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Cultural Memory and the Traumatic Past: Examining the Voids in Contemporary German and Uruguayan Literature, Museums, and Film

Jessica Paola Marino, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Blankenship, Janelle S., *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Comparative Literature

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how “voids” are used as a poetic lens in German and Uruguayan literature, film, music, museum spaces and memory places to excavate traumatic events of the twentieth-century and represent them in collective memory, further promoting a new understanding of historical experiences. These voids are used to symbolize gaping wounds left in Uruguayan culture after the military dictatorship of 1973-1985, the sense of absence and emptiness left in German-Jewish culture after the Holocaust and the breaks, ruptures and divisions in Germany post-WWII. Case studies include the architectural “Voids” in Libeskind’s *Jewish Museum Berlin*, “empty tombs” and installations on the “Disappeared” in the *Museum of Memory* in Montevideo and the powerful gaps, voids, wastelands and absences in literary texts by Peter Weiss, W.G. Sebald, Mauricio Rosencof, poetry by Mario Benedetti musicalized by Daniel Viglietti, and films by Wim Wenders, Richard Copan and Stan Neuman and Enrique Buchichio.

Keywords

Holocaust, Divided Germany, Civil-Military Dictatorship of Uruguay, Jewish Museum Berlin, Museum of Memory Montevideo, Daniel Libeskind, Peter Weiss, Winfred Georg Sebald, Mario Benedetti, Daniel Viglietti, Mauricio Rosencof, Richard Copan, Stan Neuman, Wim Wenders, Enrique Buchichio, Los Desaparecidos, voids, trauma studies, museum studies, memory studies, collective memory, urban memory spaces.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all faculty, friends and family who supported me intellectually, emotionally, etc., throughout this process. At the University of Western Ontario, I would like to give many thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Janelle Blankenship, for guiding me in every step of the way and sharing her knowledge with me for this project. I would also like to thank Dr. David Darby, who through the role of Second Reader, provided me with extensive feedback to improve my second chapter and gave me a first external opinion on how the project was going. I would like to thank Dr. James Miller, who taught me the ins and outs of thesis writing and also encouraged me to become a better scholar. I also would like to give many thanks to the following people: Dr. Cristina Caracchini, who started as my TA Supervisor and became my mentor in these exciting and challenging two years at Western; Sylvia Kontra, who gave valuable advice and words of encouragement, helping me succeed; and Dr. Rafael Montano, who provided important feedback on my third chapter and reassured me of any doubts I had regarding this project. I would also like to thank my fiancé David, who gave me the emotional support to continue to work hard and tackle every obstacle regardless of its magnitude or difficulty and our dog Bella, who accompanied me every day, every hour, while I read, wrote, or proofread to her. I would also like to extend my thanks to God for guiding me in this challenging journey, and to my family both in Canada and in Uruguay, future family-in-law, and friends who were always there to give a helping hand regardless of what the task was and did so with lots of love. Special thanks are in order to my aunt Rosana Varela, who acted as my research assistant in Uruguay and was always there when I needed her. Finally, I would not have been able to write this project without the inspiration from my professors in the German and Spanish programs at York University who first led me to the wonderful worlds of literature, film, music, art, and history. Special thanks to Dr. María Figueredo, who taught me to be passionate about my roots and to Dr. Christina Kraenzle who first introduced me to the “voids” in the topography of Berlin.

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Introduction

Stepping into the Voids

The subjects of trauma, memory, and the related issues of remembering and forgetting the past are not easy to discuss. When these subjects are expanded and connected to an entire nation, it can become even more difficult. This is certainly the case when we are dealing with the thorny questions of forgetting and remembering a traumatic historical event such as the Holocaust or the brutality of a military dictatorship. What should a society remember from such traumatic episodes in history? Why is it important to not forget? And, what happens when what we want to remember is a gaping absence left in society; a void that cannot be filled? These are the questions that frame this thesis and come to mind when we examine history, collective memory, trauma and loss.

Contemporary German and Uruguayan authors, architects, filmmakers, artists and musicians have often grappled with these questions when addressing the recent traumatic past. In this research project I use analytical tools and methodology taken from museum studies, literary studies, cultural studies, memory studies and trauma studies to focus on how a number of German and Uruguayan literary texts (some musicalized), films, and museum spaces engage with the “voids” left behind by historical trauma. On the one hand, the texts in this thesis engage with symbolic voids, pointing to absent historical subjects. However, on the other hand, in these cultural products we also find a web of other voids: empty spaces left in the urban fabric of the city, typographical voids in texts, and pedagogical gaps that are a result of missing or suppressed information. These texts and urban spaces in myriad ways productively engage with historical trauma and fractures and ruptures in the fabric of the nation in Germany and Uruguay in the

twentieth-century, including the tragic loss of millions of people in the Holocaust¹ and the resulting division of Germany, which fractured the nation, and in Uruguay, the traumatic events that occurred during the military regime that ruled the country from 1973 to 1985, in particular the tragic disappearance of citizens who were kidnapped and assassinated, “Los Desaparecidos” (The Disappeared).²

To better understand how “voids” in contemporary culture become a poetic lens through which historical trauma can be better understood, I start this thesis with a powerful case study documenting contemporary urban memory practices: Daniel Libeskind’s unique architectural design displayed in the Jewish Museum Berlin. Libeskind provocatively depicts the cultural absence of the German-Jewish community, a tragic result of the Holocaust, through a series of literal “Voids”³ including a “Holocaust Tower” and a “Memory Void.” These empty spaces, on the one hand, are symbolic and conceptual and cannot be filled, serving as a permanent reminder of what he calls the “absolute void,” the gaping wound left behind by the Holocaust, but on the other hand, are filled with tangible objects that can be touched and felt (art installations using audio

¹ Referencing the important work of Donald L. Niewyk, Francis R. Nicosia (published in 2000 in *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust* pp. 45-52) and others, Holocaust scholar Amos N. Guiora notes: “According to Donald Niewyk Nazism caused the murder, using the broadest definition, of roughly 17 million people [...] Estimates of the death toll of non-Jewish victims vary by millions, partly because the boundary between death by persecution and death by starvation and other means in a context of total war is unclear. Overall, approximately 5.7 million (78 percent) of the 7.2 million Jews in occupied Europe perished (Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of the Holocaust* pp. 242-44 (1988). In addition, 5 to 11 million (1.4 percent to 3.0 percent) of the 360 million non-Jews in German-dominated Europe. (Melvin Small & J. David Singer, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars 1816-1980* (1982); Michael Berenbaum, *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (1990)” (57n3).

² My intention in this thesis is not to compare traumatic historical events, but rather to examine cultural products that interrogate these events and speak about the loss and trauma experienced at a collective and personal level. For more information on Comparative Genocide Studies please see, for example, *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* by Alan S. Rosenbaum and “Does the Singularity of the Holocaust make it Incomparable and Inoperative for Commemorating, Studying and Preventing Genocide? Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Day as a Case Study” by David Cesarani.

³ A clarification to the readers: from here on in this thesis when the word “Void(s)” is capitalized and in quotations I am referring to the architectural structures in the Jewish Museum Berlin designed by Daniel Libeskind.

and sound), objects and media that activate the spectator's senses and provide a personal, sensorial frame for re-interpreting history.

Before I summarize the thesis chapters in depth, I would first like to define some terms used in my research. There are several terms and concepts, such as collective memory, trauma, etc., that throughout the years have been utilized by scholars who in various ways have shaped and re-shaped them to the point where it may not be clear what exactly one is referring to when discussing them. In an effort to avoid any confusions for the readers or distractions from the central points in discussion, I am providing a set definition for said terms as they will be used in this project. Collective memory is a term developed by the philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in his book *La mémoire collective* (1950), published in English as *The Collective Memory* in 1980. For Halbwachs, memory is as much collective as it is individual. According to this French scholar, remembrance of past experiences is influenced by other members of the group who lived the event with the individual; even when a person experiences an event alone, there are always people in his or her mind who influence how he or she lives the event and subsequently remembers it. As Halbwachs argues: "Our memories remain collective, however, and are recalled to us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned. In reality, we are never alone. Other men need not be physically present, since we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons" (23). There is, on the one hand, personal or participatory memory, but the author also identifies as equally important a "collective memory," also noting that the two forms of memory are inextricably linked. "[R]emembrances are organized in two ways" argues Halbwachs; "either grouped about a definite individual who considers them from his own

viewpoint or distributed within a group for which each is a partial image. Then there is an ‘individual memory’ and a ‘collective memory’ [...] [and they] are often intermingled” (50). As he further elaborates: “The collective memory, for its part, encompasses the individual memories while remaining distinct from them. It evolves according to its own laws, and any individual remembrances that may penetrate are transformed within a totality having no personal consciousness” (51). Through this notion of collective memory and remembrance, Halbwachs emphasizes the social aspect embedded in remembering. In this thesis, collective memory and individual memory are also intertwined, as exhibited in several case studies that examine how cultural productions in Germany and Uruguay tackle the difficult subject of remembering their respective traumatic pasts.⁴

The second term that needs clarification is trauma. First fully theorized by Sigmund Freud in his study *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920) (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), it has been widely adopted and used in several fields including psychology, psychoanalysis, literature, film studies, museum studies, literary criticism, and trauma studies.⁵ According to American Studies scholar Anna Thiemann, Freud first developed the concept of trauma in the 1890s with Josef Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria* and then refined this notion in 1920 in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In 1939 in *Moses and Monotheism* he finally moved “beyond individual trauma to explain the development and

⁴ Another important term I would like to highlight here is “cultural trauma” as defined by Jeffrey C. Alexander. In his seminal essay “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Alexander argues that “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity” (1).

⁵ For more on trauma studies scholarship, see these two important sources: *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* by John Fletcher, and *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* by E. Ann Kaplan.

transmission of cultural memory and collective trauma” (Thiemann, 49). The word “trauma” itself stems from the Greek word for wound: τραύμα. For Freud, trauma is linked to stress or fracture, “a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli” (Freud, *Beyond* 23). For many trauma studies scholars, as English professor E. Ann Kaplan mentions, trauma is still understood today following Freud as a fracturing or fragmentation of consciousness, a “break in consciousness” (Kaplan 24).⁶ As Freud stated in 1893 in his research report “Some Points for a Comparative Study of Organic and Hysterical Motor Paralyzes” “if physical events or impressions cause a surplus of effect and if the subject can’t get rid of this excess of affect ‘the memory of the impression attains the importance of a trauma and becomes the cause of permanent hysterical symptoms’ (Freud, “Some” 171-172 qtd. in Fletcher 30). In 1893 in another short medical report “The Mechanism of Hysteria,” Freud also described trauma as a “shock-like experience” (14). In their book *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation and Treatment*, John Briere and Catherine Scott define trauma as an event that “is extremely upsetting and at least temporarily overwhelms the individual’s internal resources” (4). The major types of traumatic events that someone can experience include: natural disasters, mass interpersonal violence, large-scale transportation accidents, house or other domestic fires, motor vehicle accidents, rape and sexual assault, stranger physical assault [referring to assaults conducted by persons not well known by the victim], partner battery, torture, war, and child abuse. (5-9). According to trauma studies scholar Cathy Caruth, “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the

⁶ Kaplan in her chapter “Why Trauma Now? Freud and Trauma Studies” in *Trauma Culture* follows Kevin Newmark in seeing trauma as related to the “break in consciousness that modernity represents” (24).

event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (181). While aware of how the term has changed over the years, Caruth highlights the broadness of the experiences trauma can encompass as well as some of the symptoms that individuals experience. In this research project, we are dealing with specific traumatic events that affected many individuals, as well as the collective identity and sense of self-understanding of the nations involved. For Freud, as already suggested, the notion of trauma was initially used for individuals, but he later discussed collective traumas as well in *Moses and Monotheism* (Thiemann 49).⁷ Although many of the types of trauma named above were experienced on an individual level, when I refer to “traumatic historical events” in this thesis, this elastically includes personal trauma and collective trauma, since such events also impact society as a whole.

The third term that needs clarification is my own understanding of “void” or “voids.” In this paragraph I will briefly sketch out a typology of the void that will act as a kind of roadmap to the different iterations and manifestations of the concept in this project. Some of these categories overlap; however, I hope this only serves to illustrate the interconnectedness of the subject under discussion. Throughout the four chapters of my thesis voids are often interpreted as haunted or spectral spaces, uncanny spaces that often return to the trauma of the past and symbolize or make us recall absence and emptiness.⁸ Other spectral spaces examined in the thesis include open and empty tombs,

⁷ In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud also started to more deeply engage with modernity, such as railway travel.

⁸ The term “uncanny” is also taken from Freud’s lexicon. The term (now widely used in literary analysis and cultural analysis) means something which is familiar but also foreign or strange and involves a drive to repeat. As Freud notes: The uncanny “is undoubtedly related to what is frightening - to what arouses dread and horror” (“The Uncanny” 619). John Fletcher also points out, Freud’s essay on the “uncanny” or “Unheimliche” was written in 1919, while he was also working on a more complete understanding of trauma. See Fletcher, *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* and Sigmund Freud, “Das Unheimliche” (1919), in: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, pp. 227-268.

tombs that contain unique artifacts and objects, blank, uninscribed tombstones, and wastelands. They are often physical voids, tangible and visible and at times shocking to the spectator. However, as I briefly discuss below, I believe they are not only negatively-charged spaces, but also like open-ended texts, are spaces that have to be imaginatively filled and can help us move towards a better future. The full range of voids examined in this thesis also includes fragmented text, typographical voids and informational voids, for example pedagogical gaps in Uruguay regarding the dictatorship as a traumatic event. As I discuss in the thesis, these are gaps that need to be filled and often poetry, film and urban memory places step in to fill them.

The voids examined in the texts in this thesis have to be interpreted; they call on the individual reader to re-imagine history at a personal level. Andreas Huyssen describes how Daniel Libeskind, in his “counter-monument” Jewish Museum Berlin, “gave architectural form to another void that haunts Berlin, the historical void left by the Nazi destruction of Berlin’s thriving Jewish life and culture” (*Present* 66). Libeskind calls for an open interpretation of his haunted “Voids,” striking symbolic voids that give spatial expression to the tragic absence left by the Holocaust. As I mention in the first chapter, some spectators even see hope in the voids, noting that there are rays of light that filter in. On the other hand, as trauma studies scholar Eric Kligerman has noted, the “Voids” in Libeskind’s architecture can be disruptive and dislocative spaces that shock the spectator, forcing them to fill in the void themselves and even step into the space of the dead.

In the museum texts, literary and filmic case studies examined in this thesis, we encounter many metaphorical and symbolic voids representing the physical and historical loss of the victims of the Holocaust and the violent loss of the “Disappeared” in Uruguay.

My thesis hopes to contribute to the ongoing debate on the significance of such voids in the context of a larger discussion of memory politics and memory ethics. While writing the chapters I have been inspired by many critics, above all Andreas Huyssen and critical theorist Arleen Inoescu. In analyzing Libeskind's representation of these metaphorical and symbolic voids in the Jewish Museum Berlin, Inoescu provocatively stated: "the void is meant to bring the invisible into visibility, or, to paraphrase the architect, to let the invisible be experienced by the public, and it translates the erasure of history into surrogate symbolic presence" (159). Following Inoescu's interpretation of Libeskind's "Voids" as foregrounding the invisible and inviting the visitor to experience the present "absence" of history, I argue that Libeskind's "Voids" do not remain negatively-charged spaces, but provide a poetic lens through which even traumatic histories can be productively re-imagined and contemplated by the readers, spectators or museum visitors.

I first became interested in the concept of the "void," the point of departure for this thesis project, when I was introduced to Libeskind's architectural representation through the lens of Andreas Huyssen, who provocatively thematizes "voids" in his article "The Voids of Berlin." The first chapter of this thesis in the spirit of Huyssen's article asks: How has architecture, as used in museums and monuments, become a prominent form of remembering and uncovering the voids of the traumatic past? To answer this question, I also turn to the Jewish Museum Berlin, not only analyzing the striking museum structure, but also highlighting some of the permanent exhibitions that complement Libeskind's architectural representation or vision of the "voids" left in the German-Jewish community after the Shoah. According to German scholar Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, Libeskind's architectural "Voids" are "a staging of absence and an

illustration of loss through the negative sacred that becomes manifest in the Holocaust Tower and in the architecture of the Jewish Museum as a whole” (53). For Hansen-Glucklich, the negative sacred is the opposite of the positive sacred: it is “associated with dangerous and frightening forces [...] [such as] death, fear, and sacrilege - before which one experiences reverence or awe” (54). The spaces of the “Voids” become for Hansen-Glucklich sacred places where the visitor memorializes the Holocaust. By connecting the Jewish Museum Berlin with the negative sacred Hansen-Glucklich highlights the important role the museum has in relation to memory work. My chapter on Libeskind takes a somewhat different turn, not reading the empty spaces or “Voids” that structure his museum in terms of “negative” theology but reading them as part of what one might call a new pedagogy. They are used as part of an interactive play that calls upon the museum visitors or spectators to activate their senses. Both sonically and visually, the exhibits and empty spaces shock the spectator/museum goer. As I discuss in the first chapter of the thesis, the “Holocaust Tower” and “Memory Void” are two “Voids” that can be entered and fully experienced by the museum visitor; the architect himself states that the meaning of his structure is “open” and can be interpreted in multiple ways. Hansen-Glucklich also in passing sees an “aesthetics of fragmentation,” ambiguity, “unclear boundaries,” “exaggerated or distorted perspective” (55) in the museum space. My goal in the first chapter is to further mediate on this fragmented, distorted perspective and experience in the museum space, also drawing parallels to what Holocaust scholars such as Eric Kligerman have termed the “Holocaustal uncanny” to consider how Libeskind’s “Voids,” empty cavernous spaces and exhibits contribute to a new memory

politics and become a new poetic lens that help structure our experience of the fractured past.

The second chapter also addresses fragmented, empty spaces, voids and wastelands that haunt contemporary and post-war German literature and film. In Wim Wenders's film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*) we see a fragmented urban experience and the Potsdamer Platz wasteland imaginatively filled in the film through poetic voice-over narration, "film within a film" historical footage and the personal memories of the Jewish storyteller.⁹ Here voids can also become palimpsests for new historical meanings. In the post-war period, German-Jewish author Peter Weiss's meditation on the destructive remains, holes and empty spaces of Auschwitz-Birkenau provocatively returns to absence and emptiness. In "Meine Ortschaft" ("My Place"), Weiss uses heightened description and excessive cataloging to document his own personal, uncanny encounter with a topography of loss and the traumatic past of the Holocaust. The narrators in Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Mauricio Rosencof's autobiographical novel *Las cartas que no llegaron* (*The Letters that Never Came*) (discussed in chapter three) also use an excess of memory places, photographs, and other records to try to interpret the past, fill in memory gaps and come to a better understanding of their own Jewish identity.

⁹ Although the storyteller is not identified as such in the film, as I discuss in the chapter it is significant that the storyteller is played by German-Jewish actor Curt Bois. Many scholars have noted the significance of this casting and have stated that many audience members would have recognized Bois "as a Jewish actor who went into exile during the Third Reich" (Horn 39). Some critics claim that "Homer's reminiscences of Berlin suggest" that he, like Bois, is "a Jewish refugee who has returned to Germany (Rogowski 556). For more on this topic see Heather A. Horn's PhD thesis: *Origins, Identity, Home: Sites of Subjectivity and Displaced Narratives in Marguerite Duras and Wim Wenders*, and Christian Rogowski "'To be Continued': History in Wim Wenders's 'Wings of Desire' and Thomas Brasch's 'Dominio.'"

The second part of this research project focuses on how the traumatic past is excavated and how the topic of the voids and “open wounds” left by traumatic historical events is represented in Uruguayan literature, music, film, urban museums and memorials that engage with the last military dictatorship in the country (1973-1985). The third chapter of the thesis focuses on literary, filmic and musical representations of absence, emptiness and voids in texts that respond to the military regime. I analyze Mario Benedetti’s poems “Desaparecidos” and “Ausencias,” written during the dictatorship, to focus on the subject of “Los Desaparecidos” (The Disappeared), citizens who were kidnapped and presumably assassinated during the military dictatorship in Uruguay. I also examine Mario Benedetti’s and Daniel Viglietti’s collaborative work that was part of the Canto Popular Uruguayo, a musical genre popularized during the dictatorship and representative of the resistance of the people against the restrictions imposed on the population. In this third chapter, I also analyze the film *Zanahoria* directed by Enrique Buchichio in 2014, which provides a contemporary perspective on the silences imposed and “voids” created by the dictatorship helping me dive further into the unhealed wounds of Uruguay’s past. In the final part of this chapter, I focus on Mauricio Rosencof’s autobiographical novel *Las Cartas que no llegaron* which creates a dialogue between the two traumatic events that frame this thesis, the Uruguayan dictatorship and the Holocaust.

To more fully engage with urban memory politics, I have included a final chapter in this thesis on the interactive exhibition space of the Museo de la Memoria (the Museum of Memory) in Montevideo. In this chapter I argue that the Museum of Memory serves as a provocative *lieu de mémoire* that seeks to educate the public on the physical and symbolic voids and tragic loss associated with the military regime. As I discuss in the

last two chapters of this thesis, this is a loss that is forever imprinted in the memory of those who experienced the dictatorship and on the family members of the victims; however, there is also a cultural amnesia in Uruguayan youth who did not experience this traumatic period. There were intentional voids created at a cultural level by the Uruguayan governments and educational institutions in the first decades of the post-dictatorship period from 1985 to the early 2000s (what has been called “the politics of silence”). The educational system sought to downplay the importance of the trauma left by the military regime by “erasing” this period from history books and letting silence reign on this topic. The didactic, interactive exhibits of the Museum of Memory and other cultural institutions try to reverse this silence and educate the younger Uruguayan population, who are often struggling to find more information on this topic.

As I explore in the last two chapters of this thesis, this new interactive pedagogy that informs many of the new monuments and memorials in Uruguay also represents a larger turn in memory politics. Architects, artists, authors, curators and directors are now seeking to open up an active dialogue about the past. Here the Holocaust has become a powerful universal trope in memory politics in Latin America to open up a new conversation about memory, loss, and trauma. The slogan “Never Again” has been used by Latin American truth commissions, the leftist government of Uruguay (who introduced a “Never Again” inaugural holiday on the birth date of Uruguay’s national hero José Gervasio Artigas¹⁰), artists who designed a monument for the “Disappeared” in

¹⁰ The holiday was created in 2006 by then President Tabaré Vázquez and was to symbolize “the commitment to never again have acts of violence and intolerance among Uruguayans” (my trans.; “A diez años”). The first Día del Nuna Más took place on the June 19, 2007. However, as various news outlets have noted, the controversial holiday is not popular among Uruguayans, and ten years after its inauguration even the national government has forgotten about it (“A diez años”).

Montevideo, and the public in Latin American countries as an “international prism” to “help focus the local discourse” about the Disappeared “in both its legal and commemorative aspects” (Huysen, *Present* 98).

To conclude this introduction, I would like to cite the final paragraph from Elizabeth Jelin’s preface to *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* as I believe that it has helped me keep an open mind throughout this project, and can help my readers have a similar approach when they step into the “voids” left by the past:

Rather than making distinctions between magnitudes of self-inflicted catastrophes, or creating hierarchies of significance or depth of human suffering, I hope that discussions of the issues in this book open the way to a broader reflection on the human need to make sense of catastrophic events and suffering, on memorialization practices, on rituals of homage, and on political initiatives that advance the principle of “never again” in reaction to all affronts on human dignity. (ix-x; emphasis added)

I hope that my thesis can emulate Jelin’s desires by continuing the task of broadening discussions of this nature and contributing to a further understanding of the “human need” to reflect on and make sense of suffering and voice new hopes for the future – even in the face of absence.

Chapter One

Showcasing the Voids: Reading German-Jewish Cultural Memory and Absence in Daniel Libeskind's *Jewish Museum Berlin*

The Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) was initially conceived in 1989 to be an extension of the Berlin Museum with a Jewish department or what the Berlin Senate called the “Jüdische Abteilung” (Libeskind, “Global” 70).¹¹ The architect Daniel Libeskind won the competition for its design, but instead of creating an extension to the museum with a Jewish department, he proposed to build an entirely new structure dedicated to the intricate history of Jewish culture and Berlin. The museum opened without displays in 1999 and with them in September of 2001 (Chametzky, “Not” 216). Libeskind’s design was influenced by Walter Benjamin’s *Einbahnstrasse*, Arnold Schoenberg’s opera *Moses and Aaron*, and the addresses of deported Berliners during the Holocaust, names which he found in the *Gedenkbuch* (Libeskind, *Jewish* [Ediciones Poligrafa] 56). The *Gedenkbuch* is what art historian Peter Chametzky calls “the massive black memorial tome of names, addresses, and dates documenting the deportation and murder of Berlin’s Jews, an alphabetically ordered archival text, void of further commentary” (“Not” 225). As architectural historian Edward Dimendberg describes, the addresses of seminal Jewish male and female authors, composers and thinkers informed Libeskind’s pivotal vision. With these three decisive elements in mind (Benjamin’s text, Schoenberg’s opera and the

¹¹ As Peter Chametzky writes: however, long before that, the JMB had a “long, complex, and controversial period of development and design - from temporary exhibitions in the 1960s, to concepts for a permanent display as a Jewish department in the Berlin History Museum, or the integration of Jewish history throughout that collection, to that for a self-sufficient museum of Jewish Berlin, and finally, Jewish Germany [...]” (“Not” 216).

Gedenkbuch), Libeskind began the design for the museum: “Locating the addresses of Heinrich von Kleist, Rahel Varnhagen, Heinrich Heine, Mies van der Rohe, Arnold Schoenberg, and Walter Benjamin on a city map, he connected these points into a system of intertwining triangles and generated the shape of the building that resembles a fractured Star of David” (Dimendberg 954-5).¹² This fractured Star of David translates into the design of the structure as a zigzag shape, which Berliners have nicknamed “the Blitz” (“lighting”) (Copan 00:04:54-00:04:57). From the outside, the imposing titanium, glass and concrete building zig-zags next to the restored Baroque Kollegienhaus (a former Prussian courthouse, which originally housed the Berlin Museum), and from the inside, visitors access the new structure through the subterranean level. The design of the JMB consists of three axes: “the Axis of Continuity, the longest leading to the stairs to the permanent exhibition (and so also the route of exit from the museum), [t]he Axis of Exile and Emigration, leading to the E.T.A. Hoffmann Garden, and the Axis of the Holocaust, leading to the dead end of the Holocaust Tower” (Chametzky, “Not” 233). However, there is another aspect of the design that is as central to the museum structure

¹² The historian Cezary Wąs in an essay entitled “Practicing Theory” concludes that Libeskind’s explanation is nothing other than a “literary fiction.” He writes: “In numerous statements concerning the formation of the project the author recalled – as the genesis – a two-volume book, received at his own request from one of the agencies of the federal government, with names of Jews persecuted during the Nazi era with dates of their deportations or deaths [...] he mentioned prewar Berlin phone books where you could find addresses of many inhabitants scattered throughout the world during twelve years of the reign of Nazism. Ultimately, however, he states that the deformed Star of David as an outline of the plan emerged when he connected on the map of Berlin addresses of six Berliner admired by him, which he paired: Rachel Varnhagen with the Luterian theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher who used to visit his salon; the poignant poet of Holocaust Paul Celan with the architect Mies van der Rohe; and finally the author of fantastic and horror stories E. T. A. Hoffman with the romantic writer Heinrich von Kleist [...] The manipulation performed by him cannot be repeated also because [...] the addresses of those persons are difficult to obtain, and the mentioned books cannot help in it. For example Varnhagen died forty years before the phone was patented, and for the same reason it would be difficult to find addresses of Schleiermacher, Hoffman or von Kleist in any phone book. The story is fascinating and perhaps because of that it was uncritically repeated by countless commentators of the project. A literary fiction, not regulated by the rules of probability, was created” (Wąs 115).

as it is to the narrative that Libeskind wants to portray with this architectural text: The “Voids.” According to the historian Cezary Wąs these “Voids” in Libeskind’s museum space “show the Holocaust not as an event in the past, but as a rupture in the history of humanity, a dramatic abyss that cannot be captured in any traditional way” (117).

Upon entering the Baroque Kollegienhaus, one “descends by stairway through the dramatic Entry Void, into the underground” (Libeskind, “Jewish”). Through this subterranean path, the visitors immediately find themselves submerged in Libeskind’s “Voids” that permeate the entire structure. They are one of the focal points of the architectural design; they cross throughout the building connecting, and at the same time, disconnecting Jewish history and culture with that of Berlin. Breaking the narratives of the exhibitions at six different points, the sixty-six feet tall “Voids” “symbolize the lost presence of the Jewish community” (Wąs 117) and the profound absence of German-Jewish objects, culture, and individuals by leaving the space empty:

The comforting continuity of the museum route was disturbed several times by these bare black blocks, where the exhibition stops. [silence] These are the concrete towers that transverse the building on all levels, there are six of them all different in shape. [silence] The only lighting comes from skylights, there is nothing in them, there is no way into them, the architect calls them the Voids. They are the incarnation of the final figure in German Judaism: absence. (Copan 00:20:41-00:21:30)

The “Voids” highlight what is not there any longer, and that which can never be retrieved. The inspiration behind these “Voids” is recounted by Libeskind in the third installment of Richard Copan’s and Stan Neuman’s series of films entitled *Architectures*.

The film opens with images from the exterior of the museum with birds chirping away and is followed by three silent black and white long shots of the Weißensee cemetery, lingering on the tombstones. At this point, Libeskind begins speaking about his experience with Jewish cemeteries:

Now I've been to many Jewish cemeteries, always overgrown with vegetation, always kind of in a state of erasure, but in the Weißensee that's what struck me, the huge confidence in a future that was blank, because all these tombstones which were created for future generations, uncarved, you know the confidence that for hundreds of years there will be Jewish families continuing to pass on a tradition struck me as the absolute void because there was nobody to see, there was nobody remaining from these families to see the emptiness of these slabs or marble. And I thought, yes, that's really the condition of this city and of this state of mind of the spiritual legacy in Europe and in Berlin and in Germany.

(00:00:52-00:01:40)

After the architect's visit to the Jewish cemetery in Weißensee, he meditates on the "absolute void" created by "the emptiness of these slabs or marble" (Copan 00:00:21-00:01:29). The void he describes is found in the empty, unscribed tombstones in Jewish cemeteries that will forever remain empty and blank because of the Holocaust and all of the untimely deaths brought upon by this massive historical event. As Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich perceptively writes in *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, Libeskind sees the blank tombstones in Weißensee that were never engraved and were "erected by wealthy families with the purpose of engraving and inscribing them with the names of future generations" (54) as inspiration to use "voids as the medium" in his museum architecture

“to express a trauma that exceeds personal tragedy -‘a trauma which is structured by the destruction of a community... an absence which is structured in the city, in the topography of a country, and in the topographies of Europe and the world’” (55).¹³ The image of a blank tombstone symbolizes the absence of this community and the trauma of the Holocaust that haunts Germany; an absence that is present through these physical and cultural voids. Libeskind then architecturally represents these voids by centering the design of the new Jewish Museum Berlin around them, using empty spaces to transverse the entire structure both horizontally and vertically. These black-painted spaces cannot be accessed by the public, cannot be decorated by artwork, and they represent the absences that define Jewish-German experience and history. “[C]utting through the form of the Jewish Museum is a Void,” states Libeskind “a straight line whose impenetrability forms the central focus around which the exhibitions are organized. In order to cross from one space of the Museum to the other, the visitors traverse sixty bridges that open into the Void space, the embodiment of absence” (*Jewish* [Ediciones Poligrafa] 58).¹⁴ The viewer can look into the “Voids” through windows and is supposed to see nothing but concrete walls and floors. The idea of representing the absence left in post-war German-Jewish identity with physical voids that penetrate all aspects of the building structure visually implants the image of this absence to the visitors and to all of Berlin. For Libeskind, this is the only way that Berlin can move forward from its dark past:

¹³ This is Libeskind’s statement about trauma, absence and topography in *The Space of Encounter* pp. 28, 204.

¹⁴ “Durchschnitten wird die Gestalt des Jüdischen Museums von einem Void, einer geraden Linie, deren Undurchdringlichkeit den zentralen Fokus bildet, um den herum die Ausstellungen organisiert werden. Um von dem einen Raum des Museums in den anderen zu gelangen, überqueren die Besucher sechzig Brücken, die sich zur Leere hin, zur Verkörperung der Abwesenheit, öffnen” (Libeskind, *Jewish* [Ediciones Poligrafa] 59).

Es gibt drei Grundideen, die die Grundlage für den Entwurf des Jüdischen Museums bestimmten. Zunächst die Unmöglichkeit, die Geschichte Berlins zu begreifen, ohne sich im Klaren zu sein über den gewaltigen intellektuellen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Beitrag, den die jüdischen Bürger Berlins geleistet haben. Zweitens die Notwendigkeit, die Bedeutung des Holocaust physisch und spirituell in das Bewusstsein und die Erinnerung der Stadt Berlin zu integrieren. Drittens, dass die Geschichte Berlins und Europas nur durch die Anerkennung und Einbeziehung dieser Auslöschung und Leerstelle des jüdischen Lebens in Berlin eine menschliche Zukunft haben kann. (*Jewish* [Ediciones Poligrafa] 57)¹⁵

By making the invisible visible, Libeskind attempts to make the void and absence that was created in the National Socialist period tangible so that a healing process can begin, and Berlin can move forward without forgetting its complex traumatic history. As art historian Arnt Cobbers comments in his notes on Libeskind's design philosophy, his unique building style is akin to an intellectual adventure: "Sich auf Libeskind einzulassen, ist ein intellektuelles Abenteuer. Seine Entwürfe sind in höchstem Maße symbolisch aufgeladen und setzen sich dezidiert mit ihrem historischen und politischen Kontext auseinander" (3-4).¹⁶ By having a physical void symbolize the absence felt on a cultural

¹⁵ "There are three basic ideas that formed the foundation for the Jewish Museum design. First, the impossibility of understanding the history of Berlin without understanding the enormous intellectual, economic, and cultural contribution made by the Jewish citizens of Berlin. Second, the necessity of integrating physically and spiritually the meaning of the Holocaust into the consciousness and memory of the city of Berlin. Third, that only through the acknowledgement and incorporation of this erasure and void of Jewish life in Berlin, can the history of Berlin and Europe have a human future" (Libeskind, *Jewish* [Ediciones Poligrafa] 56).

¹⁶ "Entering a building by Libeskind is an intellectual adventure. His designs are highly charged with symbolism and have a distinctive approach to the treatment of the historical and political context" (Cobbers 3).

and psychological level, the subject becomes less abstract and can serve as a starting point to re-examine and engage with the past. The three elements that drive the design of the museum (the impossibility of understanding Berlin without comprehending the Jewish contributions made to the city; the necessity of spiritually and physically integrating the meaning of the Holocaust into the memory and consciousness of the city; and the realization that a human future can only be achieved through the acknowledgement and incorporation of the erasure of Jewish life in Berlin (Libeskind, *Jewish* [Ediciones Poligrafa] 56)) all foreground the necessity of incorporating and acknowledging the void in the German-Jewish identity so that the city can rekindle this relationship and start building upon it. As Libeskind states: “I thought, you have to design a museum that really looks and speaks to the reality that Berlin is a complex city; it has an incredible history, with an absence that will never go away, no matter how much is built there; an absence which is always going to be part of the city. And at the same time you have to open new avenues of understanding, of hope...” (“Global” 70-71). One ray of hope in the museum could literally be the sunlight that filters in from the skylights. As Jessica Mairs notes in her online article “Architecture should not be comforting says Daniel Libeskind,” Libeskind’s commemorative architecture reflects “[...] the brutality of atrocities, rather than repressing it” (Mairs), ...yet glimmers of hope can still be seen. Mairs recounts that “Libeskind said he initially intended a portion of the building to be lightless because ‘nobody can bring light to a holocaust.’ But he changed his mind after reading an account from a holocaust survivor, who recalled a sliver of light shining through the grilles of a cattle car to transport her to a concentration camp and decided to add lightwells” (Mairs). Glimmers of hope can even be felt while visiting the “Holocaust

Tower” inside the museum. The uncanny experience of being enclosed in a dark, tall, and empty space is lightened when the visitor looks at the far top corner and sees a slight ray of light penetrating the darkness, giving hope to an almost hopeless situation.

Many critics have noted that some museum visitors have had experiences of claustrophobia and despair in structures like the “Holocaust Tower,”¹⁷ as art historian Peter Chametzky writes in his sociological case study published in 2008 “Not What We Expected: The Berlin Jewish Museum in Practice,” around 2006 management started to ask hosts to downplay the potentially “oppressive” aspects of the museum architecture and instead “allow visitors a potentially more playful, positive, self-guided experience” (228). Indeed, one must note that as Chametzky observed, some visitors to the museum pay the “Voids” and “darker” areas of the museum, the “sealed interior voids” that do not contain any objects “little heed, notice them only as passageways to be traversed, or empty areas to be avoided, and not as metaphysical or existential challenges” (235-236). Although the “Voids” and other aspects of the museum architecture could be disorienting, unsettling and could lead the visitors to feel nausea and sickness, Libeskind himself warned visitors walking through the tilted columns in the Garden of Exile that one might experience slight nausea: ““One feels a little bit sick walking through it. But it is accurate, because that is what perfect order feels like when you leave the history of Berlin”” (Ionescu 163). Chametzky concluded in his November 2008 study that visitors’ comments often do not mention the void or “sickness as central to their experience of the museum” (229).¹⁸ Although the “Voids” and oppressive museum structure actively

¹⁷ See Arleen Ionescu, *The Memorial Ethics of Libeskind’s Berlin Jewish Museum*, p. 167-168.

¹⁸ Chametzky initially read the “disorienting” and disconcerting museum space differently. In his earlier essay “Rebuilding the Nation: Norman Foster’s Reichstag Renovation and Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish

shaped my museum experience, I agree with Chametzky that the interactive elements of the museum are also important and invite an engaged and at times playful response, activating the museum visitor's or spectator's senses. In the museum, in addition to dark "Voids" and walled-off collections of everyday objects, one finds interactive art installations (analyzed later in this chapter), "panels that one can spin about to see on one side a book's cover and on the other a photograph and biography of the author," computer-based animations, electronic interactive displays and "low-tech techniques that appeal to both the tactile sense - demanding that you touch" and activating "a primal desire to play" (Chametzky, "Not" 229). As Chametzky argues "the visitor's "physical, scopical, and tactile journey through the Libeskind building and its interactive exhibitions intends to stimulate not only intellectual, but also somatic and emotional awareness of German Jewish history, which is key in the absence of the sorts of famous, monumental, or singular objects that typically reward museum visitors' 'attentive looking'" (229).

Libeskind's museum on multiple levels self-reflexively plays with presence and absence; even objects in the museum's collection, as Chametzky argues, "achieve something of the dialectic of presence and absence" ("Not" 235). As Libeskind further comments regarding the initial stages of designing museums that commemorate traumatic events: "[...] it's not only the visible, apparent history that you can photograph, but it's the non-apparent history that is to do with the people whose voices are still there" (Mairs). In designing an unprecedented museum structure as Libeskind calls it ("Global"

Museum in Berlin" the art historian initially argued that the references to the Jewish experience as a "sickening loss" unconsciously re-inscribed an antisemitic logic in the "panic-inducing and vertiginous spaces" of the Jewish Museum Berlin (262). He noted at the time of writing the article (when the museum was still empty, without exhibits) that this focus on sickness and the "staging" of the Jewish experience "in a strange, uncanny space" (262) could be problematic and contrasted sharply with the idea of "health" embodied in Norman Foster's renovation of the German Reichstag building.

72) that focuses on bringing to the forefront the traumatic experience of Germany's complex past, the museum arguably also functions as a sort of memorial, a commemorative site where the exhibitions almost seem secondary and the experience of walking through the museum becomes the visitor's central focus. Libeskind argues that spectator experience is paramount in his structure based on absence, arguing that museum space and the "Voids" should be actively "experienced by the public" (Libeskind qtd. in Oliver 105), also asserting that "the museum form itself must be rethought to transcend the passive involvement of the viewer" (Libeskind, "Between" 29). Libeskind uses a brazen architectural structure to subvert the typical museum structure and provoke the museum spectator, following on the heels of other architects that also create "painfully self-conscious" spaces to urge the public to rethink history and memory. I would argue that as commemorative architecture that challenges visitors and reflects and refracts brutality, the museum can act as a counter-monument. According to scholar James E. Young: "Perhaps the most stunning and inflammatory response to Germany's memorial conundrum [on whether the monument itself is more of an impediment than an incitement to public memory] is the rise of its countermonuments: brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being" (*The* 27). The development of counter-monuments in Germany has an interesting history; gradually, in the post-war and contemporary period there was more and more scepticism about conventional sites of commemoration. Counter-monuments now aim "to provoke a new and very different kind of memory culture" (Staiger and Steiner 8) and they have expanded to other areas of urban planning and remembering. "In many ways" argue Uta Staiger and Henriette Steiner in their introduction to *Memory Culture and the*

Contemporary City: Building Sites, counter-monuments self-consciously work with fragments and dislocations, becoming a “quasi-performative” way to “redeem traumatic experiences” and encourage “collective mourning” (8). They argue that today one can see “a surge of a quasi-performative museum architecture buoyed by a demand to evoke and redeem traumatic experience and collective mourning, with urban design consciously integrating fragments and suggestive traces of the past.” (8) Although their argument is not specifically aimed at the JMB, it can be applied to it. With the museum’s unconventional design, in particular the architecture that molds the visitor’s didactic experience, the museum provides a dynamic space where not only learning can occur; it also fosters a deeper understanding of the complex past shaping German-Jewish identities by physically evoking its traumatic past and performing it through its architecture.

Chametzky would be the first to object to my association of the JMB with a counter-monument. As he elaborates throughout his article “Not What We Expected,” the JMB does not solely function as a Holocaust memorial or monument. He argues that “The JMB, in practice, while including the Holocaust as one component of visitors’ experiences, instead *emphasizes* Jews and things Jewish as a positive component of a ‘postnational’ version of the German national narrative” (216; emphasis in original). As Chametzky perceptively points out, when the visitor leaves the museum, they walk down the E.T.A. Hoffmann Promenade and end on Friedrichstrasse facing the Al-Arabi grocery (237). Chametzky argues that the museum curators have taken into account the structure’s “physical location in a neighborhood and city with a large Muslim population” (237) reading the location of the museum, the “most prominent museum dedicated to a single, specific minority group within a rapidly changing and especially Islamicising

contemporary Germany” (237) as central to the visitor’s experience. Interestingly, Chametzky mentions that the museum tour in the Spring of 2005 also pointed out “commonalities between Jewish and Islamic customs” (239). Thus, in myriad ways through museum discourse (rhetoric and narratives used in the museum tours) and site specificity or location, “[t]he JMB has chosen to emphasize commonalities between various cultures, religions, and ethnicities while encouraging common commitment to the contemporary German national project” (Chametzky, “Not” 239).

However, my association of the JMB with the concept of the counter-monument focuses on the architectural design that is linked to the representation of the Holocaust and its aftermath.¹⁹ For example, we can immediately associate the “Voids” with the “quasi-performative” function that Staiger and Steiner give to counter-monument architecture. Although I agree with Chametzky that the museum allows for multi-linear narratives regarding a multi-ethnic present and the German-Jewish past and present, when I speak about a counter-monument I am referring to the specific sections of the museum that visualize and bring to life or “perform” the central absence that exists in this relationship. By returning to the definition of the counter-monument: “brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being” (Young, *The* 27) and applying it to the JMB, I argue we can have a better understanding of how the museum still highlights the “singularity of German-Jewish experience” (Chametzky, “Not” 217). Chametzky argues that the “singularity of the German-Jewish

¹⁹ Andreas Huyssen has also commented on the problematic nature of Holocaust monuments. He writes: “They have been reproached for betraying memory, a reproach that holds memory as primarily internal and subjective and thus incompatible with public displays, museums, or monuments. A variation on Adorno, who was rightfully wary of the effects of aestheticizing the unspeakable suffering of the victims, it has been claimed that to build a monument to the Holocaust was itself a barbaric proposition” (*Twilight* 258).

experience” is not reinforced in the JMB’s ‘Not What’ campaign, exhibits, publications, and publicity. However, I argue that the museum still uses its symbolic architecture to articulate this singularity, even if it also, as Chametzky suggests, seeks to “‘normalize’ German Jews and integrate their story into a broader German national narrative culminating in a more ethnically diverse and tolerant present” (“Not” 217).

In viewing the JMB as a counter-monument, its architectural design is “painfully” self-conscious of its intent to physically represent a part of history that is traumatic, unpleasant, and has consequences that transcend time and space. Although the museum is not explicitly a Holocaust memorial²⁰ or counter-memorial, many of its spaces are. For example, the “Holocaust Tower,” the “Voids,” and the “Memory Void,” etc., evoke a space of remembrance and collective mourning, while simultaneously using spectral spaces to evoke anxiety, perhaps indicating the inability to mourn the Holocaust and attain closure, by emotionally transmitting a sense of absence, discontinuity, and darkness to the visitor.²¹ Libeskind when asked to define the “Voids” and empty spaces in his museum which he describes using the German term “Die Leere,” provocatively stated: “‘Die Leere’ is a quality. It is a space you enter in the museum which organizes

²⁰ Sophie Oliver in “The Spatial Choreography of Emotion at Berlin’s Memorials” cogently argues in the anthology *Disrupted Memory* that “the Jewish Museum is not a Holocaust Memorial, even if it is frequently mistaken for one” (105). Oliver, however, referencing the work of Naomi Stead also points to a certain ambiguity in the structure and points to the possibility of reading the Jewish Museum Berlin as a hybrid urban memory space, a “complex overlapping of museum, memorial and monument” (105). See Sophie Oliver, “The Spatial Choreography of Emotion at Berlin’s Memorials: Experience, Ambivalence and the Ethics of Secondary Witnessing” in *Disrupted Memory: Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* and Naomi Stead, “The Ruins of History: Allegories of Destruction in Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin.”

²¹ Libeskind himself states: “When mourning is impossible, unspeakable secrets become haunting and words become hollow. The stirring silence of secrets secrete the structures constructed to enclose and contain them” (Libeskind, *Daniel* 133). About this impossibility of mourning the Holocaust, see, for example Tod Linafelt “The Impossibility of Mourning: Lamentations after the Holocaust,” *God in the Fray*. Also see the statements about mourning the Holocaust in Daniel Libeskind, “*MoUrnin*g: Arrangement of the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp.”

the museum, yet it is not a part of the museum [...] it is [also] the space of Berlin, because it refers to that which can never be exhibited when it comes to the Jewish Berlin history” (Libeskind, *Jewish* [G + B International] 79). At the same time, the museum also challenges “the very premise of its being” by concealing, not revealing, and by not only presenting the Holocaust as the only narrative of the museum. As Chametzky articulates: “Museums such as the JMB, proposing a pluralistic German identity predating Nazism and the Cold War, provide a historical precedent for circumspect, liberal, postnational national narratives in the present” (“Not” 222). Therefore, by allowing other historical and cultural narratives to be voiced in the museum along with the traumatic and painful narrative about the Holocaust, this building acts as a counter-monument that challenges its own existence. It presents a sort of performative architecture that evokes collective mourning and remembering, while constantly reminding us of the inability to mourn and revising the national narrative to help foster a new German-Jewish identity and see the past through the lens of a multi-cultural present.

Another way to interpret the museum is to see it as a text. When the visitor enters the Jewish Museum Berlin he or she is greeted by an inscription from the architect explaining his design, which he called “Between the Lines.” This text gives the visitor a description of the floor plan and the three paths that the visitor can take to explore the building. The text ends with a brief biography of the architect and his words on the project: ““What is important is the experience you get from it. The interpretation is open” (Libeskind, “Die”).²² This suggests that the museum is not merely a lifeless structure in which exhibitions are mounted, but rather a living text that seeks to interact with the

²² “Wichtig ist das Erlebnis, das sie vermittelt. Die Deutung ist offen...” (Libeskind, “Die”).

visitors and change their understanding of Berlin's German-Jewish history and identity. The architect argues that the design lures people into the museum, where they can each engage with the "text" in different ways: "There has been a realization that the building is an asset: that people are coming to the building and therefore they are also coming to learn about Jewish history, to learn about the interesting history of Berlin and German Jews, the tragic history, and also the future possibilities" (Libeskind, "Global" 73). In this manner, the museum can be considered a didactic text to be read. The understanding of museums as texts is a subject that has been explored by museum studies scholars, such as Mieke Bal in her book *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*. In the introduction to the text, Bal meticulously breaks down her understanding of the concept of museum exhibitions as discourse, which in turn leads us to read the museum itself as a text: "My guideline will be the notion that gestures of showing can be considered discursive acts, best considered as (or analogous to) specific speech acts" (3). She then further explains: "In expositions a 'first person,' the expositor, tells a 'second person,' the visitor, about a 'third person,' the object on display, who does not participate in the conversation. But unlike many other constative speech acts, the object although mute, is present" (3-4). The museum object becomes the "first person" narrator that speaks to the visitor ("second person") about the object on display, which hence becomes the "third person." It is as if a conversation between all three parties has ensued. Once the reader understands this aspect of her argument, she proceeds to develop it further and articulates her key concept of the museum as a text:

The thing on display comes to stand for something else, the statement about it. It comes to *mean*. The *thing* recedes into invisibility as its *sign* status takes

precedence to make the statement. A sign stands for a thing (or idea) in some capacity, for someone. This is a definition of a sign.

The space between thing and statements is filled up. One such “filler” is narrative. The very fact of exposing the object—presenting it while informing about it—impels the subject to connect the “present” of the objects to the “past” of their making, functioning, and meaning. This is one of the levels on which exposition is narrative. The other level on which narrative occurs is the necessarily sequential nature of the visit. The “walking tour” links the elements of the exposition for the “second person.” Walking through a museum is like reading a book. The two narratives overlap but are not identical. (4; emphasis in original)

Bal identifies two elements that make the museum a narrative. On the one hand, when the visitor interacts with the object in the exhibition, he or she links the past with the present and through the discursive encounter with the object a narrative is formed; and on the other hand, the act of walking through the museum in a sequential nature transforms this space into a text, which leads the visitor to perform a similar action to what one does when reading a book. If we embrace Bal’s argument, every museum, not just the JMB, is a narrative text that elicits a reading experience (or response) from the visitor.

When analysing the Jewish Museum Berlin specifically, right from the beginning the visitor or spectator is encouraged to “read” the museum as a text with no set interpretation. The architectural structure, along with its permanent and temporary exhibitions become a text to be deciphered. As Cobbers argues in *Architekten und Baumeister in Berlin 1: Daniel Libeskind*:

Ein Bauwerk ist für Libeskind stets Träger einer Idee. Folgerichtig sind all seine Entwürfe betitelt. Seine Museumsbauten beziehen im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes Stellung. Sie reagieren auf ihr Umfeld, mit dem sie sorgsam verknüpft sind, und machen schon nach außen hin ihr Anliegen deutlich. Die Architektur stützt und kommentiert die Exponate, schafft nicht nur eine neutrale Folie, wie es das klassische Museumsideal fordert. Schon die Erfahrung des Gebäudes soll den Besucher zum Nachdenken bringen und seine Phantasie anregen. (13-14)²³

On the one hand, Cobbers points out that all of Libeskind's designs have a title. The use of words already assimilates his architectural designs to the literary field; by giving the projects a title, the building begins its role as a narrative text. On the other hand, Cobbers also considers how the design of the museum propels the visitor to take the architecture into account on his or her visit. The museum, and in the case of the JMB its architectural design, has a role as a text; it is not merely there to showcase the exhibitions but to interact with them and dialogue with the visitors as well. An example of how the exhibitions and the museum's architecture comment on each other can be seen in the art installations by Via Lewandowsky entitled *Gallery of the Missing- Ordnung des Verschwindens | Order of Disappearance*. These installations, which can be found in three different levels of the museum, function as an interpretation of Libeskind's "Voids" and are strategically placed in front of them in all three locations. The installations consist of black glass sculptures that resemble the contorted shape of the "Voids"

²³ "For Libeskind, a building is always a vehicle for an idea. It is therefore logical that all his designs have a title. His museum buildings take a stance in the true sense of the word. They react to the environment that they are carefully interwoven with, and their central concern can be seen even on the outside. The architecture supports and comments on the exhibits, it does not merely create a neutral backcloth as the classic museum ideal demands. The very experience of the building, of the rooms themselves, should lead the visitor to thought and stimulate his imagination" (Cobbers 13).

themselves (see Fig. 1) and that have the function of “remind[ing] visitors of the concept and the essence of ‘that which no longer exists’” (*Press 1*). With this project, Lewandowsky “refers symbolically to what has been lost but can still be represented” (1) and uses audio to keep alive the fragments of historical objects that were almost destroyed during WWII. When walking by the installations, the descriptive text next to them tells the visitor that “[t]he sculptures explore the theme of emptiness in a contemporary Jewish museum and question what the destruction of Jewish culture means for the museum’s collections and exhibitions” (Wall text for *Gallery*).²⁴



Figure 1: Via Lewandowsky’s *Gallery of the Missing - Ordnung des Verschwindens*

|*Order of Disappearance* – Jewish Museum Berlin [Author’s Photo]

²⁴ “Sie fragen nach den Momenten der Leere in einem jüdischen Museums heute, auch der Bedeutung der Zerstörung jüdischer Kultur für seine Sammlungen und Ausstellungen” (Lewandowsky *Gallery*).

This information board describes the glass sculptures as audio installations that contain “acoustic descriptions” of destroyed objects that can be listened to using headphones (Wall text for *Gallery*). The first installation showcases the interruption of the writing of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*; the second the head of Hygieia, the goddess of health, which is all that remained of the Jewish hospital in Frankfurt am Main; and the third shows Otto Freundlich’s “The New Man,” one of the sculptures displayed at the “Degenerate Art” exhibition in 1937 (Wall text for *Gallery*). These installations are particularly interesting because they take the theme of the void and give the visitor examples of artwork, buildings, knowledge, people, etc., that were destroyed and are now absent in German-Jewish culture. It concretizes what Libeskind leaves for the viewers to fill in with their own knowledge of the Holocaust and the intentional destruction of Jewish culture in Europe. In a way, it “fills in” the void with particular narratives that at the same time seek to highlight the absence and emptiness of the architectural “Void.” When visitors approach one of the three installations, they put on the headphones provided by the museum and stand in front of the glass sculpture. The visitors cannot look into the structure; however once in front of it they can hear “acoustic descriptions of missing or destroyed objects relating to German-Jewish culture” (*Press 2*) as they move in a parallel direction to the installation. The sound dissipates as the visitors moves from one end of the structure to the other, and they are forced to locate the sound as if they are tuning into a radio station. The effect it has on the visitors, in my opinion after having experienced it myself, is that it further disorients the museum listener and takes them to that place of absence—the shattering moment of destruction. The theme of destruction (and the deconstructive moment within construction) is central to Lewandowsky’s artistic work:

“Das Missverständnis als Scheitern von Kommunikation, als Dekonstruktion und Umformung von Sinn ist eines davon, das Prozesshafte ein weiteres. Der Künstler sucht nicht nach dem abgeschlossenen, dem Ende, nicht nach der vollständigen Destruktion, sondern nach dem konstruktiven Moment innerhalb eines (Zerstörungs) prozesses” (Lewandowsky “About”).²⁵ For this installation in particular, the constructive moment seems to reside in the act of presenting the destruction to the spectators so that a fuller understanding of the past can be cultivated. When I visited the JMB in the summer of 2017, I had the opportunity to interact with Lewandowsky’s installation as it stood in front of Libeskind’s “Void.” At first, I was not comfortable with the idea of having a supplementary audio recording to fill in the “Voids” present in the museum. However, after further thought, the audio descriptions do not function as supplementary material to the architectural “Voids;” but on the contrary, they extend them to another sensory part of the brain, giving another dimension to what Libeskind proposes with his interpretation of emptiness. Now, we do not only see the absence, but we can hear it as well.

Another central permanent installation that profoundly builds on Libeskind’s embodiments of absence is Menashe Kadishman’s *Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves*. This installation by the Israeli artist occupies the “Memory Void,” “one of the commemorative empty spaces in the Libeskind Building” (*Press 1*) by filling the courtyard floor with “over 10,000 open-mouthed faces coarsely cut from heavy, circular iron plates” (*Press 1*). As the museum’s press release tells us, while Libeskind’s “Voids” “serve as an

²⁵ “[Dominant recurring themes include:] misunderstanding as failure of communication and the deformation and deconstruction of meaning. Another hallmark of Via’s work is that ideas are represented as process rather than completion. The artist is neither looking for something conclusive, a definitive ending, nor complete destruction but rather for the constructive moment within a process of destruction” (Lewandowsky “About”).

architectural expression of the irretrievable loss of the Jews murdered in Europe, Menashe Kadishman's installation commemorates the pain of all victims – of yesterday, today, and tomorrow" (1). The experience of walking into this installation, something that is allowed and encouraged by the museum's audio guide, is uncanny (see Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Menashe Kadishman's *Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves* – Jewish Museum Berlin

[Author's Photo]

Looking at the faces as one steps on them, hearing the clanking sound they make as they touch the other iron plates, immediately evokes an emotional response. The questions that arise in one's head are: "Should I be stepping on them? Should I avoid them? Do I go all

the way to the end of the “Void”? When is the right moment to turn back? Is this right?”

The visitor is forced to confront these difficult questions, as he or she experiences emotionally and corporeally the trauma of walking on “people’s faces.” This installation has been criticized by performance studies scholar Bryoni Trezise in several of her works. In the first chapter of *Performing Feeling in Cultures of Memory*, she argues that

Shalechet marks the unspeakable as the repeatable – the improvised steps of tourists who corporeally cathect the installation’s nod to impossible representation. In this way, Kadishman’s faces position us as subjects of Holocaust history and as meta-discursive imprints of it. This occurs in how they stage unspeakability and stage the tourist as its co-scripter. The contagion animated by the installation means that tourists are forced to cathect and destroy the trauma signifier they also seek to witness. (49)

In Trezise’s view, this installation, which invites a performative act by the visitors of the museum destroys the sacredness (in relation to trauma) of the event it is trying to represent. The visitor’s engagement with the installation allows the trauma of the Holocaust to be repeated and at the same time destroyed. As Trezise further elaborates:

Kadishman’s faces make clear that the Holocaust affect is incurred by bodily transmission and is also exposed to exploitation of that transmission. In this sense, it becomes not only the steely shudder of the shriek as it travels up the legs of those who tread, but also the unspeakable itself, which is only ever animated, and felt, by those who desire it. (49)

She implies that with installations such as *Fallen Leaves*, where the spectator embodies and performs the trauma that the artwork represents, we run the risk of exploiting that

trauma, allowing it to become repeatable, therefore losing its meaning and importance.²⁶ I agree with Trezise's argument to an extent. With any memorial, monument or art piece that tries to pay tribute to a traumatic historical event, there will always be people who disrespect it and do not engage with the material in a serious manner. However, with conscientious and critical visitors who want to interpret and interact with the art in a respectful way, the emotional response provoked by installations such as this one allows the trauma to be brought to the forefront and encourages a deeper understanding of the historical event, its consequences, and the need to not repeat it.

On the one hand, in the performative architectural space of the JMB, the spectator loses control, is disoriented and is integrated into a spectral, uncanny repetition of traumatic loss and destruction. Here Eric Kligerman's argument concerning Libeskind's "Voids" can also be applied to this installation. He writes: "Destroying our position as conventional spectators, the artist leads us to a space that reflects our own negation as spectators" ("Ghostly" 30), which means that the space of the "Void" negates our position of spectator by destroying our conventional role as one. Kadishman's exhibition has the same effect. But, on the other hand, paradoxically although there is a loss of control a more playful sensorial role is cultivated. The conventional observer role disappears, and the space, along with the shattering sound of the exhibit, enables a more ambiguous but fruitful position to develop. The argument could be made that this installation along with Lewandowsky's tries to "fill in" the "Voids" that Libeskind purposely decides to leave empty, and therefore undermines the new spectator's

²⁶ Also see her essay "Ambivalent Bereavements: Embodying Loss in the Twenty-First Century," where she elaborates more fully on this exploitation of trauma.

unconventional, but critical role. However, I would argue that just as with the black glass sculptures, this installation does not emotionally exploit the past or trivialize trauma but forces the visitor to explore the theme of the void in another sensory dimension.

So far in our discussion of Libeskind's "Voids," Lewandowsky's *Gallery of the Missing*, and Kadishman's *Shalekhet* installations, the uncanny feeling one experiences when interacting with these artworks has been alluded to several times. To further elaborate on this, I would like to briefly discuss how several scholars have used the idea of the "uncanny" to frame spectators' experiences at the JMB. First I would like to reference what Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich perceptively writes in her study *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation*. Drawing on Anthony Vidler's architectural analysis, she comments that Libeskind employs a "deconstructivist" architectural style (or even "de-architecture") that actively "decentralizes conventional architectural syntax and strips its forms of any aura of familiarity or hominess, creating what Anthony Vidler calls the 'architectural uncanny'" (55).²⁷ She notes: "General characteristics of deconstructivist architecture include unclear boundaries, ambiguous spacing, exaggerated or distorted perspective, the idiosyncratic collision of walls, and an aesthetics of fragmentation" (55). Arleen Ionescu furthermore makes the important point that the "open narratives" and exhibits in the JMB also turn the "all-too familiar ritual objects" of the museum collections and "historical chronologies" into uncanny objects and timelines, inviting the visitor to perform their own

²⁷ Also see Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. On the use of emptiness, "cuttings," "conical intersections" and holey spaces in the playful "de-architecture" of the 1970s (prior to Libeskind's experimental architecture), for example in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, something that due to space limitations is not possible to explore here, please see James Wines, *De-Architecture*.

destabilizations and defamiliarizations (179). Here I would like to add that although there are everyday objects in the museum exhibits, personal donations from family archives such as the Singer sewing machine that belonged to Berlin tailor and Auschwitz victim Paul Guerman, these objects are not only walled-off, they are also in a sense, from certain perspectives “sealed off,” displayed “discretely” in small vitrines, allowing for a “more intimate identification with these subjects of history” (Chametzky, “Not” 233).

Chametzky, however, also argues that the way objects are often presented in the dark hallways is “disconcerting,” claiming that there is a “disconcerting ‘vitrinization’ of the entire collection” (“Not” 233). The fact that the museum’s objects are often presented in angular cases with their contents not always immediately visible from certain perspectives integrates them into the larger play on absence and presence. Indeed, as I walked through the museum, my view of these objects locked away in small, discrete cases was often blocked by other visitors trying to “peek through the window.” In this way, the museum’s objects provocatively dialogue with the larger architectural aesthetic of “sealed off,” hidden, or inaccessible spaces. These objects in the “sealed off” vitrines (not interactive or hands-on) thus also become “defamiliarized,” disconcerting and dialoguing in interesting ways with what Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich has called the JMB’s “aesthetics of fragmentation,” the “ambiguous spacing,” distortion and dislocation that are central to this “uncanny” experience. As Jacques Derrida has also noted, the sealed and inaccessible spaces in Libeskind’s museum (Derrida 93) could also symbolically refer to “deep recesses” of memory or “deep memory,” hidden or difficult to access

(Young, *At Memory's Edge* 178).²⁸ James E. Young has also stated that “by placing architectural ‘voids’ throughout the museum” the architect has tried to puncture “the museological illusion” (*At Memory's Edge* 179). “What you see here, he seems to say, is only a mask for all that is missing, for the great absence of life that now makes a presentation of these artifacts a necessity. The voids make palpable the sense that much more is missing here than ever can be shown” (179).²⁹

Another very useful way of thinking about the uncanny spaces of the JMB is through the lens of Eric Kligerman’s concept of the “Holocaustal uncanny.” In his article “Ghostly Demarcations: Translating Paul Celan’s Poetics into Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin,” Kligerman discusses his idea of the “Holocaustal uncanny” and applies it to Paul Celan’s poetry and Daniel Libeskind’s architectural design for the JMB. According to Kligerman, there is an affinity between Celan’s poetry and Libeskind’s museum, as both direct the readers’ attention to the “voids” or “absences” of the texts, bringing to the forefront the uncanniness of the encounter and also disorientating the viewer:

Similar to the way in which Celan guides the reader toward the gaps of his poems, Libeskind subverts the traditional ways in which a viewer visually controls a museum space. We follow the paths devised by the artist, expecting to see or hear something. By the time we realize where we are, it is too late to turn back. The

²⁸ For more on Derrida’s analysis, see his “Responses to Daniel Libeskind: On Between the Lines” and the other discussions published in *Daniel Libeskind, Radix-Matrix: Architecture and Writings* by Daniel Libeskind and P. A. Belloli, and James Young’s *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*.

²⁹ For Young, the JMB is built on an “aggressively anti-redemptory design, built literally around an absence of meaning in history” (*At Memory's Edge* 179). Young also makes the important point that for Libeskind the void was not “imposed on Berlin from the outside; [rather,] it was, he implies created in Berlin from within” (165). He suggests the void should not be seen as a result of the “bombing of Berlin,” but as a result of the “vacuum and inner collapse of moral will that allowed Berlin to void itself of Jews” (165).

normal subject position is jarred, and the conditions evoking the uncanny arise.

The text, whether a line of poetry or a museum exhibition, suddenly vanishes; a perceptual dislocation ensues. (29)

By losing control and becoming lost in the “Voids,” the blank spaces in the museum, the viewer is forced to confront the past in a different manner through the “Holocaustal uncanny” according to Kligerman. The “Holocaustal uncanny” is similar to Freud’s definition of the “uncanny” (*das Unheimliche*), but as Kligerman writes instead of being the figure of the phantom that crosses over boundaries between the living and the dead to approach the individual, it is reversed; the individual is the one who crosses the line and enters into “the space of the dead” (“Ghostly” 35). As Kligerman further elaborates: “The Holocaustal uncanny refers to the perceptual disruptions that accompany the spectator’s relation to the artwork [of Holocaust aesthetics], resulting in an affective tonality of anxiety” (*Sites* 24). Kligerman explains that “an anxiety consistent with the uncanny” is re-produced by “mimesis in Holocaust aesthetics” (24). In Celan’s poetry or Libeskind’s museum, the voids evoked in these works trigger this “Holocaustal uncanny” and force the viewer or reader who steps into the voids to viscerally explore the trauma of the Holocaust: “Through this vicarious experience of trauma, the viewer is asked to provide his or her own images and to access his or her cultural mnemonic archive connected to Holocaust memory” (Kligerman, “Ghostly” 35). The “Voids” in the Jewish Museum Berlin invite this “Holocaustal uncanny” effect; the non-use of the space permits the absence of the Jewish culture to become visible and at the same time, provokes the visitors to interpret that void with their own experience, understanding, and images of the horrors of the Holocaust, along with the traces it has left in the present. As Kligerman

states: “Libeskind assaults the viewer’s desires to see something. At the site of a trauma, both the poet and architect leave blank the catastrophe, not to shield us from something horrible but to force us to remember the historical void left behind by the Shoah” (“Ghostly” 36).

Looking back at the installations by Lewandowsky and Kadishman, we can also see how the “Holocaustal uncanny” can be productively used to articulate the experience of the visitors when they “step” into these areas. In both installations, the visitors are required to cross the boundary between the living and the dead and physically place themselves in the space of trauma. In the case of the *Gallery of the Missing*, although the visitors cannot physically enter the space of the installation, they mentally travel through time, right back to the moment of the trauma as they hear the sirens from the Frankfurt am Main Jewish Hospital, for example. Peter Chametzky also uses the word “travel” to describe the visitor’s encounter in the museum: “The visitor-experience designed and written by the management and presented by the staff of the museum is neither the void, nor memorial silence, nor bodily sickness, not a one-way street or twelve-tone opera, but a form of edifying, perhaps surprising but not shocking or sickening, travel literature” (“Not” 225). Although, I do not fully agree with Chametzky’s assessment of the visitor-experience since I believe the “Voids” work hand-in-hand with the different installations to trigger shock and a multi-sensory response from the spectator, I do believe that the museum does encourage the visitors to travel through time. In this particular situation, they have to travel to the moment just before, or right after the shock and destruction has taken place. In the case of *Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves*, the visitor is invited to physically enter the “Void” and experience the “Holocaustal uncanny” not just on an auditory level

(hearing the clanging of the plates and screams), but corporeally as well (through the tactile play of the feet). The metal faces also become “uncannily animate,” just as the spectator through a repetitive tactile activity of stepping onto the cold disembodied metal plates also uncannily re-enacts or performs trauma. As Bryoni Trezise describes:

Kadishman’s cold, metal, disembodied faces become oddly visceral for their suggestion of the pure mechanics of death accomplished by Holocaust concentration camps. These heads have no torsos let alone arms, and in the pause of their collective utterance situate themselves as uncannily animate; trying but failing to express more than their iron visages will allow. (“Ambivalent” 225)

An uncanny spectator response frames the museum experience in both installations, although I would argue that this ultimately allows for a deeper understanding of the trauma that is reproduced or copied, leaving the visitor with a greater understanding of the sense of loss and the importance of rebuilding German-Jewish culture in Berlin. One important aspect of Kligerman’s argument must be mentioned; although he argues that Libeskind’s design evokes the “Holocaustal uncanny,” he does not view the Jewish Museum Berlin as “working through trauma” (*Sites* 249). Kligerman writes: “Breaking any consensual practice of working through trauma, Libeskind repeatedly shatters our position as subjects by undermining our vision and orientation in his hallways” (249). However, I would argue the contrary. Bringing Mieke Bal back into the discussion, I would agree with her when she states that the museum as a text places the visitors along with the exhibitions themselves as subjects. Although our position might be disoriented as we walk through the museum, we never lose our role as subjects interacting with other subjects and objects in the building. In addition, I argue that Libeskind first evokes the

trauma in his architecture so that the process of working through it can be done communally and over time after the visit to the museum has ended. We reflect on the trauma as we “read” about it, prompted by informational panels, literary cues and narratives provided, and we also experience and emotionally respond to it as we are inserted physically and mentally into the space of trauma. In the end, although there might be many ways to read the JMB, its “Voids,” or exhibitions (as Libeskind suggests, its “interpretation is open”), the important aspect of this architectural design is that it fosters a new way of bringing the topic of remembering Berlin’s complex German-Jewish past into an ongoing conversation and makes the physical and cultural void that the Holocaust left visible so that it cannot be forgotten.

In concluding this chapter, one essential aspect concerning the Polish-American architect also needs to be taken into account: Libeskind’s schooling, vision, and the purpose he gives to his designs. Libeskind was influenced by the “New York Five” formed by Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Richard Gwathmey, Richard Meier and John Hejduk. Some of their philosophies and design methods are particularly evident in many of his works. As Cobbers informs us: “Hejduk -like Libeskind after him - always emphasized that architecture is more than just a physical, material and functional phenomenon (5). Cobbers notes that “Peter Eisenman [...] who also designed the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, influenced Libeskind especially with his design method of creating axial links with the surrounding environment” (5). Libeskind is now regarded together with Eisenman as one of “the intellectual figureheads of Deconstructivism” (Cobbers 5). Libeskind’s designs, themselves “open texts,” are a product of an ongoing dialogue with other philosophers, critics and architects. They can only be understood as

part of a larger conversation with multiple teachers and diverse artistic movements, including Jacques Derrida, Deconstructivism, and Walter Benjamin.³⁰ Libeskind's structures are more than just buildings; his projects tell a story and connect the past with the present:

Architektur ist für Libeskind mehr als Grundriss, Fassade und Funktion. Ihr „Kern“, das Wesentliche der Architektur liegt für ihn jenseits des Materiellen, und Bauwerke können immer nur „Übersetzungen“ dessen sein, was sich nicht in Worte fassen lässt. Architektur verkörpert die kulturellen Werte einer Gesellschaft, handelt - ebenso wie Malerei, Literatur oder Musik – von Leben, Tod und Identität und ist deshalb genuine Kunst. (Cobbers 13)³¹

As a result, when examining the JMB, the architecture raises in the visitors a feeling of being something more than just a building; it transmits through its structure, materials, layout, and purpose, a narrative, a message that is left to be interpreted individually. Libeskind treats his designs as texts, as stories that need to be told and tales that he only knows how to tell through the art of architecture. Architecture here provides a larger space for a wider audience to receive the message it transmits. In the case of the Jewish

³⁰ Although I can only point to this in passing, the critics Arleen Ionescu in *The Memorial Ethics of Libeskind's Berlin Jewish Museum* and James Young in *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* highlight the importance of the debate Libeskind had with Derrida and Eisenmann on the “negative spaces” inscribed within his building. Both critics point out that Derrida saw two different types of voids in the museum space, both the general uncanny, dislocated space of the museum structure, “Voids” that symbolize “the absence left behind by a murdered people” and the more discrete “sealed spaces which nobody can experience or enter into” which symbolize “deep memory that gives shape and meaning to the surrounding present,” but remains hidden, inaccessible (Young, *At Memory's Edge* 178). Also see Derrida “Responses to Daniel Libeskind: On Between the Lines” and the other discussions published in Libeskind's and Belloli's *Daniel Libeskind, Radix-Matrix: Architecture and Writings*.

³¹ “Architecture for Libeskind is more than floor plan, facade and function. Its, ‘core’, the essential being of the architecture he sees beyond the material level, and buildings can only be ‘translations’ of something which cannot be described in words. Architecture embodies the cultural values of a society, it deals – like painting, literature and music – with life, death and identity, and is therefore genuine art” (Cobbers 13).

Museum Berlin, the number of visitors that have walked through its “Voids” since it opened in 1999, and the volume of media coverage it has received, helps make it clearer how architecture can amplify a message. Chematzky notes that “From February 1999 to Autumn 2000, when the JMB was open for tours without objects, it attracted some 340,000 visitors. In the first five years it presented exhibitions (2001-2005), the JMB drew over three million visitors, with an annual high of 700,000 in 2005” (“Not” 239). He also reports that “In 2004, for instance, the JMB was subject of 2,800 press reports (this includes radio, television and on-line articles, in addition to newspapers and magazines), an average of 235 per month, or eight per day” (239).

I would also like to add that in this century of globalization and technological advances, we as humans have developed a need for immediacy and a thirst for instant gratification. Already in the early twentieth-century, the German philosopher Walter Benjamin was aware of humanity’s departure from deep communal experience and storytelling (what in German is defined as *Erfahrung*) and a turn towards the more fragmented, alienated and isolated world of novels and newspaper information (*Erlebnis*). As he debates in his essay “Der Erzähler: Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows” (“The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov”) first published in 1936: “Die Kunst des Erzählens neigt ihrem Ende zu, weil die epische Seite der Wahrheit, die Weisheit, ausstirbt” (“Der” 106),³² storytelling provides readers tales and communal wisdom that can be transmitted endlessly through time precisely because it does not give them all the explanations. As he states: “Das Außerordentliche, das Wunderbare wird mit der größten Genauigkeit erzählt, der psychologische Zusammenhang des Geschehens

³² “The art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out” (Benjamin, “The” 87).

aber wird dem Leser nicht aufgedrängt. Es ist ihm freigestellt, sich die Sache zurechtzulegen, wie er sie versteht, und damit erreicht das Erzählte eine Schwingungsbreite, die der Information fehlt” (“Der” 109).³³ However, there is a decline in storytelling as a concomitant symptom of the “säkularer geschichtlicher Produktivkräfte, die die Erzählung ganz allmählich aus dem Bereich der lebendigen Rede entrückt hat [...]” (106-107).³⁴ What replaces communal storytelling is a drive for quick gratification and information. Taking into consideration this need for quick and immediate gratification, one might say that a museum structure that works didactically with the visitor and evokes emotions almost instantaneously, might deliver the message slightly better, in any case more quickly, than a traditional epic or a two-hundred-page novel, where one has to spend time listening or reading and understanding it in order for an emotional or intellectual response to occur. When analyzing the Jewish Museum Berlin, however, it becomes apparent that the institution does much more than just provide information; it tells the story of the German-Jewish communities throughout different historical periods, placing a marker on the devastating event of the Holocaust, but always leaving the interpretation open for visitors. Almost sixty years after Benjamin’s essay appeared, German scholar Andreas Huyssen also comments on the evolving form and speed of Western culture in chapter twelve of *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. Agreeing with Benjamin on how media has

³³ “The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks” (Benjamin, “The” 89). To further elaborate his argument, Benjamin brings in Paul Valéry’s view on the evolving interests of men and succinctly expresses a concern that is even more troubling in today’s day and age: “Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated” (qtd. in Benjamin, “The” 93). “Mensch arbeitet nicht mehr an dem, was sich nicht abkürzen läßt” (Benjamin, “Der” 112).

³⁴ “the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech [...]” (Benjamin, “The” 87).

changed our way of living and transmitting memory, he argues that the museum in our contemporary era could be used as a revitalizing medium to remember the past in the modern age of channel-flicking, the fleeting television image, and fast-pace living:

One reason for the newfound strength of the museum and the monument in the public sphere may have something to do with the fact that both offer something that television denies: the material quality of the object. The permanence of the monument and the museum object, formerly criticized as deadening reification, takes on a different role in a culture dominated by the fleeting image on the screen and the immateriality of communications. (255)

The question to ask might be then not *why* has architecture become a prominent form of remembering the past, but how has architecture and museum space with its curated collections of material objects *enriched* our way of remembering it? Scholars such as Huyssen have argued that although these structures in some ways offers a respite from fast-paced living and the fleeting images of screen culture, our focus on museums and monuments, and hence on their designs, is also a product of our modern age and the amnesia that accompanies it. In this chapter, I have argued that Libeskind's architecture uses a series of "Voids," emptiness and an aesthetics of absence and fragmentation to overcome amnesia, to self-reflexively play with memory, trigger new sensory awareness in the spectator and invite the spectator to engage in new ways with the traumatic past and the ruptures and divisions caused by the Holocaust. In the next chapter, I will turn to the memory politics at work in selected contemporary and post-war German literary and filmic works to continue my analysis of ruptures, fragmentation and cultural voids left by traumatic historical events, such as the Holocaust.

Chapter Two

Filling in the Voids: Representations of Historical Trauma, Cultural Memory and Absence in Contemporary and Post-War German Literature and Film

In the last chapter I examined how Libeskind's architecture has enriched our way of remembering the past by making the absence and voids left behind by the traumatic event of the Holocaust visible. In this chapter, I will turn to contemporary and post-war German literary and filmic works that excavate empty spaces, tombs, wastelands and psychological and symbolic voids linked to historical trauma. The works I have chosen to analyze in this chapter engage with both personal and collective memory and highlight different types of voids that are used to represent the Holocaust and the post-war ruptures and divisions that later fragment Germany. Here I am interested in the important role that literature and film play in furthering our understanding of the past and helping us heal from traumatic experiences. My analysis of Wim Wenders's *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*), which illustrates the cultural and psychological voids hidden beneath the topography of Berlin, uses as my point of departure the physical empty space depicted in the Berlin topography, the "wasteland" that is poetically depicted in the film as part of Potsdamer Platz. This wasteland or void is filled, however, in the film with personal memories and a poetic voice-over, film footage and palimpsestic layers of history as the character of the storyteller walks through this empty space. Winfried Georg Sebald's *Austerlitz* also highlights the importance of personal memory, as it foregrounds the individual trauma experienced by Austerlitz as a child when his family perished in the

Holocaust and the subsequent effect it has in his adult life. It is a prose text³⁵ where absences and voids are explored in connection to spaces and places of memory, which helps the reader to reflect on history at a macro level. Continuing to work on the link between collective and personal memory, space, and emptiness, I also turn to Peter Weiss's short story "Meine Ortschaft" ("My Place") to take us on a journey of remembering the past. Weiss's autobiographical short-story explores the former-concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau and documents the profound effect this place has left on the author. In selecting these texts, I am interested in how trauma and absence are represented not only through physical voids and empty spaces, but also how these authors and filmmakers try to uncover psychological voids and cultural voids hidden under the surface.

One of the scholars who has analyzed the different layers of history, memory, and the "voids" produced by traumatic events in German cultural productions is the German scholar and cultural historian Andreas Huyssen. His work on memory practice in Europe and Latin America intriguingly connects different viewpoints and case studies. In his article "The Voids of Berlin," Huyssen offers an interesting perspective on the study of the voids marking the topography of the city. The cultural historian explores the physical empty spaces left in Germany's capital, examining how contemporary German society and government have, through architecture and urban space, begun the process of coming to terms with the different layers of history and in some way are trying to "fill in the voids" produced by the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the division of Germany.

³⁵ This is a definition that Sebald himself has used: "My medium is prose, not the novel" (Sebald, "Wildes" 51).

This is a problematic venture for Huyssen who values the significance of the voids implanted in the topography of the city and in the collective memory of its residents. By discussing different historical events including the Weimar Republic, Fascism, the 1950s, and the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall in his article, Huyssen exposes different layers of history in the city and along with them, the physical voids that have been left throughout the years. He conveys Berlin as “a city text frantically being written and rewritten”³⁶ and further describes it “as something like a prism through which we can focus on issues of contemporary urbanism and architecture, national identity and statehood, historical memory and forgetting” (*Present* 49). These components, observable in a city that is notably marked “by absences as by the visible presence of its past” (52), center around the physical empty spaces that place a veil on the cultural voids hidden underneath. As Uta Staiger and Henriette Steiner emphasize: “Given the importance of the city as a shared topography, changes made to the urban fabric - in the name of preservation or redevelopment, or as the consequence of man-made or natural disasters - may have an impact on the self-understanding and sense of continuity of the inhabitants” (6). Thus, when parts of the city are stripped of their previous significance and left only as hollow and empty spaces, the sense of self-understanding and of a collective identity is also thrown into question. Just as the spaces are redefined, so does the society need to re-adjust to the changing topography of the city and what that represents to the community as a marker of their identity. This coincides with the conceptualization and purpose

³⁶ Huyssen clarifies his argument of the city as a text later on in the article: “As a literary critic I am naturally attracted to the notion of the city as a text, of reading a city as a conglomeration of signs” (*Present* 49). He further states that the idea of reading the city as a text is not new and has existed since “we have had a modern city literature” (50). Presently, “[t]he notion of the city as a sign, however, is as pertinent as before, though perhaps more now in a pictorial and imagistic rather than a textual sense” (50).

behind Libeskind's design of the Jewish Museum Berlin. As examined in the previous chapter, the architectural "Voids" in the JMB seek to physically represent the absence left in German-Jewish collective identity and culture, making visible the cultural changes resulting from the destruction and loss caused by the Holocaust. Huysen analyzes the significance of the unique design of the museum in relation to Berlin's urban development in the early 2000s adding that "[a]s architecture, then, Libeskind's museum is the only project in the current Berlin building boom that explicitly articulates issues of national and local history in ways pertinent to post-unification Germany" (*Present* 71). Pessimistic about the direction that urban planning in Berlin had taken at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Huysen recognizes the potential that this building has for providing a link between the past and the present, and for making more visible the palimpsestic layers of Berlin's architectural landscape. He writes: "The void thus becomes a space nurturing memory and reflection for Jews and for Germans [...] [and the] building itself writes the discontinuous narrative that is Berlin, inscribes it physically into the very movement of the museum visitor, and yet opens a space for remembrance to be articulated and read between the lines" (*Present* 69). Highlighting the importance of articulating memory and of inscribing it into the very topography of Berlin, Huysen distinguishes Libeskind's "Voids" as "an architectural space [that is] consciously constructed and self-reflective to the core" (69), thus alluding to the connection between physical voids and the cultural absences hidden behind the emptiness of the space. When looking at voids, gaps, and absences that permeate the city landscape, such as Potsdamer Platz and the "death strip" during the time of the Berlin Wall, or the closed-subway stations in East Berlin, we are also confronted with voids left in the collective memory of

Berliners and Germans. For Huyssen, “[t]he notion of Berlin as a void is more than a metaphor, and it is not just a transitory condition” (54). He traces the origin of the notion of Berlin as a void back to the Weimar Republic when the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, in his *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, describes life in Berlin as “functions in a void” (qtd. in Huyssen 54), “[...] referring to the vacuum left by the collapse of an earlier, nineteenth-century bourgeois culture” (54-55). From then on, as diverse historical events occurred different “voids” began to accumulate in the topography of the city throughout the years. This also led to a marked change in the memories and self-understanding of those who lived there.

As Huyssen describes, during the post-war period, in which Germany became two separate countries with two opposing political ideologies, several central places in Berlin became voids. The old Church of Reconciliation on Bernauer Straße (now part of the Wall Memorial site), Alexander Platz, the Palace of the Republic (in the former East Germany), and the New Synagogue, are just a few examples. The Potsdamer Platz is the most iconic “empty place” of the Cold War era. Now a tourist filled space, back then it was nothing more than a wasteland in-between barbed wires and walls, specifically the Berlin Wall. Looking at images from this period leaves the viewer with a sense of confusion and disbelief: How can a metropolis such as Berlin, have in its midst a gap? A gap that is not only physical, but cultural as well. One film director who has poetically represented this wasteland in his films is Wim Wenders. In *Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987), Wim Wenders presents a poetic portrait of the city of Berlin in the mid-1980s,

where the rubble from the war is still visible and the Berlin Wall has divided the city.³⁷ The story follows the angel Daniel, played by Bruno Ganz, who wants to experience the world as a human, enjoying meals, love and most importantly, the present. The film depicts the angels that constantly watch over Berliners, whose role is no more than “sammeln, bezeugen, beglaubigen, bewahren” (“assembling, testifying, [and] preserving”) (Wenders 00:15:55-00:16:00) or witnessing. The angel Cassiel, played by Otto Sander, watches over an elderly man who calls himself the Storyteller, *der Erzähler*, and who film scholars have claimed represents the Greek poet *Homer*.³⁸ The scene that is most pertinent to this chapter is when Cassiel and *der Erzähler*, portrayed by German-Jewish actor Curt Bois,³⁹ walk around the Western side of the Berlin Wall in what first appears to be a kind of abandoned construction site or wasteland. During his walk, *der Erzähler*, in an internal monologue travels back to memory lane only to find himself unable to recognize the area surrounding him:

Ich kann den Potsdamer Platz nicht finden! Hier? Das kann er doch nicht sein.
Denn am Potsdamer Platz da war doch das Café Josty. Nachmittags habe ich mich da unterhalten und dann einen Kaffee getrunken...das Publikum beobachtet, vorher meine Zigarre geraucht bei Löse und Wolff ein renommiertes

³⁷ I first started exploring the analysis of the stream-of-consciousness narration and poetic sequences in Wenders's film in Professor James Miller's graduate course "The Fundamentals of Comparative Literature II." I would like to thank him for his feedback and support and for always encouraging me to push my analysis further and think outside my comfort zone.

³⁸ See for example Alexander Graf, *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: The Celluloid Highway*, or Jonathan Bordo, "The Homer of Potsdamer Platz: Walter Benjamin in Wim Wenders's *Sky over Berlin/Wings of Desire*, A Critical Topography."

³⁹ Jonathan Bordo notes that "Homer [*Der Erzähler*] brings most tellingly into the film the German Jewish cultural legacy of pre-Hitler Berlin" (93). It seems only fitting then, that the actor playing this character formed part of the Jewish cultural legacy himself. As Bordo further states: "Curt Bois, this actor, went into exile [in 1934] in Hollywood and returned to East Germany after the Second World War. [...] Wenders introduces a mediating term [between the physical survival of Berlin and the cultural survivor of memory] - the storyteller as the survivor played by an actor from Berlin in the twenties who survived Hitler" (95).

Tabakgeschäft. Gleich hier gegenüber. Also das kann er hier nicht sein, der Potsdamer Platz, nein! (Wenders 00:41:13-00:42:00)⁴⁰

The camera initially follows *der Erzähler* and Cassiel as they walk side by side close to what used to be the lively Potsdamer Platz. As the camera zooms out, we see a panoramic shot of a wasteland with construction cranes in the background; a physical void left by the construction of the Wall that divided the city (see Fig. 3).⁴¹



Figure 3: No-Man's Land (Wenders 00:42:28) [Wenders, 1987]

⁴⁰ Unless indicated, all translations are from the film's English subtitles: "I cannot find Potsdamer Platz! Here? It cannot be here, the Potsdamer Platz. That's where there was the Café Josti. In the afternoons I went there to chat, then to drink a coffee, and watch the crowd, having smoked my cigar at Löhse and Wolff, a renowned tobacconist. Just about here. This can't be the Postdamer Platz" (Wenders 00:41:13-00:42:00).

⁴¹ This is a poetic representation of Berlin's topography that does not perfectly map onto the post-war landscape of the former site of the Potsdamer Platz. Thanks to Professor David Darby for pointing out that the two characters are walking on the site in West Berlin of the removed railway tracks to the south of the old Potsdamer Bahnhof, which bordered Potsdamer Platz to the south. The narration and camera movements, however, do poetically present this as the ghostly landscape of the Potsdamer Platz. In essence, Wenders creates a topographically con-fused poetic space.

The elderly man remembering the days before the Nazi regime and the war, when Potsdamer Platz was the lively epi-center of Berlin's city life, cannot recognize now the cold ground on which he is standing. Repeating "Das kann er doch nicht sein" ("this cannot be"), he is bewildered by the current status of the city and tries to keep moving in search of his beloved place. His refusal to be paralyzed by the erasure of the past can be interpreted by his action of walking through the empty space. Strolling with his umbrella as if it were a cane and with a slight limp in his leg, which highlight the difficulty of the activity, *der Erzähler* is always moving forward. Towards the end of the sequence, he stops to rest on an abandoned armchair, scratching his ear and getting ready to take a nap, at which point the audience expects the scene to end. However, he nevertheless proceeds with his interior monologue and continues on his journey through the past and to the future, thinking to himself: "Aber ich gebe so lange nicht auf, bis ich den Potsdamer Platz gefunden habe!" (00:42:56-00:43:04).⁴² Instead of coming to a halt, the scene ends with another type of movement. *Der Erzähler* has found his way to a souvenir shop and is featured winding a miniature music box, while he utters: "Wie er vom Engel der Erzählung zum unbeachteten oder verlachten Leiermann draußen an der Schwelle zum Niemandsland wurde" (00:43:44-00:43:56).⁴³ The act of winding the music box alludes to the cyclical and never-ending movement that must be performed in order for the music to play and, in a sense as well, for his story to continue. His thoughts, which we have access to thanks to the presence of the angels, reflect the uncertainty of his state of mind. He talks about how the angel of story-telling becomes the almost forgotten organ grinder

⁴² "But I will not give up until I find the Potsdamer Platz!" (my trans.).

⁴³ "He who, from the angel of poetry that he was, became the poet ignored or mocked outside on the threshold of no-man's land" (00:43:44-00:43:56).

on the threshold of no-man's land. On the one hand, he is referencing his role as a storyteller: the person who is the link between the past and the future and who weaves tales and transmits orally his wisdom and knowledge along with his recollection of the society surrounding him; and on the other hand, he is also referencing the precarious state of Potsdamer Platz itself, which represents the divided and broken state of the city. There are two types of voids that can be examined here: a physical one in the landscape of Berlin, and a psychological one that results from the character's uncertain status as a storyteller. This uncertainty is depicted throughout the film. Prior to this sequence, *der Erzähler* while browsing books in the State Library asks himself: "Die Welt scheint zu verdämmern, doch ich erzähle, wie am Anfang [...] Soll ich jetzt aufgeben? Wenn ich aufgabe dann wird die Menschheit ihren Erzähler verlieren. Und hat die Menschheit einmal ihren Erzähler verloren, so hat sie auch ihre Kindschaft verloren" (00:39:15:47-00:41:03),⁴⁴ revealing that his role as a storyteller influences not only him, but the collective identity of mankind as well. *Der Erzähler's* concern with his role in society as a storyteller and the close link between storytelling and memory is one that has been contemplated by German philosopher Walter Benjamin as well. He writes: "Die Erinnerung stiftet die Kette der Tradition, welche das Geschehene von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht weiterleitet. Sie ist das Musische der Epik im weiteren Sinne. Sie umgreift die musischen Sonderarten des Epischen. Unter diesen ist an erster Stelle diejenige, welche der Erzähler verkörpert" ("Der" 117; emphasis in original).⁴⁵ Benjamin highlights the

⁴⁴ "The world seems to be sinking into dusk, but I recount, as in the beginning [...] Must I give up now? If I do give up, then mankind will lose its storyteller. And if mankind once loses its storyteller then it will lose its childhood" (00:39:15:47-00:41:03).

⁴⁵ "Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation. It is the Muse-derived element of the epic art in a broader sense and encompasses its varieties. In the first place among these is the one practiced by the storyteller" ("The" 371; emphasis in original).

powerful role of the storyteller as one of the principal transmitters of memory. When Bois's character walks through Berlin, Benjamin's concerns one might say are amplified and personified.

Referring back to the architectural imagery in the wasteland sequence, the empty space surrounding the Potsdamer Platz, the physical void, is one created by the division of Germany when this area became one of the borders between the East and the West. After the wall was erected on August 13, 1961, as historian Brian Ladd remarks "the East Berlin side of the square became the death strip [where] all remaining buildings there were levelled" (119). On other side, "West Berlin turned its back on Potsdamer Platz. [...] [And] the vacant area to its west was rebuilt with a widely dispersed array of buildings known as the Kulturforum, featuring the New National Gallery (designed by Mies van der Rohe) and two sprawling gold-roofed buildings by Hans Scharoun, Philharmonic Hall and the State Library" (119). The distinctly modernist feel of the new Kulturforum with van der Rohe's glass and steel architecture and Scharoun's modern building design mark a distinct shift from the 19th-century ornamental style and grandeur of the former Potsdamer Platz commercial square. Scharoun, a proponent of organic architecture, utilized the yellow-hued metal material used to clad the façade of the Philharmonic and State Library to create an earthly balance of landscape, colour, and form (Kroll). The gold or yellow is here no longer ornamental, but linked to the organic. The sprawling modernist architecture has its back turned to the gaping hole and wasteland to the East. Ladd highlights the Kulturforum as a strong counterpoint to the physical void created in the topography of this former central-area with the rise of the Berlin Wall, documenting how the area changed with the political turmoil of the Cold War. He writes: "In building

the Kulturforum, the West even rearranged the old streets to shift the focal point away from the dead end at Potsdamer Platz” (119-120). As Ladd maintains, the Berlin wall here is in effect perhaps more than anywhere else in the city “clearly revealed as a physical and symbolic barrier stemming the motion of modernity” (120). The dead end at Potsdamer Platz and the hole in what used to be the center of the city, however, cannot suppress *der Erzähler*’s memories of the lively commercial bustle in Wenders’s poetic film. Jeff Malpas in his essay “Wim Wenders, Role of Memory” perceptively argues that “the memories recounted” in the Potsdamer Platz scene are German-Jewish actor Curt Bois’s own pre-war memories (150). As Ladd asserts in his book *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*, in the early 1900s, the “Potsdamer Platz came to symbolize above all the bustle, speed, and motion of the modern metropolis. [...] [its] central location [...] attracted major hotels, followed by cavernous restaurants such as the Pschorr-Haus, outpost of the famous Munich brewery, and Kempinski Haus Vaterland” (116) and “[t]he noise, lights, and motion [of the square] attracted painters, poets, photographers, and cultural critics and they made it famous” (116). Café Josty, referenced in Wenders’s film was the “favored vantage point, [...] where even the idle came to watch the throbbing heart of the city” (116). What was once this bustling square through which the life of the metropolis bloomed and thrived became after 1945 a vacant wasteland, a “dead end;” however, *der Erzähler* refuses to be halted by its absence. As he states: “Das war ein belebter Platz! Straßenbahnen, Omnibusse mit Pferden, und zwei Autos, meines und das vom Schokoladen-Hamann” (Wenders

00:42:09-00:42:23).⁴⁶ He also mentions Kaufhaus Wertheim, on the adjacent Leipziger Platz, and several Jewish businesses that were an essential part of the flourishing state of the city.

In *Der Himmel über Berlin*, the “crumbling” status of the city is also alluded to through the poetic lens of documentary film footage, some in colour and some in black and white, of ruined buildings, dead bodies and Germany in rubble after the destruction of WWII. During the Potsdamer Platz sequence, *der Erzähler*’s lively description of the square in the Weimar-period is abruptly interrupted by the color footage of an almost completely destroyed building, depicting only the remaining exterior brick walls. These seven seconds of footage, where the camera pans along the building, make it appear like *der Erzähler* is looking into the distance almost as if visualizing the decay of the city. With the insertion of this coloured “film within a film” in the contrasting black and white narrative, the audience is left to wonder if this is a memory of Berlin belonging to *der Erzähler* or if he is reflecting on and visualizing his own decaying role in modern society. As numerous critics have noted, Wenders often uses a shift to colour footage to indicate “the penetration into the angelic world of the vital and sensual elements of the temporal realm” (Sexson 24). Although this is more evident when Daniel meets Marion, the beautiful circus trapeze performer, and when he becomes human at the end of the film, the seven-seconds of bombed-out buildings shot in color inserted into the Potsdamer Platz scene can also be interpreted to indicate the angel’s perception influenced by or even filtered through the emotions of the human. In Wenders’s case, the sharply

⁴⁶ “It was a lively place. Tramways, horse-drawn omnibuses and two cars: mine and that of the chocolate shop” (00:42:09-00:42:43).

contrasting use of black and white and color footage can represent the poetic license to move fluidly between the past and present—both highlighting the destruction of the city caused by WWII and signalling the end of the Nazi regime, and the need to survey the rubble and rebuild⁴⁷—or even signal the future: the important sensory role of the storyteller who refuses to see Berlin as a “dead end” by still reliving the vivid images from the city’s past.⁴⁸ We can understand how the use of the coloured film footage together with the role of *der Erzähler* bridges the connection between the past and the present and highlights the importance of memory in the film. The “poetics of memory” (90) as Bordo calls it is further developed in the subsequent scene where Wenders utilizes footage from rubble films to bring to life the memories of a destroyed Berlin. The protagonist of this scene is an unidentified male character who is driving his circa 1930s car to a film set of the Third Reich era. On his way there, he reflects on the status of the city and recalls its massive destruction. Wenders cleverly cross-cuts between the Berlin of the late 1980s and the city in the late 1940s by bringing the past into the present in a series of uncanny moments. As the driver moves through the city of Berlin with Cassiel and the audience as his unnoticed passengers, we are suddenly transported to a different time period; the camera interrupts the shot of Cassiel’s face to capture, through the side

⁴⁷ As Jonathan Bordo states in his article on the film: “This inserted color image visualizes the era of the Nazi Regime by showing its end, not its rise as Homer recollects it, not flags filling the square but ruins of apartment buildings at the demise of the Nazi state and the destruction of Berlin” (94).

⁴⁸ Wenders’s film, which critics argue is a response to Walter Benjamin’s essays, including “Der Erzähler,” showcases how the changes, losses, and traumas experienced by the events of the twentieth-century in German society have brought into question the possible continuity of the art of storytelling, and with it, the essential link it has with memory and remembering the past. Jonathan Bordo emphasizes this connection in his essay “The Homer of Potsdamerplatz” when he argues: “Wim Wenders needs Walter Benjamin as his companion in order to recover the heart and soul of Berlin, a divided city in 1987, still submerged in the nightmare of its recent Nazi past” (87). He further adds that “[t]he alliance that Wenders forges with Benjamin is like Dante’s alliance with Virgil, because through the subject of Walter Benjamin, Wenders has found his way into a hellish reality and found a way to return to the present. His film becomes a link in a chain of ‘the great work of memory’” (108).

window of the car, footage of dozens of people shovelling debris out of the road with rows of destroyed buildings in the background. Although the colour of the footage does not change, we immediately understand that this is a memory belonging either to the driver or to Cassiel. Then a few seconds later, focusing again on the distraught face of the angel, the camera now shows another image from the past. This time we have a frontal view of the road. As the windshield wipers clear up the foggy window, we see more people in the middle of the street, some carrying their belongings and others picking up the debris, while the destruction of the city is highlighted when the driver passes a burned down tram abandoned on the street (See Fig. 4). The ruins here serve as both a personal and a collective memory of the past and the cultural voids, bleak emptiness and destruction haunting Germany. Yet for Bordo, “The ruins of Berlin are the aesthetic surface upon which Wenders makes survival and redemption the linked themes of *Himmel über Berlin*” (88), survival of the Nazi past and of the destruction, both human and material, brought upon the city and the country.



Figure 4: Uncanny Rubble Memory (Wenders 00:46:27) [Wenders, 1987]

Wenders's use of this documentary footage of loss and destruction as historical "film within a film" brings to mind Freud's "uncanny" and Kligerman's "Holocaustal uncanny." Once again, the spectator is brought into the space of the dead, as we saw with Libeskind's architectural "Voids." The ghostly footage of the decaying spaces left in Berlin as a result of the air raids during WWII forces the viewer to "unknowingly cross[] into the space of shock and anxiety" (Kligerman, *Sites* 249). The viewer's senses are heightened and Wenders evokes an emotional response regarding the trauma from the war (the past), and the trauma from the division of Berlin (the postwar present). As we will see below in the analysis of stream-of-conscious narration that accompanies this black and white historical "film within the film," the function of this uncanny footage is not only to bring back the memory of the recent traumatic past, but also to reflect on the current divided state of the present. As Silia Kaplan argues: "the camera tends to focus on sites of emptiness and destruction, which function as further indications of the city's violent past. However, and even more significantly, these sites depict the isolation and alienation prevalent in contemporary Berlin; in this sense they are not only reminders of the past but, rather, have become symbols of the present" (1). The isolation and alienation prevalent during the war as depicted in the film is linked to the "alienated" present-day Berlin experienced by the driver and documented in his stream-of-consciousness narration. Throughout the sequence, the driver is engaged in his thoughts pondering the present divided status of the city.⁴⁹ Wenders uses a voice-over technique to give us access to the driver's personal stream-of-consciousness, just as he does with the thoughts of the

⁴⁹ This is, I believe, the isolation that Silia Kaplan points to, represented by "the inhabitants who wander the city preoccupied with their own everyday concerns in complete isolation from each other" (1).

other humans portrayed in the film. Reflecting on the present divided status of the city, the driver proclaims: “Every proprietor, or even tenant sticks up his nameplate like a coat of arms and studies the morning paper as if he were a world leader. The German people have divided into as many states as there are individuals. And these small states are mobile. Each one takes his own with him and demands a toll when another wants to enter” (00:45:36-00:51:00).⁵⁰ The Wall is not the only border present in the city. Internal psychological borders, symbolizing the fragmented state of the city, force individuals to be critical and guarded. As the driver indicates, tolls are demanded when someone wants to enter these imaginary individual states. While the rubble footage emphasizes the destruction of the past, the driver’s thoughts allude to the unstable condition of the city in the narrative present. The uncanniness of the footage is further emphasized through the foggy aesthetic of the images and the audio. However, when the rubble footage appears, the voice-over stops, and we can only hear violins playing a somber melody. The driver’s “thoughts” continue only when the car is depicted again in present-day Berlin.

Another “rubble memory” that is inserted into the poetic narrative appears when *der Erzähler* sits down at the Staatsbibliothek (State Library) and browses through August Sander’s photographic book *People of the Twentieth Century (Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts)*. As he flips through images from the book’s sections on “The Last People” and “Persecuted Jews,”⁵¹ film footage from the end of the Second World War of corpses

⁵⁰ Original audio in German: “Jeder Hausherr oder auch Wohnungseigentümer nagelt sein Namensschild als Wappen an die Tür und studiert die Morgenzeitung als Weltherrscher. Das deutsche Volk ist in so viele Kleinstaaten zerfallen als es einzelne Menschen gibt. Und die einzelnen Staatsgebilde sind beweglich” (Wenders 00:45:36-00:51:00).

⁵¹ Particularly interesting is how he places his hand on the photograph of a woman, momentarily lingering on her image. (Wender 00:40:54-00:40:57) The caption reads: “Verfolgte Jüdin. Frau Marcus ca. 1938. Persecuted Jewess, Mrs. Marcus Juive persécutée. Frau Marcus” (Sander 419).

lining the streets replace the still images of the text. With the rubble in the background, the footage documents the rows of dead bodies that range from adults to the newly born. Confronted with such uncanny images, the audience is immersed in a spectral, haunted presence and literally forced to face the faces of the dead. Unlike Libeskind's "Voids" which "[b]y withholding a representation [...] provoke[s] the reader/visitor into remembering images of the destruction on his or her own" (Kligerman, "Ghostly" 34), Wenders forces the audience to watch his curated images documenting death, destruction and loss in full detail. Although the footage is fleeting, we have a clear view of the bodies as well as of the mourning faces of the survivors. The "uncanny" as developed by Freud in his famous essay "Das Unheimliche" ("The Uncanny"), where "an unintended recurrence of the same situation" causes the feeling of "helplessness and of uncanniness" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 631) can be best used to describe the replay of this traumatic footage. By poetically reusing this historical footage and returning to the voids and destruction left behind by WWII, Wenders invites us to see these spectral spaces, traces and absences so that other more contemporary wounds can also become visible, particularly when they are physical and psychological barriers and voids that can only be understood through their "non-present," "unfilled" status.

As many critics have noted, empty spaces permeate this filmic text, as Wenders poetically portrays the physical voids in the city: "An urban void that housed a circus tent and a great wasteland of a yearned [for] Potsdamer Platz were the characteristic landscapes which became stimulating leitmotifs. Here, Wenders expressed that Berlin (or any other city) would be best described by its interstices, its empty spaces and its uncertain sites" (Peimbert 25). However, for Wenders the empty spaces are not negative

sites of remembrance or of abandonment; on the contrary, they are places for regeneration. As Alejandro J. Peimbert argues: “Wenders manages this kind of wreck to portray it and later to show it in a motion picture, stressing that the interstitial landscape embodies a spirit of regeneration, not material, but human; not through architecture, but by encouraging a different manner of seeing and inhabiting the interstitial” (27). By seeing these empty spaces in the urban landscape through a new filmic vantage point, we are able to change our perspective on the meaning these empty spaces can have.

Although the abandoned landscape of Potsdamer Platz of the 1960s-80s is a literal result of the ideological and political divide of the city, Wenders’s film excavates the cultural voids and absences to connect the city’s present and future. By poetically reimagining, for example, the “wasteland” of Potsdamer Platz as part of an individual and collective memory, Wenders urges us to think about creating a future that incorporates the dark and the light, the good and the bad. As Peimbert emphasizes: “Beyond his [Wenders’s] interest in cities, he accepts a pleasure for wounds recorded over time, ensures that [they] transmit more history than any book or document” (21). A similar strategy can also be seen in the design of the Jewish Museum Berlin. By incorporating the “Voids” into the design of the building, Libeskind brings to the foreground a “wound” that tries to help tell a more integrated and complete history. Libeskind emphasizes the continuity and discontinuity that exists in German-Jewish cultural identity, and by using the sense of absolute void and absence felt in the city as an architectural device, he is able to transform empty space and absence into a new understanding of Berlin’s past, also meaningful for the future. Similarly, Wenders’s use of the filmic medium meditates on emptiness and peels back layers of history to depict some of the topographical, cultural,

and psychological voids left in the city of Berlin so that we can further understand how traces of the past influence the present, and how pertinent the past is to our sense of identity, our roles in society, and collective memory.

I will now turn to a series of literary case studies to further study individual and collective forms of remembering and responses to the historical trauma of the Holocaust. The two works I will analyze, W.G. Sebald's prose text *Austerlitz* and Peter Weiss's autobiographical short story "Meine Ortschaft" ("My Place"),⁵² both portray and represent absences and voids left by the Holocaust, contributing to our effort to further understand the traumatic past. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) centers on the story of the eponymous protagonist, an architectural historian who meets in Antwerp the narrator of the text who tells the story of Austerlitz to the readers. Austerlitz and the narrator form a relationship through their coincidental meetings throughout Europe and at one point, Austerlitz decides to tell the narrator his traumatic past as well as his life-long journey to uncover the truth about the death of his parents. Austerlitz's trauma first occurs when he is four when his biological parents were deported to concentration camps during the Nazi regime and he is sent to Wales via the Kindertransport⁵³ where he was adopted by a Calvinist pastor and his wife. In his new life with his foster parents, he is given a new identity and he subconsciously blocks any memories of his real family or former self. As a result of this experience, Austerlitz has "voids" in his memory, which can be interpreted

⁵² I am grateful for Professor Luca Pocci's graduate course "Narrative and the Self." In his seminar, I first had the opportunity to write an essay on trauma and identity entitled "Experiencing Trauma and Questioning Identity through the Protagonists of *Austerlitz* and "My Place." Some of the ideas in this thesis chapter were inspired by questions I explored in the paper I wrote in his course. I would like to thank Dr. Pocci for the feedback he provided on my essay and for allowing me to explore a subject that I am so passionate about.

⁵³ According to historical accounts, "The Kindertransport (Children's Transport) was the informal name of a series of rescue effort [organized by the British government] which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain from Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1940" ("Kindertransport").

as lacunar amnesia or even the purposeful repression of memories, as he cannot recall much of his childhood prior to being sent away, his mother tongue and his family's religion, culture and traditions. Psychology scholar Jens Brockmeier coins Austerlitz's memory voids as "an autobiographical void, a narrative lacuna" (352) resulting from his lost official identity and leading to "dramatic psychological and psychiatric consequences" (352). This autobiographical void suffered by Austerlitz through the traumatic experience of losing his identity manifests itself in different ways throughout the text. He only learns the truth about his former identity when he is fifteen, a fact that leads to the rediscovery of this previously blocked trauma.

We should note that according to Freud's understanding of trauma as delineated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a subject is traumatized as a result of the shock of trauma puncturing the protective barrier against too many stimuli, what in German is called *Reizschutz* (23-24). As Kligerman further elaborates in "Ghostly Demarcations," the system of perception-consciousness breaks down and the traumatic events reside in the unconscious as a lost experience (33). As a result, "[i]nstead of being incorporated into memory, the traumatic event is transformed into what Freud calls an *Erinnerungsspur*, or memory trace: It is a mark of what is missing from memory. This trace, lodged in the space of the unconscious, manifests itself through the symptoms of recurring dreams and the compulsion to repeat" (34). This compulsion to repeat is evident when Austerlitz re-visits as an adult many of the places he spent during his childhood before or during the traumatic event in an urge to recollect any part of his past. He only has a "memory trace" of his past identity as Jacques Austerlitz son of Agáta Austerlitzová and Maximilian Aychenwald, traces of which only come back to him when he is in an

unconsciously familiar place. For example, when he visits the Ladies' Waiting Room of Liverpool Street Station, he suddenly remembers being picked up by "two strangers [who] came over to [him] speaking a language [he] did not understand" (Sebald, *Austerlitz* 137).⁵⁴ Standing in the old waiting room he sees his younger self and begins to recall his first few days with the Eliases:

An neue Kleider, die mich sehr unglücklich machten, erinnere ich mich, auch an das unerklärliche Verschwinden des grünen Rucksäckchens, und letzthin bildete ich mir sogar ein, ich erahnte noch etwas vom Absterben der Muttersprache, von ihrem von Monat zu Monat leiser werdenden Rumoren, von dem ich denke, daß es eine Zeitlang zumindest noch in mir gewesen ist wie eine Art Scharren oder Pochen von etwas Eingesperrem, das immer, wenn man auf es achthaben will, vor Schrecken stillhält und schweigt. Und gewiß wären die von mir in kurzer Frist ganz vergessenen Wörter mit allem, was zu ihnen gehörte, im Abgrund meines Gedächtnisses verschüttet geblieben, wenn ich nicht aufgrund einer Verknüpfung verschiedener Umstände an jenem Sonntagmorgen den alten Wartesaal in der Liverpool Street Station betreten hätte [...]. (Sebald, *Austerlitz* [Carl Hbser] 198-199)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ All translations are from the English edition of *Austerlitz*. Translated by Anthea Bell, 10th anniversary ed., Modern Library, 2011.

⁵⁵ "I do remember new clothes which made me very unhappy, and the inexplicable disappearance of my little green rucksack, and recently I have even thought that I could still apprehend the dying away of my native tongue, the faltering and fading sounds which I think lingered on in me at least for a while, like something shut up and scratching or knocking, something which, out of fear, stops its noise and falls silent whenever one tries to listen to it. And certainly the words I had forgotten in a short space of time, and all that went with them, would have remained buried in the depths of my mind had I not, through a series of coincidences, entered the old waiting room in Liverpool Street Station that Sunday morning [...]" (138).

The memory trace of these childhood moments, the first time he meets his foster family and the sensation of losing his native tongue along with any traces of his parents only become accessible when he enters the old waiting room of the Liverpool Street Station. Prior to this moment, his mind had, as the result of the traumatic experience, blocked that information and deposited it in his unconscious as a lost experience, one that can only be accessed through a return to the place where it occurred. The close connection between memory and place has been worked on by many theorists. In *Remembering*, the American philosopher Ed Casey has asserted that “*place is selective for memories*: that is to say, a given place will invite certain memories while discouraging others. The fact is that we can’t attach just *any* memories to a particular place [...] Place is always definite, and regarding a given place only some memories, indeed only certain *kinds* of memory, will be pertinent” (189; emphasis in original). Following Casey’s argument, we can understand how Austerlitz’s visit to the Ladies Waiting Room of Liverpool Street Station would have brought back memories of his distinctly new life with his foster family. This specific *kind* of memory seems to be imprinted onto the topography of this place.

Architectural academic, scholar and critic Naomi Stead supports this notion of places being imprinted with memories. She argues: “As the spaces and settings where human lives unfold, buildings emerge as not impervious containers, but rather as permeable. They both absorb and exude the events that have taken place within them” (“Architecture” 45). Thus, emphasizing the connection between places, such as building or even train stations and memory. While revisiting a place where trauma was experienced can lead to the recollection of that specific memory, in turn the place can also be “haunted” by these memories traces. As Casey further elaborates: *Memories are*

selective for place [...] [they are] congealed scenes for remembered contents, and as such they serve to situate what we remember” (189; emphasis in original).

Returning to the psychological voids that form part of Austerlitz’s character, we see how Sebald uses this narrative to explore deep layers of memory and the trauma experienced by someone who was directly affected by the Holocaust. Even though Austerlitz is a fictional character, this work can help us to further understand the ramifications of such a horrifying event. As Stead articulates: “The overriding theme in Austerlitz is thus memory: individual and collective, forgotten and retrieved, the fragility of human memory in the face of the crushing forces of history” (“Architecture” 42). Stead points to the subject of memory being explored in this book as both individual and collective. The individual aspect is seen through the character of Austerlitz, someone who experiences a very traumatic event and subconsciously blocks any memories belonging to that time period. The text poetically depicts Austerlitz’ subsequent struggle throughout his life to recover part of his lost past and the memories that accompany it. The collective aspect of memory may be less evident; however, some scholars analyzing different aspects of the book have found connections between Austerlitz’s autobiographical void, to use Brockmeier’s term, as it is manifested psychologically at a personal level and the representation of the sense of absence and loss as experienced at a collective level. One of these instances is when Austerlitz visits the town of Terezín, the site of the former Nazi “showcase” concentration camp. In this town, the absolute emptiness felt by Austerlitz is extended to represent the massive loss of the Jewish community felt on a collective level. The way in which Austerlitz communicates this sense of absence is by

studying the objects displayed in the window of the Antikos Bazar and reflecting on what they symbolize to him:

Was, so fragte ich mich, sagte Austerlitz, mochte es auf sich haben mit dem nirgends entspringenden, nirgends einmündenden, ständig in sich selbst zurückfließenden Strom, mit *veverka*, dem stets in der gleichen Pose ausharrenden Eichhörnchen, oder mit der elfenbeinfarbenen Porzellankomposition, die einen reitenden Helden darstellte, der sich auf seinem soeben auf der Hinterhand sich erhebenden Roß nach rückwärts wendet, um mit dem linken Arm ein unschuldiges, von der letzten Hoffnung verlassenes weibliches Wesen zu sich emporzuziehen und aus einem dem Beschauer nicht offenbaren, aber ohne Zweifel grauenvollen Unglück zu retten. So zeitlos wie dieser verewigte, immer gerade jetzt sich ereignende Augenblick der Errettung waren sie alle, die in dem Bazar von Terezín gestrandeten Zierstücke, Gerätschaften und Andenken, die aufgrund unerforschlicher Zusammenhänge ihre ehemaligen Besitzer überlebt und den Prozeß der Zerstörung überdauert hatten [...]. (Sebald 280-281)⁵⁶

Austerlitz's profound comments on the never-rising river, the never-flowing sea and the timelessness of the moments captured through these objects alludes to the sense of absence and frozen time he feels in this town. His remark on the "[perpetual] but forever

⁵⁶What, I asked myself, said Austerlitz, might be the significance of the river never rising from any source, never flowing out into any sea but always back into itself, what was the meaning of *veverka*, the squirrel forever perched in the same position, or of the ivory-colored porcelain group of a hero on horseback turning to look back, as his steed rears up on its hindquarters, in order to raise up with his outstretched left arm an innocent girl already bereft of her last hope, and to save her from a cruel fate not revealed to the observer? They were all as timeless as that moment of rescue, perpetuated but forever just occurring, these ornaments, utensils, and mementoes stranded in the Terezín bazaar, objects that for reasons one could never know had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction [...]" (196-197).

just occurring moments” (197) hints at the trauma caused by the Holocaust. Although he is talking about the porcelain hero rescuing the damsel in distress, one can implicitly read a darker meaning lying behind the reference to a “cruel fate” and those innocent people “bereft” of their last hope. This passage therefore, makes references not only to Austerlitz’s personal trauma, but also to the collective feeling of absence and loss that this tragic historical event evokes. Brockmeier interprets these objects to signify what has been lost, “a universe of mementos, of memory objects that have forgotten and now are mute” (362). They are an extension of the owners who perished in this place, and with their absence, the objects have also become a symbol of the cultural voids created by the Holocaust. As Brockmeier further elaborates: “We only can suspect the dramas of life of which they were a part. [...] Now having lost their stories and, in a sense, their histories, they have become a silent assembly of signs of what is absent — undecipherable signs, that is” (362). These lost stories and absent signs form an important part of the trauma associated with an event so tragic as the Holocaust. Brockmeier zooms out from Austerlitz’s personal narrative to give us a picture of a broader sense of loss and despair. Although in my analysis I have focused on the individual trauma that the protagonist’s character depicts, this episode in the book can also help us understand the cultural voids left by the Holocaust that can be perceived at a collective level as well.

Another text that examines the “lost stories” and “absent signs” that represent the collective trauma of the Holocaust is Peter Weiss’s *Meine Ortschaft* (“My Place,” 1964). The German-Jewish author born near Berlin on November 9, 1916 has explored the events of the Nazi regime and the devastating consequences in several of his works. This includes *Die Ermittlung* (1965, *The Investigation*), “Meine Ortschaft” (1965, “My

Place”), and *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (1975-1981, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*). Having escaped the tragic destiny of the Holocaust when his parents decided to go into exile, by first fleeing to London in March of 1935 and later to Czechoslovakia and Sweden (Cohen, *Understanding* XIII), Weiss provides a unique perspective on the subject. His autobiographical short story⁵⁷ “Meine Ortschaft” recounts Weiss’s visit to Auschwitz on December 13, 1964 (Cohen, *Understanding* 81).⁵⁸ As Kathryn Jones writes in *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980*, Weiss’s short story first appeared in the journal *Der Monat* in May 1965 after a shorter version was broadcast on the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* in January of the same year (70fn5). The Volkstheater Rostock in East Germany also published the text as a limited-edition brochure in 1965. That same year the short story again appeared in a literary collection entitled *Atlas* (70fn5). The original short story included a map of the concentration camps so that readers would be able to trace Weiss’s personal journey and also “reconstruct the horrific events that occurred here” (Itkin 36).⁵⁹ The appearance of this text in 1965 is particularly significant because of the prominent silence that reined over this topic in German society at the time. As Robert Cohen notes: “Nazi concentration camps was not a major topic during the Adenauer years. Worse yet, many Nazis had been restored to office and honor by Konrad Adenauer, chancellor of the

⁵⁷ This is my own classification. Other critics such as Robert Cohen have labeled it an essay or “short prose text.” See, for example Cohen’s introduction and bibliography in Peter Weiss’s *Marat/Sade; The Investigation; and The Shadow of the Body of the Coachman* pp. xvi and 300.

⁵⁸ This general date is important because it is around the time when the Frankfurt-Auschwitz Trials took place (December 20, 1963 – August 19, 1965). These were a series of trials that sought to criminally charge twenty-two of the middle to lower rank officials working in Auschwitz. Weiss was very involved in these trials and even wrote the play *Die Ermittlung* based on the testimony of the defendants and the witnesses. For more details read chapter five of *Understanding Peter Weiss* by Robert Cohen: “Dante, Marx, and Auschwitz.”

⁵⁹ Although this is a lesser known fact, Alan Itkin also writes that Peter Weiss’s short story “influenced W.G. Sebald’s writings about the Holocaust” (19).

Federal Republic from 1949-63” (*Understanding* 77). In discussing this difficult topic, Peter Weiss was voicing the concerns of the 68 generation, the 68er-Bewegung, those authors and intellectuals who sought to “re-examine fascism, criticize relics of the ‘Third Reich’ in post-war society and squarely confront their parent’s generation with its complicity in the Nazi regime” (Völter and Dasberg 23). Weiss’s visit to the camp followed by the writing of his short story about his experience signals the determination of the author to start a conversation about this topic.

When analyzing “Meine Ortschaft,” one immediately encounters the subject of loss and absence. In the text, we read a thorough description of the camp as it stood in 1964 with references to what was happening there during WWII. Similar to Wenders’s film, there is also an uncanny dialogue between the past and present that informs the connection that Weiss develops to this site during his visit. Weiss claims the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum has remained the same throughout time. Even though the camp as it functioned during the Nazi regime was no longer in operation and had become an official museum at the time of his visit, for Weiss the massacre that occurred inside its walls and fences have given permanent significance to this place. This is a haunted “place” he was destined to experience as a prisoner, but “escaped” [entkam]:

Nur diese eine Ortschaft, von der ich seit langem wußte, doch die ich erst spät sah, *liegt gänzlich für sich*. Es ist eine Ortschaft, für die ich bestimmt war und der ich entkam. Ich habe selbst nichts in dieser Ortschaft erfahren. Ich habe keine andere Beziehung zu ihr, als daß mein Name auf den Listen derer stand, die dorthin für immer übersiedelt werden sollten. Zwanzig Jahre danach habe ich

diese Ortschaft gesehen. Sie ist *unveränderlich*. Ihre Bauwerke lassen sich mit *keinen anderen Bauwerken verwechseln*. (Weiss, “Meine” 114; emphasis added)⁶⁰

It becomes very clear that Weiss is personally affected by the events that transpired here during the war. On the one hand, he feels a sense of guilt, what could be interpreted as a kind of survivor’s guilt because he did not experience this torture and death; and on the other hand, he highlights the immutability of the structures, its self-containment, and the way in which they may not be confused with any other in the world. In *Remembering Places*, English and Philosophy scholar Janet Donohoe explores the palimpsestic nature of memory, place and tradition. For her, as time progresses our memories as well as the places which are attached to them will also change. As Donohoe states: “we must also recognize that our memories are not static and that the places we encounter, whether habitual or exotic places, are also not static. This is to recognize that place is a porous and elastic notion” (xviii). For Weiss, this argument can be applied to every other place he has visited, except for Auschwitz. This particular place remains immutable for him regardless of how much time has passed. The immutability of memory and place as well as the static notion he attaches to Auschwitz becomes particularly evident when he describes other places he has lived in or visited:

Es waren Durchgangsstellen, sie boten Eindrücke, deren wesentliches Element das Unhaltbare, schnell Verschwindende war, und wenn ich untersuche, was jetzt

⁶⁰ “Only this one place, about which I knew for a long time, but which I saw only quite late, *lies entirely contained within itself*. It is a place for which I was intended and which I escaped. I myself experienced nothing in this place. I have no other relationship to it but the fact that my name appeared on the list of those who were supposed to be settled there permanently. It was twenty years later that saw I this place. It is *immutable*. *Its structures cannot be mistaken for any other structures*” (Weiss, “My” 144; emphasis added). All translations are from English version “My Place” *Chicago Review*, translated by Karen Jackiw, vol. 29, no. 3, 1978, pp. 143-151.

daraus hervorgehoben und für wert befunden werden könnte, einen festen Punkt in der Topographie meines Lebens zu bilden, so gerate ich nur immer wieder an das Zurückweichende, alle diese Städte werden zu blinden Flecken, und nur eine Ortschaft, in der ich nur einen Tag lang war, bleibt bestehen. (114)⁶¹

His visit to Auschwitz produces a change of perspective in relation to all the other places he had formed a connection to as they become untenable, impermanent. Paradoxically, it is these other places in his life topography that become blurry “blind spots,” devoid of meaning in his life, while Auschwitz even as a spectral void is laden with traumatic meaning. As Weiss notes: the other places “can be reached and left again in a fraction of a second, and their characteristics have to be invented each time” (“My” 144). Here we can apply Donohoe’s argument and understand how places and memories can become palimpsestic in nature, and how as different memories become attached to them, their meanings change. However, for Auschwitz, this is not the case. The trauma experienced there has been too great to be forgotten. It becomes the only “fixed point” in the “topography of [his] life” (“My” 143), and even though Weiss mentions the school buses with children and the other “tourists” like himself coming to see the camp as a relic of the past, it is the absent presence of its history that marks the durability and permanence of the place in his mind.

The immutable meaning that Peter Weiss assigns to Auschwitz is amplified by the topographical or spatial vocabulary that he uses to meticulously describe every inch of

⁶¹ “They were places visited in transit, they offered impressions whose essential element was impermanence, a rapid fading away; and when I attempt to discover what could be extracted from them and found worthy of comprising a fixed point in the topography of my life, again and again I come up against this fugitive quality, all of these cities become blind spots, and only one place, in which I spent only a single day, endures” (143).

the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. For example, when he walks slowly into the “grave” of Crematorium I he starts measuring, observing and sensing immediately the overwhelming emptiness of the place, and at the same time documenting the lack of feeling and thoughts he experiences:

Ohne Gedanken. Ohne weitere Eindrücke, als daß ich hier allein stehe, daß es kalt ist, daß die Öfen kalt sind, daß die Wagen starr und verrostet sind. Feuchtigkeit rinnt von den schwarzen Wänden. Da ist eine Türöffnung. Sie führt zum Nebenraum. Ein langgestreckter Raum, ich messe ihn mit meinen Schritten. Zwanzig Schritte die Länge. Fünf Schritte die Breite. Die Wände wießgetüncht und abgeschabt. Der Betonboden ausgetreten, voller Pfützen. An der Decke, zwischen den massiven Tragbalken, vier quadratische Öffnungen, schachtartig durch den dicken Steinguß verlaufend, Deckel darüber. Kalt. Hauch vor dem Mund. Weit draußen Stimmen, Schritte. Ich gehe langsam durch dieses Grab. Empfinde nichts. Sehe nur diesen Boden, diese Wände. (116)⁶²

With this highly detailed description of the crematorium, the readers can easily place themselves in Weiss’s position and actually see and feel every component of that space as if they were actually there. Some critics like Brad Prager argue that Weiss employs a documentary perspective or a camera eye technique “in which the author-narrator attempts to bracket out his own feelings” (30). However, more important than this

⁶² “Without thought. Without further impressions than that I stand alone here, that it is cold, that the ovens are cold, that the carts are motionless and rusted. Dampness runs from the black walls. There is a doorway. It leads to a second room. A long and narrow room I measure it with my feet. Twenty paces long. Five paces broad. The walls whitewashed and peeling. The cement floor worn, full of puddles. In the ceiling, between the massive supportive beams, four square openings, running like shafts through the thick stonework, lids on top. Cold. Misty breath from the mouth. Far outside voices, footsteps. I walk slowly through this grave. Feel nothing. See only this floor, these walls” (145).

camera-eye is the spatial vocabulary constantly used throughout the text that Weiss applies effectively to evoke the past and highlight the daunting feeling of absence and death that is present in the complex. In addition, he places the past and the present in dialogue in this “place of exile” (Weiss, “My” 149) to spatially represent and even up to a point recreate the trauma that people endured in this place. The way in which he accomplishes this is by first giving a thorough description of a building in the complex, using the first-person narrative voice, as the example just illustrated, and then in the following paragraph rework that description by adopting a third-person stance and discussing what happened to the people who went *into* the site almost as if performing the role of an ethnographer who is recording the “cultural” practices of this “society.” An example of this can be seen when he writes about Blocks Ten and Eleven and the courtyard with the Black Wall: “Im Laufschrift, nackt, kamen sie rechts aus der Tür, die sechs Stufen hinab, je zwei, vom Bunkerkapo an den Armen gehalten. Und hinter den zugenagelten Fenstern im Block gegenüber lagen die Frauen, deren Gebärmutter angefüllt wurde mit einer weißen zementartigen Masse” (119).⁶³ Physical trauma and pain is foregrounded in this description. Weiss is very explicit when documenting what people experienced in this building and leaves almost no content to the imagination of the reader. I argue that the reason for this focus on the pain and suffering experienced by the victims is a way for him to find a connection with this place, particularly because there is a sense of guilt for having been able to survive the Holocaust without directly experiencing it. This need to relive a past he was not a part of can be linked to the

⁶³ “They came at a run from the door on the right, naked, down the six steps, two at time, their arms held by the prisoner trustees. And behind the nailed-up windows of the building opposite lay those women whose uteri had been filled with a white, cement-like mass” (147).

concept of “postmemory” as defined by trauma studies scholar Marianne Hirsch. The term postmemory refers to understanding that “Descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory* and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event” (Hirsch 105-106; emphasis in original).

Although this term, which Hirsch herself acknowledges can be controversial and problematic, addresses the inter- and trans-generational transmission of memory from traumatic events of the Holocaust as shared with the following generations, I argue that it can be applied to Weiss as well. Here, his visit to Auschwitz comes twenty years too late (Weiss, “My” 144), as he mentions. The memory he so vividly recalls is not his own. It has been passed down to him by different sources, including survivors. Therefore, a certain aspect of the way in which he brings back to life the harsh living conditions of the prisoners and the tortures they experienced, for example, belongs to the act of post memory transmission. For Hirsch, the “post” aspect of the term is significant because it alludes to idea of connecting the present with the past and of reflecting on it (106). For Weiss, experiencing Auschwitz through the lens of postmemory allows him to have an intimate encounter with the space, but also and I believe most importantly, with the collective trauma and the pain suffered here as well.

The collective trauma as suffered by the prisoners of Auschwitz is most powerfully represented in the text’s recurrent tropes of absence and emptiness. In a text riddled with references to holes, graves and emptiness [for example, Weiss describes the “empty fields” (“My” 144), “gas that streamed from the holes” (150), “six in every hole”

(150)] the narrator documents the cultural void and monumental absence that this structure has created with the mass murder of its victims in its role as an extermination camp, the largest under Nazi Regime.⁶⁴ The camp, which stood as a museum at the time of Weiss's visit represents for him, the image of absence. Weiss draws attention to the spiritual presence he feels in the camp, a further marker of the millions of lives that were taken away in this particular place. As Weiss enters the barracks he comments on the timeless presence felt of the people who were imprisoned and murdered here:

Und dies ist jetzt so: hier ist das Atmen, das Flüstern und Rascheln noch nicht ganz von der Stille verdeckt, diese Pritschen, in drei Stockwerken übereinander, an den Seitenwänden entlang und entlang des Mittelteils, sind noch nicht ganz verlassen, hier im Stroh, in den schweren Schatten, sind die tausend Körper noch zu ahnen, ganz unten, in Bodenhöhe, auf dem kalten Beton, oben, unter dem schräg aufsteigenden Dach, auf den Brettern, in den Fächern, zwischen den gemauerten Tragwänden, dicht aneinander, sechs in jedem Loch, hier ist die Außenwelt noch nicht ganz eingedrungen, hier ist noch zu erwarten, dass es sich regt da drinnen, dass ein Kopf sich hebt, eine Hand sich vorstreckt.

⁶⁴ Located in the town of Oświęcim in southern Poland, Auschwitz was “Germany’s largest concentration camp” also housing “its largest killing center [...] combining assembly-line mass murder and the exploitation of slave labor, Auschwitz was the premier Nazi installation of the Holocaust” (Friedlander ix). In Room 1 of Block 4 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum educational placards give visitors a detailed catalogue of the number of deportees sent to Auschwitz: “Auschwitz was the largest Nazi German concentration camp and death camp. In the years 1940-1945, the Nazi deported at least 1,300,000 people to Auschwitz: 1,100,000 Jews; 140,000-150,000 Poles; 23,000 Roma (Gypsies); 15,000 Soviet Prisoners of War; 25,000 prisoners from other ethnic groups. 1,100,000 of these people died in Auschwitz. Approximately 90% of the victims were Jews. The SS murdered the majority of them in the gas chambers” (Wall text next to urn). Also in Room 1, is “an urn containing the ashes of the murdered” (Mensfelt 13) that powerfully and painfully evokes the sense of absence and loss that Weiss depicts in his short story.

Doch nach einer Weile tritt auch hier das Schweigen und die Erstarrung ein.

(124)⁶⁵

The presence and absence of the victims of the Holocaust can be felt simultaneously, and we even feel the memory traces of this event imprinted into the landscape of the place. Here we can return to the interconnectedness between memory and place that Ed Casey discusses and add Janet Donohoe's perspective as well: "[a] phenomenological analysis of place allows us to recognize that it is impossible to erase tradition and memory from the landscape and start afresh" (Donohoe xv). Although the emphasis of her entire argument is on city landscapes, we can still apply it to Auschwitz as what is most important about Donohoe's claim is the idea that once a memory is imprinted on a place, it is very difficult to disassociate that memory from the particular space or vice versa. In Auschwitz, for example, even though the function of the place has changed, and in a sense has stopped, the uncanny memory associated with it will continue to haunt or be kept alive by the people who have a connection to this place in some way.

Weiss attempts to express the sense of "frozen-time" and "frozen-identity" that is part of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum by examining how the immutability of the place has transformed it into an "absolute void." The absence felt in the place created through the extermination of millions of people can be felt at multiple levels: physically and psychologically. The author poetically and painfully measures every inch of this sense of emptiness in his text. Again, with Weiss's almost haunting description of "a head lifting,

⁶⁵ "And this is how it is now: here the breathing, the whispers and rustles are not yet entirely smothered by the silence; these bunks, stacked one above the other three deep, along the side walls and down the middle of the barracks, are not entirely deserted; here in the straw, in the heavy shadows, the thousand bodies can still be sensed, down below, no higher than the floor, on the cold concrete, above, under the slanting roof, on the planks, in the compartments, between the supporting walls of masonry, one against the other, six in every hole; here the outside world has not yet entirely penetrated; here one can still expect a movement inside there, a head lifting, a hand reaching out" (150).

a hand reaching out” (“My” 150), Kligerman’s “Holocaustal uncanny” comes back to mind, as we are once again placed in the space of the dead, this time literally as well as figuratively. In this text, again the “Holocaustal uncanny” invites the reader to step into the space of the dead in order to permit the past to be perceivable in the present, a task that Weiss also achieves through the spatial vocabulary and topographical documentation of this uncanny space. In “Meine Ortschaft” the “Holocaustal uncanny” is used by Weiss to bring to the foreground the sense of emptiness that has been imprinted into the landscape of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. Finally, we should note that there is also a kind of typographical void in Weiss’s imaginative reading of the signs in the concentration camp. Although for most of the text, Weiss does not hold back in providing explicit details of the trauma experienced by the prisoners in Auschwitz, there is a particular moment in the text when he refrains from stating the traumatic words. This is when he describes the text written above the entrance gate: “dann plötzlich das Tor, mit dem gußeisernen Textband, in dem das mittlere Wort MACHT sich am höchsten emporwölbt” (117-118).⁶⁶ He deliberately leaves out the first and last word of the well-known sign and instead I argue, delegates this task to the imagination of the reader.⁶⁷ The act of refraining from representing the actual trauma has been discussed earlier in relation to Libeskind’s “Voids.”

In conclusion, all of the texts analyzed in this chapter emphasized the close connection that exists between memory and place. Either collective or individual, memories are rooted in physical places where we have had positive or negative

⁶⁶ “[T]hen suddenly the entrance gate with the cast iron text above it, the middle word MACHT looming highest” (146).

⁶⁷ The Nazi slogan that Weiss is referring to is the famous “ARBEIT MACHT FREI” (WORK SETS YOU FREE) that was placed at the entrance of Auschwitz, as well as other concentration camps.

experiences in the past. That intricate relationship between memory and place can be showcased in literary and filmic texts to allow the psychological and cultural voids related to a traumatic event to become palpable and observable by a reader or viewer. In *Der Himmel über Berlin*, walking through the physical void of Wenders's "Potsdamer Platz" brought back memories of its formal glory and the thriving Jewish-German culture; with this poetic and documentary film Wenders also shows the palimpsestic layers of history that make Berlin, Berlin. In Sebald's text the different layers of memory and the difficulty of remembering and assimilating a traumatic event are foregrounded at a personal and collective level. In this chapter, the connection between places and memory has also been examined through the lens of someone who did not experience the terror directly. Peter Weiss's text examines the horrific voids of the Holocaust at a personal and collective level, while walking through Auschwitz, the synecdoche of the Holocaust that still echoes with the uncanny presence of the dead. As we have seen in this chapter, literature and film can be used to explore the tragic absence, derelict wastelands, wounds, voids and traumatic scars created in Germany during what has been called the "traumatic twentieth century."⁶⁸ In the next chapter, we will turn our gaze to Latin America to examine the cultural and psychological voids left behind by the dictatorship in Uruguay of the 1970s-80s.

⁶⁸ This term is frequently used by historians in reference to the traumatic world wars. See the section entitled "History Textbooks Re-examine Germany's Traumatic Twentieth Century" in Chapter 4 "Reform Reignited: Ambitious Efforts in the New Decade, 1960-1965" of Brian Puaca's book *Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany, 1945-1965*.

Chapter Three

Digging up the Past: Uruguayan Literature, Music and Film in Response to Political Oppression

This chapter explores Uruguayan literary and filmic texts as well as musical productions created in opposition to the military dictatorship that occurred in the country from 1973-1985. Particular attention will be paid to the subject of “Los Desaparecidos,” the Disappeared; the category that designates the people who were tortured, sometimes imprisoned and kidnapped by state agents because of their political views or affiliation with opposing political ideologies. Many of these people, dead or alive, have not yet been found and their children, grandchildren and even parents still to this day are seeking answers from the authorities. In addition, during this time of political unrest many Uruguayan artists and intellectuals were forced into exile in order to avoid persecution; others who remained found themselves in, what has been called “insile” (Sosnowski 2), and many were silenced through imprisonment. In this chapter, I will analyze some of the works of the famous poet, Mario Benedetti, who was exiled from Uruguay in 1973 and his collaboration with folklore singer Daniel Viglietti, who was arrested in 1972, and examine an autobiographical text by the author and playwright Mauricio Rosencof who was imprisoned for the entire twelve years of the dictatorship. Their literary and musical works, although diverse in style, portray different aspects of coping with political oppression, exploring its aftermath and the social and political questions related to the consequences of this event on either a personal or collective level. The question of remembering and excavating the past and giving a voice to the missing subjects of history here gains new urgency. In this chapter I also examine how the pressing need to uncover

the “buried truth” regarding the fate of the Disappeared is presented in the contemporary thriller *Zanahoria (Operation Carrot)* directed by critic turned-filmmaker Enrique Buchichio and released in 2014. This award-winning film deals with the “open wounds of the military dictatorship” (Michael S.)⁶⁹ as well, but from a more contemporary perspective.

For those who are less familiar with the causes and consequences of this military regime, the following brief summary will provide the necessary information in order to understand the material and arguments I discuss in the final two chapters of this thesis. Since the late 1950s, Uruguay had been experiencing an economic crisis that contributed to the growing discontent and political and social instability that the country would experience in the following decades. In the 1960s, the emergence of the guerrilla movement, El Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros (Tupamaros National Liberation Movement), unhappy with the living conditions and government in place, started to take matters into their own hands. The “urban guerrilla network” (Kaufman, *Uruguay* 13) developed in the urban centers,⁷⁰ where important members of the Tupamaros had ties to trade unions and the Socialist Party of Uruguay. Initially non-violent, the movement “disclosed the illegal economic activities in which the political elite was in one way or another connected” (34). They also staged bank robberies to redistribute the nation’s wealth, for example ensuring that the San Rafael Casino “was reimbursed of some of its stolen money so as to pay the salary of its employees” (34).

⁶⁹ The director speaks of these “open wounds” caused by the dictatorship in an interview published in *TimeOut Chicago*: “An Interview with Uruguayan filmmaker Enrique Buchichio.”

⁷⁰ The guerilla movement was present in many Latin American countries. A well-known example is Che Guevara’s Ejercito de Liberación Nacional -ELN (National Liberation Army) in Bolivia. Kaufman notes that “[i]n Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia, [the guerilla movements] mainly took the form of rural movements, while in Paraguay, the attempt failed during its initial stage. In Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and to some extent, Chile, we witnessed the organization of an urban guerilla network” (*Uruguay* 13).

However, ultimately, they employed armed guerilla warfare tactics and this created fear in the population. After June 1968, then President Jorge Pacheco Areco tried to stifle labour unrest by declaring a state of emergency, in essence repealing all constitutional rights.⁷¹ As a contingency measure the military slowly began to intervene in the government until the parliament was dissolved on June 27, 1973. As literary scholar Saúl Sosnowski writes the “collapse” of democratic governments and “institutional life was neither sudden nor exclusively a product of the June 27, 1973, coup d’état” (4). There were many factors that contributed to the collapse, including spiraling inflation and political divides in the traditional parties. As Sosnowski notes: “[F]rom 1967 on, power was concentrated more and more exclusively in the hands of the president while democratic rights were restricted accordingly. As inflation spiraled increasingly out of control and labor unrest escalated, so did the tolerance of divergent views” (4).

Sosnowski points to the various factors that contributed over a number of years to the growing discontent in society, the rise of a left-wing guerrilla movement, and an ensuing military intervention. As Sosnowski further states: “To varying degrees, all these factors, along with others which pointed to serious divisions within Uruguayan society and shifts in international interests, led ultimately to the suspension of government by consensus and the installation of an openly authoritarian regime which ruled by force” (4). The consensus of the government to have the military take control over the country has led to the use of the term “autogolpe” (self-coup) to describe the authoritarian rule. To further clarify: “The expression *autogolpe* (self-coup) has been used as the antithesis

⁷¹ It is important to note that by 1971, “the Tupamaros had agreed to a truce, in order not to undermine the Frente Amplio’s [the political party they affiliated with] chances in the November national elections by creating a climate which might have frightened people from voting for any left-wing movement” (Kaufman, *Uruguay* 35).

of coup d'état, by which the armed forces overthrow a civil regime. In the former, it is the government itself which uses force, namely, coercion is not utilized against it" (Ferreira Aldunate ix). On that fateful day in June, then president Juan María Bordaberry together with the Armed Forces dissolved Congress and created a Council of State (Consejo del Estado), which he appointed to replace the two-house legislature and gave the mandate to draft a new constitution (Kaufman, *Uruguay* 114). In addition, Bordaberry placed restrictions on the freedom of press and freedom of expression and forbade public meetings (114). These actions hinted at the violations of human rights many Uruguayans would experience during the twelve years of the military regime. Uruguay by 1976 had the highest number of political prisoners per capita in any country. As scholar Edy Kaufman indicates:

By 1976 Uruguay had the highest per capita level of political prisoners in the world. The figure cited by Amnesty International was five thousand, meaning that one in every five hundred citizens was confined to prison; at the same time, it was claimed that one in every fifty Uruguayans had been interrogated and one in every five was living abroad (Amnesty International 1975). ("The" 29)

There was also a high level of repression as evidenced by "[t]he labor unions, the University, and the left-leaning press all be[coming] targets of the of the regime [in late 1975]" (29). In addition, "[a]ll Uruguayan citizens were classified into three categories, A, B, and, C, according to their *grado de peligrosidad*, or 'degree of dangerousness'" (29). Many of those who opposed the regime emigrated to safer countries, while others who fought to defend their rights and ideologies were either imprisoned or "disappeared."

In this chapter the voids that haunt the collective memory⁷² of the Uruguayan nation in regard to this historical event will be analyzed from a particular point of view. Many scholars who study this period (1973-1985) in Uruguay from a post-dictatorship perspective emphasize the lack of information that post-dictatorship generations have received regarding the years of terror in the country. Scholars such as Mariana Achugar, Roger Mirza, Mabel Moraña, Saúl Sosnowski and Louise B. Popkin point to the voids created institutionally, culturally, socially and even politically (both during the dictatorship and afterwards) to hide this part of Uruguay's past and cover up the events that transpired from 1973-1985 in an attempt to prevent the "dangerous" transmission of knowledge regarding this event to present and future Uruguayan generations. For these scholars, literature, theatre and the plastic arts provide alternative narratives to the official history disclosed in history books and school textbooks. These literary and artistic productions serve as testimony, documenting what has occurred in the country during the latter part of the twentieth-century. They "fill in the voids" left by the institutions and politicians (referring to the lack of information regarding this traumatic event) and permit the dark part of history to be remembered and recorded, so that those who suffered and perished for our freedom are not erased from history nor forgotten in the collective memory of the nation. The literary, filmic, and musical texts by Mauricio Rosencof, Mario Benedetti, Enrique Buchichio, and Daniel Viglietti that I analyze in this chapter all powerfully engage with this historical trauma, viewing it through a personal and poetic lens. I have selected these texts since they most fully address this need to dig up and

⁷² My use of the term "collective memory" is indebted to Maurice Halbwachs. For a fuller definition of the term, please see the introduction of this thesis.

excavate the past, to use art, literature, music and film to give the victims of the past a voice. As Saúl Sosnowski writes: “When the politics of repression and censorship succeeded in creating a virtual void, inasmuch as truly national voices of dissent could not be heard, the Uruguayan public transformed that void into a sonorous silence, filling it with alternative forms of music and an alternative literature of which international best-sellers were but a part” (5). The texts analyzed in this chapter reflect this need to transform the void into a “sonorous silence” and into an “alternative form” of music and literature.

I believe Mario Benedetti’s poetry can be used as an inspiring example to illustrate Sosnowski’s claim about the liberatory possibilities of this new “alternative form” of music and literature. In the last years of the regime Benedetti published a powerful poem giving the “Disappeared” a voice. His poem “Desaparecidos” was penned in the 1970s and first published during his exile in Spain in 1984 in his anthology *Geografías (Geographies)*.⁷³ Prior to its publication in Spain, however, the poem reached a larger public when it was musicalized by Daniel Viglietti in 1978 and performed by both artists in Mexico and other countries in their recital “A dos voces” together with Circe Maia’s poem originally entitled “Por detrás de mi voz” (Voice Behind Me) and renamed “Otra voz canta” (Another Voice Sings). This collaborative performance is an example of the Uruguayan “Canto Popular” popular song movement. The silence

⁷³ The anthology cleverly uses general geographical categories as subdividers to classify his poems and other texts; such as “migrations,” “regions,” “erosions,” “nadirs” and “glaciers.” Benedetti’s poem “Desaparecidos” appears together with a dialogue (entitled “Firmó doscientos mil” (“He Signed Two Hundred Thousand”)) about the violent events a year before the Argentinian military dictatorship, in a section of the anthology entitled “swamps” (Ciénagas). Benedetti uses what one might call negative topographies to geographically locate voices of suffering and the traumatic experiences of the dictatorship. Swamps and nadirs can both be associated with low points on a life trajectory, reaching “rock bottom” or getting “bogged down” or trapped in murky waters.

imposed by the military rule was transformed into a resilient voice that expressed that which could not be said openly. During the post-dictatorship period, those same texts that channeled resistance are re-interpreted by new generations as testimonies and documents to fill in the gaps that were intentionally left empty in order to contribute to a fuller Uruguayan collective memory. I first had the opportunity to hear Benedetti's poem in downtown Toronto at The Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University on October 19, 2013. The poem was sung by folklore singer Viglietti, along with other texts about the dictatorship in his recital "Daniel Viglietti recuerda a Mario Benedetti" (Daniel Viglietti remembers Mario Benedetti). I keenly recall how my mother sitting next to me became uncomfortable when the lyrics became political, giving a voice to the resistance. But for me the lyrics pointed to a chapter of history that had been hidden from me, a "missing" part of the past that I wanted to study further. Uruguayan literary critic María Noel Tenaglia, who did not experience the military coup personally, importantly notes: "In the educational institutions of secondary level, my generation received silence in regard to the dictatorship," observing that "Uruguayan history as dictated in high school [only] reached until 1960" (my trans.; 87). In her article on a theatrical version of an autobiographical novel published by Uruguayan author Mauricio Rosencof, "Teatralización de la memoria ineffable: *El informante* de Carlos Liscano y *Las cartas que no llegaron* de Mauricio Rosencof" Tenaglia seeks to undo the silence imposed on her generation by the educational system by giving contemporary drama a place in the collective memory of the present. She states:

Esta sensación que se impuso a nuestras generaciones es la que algunos hemos tratado de romper, buscando en otros ámbitos *la palabra* que nos explicara este

presente que parecía no tener historia reciente. Recurrimos entonces a los diferentes documentos, a los libros de Historia que tratan sobre el período histórico “reciente”, a la “memoria colectiva”; pero personalmente encontré *la palabra* y “los hechos” como explicación del pasado en la imagen viva del teatro. (87-88; emphasis in original)⁷⁴

The two Uruguayan dramas she studies, *El informante* by Carlos Liscano and *Las cartas que no llegaron*, adapted by Raquel Diana and Mauricio Rosencof from his novel by the same name, permitted her to experience the dictatorship, even though she never lived it personally. These texts become a vital part of the collective memory for her generation as they provide keys to the silence imposed institutionally. In addition, the texts also live on through these new interpretations given by a younger generation that wants to return to the past and excavate the voids left by the dictatorship and the subsequent democratic governments, who sought to cover up the wounds of the past.

For Uruguayan scholar Mariana Achugar, analyzing texts in relation to the past and to the formation of collective memory regarding this historical period involves rethinking traditional discourse analysis tools and focusing on the circulation and reception of texts (4). As she clarifies: “This means expanding conceptual analytic tools such as *intertextuality*, *recontextualization*, and *resemiotization* to track the connections and constructions of meanings across time and space” (4).⁷⁵ These three concepts allow

⁷⁴ “This feeling [of silence] imposed on our generations is the one that some of us are trying to break by looking to other areas for *the word* that would explain this present to us, the present that seems to have no recent history. So, we resorted to different documents, including history books that deal with this ‘recent’ historical period and ‘collective memory’; but personally, it was in the live image of the theater where I found *the word* and ‘the facts’ as an explanation of the past.” (my trans.)

⁷⁵ For Achugar, “intertextuality refers to the links established between texts that precede or follow others in time” (4). As scholars have noted, “recontextualization is a linguistic process through which a text produced in a particular context of time and space is used in a different context (Bernstein, 1996, 2000)”

us “to explore the processes of (re)appropriation of discourses about the recent past, and their reaccentuation (Voloshinov, 1973) and transformations when translated into other semiotic systems and contexts” (Achugar 4). Following this model, in this chapter I will first analyze the initial impact of Benedetti’s poem and also consider how it, along with other texts published in the aftermath of the dictatorship, were “recontextualized” and “resemiotized” by a new generation in a different era. As I will also discuss later in the chapter, while Benedetti’s text represents an important early voice of resistance fighting political oppression and silence, the film *Zanahoria* and the autobiographical novel by Rosencof *Las cartas que no llegaron* (*The Letters that Never Came*) also voice a powerful aesthetics of resistance in the post-dictatorship period, trying to uncover the voids created by the “open wound” of political terror in Uruguay’s past.

Mario Benedetti, born in Paso de los Toros, Uruguay in 1920, is considered to be one of Uruguay’s greatest writers, captivating the hearts of many Uruguayans and Spanish-speaking audiences with his poems, short stories and novels. He belongs to the famous “Generación del 45” (The Generation 45’) that influenced the literary landscape of the country and of Latin America in general. His literary works covered a wide range of topics, but he always had Uruguay at the center of his texts. As Margaret Randall indicates in her introduction to the anthology *Witness: The Selected Poems of Mario Benedetti*: “Indeed, Mario’s work was so intimately drawn from the reality of Uruguayan life that the two often seemed of a piece” (12). Through his writing, Benedetti reflected on the concerns of many Uruguayans, and touched upon the topics of love, struggle, exile

(4) and “[t]he concept of resemiotization (Iedema, 2001, 2003) complements the process of recontextualization by focusing on how resignification is affected by the change in semiotic mode” (4).

and ordinary life in the city. As Randall later adds: “In his writing he showed an uncanny ability to capture the essence of his countrymen and women – their sensibilities, yearnings, sorrows, idiosyncrasies, irony, and measured optimism. His politics embodied his own courage and dignity in defense of human rights, and his defiance of those who usurped those rights [...]” (15-16). Benedetti was leftist in his political views and he fought to defend human rights in his country, even during his exile. As his biographers have noted, “In 1971 he helped organize the *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front), a coalition of left parties and political organizations in his native Uruguay, including the famed *Tupamaro* guerilla movement (*Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tuparamos*)” (Randall 12; emphasis in original). These actions led to his exile in 1973.⁷⁶ I am most interested in how Benedetti expressed his disapproval of the Uruguayan dictatorship in his works, in particular in his poetry, although this was not the only genre he used to express his concerns. For example, he condemned the totalitarian regimes taking over Latin America in a series of editorials published weekly in the Spanish newspaper, *EL PAIS*. In his article “Dicen que la avenida está sin árboles” (“They say that the avenue doesn’t have any trees” my trans.) published on October 1, 1982, he calls on Latin Americans to fight against the “destabilizing” projects of these regimes:

Para las dictaduras del Cono Sur, la cultura es subversión. De ahí que su proyecto siempre incluya el genocidio cultural. No creo que nada ni nadie pueda cumplir el macabro designio de exterminar una cultura. Puede, sí, devastarla, descalabrarla, vulnerarla, dejarla malherida, pero nunca destruirla. Por eso es tan importante

⁷⁶ As Randall notes, from 1973 to mid-1985 Benedetti spent “long periods exiled in Argentina, Peru, Spain and Cuba” (12).

que, tanto desde el interior de nuestros castigados países como desde el exilio, cuidemos nuestra cultura, hagamos un esfuerzo, no sobrehumano, sino profundamente humano, por contrarrestar la devastación, por asegurar la continuidad de nuestras letras, de nuestras artes plásticas, de nuestra música. (“Dicen” 11-12).⁷⁷

His call for a “deeply human” fight to continue using culture, literature and the arts in the face of inhumane political oppression highlights the importance of culture as a voice of resistance during these difficult times. In addition, his remark about serious wounds reminds us of the voids and absences left behind by these regimes in their attempt to control the population. From his vast literary corpus, I will now turn to the poems “Desaparecidos” first published in *Geografías (Geographies)* (1982-1984) and “Ausencias” (“Absences”) published in *Canciones del que no canta (Songs from a Sorry Singer)* (2006)⁷⁸ as they deal in interesting ways with the subject of “Los Desaparecidos” and the gaping wounds and absences left behind by the dictatorship.

“Desaparecidos” deals with the subject of the Disappeared during some of the most difficult years of the dictatorship. It reflects on the (possible) posthumous experiences of these people, on how there is still uncertainty as to what happened to them and on the need to find an answer to the question of where they are now. When

⁷⁷ “For the dictatorships in the Southern Cone, culture is subversion. That is why their projects always include cultural genocide. I do not think that anything or anyone can accomplish the macabre intent of exterminating a culture. They can wear it down, destabilize it, make it vulnerable, leave it gravely wounded, but never destroy it. That is why it is so important that we take care of our culture, either from the inside of our punished countries or from exile. We must make an effort, not superhuman, but profoundly human to offset the devastation, to assure the continuity of our literatures, our plastic arts, and our music” (my trans.).

⁷⁸ There are two versions of the poem “Ausencias.” One is published in *Defensa Propia (Self-Defense)* in 2005 and another published in the 2006 anthology *Canciones del que no canta (Songs from a Sorry Singer)*. It is not clear in the scholarship on this poet when the two poems were composed, but it is very likely that they were first composed while he was in exile.

performing a close-reading of the text, we can see that Benedetti provides two perspectives on the subject. On the one hand, there is the internal cry of the Disappeared themselves, a concert of “voiceless” but “seeking” subjects, who are in an uncanny space, ambulant souls without peace:

Están en algún sitio / concertados
 desconcertados / sordos
 buscándose / buscándonos
 bloqueados por los signos y las dudas[.] (Benedetti, “Desaparecidos” 204)⁷⁹

Where the destabilizing effect of the dictatorship is most profoundly and playfully represented is in the poem’s play on musical references of the “concert.” The victims speak “in concert” or together, assembled (“concertados”), but at the same time are lost, disconcerted (“desconcertados). They do not know their final resting place, and at the same time they also long for life and for the people that they love. This is particularly visible in the following stanzas, where the uncertainty regarding their destiny is highlighted:

nadie les ha explicado con certeza
 si ya se fueron o si no
 si son pancartas o temblores
 sobrevivientes o respuestas[.] (Benedetti 204)⁸⁰

⁷⁹ All translations of Benedetti’s “Desaparecidos” are from *Witness: The Selected Poems of Mario Benedetti*. Translated by Louise B. Popkin.

They’re out there somewhere / all assembled
 disassembled / bewildered / voiceless
 each seeking the others / seeking us
 hemmed in by their question marks and doubts[.] (205)

⁸⁰ no one has told them yet for sure
 if they’re gone for good or not

On the other hand, this uncertainty also comes from the literary third-person perspective of “the nation” (el pueblo) and their collective memory. The Uruguayan people do not want to lose hope of having their loved ones return alive. Instead, they want to keep looking and believing in their survival. Hence, the poem is also a cry from the nation who wants to know where the Disappeared are and wants to know how to remember them. The poetic voice speaks about the Disappeared in a plural form, from the position of “el pueblo,” what can be understood as the nation or the people.⁸¹

In addition, the absence and the voids left behind by the Disappeared seem to be most keenly registered when the two poetic voices are fused in a key passage. “They” here refers both to the victims, the Disappeared who exist in an uncanny space, and the public or people who register and document their absence:

ven pasar árboles y pájaros
 e ignoran a qué sombra pertenecen

cuando empezaron a desaparecer
 hace tres cinco siete ceremonias
 a desaparecer como sin sangre
 como sin rostro y sin motivo
 vieron por la ventana de su ausencia
 lo que quedaba atrás / ese andamiaje
 de abrazos cielo y humo

cuando empezaron a desaparecer

if they're banners now or tremors
 survivors or prayers for the dead[.] (205)

⁸¹ Here I am utilizing the concept of “el pueblo” to refer to the collective identity of the Uruguayan people. In my view, “el pueblo” is an active seeking subject looking to find answers in regard to the Disappeared. My use of the term is not limited to a socialist, left-leaning perspective.

como el oasis en los espejismos
 a desaparecer sin últimas palabras
 tenían en sus manos los trocitos
 de cosas que querían[.] (204)⁸²

These lines emphasize the absence felt by the nation when people started to disappear, but also the shadowy horror, absence and the void that the Disappeared themselves must have felt when they were kidnapped and taken away from their families and friends. The internal psychological void felt by these lost historical subjects is amplified when the poetic voice says “ven pasar árboles y pájaros / e ignoran a qué sombra pertenecen” (204) (“they see trees and birds go by / and wonder which shadows are theirs”) (205). The tone of these lines is tinged with a sense of despair and resignation. When I saw this poem performed in Toronto there were clouds projected onto the backdrop of the stage. I thus see the “Disappeared” as wayward angels. It is as if an aerial perspective is employed; the

⁸² they see trees and birds go by
 and wonder which shadows are theirs

when they first started disappearing
 three five seven ceremonies ago
 disappearing as if they were ghosts
 with no trace or face or good reason
 they glimpsed through the window of their absence
 what was left behind / that scaffold
 of embraces sky and smoke

when they first started disappearing
 like the oasis in a mirage
 disappearing with no last words
 they still held in their hands the pieces of things they loved[.] (205)

Disappeared like birds or angels are hovering above the city, almost like Damiel and Cassiel in *Der Himmel über Berlin*, trying to reconnect with the world and find their corporeal reflections. What they sense are only shadowy impressions. They see a world of shadows but lost in this maze, they are unable to see which ones are theirs. Benedetti in the next sentence draws particular attention to the word disappeared. When he writes “When they first started disappearing” (205) this sense of shadowy erasure becomes literal. The “they” is also the people who remain, looking for the shadowy remains of their missing friends and relatives. Both “el pueblo” and the Disappeared speak from a void. The end of the poem uses an intimate first-person autobiographical voice (“my heart”) to ask an existential question about love and hate, good and evil, portraying the pain of both the nation and the Disappeared, while also trying to find a logic or reasoning that would explain this situation. The last lines of the poem state:

allá en el sur del alma

es posible que hayan extraviado la brújula
y hoy vaguen preguntando preguntando
dónde carajo queda el buen amor
porque vienen del odio[.] (204, 206)⁸³

⁸³ in the dear southern reaches of my heart

it may be they've lost their bearings
and now they wander asking always asking
where the fuck is the road to true love
because they're coming from so much hate[.] (205, 207)

The Disappeared seem to have embarked on a journey towards understanding why this happened to them, asking why they are still “lost” as their bodies have not been recovered. However, Benedetti does not leave us with a concrete answer. The answers to these questions are still hidden, not revealed to the public and the question that the Disappeared ask “dónde carajo queda el buen amor,” is a question now also voiced by their families and the entire Uruguayan nation. In this poem, Benedetti gives a voice to the Disappeared; he channels the nation’s suffering during the dictatorship by dedicating an entire poem to the hundreds of people who vanished from life and he reflects on what the dictatorship has left in its aftermath.

The subject of the Disappeared has provoked different reactions and is still controversial in the country. Cultural historians have taken a particular interest in this subject, focusing on the different Latin American countries that are continuously dealing with the remembrance and representation of “Los Desaparecidos.” For example, Latin American studies scholar Mabel Moraña includes the Disappeared as part of what she describes as the “generación fantasma,” the “ghost generation” that was absent in Uruguay during the dictatorship. As she states in the introduction to her book *Memorias de la generación fantasma*:

Era la evidencia que en el país faltaba toda una generación intermedia, entre los jóvenes que no guardaban memoria del período de violencia radicalizada posterior a 1968, y las generaciones anteriores, que habían visto desmoronarse la utopía del “welfare state” batallista y emerger la impudicia del estado militarizado. Entre ambos, “la generación de la crisis” actuaba por ausencia; se sentía su falta en todos los aspectos de la vida nacional; se la sabía asesinada, desaparecida,

encarcelada o exiliada, en todo caso silenciada, marginalizada de los centros de decisión política y difusión cultural, de la educación y los sindicatos. (12)⁸⁴

As Moraña argues the “crisis or ghost generation” marks a strong absence, a lack in the political and cultural life of the nation. However, acting through their very absence, they nonetheless have an important role to play in the collective memory of the country: “Se hacían respecto a ella referencias oblicuas; era una de las portadoras de la memoria, una de las principales responsables por la resistencia nacional y también una de las fuerzas sociales más potencialmente amenazantes para el régimen militar” (12).⁸⁵ For Moraña, it is through the absence of this generation and through the void created in the collective memory of the people that their voice is heard the loudest. Benedetti’s poem re-enforces the need to keep giving a voice to those who were silenced. This also includes the “ghost generation” that fought to obtain freedom from a totalitarian rule that disregarded all human rights. In addition, Benedetti himself also belonged to this “ghost generation” as he was in exile since 1973. So, even though he was fortunate enough to not be among the disappeared, he suffered his own kind absence when he was exiled and traumatically separated from his own country and was not able to practice his art in his own land. However, as Moraña pointed out, exile did not keep the “ghost generation” from voicing their opinions; through his literary criticism, his short stories and his poems, Benedetti

⁸⁴ “This was evidence that the country was missing an entire intermediate generation between the youth that did not remember the period of radicalized violence that occurred after 1968, and the older generations who had seen the collapse of the utopia of the Batallista ‘welfare state’ and the emergence of the impudence of the militarized state. Between the two, the ‘generation of the crisis’ acted through absence; their absence was felt in all aspects of national life; they had been assassinated, disappeared, incarcerated or exiled, but in any case, silenced, marginalized from the centers of political decision making, from the centers of cultural dissemination, of education and unions” (my trans.).

⁸⁵ “Oblique references of them were made; they were the carriers of memory, one of the main [groups] responsible for the national resistance and one of social forces that was most potentially threatening to the military regime” (my trans.).

participated in Uruguayan cultural and political life from the outside and fought for the voice of resistance to be heard in his country. The “ghost generation” occupy a liminal, uncanny position, both inside and outside of history and the life of the nation, but this does not mean that they cannot be agents or catalysts for change.

Mario Benedetti also discusses the subject of absences and voids in his poem “Ausencias.” Although it is not specifically dedicated to the Disappeared, they are briefly mentioned:

unos quedaron desaparecidos
 otros aparecieron en sus huesos
 sus palabras siguieron resonando
 como si todavía nos nombraran[.] (Benedetti, “Ausencias” 135)⁸⁶

Once again, the poet alludes to the uncertain destiny that several Uruguayans faced at the hands of the military, but also, and more importantly, he underlines how their words still echo even now when they are not here. The resilience of their spirit still lives on through the voice of others. The poem also ontologically frames the subject of “absences,” asking what do absences mean? How are they connected to us? Can we ever be rid of them? The ending of the text gives us an insightful response to these provocative questions:

no hay rescate posible en las ausencias
 uno sigue con ellas en la mano
 y sabe que no puede abandonarlas
 el mundo fue creado con ausencias

⁸⁶ Some remained disappeared
 others appeared in their bones
 their words kept echoing
 as if they still called out our names[.] (my trans.)

y allí estarán hasta que en un descuido
también uno pase a ser un ausente[.] (136)⁸⁷

Benedetti embraces the absences in the world, seeing them as a part of who we are. He ends the poem by reflecting on the inevitability of death, and by stating that once we die, regardless of the circumstances, we too will become absences in the world. This text philosophically reflects on death, arguing that the world around us is made of absences, and that they are always present. Benedetti thus invites us to reflect on the voids, gaps and absences present in our everyday lives and teaches us that they are significant, arguing that we should not look the other way to ignore them. One is reminded of Libeskind's use of empty spaces, the "Voids" in the Jewish Museum Berlin, and also of Menashe Kadishman's exhibition, *Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves*. Just as the metal faces are there to provide a physical and emotional reminder of the absences created by the Holocaust, even visually and sonically shocking museum visitors, inviting them to step on these faces, Benedetti's poem also uses a sensory language to shock us into thinking about death and suffering ("you have them in your hands" (my trans.; 135) [...] "they are calling out your names" (my trans.; 136)), forcing us to corporally experience their absence. Both the installation piece and the poem forge a connection between the present

⁸⁷ There is no possible rescue in the absences
you have them with you in your hands
and you know you cannot abandon them
the world was created by absences
and they will be there until in a careless act
you will also become an absence[.] (my trans.)

and the past and invite us to use our senses and tactile awareness to remember those who “call out,” have disappeared and become absent.

The absences and voids in Benedetti’s “Desaparecidos” came to life six years before the poem’s publication in a different form when it was musicalized by Daniel Viglietti in their recital “A dos voces,” and metamorphosed into the song “Otra voz canta-Desaparecidos.” Here we can see how Benedetti’s poem has been recontextualized and resemiotized in its interplay with another text and another artist to give a new alternative voice of resistance to the regime, through the movement *Canto Popular Uruguayo (CPU) (Uruguayan Popular Song)*.⁸⁸ During the 1960s-1980s, and in particular during the military coupe, this popular song movement was “the main vehicle of cultural resistance, [and it] became the cauldron for a renaissance of several subcultural genres such as carnival’s *murga* and African-Uruguayan *candombe*, as well as rural folk music and several trends of fusion rock” (Trigo 604; emphasis in original). Through el Canto Popular, the Uruguayan public found a way to resist the military oppression and to speak about the issues that were most pressing to them. As Mary Ríos states in her *Guía de la música Uruguaya (Guide to Uruguayan Music)*, after 1972 “the themes [of the Uruguayan Popular Song] become political, the Spanish language is adopted at a general level and people listen to what they could not hear through any other medium. (Sometimes the message was subtle and sometimes not)” [“Los temas se politizan, se generaliza la adopción del castellano y la gente acude a escuchar lo que, con

⁸⁸ “The ‘Canto Popular’ (Popular Song) is music with rural or urban folkloric roots with the accompaniment of poetic texts (of good quality) that seeks to not have any adulterations. It is expressed through the ballad singer. Its undeniable tie with the ‘canción de protesta’ (protest song) from previous generations links this musical phenomenon with the educated middle class” (my trans.; Battistoni 20).

un mensaje muy sutil (a veces no tanto) no hubiera podido escuchar de otra manera” (26-27)].⁸⁹ As cultural critic Mabel Moraña has argued the Canto Popular “was reactivated as a social response and as an alternative culture that sought its voice in the loopholes of the repression” (my trans.; 120). Uruguayans used the Popular Song movement to “advocate for the reestablishment of human rights and the restoration of civil life” (my trans.; 120). Viglietti’s and Benedetti’s collaboration illustrates just one example of how the Canto Popular movement gave artists a new opportunity to use song and literature together to amplify political messages about resisting the military regime, bringing “out the poetry from the books, disseminating it, musicalizing it” (my trans.; Moraña 124). As Moraña further indicates, “it was very frequent to find texts from Idea Vilarino, Liber Falco, Washington Benavidez, Circe Maia, Mario Benedetti, being adapted or specifically produced as song lyrics” (my trans.; Moraña 124).

In the section that follows, I will briefly analyze the lyrics and messages of the song “Otra voz canta-Desaparecidos” (English), titled after Benedetti’s poem of the same name and Circe Maia’s poem “Otra voz canta,” interpreted by Daniel Viglietti. This song was part of the recital “A dos voces” performed by the two artists at various locations; the most famous interpretation was recorded in 1978 (Figueredo, *Poseía* 153). In this performance, Viglietti begins what musicologist María Figueredo calls an “intense dialogue” (153) between the two texts:

Por detrás de mi voz
-escucha, escucha-
otra voz canta.

⁸⁹ She also notes that after 1972, when the songs and themes become political “the number of annual releases of Uruguayan Popular Music records decreases, along with the number of recitals performed [due to the political instability and censorship developing in the country]” (my trans.; 26).

Viene de atrás, de lejos;
viene de sepultadas
bocas, y canta.

Dice que están muertos
-escúchalos, escucha-
mientras se alza la voz
que los recuerda y canta. (“Daniel”)⁹⁰

Viglietti begins singing Maia’s lyrics with a mellow tone that slowly deepens as he recites the lines “otra voz canta.” There is also a change in the pitch and rhythm of his voice when he reaches the last verse of this stanza. With these verses, accompanied by a strumming guitar, he appeals to the audience to remember the Disappeared, to remember them by singing. This leads to Benedetti’s poem. As the guitar strumming continues, the poet recites the first fourteen lines of his text, after which Viglietti’s voice returns:

Dicen que ahora viven
en tu mirada.

Sosténlos con tus ojos,
con tus palabras;

⁹⁰ From behind my voice
listen, listen
another voice sings.

It comes from behind, from far away;
it comes from buried
mouths, and sings.

They say they are dead
-listen to them, listen
while the voice that remembers them
raises and sings. (my trans.)

sosténlos con tu vida,
que no se pierdan,
que no se caigan.

Escucha, escucha;
otra voz canta. (“Daniel”)⁹¹

The interplay between the two texts transforms the original poems into a powerful “concert.” With the musicalization of both Caia’s and Benedetti’s poems accompanied by Viglietti’s guitar, the song evokes an emotional response from the audience, perhaps eliciting more emotions than either poem itself can bring when the reader is quietly reciting it. As Figueredo states, life is given to the dead through the song as they are remembered: “Aparentemente el acto de cantar da vida a los muertos, porque los recuerda” (*Poesía* 156). Thus, the audience is given the active role of remembering them. Or one might say the dead are lyrically resurrected by the song, as the absences and fate of the Disappeared is further highlighted through a play of rising and falling sonic registers, shifts in tone and volume. As Figueredo also argues:

En su interpretación, Viglietti expresa todo el ambiente emotivo que guía el texto. Al comienzo su voz susurra, en un tono muy suave, estirando los vocablos de los versos de las primeras estrofas. De a poco va subiendo en tono y volumen con los

⁹¹ They say they live
in your gaze.

Hold them with your eyes
with your words
hold them with your life
don’t let them become lost
don’t let them fall.

Listen, listen
another voice sings. (my trans.)

versos: “la voz alza, escúchalos escucha, otra voz canta” para dar lugar a la voz de Benedetti. El cambio a los versos recitados alude a la soledad y a un espacio diferente. El contrapunto creado es muy fuerte, demostrando que los vivos, los oyentes, son los que aun tienen el poder de mantener vivos a los que murieron. (*Poesía* 158)⁹²

The loneliness alluded to by Figueredo is representative of the physical and psychological voids left by the Disappeared in the Uruguayan nation and the listener is given the central role of communicating that void and in a way filling it with hope. This sense of loneliness and absence is amplified through song. With the poem, we read about their absence and their suffering; but with the song we *feel* it as well. The emotional impact is stronger since more of the audience’s senses are activated. The guitar, in addition to Viglietti’s voice, deepens in tone making the song penetrate deeper into the hearts of the listeners. In addition, hearing both Benedetti’s poem and Viglietti’s musical voice and seeing both of them perform on stage becomes very powerful. These artists are the face of resisting oppression; through their popular song the story of the Disappeared lives on.

In this way, the CPU (Canto Popular Uruguayo) becomes a way of delivering hope in the face of terror. As Figueredo indicates in her article “El retorno entre la poesía y el canto popular: Uruguay, 1960-1985,” the Canto Popular represents not only a dialogue between two art forms (poetry and music); but more importantly, it fills an essential need in society to foster a collective dialogue, serving as a catalyst for change:

⁹² “In his interpretation, Viglietti expresses the entire emotional ambience that guides the text. At the beginning his voice whispers, in a very soft tone, stretching the words of the verses of the first stanza. Slowly his tone and volume increase with the verses: ‘the voice raises, listen to them listen, another voice sings’ to give rise to Benedetti’s voice. The change to the recited verses alludes to the loneliness and to a different space. The counterpoint created is very strong, demonstrating that the living, the listeners, are the ones that still the power to keep alive those who have died” (my trans.).

El acercamiento [entre la poesía y la música] se dio no solamente por su proximidad como campos artísticos, sino también en una percibida necesidad de fomentar un diálogo colectivo a niveles más populares dentro de la comunidad uruguaya a partir de las circunstancias desafiantes de esos años, sobre todo después de la ruptura institucional de 1973. (Figueredo 299)⁹³

The collective dialogue is what becomes important in a community that has to deal with the disappearance of hundreds of their citizens, in addition to having their own human rights being violated constantly. During a time when it was prohibited to gather in groups, when one constantly feared being imprisoned or censored, the Canto Popular became an alternative way to communicate and resist the oppression of the state.

According to Moraña, the Canto Popular in the mist of the dictatorship appeared as a “metaphorical form of massive mobilization” (my trans.; 122). It resemiotized poetry, but also “redimensionalized” or reappropriated popular cultural forms like dance and music, using a variety of strategies to voice resistance, as Moraña describes (my trans.; 122):

-redimensionamiento del elemento popular (a través de la utilización del tango, la murga carnavalesca, la canción folclórica) como voz de los amplios sectores oprimidos por el régimen militar.

-vinculación de la cultura nacional bajo dictadura con la tradición nacional anterior a la militarización y con la población nacional exiliada, a través de alusiones fácilmente decodificadas por el espectador.

⁹³ “The approximation [between poetry and music] was due, not only to the proximity between the two artistic fields, but also to the perceived necessity of fostering a collective dialogue, at a more public level, within the Uruguayan community, as a consequence of the challenging circumstances of those years, and in particular after the institutional rupture in 1973” (my trans.).

-tematización de las líneas principales de la ideología liberal y, en términos generales, representación de la polarización: sociedad liberal, tradición civilista, democracia representativa *versus* régimen autoritario, cultura elitista y represiva. (122; emphasis in original)⁹⁴

This form of popular culture provided a voice of resistance to a community that needed to find a way of dealing with daily oppression, imprisonments, and disappearances.

Although Benedetti's poem is very explicit on the subject matter, this was not always the case as singers of the Canto Popular used different ways of avoiding censorship and performing recitals notwithstanding the police permits that needed to be filed in order to perform and which could be denied at the last minute. According to Moraña, the most significant aspect of "el canto popular" was "the representative ritual;" the performances or shows mattered because they united thousands of people and invited them to recover their public space (my trans.; 122). In this way, poetry was resemiotized into popular song to extend the voice of resistance to a larger community that could produce cultural change in Uruguay and try to break the silence imposed by censorship and violations of human rights.

In the post-dictatorship period, the literature on the subject of "Los Desaparecidos" ranges from those texts that focus on the socio-political conditions that led to this traumatic occurrence to the poems and fictional texts reflecting on where the

⁹⁴ "-resizing or redimensionalizing the popular element (through the use of tango, the carnivalesque murga, the folkloric song) as the voice of the broad sectors oppressed by the military regime. -linking the national culture under dictatorship with the traditional one preceding the militarization and with the national population in exile, through allusions easily decoded by the spectator. -theming the principle lines of the liberal ideology and, in general terms, representing the polarization: liberal society, civil tradition, representative democracy *versus* authoritarian rule, elitist and repressive culture" (my trans.).

Disappeared are now and on how we can cope with the fact that they are still missing, such as Benedetti's, to the ones that center on documenting the organizations that have been created by the family members all across Latin America and Europe to find some traces of those who were taken. One of the texts I encountered was *Vivos los llevaron...Historia de la lucha de Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos (1976-2005)* which belongs to the last category and documents the origin of the organization "Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos" ("Mothers and Family Members of Detained and Disappeared Uruguayans") and the many milestones they have accomplished since the group was founded. Although the entire text is fascinating to read, the last section annexed to the book was the one that peaked my interest the most as it offers a reflection on the future of Uruguay. In the section entitled "El Archivo de Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos. Experiencias, contenidos y reflexiones" three of the organizers of the project speak about the task of setting up an archive for this organization to store and preserve all the documents pertaining to their fight to find the truth about the Disappeared. At the end of their account, they reflect on the function of these archives for the future of Uruguayan collective memory and society: "La idea central es que este espacio constituya un lugar más donde recordar, investigar y analizar el pasado. Que sea un elemento dinámico, donde se escuchen todas las voces, donde podamos empezar a armar el rompecabezas de un pasado que todavía está pendiente" (Alonso et al. 159).⁹⁵

The very last phrase, "building the puzzle of a past that is still pending" resonated with

⁹⁵ "The central idea is that this space should constitute another place where we can remember, investigate and analyze the past. It should be dynamic, where all voices should be heard, where we can begin to build the puzzle of a past that is still pending" (my trans.).

me the most, as I quickly recalled that there are various texts that deal with the subject of trying to find traces of the Disappeared, while also contemplating how this loss impacts society. One example in popular culture is the award-winning Film *Zanahoria (Operation Carrot)*, released in 2014.⁹⁶ Set in Uruguay in 2004, just before the presidential elections, which were won by el *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front), the thriller is based on the true story of a scammer who lured people into his scheme by telling them that he had never-before seen information on the Disappeared. He would ask for small amounts of money while dragging out the release of this top-secret military information. The film follows the true story of two journalists, Walter (César Troncoso) and Jorge (Martín Rodríguez), who buy into the scheme to seek truth and justice for the family members of the people who were detained during the dictatorship and who then disappeared without any trace.⁹⁷ The film ends with the two journalists exposing the scammer and publicly revealing his identity in the newspaper, while coming to the realization that these things will continue to occur until the truth is discovered. Again, “the past is still pending” as the mothers and family members wrote, or the truth is “being held hostage” as Walter writes in the editorial:

Dice el refrán que la historia la escriben los vencedores. No compartimos esa idea. Y creemos que la historia se encarga por sí misma de mostrarse tarde o temprano. El relato que sigue a continuación son las peripecias que vivimos durante cuatro semanas. Fuimos ingenuos al punto de llegar casi a la estupidez.

⁹⁶ The film won numerous accolades including the “Audience Choice Award” at the Chicago Latino Film Festival in 2015 and Best Film and Best Screenplay at the Huelva Latin American Film Festival in 2014. The film’s star César Troncoso also won Best Actor at the Uruguayan Film Critics Association Awards in 2015 (“Zanahoria”).

⁹⁷ For some critics, such as Jonathan Holland, the movie’s film noir visual aesthetic also amplifies this discourse on the Disappeared, absence and emptiness: “Visually, *Carrot* is all about its emptiness -- nice clean lines and unpeopled, often nocturnal spaces showing Buchichio aptly drawing on noir tropes for his atmospheric” (Holland).

Queriendo creer en la veracidad de lo que se nos ofrecía. Fuimos crédulos, porque lo que nos prometía era demasiado importante como para dejarlo pasar. Fuimos ambiciosos, porque nos vimos como dueños de primicias increíbles, nosotros los recién llegados al periodismo nacional. Pero nos equivocamos. Entonces decidimos que la verdad es más fuerte que el ridículo, y que debemos publicar esta historia para evitar que otros incautos como nosotros caigan en la misma trampa. Una trampa que solo es posible en un país en que la verdad todavía sigue secuestrada y enterrada en alguna parte. (Buchichio 1:33:40-1:34:59)⁹⁸

Walter claims that the truth is still held captive and buried in some place, like the missing Uruguayans, whose families are still searching for their remains decades after the dictatorship has ended. The truth has not been revealed because of the laws governing the country that do not fully permit releasing to the public the information from the military regarding the crimes committed against humanity. The journalist powerfully decries this lack of information transmitted to newer generations regarding this period. Although the full truth has not been exposed, the search continues. Walter, like the director of the film, also powerfully demonstrates how some people in Uruguayan society are trying to put together the pieces of the puzzle, whereas others choose to ignore the “open wounds” and

⁹⁸ “As the saying goes, history is written by the victors. We do not share that idea. And we believe that history takes care of showing itself sooner or later. The stories that follow are the adventures that we lived for four weeks. We were naïve to the point of almost reaching stupidity. Wanting to believe in the truthfulness of what was being offered to us. We were gullible because what was being offered was too important (for us) to just walk away. We were ambitious because we saw ourselves as owners of incredible breaking news, we, the new guys to national journalism. But we were mistaken. We then decided that the truth is stronger than ridicule, and that we must publish this story to prevent other unsuspecting dupes from falling into the same trap. A trap that is only possible in a country where the truth is still being held hostage and is buried somewhere” (my trans.).

would rather see the dictatorship as a “closed chapter.” Buchichio describes in an interview how this polemical issue divides Uruguayan society, even today:

Something just made a click with me about the good material for a movie and, at the same time, the opportunity to approach some of the open wounds from the military dictatorship in Uruguay, which is a very polemic issue there. It’s a very dividing issue in Uruguayan society between the people who believe that there are still things to reveal and to process, and another half of the country who believe that it’s a closed chapter and we have to move on. (Micheal S. “An”)

Buchichio’s comments on the still controversial and politically charged topic of the Uruguayan military regime serves to demonstrate not only the impact that this political event had on the nation at the time it occurred, but also how it is still affecting Uruguayan society forty-five years after the dictatorship. As he further states: “Today, it’s the same thing: 10 years after [the story of the film took place], we are still trying to come to terms with the recent past, with the brutal years and trying to understand what it meant to have a Uruguayan identity” (Micheal S. “An”). This sense of struggling to come to terms with the past and move forward as a nation is highlighted in the powerful camera work and imagery in the final sequences of the film. The poetic tracking shots give us a panoramic outlook, looking towards the future as the search continues and showing Walter re-assembling the pieces of a puzzle he had earlier completed and furiously disassembled, and giving us a sense of how important it is to try to keep reassembling the pieces of the past.

Having these two very different, but related cultural products (the film and the manual about the archive) end with the same sentiment about a “pending past” initially

struck me as revealing a collective feeling of despair and frustration with the current situation. Practically how can one move forward into the future when the government refuses to bring to trial the perpetrators of human rights and when mothers, children and relatives are still wondering where their lost family members are? Yet as I engaged more deeply with these texts I saw they refused to see this chapter of history as closed, and instead of only sensing despair and frustration in such sequences and statements, I began to see glimmers of hope; hope for change and a better future. The sense of urgency to piece together the past is central in both cultural products and is implicitly linked to an urgent need to warn others.

As I discuss more fully in the next chapter, in order to move forward into the future, it is also important in Uruguay to construct and use places of memory to denounce and warn. This resonates with sociologist Estela Schindel's view on how memory sites in Latin America compares to those in France:

En el caso de los países latinoamericanos analizados aquí, que conocen tradiciones históricas e historiográficas muy distintas a las de Francia, el ímpetu por crear lugares consagrados a la memoria mantiene aún cierta cualidad urgente de denuncia o advertencia, y se propone incidir sobre las respectivas democracias en un gesto que surge del pasado pero se orienta al presente y el futuro. (67)⁹⁹

Although Schindel's statement concerns places consecrating memory, her claim can also be applied to Uruguayan texts and cultural products that seek to give collective memory a

⁹⁹ "In the case of the Latin American countries analyzed here, countries that have historical and historiographical traditions very different from those in France, the impetus to create places that consecrate memory still has a certain quality of denouncement and warning. They propose to highlight in the respective democracies a gesture that arises from the past but is oriented towards the present and the future" (my trans).

voice. As the journalist Walter in the film *Zanahoria* states, “*we must publish this story to prevent other unsuspecting dupes from falling into the same trap*” (my trans.; Buchichio 01:34:39-01:34:44; emphasis added). There is a sense of urgency in Uruguayan films, poetry and songs which denounce the violence of the military dictatorship, warning us of the dangers of falling into traps, and teaching us just how important it is to remember the past.

In Uruguay, the Law on the Expiration of the Punitive Claims of the State (la Ley de Caducidad de la Pretensión Punitiva del Estado) protects the military personnel involved in the crimes committed against humanity during the dictatorship of 1973-1985. Although this law has always been controversial, and many attempts have been made to revoke it, the Law of Expiration has succeeded in blocking and “prevent[ing] all investigations into and prosecutions of past atrocities” (Lessa 131). As Latin American scholar Francesca Lessa argues, transitional justice in Uruguay after the dictatorship was “characteristically Uruguayan” meaning that it “reflected several enduring features emblematic of this country such as negotiations, pacts, concern with stability and governability, and slow and conciliatory attitudes” (131). Lessa further highlights that this generated “an environment of complete impunity and top-down policies of silence for many years” (131). She concludes by reflecting on the long and difficult process towards truth and justice: “[i]ndeed, progress on truth and justice was blocked for a very long time by an impunity law, which prevented all investigations into and prosecutions of past atrocities; the first attempt at a truth commission only occurred 15 years after transition and the first criminal charges were successfully brought in 2002” (131). The late and slow “transition” to justice has deeply affected hundreds of Uruguayan families,

who after having suffered the disappearance of their relatives and the violation of their own human rights, since 1985 have also have had to deal with the new “democratic” government deliberately blocking any form of truth and justice in order to protect those responsible.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the literary, musical and filmic works produced in Uruguay during the post-dictatorship period profess an urgent and pressing need to excavate the past and find truth. Creative cultural products, fictional texts and films also step in since legislative texts are not yet willing to address the problem. As Edy Kaufman indicates in his article “The Role of the Political Parties in the Redemocratization of Uruguay,” in 1985 “The Colorados [right-wing political party] proposed a blanket amnesty out of fear that any other alternative would mean conflict, a sure confrontation between the Armed Forces and the civilian government, thus the weakening or collapse of democratic institutions” (43). This fear was re-enforced in a 1989 referendum that sought to remove the impunity law. In the end, the Law on the Expiration of the Punitive Claims of the State “was upheld by 53 percent of the voters” (Kaufman, “The” 44).¹⁰¹ In 2011, the

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed summary and analysis of the transitional period in Uruguay from 1985 - 2012, including the events leading up to the enactment of the Ley de Caducidad in 1986, and all of its ramifications including its impact in memory politics please see chapter 5 and 6 of *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against Impunity* by Francesca Lessa.

¹⁰¹ However, it is important to note that since 2002, some progress has been made in convicting ex-military personal for the kidnappings and killings of some of the “detained-disappeared,” as well as for recompensating the victims of state terror. For example, as Broquetas notes “in August 2000, the “Comisión para La Paz” (Commission for Peace) was formed under the orders of then President Jorge Battle, with the objective of investigating the whereabouts of the ‘detained-disappeared.’ [...] This was the first time that the Uruguayan State officially recognized the violations of human rights. [...] In October 2002, Juan Carlos Blanco - chancellor between 1973 and 1976 - was sentenced to prison for the forced disappearance of teacher Elena Quinteros. [...] In September 2006, for the first time, the Uruguayan justice system convicted ex-military José Gavazzo, Gilberto Vázquez, Jorge Silveira, Ricardo Arab, Ernesto Rama y Luis Maurente and the ex-police officers Ricardo Medina y Pedro Sande. The courts also ordered the imprisonment of ex-military Juan Antonio Rodríguez Buratti. [...] On the 17 of November 2006, Juan María Bordaberry was imprisoned. Bordaberry and the ex-chancellor Juan Carlos Blanco were convicted as coauthors of the homicides of Zelmar Michelini, Gutiérrez Ruiz and of MLN ex-militants Rosario Barredo y William Whitelaw. [...] In addition, in October 2006, a law to repair pension and pension rights to ‘citizens who could not access work for political or union reasons between February 9, 1973 and June 28, February 1985’, addressed some of the claims that the organizations that bring together the groups affected by State terrorism were fighting for” (my trans.; Broquetas, “Centro” 17-18).

Frente Amplio, now the governing party in Uruguay managed to pass bill number 18.381 which would classify the acts from the dictatorship as crimes against humanity and would permit cases to be brought to trial. However, in 2013 the Supreme Court revoked the law declaring it unconstitutional. Therefore, Uruguayan texts still function as alternatives narratives to understand the past, and in of way, bring justice to those who have been wronged. Uruguay finds itself in the process of uncovering the voids left in the past and using literature and the arts as a means to “fill in the gaps” and discuss the terrors that occurred from 1973-1985, which the legislative and judicial system have not been able to fully address.

To end this chapter, I will analyze an autobiographical novel created in response to the Uruguayan dictatorship by noted playwright Mauricio Rosencof. *Las cartas que no llegaron* (*The Letters that Never Came*), published in 2000, portrays the theme of absence and remembering the past in a unique way that brings together two continents, two different times periods and two traumatic historical events, the Holocaust and the Uruguayan military dictatorship. Playwright, poet, journalist and former “Tupamaro” (left-wing guerrilla) Mauricio Rosencof, born in Florida, Uruguay in 1933, is considered to be “a major figure in Contemporary Uruguayan culture” (Foster 431). During the dictatorship, he “became a symbol of a generation of silenced Uruguayan intellectuals” (430) and dedicated his life and writing to the fight against social injustice. In the post-dictatorship period, Rosencof returned “again and again to his memories of the time he was imprisoned in extremely hard conditions during the time of the dictatorship” (my trans.; Forné 46) in his texts, *Memorias del calabozo* (1987), *Conversaciones con la alpargata* (1989), *El bataraz* (1997) and *Las cartas que no llegaron*. The latter, his

autobiographical novel published in 2000, depicts the story of Moishe, the author, from his childhood to his days in prison during the dictatorship. It is important to emphasize that Moishe was Rosencof's Yiddish name as a child. Literary scholar Eugenio Claudio di Stefano in *The Vanishing Frame: Latin American Culture and Theory in the Postdictatorial Era* points out that the perspective used in the autobiographical novel is not that of a "Tupamaro," but rather the childhood perspective of someone trying to recuperative memories of his Jewish heritage. Di Stefano notes:

[A]lthough the world "Tupamaro" doesn't appear in the entire narrative, the word "Jew" does (1, 3); and even though the Uruguayan military regime is barely visible, there is a clear and detectable presence of the German SS (8). Instead of an autobiographical novel that provides some historical information on Rosencof's political activity and his subsequent imprisonment, his text focuses on two historical events that have no explicit relationship to his torture or Uruguay's military dictatorship. (61)

Di Stefano emphasizes how important it is that Rosencof does not foreground his Tupamaro involvement and activist past. He argues that what is most striking in the novel is "what is missing," "the narrator's preceding years as a Tupamaro or the leftist politics that put him into prison" (63-64). The critic highlights an "informational gap" present in the narrative. This time, unlike the intentional informational and pedagogical gaps instituted through the government's "politics of silence" as I later discuss, the gap is a conscious narrative decision made by Rosencof so that he can explore a subject that is central to him, which in a sense connects the two traumatic events that have shaped his life. Rosencof's use of a childhood perspective in the first section of his autobiographical

novel not only creates an “informational gap,” as many critics have noticed, it also changes the role of the reader. Anne Whitehead highlights how a childhood perspective in literature is often linked to a “hiatus” or “gap” in narratives. As Whitehead argues: “the limited insight of the child creates a hiatus in the text, which relies on the knowledge or imagination of the reader to fill in the gap, and to make sense of the narrative” (127). In the case of Rosencof’s text, the “hiatus” between the narrator’s childhood and his imprisonment is a gap that has to be filled by the reader.

Di Stefano also provides the readers with a useful road map of the storyline behind the novel:

The first [section of the novel] is the story of Rosencof’s early life, which primary revolves around his relationship with his father, Isaac. This narrative is told through the innocent eyes of a child, Moishe, the author’s Yiddish name. The second narrates events that happened to his aunt and speaks to her forced migration first to the Lublin ghetto in Poland and, from there, to Auschwitz and to Treblinka. This second story is presented vis-à-vis an imagined exchange of letters between his aunt and Rosencof’s father; these letters highlight his aunt’s unawareness of the horrors to come as she moves closer to the concentration camps, and towards her eventual death. (61)

Rosencof’s family history and his relative’s traumatic experience of the Holocaust envisioned through the “letters that never came” take centre stage in this text. Relying on his childhood memories, the narrator begins to piece together the past and search for his lost Jewish ancestors. However, Di Stefano does not just provide a summary of the autobiographical novel, he also gives the readers some of the “missing information” that

text purposefully excludes: “what is most striking in this section is exactly what is missing from it, as it never mentions the preceding years as a Tupamaro or the leftist politics that put him into prison” (63-64). By “filling in” this “hiatus” or “gap” Di Stefano assists the reader in connecting two of the traumatic events in Rosencof’s life. As he further suggests “Rosencof understands his prison experience in Uruguay as ‘reliving’ an old Holocaust experience in Europe [allowing] him to turn identity into a mechanism of resistance and solidarity that unites him with both family and others who share the same ‘blood’” (64). This literary critic highlights the central role absence plays in the novel as Rosencof seeks to maintain his voice of resistance and fight his own oppression.

Absence is also self-reflexively woven into the play on writing itself in the novel. While recalling his family life as a child, the protagonist-narrator centers his story on the letters (both real and imagined) his father received from his and his wife’s relatives in Poland, and on letters that Moishe¹⁰² himself desired to write to his parents while he was imprisoned, something that he could only do after his release. The centrality of the letters is referenced by various scholars, including essayist Ilan Stavans, who writes “While Rosencof was in captivity, a shadowy image kept popping into his head. ‘It was, of all people, the postman in our neighbourhood in Montevideo,’ he would later tell the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. The post man was a messenger of hope” (*Singer’s* 158). Rosencof grabs that sense of hope by finishing the correspondence his relatives started and writing fragmented texts of his own to survive his imprisonment.¹⁰³ He thus fills a typographical

¹⁰² I will address Rosencof’s narrator-character as Moishe to distinguish him from his role as the author.

¹⁰³ It is important to note that Rosencof also wrote from prison. As Ilan Stavans indicates in the introduction to the English translation of *Las cartas que no llegaron*, advertising his skills as a scribe, he would trade the writing of love letters and acrostics to the young soldiers for the stub of a pencil to write a few lines on cigarette paper (xiii). As Stavans further notes: “He would roll his tiny manuscripts up tightly

and psychological void (the lack of letters after his relatives were transferred to the ghetto in Lublin and then to Auschwitz and Treblinka), providing closure to their narrative by completing their correspondence in his autobiographical novel. Stavans elaborates: “Words link five generations of Rosencofs, the Old World to the New, the plight of a Uruguayan to that of Hitler’s victims, and his own struggles to theirs” (158). The novel is divided into three sections, each depicting the narrator at a different stage in his life. In each section we learn more about Rosencof’s roots, his Jewish relatives in Poland, and about the *imagined* correspondence that *never came*. As Stavans writes, in Uruguay the Rosencofs regularly received letters in Yiddish from their Polish relatives. These letters were enthusiastically received and “‘Papa would offer [the postman] a drink and excitedly take the letters he had brought.’ But suddenly those letters stopped coming. Rosencof’s father still waited for the postman, but the postman invariably arrived empty-handed. It was 1936 and of course, the Nazis had invaded Poland” (Introduction xiv).

Although adult-Moishe is imprisoned in a cell measuring two square meters (three feet by six), he still lets his imagination travel beyond the prison walls to survive the stifling isolation. As Stavans informs us: “Rosencof, who was accused of being a subversive and attempting against Uruguayan sovereignty, spent thirteen years in prison before regaining his freedom in 1985, with the return of the democracy to Uruguay and the declaration of an amnesty for political prisoners. Of those 13 years, 11½ were spent in solitary confinement and almost total inactivity” (*Singer’s* 157). Stavans goes on to elaborate on Rosencof’s inhumane living conditions during this time and on how the

and tuck them into the hems of his underwear. When his relatives took his dirty clothes home to be laundered, they knew to check for hidden notes” (xiii).

author managed to retain his humanity and voice of resistance. This is a voice that Stavans measures against silence: “But never, ever, did he capitulate to silence” (157). Rosencof did not want to fade away, away from his parents and from society. By continuing the correspondence that his aunt and other relatives would have sent from the ghetto and the concentration camps (Stavans 158) in his autobiographical novel, he tries to fill in the gaps in his family history and resist the oppressive regime. Although the letters and the novel itself were only written after he was liberated since he was not permitted to write from prison, an active imagination and some fragmented notes written during his imprisonment prevent his captors from silencing him, and from fading into silence. As Alfredo Alzugarat asserts in his book *Trincheras de papel: Dictadura y literatura carcelaria en Uruguay*: “[Rosencof’s] imagination was his main weapon, a capability that helped him to construct a universe where there was nothing but the certain risk of losing the thread of reality and to submerge himself in the hole of insanity” (my trans.; 82-83).

It is Moïshe’s struggle to maintain the memory of his family alive that keeps him alive as well. In Rosencof’s text, there are multiple gaps and voids present in the narrator’s letters that he writes to his father. The gap that exists between his world of confinement and the outside world becomes evident when he addresses this aspect in his imaginary conversation with his father:

Nos veíamos en la frontera, papá. La visita era la frontera entre el Afuera, ese afuera en el que no puedo entrarte, para sonreír en vos y en vos caminar por la vereda al sol, y este otro territorio, este enorme, infinito desierto en dos metros cuadrados, mi Más Acá. Y nos encontrábamos en esa línea divisoria de los

mundos, en la que vos llegabas al borde de mi universo para ver si aún estaba en órbita y eso para vos era como contemplar el sistema solar entero, y se te veía la sonrisa pequeñísima que te venía solo por verlo, por verme, entonces yo veía eso y no tu resto en el Afuera. (Rosencof, *Las* 144-145)¹⁰⁴

There is a gap between his father's outside world and his own; their worlds are separated by prison bars and the scar of Rosencof's imprisonment, but the narrator hints at the way in which their family struggles and his capture have connected them even more emotionally. The trace or "hint of a smile" (Rosencof, *The* 86) he sees on his father's face connects the two individuals. At various points, Moishe even imaginatively incarnates himself into his father and they become united.

By continuing the correspondence of the past and imagining he is his father, Rosencof in his "fictionalized" autobiographical novel uses the lens of a personal family history and memory to connect the horrors of the Holocaust and Uruguay's dictatorship. As scholar Anna Forné claims: "Rosencof en un intento por revisar la memoria de los perdidos, ficcionaliza la genealogía familiar y la memoria colectiva de los miles de inmigrantes al Cono Sur que escaparon de las cámaras de la muerte de la Alemania nazi, para una generación posterior perder a sus hijos en las máquinas de horror de las dictaduras" (54).¹⁰⁵ Many passages in the novel leave the reader thinking about how these

¹⁰⁴ All English quotations for this text are from Mauricio Rosencof's *The Letters that Never Came*, translated by Louise B. Popkin. "We'd see each other on the border, Papa. Our visits were a border between the Outside, that outside where I couldn't get inside you, to smile your smile or stroll in your shoes down the sunny street, and this other territory, my Inside, this vast, endless wasteland, three feet by six. We met on the dividing line between our worlds, you'd come all the way to the edge of my galaxy to see if I was still in orbit and for you, seeing me there was like contemplating the whole universe, you'd get that hint of a smile on your face just from seeing me, so then I saw that and not the rest of you on the Outside" (84-85).

¹⁰⁵ "Rosencof in an attempt to revise the memory of those lost, fictionizes his family's genealogy and the collective memory of thousands of immigrants to the Southern Cone, who escaped the death chambers of

two events that were experienced by those who emigrated from Europe to South America could be related in collective memory. As Di Stefano argues: “what makes Rosencof’s commitment to identity [...] especially pertinent is that it is not at all unique, but is informed by a larger memory project already taking place in the period when he writes. As Andreas Huyssen suggests, beginning in the 1980s, memory becomes the critical way of framing resistance to politics and violence across the globe” (65). It is through this poetic memory lens that Rosencof explores the suffering of his family in Europe, allowing him, in a way, to resist his own oppression at the hands of the Uruguayan regime. In an emotionally-laden passage, Moishe recalls his trip to Poland to find any traces of his family. On his trip he encounters Sofía, a Jewish woman who escaped the ghetto and who offers him her help, as he scours phone directories for traces of his relatives:

Con su índice lleno de las arrugillas del tiempo y los lentes sobre la punta de la nariz, fue recorriendo minuciosamente la “R”, con todas las variantes de la gramática, porque acá llevo “s” donde allá va con “z”, y el pequeño dedo de Sofía fue de arriba hacia abajo y luego el recorrido inverso, meticuloso entonces hizo un gesto así, y con una leve sonrisa que tenía algo de tristeza habitual y algo de “yo lo sabía, pero hay que hacerlo”, dijo “no..., no hay..., acá no hay”, y cerró el “directorio”, como le decía ella a la guía, que quedó sobre la mesita de mármol blanco, frío, lo uno y lo otro, como una lápida. (Rosencof, *Las* 97-98)¹⁰⁶

Nazi Germany, only to lose their children in the horror machines of the dictatorships a generation later” (my trans.).

¹⁰⁶ “With her index finger crisscrossed by the wrinkles of time and her glasses on the tip of her nose, Sophia searched carefully through the ‘R’s, checking every possible spelling, because where we spell with an ‘S’, over there they use a ‘Z.’ Her small finger moved down one column and up the next, painstakingly.

The search for any trace of his relatives in the Varsovian telephone book leaves Moishe with a sense of emptiness and absence that reminds us of Libeskind's commentary in Richard Copan's and Stan Neuman's third installment of *Architectures*. After the architect's visit to the Jewish cemetery in Weißensee, he meditates on the "absolute void" created by "the emptiness of these slabs or marble" (Copan 00:01:21-00:01:29) that were never engraved, but were as Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich writes "erected by wealthy families with the purpose of engraving and inscribing them with the names of future generations" (54). The metaphor of the phone book now also missing Rosencof's own name recalls the blank tombstones that were never engraved and can no longer be read by the family. The absence of Moishe's last name in the phone book transforms "the directory" into an empty gravestone making it indistinguishable from the white marble table on which it sits. Sofia, who already suspects that they will not find the last name she and Moishe are looking for, nonetheless tries, revealing a sense of hope still kindling inside of her. However, Moishe is hit with the coldness of coming to the realization that all of his family members have perished in the Holocaust. Rosencof chillingly ends the paragraph with the word "lápida" ("gravestone"), leaving an empty space between it and the next passage, a typographical void that illuminates the important role absence plays in structuring Moishe's narrative and deepens the sense of disappointment and anguish in the minds of the readers.¹⁰⁷ Although Moishe will continue his search for his ancestors by visiting the ghetto and remembering his father's life in Warsaw by "oxygenating" his

Then she shrugged her shoulders and with a faint smile that was a mixture of chronic sadness and resignation ('I knew it, but you have to try. '), she said 'No... there are none...none here.' And closing the 'directory,' as she called it, she left it on the little white marble table, both of them cold, like one gravestone on another" (56).

¹⁰⁷ Like Libeskind's use of architectural "Voids," this typographical void in Rosencof's original Spanish text forces the reader to stare into silence or emptiness. It is worth noting that in the English translation this typographical void is absent.

lungs with the same air that his father once breathed (Rosencof, *Las* 98), the emptiness he feels extends throughout the text.

This absence is perhaps most profoundly felt when Moishe goes to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum to find any evidence that his family members were there. In vain he combs through the excess of objects, hoping to find a personal item or family trace:

y esa puertita semicircular era igualita, del mismo modelo, modelo de época que vi cuando fui al *stetale* en busca de alguna huella y tuve que rebotar a Auschwitz porque fija que para allí habían marchado, también en tren, y busqué en las vitrinas enormes donde se apilaban las valijas con el nombre de los que fueron y allí no estaba el nuestro, y fui a la vitrina donde había una montaña de brochas de afeitar y tal vez alguna enjabonó el rostro del abuelo o del tío, y fui a otra vitrina y las montañas eran de pelo para fabricar fieltro para las botas alemanas y allí estaría la prima, niña, muy niña, y la abuela y qué sé yo, y los montes de zapatitos del niño, y basta, papá, nada, y bajé al horno crematorio, que no recuerdo bien, creo que eran tres, y lo que yo te quería decir, nada más, pero me salió todo lo que no te iba a decir, lo que te quería decir es que la forma, el sistema, de la puerta del horno, era como el de la plancha que trajo mamá, igualita, pero más grande, más pesada, total, de hierro. (Rosencof, *Las* 91-92; emphasis in original)¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ “And that little semicircular door was exactly like the one I saw – same model, they were the style back then – when I went looking for some trace of us in the *shtetle* and I wound up in Auschwitz, because I was sure that was where everyone had gone, on another train trip, and I searched the huge glass cases, the piles of luggage with all the names of the people who went there, but I didn’t find ours, and I looked at the mound of shaving brushes in another case, maybe one of them lathered my grandpa’s face, or my uncle’s, and the mounds of hair like those the Germans used to make felt for their boots, and that’s where our baby cousin must have been, that tiny little girl, and Grandma too, and what can I say, Papa, there were piles of baby shoes, and – enough of this! – I didn’t find a thing, and then I went down to the crematorium and I

Moishe's recollection of his visit to Auschwitz highlights the personal connection he has with this place. Like Weiss, he was not interned at Auschwitz, but visits after the Holocaust. Also like Weiss, the narrator catalogues objects. Moishe, however, goes beyond the poetry of description and cataloguing to consider how these artifacts could function as important memory objects that offer keys to his past. These artifacts are also palimpsests, pointing to and giving birth to new memories. For example, the crematorium door brings back Moishe's memory of his mother's iron, a precious object he keeps in his bookshelf. Here, we are reminded of Peter Weiss's own narrative, as Rosencof in fact describes many of the same features as Weiss, the barracks, the bunkbeds, the stage for the band, the sign; but Rosencof's account focuses on a very personal desire to find traces of his relatives. For him, any shaving brush could have belonged to his grandfather, and any hair could be a remnant of his grandmother or cousin.

Furthermore, the uncanny ghostly presence that Weiss detects in his visit to Auschwitz is felt by Moishe as well, but experienced differently. In Rosencof's account, the uncanny presence is read as a sign of hope, a sign that he can find his relatives. As he describes when walking through the barracks: "Y yo siento algo: 'Acá estuvieron, acá están'. Hay en el corredor una galería de fotografías de rostros famélicos, están enmarcados y cuelgan en línea. Debajo llevan el nombre, que reviso uno por uno" (105-106).¹⁰⁹ The "Holocaustal uncanny" in both accounts connects the past with the present,

saw the ovens (I'm not sure but I think there were three), and what I meant to tell you, the rest came out but all I meant to say is that the doors on those ovens – their shape, the way they worked – were just like the one on the iron Mama brought with her, exactly the same, only much bigger, much heavier, ironclad, conclusive" (52).

¹⁰⁹ "And I get this feeling: 'Here's where they were, here's where they are.' Out in the corridor, the walls are lined with photos, of gaunt faces, all framed and hanging in rows. Each one has a name at the bottom, and I go through them one by one" (61).

but in this novel, it also serves to provide hope to a family member who wants to recover his genealogical memory and his family history. The urgent need to find the truth behind his relatives' death connects this novel to other Uruguayan literary works that seek to excavate the past as well. As Forné highlights in her article on Rosencof's *Las cartas que no llegaron*, the use of photographs (referencing in particular the photo album of Rosencof's Polish family members placed at the end of the novel and used as a narrative element) is an aesthetic strategy that in the context of the post-dictatorship period in the Southern Cone is associated with a real cultural practice, the circulation of the photographs of the disappeared that were carried in the marches initiated by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, used to bring the disappeared to life (my trans.; 51). The use of photography also connects the two historical events in an implicit way, allowing the narrative to link the trauma of the Holocaust to the protagonist's own trauma related to the Uruguayan dictatorship. Knowing that his ancestors also "disappeared" during the Holocaust, Moishe fears his own disappearance as well. Since he was being held as a "hostage" by the Uruguayan Armed Forces (Stavans, Introduction xii) he knew he could be executed at their will or could die due to the brutal living conditions he had to endure. Moishe's fear of disappearing is recounted in the text when he describes a cat he had as a child, and the spot on his fur that could be used to identify him in case he went missing. Ironically, the narrator wishes he had that same spot (Rosencof, *Las* 149), so he could be tracked down if he disappeared as well.

Moreover, through his continued imaginary conversations with his father in his letters, the protagonist delves into his past in order to recover more memories. Due to the lack of a common language there was also a void in communication between the two

generations, between father and son. What was initially a language barrier later became a physical one when the narrator was imprisoned. This physical divide fuelled a need in him to seek out more memories of his ancestors and more information about his family.

The imagined conversations helped bridge this gap and overcome these barriers:

¿Y por qué te escribo hoy todo esto, Viejo? No sé. Tal vez para decirte lo que me acuerdo y, más que nada, decirte lo que me acuerdo para que veas lo poco que sé, que quiero saber más, que quiero más memorias, más de la tuya, contame, tenemos que hablar. [...] No teníamos, Viejo, un idioma común claro. Ni vos tenías un español de charla ni yo pasé de cuatro frases en yiddish. [...] Y hoy, fijate, todo lo que te faltó por contar, por contarme, tal vez no te importaba contar, o no te importaba porque a mí no me importaba; pero ahora sí, contame. (69)¹¹⁰

Here, we are reminded of how in W.G. Sebald's text *Austerlitz* also struggles with the memories from his childhood past. However, Moishe is asking to have more memories of his childhood, more memories that will connect him with his family during this difficult time. The pattern, however, is similar. Both characters struggle with the problem of regaining their Jewish roots and of having a fuller sense of who they are. As literary scholar Anna Forné argues, photographs, texts, letters, even place names provide valuable traces and clues: a “materiality of memory” is palimpsestically used to anchor Moishe's search for identity:

¹¹⁰ “I’m not sure why I’m writing you all this today, *Viejo*. Maybe it’s so you’ll know what I remember but especially, so you’ll know what I remember and realize how little I know. I want to know more, Papa, I want more memories, more of your memories, you have to tell me more, we need to talk. [...] We didn’t have a language in common, you and I. You couldn’t get very far in Spanish, and I never learned more than a few words of Yiddish. [...] Today, right now, I want you to tell me all the things you never talked about, or never told me, or maybe didn’t consider worth telling, or didn’t consider worth telling because neither did I.” (37-38; emphasis in original)

La materialidad de la memoria tiene un lugar destacado en las historias que se superponen en forma de un palimpsesto en *Las cartas que no llegaron*. Es el protagonista quien desde el calabozo intenta reconstruir su identidad con base en objetos, personajes y espacios vinculados con su propia infancia en Montevideo, además de la historia de los descendientes judíos en Polonia, desde el tiempo antes de que sus padres emigraran hasta el exterminio unos pocos años después. Puesto que el protagonista no tiene un idioma en común con sus propios padres ni con sus familiares polacos, y asimismo carece de una memoria genealógica debido a los muchos silencios familiares, será en la materialidad de la memoria — lugares, nombres, palabras específicas, cartas y fotos— donde anclará su búsqueda identitaria. (50)¹¹¹

Material aspects related to memory and memory formation, such as photographs, become the main resource that the protagonist has to reconstruct his family history, but most importantly his own identity as well. The connection to his family's past helps him survive the brutal present he is experiencing and aids in the building of his identity. The voids created by the Holocaust have in a way travelled through multiple generations and now resonate with the author who has been forced into a physical and psychological black hole of solitary confinement as a political prisoner.

¹¹¹ “The materiality of memory has a prominent space in the stories that are superimposed in a palimpsestic manner in *Las cartas que no llegaron*. The protagonist, from the dungeon, attempts to reconstruct his identity based on objects, persons and spaces related to his childhood in Montevideo, and to the story of his Jewish descendants in Poland, from the time preceding his parents' emigration to their extermination a few years later. Since the protagonist does not have a common language with his parents or with his Polish relatives, and also lacks a genealogical memory due to the many silences kept by the family, he will anchor the search for his identity in the materiality of memory: places, names, specific words, letters and photographs” (my trans.).

While Rosencof uses this narrative and the imaginary correspondence to return to his roots on a personal quest to discover who he is, his text only three years after its original publication was brought to a wider audience and adapted into a play by Raquel Diana and Rosencof himself. In addition, Rosencof's text over the years has been used in a variety of educational contexts; it has helped many and has also inspired me to rethink my past, memory and identity. Today, Rosencof's autobiographical novel is frequently used as part of a new pedagogy, integrated into the college curricula in many countries. For example, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem uses the text in a course on Jewish writers in Latin America and the Universidad de El Salvador utilizes it in seminars in the literature and philosophy faculty.¹¹² In Uruguay, one of the private universities in Montevideo, Universidad ORT Uruguay has also used Rosencof's autobiographical text in linguistics master classes, inviting students to also continue adding to the imaginative prose by changing the punctuation and syntax and examining how these changes could foster a deeper understanding of the material.¹¹³ In addition, the Uruguyan Ministry of Education and Culture has promoted the text in an article in the third volume of the National Library's publication *Lo que los archivos cuentan* (What the Archives Tell).¹¹⁴ In this essay on the stage adaption of the autobiographical novel, Gabriela Sosa San

¹¹² See Florinda Goldberg's syllabus *Jewish Writers in Latin America*, available online at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's website: <http://shnaton.huji.ac.il/index.php/NewSyl/29844/2/2014/> and Marina L. Guidotti's syllabus on The Literature of Ibero-American States at the University of El Salvador, available at http://fleo.usal.edu.ar/archivos/fleo/docs/2017_programa_letras_-_seminario_lit_iberamericana_-_tn.pdf

¹¹³ This master class is described in the article "Una experiencia de interacción disciplinaria" by Ana Solari, published in 2004 in the second issue of *Jornadas de reflexión académica*. The essays in this issue published by the Faculty of Communication and Design were originally presented at the conference "Jornadas de Reflexión Académica de la Facultad de Comunicación y Diseño."

¹¹⁴ The article published in 2014 in the third issue of this journal is entitled "Epistolaridad, autoficción y puesta en escena Versiones de *Las cartas que no llegaron*, de Mauricio Rosencof" by Gabriela Sosa San Martín.

Martín makes the important point that “literature transforms itself in a permanent manner by linking the history of the individual to the collective” (“La literatura se transforma en la manera permanente de vincularse con la historia individual y colectiva”) (my trans.;195). This further suggests how Rosencof’s private and personal history intersects with the collective and becomes universal. Forné also recognizes the importance of re-transmitting traumatic experiences as part of forging a new “emotional community” when she references Michel Pollak’s work on memory:

En sus trabajos sobre la producción social de identidades en situaciones límite, Michel Pollak ha demostrado que la necesidad de narrar sobre una experiencia extrema está vinculada no solamente al acto de testimoniar, sino también al deseo y a la necesidad de reestablecer los lazos sociales, de recuperar la comunidad emocional perdida a causa de las experiencias y los acontecimientos monstruosos. (Forné 53)¹¹⁵

By writing about the voids present in his family history as a result of the Holocaust, Rosencof is able to not only recover a part of his past through the genre of fiction, but more importantly he reaches out to and recovers a larger “emotional community” and resists political oppression in his own country.

My reading of the texts studied in this chapter including *Las cartas que no llegaron* emphasizes how important it is to return to these voices of resistance, excavating the voids left in the Uruguayan collective memory regarding the dictatorship. In her discussion of the research findings publicized in a documentary film, Uruguayan scholar

¹¹⁵ “In his works on the social productions of identities in extreme situations, Michel Pollak has demonstrated that the need to narrate about an extreme experience is associated, not only with the act of bearing witness, but also with the desire and need to re-establish social links, to recover the emotional community lost by monstrous events and experiences” (my trans).

Mariana Achugar, in her book *Discursive Processes of Intergenerational Transmission of Recent History: (Re)making Our Past*, notes the voids left in the collective memory of the new generation in Uruguay in regard to the dictatorship and explores the subject of narrative, collective memory and identity formation in Uruguayan youth in the post-dictatorship period. She studies how the category of narrative can be used as a socio-cultural framework to connect individual discourses with collective memory, arguing that it is a “key semiotic mediational tool” (16). She also studies how youth re-appropriate texts that talk about the dictatorship to understand this part of the nation’s past and examines how it influences their identity formation, important because of the young generation’s general lack of knowledge and “lack of transmission” about this historical period today (as shown in the documentary film):

In the year 2000, Teve Ciudad – a public TV station run by the city of Montevideo in Uruguay – produced a documentary directed by Aldo Garay in which youth were interviewed to learn what they knew about the dictatorship. Despite the short time that had elapsed since the end of the dictatorship in 1985, most of the youth were not able to identify the period, nor explain what had happened. This “lack of transmission” has been related to the policies of oblivion that limited public discussion, as well as political and judicial resolution of the traumatic past. (15)

The “lack of transmission” of information about the regime due to the “policies of oblivion” leads to a collective void left in the nation’s youth, who has no memory or information regarding this event. Unlike Rosencof’s “intentional hiatus” in his narrative, this void has detrimental consequences for the Uruguayan youth, but also for our global

effort to remember the past and not repeat traumatic events. In an age of over-information (as Benjamin described earlier in the twentieth-century in his essay on “The Storyteller”), here we find the reverse - information has been suppressed, hidden. Thus, the urgency of using narrative or storytelling in the literary imagination to step in to “fill the gap.” As Achugar notes, narratives become important tools that help us connect our individual memories and discourses about the past with collective ones (16).¹¹⁶

In conclusion, the various texts analyzed in this chapter highlight the gaps, voids and absences felt in Uruguayan society, either at a collective or individual level, as a result of the political terror brought upon by the military coupe in the 1970s. Ending this chapter with Mauricio Rosencof’s *Las cartas que no llegaron*, a text that examines the open wounds of the Holocaust and the Uruguayan dictatorship, two traumatic historical events that I use to frame this thesis, almost seems surreal. However, the existence of such a text asserts my belief in the importance of this project and in the value of literature to help heal traumas, personal and/or collective.

¹¹⁶ As Achugar writes: “Narratives have a cultural history that makes processes of intergenerational transmission social, even beyond moment-to-moment interactions (Wertsch, 1987). In this sense, narratives are collective tools that have evolved sociohistorically [...] [and] are included in a system of social relations (Wertsch, 1987)” (16).

Chapter Four

The Memory of Urban Spaces: The *Museum of Memory* giving Voice to Uruguay's Recent Traumatic Past

In this chapter, I will examine the Centro Cultural Museo de la Memoria (MUME) (the Cultural Center Museum of Memory) in Montevideo, Uruguay and will consider its role, along with the Memorial de los Detenidos Desparecidos (Memorial of the Detained-Disappeared) in representing collective memory in the city landscape. I will draw comparisons between the MUME and the Jewish Museum Berlin in relation to the artefacts they hold, the exhibitions they display, the narratives they provide and the architectural designs of both buildings. This will allow me to further understand how each society portrays their recent traumatic pasts in their urban spaces.

In the preface to his book *Espacios de la memoria: Lugares y paisajes de la cultura uruguaya* Fernando Aínsa draws attention to the fact that “space is never innocent” (5), as it has memory: “El espacio tiene memoria, la nuestra individual y la colectiva que se ha acumulado a través de episodios significativos de la historia y de las sucesivas expresiones literarias, pictóricas y arquitectónicas que lo han caracterizado” (5).¹¹⁷ Spaces have gained memory through the historical events transpiring in them and through the literary, artistic and architectural representations related to them. Although space, more specifically spaces in cities can refer to any space or place where a significant historical event has occurred and crystallized in the collective and individual

¹¹⁷ “Space has memory, our individual and collective one that has been accumulating through the significant episodes of history and the subsequent literary, pictorial and architectural expressions that have characterized it” (my trans.).

memory of the people who experienced or read about it, museums and memorials are also an integral part of those spaces that have memory. The role of memory and urban space has been thoroughly discussed by several scholars. Crucial here is Pierre Nora's well-known concept "*lieux de mémoire*," translated as "realms or sites of memory." According to Nora, *lieux de mémoire* have become prominent in society "because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory" (7). As Nora argues, the more we rely on critical history, the more we externalize memory, recording it and archiving it, the less we experience it spontaneously from the inside, leading to the transformation of "true memory" into *lieux de mémoire* (13). Scholars Uta Staiger and Henriette Steiner further clarify this concept: "In compensation for such a loss [of the 'un-self-conscious' nature of memory], [Nora] argues, societies feel an enhanced need to crystallize collective memory in symbolically charged sites and objects" (6). According to these two scholars, Nora's pessimistic outlook on the role we have given to history and the subsequent transformation that has occurred to memory has led to a more intense study of memory, and a new view of places of memory. Staiger and Steiner write:

Nora has thus played an important role in the increasingly intense battle fought over the alleged vacuity of the urban memory industry [because his *lieux de mémoire* only occur due to the loss of *milieux de mémoire*, the environmental context of collective memory]. But he is also representative of a trend to quasi-sacralize memory, endowing it not only with an aura of (lost) authenticity but with a spiritual or almost sacred dimension- a 'therapeutic alternative to historical discourse.' (6)

Nora has provided a fertile ground from which urban memory practices can be re-examined, fuelling the desire to study *lieux de mémoire*. The last sentence Staiger and Steiner mention has been elaborated on by Kerwin Lee Klein in his article, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” and has become an inspirational nodal point for my research project. As Klein argues memory practices emerge as an alternative to historical discourse due to the “postmodern reckonings of history as the marching black boot and of historical consciousness as an oppressive fiction” (145). Memory has become an alternative tool, a crucial element in our remembrance of the past. In addition, memory places are also instrumental in shaping our view of the past. As Andreas Huyssen argues:

Many of the most compelling projects to nurture and to secure public memory involve interventions in urban space. This is only natural, because cities remain the main battleground on which societies articulate their sense of time past and time present. Once embodied in memorial sites as active parts within an urban fabric, remembrance of traumatic events seems less susceptible to the vagaries of memory. Memory thus has a chance to inscribe itself into history, to be codified into national consciousness. (*Present* 101)

As many scholars have noted, urban landscapes provide a place where memory can be inscribed into the collective consciousness of today, also speaking to future generations. However, it is important to point out that although as Huyssen argues “remembrance of traumatic events seems less susceptible to the vagaries of memory” (101) once they are posited in the urban fabric of the city, this does not mean that those places and the memory inscribed in them are not subject to changes made in the urban landscape, to

shifts in governmental policies or the views of subsequent generations.¹¹⁸ These factors must be taken into account when discussing memory practices related to urban spaces. Staiger and Steiner further articulate this when meditating on the importance of physical places in memory culture:

The city provides an abiding frame for urban life and establishes concrete sites of encounter with the past. Changes to the urban fabric therefore always carry with them both conflicting interpretations of the past and desires for the future.

Whether as a site of institutionalized memory, as a host to ephemeral or even immaterial urban topoi of remembrance, or as a key stimulus to artists and writers, the built environment of urban centres occupies a focal position in and for our memory culture. (1-2)

Although spaces are not living beings that can actually remember past events, what is crucial is how we use those spaces and what people experience in them or experience as a result of interacting with them and also what leaves a mark on urban spaces and on the collective memory of the society inhabiting them. Furthermore, newly constructed spaces such as museums can be used to develop new memories about the past:

Los museos son también “lugares de memoria” (según el término acuñado por Pierre Nora en 1984) que refieren tanto a objetos como a espacios (sean estos naturales o artificiales), lugares materiales, simbólicos y funcionales, en sus tres aspectos que siempre coexisten; en este caso, la dimensión tangible e intangible

¹¹⁸ For more information see Elizabeth Jelins’s article “Public Memorialization in Perspective: Truth, Justice and Memory of Past Repression in the Southern Cone of South America.”

(la testimonial) permite la experiencia sensorial, la elaboración abstracta para comprender el pasado o por lo menos conocer parte de él. (Sosa González 83)¹¹⁹

This chapter uses the case study of the Museum of Memory in Montevideo as an example of Uruguay's attempt to remember its recent traumatic past and extend into the future the nation's collective memory regarding political events from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.

Returning to the concept of “spaces with memory,” in the case of the Museo de la Memoria, which opened to the public in 2007, we should notice that the building that is now the central exhibition place of the museum and the four-acre park surrounding it has formed part of the Uruguayan collective memory since the nineteenth century. It was first used as a summer home by the former dictator of Uruguay, Máximo Santos, known as the representative of militarism of the nineteenth century and as the dictator of that period (1882-1886) (“El Edificio”). The property on which the MUME operates is now a national historical monument and has, in a sense, been re-appropriated by the city of Montevideo and its residents as a space for reflection on the country's recent past and their fight for human rights. As David Martin-Jones and María Soledad Montañez indicate:

Although this museum does not directly memorialize a physical space associated with the recent dictatorship (since it is housed in the summer residence of a dictator from the nineteenth century), it very deliberately recreates and reconstructs the social turmoil of the dictatorship by assembling fragments and

¹¹⁹ “Museums are also ‘places of memory’ [*lieux de mémoire*] (according to Pierre Nora in 1984) that refer both to objects and spaces (either natural or artificial), material, symbolic and functional places, in their three aspects that always coexist; in this case, the tangible and intangible dimension (the testimonial) allows the sensory experience, the abstract elaboration in order to understand the past or at least know part of it” (my trans.).

scraps of the past that, while unable to generate a totalizing image of the period, indicate the existence of a history of organized social activism, protest, and resistance. (74-75)

This way of using scraps and fragments to try to build a more holistic continuous narrative image of the country's past, also seen through the use of micro-narratives of carefully curated artifacts, is further highlighted by the director of the museum, Elbio Ferrario. He states:

En este sitio se instaló el Museo de la Memoria tratando de vincular, y es lo que estamos haciendo, la última dictadura nuestra con las otras dictaduras también que tuvimos en el país, exhibiendo esa continuidad. [...] [L]a misión del Museo de la Memoria es la construcción de un espacio en la ciudad de Montevideo para la construcción de la memoria del pasado reciente. Y la promoción de los derechos humanos en todas sus vertientes. (Casanova 00:00:38-00:01:02)¹²⁰

As reflected in the mission statement, the city of Montevideo wants the MUME to be a physical space where the dictatorship of the twentieth century and the people who resisted it can be remembered, but also a didactic space where new generations can learn about their nation's past and help construct its history: "Esa es la puesta básica de nuestra concepción museológica. Que sea la propia comunidad la que construya el relato [del museo]" (00:03:44-00:03:52).¹²¹ The director Elbio Ferreira also informs us that the museum is created out of archival material that the public themselves brings to them (my

¹²⁰ "At this site the Museo de la Memoria has been established, trying to link, and this is what we are doing, our last dictatorship with the others that the country has also experienced, exhibiting that continuity [...] The mission of the Museo de la Memoria is the construction of a space in the city of Montevideo for the construction of the memory of the recent past. And the promotion of human rights in all of its branches" (my trans.).

¹²¹ "That is the basic setting of our museological concept. To have the community itself be the one who constructs the narrative of the museum" (my trans.).

trans.; 00:01:08-00:01:12). Hence, the artifacts on display have been donated by community members who want to share their personal memory of the dictatorship with the rest of society. This further highlights the intertwined aspects of individual and collective memory and the interactive mission of this urban space of memory.

History professor Ana María Sosa González also reflects on the museum's pedagogical position in her article "El museo de la memoria en Uruguay: Algunas reflexiones en torno a los procesos de patrimonialización de memorias traumáticas:" "el objetivo central es no sólo la reivindicación memorial sino también la dimensión pedagógica. Se trata de propuestas que colocan la defensa de los derechos humanos en un lugar destacado, valiéndose de la enseñanza que esas memorias traumáticas pueden –y "deben"– dejar a las generaciones futuras" (82).¹²² The notion that these traumatic memories can, but most importantly must be transmitted to future generations ties in with the literary and musical works analyzed in the previous chapter. While these texts can also be seen to "fill in the gaps" left by official history about what happened from 1973-1985, the museum reflects this tendency as well through its emphasis on the resistance against the dictatorship, its focus on the disappeared, and its goal of educating the youth regarding the violations of human rights. An example of this pedagogical role can be seen through the educational programs coordinated by the museum:

En particular esta la actividad educativa que se hace con los centros educativos, con las escuelas, liceos, [...] tenemos una confluencia importante de unos seis mil, siete mil alumnos que vienen por año, que se hacen además talleres

¹²² "The main objective is not only the memorial vindication, but also the pedagogical dimension. It is about proposals that place the defense of human rights in a prominent place, using the teaching that these traumatic memories can - and 'must' - leave to future generations" (my trans.).

complementarios a la visita con el objetivo que los muchachos reflexionen sobre lo que vieron y hagan sus propios aportes, *pongan su voz en la memoria*. (Casanova 00:03:02-00:03:30; emphasis added).¹²³

Although reaching out to 6000 to 7000 students per year, might seem a small number, less than 1% of the city's population,¹²⁴ this audience is not insignificant as it is the youth, the future of the country and the future carriers of our collective memory.

Furthermore, Ferreiro's emphasis on the museum's goal of inviting the youth to "add their own contribution" to the memory work being accomplished here, encouraging them to "add their voice to memory," is the most important aspect of these educational visits and workshops.

With this objective of teaching the youth in mind, the Museo de la Memoria thus becomes a *lieu de mémoire* in the sense that it allows the collective memory of this past to live on, to be transmitted to the future, to be visible again and not left behind. This *lieu de mémoire*, as an interactive and community-orientated history museum, works to undo what History and the school curriculum have done to under-educate the youth regarding this matter. It is not enough to let memory be interior and private; in this case, the externalization and archiving of memory in spaces such as the MUME benefits society instead of undermining it. As Nora argues, historical accounts have often suppressed and "annihilated" the past, whereas *lieux de mémoire* provide "spontaneous" encounters and reframings:

¹²³ "In particular, we have the educative activity that we do with the education centers, with the schools and the high schools, [...] we have an important confluence of about six thousand, seven thousand students who come per year, we also have workshops complementing the visit with the objective of having the kids reflect on what they saw, so that they can make their own contributions, *add their voices to memory*" (my trans; emphasis added).

¹²⁴ According to the census in 2011, Uruguay had a population of 3,286,314. 1,319,108 lived in the department (province) of Montevideo ("Censos 2011").

At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it. At the horizon of historical societies, at the limits of the completely historicized world, there would occur a permanent secularization. History's goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place. A generalized critical history would no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments - that is to say, the materials necessary for its work - but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de mémoire*. In the end, a society living wholly under the sign of history could not, any more than could a traditional society, conceive such sites for anchoring its memory. (9; emphasis in original)

Uruguayan governments since 1985 have often sought to erase the memory of the trauma thousands of people experienced during the twelve years of military rule as discussed in the previous chapter. An example of this is the Punta Carretas Penitentiary that was converted into a shopping mall in the 1990s as part of the project to upgrade the Punta Carretas zone. Most historians have argued that the new mall did not preserve many markers of its past and is an example of cultural amnesia, demonstrating how the politics of memory has been used to “erase” or obscure memory in public spaces (my trans.; Broquetas, “Memoria” 233).¹²⁵ This is why Nora's emphasis on the need for memory and

¹²⁵ Literary scholar Cara Levey, however, argues that although the Punta Carretas shopping mall does not have a “plaque to mark Punta Carretas's former function” (215), some of the original features, such as the main entrance door and façade, still remain and function as visual memory traces of the past. As she further argues: “For the individuals who were detained and tortured there, or for the families of the disappeared, as well as residents in the busy neighbourhood where the former prison was a well-known landmark, the contradictions are perhaps more evident” (215). In my view, these “original features” are not enough to convey the palimpsestic layers of the place to younger generations that did not experience these events. For example, I only discovered the previous function of my favourite shopping mall when I began to do research for this project.

history to work together so that the *lieux de mémoire* do not disappear as well is so crucial. Ana María Sosa González explores this subject in more detail, arguing: “Con la asunción al poder en varios países de grupos opositores a los regímenes dictatoriales de entonces se viene procesando una serie de quebrantamientos de aquellos ‘pactos de silencio’” (84).¹²⁶ Breaking these “pacts of silence” means allowing these *lieux de mémoire* to take on a prominent role in remembering and re-voicing the past. As Argentine sociologist Jens Andermann further elaborates:

Especially, at times when official and legal recognition, let alone prosecution, of state-orchestrated crimes against humanity was being delayed or actively aborted by the authorities, memory activism would often draw on the power of place, either through ephemeral or permanent interventions into the urban fabric or through the reclaiming of former “sites of atrocity” as places for memory. (5)

The Museo de la Memoria is only one example of the many forms that “memory voices” can take so that the silence is shattered, and the memory of the past may not be forgotten intentionally or unintentionally.

The Museo de la Memoria “voices” the memory of Uruguay’s last dictatorship through various permanent and temporary exhibitions, educational activities and workshops. Created on October 17, 2006, it was inaugurated on December 10, 2007 (which is the International Day for Human Rights) and is a part of the Department of Culture of the Municipality of Montevideo (“Parque”). Although, the building is not very big in comparison to other museums, the exhibitions are spread throughout the former

¹²⁶ “With the groups that opposed the dictatorial regimes of the past now assuming power in various countries, there is a series of breaches of those ‘pacts of silence’” (my trans.).

summer house and the surrounding park. The building itself features six rooms with different permanent displays: “‘La Instauración de la Dictadura’, ‘La Resistencia Popular’, ‘Las Cárceles’, ‘El Exilio’, ‘Los Desaparecidos’, ‘La Recuperación Democrática’ y la ‘Lucha por Verdad y Justicia’, e incluso ‘Historias Inconclusas y Nuevos Desafíos’” (“Parque”; Sosa González 90).¹²⁷ The museum, as an interactive space and institution, also annually posts a “call for exhibitions” on their website, inviting community members to submit artworks to form part of their temporary exhibition space. The fact that many of the artifacts are “left in the open” in the museum space, meaning that they are not walled off with plexiglass, so that the visitor can touch them, such as the dangling cooking pots or the prisoners’ jumpsuits, further highlights the interactive element of this institution. Moreover, the property in its entirety is meant to be actively explored. On the one hand, it houses the Cultural Centre Museum of Memory (Centro Cultural Museo de la Memoria MUME); and on the other hand, it provides a public space for people to come and explore the park. As the museum advertises in one of their pamphlets: “The open gates invite the public to explore the long and straight path that leads to the summer villa where Máximo Santos resided” (my trans.; “Parque”). The pamphlet highlights several of the property’s features. There is not only a park that preserves more than eighty exotic plant species, there is also a greenhouse, caves for children to play in, and a private zoo on the far grounds of the property, and of course the MUME (“Parque”). This enticing information can be interpreted as a marketing strategy that invites people to see this space as an open, interactive museum, without the somber

¹²⁷ “‘The Establishment of the Dictatorship’, ‘The Popular Resistance’, ‘The Prisons’, ‘Exile’, ‘The Disappeared’, ‘The Democratic Recovery’, and ‘The Struggle for Truth and Justice’, and even ‘Unfinished Stories and New Challenges’” (my trans.).

feeling of coming into a space that revisits the horrors of the country's past. As the pamphlet further states, one is actively encouraged to explore the museum grounds and green space: "El parque se puede disfrutar a sol y a sombra, recorriendo las sendas que permiten apreciar las 84 especies vegetales (como palmeras Butiá, Araucarias, Árbol de papel, palmeras Washintonia, Palo Borracho, Santa Rita y Magnolias, entre otros) y los detalles de las construcciones que hacen al conjunto del diseño paisajístico de este espacio" ("Parque").¹²⁸

We can compare this green space to the Museum Garden by Kollhoff and Ovaska that forms part of the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Also envisioned as a place of reflection and relaxation, the garden has several attractive features: "The starkly geometrical garden design includes an arcade, a small cluster of plane trees, and a circular fountain of red granite in the back section. [...] The garden is also the site of the Sunday concerts [in the museum's] popular Jazz in the Garden series, part of [their] Cultural Summer Program" ("Our"). The integration of these natural spaces where people can relax and reflect on their experience before or after visiting the museums is, in my opinion, very effective in either attracting more visitors or prolonging their stay so that awareness and self-reflective thinking can occur within the space of the museum. In both cases, the gardens can be visited free of charge. However, it must be noted that the main focus of the MUME information pamphlet is on the museum as a space to reflect on Uruguay's past. It begins by stating the museum's purpose and location, circling back to it at the end, and even mentioning the new Centro Cultural Zelmar Michelini, which belongs to the

¹²⁸ "The park can be enjoyed in the sun or in the shade; you can walk the paths that allow you to appreciate 84 species of plants (such as Butiá palms, Araucarias, Paper tree, Washintonia palms, Palo Borracho, Santa Rita and Magnolias, among others) and take in the details of the constructions that make up the landscape design of this space" (my trans.).

Foundation of the same name (“Parque”) and opened its doors on April 16, 2012 (“Inaguración”). Zelmar Michelini was a legislator who along with Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz, was kidnapped and murdered in Buenos Aires in 1976 (“Zelmar”) for opposing the military regime in place at the time. The Center, which is housed in Santos’s former housekeepers’ building, was renovated and converted into a Museum and Archive focusing on Michelini’s trajectory and the historical period surrounding his life (“Archivo”); it also features a Library dedicated to his wife, Elisa Delle Pianne, containing a wide collection of books about Human Rights that was donated to the FZM (Fundación Zelmar Michelini) by their son, Felipe Michelini (“Biblioteca”). This new center expands on the subject explored by the MUME, focusing on a famous figure to further encourage new conversations about the last dictatorship in Uruguay.

It is interesting to explore how the Museo de la Memoria in Montevideo can be compared to the Jewish Museum in Berlin. There are various points of comparison that can be made, despite the fact that they are institutions focusing on distinct historical events on two different continents. One element that can be discussed is the architectural design of the buildings themselves. When looking at the exterior structures of the two museums we can see that the MUME is not as flamboyant as the Jewish Museum Berlin. Built in 1878, it has an eclectic style with the prevalence of neoclassicism, but also incorporates “Art Nouveau” touches in the details of the building (“El Edificio”). When viewed in comparison to Libeskind’s titanium structure which in a sense overshadows the Baroque building at its side, the MUME does not immediately strike the visitor as provocative or out of the ordinary. However, it is not so much the traditional exterior of the museum in Montevideo (see Fig. 5) that is most interesting, but the fact that like

Libeskind’s use of the Baroque courthouse, the formal governmental space has been reclaimed as public space by the MUME to be used as a place to illustrate the violations of human rights and to teach younger generations about the past.



Figure 5: El Museo de la Memoria / Museum of Memory – Montevideo, Uruguay

[Author’s Photo]

As Sosa González claims:

Los espacios en los que se instalan los “museos de memoria” adquieren significado no por su valor estético ni representativo para el conjunto de la sociedad que lo eleva a esa categoría, sino por su intención de generar una identificación y un conocimiento sobre un pasado silenciado, de trascender la materialidad y propiciar la reflexión y toma de conciencia. (86)¹²⁹

¹²⁹ “The spaces that are installed in the ‘museums of memory’ acquire their significance not because of their aesthetic or representative value for the whole of society that elevates them to that category, but because of their intention of generating an identification and knowledge about a silenced past, to transcend materiality and encourage reflection and awareness” (my trans.).

The property that used to belong to the dictator Santos and was later used by the Uruguayan Navy in the 1920s, has now become a place where totalitarianism has been condemned and is used to showcase the testimonies, narratives and artifacts of those who resisted and fought for the return of democracy. One of the ways in which the museum accomplishes this task is in its use of mirco-narratives, where personal memories are intertwined into the collective memory of the public that visits the museum. An example of these personal memories can be seen in the Hall “Las Cárceles” where the jumpsuits of some of the political prisoners are “openly” displayed, and some of the jewellery and paintings made by prisoners during their incarceration are also exhibited (See Fig. 6).



Figure 6: Personal Memories and Collective Trauma: Prisoners’ Jumpsuits –
Museum of Memory [Author’s Photo]

Underneath each jumpsuit is an educational placard that indicates the name of the prisoner to which the uniform belonged, except the one on the outer right of the photograph, which is a replica of the uniform used for women. Most prominent to

Uruguayan history and collective identity is José “Pepe” Mujica’s jumpsuit (second to the right), since he was a Tupamaro imprisoned in the Punta Carretas Prison in 1971, and later became Uruguay’s fortieth president in 2010.

Uruguayans and people from around the world come to the MUME to learn about the country’s past so that the policy of “never again,” which belongs to Holocaust discourse, as discussed below, can also be instituted in the collective memory of this nation. The proliferation of Holocaust discourse has, according to Andreas Huyssen activated a need to discuss memory on a global scale:

What I mean by productive inscriptions of Holocaust discourse then is simply this: as in South Africa or again differently in Australia, the politics of Holocaust commemoration (what to remember, how to remember, when to remember), so prominent in the global media and in the countries of the northern transatlantic since 1980s, has functioned like a motor energizing discourses of memory elsewhere. (*Present* 99)

This is why it is not uncommon to see “Never Again” (“Nunca más”) slogans in debates and publications regarding Latin American memory politics. Huyssen himself analyzes how Argentina utilizes this phrase in the conversations regarding their dictatorship (1976-1983) and the Disappeared: “The title of the first official collection of testimony, published in 1984 by CONADEP, the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared, was *Nunca más (Never Again)*, an explicit and emphatic reference to Holocaust discourse” (*Present* 99; emphasis in original). As Huyssen points out, while the intention is not to equate the Latin American dictatorships or any other genocidal acts with what occurred to the European Jews during World War II (*Present* 98), “Here

[referring to the memory park in Buenos Aires] as in some other cases, Holocaust discourse functions like an international prism that helps focus the local discourse about the *desaparecidos* in both its legal and commemorative aspects” (98; emphasis in original). In addition, Elizabeth Jelin highlights the use of “nunca más” in South America as “a symbol of the struggle against impunity” (“Public” 139).¹³⁰ Another example of how Holocaust discourse is used in Latin America to discuss and commemorate “Los Desaparecidos” is the newly placed monument entitled “Nunca Más” in Montevideo, in honour of the “Detenidos-Desaparecidos.” A bronze sculpture measuring 2.40 metres featuring two hooded human figures with their hands tied to their backs (“A 44 años”). Multiple scholars have discussed how Holocaust discourse has been used to focalize local conversations around the world, and also provide a powerful starting point to discuss other traumatic memories and narratives.¹³¹ As Eugenio Cluadio di Stefano argues in *The Vanishing Frame*, the Holocaust becomes a “predominant narrative through which memory has become global” (65).

As discussed in the first chapter, Libeskind’s entire architectural design of the Jewish Museum revolves around the “Voids” he has created to guide the story of Berlin’s Jews. Rather than using architectural designs to represent the voids and absence left in the country at a metaphysical level, the Museum of Memory in Montevideo tries to portray the stories of the absentees and let the community fill its space with testimonies, artifacts and literature about the traumatic events leading up to the dictatorship and those

¹³⁰ Keep in mind that in Uruguay in December of 1986 Law No. 15848, La Ley de Caducidad de la pretension punitiva del Estado, was placed in effect that granted impunity to those who committed crimes against humanity in the period encompassing 1973-1985.

¹³¹ Huyssen in *Present Pasts* argues that the Holocaust is “a universal trope” for historical trauma, allowing “Holocaust memory to latch on to specific local situations that are historically distant and politically distinct” (13-14).

that occurred during the military rule. In this way, in the MUME the voids become less theoretical and are more practical and tangible. Yet they are still powerful symbols in this museum space, especially in the context of the Disappeared, as we will discuss in the section below on the Disappeared.

First let us note that Jelin discusses the issue of the “symbolic voids, absences, [and] the ghostly specter of the disappeared” (151) in her article “Public Memorialization in Perspective: Truth, Justice and Memory of Past Repression in the Southern Cone of South America.” According to Jelin, the questions that arise from these symbolic markers are: “How can this emptiness be represented? What kinds of materializations and physical objects can take the place of absence?” (151). Within the walls of the MUME there are several exhibitions that use material objects to commemorate public resistance to the regime. In the “La Resistencia Popular” Hall that deals with the subject of popular resistance, there is an exhibit that consists of pots hanging in the middle of the room (see Fig. 7). “Las Cacerolas” (“The Pots”) represents one of the ways in which Uruguayans protested against the military regime. As Argentinian scholar Edy Kaufman indicates in his article “The Role of the Political Parties in the Redemocratization of Uruguay,” the clanging sound of pots was a powerful way to break the silence imposed by the regime:

During this stage [after May 1983 when negotiations with the military and political parties began], popular mobilization became the opposition’s principal weapon. Mass demonstrations occurred regularly. In a show of truly peaceful resistance Uruguayans took to the streets chanting slogans about the fall of the regime; turning off their lights, they banged on empty pots and pans (39).



Figure 7: Pots as Protest: *Las Cacerolas* – Museum of Memory [Author’s Photo]

Although this very public form of resistance came into action only in the final years of the dictatorship, there were other strategies like the Canto Popular discussed in the last chapter that formed an important part of the collective resistance against the regime. The museum’s educational placards emphasize how these diverse resistance strategies “were aimed primarily at promoting collective activities different from those that the dictatorship sought to impose” (my trans.; “Sala 2”).

An article published in the Uruguayan newspaper *El País* on April 2, 1984, highlights the importance of what Uruguayans call “el caceroleo” or “el cacerolazo;” terms used to refer to the act of performing peaceful demonstrations by banging on pots and pans. The article states the reasons for this peaceful protest: “The rallies have been called by the Inter-Party, unitary body of the opposition, to claim ‘elections without

exclusions of parties and people, general and unrestricted amnesty, work and decent wages” (my trans.; “Comienza”).¹³² Thus illustrating how the soup or cooking pot, an important domestic symbol, was resemiotized during the military regime as a public tool of resistance. In 1984, a Uruguayan women’s organization or feminist group called *Grupo de Estudios sobre la Condición de la Mujer en el Uruguay (GRECMU)* (Group Study on the Status of the Woman in Uruguay) launched a magazine with the provocative title *La Cacerola*¹³³ (See Fig. 8). In discussing the meaning of the title, GRECMU emphasized how the soup pot or *cacerola* was an “ancient symbol of female oppression” that became in the final years of the military regime a “symbol of national liberation” (qtd. in Miller 226). The editors of the magazine note that the soup pot had agrarian roots but has now moved into the modern cityscape. As a universal symbol, the soup pot made out of clay, iron or steel, bridges class divides just as it bridges the seasons: “La cacerola ha sido de barro, de hierro, de aluminio o de acero. Humeó en la caverna y la choza, en el castillo y el rascacielos. Sirvió en el lujo y en la pobreza, en el verano como en el invierno” (Grupo 1).¹³⁴ The soup pot moved from the private to the public sphere as a

¹³² It is important to note that this is something that is still common today in Uruguay, and even in Argentina. As a way to peacefully protest against current issues, people bang on pots and pans, turn off the lights in their houses and honk their car horns to show that they oppose whatever is happening. This could be a way to protest a variety of issues: for example, protesting for better neighbourhood security, opposing a raise in taxes, etc. The events are usually coordinated through social media.

¹³³ Francesca Miller notes that this is “an independent women’s studies group that had been documenting the history of women in Uruguay and collecting information on the status of women in the country since 1979” (225). They published their first edition of *La Cacerola* on April 1, 1984, without the government’s permission to print. As the women’s organization GRECMU proudly states: “The subterfuge we used to edit this revista [magazine] is to call it ‘a free bulletin for internal consumption only,’ by which means we escaped censorship as well as the need for permission” (qtd. and trans. in Miller 226). Although having to do this made the editors “a little uneasy,” they were clearly excited about the playful name of the publication writing: “the name was irresistible. *La Cacerola* is a surprise, a conspiratorial wink. Ninety percent of all Uruguayans will understand what the casserole means” (qtd. and trans. in Miller 226).

¹³⁴ “The casserole has made out of clay, iron, aluminum or steel. It simmered in the cave and the hut, in the castle and the skyscraper. It was used in luxury and poverty, summer and winter” (my trans.)

spontaneous tool of resistance. As the editors of the magazine write, the private sphere was the only safe space or “free” place for dialogue, debate and remembrance: “Un gran baluarte de la resistencia durante la última década fueron el hogar y la familia. Cuando no eran posibles en otros ámbitos, la libre discusión y el diálogo se dieron en la casa: allí se educó, se recordó la historia, se transmitieron otros valores” (1).¹³⁵



Figure 8: Cover Image: *La Cacerola* Bulletin (Vol. 1. Issue 1, 1984) [Courtesy of the National Library of Uruguay (Biblioteca Nacional de Uruguay)]¹³⁶

The pot, when taken to the streets, becomes a universal tool for spontaneous resistance.

As the editors further highlight: “From the private space, the hearth, resistance brought it into the public realm, the street. A resistance where everyone, great and small and young

¹³⁵ “The home and the family were a great bastion of resistance during the last decade. When not possible in other areas, the free debate and dialogue took place in the home: there we [women] educated, remembered our history, and transmitted other values [those opposed to the regime]” (my trans.).

¹³⁶ I would like to thank María Gabriela Barreto in the National Library of Uruguay (Biblioteca Nacional de Uruguay) for granting special permission to include this cover image in my thesis.

and old, men and women, participated. A resistance spontaneous and collective, made with the casserole in hand” (qtd. in Miller 226). The “cacerola,” in the hands of Uruguayan women activists was no longer a sign of domestic “subordination;” it became “a symbol of liberation” (“La Cacerola: símbolo de subordinación, que hoy es de liberación”) (Grupo 1). The organization also highlights the important “passive and elastic” resistance on the part of Uruguayan women during the dictatorship, as well as the central role that they played in amplifying the sound of collective resistance: “No es casual que tan modesto instrumento haya sido recientemente tomado por la sociedad uruguaya en su conjunto para manifestarse. Pero bueno es recordar que sin nuestras manos golpeando se escucharía la mitad del bochinche” (1).¹³⁷

The *Cacerolas* display in the hall of “La Resistencia Popular” in the museum space harnesses this powerful feminist symbol and everyday imagery to portray one of the many ways in which people tried to fight for their human rights, their freedom and democracy. The exhibit is not walled off with plexiglass, or any other material; thus one is not prevented from touching the wrench, wooden sticks and spoons along with pots dangling from the ceiling as part of this exhibition. In a sense, one is invited to bang on the pots and acoustically reproduce the revolutionary fervor in the interactive museum space. Having this display at the center of the museum hall allows people visiting the museum, in particular the younger Uruguayan generations that did not directly experience the dictatorship, to better relate to the resistance movement. Looking at the hanging pots and pans, they can see how this form of protesting still in use today connects them with

¹³⁷ “It is not coincidental that such a modest instrument has been recently taken by the Uruguayan society as a whole to protest. The important thing to remember is that without our hands banging on the pots, only half of the commotion would have been heard” (my trans.).

the past. Like the *Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves* exhibit at the Jewish Museum Berlin and the clanking noise produced when the visitor steps on the metallic faces, the *Las Cacerolas* installation piece provides the visitors with a thought-provoking sonic reminder of the need to listen to suffering and stop injustice.

Continuing with the tour of the MUME, in the hall of “Los Desaparecidos” a large-sized photograph of what appears to be an archeological site covers part of the floor in the center of the hall and immediately captures the attention of the visitors. The image by Uruguayan photographer Annabella Balduvino¹³⁸ is entitled *Más de docientos* (“More than two hundred”) and illustrates the excavation site in the Chacra Camino Piedritas-Pando (Ranch Camino Piedritas in the city of Pando), where the remains of Ubagesner Cháves Sosa, an individual detained and “disappeared” in 1976 in the Aerial Base Boiso Lanza (General Command Uruguayan Air Force) were recovered.¹³⁹ Forming part of the permanent exhibition, this forensic photograph along with the fragmented portraits of the Disappeared hanging from the ceiling (See Fig. 9) showcases the work that the government in coordination with the University of the Republic has been doing to find

¹³⁸ Annabella Balduvino has also published a photographic book with the photographs she has taken on the subject of “Los Desaparecidos” entitled *Nomeolvides*, featuring a poetic prologue by Daniel Viglietti and a powerful narrative text that accompanies the photos. The book shows how Balduvino interprets the loss of the Disappeared by highlighting absence and emptiness in her photographs. The photos from her book can also be viewed on her website www.annabellabalduvino.com. For an inside look on Balduvino’s projects on the subject of the Disappeared please see her interview in the book *Annabella Balduvino: Fotografía Contemporánea Uruguaya* published by the Center for Photography in Montevideo (Centro de Fotografía de Montevideo).

¹³⁹ The initiative to conduct an archeological search for the bodies of the “Detenidos-Desaparecidos” (Detained-Disappeared) began when the Frente Amplio (Broad Front, left-wing political party) won the Uruguayan national elections in 2004. In March 2005, then President Tabaré Vázquez announced at his inauguration speech his will to enforce article 4 of the “expiration law” (my trans.; Broquetas, “Centro” 17), which gave the Executive Branch the right to conduct investigations related to the cases of “persons presumably detained in military or police operations and disappeared as well as children presumably kidnapped in similar conditions” (my trans.; República), with the exclusion of some cases. “As a result of this announcement, the Presidency of the Republic signed an agreement with the University of the Republic to specifically address the issue of detained-disappeared persons. In this framework, archaeological work began to search for the remains of detainees as well as to conduct historical research on forced abductions” (my trans.; Broquetas, “Centro” 17).

the bodies of those who were kidnapped during the years of the dictatorship. The micro-photographs dangling from the ceiling are folded at odd angles creating the impression of only having a partial view of these lost historical subjects. Again, what German studies scholar Hansen-Glucklich in the context of the Jewish Museum Berlin identifies as an “aesthetics of fragmentation,” and a “distorted perspective” (55) is important for framing the spectators’ experience. This installation as it literally excavates the past becomes a visual reminder of the intangible void left by the pain and suffering caused to the victims and their families.



Figure 9: Hall of “Los Desaparecidos” (Disappeared) – Museum of Memory

[Author’s Photo]

Looking at this exhibit can bring mixed emotions to the visitor. On the one hand, a sense of emptiness along with sadness for what happened to these persons is immediately felt. However, when you look above and see the fragmented faces of the Disappeared, of those who have still not been found, one is also reminded of Benedetti's poem of the same name. There is still the sense that they are palpably present, roaming the streets, looking for a resting place, but in an unclear ambiguous space unsure "if they're banners now or tremors/ survivors or prayers for the dead" (205). These black and white micro-photographs featuring the faces of the Disappeared hang from the ceiling on small paper triangles, almost as if they are flying, unable to find a landing space. With their gaze pointed downward at the photographic reproduction of the archeological remains, they almost take on the role of uncanny witnesses to the historical trauma of the past. These micro-photographs visually dialogue with the actual photographic signs carried by friends, family and members of the organization Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos since 1996 at the annual "Marcha de Silencio" (March of Silence) held on the 20th of May. The signs also hanging from the ceiling in the transitional space between the hall of the Disappeared and the exhibition on prisons displayed at the museum are also part of a community-based interactive strategy employed by the museum curators. For several years they did not only function as archival objects, but once a year for the march were taken out of the museum space and put back into the hands of the protestors. As Ana María Sosa González suggests, using artifacts in this way presents them as "living" material history interweaving them into the museum's larger strategy of "participatory memory" (93). From 2007 to 2011 these artifacts were removed once a year, so they could once again march the streets. As Sosa

González writes since 2012 to prevent further deterioration the decision was made to keep the signs permanently in the museum (93).

The subject of the Disappeared is also explicitly addressed outside the museum space, on the property grounds. While wandering around the park-like setting, one encounters a temporary installation piece, eight holes in the ground that resemble tombs (See Fig. 10). Here the voids that inform the museum space are physical and tangible.



Figure 10: Empty Tombs (Temporary exhibition) – Museum of Memory

[Author's Photo]

The physical holes in the grounds of the MUME represent the most traumatic part of Uruguay's "pending past," the ongoing search to find the burial sites of people that were kidnapped during the regime.¹⁴⁰ These empty tombs are part of a temporary exhibition

¹⁴⁰ In Latin America, there are other monuments and memorials dedicated to the "Desaparecidos," in particular those built in cemeteries. Here as well one encounters empty tombs or spaces, where the names of the victims are placed, so that they can be filled later on when more information about the people still missing is discovered or released to the public. One could compare the curator's "empty tombs," although initially playfully and symbolically "filled" in the outdoor exhibit in Montevideo to these empty tombs for example purposefully left in the General Cemetery of Santiago, Chile: "[i]n the General Cemetery of Santiago a memorial commemorates the more than three thousand murdered and disappeared at the hands

created by the museum director Elbio Ferreiro and Annabella Balduvino, the same photographer whose work is displayed in the museum hall of “Los Desaparecidos.” In an interview, Balduvino explains the concept behind the installation, as well as the significance that it has for MUME and Uruguayan collective memory. The voids are “tombs,” but not empty tombs as the curator writes: “They are pits like tombs. Inside two of the pits there was a mirror, in others forget-me-not plants and in others photographs of the excavations that were taken of the remains of the Disappeared” (my trans.; Centro 36).¹⁴¹ She goes on to talk about the double meaning of the installation as well as the use of the mirror placed inside two of the pits. The empty tomb becomes “filled” through the act of spectatorship. While viewing one’s reflection on the mirrored surface there is an uncanny movement as the museum goer or spectator crosses over into the space of the dead. This is similar to what Kligerman described in the context of the Holocaust aesthetic and “Voids” used in Libeskind’s museum where “it is the viewer who is led across the rupture in the artwork’s frame, into the site of the dead” (Kligerman, “Ghostly” 35). The curator, when discussing the “double meaning” of her installation writes: “on the one hand, the tombs do not have any skeletal remains, but they do have [inside] the mirror, where you can look at yourself and [think] it could have been anyone. That was the idea. Others had the flowers and the photos of the excavations” (my trans.; 36).¹⁴² As

of the agents of the Chilean dictatorship and operates as a central memory at the national level. The work, erected in 1994, contains an immense list with the names of the disappeared carved into the stone. The bodies that were exhumed from mass graves and later identified as belonging to victims of the repression are buried there, while on both sides of the memorial plaque a series of empty niches were left, destined to be filled by the bodies of the disappeared that may be found and identified in the future” (my trans.; Schindel 78).

¹⁴¹ “Son pozos tipo tumbas. Dentro de dos pozos había un espejo, en otros plantas de nomeolvides y en otros fotos de las excavaciones que se hicieron con los restos de desaparecidos” (Centro 36).

¹⁴² “Tenía un poco de doble sentido: por un lado, las tumbas que están sin restos óseos, pero si está el espejo, uno se mira y puede haber sido cualquiera. Esa era la idea. Otras que estaban con las flores y otras con fotos de las excavaciones” (Centro 36).

she clarifies, her intention was to first create empty voids, tombs without any remains, but then to “fill them in” with symbolic references to memory politics itself, self-reflexively framing the search to uncover clues about the trauma of the past.

Both inside and outside of the museum the curator uses the theme of an ongoing “investigation” to urge museum-goers to join artists and scientists in the search for the truth about the Disappeared. The forget-me-not flowers alludes to the need to keep remembering the victims, whereas the mirrors inside the tombs create an empathetic connection to the victims and suggests the randomness of their abduction (that it “could be anyone”), and the photos of the excavation sites references scholarly and governmental efforts and work-in-progress related to the finding of the remains of the Disappeared. I find the photographer’s creative idea of placing a mirror inside one of the pits particularly powerful. It not only demonstrates her message about how “it could have anyone” (my trans.; Centro 36), meaning that any individual could find themselves being abducted by the authorities, but it also evokes an empathetic response from the visitor. Although the tombs are now empty, and the installation is no longer experienced in the same way, I could imagine how a visitor would have experienced this provocative piece. Having a part of the landscape in the MUME resemble real excavation sites related to the search of the Disappeared is very powerful. The uncanny feeling that the visitor can experience by looking at Balduvino’s empty tombs provides a reminder of the absence left in the society, and also the emptiness and sense of despair that the relatives of these people probably feel on a daily basis. Yet the mirrors that were in the tombs when the installation was first opened could have also provoked a fear of falling into the depths of the trauma and the darkness of the period. Often, we as humans try to disassociate

ourselves from pain and suffering. Staring into that mirror could have forced the visitor to imagine “what if that were me?” and be more personally affected by the trauma.

Seeing one’s reflection in the empty tomb is again uncanny as one enters into the space or site of the dead, but at least for me, it could also stir empathetic feelings towards the victims of the dictatorship, as well as for their families who continue to search for their relatives’ remains, unable to mourn and move forward with their lives. As Balduvino powerfully claims: “Because while they are still missing, we cannot cry for them” (my trans.; Centro 35). One could say that the memory politics installations in both the Jewish Museum Berlin and Museum of Memory in Montevideo leave the visitor with an almost corporeal experience of the pain that the victims of these terror states suffered, also suggesting the impossibility of mourning because of the empty, unmarked tombs and unknown whereabouts of the victims’ remains.

Inside the museum, in the hall of the Disappeared one also finds an educational placard that inform us in objective, factual language, that “[a]pproximately 230 persons kidnapped during the dictatorship, (mostly in Uruguay and Argentina, but there were also illegal detentions made in Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia and Colombia) remain missing” (my trans.; Broquetas, “Centro” 11) The kidnappings occurred in “their homes or on the street by members of the repressive forces, without police or military uniform, in unofficial proceedings or not by those recognized by the respective States as such” (my trans.; 11). Interestingly, while the artistic installations often evoke a sensory and empathetic response from the visitors, the texts accompanying the artifacts and exhibits do not draw the spectator in, do not personalize the space or use poetic vocabulary. In meditating on monuments and a new empathy, Peter Read describes a new empathetic direction and

narrative in the language used in public memorials in Latin America in an age of “post-Pinochet memorialisation” (Read 95).¹⁴³ In the Museum of Memory, one has the feeling that the explanatory placards (either on the wall or on the floor, under the feet of the museum visitor) pre-date this “new empathy” and serve as an educational backdrop that is secondary to the powerful imagery of the exhibitions themselves. There is also an unintentional fragmentation that is occurring as humidity, dust and dirt wear away or “erase” some of the letters, words, or even dates on these placards (See Fig. 11).

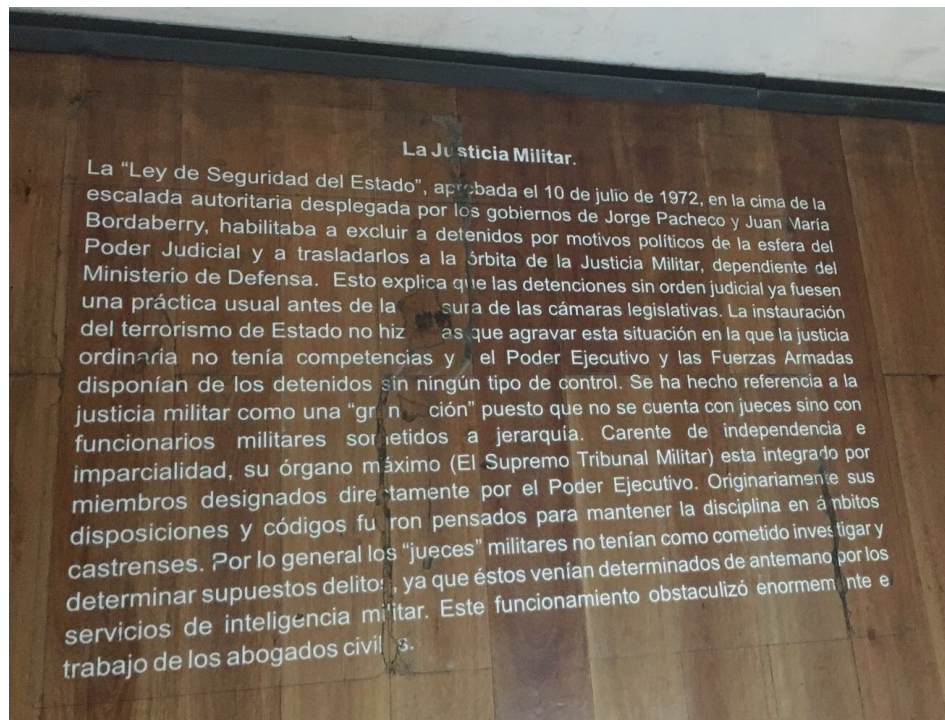


Figure 11: Fragmented Text (Museum Placard) – Museum of Memory

[Author’s Photo]

¹⁴³ See Peter Read’s article “Changing Interpretations of the Pinochet Dictatorship and its Victims in Chilean Memorial Inscriptions Since the End of the Cold War” in *Seeking Meaning, Seeking Justice in a Post-Cold War World*, pp. 81-103. This author also cites the plaque in Villa Grimaldi in Chile that the Uruguayan Embassy erected “in memory of its citizens who had been imprisoned, tortured and killed ‘in violation of their human rights by agents of the state’” (95). Peter Read comments that in contrast to this colder and objective language, memorials and public sites of commemoration are now employing a “new lexicography” that “is personal, appeals to the senses”, “uses a poetic vocabulary [...] and calls for an imaginative and empathetic response” (95).

Although this is due to normal wear and tear, this fragmentation and distortion create another poetry of absence and gaps, serving as another uncanny reminder of the “informational voids” and lack of documentation regarding this traumatic past in history books, spectral voids in the Uruguayan’s youth collective memory.

The fragmented, unclear status of Uruguay’s recent traumatic past is further concretized in the Memorial de los Detenidos Desaparecidos (Memorial of the Detained-Disappeared) in the Vaz Ferreira Park in the Cerro of Montevideo, “conceived and constructed between 1998 and 2002” (Levey 203). The memorial was erected by the Municipality of Montevideo and the organization *Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos (MFUDD)* to commemorate the victims of state terror and honour the Uruguayans that were detained and kidnapped either in Uruguay, or in neighbouring countries (See Fig. 12).¹⁴⁴ Located in the depths of the park, only accessible via a 300-yard uphill climb (Kohen 285), the project “intersects an ongoing social healing process with a material intervention crossing the realms of nature and the city” (Kohen 282).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Edna Aizenberg in her essay “Nation and Holocaust Narration” in *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*, makes the point that the creators of the Memorial to the Detained-Disappeared in Montevideo had the idea or “imprint” of Uruguay’s “Memorial del Holocausto” “in mind” when designing this new memorial and aimed to “establish a colloquy of public spaces, while pointing to [the fragmented or] segmented politics of remembering and reimagining the nation” (214). In addition, Aizenberg also states that “Rabbi Daniel Kripper served on the Memorial to the Detained-Disappeared’s commission appointed by Montevideo’s municipality” (229, n32). His congregation also contributed money to construct the memorial and Kripper was active with human rights organization in “calling for a full investigation of the dictatorship’s crimes” (229, n32).

¹⁴⁵ Another important contribution to the memory politics of the 2000s in Uruguay that I unfortunately do not have the time to discuss here is Juan Angel Urruzola’s powerful photography exhibition in Montevideo. In 2008, the photographer pasted sixty large-scale black-and-white photomurals [gigantografias] of the disappeared around the city of Montevideo. This exhibition is another way artists have provocatively used the public sphere and urban space to start a new dialogue about the disappeared. As David Rojinsky argues in his article “Urban Photography as Counter-Monument in Urruzola’s *Miradas ausentes (en la calle)*” these photomontages are self-reflexive, since they themselves contain and frame the ID photographs of the disappeared-detained individuals held up by “an outstretched hand” against the backdrop of an empty



Figure 12: Memorial de los Detenidos Desaparecidos Montevideo / Memorial of the Detained-Disappeared [Uruguayo-92, 2008]¹⁴⁶

The structure, comprised of “two adjacent walls made of high resistance glass” where the names of the 174 Disappeared is inscribed, “set on a solid cement base, [and] surrounded by exposed rock in a clearing in the park” (Levey 206), provides a visual as well as an ambiguous reminder of the country’s state terrorism in the 1970s and 80s. The ambiguity and, as Latin American Studies scholar Cara Levey argues, the “fragility” (209) of the memory of this event arises from the memorial’s textual feature, or rather, the lack of it. As Levey discusses: “the names [of the Disappeared] are the only textual

space, either a “desolate cityscapes or virtually deserted esplanades (*rambles*) along the River Plate” (34). In this way, “an erased figure” is reinserted into “the national frame” (34). Rojinsky also makes the interesting point that these posters featuring the “Disappeared” were vandalized. The posters themselves “disappeared” and the artist documented his own attempt to restore the artwork, which served as a powerful metaphor for the urgent need to piece together collective memory. Rojinsky also refers to this photography exhibit as an “alternative cartography of remembrance” (32).

¹⁴⁶ Photograph by Uruguayo-92, distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 License.

feature of the *Memorial*; there is no indication of the historical context or that these are victims of state terrorism” (206). In a way, this forces the visitor to interactively engage with the memorial, trying to solve the “pending puzzle” of Uruguay’s past. Levey further comments that “[a]esthetically speaking, the State is absent from the *Memorial* and the *textual* is chosen in favour of the *contextual*, opening up the *Memorial* to distinct interpretations, the nature of which ultimately depends on the spectator” (206-207; emphasis in original). This “contextual” and “open-ended” interpretation, which places the spectator in the position of having to “search” for more information is further highlighted by the architects’ design and material selected to construct the memorial. In discussing the symbolic values of the memorial, one of the architects Martha Kohen justified the design, also speaking of the stone foundation as if it were exposed or excavated bones, although she argues that this was not meant to be a “burial ground:”

The main idea for the Memorial arises from the exposure of the natural underlying stone bed to the sunlight as a symbol of truth revealed: the real nature of the hill and its rocky underground being the symbol of the most permanent values that are there. We took away the ‘skin and flesh’ - grass and earth - of the mound and exposed its ‘bones’ (its rock), as the most permanent value. Not meant to be a burial ground, it evokes the image of death in all its strength, hardness, and eternity as an underlying thought. The cleared surface was bordered by a meditation bench that wraps the area and allows the visitor to contemplate the Memorial from a variety of points of view always in close contact with nature, the trees, the natural vibrant life of birds that populate the park [...]. (Kohen 285)

The architects of the memorial, Ruben Otero, Martha Kohen, Pablo Frontini, Diego López de Haro, visual artist Mario Sagradini, and agronomic engineer Rafael Dodera, play with the symbolic features of the materials used to construct the memorial as well as its location to highlight the unique trajectory that the commemoration of the Disappeared has taken in Uruguayan society. As we learned in the previous chapter, this is a complicated historical subject that has polarized contemporary Uruguayan society; there are many pieces of the puzzle, and the still “pending” investigations and search for truth and justice form an important part of the aesthetics for the design of the memorial. The minimalistic style of the memorial also reflects the difficult and at times obscured history regarding the kidnappings and assassinations in Uruguay. As scholar Marisa Lerer states: “The artistic strategy of Minimalism appears to have become a favored choice for government sponsored memorials in Chile and elsewhere because Minimalism often lacks and therefore obscures a clear narrative” (Lerer 59).¹⁴⁷ By obscuring a clear narrative, the governments involved can avoid engaging with the difficult subject of state responsibility in the historical events, as well as avoid the topic of what the current status of the Disappeared is. On the one hand, this minimalist memorial does not provide full context or explanation and in a sense again censors information, but on the other hand one could argue as Levey does that it uses obscurity, ambiguity and fragmentation to provoke the spectator to also put together the pieces of the historical puzzle individually.

¹⁴⁷ Lerer points out that “[i]t is critical to note that Uruguay and Argentina also relied on a Minimalist aesthetic in their official commemorations to their disappeared citizens. For example, Uruguay’s *Memorial a los Ciudadanos Detenidos Desaparecidos* (MCDD; *Memorial to the Detained Disappeared Citizens*, 2001) in Montevideo’s Vaz Ferreira del Cerro Park is also based on the by now international memorial paradigm of a wall with inscribed names” (59).

In addition to the aesthetic and symbolic features of the memorial that Kohen highlights, such as the meditation bench and the nature-infused climb to the structure, Levey also emphasizes the sensorial experience of the park dweller viewing the memorial:

The visitor is invited to engage with this pain both visually and through the sense of touch. As Oschner asserts, ‘touch provides a second connection – a connection different from the visual’ (1997: 165) which allows the uninitiated spectator to experience the individual sense or human side of loss caused by disappearance, whilst those belonging to the ‘circle of pain’ – partners, parents, siblings – re-connect with the disappeared sensually, reflecting on what this personal loss means to them. (Levey 209)

Thus, the memorial creates a unique opportunity for people leisurely exploring the park to empathetically engage with Uruguay’s traumatic past, and most importantly to visually and viscerally commemorate the disappearance of the 174 individuals named in the glass and concrete bridge.¹⁴⁸

The fragmentary status of remembering the past is also self-reflexively evoked at different levels at the Memorial, for example, in how the names of the Disappeared are presented on the glass.¹⁴⁹ As Levey argues:

¹⁴⁸ Martha Kohen, one of the architects involved in the creation of the memorial, highlights that “[a] parliamentary commission that worked in parallel to this process since has clarified the final destiny of about one fifth of the 174 names” (287).

¹⁴⁹ Although space does not permit me to fully analyze and discuss this, I would like to note that there is also a Memorial of the Detained Disappeared in Latin America (Memorial de los Detenidos Desaparecidos en Latino América) in Montevideo at the intersection of the streets Guayabos and Juan D. Jackson, the starting point for the annual March of Silence. This uncanny memorial features a fragmented metal spine hanging from a curved marble wall. For more information on the competing designs for this memorial see Santangelo, et al., *Concurso de una obra escultórica en homenaje a los Detenidos Desaparecidos de América Latina*.

the fragmentary arrangement means that the visitor is not guided chronologically, but is invited to make the connection between the names and consider each from a variety of angles. This is not, strictly speaking, a single wall of names but an open (both structurally and metaphorically) memorial which invites the spectator to pass between the two walls and explore the names in any order, thus every visit is different, as is every interpretation. Rather than construct uniform readings and consensus, the Memorial promotes distinct layers of meaning, and its relationship to the past can be viewed as functioning on different levels. (Levey 209)

The variety of angles in which the names of the disappeared can be viewed, the palimpsestic layers of meaning, as well as the need for the visitor to fill in the gaps and provide their own “contextual” information suggests that the spectator needs to be an active participant in commemorating the Disappeared. As in the Museum of Memory, where many of the artifacts are donated by the community, here it is the community itself that transmits the memory of the past to the future generations. Cara Levey argues that “for most Uruguayans, particularly in the current context when judicial, political and societal discussion of the dictatorship is frequently documented in the media, supplementary explanations about the relationship between names and an event are arguably unnecessary” (209). Although her claim makes sense in the present, my concern is what will happen in the future, when the people who experienced the dictatorship firsthand are no longer present, or if a future government decides to revert to the politics of silence, when the “contextual” information is absent. What happens to the memorial then? Even though there is arguably a more “open-ended” interpretation of the memorial that spectators can en-act as they approach the fragmented text on the memorial from

different angles and although the way in which the memorial is integrated with nature and the values of life, truth and justice further assists the visitors in their journey of reflection and commemoration, an informational plaque would be very useful when looking at the future Uruguayan society in fifty or one hundred years from now. Although the fragmented, minimalist aesthetic of the memorial could be thought-provoking, there could also be a downside to not providing any information about what the structure is commemorating, except for the names of the individuals.

Here we should also note that the location of the memorial is also frequently part of the debate on memory politics and the significance of this structure in the City of Montevideo. The Paz Ferreira Park, “the main park in the West of Montevideo,” was chosen by the organizers because of the park’s “unique and important [mountain] relief in the city” (“Memorial”). Located in the outskirts of the city centre, one of the reasons this site was selected was due to its “high symbolism” because the Cerro of Montevideo is part of Uruguay’s national emblem (“Memorial”). One of the four symbols constituting the emblem, the Cerro of Montevideo symbolizes strength. The selection of this urban space is therefore not entirely trivial,¹⁵⁰ and although some scholars such as Cara Levey argue that, on the one hand, the location of the memorial could be considered “part of a broader state policy to marginalise memory and confine it to the periphery” (205), and thus, does not permit the memory of the traumatic past to remain central in the minds of city dwellers, Levey also sees the location as an obvious political choice, arguing that “the choice of location endorses a link between past and present, and permits different

¹⁵⁰ Kohen further notes the selection of this location “was an instance of the municipal strategy of dispersing public funding in the less privileged areas of the city. It is located in a 50-year-old municipal park, on the Cerro de Montevideo, a 500-foot-high hill whose colonial fortress overlooks this historic Bay and Old Town” (284).

levels of engagement with the *Memorial*” (205). This scholar has stated that erecting this memorial in the Cerro is also politically significant as “the site occupies an important place in local history and memory” (Levey 212). In fact, the neighbourhood around the Cerro was a working-class neighborhood known as *Villa del Cerro* (formerly Villa Cosmópolis) which grew rapidly during the late nineteenth century and “became the site of working class struggle and resistance” (Levey 212). It was also the home for the Tupamaro organization. In selecting this site, the relatives of the Disappeared involved in the planning process drew “parallels between the struggle of many of the disappeared and the working class struggle of the 1950s, as well as the continuing working class identity of the area, thus implying that the inclusion of ‘disappeared detainees’ on the Memorial is not altogether apolitical” (212) and creating a connection between the present and the past, using the location’s social importance to add another layer of significance to the structure in its totality. Adding to the layers of significance and meaning, Levey emphasizes that “[t]he peripheral location does not render the *Memorial* invisible, but offers a non-traditional, more open-ended memorial, which, rather than encourage authoritative readings, promotes outward-looking memorialisation, dependent on societal participation, which feeds into – and is impacted by – broader debates about the past” (213). Levey’s argument on the location’s significance as it encourages the broader debates about the past helps summarize the overall objective of the Memorial as an “open-ended” place of memory that encourages visitors to actively engage with Uruguay’s traumatic and difficult history. In my view, the selected location although outside the hustle and bustle of the city also encourages a participatory, self-reflective

journey about the past, and an important connection with our national identity as a country, as depicted through our national emblem.

As also explored in my previous chapter on film and literature in contemporary Uruguayan culture, urban memory places, physical museums and memorials are not the only way in which memory about the recent past can find its way into collective consciousness. In their article, “Personal Museums of Memory: The Recovery of Lost (National) Histories in the Uruguayan Documentaries *Al pie del árbol blanco* and *El círculo*” David Martin-Jones and María Soledad Montañez argue that two contemporary Uruguayan documentaries (*Al pie del árbol blanco* and *El círculo*) have also constructed “two personal virtual (in the sense of cinematic rather than physical) ‘museums of memory’” (74). By revisiting the locations that impacted the lives of their subjects during the dictatorship, Martin-Jones and Montañez explore how the creators of the documentaries construct “the cinematic equivalents of physical museums of memory through their exploration of personal histories that resonate with the national past” (74). Although this would be altogether another subject to discuss, it is interesting to see how these documentary filmmakers use the idea raised by Fernando Aínsa that “spaces have memory” to cinematically communicate individual stories that occurred during the dictatorship, and that were not initially part of the collective memory of the nation. As the authors of the article on the contemporary documentaries state: “In this way they [the documentaries] illustrate how individual attempts to reconstruct the lost past can fill in the gaps in official recollections of history” (73).

In conclusion, in this chapter I have explored the interactive Museo de la Memoria in Montevideo, Uruguay as a *lieu de mémoire* that explicitly showcases key

artifacts from the time of the military dictatorship to help curate memories of the country's recent past in order to transmit these memories and information to multiple generations and allow this knowledge to inform the future; in a way, not letting official history and the "silenced pacts" of the past erase the wounds left by the military regime of 1973-1985 and the ones further inflicted by the succeeding governments that chose silence over justice and truth. With an institution such as the MUME, Uruguay and in particular the city of Montevideo, has begun the process of "digging up the past" so that a dialogue about the country's troubled memory can ensue. Although I agree with scholars who think that the MUME still has a lot of work to accomplish (González 88-89; Rilla 31), I do believe that this institution is a project in the right direction. As Elizabeth Jelin states: "Territorial markers [sites, plaques, museums, memorials] are the product of human will and human agency, resulting from the initiative and the commitment of social groups acting as memory entrepreneurs" ("Public" 147). Memory must be actively and constantly worked on, and ultimately it is left up to us to continue to work on the MUME, as well as all the other museums that have given memory a central platform.

As a final note, I would like to state that I believe both the Jewish Museum Berlin and the Museum of Memory in Montevideo can serve as *lieux de mémoire* and are places of reflection that actively encourage the spectator to come to a deeper understanding of the traumatic history of the twentieth century. However, it is important to note that the physical voids we see in the Museum of Memory (the uncanny tombs outside the museum, photographs of excavation sites, and the disappearing, deteriorating text on the information placards) and the pedagogical voids the museum seeks to fill in are more "grounded" and tangible than those conceptual "Voids" we encounter in Libeskind's

museum space. While Libeskind's uncanny design on a grand scale highlights the absence of the Jewish community in Germany through the representation of metaphysical "Voids" (also including a "Memory Void" within his labyrinth of empty spaces) symbolizing the traumatic loss of the Holocaust, the MUME integrates its play on voids and absences into practical micro-narratives, little pieces of the puzzle we can pick up to understand the disappearance of Uruguay's democracy and the subsequent voids and absences left behind at a cultural and institutional level.

Conclusion

In the last two chapters of this thesis, I examined a Uruguayan autobiographical novel, poetry that was musicalized, an award-winning film, and urban places of memory that all meditate in different ways on the military regime of 1973 to 1985. I analyzed literary texts created during and after the dictatorship period such as Benedetti's poem on the Disappeared that was composed and used as a resistance tool in the popular music genre Canto Popular in the 1970s and 80s, Rosencof's autobiographical novel published in 2000 and the contemporary thriller *Zanahoria* released in 2014. These cultural productions all draw attention to the "open wounds" and absences left in Uruguay as a result of an oppressive military regime, while also using a poetic lens to "fill in the gaps" left by the official history disseminated by the Uruguayan government since 1985. At the core of these texts one finds a maze of multiple, interconnected voids. As seen in these final chapters, eerie tombs, typographical voids, blank or empty spaces and an aesthetic of fragmentation have been used as powerful tools in contemporary Uruguayan urban memory spaces, memorials, monuments and other cultural productions to represent the physical and psychological loss or absence left behind by "Los Desaparecidos" (The Disappeared), the citizens who were kidnapped, taken away from their families by state agents and presumably assassinated.

This thesis has also analyzed the voids, wastelands, absences and gaps lurking in contemporary and post-war German cultural productions as they seek to highlight and "expose" traumatic events in German history, particularly the cultural and collective loss resulting from the Holocaust. As I examined in the first two chapters of this project, the

works of Wim Wenders, W.G. Sebald, and Peter Weiss catalogued and explored the powerful voids left in German society as a result of the Holocaust and the subsequent division of Germany in the post-war period. In Wenders's film the wasteland near the Potsdamer Platz is seen and experienced as a void, but as *der Erzähler* (the Storyteller) walks through this desolate empty area (as this character later describes when winding the musical box, a "no man's land") he imaginatively relives the past and through his poetic sing-song voice reveals palimpsestic layers of history, also giving us a roadmap to the former Jewish businesses and community that used to populate the Potsdamer Platz in Weimar Germany. In the contemporary Berlin landscape portrayed in the film, Wenders also palimpsestically layers uncanny memories of the historical past by intertwining 1940s historical film footage or "film within a film" with 1980s urban footage to poetically meditate on the destruction of the city and the status of the "divided present."

In Sebald's novel or prose text *Austerlitz*, the childhood protagonist has a memory void and uses architectural spaces and photographs to trigger memories of the past and recover his lost Jewish identity, providing us with unique insight into the personal trauma of experiencing the Holocaust. In Peter Weiss's autobiographical short story, the narrator's journey through the uncanny space of a former concentration camp, the Auschwitz-Birkenau site, powerfully and viscerally highlights the absence and tragic loss of the Holocaust that even uncannily extends into his own present. In Weiss's text there is an almost obsessive cataloguing and heightened visual description, along with a map, that literally puts the visitor into the space of the dead, enacting what scholar Eric Kligerman has called the "Holocaustal uncanny." Daniel Libeskind's architectural "Voids" in the Jewish Museum Berlin, as I describe in the first chapter of the thesis, also can trigger

what Kligerman calls a “Holocaustal uncanny” experience. Libeskind’s architectural “Voids” painfully represent the tragic absence in German-Jewish culture and the “absolute void” experienced by German-Jewish communities as a result of the rupture formed in history by the Holocaust. In my reading of this museum space, Libeskind’s symbolic and conceptual “Voids” also become corporeal, painful and personal.

In examining the many types of voids present in both German and Uruguayan cultural productions and memory places, here I would also like to mention my own “informational void” that I experienced in relation to Uruguay’s traumatic past. I had a unique educational experience as I spent half of my childhood and teenage years in Uruguay and the other half in Canada. While in Uruguay, I completed the equivalent of Kindergarten, grade seven, eight and nine of the Canadian school system; however, I did not grow up learning about the dictatorship period in lessons on Uruguayan history. It was first during my undergraduate years at York University that one of my professors, Dr. María Figueredo, informed me and my classmates of this traumatic event, devoting particular attention to the subject of “Los Desaparecidos.” I had to overcome my own cultural and informational “gaps” because this traumatic subject was not openly discussed while I was in school in Uruguay, or by my family, and I grew up only knowing the oversimplified notion that the Tupamaros were “the bad guys” and that there had been a military coup when my parents were young. Other Uruguayan scholars have stated that there were intentional cultural or pedagogical “gaps” left in Uruguayan history books and schools in order to avoid discussing the difficult topic of the dictatorship. Mariana Achugar, for example, as I mention in the second part of the thesis, sheds interesting light on these cultural voids purposely left at a national level as various

institutions and the government have sought to erase this part of Uruguay's history and leave the younger generations who did not directly experience the dictatorship first-hand "in the dark," without knowledge of the events that transpired during those twelve years of military rule. As Cara Levey argues, "[i]ndeed, following the return to democracy in 1985, successive democratic governments (Sanguinetti, 1985–1990, 1995–2000 and Lacalle 1990–1995) attempted to draw a line under the past and impose a discourse of forgetting" (204). With the keen goal of providing a pedagogical tool for future generations to learn about the "dark" past of the nation, however, in the post-dictatorship period, interactive urban places of memory, such as the Museo de la Memoria in Montevideo, have tried to reverse this and have sought to actively provide the information needed to "fill" the gaps and teach the public about this difficult period in Uruguay's past. As I briefly mention in the final chapter, there are also other monuments in Uruguay that try to speak to this urgent need to fill in the gaps, piece together the puzzle of the "pending past," and properly excavate the past. One might say that even the monument for the Disappeared in the Vaz Ferreira Park literally tries to excavate the past with its setting of "exposed rock." The names of the Disappeared jut out over an "open scar in the landscape" as the country struggles to remember and commemorate the past. As Latin American scholar Cara Levey suggests: "The monument's exposed rock – an open scar in the landscape – may serve as a reminder that the search for truth as well as justice is a complex and painstaking one, still unresolved, and through which Uruguay is navigating *terra incognita*" (Levey, 211; emphasis in original). I believe it is important to keep creating places of memory and cultural productions that maintain the memory of the past and allow for the broader debates surrounding it to flourish. Urban memory spaces

such as museums and monuments also allow the public to address the “unresolved” and “painstaking” search for truth and justice. For even when an international company such as Coca-Cola camouflaged the Memorial de los Detenidos Desaparecidos in their *Sprite* commercials in 2010 causing uproar and commotion within the community,¹⁵¹ the “free” publicity on the issues related to Uruguayan politics of memory fuelled “debates about responsibility” and “heightened” the Memorial’s “visibility” (Levey 215), thus, also heightening and shedding light on the subject of the Disappeared, the ongoing search for answers, and the debates on commemorating and memorializing Uruguay’s traumatic past.

Since many Latin American countries have pioneered the creation of “open” monuments and memorials, I would briefly like to meditate on this further in the final section of this conclusion. Estela Schindel in her article “Inscribir el pasado en el presente: memoria y espacio urbano” explores the subject of memory and urban space in Latin American countries such as Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, as these countries try to commemorate the victims of dictatorships through monuments and memorials and compares Latin American and European concepts of memory and memory practice. According to Schindel, Europe has been a model for finding alternative expressive languages to convey the incomprehensive memory of its traumatic past; while Latin America at times operates with more traditional representational means. As Schindel states: Latin America has had to work around what she calls traditional, absolute, categoric and almost authoritative types of monuments and memorials (87). To try to

¹⁵¹ For a full description of this controversial *Sprite* commercial see “The Memorial de los Detenidos Desaparecidos: Fragile memory and contested meaning in Post-dictatorship Uruguay” by Cara Levey.

counter this older model, Schindel argues that the Latin American countries have opted for “open” monuments:

La creación de monumentos “abiertos”, dispuestos a la re-escritura, corrección y añadido futuros, así como la aparición de elementos recordatorios específicos de las desapariciones, son recursos imaginativos y renovadores desarrollados por el movimiento latinoamericano de derechos humanos. Los modos performativos, activos, de recordar señalando y resignificando los sitios de memoria difícil, implican a su vez formas originales de instalar la memoria en el espacio público que se han dado algunas sociedades latinoamericanas renovando con ellos también su cultura política. Se trata de prácticas impregnadas de la gestualidad de la protesta y su resultado se sustrae a una diferenciación tajante entre obra y acción. (87)¹⁵²

By proposing the use of “open” monuments that allow for re-writings, corrections and additions, Schindel highlights the performative, active and open aspect of the acts of remembering the brutal recent past and the atrocities associated with it in Latin American countries.

In the first chapter of this thesis, we have also seen how the Jewish Museum Berlin as an “open-ended” counter-memorial also invites spectators to step into exhibits and onto artwork, at times even going beyond interaction to shock and provoke the visitor. The empty space of the Jewish Museum is ultimately an “open text” that can be

¹⁵² “The creation of ‘open’ monuments that are prepared for future re-writings, corrections and additions, as well as the appearance of specific memorial elements related to the disappearances, are imaginative and restorative resources developed by the Latin American human rights movement. The performative, active modes of remembering that signal and re-signify the sites of difficult memory imply at the same time original forms of installing memory in the public space. This has been done by some Latin American societies who with it also renew their political culture. These are practices impregnated with the gestures of protest and their actions highlight a stark difference between artwork and action” (my trans.)

read and experienced in different ways. It too becomes performative and invites active ways of remembering. Libeskind invites visitors to embark on a self-reflective journey to contemplate the nature of remembering the victims of the Holocaust and its aftermath at a sensorial level, at times even creating uncanny encounters with the past. As previously discussed, Libeskind's architectural design, which emphasizes the absence left by the Holocaust at a symbolic and metaphysical level (through the striking use of a series of "Voids," including the "Memory Void") can also be considered a counter-monument as defined by James E. Young, since it does not adhere to traditional museum formats.

Uruguay, also home to minimalist monuments and counter-monuments, for several decades has been dealing with the subject of how to commemorate the Disappeared, how to honour and represent people whose whereabouts are unknown, and whose relatives are still searching for answers. As I discuss in the final chapter, with the Museo de la Memoria in Montevideo the objective has been to follow a traditional museum format, but with a key pedagogical element operating at the centre so that future generations are able to learn from the past and heed the "never again" ("nunca más") memory policy. By literally re-appropriating a piece of urban space that belonged to a former dictator, the city of Montevideo has symbolically taken a stance on the importance of remembering the past and making it accessible for future generations. Although not a counter-monument, through collaboration with community members, and the use of performative and interactive elements, the Museum of Memory in Montevideo also emerges as a unique example of a new kind of "open-ended" and interactive memory space in Latin America. What is also unique, as we have examined, is the emphasis on voices of resistance and protesting in the museum's exhibition space. Here we are

reminded of the Canto Popular Uruguayo as well as the poetic works by Mauricio Rosencof, Mario Benedetti, and Daniel Viglietti. In order to resist oppression and maintain the spirit of freedom, these works use poetry, music, and literature to commemorate those missing and learn from the past. In the hanging pots in the museum exhibit and the musicalized words of the poets we can hear, see and even feel the will to protest, to live, and to remember.¹⁵³ They too are part of Uruguay's "open" narratives that seek to make its traumatic past visible in the present and accessible to future generations as well.

In the German and Uruguayan literary texts, films and museum spaces examined in this thesis, we have seen how architectural voids, empty and cavernous spaces, wastelands, empty tombs, typographical voids, symbolic voids, metaphysical voids and an aesthetic of fragmentation, distortion and dislocation create a unique visual frame for understanding the past. In the face of loss and absence we have seen a heightened visual description and cataloging of objects (Peter Weiss's "Meine Ortschaft" and Rosencof's autobiographical novel) and a need to record and document, using photography, letters, maps and film-within-a film footage to add palimpsestic layers of history and memory to contemporary texts. But the play on presence and absence in these texts is not only visual. In the case studies examined in this thesis, sound has also been used as an important tool and aesthetic strategy to give a voice to those silent or missing historical subjects, the victims of traumatic events. In the Jewish Museum Berlin, we have seen

¹⁵³ As discussed in the third chapter, the Canto Popular Uruguayo was another key way in which artists such as Daniel Viglietti and Mario Benedetti resisted the silence imposed by the military. With their concert "Otra voz canta," which they continued to perform in the post-dictatorship period on an international scale, these artists demonstrated how music can help excavate the past and keep the spirit of those who fought for a better society alive.

how two artists created dynamic installations (Via Lewandowsky's *Gallery of the Missing- Order of Disappearance* and Menashe Kadishman's *Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves*) that utilize sound to further deepen the visitor's experience and meditate on the suffering, loss and destruction resulting from the Holocaust. In the Hall of "La Resistencia Popular" in the Museum of Memory in Montevideo clanging sounds of pots and pans remind the visitors of the voices of resistance during the dictatorship, highlighting the power of the people to fight for freedom, democracy and life.

As I wrap up this thesis, I would like to state that through this project I have fostered a deeper understanding of my own country's recent traumatic past. I have also learned about the vital role that Holocaust discourse has had in Latin America in opening up the conversation about memory, loss, trauma and most importantly introducing the policy of "Never Again" ("Nunca más"). Keeping in the mind the value that these two words have had in many countries that had and are still dealing with genocide, trauma and remembering state terrorism at a collective level has further reinforced my own view of the therapeutic and redemptive value of literature, the arts and museum studies.¹⁵⁴ Here I am again reminded of Mauricio Rosencof's autobiographical novel, *Las cartas que no llegaron*. In Uruguay, a country that has struggled to excavate the past and give justice to the thousands of people who suffered at the hands of the military, writers such as Mauricio Rosencof have turned to literature, using the pen to better understand one's

¹⁵⁴ While doing research for this thesis, two of Theodor Adorno's essays "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" and "Education after Auschwitz" have also inspired me to think about the need of understanding the past and not repeat past mistakes. I particularly enjoyed reading "Education after Auschwitz" because here Adorno emphasizes the need to educate ourselves about what happened in Germany during the National Socialist period so that a horrific event such as the Holocaust will not be repeated. This need to educate ourselves and not lose sight of remembering the past is something that particularly strikes me as powerful, especially as I think about Uruguay where so much has been done to forget and silence the past.

own history and identity but also to record testimony so that when the courts are finally ready to hear his voice they have not forgotten his pain. It is worth noting that the artists who were imprisoned during the Uruguayan dictatorship used literature and painting as a way to mentally survive each day. Healing from individual and collective trauma is not easy or simple, but when we utilize literary and artistic works to help heal the pain, we provide ourselves with a way of coping with the past and moving forward to seize the future.

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Curriculum Vitae

Name: Jessica Paola Marino

Post-Secondary Education and Degrees: York University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2010-2015 Hons. B.A., Spanish and German Studies, summa cum laude

York University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2015 Professional Certificate in Management

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2016-2018 M.A. Candidate, Comparative Literature

Honours and Awards: Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Masters Award (GGSM)
2017-2018

Graduate Student Travel Award
The University of Western Ontario
2017

Western Recruitment Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)
The University of Western Ontario
2016-2017

Western Graduate Research Scholarship
The University of Western Ontario
2016-2017

Dean's Entrance Scholarship / Chair's Entrance Scholarship
The University of Western Ontario
2016-2017

Related Work Experience: Teaching Assistant, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
The University of Western Ontario
2016-2018