2001: 50; Hobsbawm 1995: 33-4 and Blair, Jepperson & Pucci Jr. 1991: 363). Griswold & Griswold (1986: 691) trace the etymology of the word ‘monument’ claiming it “comes from the Latin monere, which means not just ‘to remind’ but also ‘to admonish,’ ‘warn,’ ‘advise,’ ‘instruct.’” Traditional monuments, in addition to their pedagogical function, also claim to be eternal and unchanging (Bennett-Farmer 1995: 42). Both of these aspects are found to be problematic by critics of traditional monuments and especially by those involved in the production of counter-memorials. Despite elites’ intentions for eternal and unchanging sites of
memory, all landscapes, as "culturally loaded geographies" (Osborne 2001: 47), whether they are official or unofficial, conventional or unconventional, are "unstable, contested, and highly political" (Whelan 2002: 509). And because monuments and other sites of memory are constructed in one period, but often continue to remain in subsequent eras, rather than appearing eternal and remaining capable of transmitting the intended message, monuments out of their social, political and temporal context appear "archaic, strange or irrelevant altogether" (Mumford, cited in Young 1992: 294).

The creation of places of memory comes from the felt need to contain the past in the landscape and is at least in part related to an attempt to make sense of the past or prevent the same trauma from returning. Places of memory fix aspects of the past in the landscape of the present. The past, materialized in the present, gives a sense that the particular narrative will continue to exist. For Till (2005: 9), "places of memory are created by individuals and social groups to give shape to felt absences, fears, and desires that haunt contemporary society." They also "give shape to what is metaphysically absent" (Till 2005: 10). However, while memory itself is selective, the process of concretizing the past in the built environment is even more selective. Not everything and everyone is recorded in the landscape. For example, while history textbooks record narratives about both heroes and villains, ‘villains’ are not commemorated in the street – for instance, there is no Hitler Avenue (Azaryahu 1996: 326). As a result, the city text is "a one-sided dimensional representation of only those historical figures who are located on the ‘positive’ side of the ‘good-evil’ axis predominating in a particular rendition of the past" (Azaryahu 1996: 326).

Sites of memory, whether official or unofficial, tend to draw on emotion. This seems especially true of the spontaneous and unofficial sites of memory such as those at Columbine
High School, the World Trade Center, the Murrah building in Oklahoma City and the Cromañón nightclub among others. However, even some official sites of memory like Hiroshima’s Peace Park, the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington and Peace Museum (as well as other war museums in Japan) and the Oradour-sur-Glane National Historic Site in France draw on emotion. Hiroshima’s Peace Museum emphasizes (Japanese, and not Korean) suffering following the dropping of the atomic bomb. Several large rooms display the personal effects of atomic bomb victims. Some of the most disturbing include a child’s watch stopped at 8:15am, a child’s mangled and rusted tricycle, buried after the child was killed and later donated to the museum, and clothing of bomb victims torn to shreds and stained with blood. In Oradour’s commemorative efforts, the president of the Remembrance Committee felt that drawing on emotions would ensure visitors did not forget what they had seen (Bennett Farmer 1995: 34).

The Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial also draws on emotion. Griswold & Griswold (1986: 706) call it a “living memorial” because of the presence of real veterans at the memorial and their emotional interaction with visitors. They remark, while one can casually encounter the other monuments in the Washington Mall (such as that for George Washington or Thomas Jefferson), the Vietnam Memorial demands more attention and is not conducive to passive viewing. They also note that the number of names on the memorial (nearly 58,000) is overwhelming for most viewers (Griswold & Griswold 1986: 706-7).

Conventional monuments tend to be inspiring and emphasize patriotic glory, but the Vietnam Memorial does not follow this pattern; it places emphasis on the individuals who died in the war. It is also not a comforting memorial like the traditional memorial tends to be. (Griswold & Griswold 1986: 709). The Vietnam Memorial is also “interrogative” rather than “didactic” (Griswold & Griswold 1986: 712). Griswold & Griswold (1986: 712) say the main
role of the Vietnam Memorial is to fulfill a therapeutic role. In fact, the competition for the memorial’s design stipulated that it not make any overt political statement because the nation needed “a monument that would heal the veterans as well as the rest of us, rather than exacerbate old wounds and reignite old passions” (Griswold & Griswold 1986: 712). However, like all monuments, the Vietnam Memorial is far from ‘neutral’ and in fact fulfills the task of “rekindling love of country and its ideals, as well as reconciliation with one’s fellow citizens” (Griswold & Griswold 1986: 713).

In addition to the above criticism, traditional monuments are censured for their detachment from that which they commemorate. Brosnat (1990, cited in Young 2000: 94) suggests, “In their references to history, monuments may not remember events so much as bury them altogether beneath layers of national myth and explanation.” Young (2000: 119) also says traditional monuments are “detached from daily life.” However, the biggest complaint about traditional memorials is the way that they signal an end to dialogue about the past. By declaring a particular memory will last for all time, and by remaining steadfast and unchanging, traditional monuments signal and end to that particular chapter of history. Young (1992: 273) claims, “For once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In shouldering the memory-work, monuments may relieve viewers of their memory-burden.” The traditional monuments mark an ‘end’ to memory because they free the public from its obligation to continually engage meaningfully with the past. Counter memorials on the other hand, seek to reverse this process. With reference to the on-going construction and debate over monuments in Germany, and to the counter-memorials of artist Horst Hoheisel, Young (2000: 273) writes, “better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions in Germany than any single ‘final solution’ to Germany’s memorial problem.”
Unlike the traditional monument, the counter-memorial disturbs and disrupts; it does not console as traditional monuments do, rather it provokes and demands interaction (Young 1992: 277). As sites of memory that demand interaction and prompt discussion, the role of counter-memorials is at least in part to promote reflection, contemplation, learning and finding one’s own significance in the past (rather than having the meaning of the past dictated by traditional memorials) (Young 2000: 118). The counter-memorial implies that there is no easy resolution of the past, and that one can never be entirely ‘finished’ with the past. The counter-memorial invites different reactions than its traditional counterpart that serves to console. The counter-memorial provokes response, whether the response is contemplation, curiosity, or anger (Till 2005: 167).

The work of Till (2003; 2005) and Young (1992; 2000) describes a range of counter-memorials in Germany. One of the most poignant for me is the Bavarian Quarter Holocaust Memorial that operates at a decentralized location and most importantly, is found in the very mundane corners of everyday life in an effort to demonstrate the far-reaches of anti-Semitism and the policing of Jews in Nazi Germany. Unlike other memorials, the Bavarian Quarter initiative is not immediately recognized as a memorial. In fact, as it first went up, it was criticized and removed by secret police (Till 2005: 158). The memorial consists of stylish icons affixed to regular street poles. One side of the sign consists of an image such as a loaf of bread or a picture of a hopscotch game. The reverse side holds an ominous message about daily life during the Nazi period. The messages are deliberately written in the present rather than the past tense, and include the date. In some cases, the signs refer very specifically to their location; in other cases, the connection is more ambiguous. For instance, the hopscotch sign is located near a children’s play area; the reverse side of the sign reads, “Aryan and non-Aryan children are forbidden to play together. 1938” (Till 2005: 155). The unconventional memorial recalls the
multiple ways anti-Semitism was integrated into daily life, and maps the escalation, but also the everyday-ness and ‘naturalness’ of such treatment. The designers of the memorial attribute their decision to write the text in the present tense to the fact that they wanted viewers to confront the past and to feel uncomfortable around statements such as “Jews in Berlin are only allowed to buy food between four and five o’clock in the afternoon. July 4, 1940” instead of dismissing the past as the past (Till 2005: 155-60).

Spontaneous Memory

Beyond the traditional memorial and the counter-memorial, there is the spontaneous memorial site. This is one that has attracted attention in the recent past following traumatic and violent incidents in Oklahoma City (Doss 2002; Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti 1998), Columbine High School (Doss 2002) and Dunblane School in England (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti 1998), as well as several other incidents such as the attacks on the World Trade Center, the deaths of John F. Kennedy Junior and his wife Carolyn Bassett Kennedy, and the deaths of Princess Diana and her companion Dodi Al Fayed. For Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998: 158), the construction of spontaneous memorials is a result of survivors’ need to grieve. Spontaneous memorials are constructed following trauma in the recent past. As such, they are unofficial and not bound by the rigid guidelines governing official memorials. Such memorials are “expressions of pure vernacular culture” and deal with “incidents in the very recent past (sometimes only a few hours or days past)” (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti 1998: 153). These mnemonic initiatives often precede official memorial sites (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti 1998: 153). Spontaneous (and unofficial) commemoration is a relatively new practice, but one that has become increasingly common (Osborne 2001: 80). For Senie (1999: 25) this type of memorial is “[a way] for people
to mark their own history [that ... creates] a public space for communities united in grief and sometimes anger.” These spaces mark and set aside places that have been “the scene of violent death” (Senie 1999: 25). Spontaneous commemorative sites however, are usually temporary and “fulfill an immediate public need before the more formal and official modes of commemoration are established” (Osborne 2001: 60). These unofficial sites of memory have preceded their official counterparts at Columbine High School, the World Trade Center, the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City and the Cromaño nightclub in Buenos Aires.

Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998) suggest these spaces are part of the grieving process. In most of these cases, we are talking about the deaths of children, which, on any occasion is especially difficult to comprehend. Commemoration (and ritual) in the wake of tragic loss helps add order to uncontrollable situations (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti 1998: 153). These authors link the construction of spontaneous memorials to our cultural treatment of and low tolerance of public grief. They suggest, that when there is wider trauma, there is a sense that the community will not mourn the dead, so the survivors move their grief from the private to the public sphere. Through this emphasis on grief, Doss (2002) notes that criticism of the situations that led to the violent deaths at Columbine and the Murrah building is largely absent from both the spontaneous memorials and the official ones constructed in their places. Doss (2002) notes that very little attention at these sites is devoted to critiquing the situations that made these events possible in the first place. Healing appears to be the first priority.

These memorials are makeshift, eclectic and usually temporary. They are often filled with mementos belonging to the victims. Mementos on the fence surrounding the Murrah building in Oklahoma included

- stuffed animals, teddy bears, plastic flowers, laminated poems, hand-drawn pictures, religious mementos, military medals and patches with notes like ‘I serve for you,’
hundreds of ‘What would Jesus do?’ bracelets, and more. Local residents who lost family and friends in the blast added personal belongings (toys, photographs, baby blankets, prom flowers) and, claiming particular areas of the fence, regularly attended to those mementos (Doss 2002: 66).

The shrine at Columbine High School was similar, only with more religious mementos.

However, there was conflict around one aspect of the makeshift shrine. A Chicago carpenter had set up fifteen crosses at the site, one for each of the victims including the shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (Doss 2002: 69). Those two crosses were later defaced and debate erupted around who should be remembered at the site. The father of one of the victims eventually tore down the crosses for Harris and Klebold (Doss 2002: 71).

Unofficial memorials are often temporary and later co-opted or replaced by their official, more permanent counterparts. But, even official memorials are not free from popular influence. Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti (1998: 152) mention the “vernacular co-opting” of the official Vietnam Memorial in the Washington Mall where visitors to the memorial leave medals, flags, and mementos of various sorts. At such a time, the official memorial (temporarily) becomes a place of both popular (unofficial) and official memory. The univocal official monument becomes multi-vocal (at least temporarily) (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti 1998: 152). Although quite different, the unofficial (spontaneous) memorial and the official (often traditional) monument are not entirely separate from one another. In fact, they often overlap and there is often conflict between the two spaces. This will be explored more thoroughly in the chapter about the Cromañón nightclub in Buenos Aires.

Contentious Memory

As “culturally-loaded geographies” (Osborne 2001: 47), landscapes of memory are always open to alternative readings than those intended by their designers. However, during periods of
political, economic or symbolic change, the ‘normality’ of certain practices, power relations and narratives instructed by the elite are more apt to be questioned (Till 2003: 294). For instance, in times of change, groups or new authorities enact symbolic change such as the renaming of streets or the replacement or removal of statues. For example, in the Soviet Union, statues of Vladimir Lenin were removed and Lenigrad was renamed; more recently, American soldiers in Iraq symbolically toppled a large statue of Saddam Hussein. The re-working of the landscape is an ongoing process and memory materialized in place in the form of memorials is not immune to challenge. The landscape must not be thought of as ‘just there,’ rather as power concretized in the built environment. It is “never inert [and] people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it and contest it” (Bender 1993: 3, cited in Osborne 2001: 49). Whelan (2002: 509) explains how (official) monuments serve to legitimate authority, but notes that they can also be used to challenge that same power. People recognize them as symbols of power and as such, they are also “a useful target for those who wish to demonstrate opposition” (Whelan 2002: 509). Rather than being the site of “shared national values and ideals,” as was intended during the rise of the monument in the 19th century, “the monument has increasingly become the site of contested and competing meanings” (Young 2000: 119). The groups of memory entrepreneurs contest the dominant meanings of symbolic spaces and sites of trauma as they attempt to inscribe these spaces with alternative narratives of the past and alternative ‘senses of place.’

The tactics of the ‘memory entrepreneurs’ (Jelin 2003) or ‘memory warriors’ (Kenny 1999) consist of various strategies and tactics. The common denominator appears to be

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14 I use De Certeau’s definitions of strategies and tactics here, to refer to the actions of memory entrepreneurs to ‘blow by blow’ challenge the dominant meanings of place and dominant interpretations of the past. I understand ‘tactics’ to mean opportunistic, seized on the fly, often spontaneous actions. They are a kind of hijacking or poaching and take advantage of situations. Tactics belong to the marginal and generally, are not fixed in any particular location. Strategies, on the other hand, belong to the realm of power and can be linked to a specific nexus of power. Tactics are used not to transform or overhaul the system of power, but to work within it to modify the
visibility in a way that memory "irrupts" in everyday life and in everyday landscapes, both at the site of trauma, and elsewhere in the city. Memories 'irrupt' both vocally, and visually on the landscape, in the forms of demonstrations that occupy public spaces, graphic demonstrations such as unofficial monuments, installations and graffiti. While I focus on the unofficial mnemonic initiatives, it is important to note that there is often pressure to turn these unofficial initiatives into more permanent initiatives that would displace other narratives of the past.

Alexander Wilde (1999) refers to sudden conflicts about the past in the present as "irruptions of memory." The past, he suggests, interrupts the present around key anniversaries, discoveries of new information about the past, ceremonies and book publications among other events that remind the public of the traumatic past (1999: 475). Wilde's irruptions of memory refer to Chile after Pinochet and the deep divisions of society following the end of his rule. However, Wilde's term can be applied more generally to places affected by a traumatic past where division about the past continues, such as Argentina, Chile or Uruguay following the dictatorships of the 70s and 80s (as well as elsewhere in Latin America), Germany following the Holocaust, South Africa following Apartheid or Japan following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the massacre in Nanking (regrettably, this list is not easily exhausted). Wilde's 'irruptions of memory' are defined as "public events that break in upon Chile's national consciousness, unbidden and often suddenly, to evoke associations with symbols, figures, causes, ways of life which to an unusual degree are associated with a political past that is still present in the lived experience of the majority of the population" (Wilde 1999: 471). As Wilde's phrase suggests, the past in the present is not steady and continuous, but rather sporadic and unpredictable. I apply the idea to a more general context of memory and trauma to refer to any situation, if only slightly improving the lot of the weak. Tactics are the "ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong" (De Certeau 2002: 63-75).
case where the past breaks into, or disrupts the present because of multiple versions of a traumatic past, inadequate or inappropriate institutional treatment of the past and in many cases, the partiality of justice.

It is this failure of ‘adequate’ and ‘appropriate’ institutional treatment of past trauma that has plagued Argentina and Uruguay (Roniger and Sznajder 1998). Such failures cause the recent past to haunt or irrupt in the present. Roniger and Sznajder (1998: 161) also suggest that in Argentina and Uruguay, there are few official sites of memory, and as a result, memory surfaces unofficially in time and space. The memory work that surfaces in the “symbolic” or “unofficial” realm is a reaction to the ‘inadequate’ and ‘inappropriate’ institutional treatment of the past. This failure, Roniger and Sznajder (1998: 141) suggest, is a result of the “initial expectations” of truth commissions in the two nations, and the “partial institutional solutions” that followed. The least favourable “institutional solutions” in Argentina included the Final Point/ Punto Final law which set a deadline beyond which offences committed during the dictatorship could no longer be tried, the Due Obedience/ Obediencia Debida law which prevented punishment of military or police who were “following orders,” the eventual amnesty granted to convicted military, police and collaborators by president Carlos Menem, as well as the absence of a full disclosure of the ‘truth’ and acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the military and police.

Periods such as the democratic “thaw” following the 1976-83 dictatorship in Argentina or the 1990s following the fall of Augusto Pinochet in Chile usher in a period more conducive to the transmission of particular memories, namely those insisted upon by the various groups of leftists, human rights workers, survivors and families of victims, essentially those censored and repressed under military rule. Strategies for collective memory intensify around periods of political change, such as the transition to democracy following the end of a military dictatorship.
In this kind of ‘space,’ groups can discuss previously censored topics. These periods are characterized by a plurality of discourses about the past where different memory workers attempt to make their version of the past more central (Jelin 2003: 29).

Actors in the various struggles over memory attempt to “establish/convince/transmit their narrative, so that others will accept it” (Jelin 2003: 26). Through this process, groups and individuals claim a certain “right” to the past, and a “right” to determine how the past should be remembered. Various groups claim different connections to the past — such as witnesses to the past, people who “inherited” the past from family members killed under past repression, academics who study the past, as well as those in authority (Jelin 2003: 26-7). Jelin also remarks that different groups claim a ‘privileged’ link to the past and she refers to these groups as the “owners” of memory (2003: 26-7). In regards to political figures, she claims “agents of the state have a central role and special weight because of their power in relation to establishing and developing an ‘official history/memory’” (Jelin 2003: 26-7). Groups address the past with various levels of effectiveness and appropriateness, determined of course by the public and other memory workers, but initiatives such as President Carlos Menem’s plan to demolish the Navy Mechanics School (a notorious torture centre) have been largely criticized as inappropriate.

Division between groups of memory entrepreneurs exist and shape memory work in societies following periods of trauma. Groups do not always agree on who should be remembered or how past events should be recalled. ‘Mnemonic battles’ occur when there is disagreement “over the ‘correct’ way to interpret the past” (Zerubavel 1996: 295). These divisions are “[power struggles] around knowledge or claims to knowledge” (Crews 1995; cited in Kenny 1999: 421). At no point should the “mnemonic battles” (Zerubavel 1996) or “memory wars” (Kenny 1999) be seen as struggles between united groups of memory entrepreneurs.
against the state. The memory wars and memory battles, while often confronting national strategies of remembrance (or oblivion), also occur between groups of different memory entrepreneurs. Conflict is inevitable in memory work as “groups and individuals may struggle with one another to gain authority to represent their version of the past in the built environment” (Till 2003: 290). Differences on the politics of commemoration are not uncommon. Till (2005: 1-2) discusses debates about the construction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in central Berlin. While various groups supported its construction, there have been disagreements over the location, form, function and method of commemoration of the memorial. But there have also been disagreements about the memorial’s construction. As she describes, the Schlußstrich citizen group “advocates discussion about the continued presence of anti-Semitism and xenophobia in contemporary Germany” (Till 2005: 1-2). The group supports continued discussion about the past and feels that such a memorial is “symptomatic of contemporary Germans’ desire to put an end to discussions about their social responsibility for the past” (Till 2005: 2).

The location (along with form and function) of museums, memorials and monuments is especially contentious following recent trauma, or when the past is characterized by multiple and conflicting discourses. Places mean different things to different people so when there are deep divisions over the past, attempts to materialize particular memories in contested spaces is met with opposition. When there are few ‘official’ mnemonic sites, memory entrepreneurs and their projects are relegated to the ‘symbolic realm’ (Roniger and Sznadjer 1998; Jelin 2003). Detention centres from Argentina’s dictatorship such as the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA) and El Olimpo have been at the centre of struggles over memory and struggles over place (see

Power and Resistance

In addition to speaking of memories of the past in the plural form, it is also useful to think of resistances instead of resistance in the singular form (Routledge 1997). Also, the discussion of collective memory(ies) cannot be separated from a discussion of resistance(s) as the two are very much linked: challenges to collective memory are challenges to the dominant narrative. Swedenburg (1995: 76) implies that the simple recollection of alternative memories is an act of resistance because it signals a refusal to comply with the dominant (Israeli in this case) view. This is to say nothing of more radical strategies such as the occupation of spaces associated with traumatic events, the unofficial renaming of city streets or alterations to the landscape through street art. Routledge (1997: 69) provides a strong introduction to resistances and their multiple forms:

Resistances are assembled out of the materials and practices of everyday life, and imply some form of contestation, some juxtaposition of forces. These may involve all or any of the following: symbolic meanings, communicative processes, political discourses, religious idioms, cultural practices, social networks, physical settings, bodily practices, and envisioned desires and hopes. These actions may be open and confrontational, or hidden (see Scott 1985, 1990) and range from the individual to the collective. Their different forms of expression can be of short or long duration; metaphoric, interconnected, or hybrid; creative or self-destructive; challenging the status quo [...] or conservative (Routledge 1997: 69, based on Calderón 1992: 23).

Resistances to dominant memories in Buenos Aires are characterized by several of these traits, and resistances involve both hidden and confrontational expressions of discontent. For Scott (1990), the more common acts of resistance are not the head-on confrontations with the powerful, but the everyday resistance under the guise of compliance. Resistance is not always
transformative. Alternatively, the purpose of everyday resistance is to mitigate some of the material appropriation of domination and to respond to regular attacks on one’s personal dignity (Scott 1990: 117). Everyday resistance includes things such as foot-dragging or pilfering (Scott 1990), whereas head-on resistance signals an open expression of disobedience. The consequences of open confrontation vary in different historical periods. Confrontation may be violently quashed in one era (such as the dictatorship in Argentina) but more or less tolerated in another (such as the present in Argentina). Scott (1990: 205) suggests, openly confrontational resistance is more risky than hidden resistance. For Jelin (2003), certain periods are more hospitable to the transmission of alternative narratives of the past. Scott (1990: 210) also suggests there are temporal contexts more conducive to speaking out against domination.

It is not necessary that an open refusal to comply be transformative because it can have intense symbolic power. According to Scott (1990: 205), it “pierces the smooth surface of apparent consent.” The meaning of such an act is socially constructed, and thus subject to attempts by various groups, including the dominant and other marginal groups, to define the act of defiance. The elite may ignore it or belittle it while the marginal may invest it with intense symbolic importance. It may become a rallying point or inspiration for future insubordination. According to Scott (1990: 206) “the political struggle to impose a definition on an action and to make it stick is frequently at least as important as the action per se.”

The open refusal to comply with dominant power is a moment of ‘personal authentication’ for the performer (Scott 1990: 208). It also “seems to restore a sense of self-respect and personhood” (Scott 1990: 210). At the level of the group then, acts of collective resistance help to establish or to restore a sense of purpose, competence and reaffirm group identity. Scott (1990: 203) also distinguishes between the ‘practical failure to comply’ and the
'declared refusal to comply.' The practical failure could be an accidental failure to comply with the dominant, but the public refusal is unmistakably a “throwing down of the gauntlet, a symbolic declaration of war” (Scott 1990: 203). The latter poses a clear and intentional threat to domination (Scott 1990: 203).

An act of open defiance can become extremely powerful. It is difficult to ignore, and even if the performer is sanctioned, Scott (1990: 215) explains, “something irrevocable has nonetheless occurred. It is now public knowledge that relations of subordination, however immovable in practice, are not entirely legitimate.” Similarly, traces of the incident may remain in people’s memory. Despite dominant attempts to raze evidence of transgression from the landscape (such as the erasure of graffiti or landscapes of memory), traces of the memory of resistance (even if the act of resistance was quashed) may remain (Swedenburg 1995; Routledge 1997: 85). Aspects of past resistance may inspire resistance in the future (Routledge 1997: 85). Similarly, Scott (1990: 227) writes, “If, of course, the first act of defiance meets with a decisive defeat it is unlikely to be emulated by others. The courage of those who fail, however, is likely to be noted, admired, and even mythologized in stories of bravery, social banditry, and noble sacrifice.”

Throughout this project, several people have asked me why Argentine authorities permit groups to block a street for months on end, or to deface buildings with graffiti. Others inquire as to why the popular memory entrepreneurs, piqueteros, or other groups devote so much time and energy to struggle. I can only speculate here, but the answer may lie in a pervasive sense of frustration among Argentines. The repressive dictatorship, followed by Menem’s back to back terms and then an economic crisis have all added to the sense that one has very little control over his/her life. To be free of the state’s authority or to overhaul it completely is unlikely, even
through direct confrontation. However, as Thiele (1990: 922) remarks, the agonal and seemingly futile struggles may be more important to the average citizen than “heroic manifestation[s] of freedom.” The struggles of some Argentine memory entrepreneurs and certainly the piqueteros are better understood as “the more or less continuous acts of resistance and political struggle that serve to loosen the hold of power enough that glimpses of freedom are made possible” (Thiele 1990: 922-3). I agree more or less with this concept of ‘agonal struggle,’ but feel in this particular context, that it requires some qualification. I do not mean to suggest that these struggles are entirely unproductive. To the contrary, regular struggle has yielded varying results. It is possible that the truth commission would not have been created, or that community groups may not have gained access to former detention centres, or that the political impeachment of Anibal Ibarra might not have proceeded as it did had it not been for regular, agonal struggle.

Again, like collective memory, resistance must be considered in relation to spatiality. Above, I mentioned the emotional attachment people have with certain spaces and the positive or negative ‘sense of place.’ Because of these conflicts and strong attachments to place, “particular places frequently become the sites of conflict where the social structures and relations of power, knowledge, domination and resistance intersect” (Routledge 1997: 70). Tensions arise out of the different and conflicting uses of space, as well as the “domination of space by the state and other forms of class and social power” (Routledge 1997: 70). In regards to space, Routledge (1997) discusses the ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘territorialization’ practices of resistance movements. Deterritorialization does not openly confront power and is more secretive, employs underground tactics and relies on surprise. Deterritorializtion practices involve the moving across space rather than the occupying of space. This is usually the style of tactic used by smaller groups. By contrast, territorialization involves the temporary or permanent occupation of space by resistance
movements, and usually involves larger numbers of people. The ‘swarm-like’ characteristics of movements using territorialization means that they can openly confront dominant power because there is strength in numbers. Territorialization includes the physical, symbolic, political or cultural occupation of space (Routledge 1997: 76). Graffiti have characteristics of both deterritorialization and territorialization. Graffiti occupy space and often last much longer than street protests. On the one hand, graffiti writing can openly challenge power (especially when a large number of people are involved). On the other hand, while graffiti tends to remain after the crowds have left, without the crowds, they lack the same power and fizzle into indirect confrontation. Basically, the act of graffiti writing, especially when in the presence of the powerful, represents a direct confrontation with authority, but graffiti in the landscape (without their human creators) only indirectly confronts the powerful.

Routledge (1997: 78) also suggests that resistance movements are often conscious of ‘the spatial’ and used this ‘spatial knowledge’ to design and execute their acts of resistance. The ‘spatial practices’ of the marginal lead to a ‘spatial’ reaction by the dominant who in turn attempts to regain control of the space in question (Routledge 1997: 80). Of particular importance to this study, is that “the practices of resistance can change the meaning of particular places” (Routledge 1997: 85).

**Challenging Dominant Memories through Street Art**

Unofficial mnemonic initiatives, and street art or graffiti more specifically, question the ‘naturalness’ and authority of dominant mnemonic initiatives. And, while official monuments seek to present a unified narrative of the past to the public, there is tension between the official and unofficial because of the plurality of public memory. Moreover, like their official
counterparts, unofficial mnemonic initiatives are strongly linked to the question of place. Street art is referred to elsewhere in discussions of collective memory, but it rarely takes centre stage. An interesting anecdote at the beginning of Till’s *The New Berlin* (2005: 1-3) refers to a fence surrounding an empty lot which was the future site of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The fence, covered with posters and political graffiti on the busiest corner, revealed multiple sentiments about the construction of the memorial. Lyman Chaffee (1989: 53-4) recounts the elaborate painting of the tall white Obelisk at the centre of Buenos Aires on April 22, 1985, the night before the trials for persons involved in human rights abuses during the dictatorship were set to begin. An unidentified group painted the Obelisk with the names of the 1200 hundred people listed in the report by the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP). The names were followed by a graffito saying the 1200 should be tried and that no amnesty should be granted (Chaffee 1989: 54).

My intention here is to bring street art to the forefront in a discussion of collective memory and to explore how it is used to question the ‘naturalness’ of spaces associated with dominant powers, as well as to ‘instruct’ different versions of the past. I begin with a rather basic definition of graffiti from Tristan Manco (2002) and then move through several other definitions and discuss the relationship of street art to collective memory. Manco (2002: 9) links the word ‘graffiti’ to the Italian word ‘to scratch’ and the Greek word ‘to write’ and uses the term generally to refer to “drawings or scribblings on a flat surface.” He also links graffiti to “those marks found on ancient roman architecture” but places the term (and practice) in “the twentieth century urban environment, where it covers anything from simple marks to complex and colourful compositions” (2002: 9). Manco’s broad definition is quite inclusive, encompassing
“all styles from tags to political graffiti, and all methods from spray cans, paint brushes and marker-pens to stickers and stencils” (2002: 9).

Chaffee (1993, 1989, 1986) has written specifically about graffiti in various South American nations and the Basque region in Spain. He is interested primarily in the political graffiti in these areas and suggests graffiti (street art) is a low-technological form of mass communication. He emphasizes the acceptance of street art in the Hispanic world and claims that in such places it “is utilized by a cross-section of collectives and the state to inform and persuade” and that one of the functions of street art is to form “social consciousness” (1993: 3).

Armando Silva (1987) devises a more extensive definition of graffiti listing seven qualities necessary for a street text to be classified as graffiti. If the text does not possess all seven qualities, he argues it is therefore not graffiti. I draw at length on Silva’s (1987) definition here because it is very specific, but also because it is based on graffiti in South America. Graffiti, he claims, makes public that which cannot be published elsewhere for various reasons ranging from the lack of other medium appropriate to the message, a target audience that is best reached in the street, or “because legal, moral, or social factors prevent its expression in any other form” (Silva 1987, translated in Brungardt 1993). Graffiti for Silva (1987: 32), is always anonymous. It also comes from a desire to express oneself and is spontaneous (without pre-meditation). He implies there are various strategies involved in graffiti writing including considerations of location, style and colour. Speed is also a factor as the author is conscious of avoiding authorities. The instruments of graffiti writing are precarious, stemming from the fact that they must be relatively inexpensive, easy to transport (and I might add conceal) and relatively simple to use. Lastly, graffiti according to Silva is ephemeral, and writing is never a guarantee of permanence (Silva 1987: 33).
Within the context of memory struggles in South America, and for the purpose of this project, I disagree with Silva on a number of points. Namely, within the work of the various memory campaigns, graffiti (or street art) is often but not always anonymous. It is occasionally signed by a group name such as a trade union or social movement. The specific author in this case remains anonymous, but the ideas are attributed to a group of people. Even in cases where the texts are unsigned, they can sometimes be traced back to a particular group based on the actual message (the phrase may be associated with a particular group) or aesthetics of the graffiti. For instance, certain colours are associated with particular groups, such as light blue and white for the Peronist movements or red and white for the Socialist Party. In graffiti not relating to collective memory, the “I-love-so-and-so” variety is often not anonymous. It is often signed, but this information is typically meaningless to observers, as the given names of the couple do no divulge identity. These are generally private messages – declarations of love and emotion between two people that are inscribed in public spaces.

Although I agree to some extent with Silva’s (1987: 31) first point, that graffiti makes public that which cannot be published elsewhere, I think it is useful here to add something that refers to graffiti’s alteration of the landscape with particular reference to the graffiti at the sites of this study. In some cases, graffiti or street art exists because it cannot, for various reasons, be written elsewhere. In the case of memory of trauma, it may not be ‘publishable’ elsewhere because it is not an ‘official’ or hegemonic memory, and quite possibly exists in opposition to those memories that are written elsewhere. Additionally, we must not overlook the spatial aspect of graffiti. Graffiti, especially the mnemonic variety, are placed in sites not necessarily because the messages cannot be published elsewhere, but because an important aspect of the realization of the messages is to alter the landscape, to make a claim to that particular site or to point out
(escrachar) something about that space. For instance, messages written on *El Olimpo* between the late 1990s and the present claiming "People were tortured here" or "El Olimpo – Former clandestine detention centre," are messages that are found elsewhere. *Nunca Más*, the report which followed the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), was published in English in 1986. In Spanish, it was first published in 1984. Much of the information found in the graffiti, especially at *El Olimpo*, can be found in other sources. The intent in placing this information in these particular spaces is to bring this information out of the books and archives and to locate it in the landscape to which it refers. What is the effect of locating such as message as "People were tortured here" on *El Olimpo*, when the same information can be found in a book? The answer again relates to space and landscape. Such messages take an everyday landscape, a city block in a residential neighbourhood that might otherwise appear ‘normal,’ and expose its relationship to Argentina’s ‘dirty war.’ The effect is powerful, especially when we consider that the ‘everyday-ness’ and apparent ‘natural-ness’ of such buildings extends back to the very years of the dictatorship when the unimaginable, the unspeakable, the horrific took place in the ordinary, everyday landscape (and that the clandestine uses of these buildings were often not known by neighbours). Marking the ordinary as the site of torture, death and disappearance has another effect as the marking impedes forgetting whether this is casual forgetting or its more sinister sibling, coerced or encouraged forgetting. Graffiti such as "Here they tortured" and "Federal Police of Argentina – 1500 deaths" function like Wilde’s "irruptions of memory" (1999) where the past spills into and disrupts the present following inadequate and/or partial institutional treatment of the past. The unexpectedness of the messages and their disruption of the present is part of what makes them effective and memorable. They are unavoidable, and difficult to ignore (although the comic in *Pagina/12* suggests a sort of immunity to sites of
traumatic memory in Argentina, what Elizabeth Jelin calls the ‘saturation of memory’ (2003: 36), this is perhaps, an issue for another time).

While it remains true that speed is a factor in graffiti writing, in Argentina the author is not always faced with the same risk or punishment if apprehended in Canada or the United States. When graffiti is painted during protests or demonstrations, there is less risk of ‘getting caught.’ At the end of October 2005, a week before the Summit of the Americas was to begin in Mar del Plata (bringing thirty-four heads of state to Argentina, including George W. Bush and the foreign press), I found the Monumento a los dos Congresos to be almost completely free of graffiti. It appeared foreign and out of place. I had only ever known the monument to be painted with very expressive and aggressive messages as it stood facing the clean National Congress. As I stood beside the National Congress, I engaged a police officer protecting the Congress in a conversation through the security fence that protects the historic building. I had tried to get him to divulge that the monument had been cleaned for the arrival of the American president, but he was not easy to fool. He humoured me for a bit, and was intrigued by my persistent interest in the monument. Finally, he asked me “Querés pintar un grafiti?” or “do you want to paint graffiti?” This was a police officer asking me if I wanted to deface a newly cleaned national monument, as he and his coworkers stood by and watched. I humoured him in return, explaining although I had never before had the urge, that I was then overwhelmed with the desire to paint the tall white tower facing the Congress with the words (in Spanish) “this monument was cleaned for the arrival of George W. Bush.” However I explained, for a variety of reasons, I just could not do it, especially with the police watching, even though he assured me that nothing would happen.
In regards to Silva’s (1987: 32-3) point about the speed necessary for graffiti writing, I agree that this is often a factor, disagree that speed is important for graffiti writing only because the author runs the risk of being caught. This may be the case in more contentious spaces, or guarded spaces such as the actual Congress, the Casa Rosada, the City Legislature, the Supreme Court and the Navy Mechanics School. However, speed is also a factor when the author has a large territory to cover, such as stencilling the length of Avenida de Mayo or writing graffiti during a demonstration or procession that moves from one location to another.

Elsewhere in the world graffiti writing is used to challenge dominant power and accordingly, to challenge dominant histories and popular memories of the past. Among the many functions of graffiti in Israeli-occupied Palestine, Palestinian graffiti “simultaneously reaffirmed community and resistance, debated tradition, envisioned competing futures, indexed historical events and processes, and inscribed memory” (Peteet 1996: 140-1). Most relevant to this discussion on collective memory following trauma is how graffiti was used by the Intifada to commemorate martyrdom (Peteet 1996: 141). Graffiti writers working with incredible risk inscribed the names of martyrs in public spaces, but in doing so, they also made statements about who had the authority to decide who was and who was not a martyr, as well as determining how the individual should be recalled (Peteet 1996: 153). In such a way, Palestinian heroes could be entered into public memory despite the Israeli occupation; Peteet (1996: 153) remarks that in writing about the martyrs, graffiti writers ‘promised memory.’

It may be useful here to revisit Cresswell’s (1996) remarks on the changing meaning of place. In this first instance, if the Israeli occupation were to continue, particularly if it was to proceed without contest, the meaning of Palestine would change. In such a case, if the meaning of Palestine changed, then the place itself would change, the new meaning would be Israeli
meaning, and Palestine itself would be Israeli territory, if only symbolically. Within this, I think it is important to note that if the place changed, and if the meaning of the place became ‘their’ meaning, all aspects of that place, including the dominant public memory, would change. Graffiti of the Intifada is largely symbolic. Petee (1996: 142) emphasizes how quickly messages were erased because they were written under censorship. As such, graffiti challenged Israeli authority and signalled a refusal to recognize Israeli authority (Petee 1996: 143). Graffiti in this case, “signalled a refusal to acquiesce” and graffiti represented “an open challenge to Israel’s monopoly on the circulation of information and knowledge” (Petee 1996: 153). The graffiti of the Intifada presented a challenge to the dominant power and questioned their authority. This act of resistance questioned official authority by working within the ‘unofficial’ or ‘symbolic’ realm. The graffiti remained for short periods, such as days or mere hours, as opposed to the longer duration (generally speaking) of graffiti in Buenos Aires. But within such a short time, the messages of the Intifada questioned the ‘naturalness’ of Israeli order. The Palestinian messages interrupted space strongly associated with Israeli identity, questioned the symbolic boundaries of these spaces controlled by Israelis and challenged who had the right to define what was considered in place and out of place (Cresswell 1996: 39).

When appeals to government in regards to past trauma fail in the political realm (such as demands for the construction of a museum for memory or demands for punishment of former repressors), issues are forced into the ‘symbolic realm’ (Jelin 1994: 49). The lack of (adequate) institutional treatment of the past causes issues related to past trauma to surface in the streets. When all else fails at the official level, the past is kept alive through graffiti and other ‘unofficial’ initiatives that take place in public spaces. In a post-traumatic society, Jelin (1994: 52) suggests the use of symbolism in mnemonic strategies, such as the silhouettes of human
rights groups, the headscarves of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo or unofficial monuments in the streets, “[come] out of the need for traumatic experiences to be somehow elaborated, brought to a close.” For Roniger and Sznajder (1998: 141), struggles in the symbolic realm are a result of the inability to reach a consensus about the past and about the inability to adequately address the past at the institutional level.

Writing in 1998, Roniger and Sznajder suggested that in Argentina and Uruguay there was an “almost total lack of physical places of commemoration” (1998: 161). This void is filled by the ‘symbolic’ and the ‘unofficial’ and is evident in the graffiti and unofficial monuments, murals and banners that call for remembrance of various interpretations of the past. Since 1998, at least in Argentina, public officials have taken more steps towards ‘official’ commemorative sites, but as we will see in the case of the Cromañón fire, these are not without their critics. The criticism is no longer the lack of commemorative spaces, but the lack of commemorative spaces deemed ‘appropriate’ by the various groups of memory entrepreneurs.

Graffiti is involved with various aspects of memory work in Argentina. It is because of the widespread use of street art (I use street art as an encompassing term to refer to graffiti as defined above, including murals and installations), that I have taken it as the focus for this project. Mnemonic street art, as Chaffee (1993) has suggested of political graffiti, communicates the existence of an opposition (or multiple oppositions) and is a popular form of communication. It also indicates the existence of memory(ies) in a society where memory has historically been devalued, ignored and contested. Multiple memories contest more hegemonic or ‘official’ memories. Graffiti is used to help remember traumatic pasts, to pay homage to the dead, and to recall anniversaries of trauma so that this information is transmitted. Graffiti is used to articulate mnemonic narratives and to help gain support for particular versions of the past, to notify others
of events such as marches, vigils, anniversaries or demonstrations, and to point out (escrachar) something about someone or some place. Graffiti is used to claim or reclaim specific places and to articulate a new ‘sense of place.’ The transmission of memory to a wider audience and to future generations, all ensuring the survival of memory, is facilitated by messages inscribed in public spaces.

**Selection of Field Sites**

The selection of sites for this project was a process that evolved over a number of years. Initially, I developed a list of sites to consider and visit in the preliminary stages of the project in July 2003. These were selected based on photographs of the National Congress received from an old friend, articles about former detention centres in the capital, and the work of Lyman Chaffee (1993; 1990; 1989; 1986) in which he outlines a number of places in Buenos Aires that are frequent targets of graffiti. My thesis proposal focused on the spaces I had selected in this way, but much of this changed when I began my fieldwork in July 2005. Throughout the data collection phase, I allowed myself to be flexible with the locations of focus. I entertained a number of suggestions from friends as well as people on the street who stopped to ask what I was doing. I found a number of good ‘leads’ this way. I also ‘listened’ to the graffiti in one particular case and this led me to another site of interest that I would not have considered otherwise. After a few bewildering days in the field, I realized that a lot of the messages in various places were referring to the December 2004 nightclub fire at La República Cromañón. The graffiti itself, and suggestions from a few Argentines, led me to the former nightclub near Estación Once and Plaza Miserere.
I had a long list of places to visit, and had not realized how much time I would need to invest in documenting, transcribing and interpreting the graffiti in each. However, in those three weeks, I visited a number of sites in addition to those studied here, such as the AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina), the Jewish community centre that was the target of a terrorist car-bombing in 1994. Almost daily, I walked through the banking district which is spray painted regularly with graffiti relating to the corralón\textsuperscript{15} and economic crisis in late 2001. I wandered around several faculties of the University of Buenos Aires and revisited the Pueyrredón Bridge in Avellaneda where piquetero groups stage their protests, and where the police pursuit of Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki began. I frequently travelled the Avenida de Mayo, the busy street connecting Plaza Congreso and the Plaza de Mayo and the most common route for protests of various types. On different occasions, I located the excavated site of former detention centre El Club Atletico and the Navy Mechanics School complex (ESMA) which is the most notorious former detention centre an ominous reminder of the military dictatorship.

For various reasons, I cut the list down to the five sites which make up this project. The Navy Mechanics School (ESMA) had been one of the sites in which I had anticipated finding a great deal of graffiti. I was hugely disappointed and shocked when I finally visited the ESMA and found that there was no graffiti. An interesting series of metal silhouettes had been bolted to the iron fence in front of the ESMA, but these were obviously part of a more organized initiative, and probably one that had been granted permission by the authorities. The ESMA was and is undergoing a transition, as the complex is converted into a Museum of Memory following President Kirchner’s March 24, 2003 announcement to this effect. The silhouettes operate in a

\textsuperscript{15} Corralón or Corralito literally means “small enclosure” or “playpen”. This term was applied to former Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo’s December 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2001 decision to limit withdrawals from private bank accounts to $250 AR per week. (At the time, the peso remained pegged to the US dollar in a one-to-one ratio) (Lopéz Levy 2004: 11). Later that month, the government devalued the peso, converted savings in dollars to pesos, and devalued savings trapped in the Corralito.
way similar to that of the graffiti in that they point out what happened there, and mark this space as a former detention centre. I found it quite unbelievable that there was no graffiti on the cement and iron fence surrounding the ESMA, and upon closer inspection, I noticed that at some point, there had been posters as well as spray painted graffiti, but they had all been removed or someone had painted over them. Eventually, I did find two very miniscule graffiti, written in pencil letters no larger than one centimetre in height. The two messages were written with the same letters and because of their size, appeared to have been written cautiously. They read: “1976 Never Again!” and “30,000 Reasons to Continue Struggling, Never Again – Miguel”.

As I moved towards a focus on memory following trauma, a number of the sites emerged as being more central than others, including the five in this study, but also the ESMA, El Club Atlético and the Pueyrredón Bridge. The ESMA was dropped from the project for the reasons stated above. In the beginning, I had hoped to use either El Atlético or El Olimpo. When I did my initial reading and preparation for the fieldwork, I was under the impression that both El Atlético and El Olimpo were highly contested spaces; this was based on a handful of somewhat dated articles by Elizabeth Jelin. The excavation of El Atlético and the conversion of this space to a place of memory (although surrounded by a fence and watched by a security guard) seem much less contentious than recent efforts to convert El Olimpo into a community space and a space for memory. Only recently, and following my fieldwork, were members of the public permitted to enter this former detention centre. While I conducted my fieldwork, numerous cues, aside from the graffiti, suggested that this space was a source of conflict within the community. The most obvious cue was the man who seemed to be observing my friend, Silvia and I, and who walked past, with his fist closed as if holding a radio and spoke into his hand as if reporting and said: “Reporting, two females taking pictures at El Olimpo.” Silvia later explained to me that his tone,
gestures and lexical choice all indicated that he supported the police and/or the military, as all were behaviours linked with these groups. For instance, the use of “females” and not one of the many words for “women” in Spanish corresponds to the language used by military or police.

I had also hoped to use the Pueyrredón Bridge for my thesis after another friend of mine brought me to see the magnificent mural of Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki at the Avellaneda end of the bridge (see figure 25). The bridge links Avellaneda, a working class barrio in the province of Buenos Aires, with the separately governed, independent federal district of Buenos Aires. The volume of traffic moving across the bridge is high. It is, therefore, frequently the site of piquetero road blocks during which protesters demand wage subsidies or social security from the government. It was during one of these protests where the police pursuit of Darío and Maxi began. However, I had considered the bridge as part of my project before I visited the train station in Avellaneda, where the two protesters were shot by police. In truth, I had never considered going to the train station. I had not imagined that there would be so much graffiti there, and that what was there would be so powerful and so uniformly about Darío and Maxi and police repression. My greatest hesitation about working in Avellaneda related to safety, as I was completely unfamiliar with the area and because I knew that I was safer the city and than in the province. However, Silvia offered to accompany me here as well. I remain indebted to her as without her assistance two of the most important case studies in this project would have been missed. She also persuaded the staff at the station to permit us to wander around the station and take pictures. Collecting data around the bridge also proved more difficult than in the train station, mostly because the graffiti is spread over quite a large area, and I found it difficult to decide where I would document graffiti and where I would not. The decision was much easier in
the train station. Excluding the platforms, the station is very small. Within the station, the graffiti are concentrated in the two main rooms.

My fieldwork in July coincided with the anniversary of the AMIA car-bombing. Posters throughout the downtown area caused me to think there might be graffiti there. Small plaques engraved with the names of victims line Pasteur Street for several blocks near the AMIA. The names have also been tidily painted on the exterior of the new building. There appear to be traces of graffiti on the asphalt but none of it remains visible. I think it is quite likely that this graffiti was from a previous anniversary or rally. There is heavy security at the AMIA (especially around the anniversary) and I was warned by police and security not to take photographs. On one of my last days in Buenos Aires, I attended the anniversary vigil and I was intrigued how here, like the street signs near Cromañón, the street names at one intersection had been unofficially changed to “Anti-Semitism” and “Impunity.”

Data Collection and Methodology

Data for this project was collected between June 28 and July 20, 2005 at various locations, including the five studied here. Prior to this trip, I had selected a number of sites to investigate, based on existing literature about graffiti in Buenos Aires, a previous trip to the capital, and current events articles in various Argentine dailies (Buenos Aires Herald, Página 12, La Nación and El Clarin). As mentioned above, I decided against using a number of the sites when I turned from a general look at social and political graffiti to mnemonic graffiti in contested spaces in Buenos Aires, and for this reason, wanted the sites of my study to reflect the degree of injustice expressed in public spaces, as well as the coexistence of obstinate social memory and social amnesia.
Data collection in larger sites, such as the two plazas and the avenue connecting the two, was conducted over several days, while data collection in some of the smaller spaces, Estación Avellaneda, El Olimpo and Cromañón, was completed in the course of one day in each of the spaces. Not only did I find I had to be flexible in my sites of focus, but also in the way data was collected. For example, I had intended to take notes in coding books I had developed before the fieldwork began, and to take photos of all the graffiti in my study. But in some cases, one or the other was not always possible or wise. If it was raining too hard, my notes were useless and illegible. In less secure places, I had to gauge whether it was best to hide my camera and take notes instead, or if it was best to make the notes later and quickly snap the pictures needed and then leave. In very few cases did I rely only on my notes – I was not allowed to take photographs outside the AMIA Jewish community centre and outside the Banco de la Ciudad in the banking district. At this bank, a well-dressed man approached me and told me I could not take pictures of the bank. However, as I moved from the data collection to the transcription phase, and as I gravitated to a narrower focus on collective memory, I eliminated these two sites from the study.

As I mentioned above, I had also intended to note everything in elaborate coding books that I had prepared before leaving for Buenos Aires. In a study of 1,484 graffiti (a figure which excludes graffiti that were documented and photographed at other locations, but were eventually dropped from the study), this would have been a tedious and endless task. Using the coding books entailed filling out a questionnaire for each graffito. I quickly realized that this was extremely time consuming and that my limited time in Buenos Aires could be better spent. This was also a safety concern as well, as it meant I was spending a great deal of time with my head down, scribbling in a coding book. After the first day, I abandoned them, but continued to document things along similar lines in notebooks.
While the locations of this study were selected with the idea that the graffiti found there would reflect struggles over collective memory it was, and is, my intention to offer a description of other messages in these spaces, as none of them (although *Cromañón* comes close) are sites painted exclusively with mnemonic graffiti. Groups devoted to memory and/or justice are not the only groups that make claims to these spaces, particularly to the two plazas. Nonetheless, I do suggest that in the majority of these spaces groups devoted to memory and/or justice (they are so often linked) make the most aggressive claims to these spaces and that their claims are sustained with greater regularity and over long periods of time.

In order to offer a convincing analysis of the struggles over memory and the alternative meanings associated with the selected public spaces in Buenos Aires, it was fundamental that all of the graffiti in each designated site was documented, including that which was not mnemonic graffiti. The inclusion of all graffiti allows me to draw more conclusions about the use of public space in these locations, and specifically, to the way groups devoted to memory use these spaces. For instance, although *El Olimpo* occupies an entire block, the graffiti and murals that refer to state and police repression are not distributed evenly over the entire building. The majority are concentrated on one or two sides. One of the opposing sides has relatively little that makes reference to repression, but instead features graffiti about music, drugs and soccer. Knowing this, we can begin to ask more questions about graffiti and public space, such as, why is most of the graffiti located on one side of the building? Or why did the plain-clothed police officer outside *El Olimpo* tell my partner and I that the mnemonic murals and graffiti concentrated on one side were not graffiti at all, but that all of the graffiti was located on the opposite wall, where I was to find almost nothing which made reference to anything besides drugs, music or soccer?
This aspect of the methodology was not without its problems, however. On two particular occasions, I had to make adjustments. The first was at the Congress. On the *Monumento a los dos Congresos* there are four large eagle statues. These ominous statues appear to be the preferred location for couples' graffiti, written in tiny letters using liquid paper pens. The overwhelming quantity of messages on all four statues would have been very difficult, if not impossible to document, and on at least one occasion I was warned by youth there that they would steal my camera. I was not the only one to exclude this graffiti; I noticed in November 2005, when the limestone monument was sandblasted, the cleaning crew did not bother to remove this variety of graffiti from the monument. It is, after all, much less visible than the larger graffiti written with paint brushes or aerosol cans that are large enough that they can be read from a distance by those passing in traffic, those out for a stroll in the plaza, and by those at the National Congress.

The second occasion was at *Cromañón*. I had been led to this site by other graffiti about the tragic fire, and had expected to find more graffiti there, but I was not prepared for the volume of mementoes and memorials, banners, rosaries, clothing from the victims or for the size of the make-shift sanctuary in the middle of the road (see figure 36). The main part of the sanctuary consisted of five sunshades joined together in the middle of Mitre Street, which has been closed since the fire. Steel fences blocked the road behind and provided a surface on which friends and families of victims could affix posters, messages, and mementoes. Layers of all three had been placed on the back wall, and on the ground. The quantity of these mementoes, many of which are personal effects of victims, was overwhelming on my first visit to *Cromañón*. It still smelled faintly of fire. This, and knowing that many of the victims had been younger than me, and that many had died because exit doors had been chained shut, was incredibly disturbing. The pain of
the victims’ families was so fresh and so intense that I did not know if I would be able to include the Cromañón site here. I left the first day unsure of how I could work with this place, but also knowing that this was the site most strongly claimed by groups devoted to memory, and this was the space that had been transformed the most. I made a decision to document only that which was visible on the first layer. I was not about to touch any of the mementoes in order to read graffiti underneath. This study also does not include posters or banners, countless of which have been used to transform this space. I focused exclusively on messages written directly on the walls of Cromañón, the asphalt nearby and other elements of the built environment that had been altered by graffiti, such as lamp posts, street signs and traffic lights.

Initially, I surveyed each location and in the two largest spaces, Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Congreso, I sketched rough maps of the area and noted the different features of the plazas. These sketches included things such as pathways and high traffic areas, monuments, benches, security fences and the presence of police. These maps simplified data collection, as I was able to divide the large plazas into sections and then collect data in each without covering the same area twice. Except when it was prohibited by rain or when safety was an issue, I documented each graffito with a digital photograph and with handwritten notes. Following this, the next stage involved transcribing the graffiti from the notes and photographs for all of the sites I had observed. Transcription notes included the text of the graffito and descriptive features such as colour, medium (such as stencil or aerosol), and placement of the graffiti (relative to significant landmarks, placement on top of other graffiti or when significant, the direction the graffiti faced). When graffiti contained other distinguishing features, or when they contained images, a description of these was also included. The descriptiveness of the transcription notes was designed to facilitate the next stage, a basic, conceptual content analysis using a simple
spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel. I chose a simple content analysis because I was interested in the quantity of messages that related to public memory and wanted to convey to the popularity of this form of (marginal) communication in Argentina to my readers.

The basic categories of the content analysis were developed prior to conducting the fieldwork and were outlined in the original coding books for the project. These initial categories included information such as geographic location, themes, repeated phrases, medium, colour, attribution, language, distinguishing features of the diction such as humour, irony or profanity, the use of people's names or faces, the legibility of the graffiti and indicators as to whether or not attempts had been made to obscure, co-opt or contradict the message. After the data collection phase, I used emergent categories to round out the content analysis. Each site was analysed separately and as a result, the categories, although they are basically the same for each site, were tailored to reflect the variances of each of the five locations. For instance, as I was collecting data at Cromañón, I noticed that a number of the texts emphasized the youthfulness of the victims so I included a column in the spreadsheet that accounted for this, while this was not a consideration in other spaces. All five spaces included a column to indicate whether or not the graffiti referred to people or groups (government, the military, the police, etc.) by name, or if they implied such, and then, a description of that person or group.

Two columns from the spreadsheet addressed the use of repeated phrases; the first column simply indicated whether or not the graffiti employed a common phrase, while the second included the actual text of the phrases. Examples of such include "Dario and Maxi are not alone," "Justice for the kids of Cromañón," "Never again" or "Freedom for all political prisoners." There is incredible variation of phrases within each of the five sites, but even more variance (as to be expected) across all five locations. As a result, this step was rather meaningless
in the content analysis phase. For instance, a range of phrases might discuss memory, or justice, but the phrases themselves would be slightly different, meaning I had a long list of “repeated phrases,” some which legitimately were repeated over and over, such as “Freedom for all political prisoners” in either of the two plazas or at El Olimpo. However, it became apparent in the analysis phase that this was not sufficient to account for the varied messages, which addressed issues of memory or justice. For this reason, I implemented an additional stage to the content analysis, to be completed following all of the initial calculations, which would break the language of the individual graffiti down into key themes focused on issues of memory and/or justice. Again, these categories differ by location, as there are no graffiti which address the legalization of abortion at Cromaños, but there are several in the Plaza Congreso. Also, there are more of these categories in the analysis of the two plazas, as these spaces are not exclusively characterized by mnemonic graffiti as is the case at El Olimpo, Cromaños and Estación Avellaneda.

Cromaños, more than any of the other field sites, is characterized overwhelmingly by graffiti relating to memory and justice. The categories for the analysis of the text reflect this. They are: assigning blame/escrache; calls for justice; for memory/against forgetting; emphasizing youth of victims; calling victims Callejeros (the name of the band which was playing at the time of the fire); and never again (Nunca más). In all cases, I included a category to account for messages which fall into multiple categories — a step I think is essential in a discussion of traumatic past in Argentina. Whether graffiti are about the military dictatorship thirty years ago, police repression in the present, or the fire at Cromaños, they often link calls for remembrance with calls for justice and the assignment of blame. Mnemonic graffiti represent not memory for memory’s sake, but various quests for both ‘appropriate’ memory and ‘appropriate’
justice. In these cases, Elizabeth Jelin (2003: 29) has suggested, “memory, truth and justice blend into each other, because the meaning of the past that is being fought about is, in fact, part and parcel of the demand for justice in the present.”

Unlike the graffiti at Cromaño, the messages in the Plaza Congreso reflect a much wider range of social issues and are not so exclusively about memory and/or justice. Here, I included the same categories for the sake of comparison, but was forced to add additional ones to reflect the presence of so many other issues. These other categories are abortion, political prisoners and conditions of jails, anarchist messages, calls for revolution or liberation, the decriminalization of protest, anti-imperialism, Nazi and anti-Nazi messages, messages attributed to a political group, and more general categories about love or music.

I identified these five locations as contentious spaces, and as such, expected to find the erasure, co-opting or discounting of graffiti, a sign that would indicate both a struggle over space and a struggle over memory. For this reason, I was interested to find out if in these spaces, there was a presence of faded or erased graffiti, if graffiti had been painted over or removed, and if so, if it had been painted over with other graffiti or with whitewash, or other means of removal. These means of removal could include a range of methods including covering graffiti with posters or advertisements or the sandblasting of walls and monuments. However, these two examples are quite different. When advertisements are pasted en masse and they conceal graffiti, the people who put them up do not necessarily object to the message. They are not concerned with the graffito’s message; rather, they are concerned with finding a prime location for their posters. On the other hand, when graffiti is sandblasted, someone has found something offensive about those messages.
I also looked at the language of graffiti. Although in most cases, graffiti is written in Spanish, there are cases where it is written in English or in a combination of the two. A second category here attempts to highlight some of the nuances of the language (although this is difficult in a content analysis) such as cases where humour, irony or sarcasm is used. Another category towards the tail-end of the spreadsheet accounts for the use of profanity.

Two other categories in the content analysis address the reference to particular events, either by name or implication. These categories allowed me to quantify, for example, how many of the messages at *El Olimpo* referred to the military dictatorship or to state repression, and how many did not. The subsequent categories deal with the use of dates and numeric figures in mnemonic street art. My intention here was to highlight how the transmission of collective memory involves an insistence and constant reiteration of dates and figures specific to that particular memory. For instance, human rights groups, since the return to democracy in 1983, have insisted on the figure 30,000 detained and disappeared. Their insistence on this figure for two decades has helped this particular version of the past to survive, despite the existence of other, differing narratives. For instance, the report by the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), *Nunca Más*, documents the disappearance of slightly more than nine thousand people. This figure has been adopted by other groups in order to privilege a past which says there are, and there were, less than ten thousand disappeared while *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* and other human rights group insist that there are at least thirty thousand disappeared. Graffiti and street art privilege certain dates and figures in order to ensure that these are the ones that are passed on to others.

The remaining category borrows the concept of "*escrache*" from Argentine social movements, and from the H.I.J.O.S (Children of the disappeared for Identity and Justice against
Forgetting and Silence) group in particular, for the cases where graffiti is used to mark the landscape specifically to point out something about a person or place. *Escrache* is used in its original sense, as a shaming or humiliation ritual, something groups resort to in the absence of justice. *Escrache* takes information that is otherwise hidden, suppressed, or forgotten, and launches it into the public sphere. I have used this term because graffiti tends to function in a similar way as *escrache* in the way it interrupts the present with elements of the past. However, I use the term very generally here. In addition to the original meaning of *escrache*, I use it to classify insults and personal attacks. Here, the term is not used to refer exclusively to military repressors, or sites of repression under the military dictatorship. I use this term to refer to all personal insults, and all efforts to mark the landscape with texts pointing out something about someone or some place. One category indicates whether or not *escrache* is used, and the subsequent category describes what is targeted by the graffito.

As mentioned above, the content analysis considers the use of repeated phrases in the graffiti. Similarly, I added a category for the use of repeated symbols, recognizing that iconography plays an important role in the transmission of memory and to the success of social movements. The use of symbols or icons seems to assist in the transmission of memory and of specific versions of memory. For instance, Dario and Maxi were killed by police in the province of Buenos Aires, and yet, their names and faces are known throughout Argentina. A number of Dario and Maxi stencils are found throughout the locations in this study, but even three hundred kilometres north of the city, the faces and names of Dario and Maxi are found on the walls and streets in Rosario. The constant visibility of Dario and Maxi, and the steady reiteration of particular narratives about their deaths, the use of the same symbols and text over and over again facilitate the transmission of a particular memory. However, in my opinion, it is impossible to
gauge whether or not particular memories of police repression are transmitted so soon after the incident. I think it is more appropriate to say that this visibility, this constant and public insistence on a particular narrative and the symbols which go with it, facilitate the life of memory, without knowing if this particular narrative will be transmitted from one generation to the next.

Mnemonic graffiti (and mnemonic discourse in general) tells us not only what is privileged in particular versions of the past, but also what is dismissed. The absences are perhaps just as important as the presence. The images of the graffiti offer similar indications of how something is to be remembered (though some may reject the memory), and subtly influence how witnesses view the traumatic incident, before they accept it, and transmit it themselves in a similar light. Take, for instance, one of the many Darío and Maxi stencils at the Avellaneda train station, and throughout the city of Buenos Aires. One of the stencils appears to have been based on a series of media photographs that were taken during the police shootings of the two protestors. The image depicts Darío crouched down to assist Maxi who is dying on the station floor after being shot by police. The photograph was taken moments before Darío met the same fate. In the popular stencil, Darío has his hand extended, indicating to police to stop firing. This is the moment that is 'frozen' in the popular street art. It is a moment in which Maxi is presumably still hovering above death, and hauntingly, a short moment before Darío too is shot and killed. The image preserves the innocence of the two piqueteros, and Darío's self-sacrifice to assist a fallen compañero. It also preserves the image of the barbarity of the police, emphasizing their reckless use of deadly force.

The point of this example, and the inclusion of Estación Avellaneda in this study, is not to point blame at the police, but rather to examine how narratives of traumatic and repressive
past events are constructed in public spaces. The selection of particular icons in collective action appears to be integral to the transmission of memory. For instance, we might speculate on the success or failure of a stencil for Darío and Maxi which would depict the two wielding sticks with their faces covered by bandanas. Perhaps for those outside the picket movement, such a stencil would be less successful in transmitting a memory of Darío and Maxi as unfortunate victims of a repressive government and police force.

The other popular Darío and Maxi stencil contributes to the way the pair is remembered. It ensures that Darío and Maxi are remembered not only by name (and it is key that their names, first and last, are repeated over and over again), but also by face. Neither was as well known in life as in death. Their martyrdom can be attributed to many things: the regularity of protests, anniversaries, movements which took the names of Darío or Maxi; the constant reiteration of narratives surrounding their death; the pressure to punish the police and politicians responsible for their death; and the visible street art that preserves their names and that attempts to preserve a very particular narrative surrounding their deaths.

Looking at graffiti and street art involves looking at issues of power, and how power is contested in public spaces. Graffiti, installations and other aspects of street art are used to challenge dominant versions of memory/history and dominant uses of public spaces. These are both spatial and discursive struggles, and as such, a study of mnemonic graffiti should address the discursive aspects of the street art. Ruth Wodak (2004: 199) suggests that

the constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined with social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term. Language provides a finely articulated vehicle for differences in power in hierarchical social structures.
Graffiti is a specific example of where language is used to ‘challenge, subvert or alter distributions of power.’ In order to understand how the process of ‘collective memory making’ happens following repression and trauma in Argentina, it is crucial to take a close look at the discourse of the ‘memories’ that are inscribed on the landscape. This involves considerations for the historical and spatial context of the messages, the argumentation style of the writers and the type of support employed in the texts to make their histories/memories convincing, and thus ones which will have a better chance of being passed on to other generations or other groups of people. The point of these messages is to convince and as such, Gillian Rose (2003: 140) suggests, discourse analysis should focus on how those discourses are persuasive. In addition to the above, following the content analysis of the street art texts, I focused on the “social context” of the texts, who authored them and under what circumstances, how things are described in the discourse as well as consideration for key phrases, repeated words and the recurrent use of symbols. Rose (2003: 149-51) also suggests that a researcher consider the audience of discursive texts and whether or not messages are presented differently in different settings. And finally, she suggests consideration of what affects the selection of the symbols, phrases and mediums used for the texts in question (Rose 2003: 149-151).

While the content analysis stage addressed all 1,484 graffiti texts, in the discourse analysis stage that followed, I focused on groups of texts that specifically address issues of memory following trauma and repression. So long as the original message is not altered, Fran Tonkiss (1998: 254) suggests discourse analysts select the richest data and provide “a close analysis of specific texts” by looking at themes, repetition, variance and omissions. The main aim of discourse analysis is to consider “the complex processes through which social meanings are produced” (Tonkiss 1998: 259). Discourse analysis, Tonkiss (1998: 246) suggests, sees
language as “constructing and organizing” social reality. Because language is a means through which social and political ends are reached (or at least sought), discourse analysis looks at “how people use language to construct their accounts of the social world” (Tonkiss 1998: 248). Here I sought to understand what made (or did not make) these texts persuasive and to understand the ‘silences and voids’ (Jelin 2003) of mnemonic initiatives in Argentina.

Tonkiss (1998: 248) outlines three functions of discursive systems of knowledge within the wider goal of making a particular version of social life persuasive. Discourse, she says, confers membership to certain groups and demarcates who has the authority to speak on the particular issue (Tonkiss 1998). Along these lines, it seems useful to add that by including specific social actors, others are excluded. Discourse then both confers and denies membership. Secondly, discourse entails a common language that is used and understood by those privy to the group. Thirdly, while conferring membership, certain speakers are privileged, while others are discounted as having limited or no authority to speak. For instance, within the memory struggles in Argentina, those with the most ‘authority’ would arguably be survivors of trauma and the families and close contacts of victims of trauma and repression: groups that, Jelin (2003: 41) implies, have at times positioned themselves as the ‘owners of memory.’

While various scholars have written about discourse analysis as being concerned with questions of power and the persuasiveness of language, Ruth Wodak (2004: 206-7) outlines five specific points of focus which enable the analyst to determine the strategies of the actors involved with the (mnemonic) discourse. These include paying attention to patterns of reference and nomination (the ways in which people are named and referred), predication (the traits, characteristics or qualities which are attributed to them), argumentation (the arguments and methods of argumentation which are used to include or exclude others), perspectivation (the
point of view of these labels), and intensification or mitigation (the level of intensity of statements and whether statements are overt or mitigated). In the application of these five considerations, we could consider how in several of the locations of this study, the police are referred to as murders, politicians as corrupt, victims (especially at Cromañón) as innocent and defenceless, and activists (especially piqueteros) as fighting for patriotic ends. Police at *Avellaneda Station* are seen as cold-blooded, trigger happy, immune to punishment and barbaric. Their victims (Dario and Maxi) are depicted as patriotic, dignified in their struggle, sympathetic and unified. At Cromañón, the discourse seems to include sympathetic visitors to the memorial space, but more specifically, it includes survivors of the nightclub fire, and parents and friends of the fire’s victims. Those judged to be guilty, nightclub owner Omar Chabán and Chief of Government Ánibal Ibarra are excluded. The memories put forth here are ‘privileged’ by the connection of people to the victims or to the fire. One of the strongest arguments for the exclusion of Ibarra is the idea that “children died because of corruption.” Narratives at Cromañón are told from the perspective of family members who lost their children in a nightmarish fire. In all of the spaces studied in this project, many of the statements seem to be very explicit. There is little or no mitigation of the remarks. Various parties are labelled as guilty, repressors, corrupt, and/or murderers. These ‘markings’ are very explicit, free from subtleties, and indeed, this is part of the strategies of the various memory/justice groups as they seek “to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim” (Wodak 2004: 207).
CHAPTER 3

Plazas and Protest: Graffiti of the Plaza del Congreso and Plaza de Mayo

Anton Rosenthal (2000: 33) suggests struggles over Latin American public spaces “have often been violent, leaving deep imprints in the collective memories of places as culturally and physically diverse as Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Havana, Bogotá and Río de Janeiro.” In Buenos Aires, the violence of the military dictatorship, police repression during the massive protests of 2001, military repression and attacks on civilians in 1955, and other violent incidents in public spaces exemplify this phenomenon. In this project however, I have taken a different perspective in regards to collective memory. Acknowledging that individual memory is marked by trauma, I am interested in how the physical landscape bears the imprint of trauma as groups of ‘memory entrepreneurs’ attempt to shape collective memory. Both Plaza de Mayo and the Plaza Congreso bear numerous markings of this sort. These can be further divided into those that attempt to “establish/convince/transmit” (Jelin 2003: 26) particular memories, others that relate to various social causes, and that serve as declarations of love or demonstrate identification with a specific soccer team or musical group.

Two of Argentina’s most important and well-known plazas make up the first case study of this project. The Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Congreso also stand out from the other case studies in that unlike Estación Avellaneda, La República Cromañón and the former detention centre El Olimpo, the two plazas are not the sites of one specific traumatic event. That is not to say that they are not sites of trauma. A plaque in front of the Monumento a los dos Congresos recalls a man killed by police as he ascended the stairs of the National Congress during the uprisings of December 19 and 20, 2001. The Plaza de Mayo has also been the site of repression on several occasions. The Argentine daily El Clarín estimates that 364 civilians were killed during the 1955
Figure 2. Sketch of Plaza Congreso (not to scale). The West (top side) of the plaza faces the National Congress. The East (bottom side) leads to the Avenida de Mayo, which leads eventually to the Plaza de Mayo. A) Tent and banners positioned in front of the Congress. B) Central tower of the Monumento a los dos Congresos. C) Less-political section of the plaza.
Figure 3. Diagram of Plaza de Mayo (not to scale). The East (bottom side) of the plaza faces the Casa Rosada. The West (top side) faces Avenida de Mayo which leads eventually to Plaza Congreso. A, B, C) Judgement and Punishment installations. D) Installation for ‘20 years of democracy.’ E) Piramide statue at the centre of the plaza. F) Installation “Homage to the victims of December 2001” as well as paintings of the “Pocho hormiga.” G) Area covered by the (now fading) white silhouettes of victims of police brutality. H) Fountain in honour of Perón’s workers. I) Removed ‘Judgement and Punishment’ installation on the ‘state side’ of the barricade. J) ‘Pinguino Chorro’ graffito which faces the Casa Rosada. The police barricade, shown by straight, black lines, cuts across the belly of the plaza.
military bombing of the plaza; more than 800 more were injured (Seoane 2005). As I will discuss below, the police attempted use force to prevent the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from marching in the plaza during the same demonstrations in December 2001. Like all public spaces during the dictatorship (1976-1983), the plaza became a place of terror and surveillance as well as a place where groups were prohibited from congregating. However, unlike the other three case studies, these two plazas are areas of public gathering and demonstration for a variety of causes. Groups come from great distances to protest in both plazas. In what follows, I describe the significance and history of these spaces before discussing my findings about graffiti in these.
spaces. In the final section, I will offer some conclusions about street art and protest in public space.

Figure 4. Plaza de Mayo in 1800. The Cabildo is visible in the background before many different facelifts. The old fort stands where the Casa Rosada would later be built. Photo: Buenos Aires Antiguo (http://www.buenosairesantiguo.com.ar/plazademayoalredagn/images/MVC-3275.JPG.jpg)

History of the Plazas

The City of Buenos Aires is built largely using a checkerboard design interspersed with smaller and larger public plazas. According to Benevolo (1980: 624), the cities of Spanish and Portuguese colonizers often followed this pattern and were characterized by

[…] rectilinear streets, containing a series of isolated blocks, almost invariably square. At the centre of the city, either cancelling out or reducing the size of a few blocks, was the main square on to which the principle buildings of the city faced; the church, the town hall, and the houses of the merchants and the richest colonists.
The Plaza de Mayo in the centre of Buenos Aires closely follows this model. It is surrounded by several important buildings, including the City Legislature, the Cabildo (where the first constitution was signed), the Bank of Argentina, the Cathedral, the Ministry of the Economy and the Casa Rosada (government house). It seems to resemble the guidelines about city planning set out by Phillip II in 1533. These guidelines stipulated that cities be laid out in a way that they extended outwards from the central plaza, and that streets would run towards the tip of the plaza, and intersect with the plaza’s sides. The connecting streets were supposed to be broad for purposes of defence (Benevolo 1980: 627). The main plaza was to be of oblong shape. Phillip II was specific about the shape and dimensions of the main plaza suggesting, “[a length of] at least one and a half times the width, since this is the best proportion for festivals in which horses are used, and for other celebrations.” He felt the plaza should be at least 200 feet wide and 300 feet long but no wider than 500 feet or longer than 800 feet. The ideal plaza was 600 feet long and 400 feet wide (Benevolo 1980: 627). The geometric regularity of the general plan from 16th Century Spain went on to influence cities such as Buenos Aires in the 19th Century up until present day (Benevolo 1980: 639).

The Plaza de Mayo has undergone a range of changes and has been the site of several important political events (see figures 4 and 5). It dates from 1580 and was originally called Plaza Mayor (Main Plaza). Originally it occupied twice the space that it does today (Historia n.d.). Numerous changes were made to the plaza including the 1884 removal of a large building, the Recova Vieja. The Recova Vieja was as tall as the Piramide is today (Historia n.d.). The removal of this building in 1884 opened up the public space formerly divided in two. Before that time, the section near the Casa Rosada was called Plaza del Fuerte (Plaza of the Strong) while the section closest to the Cabildo was called Plaza de Victoria (Victory Plaza). The Plaza Mayor
served two functions; it was used as an open-air market (as many public plazas are today) and it fulfilled a civic role. *Plaza Mayor* brought together the most important public buildings in one space, including the *Cabildo* and the Church (Historia n.d.). The plaza has been used for large political gatherings since the events that culminated in the 1810 revolution and has since been used as a place for national festivals, opposition to government as well as violent protest (Historia n.d.). It its earlier years, the plaza served multiple purposes. It was a place for religious ceremonies, markets, parking of carts and wagons, bullfights and public executions (Cagliani n.d.).

In addition to the changes mentioned above, further modifications were necessary for the construction of the *Avenida de Mayo* that would unite the *Plaza de Mayo* and the *Plaza Congreso*. The “most popular artery in Buenos Aires” was planned between 1883 and 1887 and inaugurated on July 9, 1894. The massive project involved the full construction of sixteen new blocks. Before 1880, there were very few buildings with more than two levels in Buenos Aires. During the construction of the avenue, these were replaced with grand five and six storied buildings following popular French styles (Suárez n.d.). The construction of *Avenida de Mayo* also required major remodelling of the *Cabildo* that was originally built in 1609. This was not the first facelift for the *Cabildo*; it has been modified and repaired on several occasions. It was rebuilt in 1765 and it was at that time that it took on its colonial style. It was build using the Jesuit design and resembles other *Cabildos* in the provinces of Cordóba and Salta. It was designed with several arches and a covered walkway. The symmetrical design had a central clock tower. When Torcuado de Alvear announced the building of the *Avenida de Mayo*, three of the colonial-style arches on the north and south sides of the clock tower were removed to
accommodate the new street (Suárez n.d.) (Compare the symmetrical and asymmetrical *Cabildo* in figure 4 and figure 5).

Figure 5. *Plaza de Mayo* in the 19th Century after the construction of *Avenida de Mayo* (the street extending from the Plaza). Several arches from one side of the *Cabildo* have been removed; Later the other side would be made symmetrical for the construction of other streets. Photo: Buenos Aires Antiguo. (http://www.buenosairesantiguo.com.ar/plazademayoalredagn/images/MVC)

The plaza’s present name comes from the 1810 May revolution with Spain. This is also reflected on the white *Piramide* at the centre of the plaza that commemorates May 25, 1810. The *Piramide* itself was erected honouring the one-year anniversary of the revolution in 1811.

However, seventy-three years later, the white monument was moved to its present location in the centre of the plaza, where the *Madres of Plaza de Mayo* have marched since the late 1970s. This white statue is the centre and focal point of the plaza.

The second most important government building in Buenos Aires (following the *Casa Rosada*) is the National Congress located at the opposite end of *Avenida de Mayo*. The Congress, built with a granite foundation, 40,000 pieces of grey limestone and covering an area of 50,000 square metres, and topped by an eighty metre bronze cupola, opened in 1906 after eight years of
construction (Suárez n.d.). Work on the building continued until 1946. The Plaza Congreso directly infront of the National Congress, was created in 1910 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the 1810 Revolution. The large fountain and monument called the Monumento a los dos Congresos (Monument to the two Congresses) commemorates the General Constitution of 1813 in Buenos Aires and the 1816 Declaration of Independence in Tucumán (Cagliani n.d.).

The Plazas of the Present

The layout of the plaza invites pedestrian traffic and also marks a node from which several major streets radiate outwards. The plaza features a number of pathways leading from the Cabildo to the Casa Rosada (lengthwise and from East to West) and shorter North-South paths that cut across the width of the plaza. Four paths also draw pedestrians in from the plaza’s four corners that connect to the wider East-West paths. All of the pathways in the plaza extend from the large, circular area in the middle, at the very centre of which is the white Piramide. The plaza occupies the space of two blocks and is the symbolic centre of the city. As such, several of the main subway lines begin or end here. The major Avenida de Mayo as well as two diagonal streets originate here and radiate from this space. The plaza is a public space, but is surrounded by symbols of state power. The government house and the historic Cabildo where the first constitution was signed frame the plaza at either end. Surrounding the plaza are other important buildings symbolic of state or ideological power such as the Ministry of the Economy, the City Legislature, the Cathedral and the National Bank of Argentina. This space, like the Plaza Congreso that faces the National Congress, appears to be constantly under the gaze of the state.

The Plaza Congreso is larger and also faces a building or national and political importance. However, this space is not flanked by other symbolic buildings like the Plaza de
Mayo. It occupies three blocks but is really divided into two sections. One side is not designated officially as more political than the other, but Cevallos Avenue, which cuts through the centre of the plaza, effectively makes this division. One half is much closer to the National Congress. The more distant side has far fewer places to write graffiti than the half closest to Congress. The section directly in front of Congress hosts the mammoth Monumento a los dos Congresos (see figure 6). The monument features a series of statues, three wide staircases leading to a large platform and a towering section of the monument. The back of the monument faces a large fountain. As this is the gathering point for numerous protests, the messages here are diverse and ephemeral. The variety of texts is also related to the prime location of the plaza, and its symbolic power, similar to the Plaza de Mayo. Placement here, especially on the part of the structure that towers above the rest, ensures visibility. During the day, there is significant pedestrian traffic through both plazas. However, in the Plaza Congreso, the bulk of the traffic passes through the section closest to the Congress, as this side is in close proximity to the subway and to bus-stops for various lines.

Figure 6. Plaza Congreso, view from the back of the Monumento a los dos Congresos, facing the National Congress in the 'political' half of the plaza. The Monumento was cleaned shortly before I took this photo.
Even more than the Casa Rosada, the National Congress is an impressive building that exudes power. In addition, the wide staircases, driveways and entire front of the building are now closed off by metal police barricades, and numerous police officers guard the building. The Congress and the monument in the plaza in front stand in stark contrast to one another. The front side of the Congress is kept relatively free of graffiti. The monument on the other hand, is a hot-bed for graffiti painting, and for messages intended to be seen and read by the Congress. A circular drive (now closed off by metal gates and barricades) leads up to the Congress entrance, and along the walls of this drive, traces of graffiti are evident. Although they have been erased or sandblasted, part of one of these graffiti still reads; ‘Here they rob you.’ On a symbolic level, the Congress belongs to the state, but the Monument for the Two Congresses, while honouring the state, is built in a public space and its meaning has been poached by the masses (De Certeau 2002). The front of the Congress is heavily guarded and therefore nearly completely free of graffiti or traces of graffiti. There are similar efforts to protect the sides of the building from graffiti, but there is significantly less police supervision here, and the sides are not protected by a fence. However, the sides are much less visible, and writing graffiti here is not as transgressive as writing graffiti on the front of the Congress. The back of the building is a different story altogether. There is little or no police surveillance, and it seems little is invested in cleaning the messages that get written here.

In what appears an attempt to claim the Plaza Congreso as a public space for all, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have set up an antique carousel in the less political half of the plaza. The carousel is located along Avenida Hipólito Yrigoyen, in front of the Popular University, bookstore and café of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Their aim is to ensure the plaza remains a place for all citizens. The second half of the plaza has significantly less traffic. A
number of decorative iron gates block off sections of the plaza. One of these is used daily by professional dog walkers who use the gated space to let the animals run free. On the opposite side, a similar space is occupied by a number of homeless.

The Plaza Congreso is of similar scale to the Plaza de Mayo; Avenida de Mayo separates the two. Many protests begin at the Congress and make their way (clogging the street as they go) down Avenida de Mayo to the Plaza de Mayo, where here they can ‘confront’ or ‘face’ the government house, the Casa Rosada. The two plazas are similar in their positioning in front of government buildings. They are as a result, extensions of political spaces and spaces under the gaze of both elected officials and the police. They are both spaces in which the public literally confronts or attempts to engage in dialogue with the government. This deliberate and tactical positioning is evident in the Plaza Congreso by the concentration of large banners, the large graffiti written on the front of the monument, and the placement of a tent directly in front of the Congress. The tent is “installed as a permanent testimony” (sign on the tent) and is part of the quest for justice following the kidnapping of a young man named Juan Marcelo Ramírez on December 10, 2003.

Confrontation with the state (the government house, and increasingly the federal police) is even more visible in Plaza de Mayo, where the confrontation is evident not only in the graffiti and placement of banners, but also in the organization of protests, many of which arrive from the Plaza Congreso. As citizens march from the Plaza Congreso to Plaza de Mayo, they are the entire time, facing in the direction of the Casa Rosada, so that when they arrive they are already “confronting” the state. This division of the State and the People is exaggerated by the post-2001 addition of a metal security fence, cutting across the belly of the plaza. The fence has been permanent since the uprisings of December 2001. For four years, it has divided the public space
in half. When there are no protests, one can walk on either side of the fence. However, the perpetual fence means one must walk to the edge of the plaza, around the fence, in order to reach the opposite side. During times of protest, the plaza has a heavy police presence. At times, the police are armed with a water cannon and the two streets that border the plaza and lead towards the Casa Rosada (Rivadavia and Yrigoyen) are closed off with additional sections of security fence, conveniently stored in the plaza. These sections are bolted together with iron bars and linked to the permanent fence. Police stand in a line on the 'state' side of the fence with their backs to the government house facing the crowd. On the other side of the fence, protesters affix posters to the metal fence, so that they are visible to the 'state,' and the protesters themselves conduct their demonstration while facing the 'state.'

Figure 7. Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Asociación from Buenos Aires) marching in Mar del Plata during the Summit of the Americas in November 2005. Their banner reads "Bush, get out."
The plazas are different from the other sites in this study. They are characterized by a diversity of messages, ranging from escraches, to memorials, to graffiti about soccer, music or love, to stencils about current issues such as legalized abortion, government corruption causing the Cromañón tragedy, political prisoners and many others. Plaza de Mayo is the most famous plaza in Argentina, and the Plaza Congreso is not too far behind. Plaza de Mayo is known worldwide for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and their weekly marches during which they demand answers to questions concerning the disappearance of their children during the dictatorship (see figures 7, 8 and 10). The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, although they have split into two lines (Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo and Madres Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora), have never missed a week, not even when the Thursday march coincided with the chaos of December 20, 2001, during which mounted police attempted to dispel the large crowds that had gathered in frustration to unemployment, limits on bank withdrawals, and the devaluation of the Argentine peso.16 The mounted police attempted to prevent the Mothers from marching and gathering in the symbolic plaza, but they were met with the chant, “La Plaza de las Madres, y no de los cobardes” (rhyming phrase translated crudely into English as “the plaza belongs to the Mothers, and not to the cowards”). The white stencilled bandanas around the Piramide also make the plaza feel as though it has been claimed by the Mothers. In July 2003 someone had spray-painted the actual Piramide with another bandana and the words, “Thank you Mothers.” The number of Mothers at the weekly marches varies. They are aging and some have passed away. Younger family members and other allies often join them for their half hour march.

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16 The Argentine peso had been pegged to the U.S. dollar since January 1992, a result of the Convertibility Plan announced in the previous year by President Carlos Menem and his Minister of the Economy, Domingo Cavallo (Lewis 2002: 162-3).
The *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* are symbolic for Argentines. They are widely recognized, and resented by some, for their defiance of the military during the dictatorship, for their perseverance in their quest for justice sustained over more than twenty years, and for their rigid stance in opposition to repression and impunity. They have massive power, both actual and symbolic, so their actions are followed closely. In fact, according to Lopez Levy (2004: 9), it was the media coverage of police interference with the group during the December 2001 protests that led to greater outrage and brought even more people to the streets.

Figure 8. *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* marching around the *Piramide*. November 2005.

The linking of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* to this space is not accidental. They are associated with the plaza because of their stand against the military during the dictatorship, but also because of their incorporation of the plaza name into their own, the regularity of their marches in the plaza, and perhaps, the iconography of their resistance. Nationwide, the kerchief or bandana symbol is unmistakenly linked to the *Mothers*. The various chapters of *Mothers of*
Plaza de Mayo around Argentina have stencilled the plazas used for their demonstrations with white bandanas arranged in a circle. It is around these circles that the Mothers march.

Figure 9. Plaza de Mayo on March 24, 1996, the twentieth anniversary of the military coup. The photograph was taken near the Casa Rosada, which the crowd faces. The tall, white Piramide, around which the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo march is visible in the centre of the photograph. Source: Vázquez, Inés. Historia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 2nd edition (2003: 250).

The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo reserve a special place in their commemorative activities for Azucena Villaflor, one of the group’s founding members. Attached to the base of the monument for General Manuel Belgrano that faces the Casa Rosada is a bronze plaque for Azucena Villaflor. Villaflor was one of the first Mothers of disappeared children to demand answers about the missing. She is also the Mother that other members of the organization credit with the idea of demonstrating publicly about the missing and specifically about marching in the Plaza de Mayo. Villaflor, along with other Mothers inquired about their missing children with the Ministry of the Interior. In recognizing the futility in this, Villaflor suggested to other women “We need to go to the Plaza de Mayo because over the years, that is where the largest concentration and most significant political and social actions have taken place” (Azucena
Villaflor had lost her son and his girlfriend during the first year of General Rafael Videla’s rule. In April of 1977, she was one of the thirteen original Mothers to march in the plaza and publicly demand answers about the disappeared. She helped transform the issue of the missing from a private to public tragedy. By the end of 1977 Villaflor, along with three other founding Mothers, had disappeared. For the International Day of Human Rights (December 10) 1977, the group had decided to resist the state-imposed silence over the disappearances and run a list of the missing in a daily newspaper. According to the movement, this action was undertaken in order to reduce the isolation that the dictatorship had been so successful in creating through its campaign of terror. On this same day, Villaflor was taken forcefully from her home and never seen again. It is believed that she was taken to the Navy Mechanics School and was one of the victims of the notorious death flights. Her remains were identified years later as some of those discovered on the coast of the Rio de la Plata. It was Villaflor’s symbolic act that brought the Mothers to the plaza. Her daughter, also recognizing the power of the Plaza de Mayo, recently made a similar symbolic decision. After the discovery of Villaflor’s remains, her daughter decided to have her mother’s ashes buried in the space below the Piramide so that her Mother would remain permanently in the Plaza. At the ceremony, Cecilia Villaflor announced, “Here my Mother was born into public life, and here she ought to remain forever” (Keve 2005).

The Plaza de Mayo (not unlike the Plaza Congreso or other spaces studied in this project) remains marked by peoples’ sense of injustice in regards to state violence and/or trauma. These markings take the form of graffiti, written with brushes or spray cans, occasionally making use of stencils. They are temporary for the most part, but in the Plaza de Mayo, ephemeral

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17 Translated from Spanish.
18 Prisoners were drugged, stripped of their clothing, and thrown from airplanes into the Rio de la Plata. Corpses were reported to drift ashore in La Plata as well as in Uruguay.
19 Translated from Spanish.
graffiti, in some cases, have been replaced by fibreglass laid over stencilled fabric on the ground to create more durable, unofficial installations. It is interesting that this medium is used uniquely in this plaza. This is perhaps an indication of the symbolism of the Plaza de Mayo and citizens' 'sense of place' and the general association of this space with the people, and with protest.

The fibreglass installations mimic graffiti in that they are homemade, unofficial and demonstrate resistance to the dominant power. However, the hard, transparent layer over the text increases their lifespan. The messages and/or images appear to be printed on fabric that is then laid on the ground and covered with a layer of fibreglass. The adhesive both affixes the message to the ground, but also provides a hard, protective surface. Alternatively, the message is created by first laying the fibreglass, then etching the letters in the fibreglass, and applying paint to the letters. Several similar messages 'mark' the plaza and alter the dominant meaning of place. Like many of the changes in the history of the plaza, these fibreglass installations inscribe part of history, and a particular version of that part of history, on the landscape. Their positioning, like so much of the mnemonic graffiti in Argentina, seems to be strategic. For example, in the heart of the plaza in the large, round section surrounding the 1811 Piramide, there is a rectangular installation that reads: “In honour of those that fell in the police repression during the popular rebellion on December 20th, 2001.” In comparison to some graffiti, the scale is massive, dominating the well-travelled space in front of both the Piramide and the Casa Rosada. Four years later, the message remains and attracts the attention of willing and unwilling witnesses to this version of history. Its location in the 'present' and in an everyday space and its message, allows the installation to act as what Alexander Wilde (1999) labelled an “irruption of memory.” Plaza de Mayo is full of similar “irruptions.” These are the “irruptions” of various memories that repeatedly break into the present because of the lack of adequate institutional attention and
resolution, or perhaps because of the impossibility of adequate institutional attention and resolution to Argentina's multiple traumatic pasts. Such irruptions are due, as Wilde (1999), Roniger and Szandjer (1998), and Jelin (1994, 1998, 2003) allude, to a lack of institutional treatment to issues of the past, but primarily, these irruptions are a product of an unjust society, with a history of state violence, impunity and corruption. Interestingly, if the state or individual police officers wanted, it could remove the installations but, with the exception of one of the "Judgement and Punishment" installations, it has not.

Those entering the Plaza from the East, North and South entrances are faced with similar unofficial, yet semi-permanent, installations. These three installations are identical to one another and to signs found at former detention centres, and signs used during escraches for former military and security personnel. They are simple, and consist of a circle outlined with red filled with the words "Judgement and Punishment" and the image of a federal police cap (see figure 11). The scale is large in comparison to most surrounding graffiti, and the white background against the reddish bricks of the plaza pathways makes these messages stand out more than graffiti in the plaza. The message and symbol are simple. And the function is to escrachar, to point out police repression and impunity. Such messages co-exist with a heavy presence of Federal Police in the plaza, so that when people enter the plaza they are confronted both by the actual on-duty police officer, and unofficial installations providing a particular version of the role of the Argentine police in local history. The entrances at the East, North and South appear to be the most common paths to enter the plaza, as the government house sits at the West end while most arteries coming from the city centre, as well as most pedestrian traffic, lead to the plaza and to the government house. The absence of a similar installation at the West end also has another
probable explanation, that being its location on the other side of the police fence and its proximity to the heavily guarded Casa Rosada.

**Graffiti in the Plaza de Mayo**

Azucena and Cecilia Villaflor are not the only people to have recognized and taken advantage of the symbolism and political significance of the Plaza de Mayo. A quick survey of the space reveals that several groups have marked the plaza with plaques, banners, installations, stickers and graffiti. My primary interest here is how graffiti writing here has been used to claim this public space and how it has been used to articulate alternative narratives of past trauma.

Graffiti (as well as other alterations to the landscape) are significant in Plaza de Mayo not only in their messages, but often in their placement, as we have seen through the placement of the “Judgement and Punishment” installations at the main entrances to the plaza. Pedestrians are met not only with the constant presence of federal police in the Plaza, but also a corresponding message in this space that serves to ‘escrachar’ and expose a different view of the police than the one that is projected by the police services as an institution (‘At the service of the community’). The message “Judgement and Punishment” is telling and critical on its own, but becomes ever more so when it is located, for example, on the walls of a former detention centre, the home of a repressor from the military dictatorship, or the Plaza de Mayo. The police discourse suggests onlookers view the police presence in one way, while the discourse of human rights groups, including the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, encourages onlookers to view this presence in a different way.

We can also look at graffiti positioned with reference to the most important symbol of government in the plaza and in Argentina in general, the government house (Casa Rosada). As I
discuss below, it appears that the security fence positioned permanently across the width of the plaza has limited the amount of graffiti on the Casa Rosada side of the fence, and for this reason, I describe this half of the plaza as the state side whereas that with the Piramide around which the Mothers march is the side of the people. However, directly in front of the government house, on the curb of the plaza someone has written “Pinguino Chorro Asesino!” (Penguin – Thief and Murderer!) and a little off-centre from the Casa Rosada, “Estafaron al Pueblo” (They swindled the People.) “Pinguino” is a reference to President Néstor Kirchner, in regards to his appearance or to his Patagonian origins. The second graffito (They swindled the People) refers not to the president individually, and judging by its less than perfect condition, not necessarily the present administration, but rather to government in general, and possibly the former Duhalde or the De la Rúa administration. It challenges the widely held ideal that the government serves the people. The spray-painted graffito stands in stark contrast to the Casa Rosada. The impressive palace is a place of order, power and tradition (as indicated by the historic colour of the government house and the guards in official and traditional dress alongside police officers). The “Pinguino” graffito challenges the power of the government, and the building that symbolizes that power by referring to the president derogatively, in a colloquial rather than respectful way, and by linking the president with criminal behaviour.

The second message “They swindled the people” would make less sense if it was located arbitrarily in another location, even within the plaza. The Pinguino message would still make sense if it was located elsewhere because of the common language, people are familiar with the president’s nickname, and the words ‘asesino’ (murderer) and ‘chorro’ (thief) are often tagged to people in power, at least in contemporary times in Argentina. However, in both cases, these messages become more powerful in a symbolic sense because of their location. Both are directed
at those in the government house. Although it is possible that they could be seen by someone from within the palace (especially from the historic and symbolic balcony directly across from the “Pinguino” graffito), it is probably just as important that onlookers recognize the two graffiti as critiques of the government. Various signals prepare the onlooker to interpret the graffiti in this way, some of which I have outlined above. A final point relates further to the positing of “Pinguino Chorro Asesino.” Not only is it located directly in front of the Casa Rosada entrance and main balcony, but the letters are written so that they may be read right-side-up from the Casa Rosada, and not from the plaza. The intended audience is not pedestrians in the plaza or other demonstrators, but the state.

Another, larger production has used the same strategy to target the state. In its original condition, the series of human silhouettes facing the Casa Rosada must have left quite an impression on its viewers because of the potency of its message, its intense symbolism and its sheer size. The nearly lifesize human silhouettes are outlined in white paint and resemble the outlines of corpses at a murder scene. The silhouettes are identical in their appearance and format, but differ only in the names and dates painted across their chests. There were at least forty of these silhouettes, although now only three or four remain legible. I assumed originally that the silhouettes represented disappeared individuals, as this form is often used by human rights groups in demonstrations about the disappearances of the 1970s. The dates, or those which I could make out however, did not correspond with this period, but point to the 1990s. I later learned that the names are those of individuals who died in police custody, or in other cases, because of unwarranted police brutality. The series of silhouettes is interesting for a number of reasons. These are the silhouettes of the dead and often forgotten. They are ‘isolated’ cases, but in front of the most powerful building in the nation, they collectively and symbolically ‘come to
life’ (Aparición con vida). Their collective positioning and stance suggests a large group confronting the state. In fact, as I have mentioned, this is what often happens in this space, the state addresses the people, or seemingly more often, the public confronts the state. The silhouettes ensure that the scattered names and cases of police brutality and torture are recalled (and that justice is pursued) for human beings and not just names, dates and numbers. The silhouettes resemble a haunting presence in the space opposite the government house.

Figure 10. Plaza de Mayo during the annual March of the Resistance. The Piramide has been surrounded by scaffolding which has then been covered with pictures of the disappeared. Source: Historia de las madres de Plaza de Mayo, 2nd edition (2003: 280). Photo is dated the year 2000.

Aparición con vida became one of the slogans of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Its direct translation and symbolic meaning are quite different. The slogan translates to ‘Appear with life,’ even though all of the evidence indicates that the 30,000 detained and disappeared are dead. However, while the state was willing to move on after acknowledging the 30,000 were dead,
human rights groups pushed for lists of war criminals involved in the kidnapings, torture and murders and above all, a full acknowledgement of the ‘truth,’ and punishment for those involved in state violence between 1976 and 1983. Essentially, Aparición con vida means that the entire structure that made the disappearances possible has to be exposed, punished and destroyed. One of the tenets of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Asociación Madres) is that their children are not dead, but that they live on in the struggle (Historia 2003: 167). The forty silhouettes of young people tortured and killed by police brutality across Argentina in the 1990s appear to be similarly motivated. In several of these cases, the facts are known, the victims are known to have died because of police brutality but the system remains in place. Demonstrations such as the painting of these silhouettes confronting the state in the most symbolic of spaces in Argentina continue because of the failure and absence of radical institutional change.

The Plaza de Mayo is no stranger to silhouettes and photographs of the disappeared. They ‘appear with life’ regularly during vigils and demonstrations. Although the silhouette human form has been used predominantly by the Mothers, it has spread across the range of social movements. In July 2005, during the seven-month anniversary of the Cromañón fire, parents set up several rows of posters, each containing the name, age and birth date of the fire victims. In her 1998 book, Feitlowitz (1998: 168-9) published photographs of silhouettes of a man and a pregnant woman on the Metropolitan Cathedral (which fronts on the plaza) and various life-size silhouettes pasted along the Avenida de Mayo during the first annual March of Resistance. Silhouettes of the dead occupy the streets during certain commemorative ceremonies and demonstrations. In July 2005, I photographed various silhouettes, some of them quite intricate and artistic on the fence of the Navy Mechanics School (see figure 16). Photographs of the disappeared and now photographs of the Cromañón fire victims accompany participants in
marches and demonstrations. During the weekly marches of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, photographs of three of the original members of the organization, including Azucena Villaflor, are set up around the plaza. In October 2005, the ten-month anniversary of the Cromañón fire was marked by a vigil and open-air rock concert in the plaza, with the Piramide and the Casa Rosada as the backdrop. On stage, the young sibling of one of the victims stood holding a poster with her sister/brother’s picture. Additionally, in the year 2000 and again in 2003, for the annual March of Resistance, the tall Piramide at the centre of the plaza was completely enshrouded with photographs of the disappeared (see figure 10).

These and other demonstrations temporarily occupy public spaces and temporarily attach an alternative meaning to that space. During the weekly Thursday marches of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, or during the annual March of Resistance in December, and on the anniversary of the military coup (March 24), the Plaza de Mayo is transformed into a space for memory, ‘truth’ and justice. Of course, we might more accurately say the plaza is transformed into a place for their memory, their truth and their justice. Memory entrepreneurs articulate specific memories, and call specifically for certain types of justice such as “Carceles por todos los responsables” (Jail for all of the responsible) or “Juicio y castigo por todos los responsables” (judgement and punishment for all of the responsible). On other days, such as anniversaries of the Cromañón fire, the national day of strikes and protest which corresponded with George W. Bush’s visit to Mar del Plata and days for other protests, the Plaza de Mayo is transformed into a space temporarily associated with those various causes.

I am suggesting that these demonstrations temporarily make the plaza “their place” (see Cresswell 1996: 60). However, in the case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, at least on a symbolic level and during this period of history, the plaza is associated with this one group. This
connection is a result of twenty-eight years of action, nearly 1500 marches in the plaza, the incorporation of the plaza’s name into the group name, regular occupations of the plaza and a very visible presence in issues of human rights on the national and international stages. While the plaza is most visibly associated with the Mothers during their marches, even the vacant plaza can be seen as linked to the group. Since 1994, Azucena Villaflor’s plaque has graced the monument for General Manuel Belgrano in front of the Casa Rosada. In 2005, her ashes were interned at the foot of the Piramide. Most importantly, the circular patio space around the Piramide has since at least 1992, been stencilled with large, white ‘panuelos’ (resemble bandanas), the most recognizable symbol of the group.

One common protest cry “La Plaza es la Nuestra” (the plaza is ours) suggests that Argentines are very much aware of the state/people divide that governs the plaza. As I mentioned earlier, it is surrounded by significant state buildings, but the plaza in the middle is a designated public space (albeit one under the gaze of the state). Argentines seem hyper-aware of the vulnerability of public spaces and as such, defend it and often stake claims to it. With reference to the steadfastness of the Mothers and their defiance of the military government through their regular and very public demonstrations (and occupations) of the plaza, Rosenthal (2000: 40) proposes “public spaces may have greater emotional importance in a region in which it disappeared virtually overnight than it does in the United States where is has suffered a slower, more consumerist-driven decline.” The Plaza de Mayo above all other plazas, is associated with a particular sense of place. It is associated with nationalistic feelings as the space commemorates Argentina’s independence. It is also associated with citizens’ agency. However, identity in relation to the plaza is complicated, because it also demonstrates the division between government and the governed. There is also a sense that the space must be defended; its
designation as a public space is vulnerable. The particular sense of place, as a place for the people, but where the people communicate with the nation and the symbolism of the plaza could be some of the reasons that Azucena Villaflor suggested the Mothers take their first steps there to protest on 'Videla’s doorstep.' In discussing the Plaza, in their history of the organization, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo use language such as “retomar la Plaza” to “reclaim or retake the Plaza” (2003: 28). Hebe de Bonafini explains in the same book, “This plaza which gave us its name, is the plaza where our independence and our liberty was produced and is where our liberty will continue to be produced, where we will continue to be” (2003: 41).

One might be tempted to suggest that there are two different struggles over space in the Plaza de Mayo. Here, I am speaking of where the public reasserts authority over the space in defiance of the state, but also competition between groups for the plaza. However, in looking at the various graffiti and installations in the plaza, it appears there is little foundation for such a claim. If this were true, there would be increased erasure of group messages and the replacement of other messages with that of one particular group. Rather, the graffiti and installations suggest that the plaza is viewed as a communal space for dialogue or confrontation with the state on multiple (and often related) issues. As such, graffiti seem to ‘live their natural life,’ meaning they exist until they fade to the point of being illegible, or in other cases, they are obscured by someone who rejects their message. Yet in this case, it still appears that it is not another social group that erases or removes the message in order to replace it with ones own, but rather a group of individuals who take offence to the message and destroy it for that reason. Such is the case with the fibreglass installation depicting the names of victims of police repression from 1983-
2003 and the “Judgement and Punishment” installation which was located on the “police” or “state” side of the metal barricades.²⁰

Figure 11. Judgement and Punishment installation, made presumably of a stencilled sheet laid on the plaza’s tiles, covered with fibreglass creating a hard, durable surface capable of standing up to the elements and high levels of pedestrian traffic.

At the time of my fieldwork, the Plaza de Mayo contained 225 graffiti, of which eighty-eight were in good, legible condition, eighty-four were somewhat weathered and more difficult to read, and fifty-three were completely illegible. As I mentioned above, there seems to be little competition between groups for space in the plaza, and the erasure of messages happens for other reasons, such as the repainting of an area in the plaza such as an entire fountain or the removal of graffiti seen as offensive to a group of people, such as the “Judgement and Punishment”

²⁰I took note of these installations in July 2005. There were three at the entrances to the Plaza on the ‘people’s’ side. On the ‘state’ side, there were traces of the fourth installation. However, I am unsure of who removed the installation or when it was removed. I suspect it was removed by police. For an interesting parallel to this, see Avi Lewis’ short documentary “Gustavo Benedetto Presente!” Some of Lewis’ footage captures plain-clothed police officers removing an unofficial memorial for a slain protestor along Avenida de Mayo under the cover of darkness.
installation on the police side of the fence. Of the 225 graffiti, six have been concealed. The “30 Years of Democracy” fibreglass installation listing names of victims of police repression has been burnt to the point where two thirds of it is illegible. One of the “Judgement and Punishment” installations as mentioned above has been completely removed. One graffito has been smeared with paint, two have been covered with whitewash (on one of the large fountains) and one graffito on the paving stones in front of the Casa Rosada has been covered temporarily by a wooden stage.

Graffiti are distributed throughout the plaza, 176 on the Piramide side, and forty-eight (of which forty are the white silhouettes with the names of people who have died as a result of police brutality) on the Casa Rosada side of the police barricade. One additional message, the illegible graffito on the police barricade, is not grouped into either of these categories, as it is not apparent whether it was painted on the state or the people side, although I presume it would have been painted from the Piramide side while facing the Casa Rosada. I mentioned above that one of my first impressions in the space was that the graffiti seemed to be concentrated in the ‘people’s’ side of the plaza and this is confirmed through my observations. Additionally, although the actual date of the painting of the white silhouettes is not known, it appears to have been some time in the late 1990s, long before the police barricade was erected in 2001 or 2002. Most of the graffiti is painted on the paver stones; 193 graffiti are found on the ground; two are painted on trees in the plaza, three on fountains, five on plaques, two on existing monuments, and ten on mailboxes found on the plaza’s perimeter. Ten messages are found on fences, one of which is written directly on the police barricade. The majority of the messages (99) are located on the “public” side of the barricade and around the Piramide and central paths with run North-South and East-West and intersect with the circular path around the Piramide. On the “state” side of the
plaza, fifty-seven messages face the Casa Rosada. Throughout the rest of the plaza, ten messages are found on the perimeter and fifty-nine are distributed throughout the other various paths on both sides of the plaza.

As the Plaza de Mayo is known as a space for demonstration and confrontation with the state, I suspected that several of the graffiti would refer to specific events. The following categories are related in some ways, however, I found that thirty-four dealt with police brutality; thirteen refered to repression in the past or the present and two refered specifically to the killing of a young man named Diego Lucena. In addition to this, six refered specifically to December 19 and 20, 2001 and one to the Corralón. Reflecting the potency of the disaster in social circles, twenty of the messages deal with Cromañón. Six messages, all stencils located on green mailboxes along the perimeter of the plaza, address the Falklands/Malvinas war. Five messages reflect the trend to ‘worker occupied’ factories in Argentina. Along similar lines, several of the messages refer to people, eight of whom are victims of repression, twelve victims at Cromañón, four refer to politicians, five to police, five to workers in expropriated factories, three to presumed political prisoners and forty to victims of police brutality (although only three of these names are legible).

In conducting this project, I have realized that symbols and repeated phrases are important to the sustenance of particular narratives as well as the survival of social movements. Although this comes mostly from personal observations, Bosco (2001: 317) suggests the uniformity of the name ‘Mothers of Plaza de Mayo’ across all groups of Mothers nation-wide as well as the stencilling of the Mothers’ plazas with white kerchiefs has contributed to the sustainability of the group. All groups of Mothers take the name of the most symbolic plaza in Argentina, and most of the plazas where their marches are staged are stencilled with their
symbol. The repetition of the plaza name in the name of the social movement, I suggest, also contributes to a particular ‘sense of place’ in the Plaza de Mayo. This repetition reinforces that the plaza be seen as a place of resistance and community. This realization concerning the importance of symbols and repeated phrases led me to look at both. The most common symbol, not surprisingly, is the human silhouette. Eleven identical stencils declaring “Women Resist” use the raised fist, a common symbol in social protest. Other symbols such as the (Communist) red star (2) and the symbol for the Quebracho movement (2) are linked to various political groups. Two messages use the shoe to refer to Cromañón, and of the various installations in the plaza, three use the police cap symbol in linking the slogan “Judgement and Punishment” to the police. Two graffiti, located above and below the fibreglass installation that pays homage to the ‘fallen’ from December 2001 rely on the symbol of the ‘hormiga’ (ant). This graffiti is not at once comprehensible in Buenos Aires, as it is a symbol that has been primarily associated with the city of Rosario, 300km north of the capital. The image of the ant, painted in a specific style, has been used throughout Rosario to represent Claudio “Pocho” Lepratti, a social activist shot on the roof of a school in Las Flores, a shantytown on the outskirts of the city, on December 20, 2001 in the same police violence that affected Argentina as a whole. These two black, painted ants are symbolically located above and below the large installation in memory of the December 2001 victims. This symbol is spread throughout Rosario, often with the words “Pocho Vive” (Pocho Lives). I had never seen the ‘Pocho hormiga’ in Buenos Aires; I believe it is significant that its planners decided to paint the symbol in the Plaza de Mayo. This decision seems to imply that the painters recognized the Plaza de Mayo as the most appropriate space outside Rosario to transmit their narrative of the past. Those who painted the ‘hormigas,’ like Azucena Villaflor and the December 2001 protestors before them, recognized the symbolic power of the plaza and its
association with social struggle. The placement of the ‘hormiga’ symbol here is also significant in that policies that led to the 2001 economic crisis came from the government house facing the plaza. Likewise, one could perceive that the social crises Claudio Lepratti dealt with every day while working in Rosario’s shantytowns were addressed ineffectively here in the Casa Rosada as well as in the National Congress.

In general, Argentine graffiti often addresses various themes such as soccer, elections, drugs, birthdays, love, music and individual tags (Chaffee 1993). The absence of much of this in the Plaza de Mayo should indicate to us something about the common association of this place with protest and debate on social, political and even economic issues. Of these common categories, three of 225 deal with music, one with love and twenty-six are tags. The tags are generally found around the large circular fountains in the Piramide side of the plaza, and appear to be graffiti written while people congregate or sit around the cement fountains. In this area, graffiti are predominantly tags whereas graffiti in the central paths and around the Piramide are predominantly social or political in nature.

Several of the mnemonic graffiti in the plaza refer to dates crucial to the transmission of alternative memories. These often refer to the date of trauma. Four messages in the plaza refer to December 20 2004, the third anniversary of the December 19th and 20th uprisings. One refers more generally to “December 2001” while another, obviously painted around the two-year anniversary, cites December 2001 and December 2003. Two stickers for victims of Cromañón cite the birth-dates of individual victims and the date of the fatal fire. Another five graffiti (the white silhouettes) cite the dates on which various individuals died in police custody as a result of brutal interrogations, torture and mistreatment. At one point, there would have been thirty-five more of these dates, but the silhouettes are quite old and weathered, and mostly illegible. As I
was primarily interested in 'mnemonic' graffiti, I counted how many messages used the word "memoria." Fifteen of the two hundred and twenty-five messages used the word "memory."

However all of these are the same stencil "Sembrar la Memoria" or "to plant or sow memory."

In addition to this, one message, a large installation for victims of repression on December 19 and 20, 2001 uses the word "homage" instead of the word "memory." The installation "Homage to the victim of the December 20 2001 police repression" suggests a respect for, and a positive remembrance of those killed by police during the December 2001 uprising.

The subjects of the mnemonic graffiti are referred to in particular ways as groups attempt to make their narratives persuasive and more central. The police are depicted as repressive, violent, 'quick triggered,' guilty of repression and benefiting from impunity. The victims of the police on the other hand, are presented as victims of repression, as united martyrs, patriotic and fighting for one's homeland. They are presented as having been killed during 'democratic' times following the end of the dictatorship. Pocho Lepratti, the Rosario activist killed by Rosario police in December 2001, in particular is depicted as hardworking, cooperative, strong and able to influence social change through the symbolism of the 'hormiga.' Similarly, the passing of these victims is not presented simply as 'death' but in several cases as 'murder' as can be seen in the name of the APHAC organization. Translated into English, the name means Association of Parents of Children Murdered in Cromaño (my emphasis). Chabán and Ibarra are specifically referred to as murderers. The 194 victims of Cromaño are presented as "our children," and as having died because of corruption. Their youthfulness is also emphasized. The placement of a graffito about "los pibes" on a mounted plaque for "those who died for the fatherland in Tucumán on the 24th of September 1812" suggests something 'honourable' about the deaths of the 194 Cromaño victims.
Clear distinctions are made between who is included and excluded in the mnemonic discourse, and a connection can be made here between the exclusionary discourse and the layout of the plaza. As I mentioned previously, the explicit and implicit power of the state is visible in the plaza, but this is exacerbated by the police barricade that divides the plaza in two, and whether intentionally or not, into one side for 'the state' and the opposite for 'the people.' The discourse tends to exclude the state, and specifically its strong arm, the Federal Police by constructing these groups as 'evil' or 'wrong.' Their exclusionary status is also indicated by the lack of police 'voices' in the Plaza de Mayo graffiti. Those judged by memory entrepreneurs to be opposed to 'socially-just' policies are also treated as 'outsiders' whereas the people, the popular masses, social movements and activists of various causes are 'insiders' and thus allowed to contribute to the discourse. Among others, this includes the Cromañón 'memory entrepreneurs' as well as the 'memory entrepreneurs' who push for justice for human rights violations under the dictatorship and for more recent repression. Family of victims and the victims themselves are also included and contribute to the production and transmission of specific narratives. In relation to the Falklands/Malvinas War, the discourse includes Argentines while excluding the English. In other words, the 'nation' is presented as united in the nationalistic feud with England. The nation is brought together despite fragmentation in other contexts over corruption, economic policy and the military past. However, in terms of domestic issues, particularly ones involving the military, the 'nation' is divided into different camps. Some Argentines are 'good' and 'right' while others are 'bad' and 'wrong.' Various perspectives are presented in the graffiti including that of the 'masses,' family of victims, social activists, individuals, neighbourhood assemblies and various groups of 'memory entrepreneurs' including family of Cromañón victims, APHAC specifically, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, H.I.J.O.S and
other human rights pressure groups. Groups such as these claim a privileged link to the past (Jelin 2003, Todorov 2003).

The graffiti range in their degree of intensity; some are much blunter and more intense than others. The ‘hormiga’ symbol for Pocho Lepratti is mitigated by the fact that the symbol is largely unknown outside of Rosario, and that it is not accompanied by the words “Pocho Lives” which frequently accompany it in Rosario. The stencil “Sow or plant memory” is also less explicit than other messages. It cannot be traced to any one group, and it is unclear what kind of memory to which it refers. It may refer specifically to an event or “to plant memory” in a place felt to be inhospitable. This stencil appears to be written alongside another and it appears that the two are supposed to be read together. The second message reads, “So that forgetting doesn’t grow.” These stencils have been painted en masse, with fifteen of the former and eight of the latter facing the police barricade as if confronting police and facing the state (the Casa Rosada). This message is intriguing – as we could consider it to mean “to plant memory” in the people or in Argentina in general, but because it was only found in the Plaza de Mayo, it could be interpreted as planting memory specifically in this space as if the Plaza de Mayo was seen as an ‘appropriate’ place for transmitting and nurturing memory. These two stencils read together are also interesting in the way they state that which is implied by so much of the memory discourse surrounding the various traumatic incidents in Argentina. The two stencils express the sentiment and motivation of the various groups of (marginal) memory entrepreneurs and a former slogan of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, ‘Remember so not to forget and remember so not to repeat.’

Much of the discourse in Plaza de Mayo is very explicit and borrows characteristics from the ‘escrache’ tactic. Various groups disseminate specific narratives in this space with the hope that they will be accepted and further disseminated by observers. It is essential that the messages
are clear so that there is no misinterpretation and thereby mis-articulation of the narratives.

Insiders and outsiders are very clearly defined and in several cases, the visual impact of graffiti and installations appears to be given serious thought. The “Judgement and Punishment” installations located at the three main entrances to the plaza on the ‘public’ side are explicit in their condemnation of the police, but as I indicated earlier, it is important that this escrache has been staged in a space where there is a high police presence (see figure 12). It is not uncommon to see a police officer, or group of officers on duty positioned close to one of these installations.

In fact, on any given day, there are upwards of 25-30 officers in and around the plaza. There are many more when there are demonstrations. The Argentina-shaped installation listing names of people killed by repression since the return to democracy appears to have been done at the same time, but its placement directly below one of the “Judgement and Punishment” installations suggests that Ánibal Verón, Maxi Kosteki, Darío Santillán and Teresa Rodríguez among many others, be recalled as victims of police repression. The slogan “Argentina 2003 – 20 years of democracy” is critical of the depth of democracy in Argentina since 1983. It also hints that while the military (as well as the police) was associated with the violence of the dictatorship, the repressors in democratic times are the police. The fibreglass installations also demonstrate an attempt at permanence. They weather the elements and high pedestrian traffic better than regular graffiti. The longer life of the installation (except in cases where it is completely removed from the plaza or the surface is burnt) means there is greater potential for the message to be transmitted. These two messages, “Judgement and Punishment” and “20 Years of Democracy” are explicit in their criticism of the Federal Police and the government. They are so explicit that it appears others have interpreted them this way and set out to interfere with the messages in
order to stop a negative image of the PFA from being transmitted, or in order to prevent victims of repression from being commemorated in the most symbolic plaza in the country.

Visual impact appears to increase the persuasiveness of specific narratives of past trauma. It seems that linking ‘human-ness’ with the ‘facts’ of the narrative makes this discourse more persuasive. As such, names, and often full names, are found in the graffiti. This can also be explained by the disconcerting thought of a loved one being forgotten. However, it seems there is a sense that mnemonic discourse is even more persuasive if it visually depicts the ‘human-ness’ of the victims. As such, stickers affixed in public places for individual Cromaño victims always use a photograph of the victim, which is accompanied by his/her full name and birth date. To add to the ‘human-ness,’ the logos of their favourite soccer teams or rock groups are also incorporated into the stickers. In order to frame how the particular victim should be remembered, one of the slogans or symbols of the Cromaño memory entrepreneurs is found on the sticker. These practices also have a relationship to the grieving process of family and friends, and while demonstrating a resistance to forgetting, are relating to a ‘working through’ of trauma (Doss 2002). Likewise, ‘sites of memory’ are also ‘sites of mourning’ (Winter 1995: 10, cited in Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti 1998: 153). The silhouettes and photographs installed in the plaza also function as a kind of haunting; the white outlines indicate ‘where’ there was once life but where there is no longer life. They indicate the ‘scene of the crime.’ Presented together, and standing as if in defiance and in unity, the silhouettes and the photographs indicate the scope of police violence and ‘gatillo fácil’ in Argentina.

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21 The ‘quick triggers’ of police, military and private security.
Graffiti in the Plaza Congreso

The Plaza Congreso is the second most popular place for demonstration and confrontation with the state in Argentina. Two kinds of demonstrations originate here, firstly, marches that begin here and move en route to another location (Cromañón as late, but typically the Plaza de Mayo) and secondly, protests that coincide with political issues being discussed by members of Congress. For instance, although demonstrations by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo tend to be held in the plaza of the same name, in 1995 they held a protest atop the Monumento a los dos Congresos, facing the national Congress while hoisting a sign “The government pays the external debt with lives.” The protest coincided with Carlos Menem’s re-election as president.

The large Monumento a los dos Congresos provides ample space for painting graffiti that are visible to the Congress but also to those traveling through the downtown area by car or bus (see figures 6, 7 and 13). Owing to the large size of the plaza, and the size of the monument in itself, as well as to popular usage of the plaza as a site of demonstration and a youth hang-out, there were more graffiti in the Plaza Congreso than in the other spaces studied here. As I mentioned previously, the plaza feels like two separate spaces, one more political than the other. For this reason, I divided data collection between the two spaces. On the section immediately in front of the National Congress containing the large Monumento a los dos Congresos, I documented 470 graffiti. On the other side of the plaza, I documented 220 graffiti.

On the less-political, and much quieter side of the plaza, 155 graffiti consist of text, twenty-four of a combination of text and images, and forty-one consist of images alone. The majority are located on the green wooden benches found throughout the plaza (98 graffiti), and the round, cement water fountain at the centre of the space (62). Fifteen graffiti are found on the various monuments and statues in the plaza, while the rest are found on decorative granite pillars.
(20), the sidewalk (4), a low retaining wall around underground parking entrances (5) and various other structures (16). These messages address various people, some the same as those addressed in the other side of the plaza. Thirty of the messages refer to specific individuals unknown to the researcher while thirty-three refer to couples. Six graffiti refer to politicians, and of this figure, three refer to George W. Bush. Nine refer to various political groups, one to a revolutionary figure (Che Guevara) and one derogatory message that refers to Brazilians. Two refer to police, one to Congress in general, and one to victims of Cromaño. Eleven messages refer to various music groups or soloists, one to Argentine soccer and one to anti-Nazism.

The real difference between the two plazas is not only seen in the higher concentration of graffiti in the side closer to the Congress, but also the differences in the number of graffiti referring to specific events in the two halves of the plaza. Although there are six messages which make reference to the dictatorship, two that refer to repression past or present, four to American (USA) imperialism and one to the Cromaño disaster, most of these messages are located on the perimeter of the plaza and along Cevallos Avenue, the street that divides the two sections of the plaza. In fact, all but one of these messages are found near Cevallos Avenue, the one exception, one of several Juventud Radical stencils (“Somos el juicio de las juntas”/“We are the justice for the juntas”) is located towards the back of the plaza, but is located along the perimeter as the street curves towards the beginning of the Avenida de Mayo. In other words, it appears the group that stencilled this area (there are fifteen of these stencils in the other half of the plaza, six in this half) walked through the section containing the Monumento de los dos Congresos, crossed into the second half of the plaza but remained on the perimeter, and then made its way down Avenida de Mayo. This same stencil is found fifteen times throughout the length of Avenida de Mayo, stretching from Plaza Congreso to Plaza de Mayo.
Contentious events appear in the graffiti closer to the *Monumento a los dos Congresos* and the National Congress. Seventy-one graffiti deal with repression past and present while nineteen refer specifically to the dictatorship. In addition to this, two stencils deal jointly with the dictatorship and *Cromañón* ("society that didn’t see 30,000 disappeared, society that doesn’t see 193 [sic] deaths"), pointing out the complicity and blindness of society during the dictatorship to the (supposed) blindness or ignorance of present society to pay attention to the victims of the fire. Five more graffiti address *Cromañón*. Reflecting the recent crisis, four messages address the protests and repression of December 19/20, 2001 while one specifically deals with the economic collapse. Other graffiti reflect various other issues such as the privatization of schools (6), American (USA) imperialism (1), the Summit of the Americas and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (6), Eduardo Duhalde’s term as president (1), the war with Iraq (1), and the killing of Axel Blumberg and the public response (2) and the arrest of Romina Tejerina (4).  

Although the two plazas in this study are not mnemonic spaces in the same sense as *Estación Avellaneda, La República Cromañón* or *El Olimpo*, mnemonic graffiti and installations in memory of victims of repression are found in both the *Plaza de Mayo* and the *Plaza Congreso*. However, within the latter, graffiti in memory of victims is found only in the more political side. Although only one graffiti specifically uses the word "memoria," another thirty-four graffiti can be counted as "memorials" (such as "Diego Lucena lives"). Also, the fact that this half of the plaza is more of a place for memory is suggested by other installations facing the Congress.

Elaborate banners and laminated signs had been affixed to the black iron fence on the front side of the *Monumento* and another black fence closer to the Congress. These banners and signs (as well as the tent I mentioned above) do not form part of this study, but it seems relevant to  

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22 Tejerina was arrested for the murder of her infant child. Her pregnancy had been the result of a violent rape and she experienced emotional trauma as a result, but as abortion is illegal in Argentina, she was forced to carry the pregnancy to term. The issue has reopened the debate about free and legal abortion.
mention their positioning and the appeal they seem to make to the Congress. The concentration of these banners and posters, as well as graffiti facing the Congress leads me to conclude that this particular space is recognized as one useful in the quest for information or justice, and a space that can be used publicly to hinder the social and political forgetting of missing loved ones.

The wide range of issues articulated in the Plaza Congreso points to the variety of protests that are staged here, and to the fact that protest over various issues often takes place around the time related issues are being discussed in the Congress. The variety of issues here suggests a general understanding of this space as one conducive to protest and expression. The public discussion of events and issues in this space and the state and official discussion of issues in the Congress in front could, in an ideal world, be perceived as a 'conversation,' although it might be more accurate to say that the two spaces and two debates are more parallel than they are dialectic. Reflecting the idea of this plaza as a place conducive to protest, nineteen graffiti discuss the decriminalization of protest. Twenty-one deal with justice for various individuals or groups, three deal with prison conditions and prisoners' rights while twenty-seven call for freedom for political prisoners. Eight stencils criticize the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) while four call for free and legal abortion. Eight graffiti address a new minimum salary of $800AR while a wide range of graffiti reflects opposition to various things from war (1), to Shell Oil (1), the International Monetary Fund (1), police and military (1), the President (1), George W. Bush (3) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (5). About midway through the first section of the plaza, the plaza is lined with two decorative limestone-sitting areas. Both are in poor condition and are occupied at least part of the day by homeless people. But in both of these areas, a sort of graffiti war appears to have been waged between Nazi and anti-Nazi groups. Seventeen graffiti deal with one side or the other.
Three additional graffiti are about anarchy. I note the presence of these messages, but do not discuss them in detail.

_Escrache_ is found on both sides of Cevallos Avenue, thirty-nine closer to the Congress and seventeen on the other side. On the Congress side, targets of _escrache_ are “genocidas” (war criminals) (1), Nazi groups (1), corrupt groups (2), groups judged to be ‘guilty’ (15), groups judged to have been complicit with the dictatorship (2), repression in general (17) and Axel Blumberg’s militant father (1). An additional two messages appear to be _escrache_ but could not be deciphered entirely. On the other side of the plaza, targets of _escrache_ are police repression (4), groups seen as ‘guilty’ (7), George W. Bush (3) and three more are personal insults. However, as I mentioned above, these messages are relatively close to the ‘political’ side of the plaza and therefore indicate the possibility that they were written during protests staged in this half of the plaza before moving down the _Avenida de Mayo_.

Graffiti in the plaza, especially on the side of the Congress, employs various symbols. These are in many cases, symbols involved in the group identity and are used as a means of garnering support and attention for groups. Recognition of others of these symbols is a small victory for these groups. The feather symbol accompanies the _Juventud Radical_ stencil, and is thus found fifteen times in the Congress side of the plaza, and six times in the other side.

Anarchy groups have marked the sides of the plaza (rather than the _Monumento_) with their symbols including the encircled letter _A_ (14) as well as a combination of crossed out swastikas (4) and hammers and sickles (4). On the other side of the plaza, there are four anarchy symbols and one crossed out swastika. A single red (communist) star is found on either side, as are various flags, two on the Congress side and three on the other. The PV symbol for Peronist groups (indicating _Perón Vuelve_/Perón Returns or _Perón Vive_/Perón Lives, depending on the
era) was found in the Congress side (1). A single logo for the Callejeros (band logo but attached to the victims of Cromañón) is found on both sides. Additionally, a symbol using five-dots (like those on the side of a die) indicating four police officers surrounding and beating one delinquent is also found, once on the Congress side, and three times on the other side.

Concluding Remarks

As repeated phrases and symbols are used to help "establish/convince/transmit" (Jelin 2003: 26) particular memories, the stencilled image of Darío Santillán outstretching his hand and gesturing to police not to shoot as he attends to Maxi Kosteki, dying on the floor of Avellaneda Station, is particularly interesting. This stencil is found throughout Buenos Aires in great numbers, and is also quite visible in the City of Rosario, 300km to the north. Seventeen of these stencilled images are found in the Congress side of the plaza. This image is integral to the cultivation of a very particular memory of this event and in order for it to be accepted and re-transmitted by receivers, it must be visible not only in the space of trauma (Avellaneda Station) but throughout the city and area where memory entrepreneurs hope to plant this memory. Although the police are not visible in the stencil, the intense media coverage of the killings of Darío and Maxi has meant that most people are aware of the basic facts of their attacks. The faces and names of Darío and Maxi have become synonymous with police repression. The circulation of photographs taken by journalists during the police shootings (that later became evidence used against the police) also ensured that many people were familiar with the desperate image of Darío stopping despite the risk of police brutality, to help his dying comrade.

The concentration of graffiti appears to be higher closer to the Congress for a couple of reasons. It appears important for writers of social and political graffiti to locate their messages as
close as possible to the National Congress, and to do so in places visible to both the public and members of Congress. For ease of visibility, as well as the duration of messages, vertical surfaces are preferable to horizontal ones. The second half of the plaza is not only distant from the Congress, but also lacks significant structures on which graffiti can be painted. The *Monumento a los dos Congresos*, unlike the actual Congress in front of it, is not guarded. This and its mammoth size and abundance of large, flat, vertical surfaces makes it ideal for graffiti that needs to be seen (see figure 12). This central tower appears to be the most ideal and coveted place for graffiti as it is visible to the Congress on one side, and on the remaining sides, to traffic and pedestrians from farther away.

Graffiti in this half of the plaza refers to a range of different groups from political groups (42), to prisoners, especially political prisoners (31) and politicians (14). Twenty-seven refer to victims of police repression while four refer to victims of *Cromaño*. An additional four refer to “the responsible” and one makes specific reference to “genocidas/ war criminals.” Eighty-six graffiti belong to individuals (mostly tags) and ten refer to couples (excluding the range of couple’s graffiti that was not documented on the four eagle statues on the *Monumento*).

A range of subjects are addressed in the graffiti for memory and justice in the *Plaza Congreso*. There is of course, overlap here between this and the other spaces of this project. A number of stencils deal with Darío and Maxi; other graffiti mentions police repression, individual victims of repression such as Diego Lucena and Jorge Cardenas, politicians, victims of *Cromaño*, 30,000 disappeared, and the military juntas of the dictatorship. As in other spaces, the construction of an ‘us versus them’ argument is evident in the characteristics associated with the positive and “other” groups. The *Callejeros*, or victims of *Cromaño* are referred to possessively (‘our *Callejeros*’) suggesting a familiarity and intimacy with the victims. The
Figure 12. Central tower of the Monumento a los dos Congresos, facing the National Congress. This photo was taken October 31, 2005 after the monument was cleaned or sandblasted for the beginning of the Summit of the Americas.
30,000 disappeared are presented as ‘living in our struggle’ while political prisoners are depicted as unjustly imprisoned, victims of repression under democracy but as being ‘present’ in the current struggles. Politicians are presented as corrupt to such a degree that radical public intervention is required to save the nation (‘Do something patriotic, kill a corrupt politician’).

The Federal Police and Gendarmeria (military security force) are seen as murderous, repressive, controlling and intimidating, in contrast to the idea that both are groups providing security to the public. Similarly, the Federal Police as an institution serving the community is questioned through a humorous play with the PFA’s logo and slogan. Instead of reading “At the Service of the Community,” the stencilist has asked witnesses to reconsider who is served by the PFA by changing the slogan to “At the Service of the War Criminal Community.” The mnemonic discourse here includes the perspectives of survivors of victims of repression, various social and political groups, memory entrepreneurs and in general, the marginalized, seemingly powerless citizen. As such, the discourse includes these groups while excluding most obviously, the military especially from the dictatorship era, the police both past and present as well as politicians in general.

The mnemonic graffiti and graffiti about justice in the Plaza Congreso are very explicit and biting in their attacks. These escraches are not mitigated – for instance, the stencil I mentioned above about the PFA’s logo and slogan, does not state (or need to state) that it refers to the federal police. The slogan is well known, and a frequent target of parody. This and another graffito employ sarcasm while ‘othering’ or ‘marking’ particular groups. The graffito that reads, “Do something patriotic, kill a corrupt politician” is a good example of this. Other messages are explicit in their extensive provision of details memory entrepreneurs and activists hope to transmit. For instance, the plaque for Jorge Cardenas details how, when, where and by whom he
was killed. The plaque, although not located on the steps of the Congress where he was killed, is located on the island/sidewalk/bus stop area facing the Congress essentially marking this space as one of terror and trauma. An elaborate stencil provides a thorough critique of the police and the gendarmería, and in the end, tells the observer how to ‘read’ the message. From the top it reads:

\[ \text{Policia – Prefectura – Gendarmería} / \text{Police – Prefecture -- Gendarmería} \]
\[ \text{Te Asesina} / \text{I kill you} \]
\[ \text{Te Reprimo} / \text{I repress you} \]
\[ \text{Te Vigilo} / \text{I watch you} \]
\[ \text{Te Intimido} / \text{I intimidate you} \]
\[ \text{Te Controlo} / \text{I control you} \]
\[ \text{Seguridad?/ Security?} \]

This was arranged on the stairs that lead to the top of the Monumento so that each line was placed on the vertical section of the individual steps. As you ascended the stairs, you were faced with this message, outlining for a particular perspective all the things police do to you, and by the last line, you are asked to consider, is this really security? (see figure 13).

It is not always necessary to explicitly state the target of the escrache, as this can often be interpreted based on the context as well as the proximity to other graffiti. The following graffiti serves as an illustration to the importance of context: “We are not in the dictatorship, but they kill us anyway.” From the context of the sentence itself, we can derive that the state is responsible for killing its own citizens because of the link that is made to state terror under the dictatorship. Beyond this, the physical context of the graffito is telling, as it is located in the same space as other graffiti that explicitly blame police for the murders of social activists and ordinary citizens. In this way, graffiti are read together, even though they have been written by different people and at different times. Lastly, also with reference to physical context, it is important to consider the location of this graffito. It is located on the Monumento in the public
Figure 13. View from the North (Avenida Rivadavia) side of the Monumento a los dos Congresos, July 2005, although this same stencil was visible in this location two years prior (but was erased along with the rest of the graffiti on the monument by the end of October 2005). The multi-part stencil questions the ‘security’ offered by the police and the gendarmería.
plaza that faces the National Congress, a fortress of state power. The graffito reaffirms the plaza as a place of the people that exists parallel to a space of power. The ambiguous ‘they’ of the graffito does not require clarification; its context suggests readers interpret ‘they’ as referring to the state.

The two main plazas in downtown Buenos Aires serve as rallying points for demonstrations of various sorts. They also celebrate the nation’s history and are centres of state power. During the dictatorship, the plaza, like all public spaces in Argentina from 1976-1983, was brutally controlled by military and police. Open confrontation was violently repressed. However, in more recent times, state control of public space has relaxed to the point that open (especially non-violent) confrontation with the state occurs frequently, and seemingly regularly on the anniversaries of traumatic events. Naturally, there is a point at which the state reacts. The state permits confrontation until a certain (not easily determined) threshold is crossed. For this reason, particular aspects of the plazas are ‘in bounds’ or ‘out of bounds’ to demonstrators; the Monumento a los dos Congresos is in bounds, but the National Congress is off limits. These boundaries vary depending on the social climate. For instance, graffiti writing on the Monumento a los dos Congresos was permitted for many years, but for a short window in 2005 (during which the world media converged on Argentina for the Summit of the Americas), street art was controlled. Similarly, there is a stronger ‘urge’ to transgress these boundaries in certain periods. At present, there appears to be little interest in painting the Congress, and for the most part, graffiti writers respect the state’s desire to keep it clean. However, during the unrest of December 2001, anger and frustration among citizens escalated to such a level that the government required extra security to defend symbols of its authority (such as the Congress and the Casa Rosada).
The Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Congreso are centres of protest for multiple causes. Graffiti in each reflects multiple campaigns against injustice and various campaigns for alternative narratives of past trauma. At the time of my fieldwork, these plazas contained graffiti about the fire at Cromañón, the murders of Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki and the violence of the military dictatorship. In the chapters that follow, I turn to the locations of these traumas. In each, the motivation of (marginal) memory entrepreneurs appears to be to confront injustice by pointing to the responsible, to impede forgetting of the victims, and to wrestle the meaning of these spaces away from all other associations they may have had in the past.
CHAPTER 4

Thirty-thousand Calls for Justice: Graffiti and the Spaces of Terror Thirty Years Later

It seems appropriate that I begin this chapter today, March 24, 2006. This date is not significant to most North Americans, but it is one that resonates deeply among Argentines. This date marks the anniversary of the military coup that brought General Videla to power and began a period of fear, disappearances and torture. The anniversary has in the past been marked with intense contestation, not unlike the spaces in which the terror was carried out. But this day marks the thirtieth anniversary of the coup, and without seeming too optimistic, it appears, at least from my distanced perspective, that human rights groups have made great strides in their efforts to displace dominant interpretations of the military period and have received more support for their alternate interpretations of both this period and the spaces associated with the dictatorship.

Former Detention Centres as Places of Memory

The Plaza de Mayo, although associated with social protest in general, is strongly linked with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Today, El Olimpo, El Club Atlético and the infamous Escuela Mecánica de la Armada (Navy Mechanics School or the ESMA) are associated at least in part, with the human rights movement. However, these changes in ‘ownership’ or the right and power to define these spaces is a new development and has been the result of intense action sustained over decades. During the dictatorship, these buildings functioned as detention centres. During the 1980s, the CONADEP collected testimony concerning the 340-plus detention centres, including the ESMA, El Club Atlético and El Olimpo. In the 1990s, human rights groups began to reclaim some of the former detention centres. Several (like the ESMA and El Olimpo) continued to be
Figure 14. Diagram illustrating the location of El Olimpo, a former clandestine detention centre in the Buenos Aires barrio of Floresta (Not to scale). The block is occupied mostly by a large garage which was once used as a garage for city buses before being used as a vehicle registration office for the Federal Police. For this reason, it is sometimes called “El Garage Olimpo” (The Olympus Garage). A) Along this exterior wall (on Olivera) there is a large (amateur) mural about the dictatorship. Most of the mnemonic graffiti is concentrated on this side of the building, although some continues around the corner on Rafaela. Very little is found on Fernández. Instead, this side is dominated by graffiti about soccer and drugs. B) Main entrance to the garage. It was here that the “Policía Federal - Servicio a la Comunidad” sign was located. The main gate is iron grille and permits one to look into the garage. C) Former entrance to the detention centre (standard sized, window-less garage door). D) Area where the detention centre was located (this occupied a very small portion of the block).
used by the military or the police. The president at the time, Carlos Menem and his administration were less than tolerant of these initiatives. Menem declared the ESMA would be destroyed. However, the ESMA is a very large complex on expansive grounds. Its facilities include well maintained sporting facilities and it is these facilities that sparked conflict in the 1990s when various highschools moved sporting events to the ESMA (see Feitlowitz 1998: 172-4). Students whose relatives had disappeared, or schools that had lost large numbers of faculty and students objected to swim meets and gym classes being held on the grounds of the former detention centre. Many others objected to their inability or unwillingness to move on. One swim coach challenged, “How long are we going to live anchored to the past?” (quoted in Feitlowitz 1998: 174). In contrast, the student secretary of human rights for the University Federation of Argentina argued, “This is not just any swimming pool, this is the Argentine Auschwitz” (quoted in Feitlowitz 1998: 174). Initiatives to further investigate the past and to recall the past through commemorative acts were met with a lot of resistance from individuals, the military and police, politicians, and above all, the President in the 1990s. In 1996 (the year of the twentieth anniversary of the coup), Carlos Corach, the Minister of the Interior, attempted to “ban all commemorations organized by [Hebe de] Bonafini’s segment of the Mothers and scheduled for March 21-24 in Plaza de Mayo” (Feitlowitz 1998: 188). However, a judge prevented the ban because it contradicted constitutionally granted rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly (Feitlowitz 1998: 188). Around the same time, the city council approved a proposal to turn El Olimpo into a museum of memory. The museum meant the police, who had continued to use the building after the dictatorship, would be relocated. Despite the city’s proposal, the police denied attempts by of a group that wanted to paint a mnemonic mural on the building’s exterior. The chief of police suggested instead that they paint their message on a municipal billboard
El Olimpo had been the second choice for the location of the museum in 1996. Memory entrepreneurs would have preferred to pursue the ESMA because of its intense symbolism. Feitlowitz (1998: 189) explains, “It would have made a ringing statement against the machinations of [Admiral Emilio] Massera, the Navy’s promotion of known torturers, and the force’s censure of [Retired Navy Capitain Adolfo] Scilingo’s revelations [about the death flights.]” However, because of its charged associations, human rights groups recognized that their plans for the museum might have been met with less resistance at El Olimpo than at the ESMA (Feitlowitz 1998: 189).

It is vital to note that on the twenty-eighth anniversary of the coup, President Néstor Kirchner announced from the ESMA, that the former detention centre would be converted into a museum of memory. In the year of the thirtieth anniversary of the coup, Hebe de Bonafini announced “The enemy is no longer in the Casa Rosada,” implying that Kirchner, unlike former President Menem, was supportive of the work of the (popular) memory entrepreneurs. In contrast, for the twentieth anniversary in 1996, while 100,000 people congregated in the Plaza de Mayo, President Menem did not attend any of the commemorative events. When challenged about his 1989 executive pardon of convicted commanders, Menem responded,

I regret nothing. We had to pacify the country in order to transform it. We have definitely closed the wound (my emphasis, cited in Feitlowitz 1998: 187).

Jelin (2003) and Kenny (1999) suggest that certain periods are more conducive to transmitting alternative interpretations of the past. In this case, the passage of time, but especially changes in the political climate have made the present a place that is more open to previously suppressed narratives about the dictatorship. For instance, within the twenty months, El Olimpo was turned over from the Federal Police to human rights groups and is in the process of being turned into a community space. Excavation at the former site of detention centre El Club Atlético has been
completed. In December 2005, the results of the excavation were presented in a commemorative event held at El Olimpo. Symbolically, this was the first public opening of El Olimpo. Also, when I visited the ESMA in November 2005, although still closed to the public and guarded by soldiers, it was being converted into the promised ‘Space for Memory.’ It appeared a space in transition. It was no longer uniquely a military space, but was also not entirely a space for memory. Nearly all of the graffiti on the long fence at the front of the grounds had been erased. All that remained were two nearly undetectable messages that I found only because I was looking so closely and was so determined to find something. The central part of the building, the part most frequently photographed and the part most recognized as the ESMA, stood in stark contrast to the metal silhouettes of human figures affixed to the metal fence, and the large blue and white banner for a museum of memory (see figure 16). Hanging below the now ominous words Escuela Mecánica de la Armada hung a banner reading “Espacio para la memoria y para la promoción de los derechos humanos” (Space for Memory and the Promotion of Human Rights.) For the thirtieth anniversary of the military coup, more than 100,000 people filled the Plaza de Mayo and spilled out into Avenida de Mayo and the diagonal streets that connect to the plaza. The vigil began at three o’clock in the morning, the exact hour of Videla’s coup.

Commemorative activities were also scheduled later in the day at the ESMA.

Much has been written about the dictatorship and about the individual spaces of terror from this period, beginning with Nunca Más (1984), the national report on the disappeared. However, what I would like to explore here are the ways former clandestine detention centres have been claimed as spaces for memory through social protest and collective action, but particularly through the use of street art and graffiti, tactics that physically mark the landscape and challenge the dominant meaning of place. I had hoped to focus on the ESMA, but as I
Figure 15. Site of the former El Atlético, a clandestine detention centre from the beginning of 1977 to December 28th of the same year.

mentioned above, the military remains quite efficient at erasing traces of resistance. Staff at the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Bookstore directed me to the site of the former Club Atlético in the barrio of San Telmo on Paseo Colón beneath the May 25th Highway. Like El Olimpo, I had read a little about this former detention centre and about struggles around the twentieth anniversary about the ‘appropriate’ uses of this space. Attempts to reclaim the area where the Club Atlético had stood prior to its demolition for the construction of the highway were met with resistance. Artistic installations presenting pro-memory messages were destroyed soon after their creation (Jelin 1994, Jelin and Kaufman 1998). As I mentioned above, a mural at El Olimpo was
similarly met with resistance, and human rights groups were denied permission to paint the building with a pro-memory anti-military message (Jelin 1994, Jelin and Kaufman 1998).

However, by July 2005, it appeared that the most heated days over the struggle at *El Atlético* were over. More permanent installations have been set up at the site, and part of the building itself has been excavated by archaeologists. A small memorial has been built with bricks (presumably recovered from the former detention centre) with several phrases etched into mortar claiming that “San Telmo (the barrio) has memory,” “We have 30,000 reasons to continue the struggle,” and “Don’t Forget or Forgive.” The memorial is signed by the Popular Assembly of the neighbourhood of San Telmo and is dated May 2002. On the incline of loose dirt under the highway overpass, a human silhouette has been constructed using bricks and bits of pipe from the former building (see figure 15). A makeshift staircase has been built into the incline to facilitate movement around the silhouette. On the March 24th anniversary candles are lit and placed in the pipes. Around this figure, there are small white signs listing victims of *El Atlético*. Outside the fenced-off excavation site, cement benches have been stencilled with “No Forgetting” symbols and “30,000 Desaparecidos,” “Encounter for Memory” and “Judgement and Punishment.” There are metal silhouettes affixed to the various supports for the highway overhead. Although it was once a heavily contested space, last year it appeared to be associated predominantly with human rights and memory initiatives.

*El Olimpo*, on the other hand, remained quite contentious, despite a recent change in the ownership of the former detention centre. In May 2005, it was turned over from the federal government (it had since the end of the dictatorship, continued to be used by the federal police) to the city, and from the city, to human rights groups and the community. The contentiousness of the space became evident when private security at the building seemed very critical and
unaccommodating of the work I wanted to do. It was also evident in the erasure and rewriting of graffiti, and through the actions of a citizen who walked by acting as if he was reporting our ‘subversive’ observations of *El Olimpo* in a fashion that drew unmistakably on police or military discourse.

![Figure 16](image16.png)

Figure 16. Silhouette attached to the fence at the *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA). Below the word “Escuela” hangs the banner for the “Space for Memory.”

![Figure 17](image17.png)

Figure 17. The *Olimpo* garage and mural. The photograph shows the corner of Oliviera and Falcón. The gated entrance is to the left of the photo.
El Olimpo

El Olimpo is located in the Buenos Aires neighbourhood of Floresta (see figures 14 and 17 and map 1). The building is best described as a large garage, which takes up an entire irregular shaped block. The block has five sides, and is quadratic except for where a larger street, Lacarra, cuts off the corner. The garage is surrounded by Falcón, Oliviera, Rafaela, Vucetich and Lacarra. There are two entrance gates, both of which are located on Falcón. One is a black iron gate that allows passers-by to look into the large garage section of the facility. To the left of this, there once stood a sign for the Federal Police that carried the police slogan “To the service of the community.”23 Today, such a sign would be out of place as the Olimpo is turned into a space that critiques and recalls state terror. The horrible irony of the slogan is indirectly challenged by graffiti that say, “Here they tortured” or “Argentine Federal Police – 1500 dead.” Towards the corner of Lacarra, there is a second gate. This one is solid and once served as the entrance to the detention centre. In this corner of the garage there is a two-storied building that, according to a survivor, was used as the administrative offices of the police. The victims never entered this building. However, near here, there were rows of narrow cells for individual prisoners. There was also an area for solitary confinement, torture chambers, a kitchen for the police and several offices. Only a small part of the large garage was used as a detention centre. Most of the mnemonic graffiti is located on Falcón, Oliviera and Rafaela. The large mural is located on Oliviera, the busiest of the surrounding streets. Most of the graffiti along Lacarra and Vucetich is related to music, soccer or drugs.

El Olimpo was once a bus terminal before it became a police facility. After the dictatorship, it continued to be used by the federal police and was used as a vehicle registration

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23 This information was relayed to me by a friend, Silvia Varchetta. Such signs are found outside all federal police stations, and this slogan and logo is painted on the side of federal police cruisers.
office. Like the some 340 detention centres of the dictatorship, neighbours often did not know the building operated as a detention and torture centre, something a cab driver made sure to point out as he dropped me off for the first public opening of the building in 2005. Most of the space is used as a large garage, and some of the buildings on the site have been dismantled. According to a survivor who led us through the "pozo," a number of changes were made to disguise signs of its former use as a detention centre. All of the cells have been destroyed, but archaeologists have recovered signs on the walls and on the ground that indicate the former location of the cells so that the layout of the "pozo" can be documented. The same former survivor used a string and these lines to show us the size of the cells. They were so short that one could not have stretched out completely, and so narrow that if one outstretched his/her arms, s/he could easily touch the walls.

When I began documenting the various messages at El Olimpo, I could not help but notice as we spoke to two private security officials (who revealed they had worked on the premises) that they stood directly in front of a graffiti that said "PFA Puto" (Federal Police, followed by an expletive). El Olimpo is still a highly contested space. These two security officials tried to persuade us to collect data along Lacarra and Vucetich instead of along Falcón and especially Oliviera. They were very dismissive of the mural and after I had explained what I was looking for, they suggested I look at the back of the building (the section that turned out to have very little mnemonic graffiti), instead of the mural and graffiti on Oliviera. Police, military and security officials are portrayed in very negative light in the mural and along Oliviera, whereas very little is said about the police on the opposite side of the building.

Near where the sign stood which said "At the service of the community," neighbourhood groups have painted "Neighbours for Memory." Around the corner on Oliviera, the same group

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24 Literally "hole." Pozo is the euphemism that was used by military officials to refer to the detention centres.
has painted a simple mural loaded with symbolism (see figure 19). This is not a professional mural like the ones found at the Pueyrredón Bridge, Estación Avellaneda or La República Cromañón, but it is rich with information about the memories/histories that this particular group is interested in ‘establishing,’ ‘convincing’ and ‘transmitting’ (Jelin 2003: 26). The individual drawings and phrases that make up the mural emphasize several points that allow us to understand some of the goals of these memory entrepreneurs. Within the mural, four messages suggest ‘We will not forgive or forget.’ Twelve messages focus on ‘too much death’ or ‘too much violence,’ or citing the number of people who died in El Olimpo. Along these lines, four specifically mark El Olimpo as a torture centre through the phrase “here they tortured.” The Federal Police is frequently the subject of the paintings that make up the mural. Six graffiti attack or insult the PFA; another six order the police out of El Olimpo. Another seven messages order the police out of El Olimpo and then claim the building belongs to ‘the people.’ Four messages cite the phrase ‘never again’ and three speak in favour of ‘memory.’

The mural depicts two groups confronting each other (see figure 18). The first group is that of the people or the community. This group hoists a flag with the image of Che Guevara, identifies with the 30,000 desaparecidos and supports their struggles. They are described as “the united public.” Amongst them walks a woman with the distinctive headscarf of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. The other group consists of the federal police and their collaborators from the dictatorship. Among figures clearly meant to be police officers, is a man holding a baby, a grim reaper-like figure with several skulls, an Uncle Sam figure surrounded by skulls and a police officer saying “Derechos y humanos” (right and human). Feitlowitz (1998: 36-7) describes how during the 1978 World Cup of soccer in Argentina, when the military was under international scrutiny for reports of human rights abuses, military commanders replied, “What do you mean
human rights? ... We Argentines are human, we Argentines are right.” The phrase that emerged, “Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos” (We Argentines are right and human) surfaced in various places, mocking both domestic and international reports of human rights violations (Feitlowitz 1998: 36-7). In the mural, the police are portrayed as uttering this phrase while being linked with symbols of death, the grim reaper, skulls, and the notorious Ford Falcons, the vehicle used by police to kidnap and transfer victims. The police are constructed as the enemy, and are linked to officials from the United States. The mural not only performs an escrache against the police, but also against those who supported the dictatorship, including the United States at the international level, and the doctors who were accomplices in the torture of prisoners. Many of these same doctors were also involved in the delivery and subsequent kidnapping of children born to pregnant women in the detention centres. These women were permitted to live until they gave birth, after which many of them were killed. The newborn babies were clandestinely ‘adopted’ by military families or families with connections to military personnel. The names, dates and places of birth and the biological identities of the children were falsified.

Another section of the mural draws on the idea of united struggle against oppressors, but in this case, the struggle is one that spans the continent. A fist emerges clenching a rifle from the centre of a painted map of South America. The text around the image claims a united Latin America and condemns the extent of violence claiming “Too much violence, Never Again!” This part of the mural suggests the struggle is not only one of the people against the state, but a struggle that is much larger involving the people of the continent against the oppressive powers of different states. Both of these murals depict a large crowd opposing groups with power. However, this section of the mural points to a contradiction in the discourse at El Olimpo. While several messages say things such as “no more violence” or “no more death,” this section
condones certain acts of violence when violence is ‘necessary’ to achieve particular ends (such as freeing Latin America from capitalism and American [USA] imperialism). The mural reveals a rejection of the violence committed against the mural’s authors, but an acceptance of violence if it advances the causes (of at least some) of the mural’s creators. Perhaps the mural indirectly condones the violence of some of the desaparecidos. To this date, many of those who supported the dictatorship argue that many of the victims were guerrillas. Memory entrepreneurs have downplayed this, and they tend to depict the desaparecidos as pure victims, rather than as casualties of a ‘dirty war’.

Figure 18. Mural on Avenida Oliviera on the side of El Olimpo, a former detention centre.

On the corner with Falcon, much of the mural on Oliviera consists of a variety of slogans painted in various colours. These phrases range from “too much death” or “no more death” to
“We don’t want to forget” and “Not forgetting or forgiveness.” In fact, at El Olimpo, nineteen of the 290 messages emphasize the building’s history as a clandestine detention centre; of those 290 messages, 127 more subtle references to the dictatorship. The wall was whitewashed prior to the painting of the mural, and the work occupies about one third of the block. The remaining section of the block has also been whitewashed, but is occupied by a typical election mural or pintada.25 There are also additional messages about memory and justice in this area including one that reads, “Here, they tortured” (emphasis added; see figure 20). At Estación Avellaneda as well as at Cromaño, the graffiti often employs this ‘us versus them’ argumentation style, but at El Olimpo it is particularly intense.

The struggle over this place is also evident in the graffiti. Aside from the one message and banner at Cromaño that alluded to the city’s pressure to open the street in front of the nightclub, there is little in the actual messages to indicate the space is contentious. However, at El Olimpo, several graffiti have been partially painted over so as to render the message illegible or incomprehensible. Others have been erased or painted over with white paint, and repainted again, such as the one that reads, “Here they tortured.” The last word was covered with white paint, but someone returned to paint “tortured” over the white paint used to erase the original graffito. The graffito indicates a sort of ‘dialogue’ between those who support and those who resent the plans to create a museum of memory at El Olimpo. The mural and other graffiti present the dictatorship not as the “Process for National Reorganization” (military slogan) or the economic recovery and restructuring or the justified ridding of subversion and terrorism, but as a brutal period of fear, torture and death. Graffiti that mark the building exposes the Olimpo’s ominous past. These graffiti become “irruptions of memory” and seek to prevent complacency of

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25 A long wall painting consisting usually of the letters of a politician’s name painted in a particular style, executed by a brigade paid to paint the propaganda in the party’s colours.
the citizenry. Graffiti, as Cresswell (1996) suggests, questions the naturalness of space. Mnemonic graffiti at El Olimpo questions this acceptance of El Olimpo as a space for the police as something that is 'natural' or 'normal.' The memory entrepreneurs work to have El Olimpo seen differently, as a place of repression during the dictatorship, but as a future for community organizing, cohesion and as a place for memory.

![Graffiti Image](image)

**Figure 19.** “Here they tortured.” This graffito was found high on the wall of El Olimpo on Oliviera Avenue. The word ‘tortured’ had been concealed with white paint to render the original message incomprehensible. Whoever repainted this graffito also retraced the first two words, originally painted with red aerosol with the black aerosol used to complete the message.

In order to address the contentiousness of the space (and the transgressive graffiti on its exterior), I looked at attempts to conceal messages as well as chained responses where existing graffiti is altered either by adding a message that supports the original, adding something that contests the original text, or by co-opting or hijacking the original message to change its meaning. I found two supportive chained responses (both of these were football graffiti), six that contested the original message, and four that attempted to co-opt the original meaning. For example, at one time there were several black “El Olimpo – Ex Clandestine Detention Centre”
Figure 20. Stencil on El Olimpo, Rafaela Street. Much of the stencil marking the building as a former clandestine detention centre has been covered with a thin coat of white paint.
stencils with the image of a stick figure contained behind bars. Most of them have since been altered in some way. For instance, on one of them, the “ex” has been covered with spray-paint and the stick figure behind bars has been crossed out (see figure 20). Another of the same stencils was crossed out with spray-paint before being completely painted over with white paint. In two other cases, this stencil and one that often accompanies it (see figure 21 – the image of a cockroach wearing a police cap, accompanied by the words “They are Insecurity,”) has been painted over top of football graffiti. The stencils have been painted atop blue and yellow stripes for the Boca Juniors soccer team. On one occasion, a stencil of Che Guevara is circled and crossed out; his image is also crossed out in part of the mural. The stencils shown in figure 21 and figure 22 show the partial erasure of some of these stencils. In these two cases, the erasure of part, but not all of the original graffito leaves the remaining message unintelligible. I also found sixty attempts to conceal various messages around the building. Most of these attempts were done by whitewashing the wall or a section of the wall (28). Other methods of erasure included scratching (5), other graffiti (3), a splash of paint (5) as well as various combinations of methods. The mnemonic graffiti at El Olimpo is concentrated on Oliviera but found on all five sides of the garage. However, along Vucetich, there is very little graffiti about the dictatorship.

I documented 290 graffiti including murals, political wall paintings and stencils on the walls, gates and sidewalks at El Olimpo. The majority, 187, consisted exclusively of text. Sixty-eight involved text and images, twenty-seven consisted exclusively of images (most of which were part of the large, collaborative mural). There were eight messages that were too illegible to determine if they employed text, images or a combination of the two. In most cases the messages are unsigned. I discovered later that the mural was the work of a group called ‘Vecinos por la Memoria’ (Neighbours for Memory), the mural itself is not signed. It was clearly done by a
human rights group, but only two messages at El Olimpo can be said to be the work of one of the human rights groups. An additional five of the texts are from a political party, El Partido Socialista (the Socialist Party), and these take the form of political wall paintings or pintadas. On Vucetich, four murals (painted elsewhere on sheets of plywood) have been installed on the walls of El Olimpo. They are the work of school classes, and are signed with the students’ names and that of their school.

Figure 21. Stencil on El Olimpo, Rafaela Street. The words that accompany the stencil “They are security” have been covered with white paint.

A substantial number of the messages (84 of 290) employ repeated phrases, although there is much variation between these phrases. The wall along Vucetich has a heavier concentration of soccer graffiti, and nine messages use the Argentine slang phrase “Capo” to describe a particular soccer team as being the best. However, the majority of the repeated phrases relate back to discourse about memory and justice following the dictatorship. These phrases are variations along key themes, often employing a similar argumentation style. For instance,
messages such as “Fuera la Policía,” “Fuera la Cana” and “Fuera la Yuta” are essentially the same. They all mean, ‘get out police’ but use various terms, often derogatory ones, to refer to the police. Other messages emphasize the ‘ownership’ of the contested building. These arguments operate on an ‘us versus them’ argumentation style where the police, military and their conspirators are constructed as ‘other.’ The community, the public, human rights groups, family of victims and survivors identify against this group. These messages are also quite similar with slight variations of “The Olimpo is of the people,” “The people take care of El Olimpo” and “The Olimpo for the neighbourhood.” Other messages refer to El Olimpo’s history as a clandestine detention centre, a place of torture, or in one case, as a concentration camp. Still other repeated phrases demonstrate a link to dominant human rights groups and human rights discourse through the use of popular phrases such as “Nunca más” (never again) and “ni olvido ni perdon” (don’t forgive or forget). The latter is also seen with some variation as “no olvidamos no perdonamos” (we don’t forgive or forget). These phrases link struggles at El Olimpo with those at other former detention centres, especially El Atlético and the ESMA.

The use of repeated phrases is more common than that of symbols, but various icons are found throughout the graffiti at El Olimpo. In two separate sections of the mural, the symbol of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a white headscarf, is used. There are also three images of Che Guevara in the mural. Both of these symbols are used in the construction of the “us” identity in contrast to images of police and military. On the other side of the building (Fernández Avenue), there are five football crests from various clubs. In addition to football, some of the symbols refer to rock music. In two graffiti that are classified as escrache, the ‘SS’ symbol for the Nazi Secret Service is incorporated into the graffiti text. Most of these symbols are recognizable to an Argentine audience, but one additional symbol is a little more obscure. It consists simply of five
dots like those on the fifth side of a die. It was explained to me that this symbol is often tattooed at the base of the thumb of inmates in Argentine prisons and that is signifies four police surrounding one thief. The symbol suggests police brutality and repression. I have therefore, classified this symbol as escrache.

As I mentioned earlier, I had expected that one of the strategies to “establish, convince, transmit” (Jelin 2003: 26) a particular version of the past, and a strategy to produce a narrative which is persuasive, would be to draw on ‘facts’ such as numeric figures or dates. The figure most strongly associated with the human rights movement in Argentina, 30,000 detained and disappeared, is repeated four times on the building. In addition to this, there are two separate messages that discuss 1,000 dead and 1,500 killed by the Federal Police. There is a disparity between the two figures, and it is unclear to me if they refer to the number of desaparecidos who died at El Olimpo, or if 1,500 is the number killed by the Federal police in all of Buenos Aires. According to the female survivor of El Olimpo who led a tour of the grounds, there is no consensus about how many people were detained and released from El Olimpo nor is there a record of this information. Only a rough figure of how many people did not survive the detention centre exists.

Similarly, in attempt to displace hegemonic narratives of the past, to transmit alternate memories, and to change the way spaces of trauma are viewed so that they become associated with memory and an ‘appropriate’ version of the past, I suspected that the mnemonic graffiti would refer (either explicitly or implicitly) to a particular event. The results for this part of the content analysis proved quite convincing, especially in regards to the various messages incorporated into the mural along Avenida Oliviera. Considering graffiti on all five sides of the building, 127 refer to the dictatorship. Within this figure, 121 refer generally to this period, one
refers to baby trafficking, four to dictatorship and Latin American repression (continent-wide state violence), and one refers to the dictatorship and the reclaiming of El Olimpo. Another two messages refer to a football championship and two refer to an election.

Escrache, especially in condemnation of the federal police and their collaborators, and the building itself, was quite prevalent at El Olimpo. Twenty-eight messages fell into this category. Of these twenty-eight, nineteen point out that El Olimpo operated as a clandestine torture and detention centre; two refer to disappearances, two compare the police to the Nazi 'SS,' two, as mentioned above, reveal a number of dead attributed to either the police or specifically to El Olimpo, one refers to war criminals, one to the practice of appropriating babies born in detention centres and one refers to complicity with the police and military's rule of terror. Escrache is driven by emotion, especially by anger and frustration and a sense of hopelessness in official justice. This emotion is seen in the graffiti that employ profanity as a means of adding emphasis and expressing dissent towards the subject. In this case, the police is overwhelmingly the target of insult and although occasionally referred to as "policia," the police are also referred to derogatively using various slang including "la cana" (3), "la yuta" (2) and "cana fachos cagones" (1), all of which are involved in creating a negative image of the police in order to displace hegemonic narratives (state narratives) of the military period. Elsewhere in the graffiti, various swear words are used to refer to individuals: "puto" (3) and "puto cornuda" (1).

Although graffiti at El Olimpo is predominantly about the ominous past of the building, other graffiti are about love (11), soccer (21), music (52), drugs (6) and elections (5). There are also a number of graffiti tags (11). These messages are concentrated largely on parts of the building with fewer messages about the dictatorship and the history of El Olimpo as a former detention centre. These messages are also much less contentious and are not erased or obscured
in the way messages such as “No Olvidamos No Perdonamos” (we don’t forgive or forget) or “Acá se torturó” (here they tortured) have been challenged with scratching, whitewash and spray-paint.

At El Olimpo, as at Estación Avellaneda and La República Cromañón, it is important to consider how the histories of the various groups of memory entrepreneurs have been persuasive, at least to some degree. The persuasive strategies of these groups involve demonstrations, escraches, media coverage at times, lobbying of government, pressure for justice, and other campaigns in the street such as the use of graffiti and street art. In the mnemonic discourse at El Olimpo, there is a clear “us/them” division between memory workers, victims, social activists and families of victims and those whom this group presents as “other.” This group includes above all, the police but also police employees, the military, those complicit with the crimes of the dictatorship, doctors who treated tortured desaparecidos and who participated in the kidnapping of children born to female prisoners, and political figures from the United States. In addition to these, subjects of the street art include generally the 30,000 detained and disappeared, the public, neighbours and people from the barrio of Floresta, South Americans fighting for social justice and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The building itself is often the subject of the graffiti. At El Olimpo, those associated with the police are presented negatively, while the memory entrepreneurs and the victims of state repression are favourably constructed. The group that is viewed positively is made up the community, members of social movements, and Mothers of lost children, as well as friends of desaparecidos. This group is presented through the mural as being united, strong and motivated by issues of social justice. This group depicts itself in the mural as steadfast, resistant to oblivion and unwilling to forgive. They also make claims to the 30,000 detained and disappeared as if to suggest that although they were taken and killed by the
"other" group. South Americans, more generally, are depicted as united and as collectively opposed to state violence and repression.

The police, who occupied *El Olimpo* and operated the building as a torture centre, are presented as murderers, torturers, barbaric war criminals. This is a carefully constructed narrative to displace dominant views of this group spread through speeches and propaganda during and shortly after the dictatorship. According to military discourse, it was not a 'dictatorship' or 'genocide,' rather a "process of national reorganization." The image constructed by memory entrepreneurs is quite different from the one created (for one million dollars) by General Rafael Videla and Burson Marsteller (a New York public relations firm). Videla had wanted to "improve [his country's] international image" (quoted in Feitlowitz 1998: 42). A few weeks after the Organization of American States (OAS) commission on human rights ended its investigation in Argentina in 1979, the advertising firm ran a supplement in the *New York Times Magazine*. At one point, the text read, "Argentines are again living with security. The nightmare of the subversive war is now beyond them and Buenos Aires at night is once again one of the most lively and best protected cities of the Western world" (quoted in Feitlowitz 1998: 44). While the graffiti at *El Olimpo* suggest the memory entrepreneurs and not the police or military are associated with life and critical of violence, the 1979 publication claimed the opposite, that the children of today's memory entrepreneurs (the disappeared), those labelled as "subversives" by the state, were the ones, "who decided on death as opposed to life" (quoted in Feitlowitz 1999: 44-5). However in the graffiti, the police are brutal agents of violence associated with the Nazi Secret Service and with death.

Few of the graffiti at *El Olimpo* are painted by the military, the police, or their supporters. Instead, they are the work of neighbours and community members, human rights groups, and
survivors among others. The perspective presented through the graffiti belongs to that of the more marginal or vulnerable, and aside from the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, those who lack significant power, especially in comparison to power wielded by the police and the state. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo have intense public influence, yet they refuse to be affiliated with any political party. The Mothers and other memory entrepreneurs have established a "community of resistance" (hooks 1990: 149) and the margin is their "space for resistance" as well as "a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse [...]" (hooks 1990: 149). It is in a 'space' or 'community' such as this that the creation of change and alternatives are developed (hooks 1990: 150). The goal of these and other memory entrepreneurs is to displace hegemonic narratives of the past (especially the narratives of the 'winners') and to transmit alternative narratives from the margins. Mnemonic graffiti works to 'irrupt' in the present and disrupt citizens' complacency and acquiescence to hegemonic narratives.

Graffiti at El Olimpo is aggressive and explicit in its attack on a culture of impunity, silence and injustice because before constructing a new meaning of place that will become widely accepted, the memory entrepreneurs have to fracture and displace the dominant meaning of place. For instance, I mentioned earlier the police slogan which donned a former sign in front of El Olimpo stating “At the service of the community.” This idea must be questioned and destroyed before El Olimpo can be associated with human rights groups and with memory. Ideas of justice and order should normally be associated with police, and generally we believe the police should be “at the service of the community.” However, by exposing the crimes of the past, human rights groups question the ability of the police to serve the community and the unquestioned ‘naturalness’ of this belief. In contrast to the earlier association of El Olimpo with morally good agents of the state servicing the community, the graffiti present the police as
barbaric, brutal and morally ‘bad’ citizens. The graffiti exposes “services to the community” such as baby trafficking, kidnapping, torture, murder and genocide. This connection of PFA with the Nazi SS is seen through the graffiti “Not PoliciaSS nor police employees. The Olimpo for the Public” and “The public takes care of the Olimpo and not the private SSecurity.” By linking the Nazi Secret Service and the police or security associated with El Olimpo, memory entrepreneurs suggest to readers of the graffiti how the space should be viewed, and how the dictatorial past should be remembered by drawing a parallel to the Nazi genocide of World War II.

The texts which challenge the ‘naturalness’ of El Olimpo as a space belonging to the Federal Police mention numeric figures which suggest 1,000 or 1,500 murders, American (United States) support for the ‘war against subversion’ (in terms of training of military officials at the School of the Americas and in terms of financial support for the ‘war’), police brutality and state culpability for 30,000 disappearances and deaths. However, this questioning of the ‘naturalness’ of El Olimpo as a space used by the police is not without opposition. In some cases, it seems these aggressive messages have been perceived as being too explicit, and in turn have been completely or partially obscured as is the case with the graffito which originally read “We don’t forget or forgive/ No olvidamos Ni Perdonamos.” Most of the message has been covered with white paint so that it instead reads “amos amos.” The stages or evolution of this graffiti are made evident by the original blue spray-paint, the whitewash which covered part of it, and the red spray-paint applied to re-write the message.

It is important to consider how the histories of the various groups of memory entrepreneurs have been persuasive and have contributed to creating a different ‘sense of place’ at these spaces of trauma. These meanings of place are susceptible to change, and this is seen through continued initiatives at all three sites to maintain or further develop a particular ‘sense of
place.' In all three spaces, there have been various attempts at permanence of these specific memories, but the meaning associated with space is actively contested and struggled over, even after the initial questioning of the ‘naturalness’ of space. I will continue to explore this idea in my discussion of *La República Cromañón*. The former detention centre, *El Olimpo* has officially been transferred from the control of the police to the control of the city and then the control of human rights groups. However, this still does not mean that *El Olimpo* as a space for alternative and community memory will be the permanent ‘meaning’ of the place. The meaning of space is actively contested, socially produced and can change as time passes. One long struggle is over. *El Olimpo* now belongs to the community and is now a space for memory; however, this also means a similar struggle has begun, one to maintain this particular meaning of place as well as a struggle to transmit this meaning to a wider group of people and to future generations. Also, because memory struggles are much more complex than simply one field for memory and another against, there will continue to be discussion and disagreement over *how* and *what* will be remembered in the memorial space.
CHAPTER 5

Memories of Repression and Trauma in the Landscape: Estación Avellaneda and La República Cromañón

In a previous chapter I mentioned that the aggressive memory work in Argentina was born out of a sense that state treatment of the past following the dictatorship was inadequate and inappropriate. The ‘inadequacy’ of state initiatives to address or bury the past was and continues to be resented by the general public, but particularly by the victims of state terror. This group holds a privileged link to the past (Todorov 2003; Jelin 2003). The large size of the human rights movement in Argentina and the availability of credible information about the crimes of the dictatorship has meant that their campaigns for memory, ‘truth’ and justice (recall these are their memories, truths and justices) have significant influence in the present. Another factor affecting the ability of these groups to develop and transmit their narratives of the past is their ability to sustain action over long periods. Finally, as several authors mention, certain historic periods or ‘thaws’ (Jelin 2003; Kenny 1999) are more conducive to alternative memories of the past. As such, the suppression of information about the dictatorship between 1976 and 1983, and the denial of fundamental rights such as the right to free assembly and freedom of expression meant that when those rights were returned in 1983, there was a surge of discussion of the past, of movements meeting freely and pressing the state with their concerns. Despite their ‘privileged link’ to the past, victims’ attempts to seek ‘memory, truth and justice’ are met with obstacles. As I mentioned above, the 1980s demonstrated a desire on the part of the state to balance the interests of the public on one side with the interests of the military on the other. Alfonsín and Menem both feared the potential for instability should the past be (too) aggressively pursued. The Punto Final and Obediencia Debida laws along with the 1989 executive pardon set precedents for the leniency of punishment for violent crimes. Through the next two decades,
Figure 22. Diagram of Avellaneda Station (not to scale). A) Mural for Dario and Maxi. B) Tree below which there is a mounted plaque for Dario and Maxi, produced by the Zanon worker-occupied factory. C) Notice board with the train schedule, defaced by a stencil accusing former President Eduardo Duhalde of his culpability in the killings of Dario and Maxi. D) Blue pole, apparently that which is visible in media photos of the shooting. E) Hotdog vendor area. Along this wall is the large spray-painted message "Estación Dario y Maxi." F) Front entrance covered by an overhang. The full-sized collage-installation of Alfredo Franciotti is located here. G) Main entrance to the train station. Here other installations depicting those 'responsible' for the shootings have been removed. Based on the layers of graffiti and posters here, it seems safe to assume the installations were part of commemorative activities for the third anniversary of the Pueyrredón Massacre (June 26, 2005).
various traumatic incidents such as the explosion at the AMIA, the 'gatillo fácil/quick trigger' of police, and the failure to punish 'the responsible' in numerous cases added to the sense that Argentina was in the middle of an 'age of impunity' (see figure 23).


The frequent surfacing of new groups pursuing 'memory, truth and justice' in more recent years (post 2000) can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, sustained efforts to investigate state violence and to commemorate victims of trauma and repression by the more established actors in the human rights and social justice field (such as Madres de Plaza de Mayo) have created a space for additional marginal groups to join the quests for 'memory, truth, and justice'. Secondly, as I mentioned above, the continuation of repression and the failure to punish the
perpetrators has meant that aggressive memory work is necessary if there are to be narratives that ‘correctly’ (determined of course, by the victims and the popular memory entrepreneurs) record these events, and if there is to be justice. In this chapter, I explore two different spaces associated with recent trauma. The first is Avellaneda Train Station where police shot and killed two protesters in 2002. The second is the República Cromañón Nightclub where 194 young people died in a fire at the end of 2004.

Figure 24. Mural below the Pueyrredón Bridge in Avellaneda for Dario and Maxi. “Work, Dignity and Social Change. Maxi and Dario Presentes!” Photo: José Luis Fassac.

Estación Memoria – Memory Station

Next stop: Memory Station. There appear to be several formal and informal ‘memory stations’ throughout Buenos Aires. It is this abundance of memorial spaces that is illustrated in a Página/12 political cartoon cited earlier in this study (Tragedialandia 2006; see figure 1). The most actively contested are the fairly recent and unofficial spaces for memory following trauma. Tim Cresswell’s (1996) work on the contestation of space is especially useful in this context.
Through the hegemonic meaning of place, certain actions, beliefs (even narratives of the past) and behaviours are deemed either in place or out of place. However, the dominant meaning of place is never static and is subject to questioning and transgressive acts that challenge and ‘pick away at’ the meaning of place. Sustained challenges to the meaning of place can result in the development of a new meaning of place, and in such a case, Cresswell (1996: 60) explains, the new meaning of place becomes that of the “other.” When this happens, the place in question will also become “their place” (Cresswell 1996: 60).

The contestation of space was vividly illustrated to me during a visit to Buenos Aires in 2003 near the Pueyrredón Bridge in Avellaneda. The bridge is frequently blocked by various piquetero groups, and as such, has come to be associated (both positively and negatively) with them. Since the unofficial criminalization of protest and the shootings of Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki, piquetero claims to the bridge have only intensified. Below the bridge, and near

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26 Avellaneda is a working-class barrio located in the Province of Buenos Aires. Avellaneda is separated from the City of Buenos Aires by the Riachuelo River. The Pueyrredón Bridge provides a link between the city and the province.
the large mural for Darío and Maxi (see figure 24), members of the Ánibal Verón picket group have painted “For the memory of the compañeros, the struggle continues. The bridge is ours” (see figure 25). Cresswell’s (1996) ideas on the contestation of space seem to be perfectly illustrated by the popular protest cry “la plaza es nuestra” (the plaza is ours), as well as this graffito on the Pueyrredón Bridge. Murals and other graffiti make claims to the bridge space, but it is the train station where two piqueteros were killed by police that has most successfully challenged the dominant meaning of place.

The overwhelming quantity of graffiti in support or remembrance of Darío and Maxi at Estación Avellaneda suggests that this space is strongly associated with the two piqueteros. However, it is the message in the main room of the station reading “Estación Darío y Maxi/ Darío and Maxi Station” that best illustrates this unofficial challenge to the dominant meaning of
place. Although sixty-one (of a total of ninety-three graffiti) other graffiti link the station with the ‘Pueyrredón Massacre,’ and fifty-two others make reference to Darío and Maxi by name or image, “Estación Darío y Maxi” makes these claims explicit by unofficially changing the station name to one which recalls the two protesters, and if it was official, would permanently recall Darío and Maxi (see figure 26). In January 2006, a group of representatives from the Darío Santillán Front submitted a petition to the provincial minister of security proposing an official name change for the station27 (Próxima n.d). This group recognizes the ephemeral nature of graffiti, and as such, the vulnerability of this particular version of the traumatic past. An official name change would indicate the memory of Darío and Maxi as victims of unjustified police brutality was more central, and on its way to being successfully ‘established’ and in the process of being ‘transmitted.’ If this unofficial name became the official one, over time, it too would come to be ‘naturalized’ in the way that the present name of both the station and the community (Avellaneda) has become ‘normal’ but also distanced from its original commemorative purpose.

Avellaneda Station in the province of Buenos Aires is a relatively small station composed of a few small rooms and a larger space as you move towards the train platforms. I concentrated my data collection on the first space you enter from the street and the large, open space you move through once you have purchased your ticket. The first room is an open-concept with a small place to purchase refreshments, a kiosk, and a ticket wicket. The second space is oddly shaped and only partly covered by a roof. In this space, a memorial plaque has been installed for Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki, and muralists have painted a mural in their honour. It was in this space that Darío was shot and killed by police; the bodies of both Maxi and Darío were then dragged out the front entrance and placed in police vehicles. There are fewer graffiti in these two

rooms than in the other locations of this study. However, the actual size of the space is also significantly smaller. We should also note that the majority of the graffiti in these two rooms is about the police killing of Darío and Maxi. A wider range of graffiti can be found on the multiple platforms, but these do not form part of this study (for safety concerns and also because it is the two first rooms of the station that are most strongly associated with the two *piqueteros*). At the entrance way, and in the first and second room as you proceed towards the platforms, there are ninety-three graffiti, including stencils, graffiti with brushes and spray-paint, murals, collage-style installations and a monument. The majority of these are located on the interior and exterior walls (80) while others are found on poles (3), lockers (3), a framed train schedule (2), trees (2), the ground (2) and a metal door (1). Graffiti here refers overwhelmingly to the Pueyrredón Massacre (62). In addition to this, there is one reference to the Falklands/Malvinas War, the military dictatorship, and one reference to December 19-20, 2001. More than half of the messages (52) refer to Darío or Maxi either by name or their stencilled image. In addition to these, there is one reference to a musical group, one to prisoners, two to politicians (Duhalde and Kirchner) and ten to police (although some of these have been removed). On this note, the targets of *escrache* are all related to repression. Eduardo Duhalde, who was president at the time, is twice the target of *escrache* (labelled a murderer), current president Néstor Kirchner is once named Duhalde's accomplice, and quite generally, one graffito links the victims of repression with the people, and impunity with the state. Police, in general, and the officers involved in the massacre are *escrache* targets, but the most explicit attacks are against Alfredo Franciotti who shot and killed the *piqueteros*, and who led the operation which is now felt to have targeted and pursued specific individuals. It was also Franciotti who initially blamed the two deaths (and other injuries) on *piquetero* in-fighting until media photographs and eyewitness accounts proved
otherwise. Ten of the graffiti target police. In eighteen cases, graffiti in Avellaneda Station have been surrounded by colourful handprints. I have interpreted this as being indicative of support and embrasure of the messages and thereby the narrative which they present. Various dates are cited in the graffiti at the station, although the majority (12 of 16) refer to June 26th (the date of the Pueyrredón Massacre). The dates also reveal that both are remembered on their anniversaries. Three refer to the exact date of the shootings of Dario and Maxi on June 26th, 2002, while one cites this date but also the date of the two-year and another the three year anniversary. One graffito cites the one-month anniversary of the killings. One other graffito refers to an anniversary of the December nineteenth and twentieth uprisings, and five refer critically to “20 years of democracy”.

The “us” and “them” of the graffiti are presented in very distinct ways. These messages are very clear so that the intended message/memory cannot be misinterpreted. The life-size installation featuring Franciotti’s image suggests the police commissioner be viewed in a very particular way. The installation is a life-size photograph of the Franciotti, outlined with red and yellow paint. In the photograph, Franciotti is wearing his police uniform and gripping his rifle. Red paint, suggestive of blood, drips from the tip of his rifle. Franciotti, in this and other installations that remain only in part, is presented as a cold-blooded murderer, as predator-like and unquestionably guilty (see figure 27). Alfredo Acosta is depicted similarly in the same style of installation, and presumably other officers were as well, but their faces have been removed from the walls of the station. The victims of police, Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki specifically, are presented positively. Narratives about this pair set out to construct the two as victims of police repression (and sometimes specifically as victims of police repression under the government of Eduardo Duhalde). As with the victims of Cromañón, the dictatorship, and police
Figure 27. Alfredo Franciotti. Installation on the outside of Avellaneda Station.
repression in the other spaces, Dario and Maxi are presented as martyrs, and as ‘living’ despite their traumatic deaths. One graffito honouring Maxi links him to human rights groups, specifically the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo through the phrase, “ni un paso atrás/not even one step backwards.” As such, he, and other piqueteros, are depicted as fighting injustice. A stencil of Dario and Maxi involves a very careful construction of a very specific memory. Dario is immortalized in the “Dario and Maxi are not alone” stencil as a ‘good’ person, stopping to help a fallen comrade (see figure 28). Knowledge of the shooting, and this image of Dario helping Maxi on the station floor suggests that Dario’s death may have been avoided (it certainly would have been delayed) had he not stopped to assist Maxi. This very popular stencil tells observers the pair was killed at close range, and that Dario was killed as he provided assistance to a wounded peer, and as he gestured to police to hold their fire (as is indicated by his extended hand). Within the context of the train station, the stencil suggests the pair was killed within a very small, enclosed space. The “us” of the graffiti is presented as collective, and often employs the inclusive first person plural “we fight” or “we struggle.” This inclusive “we” is used in one graffito which says “we speak for those who have been silenced” before it recalls, “Maximiliano Kosteki Presente.” In other words, the collective that remains continues to speak against injustice for those, like Dario and Maxi who have been silenced by repression. Social activists, specifically piqueteros, are presented as patriotic and fighting for a better Argentina, as victims of repression under democratic governments, as committed to social struggle, and as fighting injustice even in death. The public is presented as eternal, as struggling against repression and as being joined by the force of the 30,000 disappeared. One particular graffito (“The fallen are from the people, impunity is from the state”) depicts the public as victims of the state; in contrast, the state is seen as free from punishment, and responsible for the deaths of Dario and Maxi among others.
Duhalde’s government is addressed specifically as murderous. Lastly, martyrs Dario and Maxi are portrayed heroically, especially through the graffito that unofficially renames the station, “Estación Dario y Maxi.” Neighbourhoods, buildings and streets are often named after national heroes or other people of historic significance. The unofficial renaming of the station replaces the very prominent name of Nicolás Avellaneda (Argentine president 1874-80) with the first names of Dario and Maxi. This renaming implies an importance in recalling this pair, and an attempt to enter these names into the history of the nation (or at least the region). We might also say something about how the unofficial renaming of the station uses the given names of Dario and Maxi. Official commemorative renamings in Argentina typically use the surname as was the case with the original station name. The ‘Dario and Maxi’ renaming is a different sort of commemoration; it is more personal and one that commemorates ‘average’ citizens. In fact, all of the unofficial mnemonic spaces studied in this project follow this pattern.

The inclusive group in Avellaneda Station includes activists from various social movements, groups of unemployed such as piqueteros, victims of state and police repression, and anyone seen to be fighting for a ‘better’ Argentina. The inclusive group includes marginalized Argentines, those who lack sufficient power or influence. The excluded group is crafted with equal care and is made up largely of the police, both generally and those who were specifically involved in the massacre. The state is also excluded, especially Duhalde and his administration. Graffiti in the station come from the perspective of various piquetero and unemployed groups (MTDs/ Unemployed Workers Movement) such as MTD Anibal Verón.28 Darío and Maxi’s perspectives are also presented (by third parties) through quotations from the

28 Movements are often named after martyred individuals, such as the MTD Aníbal Verón, or the MTD Teresa Rodríguez.
pair. The use of the slogan “ni un paso atrás” also suggests the perspective of the *Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*.

![Figure 28. Dario and Maxi “are not alone.”](image)

Texts in *Estación Avellaneda* are explicit in the delivery of their ‘memories.’ As I have mentioned, short, explicit texts where the “us,” “them” and the specific narrative are clear help ensure that the message is received as it was intended, and that following reception, the message can be again transmitted to others without distorting the original meaning. Before one even enters the station, s/he encounters the life-sized silhouette installation of Franciotti. Although the message involves no text, it remains very clear in its attack. Visitors to the station are met with the realistic image of the uniformed police commissioner holding the ‘smoking gun.’ The red outline drips from the rifle’s barrel, implying Franciotti is a cold-blooded killer. This *escrache*
questions the conduct of police in Argentina, as do messages elsewhere in the city. Contrary to
the ideal that the police ‘serve and protect’ the community, graffiti in this train station clearly
present the police as having planned, pursued and murdered Dario and Maxi. Along these lines,
one graffito cited above suggests Maxi was “silenced.” Some messages explicitly record the
‘facts’ of past trauma such as the names of the responsible and benefiting from impunity, as well
as the names of the victims. The message cited above about the Fallen being of the public,
whereas those benefiting from impunity belong to the State is very explicit, and has been
received as such, because the last words have been erased. The word “state” has been smeared
but the bulk of the message remains, and the physical context can help us understand the
escrache target (the state). The message “Dario y Maxi: Asesinados por el gobierno Duhalde
26.6.2002/ Dario and Maxi: Murdered by the Duhalde Government” is an illustration of this lack
of restraint and interest in recording ‘the facts’ (see figure 39). It identifies the victims, the
politician responsible for the federal police and the date of the shootings. This information is
recorded and transmitted only meters from where the two piqueteros were killed. The stencil
made up of victims names in the shape of Argentina also clearly ‘records’ information, but
unlike the previous, does not name those responsible for the deaths of people like Teresa
Rodríguez, Aníbal Verón and Carlos Almirón. Rather, it makes a sharp, sarcastic comment about
the state of democracy in Argentina since the end of the dictatorship. By specifying “20 Years of
Democracy,” the message suggests that the reader be critical of Argentina’s democracy, and
make a connection between the violence of the dictatorship with that of the return to democracy
in 1983. Implicitly, this image asks readers to question the fallacy that violence and repression
transpire only under dictatorial regimes, and that democracy automatically brings freedom and
an end to state violence. Images and messages at Avellaneda Station also privilege certain
stories, while suppressing others. Memory entrepreneurs for Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki are careful to overlook the violent clashes between *piqueteros* and police that preceded the shooting of the two protesters during which *piqueteros* hit police over the head with home-made batons. Darío and Maxi are constructed exclusively as victims, as social activists targeted for elimination by the police. Finally, the "*Estación Darío y Maxi*” message that recalls the pair as heroes and martyrs, makes explicit the claims to space of graffiti throughout the rest of the station.

![Image of graffiti](image.png)

Figure 29. “Darío and Maxi: Murdered by Duhalde’s government June 26, 2002.”

**Coping with Recent Tragedy at La República Cromañón**

During a rock concert on December 30, 2004, a Buenos Aires nightclub, *República Cromañón* caught fire. The crowd had exceeded capacity, a nursery had been set up in part of the building, and some of the exits were chained shut. The result was the worst fire tragedy in Argentine history. One hundred and ninety-four people perished and adding to the trauma, some of the victims were as young as three years of age. Parents of victims, friends, survivors and others immediately demanded answers and blamed the nightclub owner and the Chief of Government in
Buenos Aires. According to newspaper coverage of the fire, *Cromañón* had repeatedly escaped fire inspections as the owner had paid bribes to cancel or delay inspections (See for example, Carvajal 2005, Coimas 2005 and Kollman 2005). The demand for justice and the recollection of this trauma can be read in the landscape in the form of graffiti, murals, stickers, banners, belongings of the victims and memorials. Sneakers with the laces tied together are tossed over telephone wires at *Cromañón* and in some of the city's busier streets to slow down the process of societal forgetting. A makeshift sanctuary for the victims was set up in the days following the fire, closing the street in front of the nightclub for at least a year, despite pressure from the city and the Ministry of the Interior to move the mnemonic space to a more ‘official’ and ‘cleaner’ site where the memorials, the volume of memorabilia, and the manner of creating remembrances can be more easily controlled. The result is a clash between the symbolic and unofficial memory, and the institutionally approved and controlled memory. The street in front of the nightclub remained closed when I returned to Canada in December 2005.

The flood of mnemonic initiatives that followed the devastating fire, and that continued more than one year after the fire, reveals particular memories. Elizabeth Jelin (2003: 27) suggests that memories are always partial and privilege particular ideas over others and that all memories/histories have their own voids and silences. She also remarks that the intention of memory work and ‘memory entrepreneurs’ is to “establish/convince/transmit their narrative, so that others will accept it” (Jelin 2003:26). A focus on the symbols, language and spatiality of the memories surrounding the *Cromañón* tragedy reveals how different groups compete to make their memory, and meaning of place more widely accepted.
Figure 30. Diagram of Official and Unofficial Memorial Spaces for the Victims of Cromañón near Plaza Miserere in the barrio of Once, Buenos Aires. A) The canopies that protect mementoes left at the sanctuary. Behind the canopies, metal barricades have blocked Mitre Street. B) Chairs set up in the unofficial sanctuary. During vigils they are rotated and appear like church pews. C) In this area there is scaffolding used to hold various banners, as well as to address crowds during demonstrations. There is also a traffic light and street sign here, both of which have been co-opted to spread particular mnemonic messages. D) Second gate to the official memorial space (not used at present). E) Official memorial space constructed by the government. This long wall is the ‘memorial wall’ with photographs and names of the victims in alphabetical order. F) Small, controlled area set up so that mementoes can be affixed to a wire grid on the wall. G) Shelter. H) Mural for the Victims of Cromañón. I) Portable toilets for those keeping watch over the unofficial memorial.
The Cromañón Field Site

The former República Cromañón nightclub is located at the corner of Ecuador and Mitre in the Buenos Aires neighbourhood of Once (pronounced Own-say). It is adjacent to the Plaza Miserere and a key bus terminus. The nightclub itself was located in the end of a three-storey building that extends nearly the length of the entire block. The Once railway station is located at the opposite end of the block. Plaza Miserere, Once Train Station and the bus terminus all have a high level of activity. The Cromañón sanctuary is quieter. As I have described elsewhere, the unofficial sanctuary occupies the street in front of the nightclub while the official plaza is located parallel to this, but is separated by a tall stone wall. There is a mural on the front of the nightclub, and in this area, a small group of victims’ family members have established a make-shift shelter complete with portable toilet facilities. From here, they watch over the unofficial memorial space. The unofficial plaza consists of canopies that stretch across the width of Mitre Street and piles of items belonging to the victims. Countless signs and banners have been set up in this space. The official memorial is noticeably tidier than the unofficial one. It consists of a fenced off plaza, a long memorial wall and a small designated corner in which family members leave mementoes.

The Graffiti at Cromañón

Ideas can be expressed in any number of ways through language and whether it is intentional or not, narratives, "[involve] a choice or selection from a number of different possibilities" (Gill 1996: 142). Mnemonic graffiti is no different; particular arguments are constructed in order to achieve a particular goal. Mnemonic initiatives privilege certain memories while silencing or downplaying others. As such, the language of graffiti texts at Cromañón contributes to the
building of a specific version of the nightclub fire. As Gill (1996: 142) explains, “People use discourse to do things” such as offer blame or present themselves positively. Memory and remembering are contentious practices; the politics of memory involve discussions of how to remember, what to remember, where and why to remember. To begin with, and quite obviously, memories of the disaster emphasize the victims. Victims of Cromaño are addressed by name, but they are also referred to more collectively as “hearts,” “dreams,” “souls” or “souls that died without the power to fight.” Perhaps more than anything, they are referred to as “pibes,” or more specifically, they are referred to as the “pibes of Cromaño.” As an outsider, it seemed strange to me that the victims of the fire also came to be called “Callejeros,” the name of the band that was playing on the night of the fire. However, victims are not usually called the Callejeros, but our Callejeros.

A smaller portion of the graffiti at Cromaño focuses on those survivors and families of victims have judged to be responsible for the fire, owner Omar Chabán and the head of Buenos Aires city government, Ánibal Ibarra. Graffiti villainize the pair as ‘murderers,’ ‘guilty,’ and in one case, as the children of a thousand whores (hijos de mil putas). Graffiti also suggest that Chabán and Ibarra will not be permitted to escape and that they will be “made to pay.” There is also an emphasis on the desire that the victims rest in peace while the guilty are castigated and punished. The mnemonic initiatives demonize Chabán and Ibarra, and martyr the victims.

Jelin (2003: 17-8) reminds us that all memories have their own ‘silences and voids.’ Todorov (2003: 128) also explains that memory is not ‘total memory’ but rather a process of selection. Some things are recalled while others are forgotten. The primary silence or void in the predominant ‘memory’ is the exclusive blaming of Omar Chabán and Ánibal Ibarra. This finding is largely consistent across all spaces where the Cromaño disaster is addressed, from the
victims' sanctuary, to the Plaza de Mayo, to newspaper coverage of the fire, and demonstrations. There is a very deliberate silence in the narrative of the victims' families. To begin, there is no mention by families of the victims of the daycare that had been set up in the nightclub's second floor washroom. Several concert-goers had brought their young children here; these children later perished in the fire. Few disclose that the flare that had been set off by someone in the audience was the cause of the fire. Owner Omar Chabán has stated publicly that he had asked Callejero fans to refrain from setting off flares during the show specifically because of the risk of fire. The press, to some extent, has blamed the Callejeros for the fire because they did not dissuade their fans from using flares. There has been much less controversy over who actually lit the flare. While both of these narratives are present to a limited degree in the press, there is little blame attached to the band or the concert-goers for the disaster.

There is one exception that does not conform to the other 'memories.' It reads 'los Callejeros también "son culpables,"' or 'The Callejeros are also 'guilty.'" This graffito makes a direct reference to the discourse used by the 'Cromañón memory entrepreneurs' and makes this inter-textual reference evident by the use of quotation marks around "son culpables" ("are guilty"), as if borrowing this phrase from the other graffiti writers. The graffito is somewhat obscure. Because of the appropriation of the name "Callejeros" by survivors and victims' families in describing the victims, it is unclear if this message refers to the band or to the victims as being "also guilty." Either way, the graffito is unique in its difference from the other messages. The single message points to one of the 'silences and voids' in the parents' narratives as well as to the plurality of memories.

I was interested in understanding what was emphasized in the graffiti, particularly how many of the messages assigned guilt, or how many were written in memory of the victims. The
Figure 31. “Ibarra – Chabán Guilty.” Poster on the front of the former nightclub blaming Ánibal Ibarra (former Chief of Government for Buenos Aires) and Omar Chabán (former owner of Cromañón) for the 194 deaths. The poster reads “IBARRA CHABÁN Guilty of the murder of our children.” The graffiti beneath the poster reads “Marianito will live forever” while the one on the wood door reads “Mariano lives.”

following data comes from the content analysis and discourse analysis I undertook for this project. In part of the content analysis, I had initially looked at the number of times various phrases were repeated in the graffiti at Cromañón and in other spaces. However, because of the variation of phrases on similar topics, I focused instead on themes that emerged from the graffiti. The largest category (55/182) was comprised of those messages that are written in memory of victims. After this, forty-five make reference to justice. Twenty-four make reference to Callejeros. In most cases, the “Callejeros” reference appears to refer to the victims rather than the band. Another twenty-two refer to the victims as “pibes,” clearly emphasizing the youth of
the victims. Somewhat surprisingly, only eighteen assign blame, whereas it appears that messages about Cromañón in other spaces, the Plaza de Mayo, Avenida de Mayo and the Plaza Congreso (spaces associated with demonstrations) emphasize more the assignment of blame than do the graffiti at Cromañón. This is perhaps explained by the fact that the space outside of Cromañón has largely been set up as a sanctuary, and the audience for protest is minimal. The victims are remembered here, while elsewhere, the responsible are condemned and parents, survivors and other supporters rally for justice. The struggles of the Cromañón memory entrepreneurs are multi-dimensional. One goal is to fight for justice; another is to produce and preserve the narratives of the event that the groups consider most appropriate. Lastly, part of the reason for the public occupations and vigils is to mourn the deaths of their children. To some extent, the mourning and the fighting are done in different spaces. Mourning is done at the site of the tragedy, while the ‘fighting’ is done in the spaces most likely to produce favourable results. For instance, memory entrepreneurs ‘battle’ where they can be seen by government and large groups of people, in the Plaza de Mayo, Plaza Congreso or along Avenida de Mayo. While fighting for justice is done primarily in these spaces, and grieving is largely situated in the sanctuary, there is some overlap between these two kinds of spaces. Also, the production and transmission of memory happens in both the spaces for mourning and the spaces for confrontation.

An additional four messages emphasize that a disaster such as this must never be repeated (nunca más or que no se repita). It should also be noted, that in the discourse surrounding Cromañón, it is often impossible to separate discourse on memory and justice, and for this reason, a number of the graffiti (45) belong to multiple categories. This supports the idea that
mnemonic initiatives in the wake of trauma are not only about memory for memory’s sake, but are also, in many cases, about the quest for both ‘appropriate memory’ and ‘appropriate justice.’

Cromañón differs from the other spaces in this study (except perhaps Estación Avellaneda) in its intense concentration of messages about past trauma. For instance, out of the 182 texts studied at this site, 121 refer to the fire. One makes a link between the nightclub tragedy and the Pueyrredón Massacre in which police killed Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki, and there is one reference to the war in Iraq. There are five messages that refer to love or emotions, but unlike other spaces, these are not the typical ‘I love so-and-so,’ rather, they are messages expressing love or affection for people who died in the fire. There are not any messages that refer to drugs, football or birthdays, things that are commonly found in graffiti elsewhere in Argentina. There are two messages that deal with elections, but these are located a little farther from the memorial space, and closer to the nearby train station. As I mentioned above, the erasure of graffiti is not present to the same degree it is elsewhere, such as at El Olimpo or at the ESMA. There is only one case at Cromañón where a graffito has been erased, and in this case, the large mural partly covered a graffito that said “Justice for the Callejeros.” Part of the mural dips down and covers the last word, which has simply been re-written below. Thirty-eight of the messages are illegible and a further twenty-four are partly illegible. Their illegibility however, has more to do with the concentration of messages in a relatively small space to the deterioration caused by the elements, and, in the case of messages written on the asphalt, erasure caused by heavy pedestrian traffic.

A variety of techniques are used in the writing of mnemonic graffiti at Cromañón. Because of the limited space of the memorial, and the personal nature of the texts, many of the messages are written with smaller implements such as markers (76), whiteout pens (9), and pens
(2), all of which are commonly carried by young people. However, amongst these, there are a number of larger messages, created using spray-paint (31), stencils (25), paint brushes (29) a combination of spray-paint and brushes (1) and elaborate murals (2). Twenty-five of the messages are stencils and two are wall paintings (from former elections). Four additional messages consist of printed pages affixed with glue to street signs and a sticker on the traffic light. The graffiti at *Cromañón* are largely done in a single colour (176), indicating that aesthetics are not the primary concern of the author. A large portion of the graffiti (122) is found on a cement wall beside the unofficial memorial space (the official memorial space is now found on the other side of this wall), or on the actual front of *Cromañón*. Forty-two of the graffiti are found on the ground (on the sidewalk or the asphalt) in the unofficial memorial space. Seven are found on street signs in the vicinity, two were located on a metal gate that was removed to create the official memorial plaza, five are located on the white canopies over the unofficial memorial and four are written with whiteout pen on the barricades that block Mitre Street. The majority of the messages consist exclusively of text (122) although eighteen employ text and symbols, and four are images without text. Symbols include hearts, crosses and Jesus figures, the *Callejeros* logo (the most common symbol) and the recognizable profiles of Darío Santillán and Maxi Kosteki.

I had anticipated that one of the strategies to make the discourse surrounding past trauma at *El Olimpo, Estación Avellaneda* and *Cromañón* persuasive would involve citing numeric figures or key dates. I suspected this might be a trend in the graffiti in all three spaces, as the various memory entrepreneurs attempt to gain support for their versions of the past. This seems to be the case (or seems to have been in the case) in regards to narratives about the military period. The figure of 30,000 detained and disappeared has much more support today than it did.
in the 1980s. Popular memory entrepreneurs have had to articulate this figure over and over for it to become part of a more central narrative. The figure competes with much more conservative figures from the military and from the right. I had suspected to find something similar with *Cromañón* for two reasons – the rearticulating of figures to enter them into collective memory, and also because of the repetition of the 194 dead in the press. However, in the graffiti, only one such reference was made, and it was made to 193 victims. (I believe the 194th victim died later in hospital.) Twelve cite a date, some the date the graffiti was written, others cite the date of the fire. Again, this could be attributed to the idea that *Cromañón* has become a place for mourning of the individual victims while graffiti about *Cromañón* in other spaces (*Avenida de Mayo* and *Plaza de Mayo*) focuses on the struggle for justice. The memorial sanctuary is largely a place for working through the premature deaths of 194 young people. The mementoes are intimate and victims are often addressed by name. This happens elsewhere to a limited degree (a victim named Mariano is recalled in graffiti along *Avenida de Mayo*), graffiti in the *Plaza de Mayo* and along *Avenida de Mayo* tends to focus on the victims as a group. Also, although the shoes found strung over telephone wires along *Avenida de Mayo* may have belonged to individual victims, they do not transmit information about their owners, only about the victims as a collective.

These forms of address, and their context in the various graffiti, portray the victims as heavenly and pure in some cases and as good and innocent in others. They are presented as having died tragic and unnecessary deaths and having died “without the power to fight.” They are talked about as having died helplessly, and their deaths are presented as tainted by corruption. The victims are addressed with affection and familiarity or intimacy. In one case, they are addressed as ‘chicos,’ which like the term ‘pibes’ emphasizes the youth of the victims. In this sense, the discourse emphasizes the young victims (the majority). They are addressed
collectively as “ours” and although they are deceased, are presented at times as eternal, or as
dead but present. They also seem to be presented as united (united against corruption and
injustice). The imagery of the large mural is loaded with characteristics assigned to the victims.
They are depicted as a group, surrounded and encaged by fire, raising a white flag and pointing
in the direction of President Nestor Kirchner, Chief of Government for the autonomous City of
Buenos Aires, Ánibal Ibarra, nightclub owner Omar Chabán, Minister of Security Juan José
Álvarez and former president Eduardo Duhalde. Another group is depicted as holding hands as
they are draped in an Argentine flag and the word “JUSTICIA” (Justice). The flag is held by a
strong, long-haired figure with the Callejeros logo on his chest. So, in addition to being united
against injustice, they are also depicted as patriotic. Chabán and Ibarra, on the other hand (but
not the Callejeros group) are portrayed as guilty, deserving of punishment, corrupt and as
murderers. While newspaper accounts and one graffito point fingers at the Callejeros group, I
think it is important to consider the mural and how it works to assign blame. It is impossible to
miss the fingers of the youth, surrounded by flames that point to Chabán, Ibarra and three other
politicians. To the right of this, the Callejeros group is depicted. Rather than being the target of
escrache, they are shown wrapped in the blue and white colours of the Argentine flag and the
words “Justicia” (Justice) (see figures 32 and 33).

Memories are always particular and privilege particular versions of the past and particular
actors while marginalizing or silencing others. As Tonkiss (1998: 248) explains, discourse
confers membership to certain actors and denies membership to others. Discourse articulated at
Cromañón involves an “us versus them” argumentation strategy and in this, various groups are
presented as party to these ‘memories’ while others are presented as ‘other.’ The inclusive
category includes the victims and survivors, family and friends of victims, general supporters of
the campaign for justice and the campaign against corruption, various human rights groups and memory entrepreneurs associated with the Pueyrredón Massacre. These inclusions are evident by the inter-textual references at Cromaño. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the inclusion of Cromaño may appear odd in this study, but the overlap of discourse at the various spaces of trauma in Buenos Aires makes the inclusion of Cromaño important. At Cromaño, there are messages that borrow the phrases “Ni Olvido Ni Perdon” (Don’t forgive or forget) and “Nunca más” (Never again) from the human rights discourse associated most strongly with the military dictatorship.

![Escrache in the Cromaño mural. Small section of the mural on the front of the former Cromaño nightclub. Youth surrounded by flames point towards 'the responsible.'](image)

Figure 32. Escrache in the Cromaño mural. Small section of the mural on the front of the former Cromaño nightclub. Youth surrounded by flames point towards 'the responsible.'

As a memorial space for the public (and collective) grieving of the victims, graffiti at Cromaño contains the perspectives of victims’ families and friends, survivors, and other visitors in general. The perspective belongs to those hurt by the 194 deaths. In some cases, the mourners
are ordinary citizens who visit the site but who have no connection to the victims. In the case of the large mural, the perspective appears to be that of all of those who fight against corruption and freedom from, and in this case, the group is much larger as it includes movements outside of *Cromañón* such as *piquetero* and human rights groups.

![Figure 33. “The children of Cromañón Presentes now and forever.” Mural on the former República Cromañón nightclub.](image)

It is also important to consider the intensity or mitigation of texts (Wodak 2004). In this sense, there is a fair bit of variance in texts at the unofficial sanctuary. Intimate messages to individual victims are not always about justice. Other texts are clearly part of the justice campaign, but do not come close to the intensity of others. They might, for instance, not specifically assign blame or name names, but refer generally to the need for justice. Still others
are very explicit and biting in their comments. It is these messages that most closely resemble the escrache protest and popular justice strategy invented by H.I.J.O.S (Sons and Daughters for Justice and Against Forgetting and Silence). Elsewhere, I have described this strategy as a ‘pointing out,’ public marking or shaming of individuals judged by the public to be guilty of various offences, relating to repression, corruption or injustice of some sort. Some of the escrache texts are very explicit with no mitigation in their commentary such as one which reads “Chaban and Ibarra will pay.” Another graffito clearly depicts the ‘us versus them’ style of the graffiti by suggesting first that the guilty are punished and secondly that the victims rest in peace (“Que los culpables sean castigados/ y que las victimas --- en paz. Justicia!! That the guilty are punished and that the victims --- in peace.”)

One final graffito that is repeated with great frequency throughout the city (in Plaza Congreso and Avenida de Mayo) explicitly blames corruption as the sole cause of death of the ‘pibes.’ It reads, “Ni una bengala/ Ni el Rock + Roll/ A los pibes los mato/ La corrupción/ Not a flare, nor Rock n’ Roll, the young people were killed by corruption.” Without naming names, the stencil is overt in its assignment of blame. Because of intense media coverage of the disaster, and the public’s familiarity with the issue, Ibarra’s name does not have to be mentioned for readers to understand the references to his government. Nor does the stencil need to mention Chabán’s name because it is now widely known that he paid bribes to avoid mandatory fire inspections. So while the stencil does not mention the names of Chabán or Ibarra, it clarifies and positions the argument of its authors: despite claims that the 194 victims died because of a flare that had been set off during the Callejeros concert, or claims that the Callejeros themselves encouraged the use of flares, despite Chabán’s appeal or warning against their use, the victims died because of corruption. This is the narrative the memory entrepreneurs (largely the families of the victims)
wish to transmit. The children, or 'Pibes de Cromañón' are presented as innocent, and in such a way as to purge all the young of responsibility, instead emphasizing that the fire was caused by corruption. This stencil releases the Callejeros from blame, and also frees individual members of the audience from blame at the same time that an investigation has attempted to identify the person or group responsible for setting off the flare.

Figure 34. Sneakers belonging to or symbolizing the individual victims of the Cromañón fire at the unofficial memorial site.

This leads us back to the idea of ‘establishing, convincing and transmitting’ a particular memory (Jelin 2003: 26). The narratives presented in the unofficial sanctuary represent the privileged voices of the Cromañón memory entrepreneurs and are closely tied to the campaign for justice and the campaign against corruption. The quest for justice however, is partial. The targets have been unquestionably Chabán and Ibarra but the laying of blame has stopped there. Ongoing investigations are looking into the responsibility of the Callejeros, but with the
exception of one graffito, the band is not blamed at the site of the fire. There are also investigations into who set off the flare, but mention of this at the sanctuary would be in stark contrast to the memories the parents and survivors want to ‘establish/convince/transmit’ (Jelin 2003: 26). There is also little criticism of the young people who brought young children, even infants, to the nightclub and who left these children in a make-shift daycare set up in an upstairs washroom. This fact is entirely absent from the graffiti, but has also received very little coverage in the press. The main focus is on Ibarra and Chabán. During my research, coverage focused more on the politician than the nightclub owner, perhaps because there was less worry that Chabán would escape punishment. If Ibarra avoids punishment, he could continue his political career. The memory entrepreneurs and Ibarra’s opposition, however, have had to prove that the fire is related to a failure in duties of the Chief of Government. In a society with a history of corruption, memory entrepreneurs and the public recognized the mammoth task they had ahead of them. Early in 2006, Ibarra was suspended, but has not been banned from political life. Ánibal Ibarra’s suspension is landmark and represents a victory for a group of memory entrepreneurs. It brings attention to problems of corruption. It also demonstrates that a group of memory/justice workers can, through sustained action and diverse tactics, compete with a long history of impunity and oblivion. Ruth Wodak (2004: 199) suggests that texts are rarely the work of any one person and that they often display signs of different struggles or differences within groups. The various texts at the sanctuary, although they are generally fairly similar in regards to the castigation of Ibarra and Chabán and the favourable and affectionate remembrance of the victims, do suggest some variation in terms of the intensity of the escraches. What does seem apparent in regards to the authorship of the texts is that while penned by individual mourners and memory entrepreneurs, they use a common language and repeat a small variation of phrases
(Justica!; Presente!; Por los pibes de Cromañón!; Justicia por nuestros Callejeros!; Justice!

[They are] Present! Justice for our Callejeros). They are written or painted by individuals, but
the phrases have been developed in a collective and then used in rallies and demonstrations,
posters, stickers, placard, banners and street art despite the internal differences between
survivors, victims’ families and friends.

Discussion of Cromañón Memory Initiatives

We should inquire as to why the struggle to “establish/convince/transmit” (Jelin 2003: 26) the
memory of “los pibes de Cromañón” by parents of victims has been so aggressive.29 Would the
same struggle happen elsewhere? Or, is there something particular about memory of trauma in
Argentina? This is a difficult, and perhaps impossible question to answer. However, I would
suggest that memory, particularly the memory of the military dictatorship, is both obstinate and
elusive in the same moment. Various initiatives make up the memory and justice campaign of the
Cromañón memory entrepreneurs. The common denominator appears to be visibility in a way
that memory “irrupts” in everyday life and in everyday landscapes both at the site of the disaster
and elsewhere in Buenos Aires. These irruptions of memory are not exclusively about memory
for memory’s sake, but are often linked to a sense of injustice in the context of corruption or
impunity.30

29 “Pibes” is the slang term used in Argentina to refer to youth. “Los pibes de Cromañón” can be translated loosely
as “The kids of Cromañón.”
30 The lack of adequate or complete resolution to the military past, as well as the reversal of sentences handed out to
military has created a ‘culture of impunity’ or an ‘age of impunity,’ a general sense that those responsible for grave
injustices will go free. The precedent for this was the treatment of the dictatorship in the years following the military
period. This sense of impunity is a result of among other things, former President Carlos Menem’s executive pardon
of those military and security personnel who had been sentenced to jail time. However, the failure to find and punish
those responsible, namely the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community centre (AMIA) has contributed to this sense of
impunity. Smaller, day-to-day tragedies particularly police brutality and the quick resort to violence and lack of
restraint by police and the failure to punish such brutality has further contributed to this sense. All of the above has
meant that the word “impunity” is found far more frequently in Argentine conversation than it is here in Canada.
Elizabeth Jelin (2003: 39) remarks that similar endeavours by memory entrepreneurs (monuments, plaques and other markers) “are the ways in which official and nonofficial actors try to convey and materialize their memories.” The ‘irruptions of memory’ following the Cromañón tragedy/massacre include a range of tactics (De Certeau 2002) that transform the landscape in attempt to materialize memory. In the vicinity of the former nightclub, groups have used stencils to unofficially change street names on the official street signs to read “Los pibes de Cromañón/ The children of Cromañón” or “Justicia para nuestros Callejeros/ Justice for our Callejeros.” As I mentioned above, the sneaker has been adopted as a symbol for the tragedy, perhaps because it indicates the youthfulness of the victims. Or, the shoe, like other personal belongings, prevents individual victims from becoming just one of the 194 victims. Shoes from individual victims stand for their owners who are no longer alive. The Cromañón memory entrepreneurs have piled victims’ shoes under the tents in the unofficial memorial (see figure 34). They have also tied together the laces of these shoes, and draped them over telephone wires at the site of the nightclub and along Avenida de Mayo in the downtown core. The Avenue is an important artery, as it links two spaces well-known for their association with popular protest (Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Congreso). People have also dipped the soles of shoes in paint and stamped them on buildings along this avenue with a stencil that reads, “Zapatillazo por los pibes. Para no olvidar/ Zapatillazo for the kids. So we don’t forget.” Memory entrepreneurs have had elaborate stickers produced with photos, names and birth dates of individual victims, as well as symbols of favourite soccer teams or rock bands and one or more of the Cromañón memory and

31 Zapatillazo borrows the “azo” suffix. Azos are massive and spontaneous “social explosions” (Pozzi 2000: 68). Instead of taking the name of a city, such as the Cordobazo or the Rosariazo, memory entrepreneurs have used the word for running shoe (Zapatilla) and added the suffix to mean a ‘massive, spontaneous social explosion’ where a busy corridor is blanketetd with shoe prints in order to impede forgetting of the Cromañón victims.
justice slogans. These stickers have been placed in public places such as on traffic light poles at busy intersections in the downtown and at Cromañón.

Figure 35. Unofficial memorial (sanctuary) for the victims of the Cromañón nightclub fire. When this photograph was taken in July 2005 this was the only memorial space. However, in October 2005, the Ministry of the Interior and the City of Buenos Aires opened an official memorial space behind the cement wall on the right of this picture.

The Cromañón memory and justice struggle is one that has been sustained over a long period of time. It has intensified at crucial moments such as the impeachment proceedings of the former Chief of Government for Buenos Aires, Á́nibal Ibarra, at massive protests to have the former nightclub owner, Omar Chabán, returned to prison as he awaits trial, and at monthly and annual anniversaries. On the thirtieth of every month there are vigils, demonstrations or gatherings. These events temporarily occupy public spaces such as the Plaza de Mayo, or reaffirm the semi-permanent occupation of space outside Cromañón. On the ten-month anniversary, Plaza de Mayo was the site of a vigil and rally, and later, an open-air rock concert in honour of the victims. Nico Fabio, son of a major Argentine film director, played on a stage in
front of the symbolic Piramide, with the security fence and the Casa Rosada as the backdrop. A young girl stood on stage holding a sign with the face of one of the fire victims.

While the vigils and rallies in the Plaza de Mayo make temporary claims to public space, memory entrepreneurs have, since the night of the tragedy, claimed the street beside and in front of the nightclub. Mitre Street remained closed at least until mid-December 2005 despite pressure from the city to end the occupation. Mitre Street was temporarily closed when rescue crews arrived at the scene of the fire, and when the scale of the tragedy became known, Mitre Street became the site of a spontaneous and unofficial memorial for the victims (see figure 36). Metal barricades (perhaps the very ones set up by emergency or investigating crews) closed the busy street and formed the back of the memorial. In front of this, five canopies were erected to protect the messages and mementos deposited in the space. Similarly, messages, songs, and poems have often been placed in Ziploc bags to increase the lifespan of the memorial. This unofficial memorial contains an overwhelming quantity of memorial items, including a large pile of victims’ shoes, many of which have been inscribed with messages to or about the young victims. Aside from an out-of-service traffic light from which a rosary hung in December 2005, the space no longer resembles a street. In front of the five canopies there are several sets of chairs not unlike what might be found in a waiting room, as this is a space for memory and a space for meeting and dialogue. There is also a wooden donation bin, a book where visitors can leave messages, and, at times, a petition to keep the street closed. Although the space is multi-faith, the sets of chairs are turned to form rows facing the memorial during vigils. It has a distinctly Christian feel (see figure 35). Another key aspect of the transformation of the Cromañón nightclub and Mitre Street into a space of memory is the large mural painted on the building. The
mural, along with various banners and the memorial space in general, are visible from a distance and from the large, busy plaza (Plaza Miserere) and bus stops adjacent to the nightclub.

Figure 36. The official “Memory Plaza for the Victims of Cromañón.” The white wall at the far end of the plaza is an exterior wall of the former nightclub. The parallel unofficial memorial space is located on the other side of the concrete wall on the right side of this photograph. The memorial wall is on the left.

Unlike spaces such as former detention centres, El Olimpo, the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA) and El Club Atlético, mnemonic graffiti in the sanctuary has not been erased or altered. In the cases of the former detention centres, there is intense resentment focused on the denial of the existence of concentration camps and disagreements over the number of disappeared. In the Cromañón case, there is no dispute over the number of victims, or that this was the site of trauma, but there are conflicts of a different nature: where and how the victims should be remembered, and who should shoulder responsibility for the fire. The Mitre Street occupation is unauthorized and some of the parents and family members associated with the memorial space recognize this. The site appears to be monitored permanently by a small group connected with
one or more of the victims. Tents and a shelter also occupy the space in front of Cromañón. There are also basic facilities such as a steel barrel for fires and portable outhouses. The city appears to tolerate the occupation and recognizes that it is a space with intense emotional significance for the victims’ families and friends. The city walks a thin line between allowing the illegal occupation for the purpose of collective mourning, and allowing the disobedience to escalate too far. The Cromañón case is sensitive because the city is partially responsible for the disaster. That said, the city must also listen to citizens who object to the unlawful street closure and citizens who tire of the frequent ‘irruptions’ related to the fire.

As I mentioned above, there has been no erasure of mnemonic graffiti at Cromañón. However, the how and where to remember the victims has become an especially contentious issue involving the state and family members of victims. I did not detect any of this when I first visited the site in July, but by October 2005, the City of Buenos Aires and the Ministry of the Interior had opened up an official memorial space in a courtyard connected to Cromañón immediately beside the unofficial space (see figure 36). It is important to point out that various groups have formed amongst families of victims and survivors and that, in the time since the fire, there has been a great deal of fragmentation between the various groups. In regards to memory of the dictatorship, Elizabeth Jelin and Susana Kaufman (2002) warn against seeing the memory struggles simply as ones of memory contra oblivion. Rather, histories and memories are numerous and we should see collective mnemonic initiatives as “struggles over opposing memories, each with its own silences and voids” (Jelin and Kaufman 2002). Thus, some of the parents’ groups support the official space, but others have resisted it. In December 2005, the father of one victim explained to me that he and various other parents opposed disassembling the unofficial memorial, moving the mementos to the official space and re-opening the street so long
as there was a lack of justice. So while there has been no overt erasure of mnemonic graffiti in this space, or no overt attempts to remove the unofficial monument, there has been substantial pressure from the city to remember in a different way and to remember in a different space.

The constant vigilance of a small group of parents and family suggests that there is a fear of erasure here – not necessarily erasure because of dissent towards what is being remembered in this space, but dissent for how the Pibes are remembered here. There is resentment that the sanctuary has blocked a busy street for more than one year and resentment over the state of the sanctuary. Because of its location in the street, next to a bus terminal and a busy bus stop, the sanctuary is dingy and cloaked in the filth of diesel buses. Each time I visited the sanctuary, I encountered pedestrians frustrated that they had to take a long detour to get to the other side of Mitre Street. The city of Buenos Aires and the Ministry of the Interior opened the official sanctuary, called “Plaza de Memoria por las Víctimas de Cromañón” (Memorial Plaza for the Victims of Cromañón) in October 2005. I was shocked by the stark differences between the two parallel plazas and my first thought was that the city intended to replace the dirty, sprawling, unofficial sanctuary with a clean, controlled and official space for memory.

The official space consists of a rectangular plaza contained behind a wall in a space beside Cromañón. A long wall with a uniform space for the name, photograph, age and birth date of each victim dominates the plaza. However, in several cases, the place for the photograph and birth date has been left blank. The father of one victim and member of a group opposed to the official sanctuary (and the reopening of the street) explained to me that some parents are resisting the plaza until justice – especially for Ánibal Ibarra – is sought. For this reason, their children’s photographs are not found in the official site. Between visits in July and October
2005, I could tell that some of the memorabilia had been either removed from the unofficial sanctuary, or some of it had been transferred to the limited space inside the official plaza.

It appears to be a subtle but deliberate intent of the plaza organizers to “cleanse” the memory of Cromañón and to “control” it. A sign in the plaza asks “Out of respect, please keep this plaza clean.” The plaza, unlike the makeshift sanctuary, is also a confined space, enclosed by a wall and by gates that are locked during the night. During the day, the space is watched by a police officer. Outside this plaza, at least from October to December 2005, there was a petition to maintain the unofficial sanctuary in the closed street until justice was served. In December, resistance to the removal of the sanctuary and the opening of the street was evident in a graffito and accompanying banner reading: “You closed the door for us. You want us to open the street. NO! Los Pibes de Cromañón Presente!” This space not only specifies how, when or where to remember, but it also incorrectly inscribes memory. There are a number of errors on the wall of memory in ages and birth dates. Parents and acquaintances have corrected the errors with black marker.

Roniger and Sznajder (1998: 161) allude to the lack of commemorative sites that institutionalize memory of human rights violations under the two dictatorships. Such sites, they suggest, “could help to encapsulate and frame the past” and that “for society at large, the absence of lieux de mémoire keeps the memory of unfulfilled justice and past human rights violations as an open wound and projects the basic disagreements about the past into the public sphere at periodic crises” (1998: 161). The issue at Cromañón is not a “lack of commemorative sites” but rather contention over commemorative sites and of a lack of consensus on the form the sites should take. Differing levels of authority complicate this conflict. The city and the nation have the power to designate a site for commemoration, however, various groups of parents and
survivors have been powerful in resisting institutionally approved lieux de mémoire – particularly a site that is constructed before the "responsible" are punished and a site that is judged to "inadequately" recall the victims and the tragedy.

When I left Argentina, there was talk of a more permanent and more appropriate memorial, one that would address some of these issues and officially incorporate some of the modifications families have made to the landscape into a permanent memorial space. The proposed plaza would eliminate the stone wall that "hides" the memorial wall. The new plan includes a proposal to officially change the name of this section of the street to "Los pibes de Cromañón." This would mean incorporating one of the mnemonic landscape changes that families have insisted on over the last year.
CHAPTER 6

Vulnerable Memory and the Street: Transmitting Narratives of Trauma and Injustice

"La memoria es como un obrero que trabaja para establecer cimentos duraderos en medio de las olas./Memory is like a laborer who works to lay cement in the middle of a torrential downpour."32

-Marcel Proust

I chose a line from Marcel Proust as one of the epigraphs for this project. Establishing, convincing and transmitting memory, to borrow from Elizabeth Jelin (2003: 26), is difficult work. Matters are more complicated in places or times less conducive to the production and dissemination of memories of the past. One could suggest that the worst days of vulnerable memory are past in Argentina, the ‘worst’ days having been those under the dictatorship when fear and repression prevented people from recalling trauma in particular ways. Despite that, the ‘bad’ days continued during the return to democracy when the military’s shadow loomed, and later during Carlos Menem’s long reign and his multiple attempts to produce a very specific narrative of the military period. However, I do believe that Argentina’s ‘popular memory entrepreneurs’ devote their energies to the various memory causes because of a general feeling that memory (and justice) there was and continues to be fragile. The ‘popular’ (popular) memory entrepreneurs of the present have learned from their peers fighting other causes, and from memory entrepreneurs of the past. These entrepreneurs seem to recognize the coming of Proust’s

32 Translated from Spanish. This quotation was on the wall of Rosario’s Museum of Memory during an exhibit by Rosario artist, Fernando Traverso.
metaphoric downpour; they anticipate its arrival and attempt to shield their solidifying memories from its destructive path.

Narratives of the past involve much more than stories. Rather, as the fieldsites of this project illustrate, these narratives involve two additional aspects that seem important to the success of alternative stories about the past. By this I mean the crucial spatial and visual aspects of collective memory. Graffiti or street art are a common medium for the various groups of memory entrepreneurs in Argentina, and in Buenos Aires specifically. Graffiti writing is cost effective, and when official channels are closed (and even when they are open) provides a venue for expression, especially for marginal groups of people. Graffiti are used to assign blame for past injustices or tragedies. Street art is also used to slow down the process of societal forgetting. While demonstrations and vigils temporarily claim and occupy contested spaces such as Mitre Street in front of La República Cromañón or Plaza de Mayo, graffiti mark spaces and thereby extend the claim to space for the lifespan of the street art. Space, above all else, seems to be the most important concern to writers of mnemonic graffiti. However, visual details and visibility are also important. Graffiti are carefully placed so to be visible both to the ‘victims’ and marginal memory entrepreneurs, and to the dominators alike. “The Visual” is important in terms of the durability of texts, their immediate impact, making the best of a captive audience and in terms of making messages readily comprehensible to observers. In the first case, durability betters the chances of messages remaining in the contested space longer than other graffiti. This is best illustrated by the fibreglass installations in the Plaza de Mayo. The “Juicio y Castigo” (Judgement and Punishment) installations have been established in high traffic areas, and on horizontal surfaces susceptible to the elements. Yet, except in the one instance where the installation was removed, the works remain. In terms of impact, the “Juicio y Castigo” image is
successful because of its placement at three of the most important entrances to the Plaza de Mayo, and also because of the clear link it makes to the police who monitor the plaza. This strategic placement instructs pedestrians in the plaza to interpret both the police presence there and the plaza itself in a specific way. This positioning demonstrates the sound understanding of "the visual" by some of Buenos Aires’ most active memory entrepreneurs. The message is simple, large in scale and clear. There is little room for misinterpretation of the message. The combination of text and image, especially the powerful symbol of the police cap, conveys in an uncomplicated manner, the intended message. Similarly, the repetition of a phrase used frequently by memory and justice entrepreneurs, as well as the repetition of symbols, means viewers understand the context of the message, and have less difficulty interpreting it.

The "Juicio y Castigo" (Judgement and Punishment) installation is durable; it is positioned to make the best of a captive audience, has a strong impact and delivers a readily comprehensible message. Other texts contain aspects of these elements, but may rely more on one of these factors than others. For example, we can consider the Alfredo Franciotti installation on the exterior wall of Avellaneda Station and the other similar installations in the station. These installations appear to have been erected on the third anniversary of the "Pueyrredón Massacre," one month before I conducted my fieldwork.\(^{33}\) Originally, there were more of these collage-style installations, but most of them have been removed. Interestingly, one on the outside of the building (and therefore one of the first ones seen by people entering the station) remains, and is perhaps the most powerful in that it attacks the police commissioner rather than lower ranking officers. A similar installation inside the station uses the photo of Alejandro Acosta, another police officer involved in the shootings. However, both inside and outside the station, there were additional collage-style installations but they had been removed prior to the time I conducted my

\(^{33}\) The third anniversary of the "Pueyrredón Massacre" was June 26, 2005.
fieldwork. Unlike that of Franciotti and Acosta, these were not life-size installations, and therefore may not have the same impact as the one pictured in figure 27. This one of Franciotti means that those entering or leaving the station are confronted with the carefully constructed image of the senior police officer. His eyes are at the same level as onlookers’ eyes and his gun is life-sized. These images are not as durable as the fibreglass installations in the Plaza de Mayo. However, they are very explicit and have a comparable impact. They are even more aggressive in their attack as they identity specific officers, and rely on newspaper photos taken the day of the massacre in which the police are shown uniformed and gripping police rifles. The Franciotti installation has a very captive audience – it is visible to anyone entering the station from the street, and cannot be missed on account of its size, resemblance to the police commissioner, and the graphic brutality of the rifle dripping blood. This blood dripping from Franciotti’s rifle prepares those entering the station, to see this space in a particular light.

The other fieldsites illustrate the multiple claims to space and conflicting ‘senses of place’ of these contested landscapes. At this point, El Olimpo appears, despite dissention and erasure of graffiti, most convincingly to belong to the neighbourhood and one group of marginal or popular memory entrepreneurs (Neighbours for Memory). It is no longer a “police” space, (although there are certainly people who oppose its transformation into a place of memory). This is both unofficial in terms of the graffiti, but also official in that in May 2005 the building was turned over from the state to the city government, which in turn gave it to human rights organizations. The dominant meaning of Avellaneda Station at this point belongs to piqueteros and social activists. It is largely a space associated with police repression and remembrance of Darío and Maxi. However, this claim is not recognized officially; it remains symbolic. However, as I mentioned above, in early 2006, a group of representatives from an unemployed workers
movement (MTD) submitted a petition to have the name changed from the renowned name of (Nicolás) Avellaneda to “Darío and Maxi Station.” It is as if this group recognizes the fluctuations in the meaning of place, particularly in cases where one’s narrative is not the dominant or official narrative.

Yet elsewhere, contested sites seem to have been ‘divided’ amongst those who stake a claim to them. At Cromañón, and in both the Plaza de Mayo and Plaza Congreso, it seems as if spaces belonging to the state, and spaces belonging to marginal groups (the people, generally) exist side-by-side. The Monumento a los dos Congresos is most often covered with graffiti, while the National Congress, no more than fifty metres in front of it, is kept free of graffiti and is guarded by police.34 The Plaza de Mayo has literally been divided in two by the police barricade that cuts across the middle of the plaza. Neither side is designated as belonging to one group and not others, but the proximity of one side to the government house, and the proximity of the opposing side to the Avenida de Mayo from which various demonstrations enter the plaza, effectively makes these designations. Cromañón was a privately owned club, but the tragic fire turned it into a site for both private and public mourning. Families and friends of its 194 victims brought their private mourning into the public place, and through their occupation of the street and erection of a makeshift memorial space, effectively made the space in front of Cromañón their space. However, the Cromañón memory entrepreneurs, although they are vocal and quite visible, do not have the authority to officially make the space theirs, and as if denying them this power, the Ministry of the Interior and the City of Buenos Aires has opened the official

34 The National Congress is not entirely free of graffiti, but efforts are made to keep it this way, and to clean up graffiti when it is painted, especially on the front of the building facing the plaza. Similar efforts are made on the sides of the building, but there is less supervision here by police. However, it is also a less visible space, and writing graffiti here is not as transgressive as writing graffiti on the front of the Congress. The back is a different story all together. There is little or know surveillance in the form of police, and seems little is invested in cleaning the messages that get written here.
memorial space for the victims of *Cromañón*, and is pressuring the memory entrepreneurs to give up the street, and move their memorial to the clean, controlled, commissioned site.

The various initiatives of the Buenos Aires memory entrepreneurs seek to “establish, convince [and] transmit” (Jelin 2003: 26) particular memories. Graffiti and street art are certainly not the only means through which narratives are transmitted, but they are quite important to consider in memory and justice struggles in Argentina as they are so widely used and because, unlike demonstrations which occupy spaces for a small window of time, graffiti and street art can occupy these same spaces for longer, (provided they are permitted to remain) meaning the same message, delivered another way, has more opportunity to become established, has more potential to convince, and more time to be transmitted.

How is collective memory passed on? How is it that a particular memory becomes the dominant one? Yosef Yerushalmi suggests that what it really means for a group to remember is that the narrative has first been articulated by one group, then it must be accepted by willing receivers, and finally, for one to say that a society truly remembers, the receiving group must also pass on the narrative to others (1996: 109). Yerushalmi (1996) discusses this process of transmitting narratives of the past with specific reference to inter-generational memory.

However, I think this idea can be extended beyond inter-generation memory to apply to the general transmission of memory across society, as groups articulate specific memories, and hope to find willing receivers who will then continue the chain of actively transmitting that narrative. At any point, the receiving group can continue the memory by passing it on to other groups (belonging to the same generation) or to younger generations. Both are examples of a society “remembering.” In contrast, when those on the receiving end do not accept the memory as meaningful, or they reject it entirely, or alter it in a way that changes its meaning, we can say that
a society forgets (Yerushalmi 1996: 109). Both forms of remembering are important for the survival of a particular version of the past. However, at least with the cases of *Cromañón*, the Pueyrredón Massacre and other incidents of very recent trauma, I suspect the latter form, the spreading of memory across a population is the bigger priority as this means (potentially) more state and media attention is brought to the issue, and potentially, more pressure for a quick resolution. Examples of this include the public pressure that forced the political suspension and hearing for Ánibal Ibarra, as well as the criminal charges brought against members of the police who orchestrated and participated in the Pueyrredón Massacre (although in this case there were also damning press photographs and eye witness accounts). Except in cases of trauma that affect much of a population, this “lateral” transmission of memory across a population seems to be the first priority both because it makes pursuing justice more likely, and also because it opens up more possibilities for the inter-generational transmission of memory.

Street art is involved in this process of societal remembering, both in cases of remembering across a population and inter-generational memory. During the dictatorship, citizens were not free to discuss the disappearances or challenge the state. As such, the spreading of memory across groups was affected. However, after thirty years, the social arena is more conducive to these memories that were not previously transmitted or accepted. Now initiatives must both continue to spread memory inter-generationally, but also to spread memory across groups who either never received the information, or across groups who rejected it in the past.

The conversion of former detention centres, especially highly symbolic ones such as the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA) into places of memory is indicative of the success of one group of memories and its memory entrepreneurs. It has been received and accepted as meaningful and appropriate by enough people that the meaning of the actual location of the memory can also
change. The ESMA for instance, changes from being a place associated exclusively with terror and torture, the notorious death flights and infant kidnappings, to a place associated with an ominous past that in the present and future is also a space for memory, and a space in which the justification for the past is questioned. The various silhouettes affixed to the ESMA fence represent the articulation stage of Yerushalmi’s societal remembering/forgetting framework. They exist in attempt to further convince and transmit a particular memory (to younger generations or to other ‘non-believers’). However, even the process of getting them placed on the fence requires comment. These are the work of professionals. The process of getting permission to put them on the fence, or the process of getting permission to open a museum of memory in the ESMA all demonstrate somewhat successful attempts at convincing others of one fairly cohesive group of memories. However, it is also important to note the difference a change in government can make in terms of creating an environment more or less conducive to certain memories. Under the Menem government, the president proposed to tear down and destroy the ESMA. A few years later, President Kirchner announced the grounds and facilities would be turned into a museum of memory. Likewise, the turning over of El Olimpo to human rights group occurred under Kirchner’s administration.

However, as we look at the rather unified initiatives behind museums of memory, memorial plaques and plazas, Elizabeth Jelin warns, one should be careful of seeing memory as singular, but rather consider that no matter when or where, there is always more than one memory. In regards to distant events, it is more common to find one ‘agreed-upon’ version, but yet, there will still be alternate stories (2003: 54). For instance, the new museum of memory at the ESMA does not represent only one memory, but is rather a collaboration of memories, although the opinions of one or two groups may be more powerful than others. At this point,
there is much debate about what this space should be used for, and there are points of
disagreement between the various memory entrepreneurs (see Brodsky 2005). Similarly,
disagreement between memory entrepreneurs is visible at Cromaño, where some family
members have cooperated with the city and moved memorials into the official plaza, while
others have remained steadfast in their resistance to the memorial plaza currently hidden behind
a cement wall. This group recognizes the power they hold so long as the street remains occupied.
Also with reference to the official and unofficial plazas at Cromaño, we should probe how this
space will appear and be read once the unofficial memorial is removed (either willingly or
unwillingly). At present, the site is visibly one of contestation, but at some point, the official
memorial will be the only testament to the tragic fire. When this happens, the memory presented
through the memorial will appear unified. However, whenever there is a unified narrative of the
past, we should question whose memory it is, as well as probe its “voids and silences” (Jelin
2003).

Mnemonic graffiti and other forms of social protest (related to issues of collective
memory) challenge these ideas of “one” memory and indicate the presence of multiple versions
of the past. Similarly, they challenge dominant meanings of space or place and attempt to
displace the centrality of a ‘sense of place’ that is not hospitable to the narrative(s) put forth by
various popular memory entrepreneurs. This process may not only involve assigning a new
memory to a particular place, but may also mean pointing something out about that place. For
instance, in the struggles to have El Olimpo turned into a space for community use and a place
for memory of the dictatorship, memory entrepreneurs have painted the building with phrases
such as “Acá se torturó! Here they tortured.” This is where graffiti resembles the escrache
demonstration tactic. Memory entrepreneurs not only assign a different meaning to the place in
question, but they also mark the space and critique how the space was used and what it meant in the past.

Tactics of Buenos Aires’ varied and multiple memory entrepreneurs often piggyback or mimic official uses of space. For instance, along Avenida de Mayo there are three large cement and tile plaques recalling victims of police repression in December 2001. The plaques follow conventions of public remembrance, but are unofficial installations in the street, and facilitate ‘irruptions’ of the past in the everyday landscape when pedestrians have to navigate past these large plaques on the sidewalk. Similarly, buildings, plazas and streets are often named after significant events, or important figures in history. I mentioned earlier the name Estación Avellaneda comes from Nicolás Avellaneda, a prominent figure in Buenos Aires history. The changing of the station name from Avellaneda to Dario and Maxi suggests the pair is deserving of this honour. This official naming also helps ensure the story is passed on and remembered in the future (although with time, perhaps only the name will be recalled and the story forgotten).

Memory entrepreneurs at Cromañón and AMIA (the Jewish community centre) also recognize the power invested in ‘official’ names. On the twelfth anniversary of the AMIA bombing, I noticed the street signs near the synagogue on Pasteur Street had been painted “Anti-Semitism” in one direction, and “Impunity” in the other. During my fieldwork, I noticed the black street signs near La República Cromañón had been covered with black stickers reading “Los pibes de Cromañón.” The stickers were the same size as the official street signs, and mimicked them in colouring and font. From a distance, they appeared ‘official.’ Here too, the memory entrepreneurs recognize the potential to establish and transmit their version of the past by having the street ‘officially’ renamed “Los pibes de Cromañón.” A proposal to this extent has been submitted to the city as part of the new plans for the official memorial plaza. An official
renaming of Mitre Street would not only displace the name of a former politician, but would also enter a particular view of the Cromañón tragedy into everyday life (Azaryahu 1996, Von Hennberg 2004, Alderman 2000). For instance, addresses, directions, maps, business cards and other stationary in addition to the actual street signs would be changed to reflect the newly accepted narrative (Alderman 2000). Beyond the commemorative name-changing ceremony, the new name would come to be accepted as natural, and by extension, detached from particular views of the world (Azaryahu 1996). On the contrary, commemorative street signs seem benign but represent particular political views and agendas. However, Von Henneberg (2004: 61) warns that although commemorative street signs can subtly incorporate a particular version of the past into the spaces of everyday life, “place names alone do not specify which stories should be told or what one should think about them” nor can they guarantee knowledge of or interest in the intended memory (Von Henneberg 2004: 61).

The human rights movement in Argentina is made up a large range of different groups. Many of these groups, especially the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, have considerable influence and have made monumental contributions to human rights in Argentina. Elizabeth Jelin remarks that in the political realm, these groups have been successful in making specific demands (such as calls for punishment, formal apologies and demands to have former detention centres turned into memorial spaces) but beyond this Jelin says, “one of the most important aspects of the human rights movement’s cause is its struggle ‘against forgetfulness’ and for the construction of [collective] memory” (1994: 49). She implies that the human rights movement fears not individual forgetting, but collective amnesia (1994: 49). For narratives of the past to be transmitted to others (either other groups or other generations), those narratives must be kept ‘in view.’ The best examples of this are the weekly marches of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, as
well as the repeated use of the same phrases and symbols by this group. The Mothers’ marches are regular and frequent; their message, slogans and symbols are used consistently at demonstrations and in publications. The Mothers challenge other ‘senses of place’ related to the Plaza, particularly those not conducive to (their versions of) collective memory or social justice.

Mnemonic devices facilitate struggles for memory and ensure that issues are kept in view, and although mnemonic initiatives may not have the same power as official designations, they at times, have intense symbolic power. For example, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo stencilled kerchiefs around the Piramide marking this as their space, or in the very least, as a space associated with human rights. The plaque for Azucena Villaflor is similar, although the decision to have her ashes scattered there has even more symbolic power. She, from that moment on, will permanently occupy the plaza.

Jelin alludes to a marking of memory and marking of space that is useful here. She suggests “social memories become established through practices and ‘markers’” (2003: 55) where practices eventually become rituals, and where ‘markers’ refer to public places, but also to dates on the calendar (such as March 24, 1976, June 26, 2002 or December 30, 2004). Street art very literally marks space with a particular memory. From the case studies, a number of commonalities emerge. Within this process of ‘marking’ memory and ‘marking’ space, there appears to be some borrowing of tactics and slogans across the different groups of memory entrepreneurs. Also, in attempt to make their narrative of the past more central, these groups have to displace or subvert dominant or competing memories and meanings of space, and this often means critiquing that ‘other’ memory or that ‘other’ sense of place. The intense sense of injustice also contributes to the intensity of this critique. Related to this shared sense of injustice is the interconnectedness of many of these traumatic events. They are connected in terms of the
continuance of repression from the past into the present, or impunity from the past into the present, but also in terms of strategies and slogans. I mentioned earlier how various groups have used the silhouette in demonstrations, or have stencilled street signs. The language of the various memory entrepreneurs is also similar. This, I think, is a result of the success of a handful of groups (especially the Mothers). Families of Cromañón victims have also adopted the escrache tactic that started with H.I.J.O.S, a radical human rights group. There is also support between the varied groups of memory entrepreneurs: I mentioned the trials of Alejandro Acosta and Alfredo Franciotti, which were attended by members of various human rights groups.

Discursive strategies across the various sites of this study also share similarities. In general, I find the mnemonic graffiti to follow a “positive-self, negative-other” (Wodak 2004: 207) argumentation style. In attempt to displace other narratives, memory entrepreneurs must not only put forth their version of the past, but also discredit the dominant one. This process of discrediting is quite explicit as graffiti texts are concise, and to ensure the accurate transmission of memory, one must be clear. In this process of “othering,” the target of critique or exclusion is often the police, politicians or the state in general, where the inclusive group includes social activists, and generally the public. Much earlier, I mentioned I felt the aggressiveness of mnemonic graffiti stemmed from the fact that memory entrepreneurs experience a sense of necessity in their militancy because of a perceived atmosphere of injustice and impunity. The “other” is presented negatively, often as corrupt, an agent of repression and disruptive to a climate of justice and remembrance. The perspectives of the graffiti is often that of victims’ families, marginal political groups, movements of unemployed workers or survivors of trauma. These various groups are situated ‘on the margins.’ However, in some cases, especially that of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, these groups choose to remain on the margins where they can
continue to challenge hegemonic views of the past from a ‘safe’ space within a community of resistance (hooks 1990: 149). From this space, ‘marginal’ memory entrepreneurs regularly challenge more official memory entrepreneurs (like the state). As such, social activists and generally those ‘without power’ are included in the discourse in these contested spaces. On the other hand, the state, especially the repressive state, is excluded, as are those felt to be responsible for the traumatic incident. But these memories all have their own “silences and voids” (Jelin and Kaufman 1998). In the Avellaneda case, we have seen how the Dario y Maxi stencil presents their killings in a particular light. What is carefully omitted from this narrative, and really all of the narratives at Estación Avellaneda, is the conduct of the two fallen protestors on that day. Piqueteros on June 26, 2002 had clashed violently with police using sticks, rocks, and items at hand. I am not suggesting the pair ‘got what they deserved,’ simply that the memory inscribed on the walls of Estación Avellaneda privileges a specific version of events. Similarly, I mentioned the “Ni una bengala, Ni el Rock n’ Roll, a los pibes los Mato la Corrupción/ Not a flare, nor rock n’ roll, the children were killed by corruption” stencil and graffiti such as “Chabán y Ibarra le van a pagar/ Chabán and Ibarra will pay.” These memories absolve others of culpability in the Cromañón incident, and place blame almost exclusively on the shoulders of Oman Chabán and Ánibal Ibarra. Those who lit the flare that started the fire, the band that apparently encouraged flares, the parents who brought young children to the club are all absolved of blame in the graffiti.

Lastly, we should think about the location of mnemonic graffiti. Although graffiti about the dictatorship, Cromañón and the Pueyrredón Massacre are found elsewhere, these messages are concentrated in the actual sites of repression. In addition to these spaces, they are also found in places recognized as sites of debate, dialogue and demonstration such as the plaza that faces
buildings of significant influence over the citizenry, such as the Plaza de Mayo or the Plaza Congreso. By no means are these the only plazas where such discussions take place, but the activity in these two plazas seems constant. The space in front of the Supreme Court is at times one of debate, depending on the cases being tried. Perhaps one of the most informative messages about the “crucial where of [mnemonic] graffiti” (see Cresswell 1996) are the two ant-images around the fibreglass installation for those killed by police repression on December 20, 2001. These icons are not found in any of the other sites studied for this project, nor have I seen them anywhere else outside of the city of Rosario. Memory entrepreneurs for Claudio “Pocho” Lepratti have recognized the importance of painting mnemonic graffiti throughout Rosario, but in addition to this, the importance of leaving their memory in the Plaza de Mayo.

Mnemonic graffiti is painted in places invested with the meaning of the “other” or an “other,” as well as in the sites of trauma. This positioning facilitates confrontation, both a literal and more symbolic form of confrontation. Symbolically, the new memory and new meaning of space compete with other memories and ‘senses’ of place. Quite literally, graffiti is positioned to confront or challenge a more powerful group such as the police, politicians or in the case of Cromañón, a business owner. We have seen this in the Plaza de Mayo and can draw on a number of examples such as the message directed at President Kirchner located directly in front of the Casa Rosada, or the white silhouettes facing the same building. Likewise, graffiti on the Piramide and ‘people’s’ side of the plaza seems to be written while protestors face the Casa Rosada, the police barricade, and the federal police. The first attempt to paint a mural at El Olimpo in the mid-nineties also involved a literal confrontation with police and a symbolic collision between two opposing memories and senses of place. Police and the “owners” of this
space prevented the painting of the original mural thereby denying memory entrepreneurs the opportunity to make *El Olimpo* ‘their’ space with ‘their’ ‘meaning.

My focus here has been on the more marginal memory campaigns that conflict with the more hegemonic mnemonic projects and narratives. The mnemonic battles discussed here are contentious. There is no consensus around the traumatic pasts associated with *Cromañón*, *Estación Avellaneda* or *El Olimpo*. There are two clear motivations in these memory battles – one, to ensure the past is recalled in a particular way, and two, to seek justice for the victims. Collective memory more generally can serve different purposes. As I have just mentioned, narratives of the past can be constructed in such a way so to facilitate the pursuit of justice, but collective memory can also be constructed in a way that it unites people despite difference. It consoles and builds group identity. Argentina is divided over memory of the dictatorship. However, despite these aggressive and often violent divisions over this aspect of Argentine history, these same divided groups unite when recalling the 1982 *Malvinas/Falklands* War. There is a fairly strong consensus over this war, and a general sense among Argentines that “England attacked us.” In this case, England is the ‘other’ and Argentines are united rather cohesively. The goal of the *Malvinas/Falklands* memorial projects seems to be to remember the individual soldiers, to remember that Argentina was the victim, and also to gather support for political movements that continue to make claims to the islands. Even some of those who disagree over memories of the dictatorship can agree on how the *Malvinas/Falklands* War should be recalled.

The mnemonic projects studied here do not seek primarily to console the public or the victims of trauma in a way that other monuments have done (consider the Vietnam memorial for example). Rather than soothing victims of trauma, many of the popular memory projects in Argentina disrupt the present and make the past uncomfortable while challenging the hegemonic
narratives of the past. This is not to say that Argentina’s unofficial monuments do not serve some sort of therapeutic role, but to emphasize that the primary role is to challenge the history of the elite and the powerful.

I have tried to demonstrate the range of memory struggles that exist in Argentina, and the militancy required to defend or establish particular versions of the past. The process of ‘establishing’ memory and ‘transmitting’ it to other groups and future generations is tedious and it demands creativity and sustained efforts. However, the ‘memory industry’ and ‘memory climate’ have changed somewhat in Argentina, particularly as time passes since the end of the dictatorship, but also since significant changes in administration at the Casa Rosada. While the past is recorded in institutions and official spaces for memory, the memory entrepreneurs of Buenos Aires seem to suggest that collective memory needs to be negotiated in the streets and plazas of a nation, and with regards to past trauma, collective memory begins in the sites of trauma. Within these struggles, the message itself is important, but so too are the spatial and visual aspects of the mnemonic graffiti employed to “establish” and “transmit” narratives of trauma.
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INFORME ESPECIAL-PRIMERA ENTREGA

16 DE JUNIO DE 1955
Seguidos de la Marina y grupos clúster se rebelan contra el gobierno de Perón en su intención de golpe de estado.

10:00
Desde la base de Punta Indio parten 22 bombarderos North American y 1 BEECHCRAFT con tripulación de la Armada, DERIVÓ: bombardear la Casa Rosada.

13:30
Los aviones llegan a Buenos Aires cargados de combustible y avizoran vuelo hacia la Casa de Gobierno. Perón se abstiene del avión y se traslada al Ministerio de Guerra.

Se tienden banderas antinacionales en las terrazas de la Casa de Gobierno y el Regimiento Granaderos rechaza al Palermo para reforzar la defensa.

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El bombardeo

1 HORA 12:40
Se bombardea
Los aviones anteriores al Río de la Plata y desovan sus bombas sobre la Casa de Gobierno. Hay muertos, heridos y daños materiales.

BOMBAS
Se utilizan bombas de: 50 kg y 210 lb de peso. Cada avión podría cargar dos.

Las primeras bombas fueron impactadas en un hospital que está a la altura de la Calle Diagonal. Murieron todos sus pacientes.

2 HORA 13:00
Llegan los aviones de Granaderos a la Plaza de Mayo. Un grupo de aviones de Marina apostados en una esquina de aeródromo del Aeronautica los espera con armas.

3 HORA 13:00
Dos compañías con 150 hombres de Marina se dirigen al aeródromo a la Casa Rosada donde la Plaza de Mayo y desde la esquina a la vuelta del Aeronautica.

4 HORA 13:50
La movilización de los Granaderos hasta el documento de vuelo hace que el Ministerio de Informes inicie la vuelta mantenga su posición.

5 HORA 15:00
Para apagar los incendios de fuego, en una nueva inmersión varios incendios devastan las bombas que caen en la Casa Rosada en lo que fue el ataque de mayor violencia y atrocidad.

6 HORA 17:50
Al final de la tarde, como las bombas de los aviones, incluido el Memorial de la Marina, el 30% que había el capitán generalel de las rebeldes.

Reformados
1 Casa de Gobierno
2 Plaza de Mayo del Ainin
3 Ministerio de Marina
4 Ministerio de Guerra
5 Ministerio de Hacienda

VÍCTIMAS

MURIOS

Muertos 364

Heridos

Más de 800

AVIONES UTILIZADOS

34

North American AT-6

22

Beechcraft AT-11

5

Glaster Mentor

4

Artillero Catalina

3

227

Figure 37. "El Bombardeo." Diagram from national daily El Clarín, June 16, 2005. The diagram depicts the bombing of Plaza de Mayo and the Casa Rosada by the military in 1955. The accompanying story by Maria Seoane can be found at http://www.clarin.com/diario/2005/06/16/elpais/p-02615.htm