
Sites of Condor

The Bastille was not simply a site. It was a penal institution operating within an elaborate machinery of repression where those who posed a political threat to the monarchy were subjected to a surreal ritual of arrest and confinement, without any semblance of due process. Commenting on that brazen display of power, Schama writes: “Seized without warning—usually at night—from the living world, the victim of this state abduction was then deprived of all means of communicating his existence to friends and family beyond the walls” (1990: 394; see also BnF, 2010). In more recent times, military regimes in the southern cone of Latin America would imitate the capricious authority exercised by the King of France. Memory of the dictatorships, and of the brutality inflicted on civilians regarded by the military as “subversives,” has spawned a sharp awareness of those atrocities. That upsurge in memory, Nora (2002) points out, is spreading in post-conflict societies as they adjust their relationships to the past. Several forces drive this trend. First, certain groups are challenging “official” versions of history by recovering segments of the past that have been suppressed. Second, there is growing demand for signs of a past that have been confiscated. Third, the importance of heritage has taken hold among certain people interested in reevaluating their own identity.

Efforts to understand the upsurge in memory in the southern cone gain much from the significance of sitedness, which helps us sort out the nuances of space and place. Michel de Certeau (1984) posits that place is where things and people are ordered; space, by its very nature, is the use of space (see Casey, 2003). The two concepts are deeply intertwined given that former detention centers are still the precise places where atrocities occurred. In their afterlife, those sites have been strategically transformed for purposes of memorialization. Toward that end, a delicate emotional register comes into play: “memoryscapes” require that sites retain sufficient authenticity of their profane past, or its use-value, but that they do so without repelling visitors (Bilbija and Payne, 2011; Sevenko, 2004). In this chapter we explore Operation Condor—a sweeping cross-border mission to eradicate

“subversives.” We do so by entering former detention centers in Buenos Aires, Santiago, Asunción, and Montevideo. There we will find that the plain arbitrariness of abduction, confinement, and disappearance is a central factor in the upsurge in memory. We will also find that entire sites have been culturally transformed. As a Bastille Effect in the making, these once-polluted places are becoming metaphors for human rights activism in a post-conflict society.

CITIES OF CONDOR

In the aftermath of the 1973 coup, Chilean intelligence agents extended their power by forging a regional and international security network. On the instructions of dictator Augusto Pinochet, Manuel Contreras, director of the Chilean secret police, embarked on an anti-communist campaign, lobbying other nations for their support. In the late summer of 1975, Contreras traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with CIA Deputy Director Vernon Walters. During that trip—the second in less than two months—Contreras pitched his plans for what would become Operation Condor. Then, on August 27, Contreras met with the Venezuelan intelligence service in Caracas. Years later, Venezuelan intelligence officer Rafael Rivas Vasquez would disclose that Contreras was “building up this grandiose scheme of a very big and powerful service that could have information—worldwide information” (Kornbluh 2013: 344). Contreras’s vision of Operation Condor crystalized in October 1975 when he invited his counterparts in the southern cone to join him in Santiago (Chile) for the first inter-American conference on national intelligence. At that meeting, which was “strictly secret in nature” (Kornbluh 2013: 331, 364), the attendees arrived at a strategy for combating “subversives.” From November 25 to 28, 1975, and again in June 1976, delegates from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay met and agreed to cooperate in a joint intelligence mission (later supported by Peru and Ecuador). Contreras, who for a time was on the CIA payroll, would gather significant backing from the Nixon administration and its intelligence agencies. Adding symbolic significance, the operation was named after Chile’s national bird, the condor (Dinges 2004; McSherry 2005).

A shadowy intelligence network, Operation Condor maintained a highly centralized data bank that included computer records of abductions, detention, torture, and ultimately assassinations. The transnational reach of Condor would soon become its defining trait. Argentina was selected as the base for Sistema Condor. It has been reported, however, that the hub of that system was at the US military installation in the Panama Canal Zone (Kornbluh, 2013: 347). In one of the worst of a series of spectacular crimes, Condor agents abducted and murdered Zelmar Michelini and Hector Guterrez Ruiz in 1976; at the time, the two Uruguayan legislators were living in exile in Buenos Aires. The following month, former Bolivian president Juan Jose Torres was assassinated in Buenos Aires. In what is often

described as Operation Condor's most audacious action, former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier and his American colleague Ronni Moffitt were killed by a car bomb in Washington, D.C., on September 21, 1976 (Branch and Propper, 1982; Dinges and Landau, 1980). All of this lethal violence was enshrouded in black propaganda coupled with psychological warfare with the intent of convincing the wider population that the shootings and bombings were the work of leftist "subversives" engaged in a "dirty war" (Marchak, 1990; D. Taylor 1997).

It remains unclear when Operation Condor officially disbanded, if it ever did. During its peak years, 1975 to 1977, Condor agents in the southern cone murdered—or "disappeared"—hundreds of victims. Moreover, after the 1976 coup in Argentina, an estimated 15,000 exiles from neighboring countries found themselves "trapped by the increasingly coordinated, regional collaboration in abductions, torture, disappearances, and murders" (Kornbluh 2013: 417). McSherry (1999, 2005) describes Operation Condor as a parallel state that defied international law and engaged in criminal tactics to undermine constitutional institutions. In tandem with Operation Condor, other forms of state terror were being conducted before, during, and after the Condor years. So it is important to note that not all political violence in those countries can be attributed to Condor. That said, all of those dictatorships perceived a threat from so-called subversives, broadly defined as people who harbored dangerous ideas. Such people included not just armed militants but also mainstream political opponents, peaceful dissenters, and religious workers. Argentine General Jorge Videla infamously declared in 1976 that "a terrorist is not just someone with a gun or a bomb, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization" (McSherry, 2005: 1).

Clandestine detention, torture, and extermination centers were important sites for Operation Condor as well as for other forms of state repression. Decades later, many of those sites have been repurposed as storytelling institutions that issue narratives through their sitedness—a reminder that performance and spectacle continue to shape national identity in post-conflict societies (Clark and Payne, 2011; D. Taylor, 1997). In *Afterlives of Confinement: Spatial Transitions in Post-dictatorship Latin America*, Susana Draper examines former detention sites in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay in an effort to expose the continuity of power and economic structures. Some of those sites have been repurposed as human rights memorials and museums. Others have been transformed into shopping malls that embrace neoliberal consumerism, thus masking unachieved goals. With that observation in mind, Draper furthers Huyssen's critique of the ways "memory and forgetting pervade real public space, the world of objects, and the urban world we live in" (2003: 9–10; 1995). Focusing on the "politics of amnesia," Draper refines the notion of afterlife, which "acquires the sense of a mode of experiencing the echoes of a past that is lost to history but has the potential to be heard or legible. It is a missed possibility that keeps open the promise of that which did not / could not take place" (2012: 4–5; see also Jelin, 2003; Jelin and Kaufman, 2000).

BUENOS AIRES: CITY OF RECOVERY

Remembering and forgetting figure prominently in the post-conflict heritage of Buenos Aires, especially given the immense scope of the human rights atrocities committed there. As General Iberico Saint-Jean boasted: “First we kill all the subversives; then we kill their collaborators; then . . . their sympathizers, then . . . those who remain indifferent; and finally we kill the timid” (Simpson and Bennett, 1985: 66). From that perspective, the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976 to 1983) is properly characterized as the most ruthless: while in power, it disappeared more than 30,000 civilians through a complex network of 500 clandestine detention centers (Dinges, 2004; Feitlowitz, 1998). This “dirty war” (“guerra sucia”) was a military euphemism for the process of “cleansing” the nation of ideological contamination through wholesale abductions, torture, and extermination. The legacy of the dirty war has left residual scars on the Argentine psyche in ways that sensitize remembering (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). And it is often the power of place that activates such memory. One of the most notorious sites was ESMA, now known as El Centro Clandestino de Detencion, Tortura y Exterminio, which was recovered from the military during the transition to democracy. Located in the wealthy suburb of Nuñez, the ESMA memorial has a brooding presence given that more than 5,000 political prisoners were held there, very few of whom survived. Its handsome neoclassical buildings are visible from the busy avenue; the iron fences that surround it are now draped with protest banners informing passersby of its profane past: “No Impunity for Genocide,” “Don’t Forget,” and “30,000” (see Robben, 2005).

One of ESMA’s main buildings, the Casino (or Officers’ Club), was the central hub for planning disappearances and exterminations; it was also where prisoners were detained and tortured. While ESMA was being converted into a memorial site, more evidence was uncovered that corroborated witnesses’ first-hand testimony about atrocities. Those findings are on display for the public, prompting sober reflection on state crime. Conceptually, the Casino attends to the process by which a profane site for clandestine detention is transformed into a sacred place for memorialization. Fittingly, the slogan of the Argentine human rights movement is “Memoria, Verdad y Justicia” (Memory, Truth, and Justice). ESMA has evolved into a storytelling institution that explains its brutal history and, in doing so, reflects the words of philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who warned that “forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination” (1994: 49).

The afterlives of confinement are evident in different realms, namely literature, film, and architecture. Of particular interest here is Draper’s (2012) commentary on “architectural recycling.” That concept captures the spatial element of a site as well as a temporal one in that it attends to the past and present simultaneously. For instance, visitors to ESMA are aware that the Casino is both a former detention, torture, and extermination center and a memorial space. The act of “recycling”



FIGURE 7. “ESMA.” In Buenos Aires, ESMA was a major site for detention, torture, and extermination. Pictured is the Casino, where faces of the disappeared are arranged on the façade. © retrowelch 2022.

recedes into the background, allowing the narratives of past atrocities and current human rights campaigns to resonate together. Spatial afterlives at ESMA are also central to the analysis of Jens Andermann (2012), who untangles the debates over postmemory, secondary witnessing, and the politics of empathy. In 2004, the Argentine armed forces handed ESMA over to the City of Buenos Aires for it to begin the process of memorializing the space. The mood among human rights activists remains mixed. “The joy of having conquered a site you are beginning to populate runs parallel with the sensation that you are keeping company with the souls that have passed through here” (Ginzberg, 2008). Borrowing again from a sociology of place, the Casino has been “personed” through photographs of victims projected onto the façade, thereby enhancing its signifying-value in its current incarnation (see Bell, 1997; figure 7).

Andermann does not stray from the canon of museum studies (Bennett, 1995; Williams, 2007). Thus, he emphasizes sitedness as it enhances a sophisticated repertoire of cultural techniques for encouraging “visitors to turn into active participants of a memory performance” (2012: 82; 2007; Andermann and Arnold-de Simine, 2012). That form of museumgoing becomes an act of secondary witnessing through the deployment of an “iconography both sufficiently familiar to trigger traumatic repetition as well as prompting secondary-generation viewers to

transpose their own experiences and subjectivity into the space” (Andermann, 2012: 82). To be clear, issues underlying sitedness and technique are attached to competing ambitions for ESMA. At one end of the spectrum is the testimonial perspective, which claims that the entire site is unalterable heritage. At the opposite end is the performative option. Hence, when handed over to artists and political activists, the space is symbolically “wrested from death and its executioners” (Andermann, 2012: 85). From the standpoint of the museal—or the centrist position—the site is transformed in ways that contextualize and arrange material evidence for public education and the promotion of democratic values. Among the many groups that weighed in on the repurposing of ESMA, the Association Madres de la Plaza de Mayo adopted the most anti-museal proposal. The Madres (the mothers of the disappeared) proposed that the entire site be reworked into a multifunctional center for youth culture and popular arts to commemorate their children. “We do not share the idea of a museum of horror,” said Hebe de Bonafini of the Madres. “Museums are associated with death. . . . Death is for executioners, not for us” (Brodsky, 2005: 219; Di Paolantonio, 2008; Park, 2014).

In its present configuration, the vast compound of ESMA—17 acres—features testimonial, performative, and museal techniques within different buildings devoted variously to the arts, to human rights activities, and to forensic archives. The Casino is explicitly referred to as a “reconstruction” based on the testimony of survivors; thus, it is made clear to visitors that they are touring a reconstruction and not the original space. Even so, that reconstruction benefits from its sitedness, which transmits sacrality and promotes reflection. To do so, however, it has resorted to a curatorial technique, or “art of arrangement,” that “recycles” the space in ways that give it shape, “illuminating a dialectical relationship between the past and present where different tenses confront rather than overwhelm each other” (Di Paolantonio, 2008: 40).

In more practical terms, the recovery of ESMA fulfills the aims of the Centre for Legal and Social Studies (CELS, an NGO affiliated with Human Rights Watch). Principally, the site has become an extension of the human rights movement, which even during the last dictatorship fought to expose the extermination. As a crime scene, ESMA provides evidence for legal teams as they prepare cases to quash the junta’s efforts “to erase the physical and symbolic memory of its victims” (Andermann, 2012: 89; see also Kaiser, 2011). The spatial afterlife of ESMA possesses a temporal mode in that it links the past with the present. Placards are scattered around the Casino to remind visitors: “Here a crime against humanity was perpetrated.” Indeed, curators strategically draw attention to the role of sitedness in the memorial process in ways that reveal a history of atrocities that were once concealed. In this way, the site provides a performative anchor through which visitors, as secondary witnesses, can identify with victims. That degree of emotive bonding is significant as Buenos Aires, and the nation, recover from the last dictatorship.

SANTIAGO: CITY OF RE-COLLECTING

Evidence of human rights atrocities under Operation Condor—in tandem with the Pinochet dictatorship—is harder to access in Santiago than in Buenos Aires. That is partly because sites have been deliberately demolished so as to erase all physical traces of a profane past. Still, a handful of spaces are open to the public, where objects and images have been *re-collected*—a term that refers to the actual recovery of artifacts as well as the activation of memory. Londres 38 is a former center of repression and extermination that from September 1973 to the end of 1975 held nearly 100 detainees. During that time, the building, code-named Cuartel Yucatan, was occupied by the secret police. There, DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional) began “developing a system of forced disappearances as part of a global political framework of state terrorism” (Londres 38 brochure, n.d.). That transnational aspect of Operation Condor is evident in political posters on display at Londres 38, including one featuring Uncle Sam and Pinochet as a pawn on a chessboard (see Welch, 2020).

The curators at Londres 38 provide insights into the phenomenon of collecting and re-collecting in ways that underscore the site’s cultural transformation from use-value as a detention center to signifying-value in its afterlife. A film projector displays a looping slideshow of data cards compiled by DINA to identify so-called “subversives.” That information was digitized in a central data bank and distributed to neighboring military juntas; that computerized system was assisted by Tel-Ex equipment (and training) provided by the CIA (Dinges, 2004; Kornbluh, 2013; McSherry, 2005). Although the dictatorship went to great lengths to destroy evidence, a trove of 39,000 secret files was discovered at another detention site in Chile, the notorious Colonia Dignidad. At Londres 38, those files were re-collected for visitors to witness the fine detail of Operation Condor. A case in point is the profile of political prisoner Maria Elena Gonzales, about whom extensive biographical information had been collected, such as her membership in Amnesty International. Londres 38 is essentially vacant. However, as a memorial space, it has been recycled as a repository for recollection; according to a statement on one of its walls, “this void is full of memories.” In the words of Collins (2011: 235), that shift from amnesia to memorialization marks an important development in “the moral economy of memory” aimed at the commemoration of space in post-Pinochet Chile.

Farther afield is Villa Grimaldi, which served as a major detention hub for DINA but now seems to have faded into the amnesia of suburban Santiago. The site was razed by the military, but in 2004 it was reconstructed as a “park for peace.” To re-collect its brutal past, many of the structures have been reassembled to illustrate how the site might have looked when it functioned as Cuartel Terranova. Wooden shacks have been rebuilt to demonstrate how they were once used as cramped spaces of confinement—and torture. When the site was a prison, in one

corner of the large compound there stood a water tower that was used for detention. That water tower has since been rebuilt for the public to visit. The interior contains drawings by survivors, who graphically depict the ways they were forced into tiny isolation cells and subjected to electrocution. On the opposite wall hangs Pinochet's "structure of repression." The organizational chart outlines the chain of command, with Manuel Contreras, director of DINA, prominently displayed. Visitors are reminded that the dictatorship conducted cross-border missions under Operation Condor with the support of US intelligence agencies. Irony is not lost on the fact that Villa Grimaldi had once been an elegant social club known by its patrons as "Paradise." Its demolition left the site with mounds of colorful tiles, which artisans have re-collected—and recycled—to create sculptures, which are spread throughout the park. That shift from use-value to signifying-value made for an even greater retreat from a profane past to a sacred present. As part of the process of establishing the park's afterlife, a Catholic priest conducted an elaborate purification ritual by blessing the property with holy water (see Douglas, 1966). Still, there remains some emotive tension. Some human rights groups resisted the plan to reconstruct the water tower and the wooden cell blocks, arguing that doing so would seem "inauthentic and distract[] from the park's initial aesthetic as a place of serenity and restorative beauty" (Collins, 2011: 239).

In Santiago, perhaps one of the most surreal spaces of confinement was the National Stadium. In the early days of the coup, thousands of detainees were processed through this enormous sports facility. Between 12,000 and 20,000 Chileans and foreigners were detained in the stadium for periods ranging from two days to two months (Hite, 2004). A brochure titled "Estadio Nacional: Memoria Nacional" points to its global significance: citizens from 38 countries were rounded up and assigned to the bleachers, the dressing rooms, and the concourse below the stands. The Stadium still hosts major events (football matches, rock concerts), yet it is also a place of "constructing memory," which makes visiting it a somewhat jarring experience. Its afterlife as a memorial space is animated by Section 8. The dark passageway one must follow to enter that section adds to the somber tone, which is maintained by a collection of photographs recalling the mayhem of the coup, when civilians were being funneled into the stadium. The content of the pictures becomes increasingly foreboding, for they memorialize those who were detained in the stadium as well as those who disappeared—another reminder of how places remain "personed."

The transnational scope of the Pinochet regime is again evident in a poster dedicated to the Argentines placed under military arrest. Nearby, a composite of more than 20 portraits of those murdered in the stadium hangs in front of a row of candles. Their identities are revealed by name. They include Charles Horman, who was the subject of the film *Missing*. Being a US citizen did not spare Horman and his colleague Frank Teruggi from the barbaric reach of the dictatorship. Their deaths foreshadowed Condor's assassination operations elsewhere, most notably



FIGURE 8. “National Stadium.” The National Stadium in Santiago held thousands of detainees in the early phase of the Pinochet dictatorship. © retrowelch 2022.

the attack on Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt. Visitors exploring the previous life of the stadium are permitted to enter the bleachers, which refuse to shed their past. The original patch of seats jars with an otherwise state-of-the-art sports venue. The outdated benches are lit with candles that reinforce the message that Section 8 is a sacred space for reflection and recollection. Across the back row are

the words “Un Pueblo sin Memoria es un Pueblo sin Futuro” (A people without a memory is a people without a future). Together, the memorial sites in Santiago battle the impulse to erase memory, thus pushing back against Pinochet’s 1995 statement: “It is better to remain quiet and forget. That is the only thing we must do. We must forget. And that won’t happen if we continue opening up lawsuits, sending people to jail. FOR-GET: That’s the word. And for that to happen both sides must forget and continue with their work” (Clark and Payne, 2011: 104).

ASUNCIÓN: CITY OF TEARS

It is said that when you visit Asunción you cry twice: first when you arrive, and again when you leave (Whicker’s World, 2016). While that saying is subject to personal interpretation, tears shed during the Alfredo Stroessner dictatorship (1954–89) and Operation Condor certainly help narrate the story of human rights. Toward that end, a key destination is the Museo de las Memorias. However serene it first appears, its violent past is palpable. During its years as a torture center, it processed more than 10,000 detainees. On display are devices that inflicted physical and psychological torment, including pliers for pulling out fingernails, a shock generator, and a bathtub used for waterboarding (see figure 9).

Those instruments of torture pave the way for a cultural transformation into a sacred space. The use-value of devices is neutralized, allowing their signifying-value to emerge as metaphors for suffering. To offset its profane past, the memorial has been decorated with serene artworks. Most noteworthy is a “tree of life” that was blessed and thus purified by Pope John Paul II as a means to symbolize the transition a post-dictatorship society. Elsewhere, the museum consists of a series of galleries, making it a place for learning and political commentary related to Operation Condor. A huge map of North and South America is marked in several places to identify locations of military interventions by the US government. Pre-Condor photographs of Stroessner shaking hands with US President Eisenhower in Panama are juxtaposed with a picture of Stroessner visiting Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

References to outside interests also point to the economic underpinnings of the dictatorship. A photograph of US President Ford, Vice President Rockefeller, and Henry Kissinger meeting in the White House is coupled with a document from Standard Oil. A caption takes exception to Rockefeller’s visit to Latin America, positing that his mission to combat the resistance actually “hid the need to protect foreign investments.” It is here that we witness some evidence of “public memory,” which contains tension between the “official culture” and the “vernacular culture” (Bodnar, 1992). It is theorized that the politics of memory are managed through the power of state and its elite partners. With the downfall of the Stroessner dictatorship, his close financial ties to the US (“official culture”) were laid bare, allowing memorial activists to issue a critique of Paraguay’s historical past (“vernacular culture”).



FIGURE 9. “Bathtub.” In Asunción, the bathtub (*pileta*) used for waterboarding is on display at a former detention site currently open to the public as the Museo de las Memorias.
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Reinforcing the ominous enigma of Operation Condor, a poster of a condor soaring over the southern cone is titled “Flights of Death.” In his foreword to McSherry’s *Predatory States*, former political prisoner Martin Almada recalls being interrogated by Paraguayan military operatives. Almada—a doctoral student—was charged with the crime of “intellectual terrorism” and subjected to torture. “My wife, the educator Celestina Perez, died as a consequence of the psychological tortures to which she was subjected, being forced to listen on the telephone, systematically for ten days, to my cries and screams from the torture chamber” (2005: xiii; see also 1993). After living in exile in Panama and Paris, Almada returned to Asunción to continue his human rights work. On December 22, 1992, Almada’s tears of suffering turned to tears of joy when he discovered an enormous trove of documents on Operation Condor in a suburban police station. That moment is captured on camera with Almada emotionally declaring that it was like “taking the Bastille.” The following day, the torture center was closed. The discarded police records, which were once used to guide thousands of detentions, have enjoyed an important afterlife: judges now rely on them to prosecute former military personnel for crimes against humanity. Among those cases was the one assembled by Spanish lawyer Baltasar Garzon against Pinochet.

The Archives of Terror are stored at the Supreme Court in Asunción, where they are available for researchers. That building has thus become another site of Operation Condor, albeit in very different way. In an eerie revelation, Almada's own arrest record (with mugshot, personal data, and fingerprints) is posted alongside those of other political prisoners from the southern cone. Formal correspondence between DINA director Contreras and Paraguayan officials further reveals the early stages of Operation Condor. It includes a 1975 letter to Pastor Coronel, who was one of the most feared torturers under the dictatorship (see Almada, 1993). After the fall of the Stroessner regime, Coronel was imprisoned on charges of torture and murder. A photograph in the Archives shows him crying while declaring his innocence. The archives unearth previously unknown details about Operation Condor, making it a tangible conduit for deciphering human rights atrocities. The afterlife of those documents is commemorated by a framed 2009 announcement from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that certifies the Archives of Terror as part of the Memory of the World International Register.

In a foyer outside the Archives Center is an exhibition about the history of repression in Paraguay. It informs visitors that the collection occupies "a relevant space in the fight against collective amnesia that affects our recent and remote past." Given the practical value of the Archives, it is easy to overlook a larger conceptual element of memory. Nora reminds us that sometimes "memory is in fact a gigantic and breathtaking storehouse of a material stock of what it would be impossible for us to remember, an unlimited repertoire of what might need to be re-called" (1989: 13). Asunción, Santiago, and Buenos Aires share a common interest in using the afterlife of detention sites for transmitting memory. However, the next—and last—city to be explored, Montevideo, marks a drastic departure from this upsurge in memory.

MONTEVIDEO: CITY WITHOUT MEMORY

In her critique of penal institutions and the economics of memory in Montevideo, Victoria Ruetalo declares that the Uruguayan dictatorship (1973–85) "imposed a conscious political crusade to forget" (2008: 39). Or, what has been described as a modernizing leap in the form of a blind jump into the nation's future that negates the past (Ludmer, 1994). To further unveil that phenomenon, the Grupo de Estudios Urbanos (1983) launched the audiovisual project *Una Ciudad Sin Memoria* (A City without Memory), showing how the military regime relied on an economic logic that would meet the demands of the neoliberal city. Unlike in Santiago—and Buenos Aires and Asunción—public discourse on the dictatorship and Operation Condor as embodied in sites and architecture is difficult to extract. A minor exception is MUME (Museo de la Memoria), housed in the manor of Maximo Santos, the 19th-century dictator. MUME is not a former detention/torture center;

it does, however, provide sophisticated commentary on assassinations, forced disappearances, and political imprisonment. An exhibit on “State Terrorism” taps into Michel Foucault (1977) by interpreting how Operation Condor invented an apparatus of extreme vigilance in order to “discipline” society as a whole. “The secret intelligence . . . enabled the exchange of information between the dictatorships of Latin America’s South Cone (El Cono Sur de America Latina) and the transnational repression called ‘Plan Condor.’”

Consistent with Grupo de Estudios Urbanos and its insights into *Una Ciudad Sin Memoria*, two of Montevideo’s main prisons used for political repression during the dictatorship have been radically transformed. In the first instance, Miguelete has been repurposed as Espacio de Arte Contemporaneo, an intriguing art museum that has embraced its panoptic heritage. A large sign on the perimeter of the property explains that the prison was built in 1880s to emulate Jeremy Bentham’s design for control and vigilance. While that posting would have been a prime opportunity to connect the dots of the dictatorship and Operation Condor, it conspicuously avoids doing so. Although the containment wall facing the neighborhood does offer some edgy political street art (e.g., condemning the “extermination of the original people”), it tends to focus on the wider controversy of imprisonment. A large portrait of Foucault is situated near a mural of a caged prisoner that is captioned: “The prison is not the solution, it is the problem.” That critique appears to be an extension of Foucault’s (1977) contention that the prison was introduced as an answer to a crisis whose solution was actually to construct more prisons. In support of that thesis, Draper points out that the Uruguayan dictatorship in the 1970s converted a military prison (i.e., Libertad) into a penal institution—for political and common prisoners—“in an effort to improve the failure of other prisons” (2012: 212).

Fittingly, artwork at the entrance of Miguelete/Espacio de Arte Contemporaneo foreshadows the spatial transformation of another prison, Punta Carretas, into a megamall. An image shows a woman (consumer) gazing into a glitzy fashion store called “CARCEL.” The piece is titled “Esto no es una carcel” (This is not a prison). Approaching Punta Carretas, visitors steeped in critical analysis will agree with Ruetalo, who summarizes the recycling: “The paranoid, bureaucratic structure, as theorized by Michel Foucault and others, suddenly became a fast-paced, neon-signed, food-chained Baudrillardian postmodern mall, an emblem for the newly democratic nation caught in globalization’s zeal” (2008: 38; see figure 10). The prison and the shopping mall may seem unrelated, yet we can trace their mutual paternity back to Bentham’s panopticon, which inspired developers and architects, including Alexander Haager in Los Angeles (California) and his counterpart Juan Carlos Lopez in Montevideo (see Davis, 1990; Day, 2013; Welch, 2017c). Both institutions—in form and function—embrace discipline, surveillance, and economics. Still, the transformation of Punta Carretas begs the question of how memory dissolves and forgets its past political repression, especially since a proposal to



FIGURE 10. “Shopping Mall.” In Montevideo, the former prison Punta Carretas has been transformed into an upscale shopping mall. © retrowelch 2022.

convert the site into a place of public memory was rejected. “In negating the violent history of the dictatorship, Punta Carretas becomes a metaphor for the nation, a perverse and violent imposition of oblivion” (Achugar, 2000).

The tandem developments of converting Punta Carretas prison into a shopping mall and instituting impunity—both of which provide a foundation for forgetting the past—have been the subject of extensive analysis (see Ruetalo 2008). Draper (2011, 2012), for instance, offers a compelling explanation. In Montevideo, which she calls the “city of impunity,” post-dictatorship politics and architecture merged in *Sociedad Anónima*: a corporation operated by major players in the transition to democracy, who included the Minister of the Interior, who was then juridical partner of Julio María Sanguinetti, president during the transition and Minister of Culture during the dictatorship. *Sociedad Anónima*, alongside the architecture team of Lopez, developed the prison into a commercial center by promoting it as a place of love. That transformation, according to Draper (2011: 134), “must be considered in conjunction with the referendum and plebiscite for the Law of Expiry which amnestied military personnel for their human rights violations during the decade of terror.” Together, immunity and the shopping mall were deliberately geared toward making a country of the future, calling into question the status of the past by reconfiguring history into the present and thereby erasing

memory. Especially in Montevideo, the broader legacy the dictatorship left the city was a kind of “utopia for a freedom of movement within a highly surveilled site” (Draper, 2011: 135). It is within that dystopian diagram that the shopping mall materialized as a new form of the surveillance that by then had been naturalized by the dictatorship (Ruetalo 2008).

RECAPPING THE BASTILLE EFFECT

The former sites of repression discussed in this chapter are not merely places of memory; they also serve as metaphors for human rights campaigns, suggesting a Bastille Effect in the capital cities of the southern cone. In Buenos Aires (City of Recovery), criminal charges against former military personnel have been mounting. At ESMA, the Casino remains an active crime scene where investigators continue to collect scientific data. Visitors are reminded of those ongoing tasks and are frequently cautioned not to touch the walls, which could contain forensic evidence. In late 2017, 29 former Argentine military officers were sentenced to life in prison for their involvement in the “death flights,” during which detainees were thrown from aircraft into the ocean. During the five-year trial—the country’s largest ever—prosecutors tried 54 defendants charged with the murder or forced disappearance of 789 victims, hearing testimony from 800 witnesses. Among those convicted was Alfredo Astiz, known as “Blond Angel of Death,” who orchestrated kidnappings and systematic torture leading up to the killings. His 2017 conviction has been stacked onto a previous life sentence for crimes against humanity (Goñi, 2017). More details on the “death flights” emerged during the 2017 ESMA trials. Journalist and ESMA survivor Miriam Lewin recovered the actual aircraft, a Skyvan PA-51, belonging to its new owner in Miami (in 2011). The original 1977 flight logs of the plane remained intact, exposing the names the crew. Consequently, those pilots were convicted: Mario Daniel Arrú and Alejandro Domingo D’Agostino (Enrique José de Saint George died during the trial) (Goñi, 2017; see also Actis et al., 2006).

In Santiago (City of Re-Collection), the Museo de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos houses thousands of documents, images, and objects that possess a potent afterlife, thus memorializing the victims of the Pinochet dictatorship and Operation Condor. Inside a display case is a collection of jewelry made by political prisoners while incarcerated. Among those items is a white pendant in the shape of a seahorse carved from bone. Survivors recall how during their time in captivity they would be blindfolded but still able to see the floor directly below them. In the bathroom, they could see the metal covering of a drain decorated with a seahorse. Since then, the seahorse (*caballo de mar*) has been an enduring symbol of surviving the dictatorship. Extending its afterlife, the seahorse is inscribed on the windows of the archives room at the Museum. Under the dictatorship, more than 3,000 political prisoners perished, including celebrated folksinger Victor Jara. In

2018, 45 years after his murder, a judge sentenced eight retired military officers to 15 years in prison for their complicity in his death. Early in the coup, Jara was rounded up and taken to Estadio Chile in western Santiago. While he was being detained, his hands were smashed with the butt of gun; he was then shot 44 times. The stadium, in its afterlife, is named in his memory (Reuters, 2018).

The afterlife of the Archives of Terror in Asunción (City of Tears) retains a significant role in the post-Condor era by aiding research as well as providing evidence for pending international cases against perpetrators. Its founder, Martin Almada, a political prisoner who survived psychological and physical torture, continues to campaign for human rights causes and has testified at trials in Buenos Aires, Madrid, Paris, and Rome. In 2002, Almada was granted the Right Livelihood Award (the “Alternative Nobel Prize”) for his outstanding courage in exposing repressors and bringing them to account. The prize committee declared that the Archives of Terror has “proved the most important collection of documents of state terror ever recorded. It is important not just for Paraguay but for the whole of Latin America and, indeed, the world” (Dinges, 2004: 241; see also Almada, 2005, 1993).

In sharp contrast to other post-Condor cities, Montevideo (City Without Memory) lags behind the campaign to hold the repressors accountable. A congressional commission attempted to launch an investigation into crimes committed by the military junta; however, the move was aborted by an airtight amnesty law ratified by a national referendum. The Expiry Law (officially known as the Law on the Expiration of the Punitive Claims of the State), passed in 1986 granted amnesty to the military involved in crimes against humanity during the dictatorship. It amounted to an ad hoc remedy to a political crisis fomented by the military, which feared prosecutions. The law—as well as the dictatorship—deeply marred Uruguay’s reputation as the “Switzerland of Latin America,” a nation known for its long tradition of liberal and participatory democracy. In 1989 and 2009, referendums maintained the law; in 2011, it was finally repealed (Amnesty International, 2011).

International warrants remain for many retired military officers accused of crimes against humanity; this has deterred them from traveling outside the country, since they could be arrested anywhere. That post-Condor reality is upheld by multilateral judicial agreements that continue to gain momentum as more evidence unfolds. “Those consequences are a measure, albeit imperfect, of justice. In a larger perspective there is a deep historical irony [in Operation Condor]. It once was the primary destroyer of international protections. Now two decades later its legal prosecution is the catalyst for a pioneering new era of international law” (Dinges, 2004: 246; Roht-Arriaza, 2005). Despite major advances in human rights in the wake of Operation Condor, its aftermath in the United States “is undigested history” (Dinges, 2004: 247). The lengthy paper trail unveils the complicity of US diplomats, intelligence agents, and military officers in Condor—yet there remains judicial silence. Even in the face of promising new leads contained in declassified

materials, the cases of Charles Horman and Frank Terrugi are relatively dormant. Such inactivity is another reminder that the denial and amnesia surrounding Condor presents a dilemma not only in South America but in the North as well (see Cohen, 2001; Welch, 2009a).

Many former detention and torture centers in the capital cities have benefited from cultural transformation. With the force of the Bastille Effect, those sites deliver noble allegories for human rights. Similarly, Parque de la Memoria y Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado in Buenos Aires has established another creative forum for memorializing the victims of state terrorism. Although the park is not on a site of a previous place of confinement, its location is imbued with solemn symbolism in that it rests on the bank of the river where victims of the death flights were deposited by military agents of the last dictatorship. Perpetuating the power of memory, the park represents a “nonexistent tomb” that performs the “exorcism of forgetting” (Gates-Madsen, 2011: 159).

CONCLUSION

In *The Oxford History of the Prison*, Aryeh Neier, past Director of Human Rights Watch, contributes an insightful commentary on “Confining Dissent: The Political Prison.” Setting the stage for his survey of the topic, Neier depicts the Bastille as a symbol of political imprisonment because it had been used to confine a number of well-known dissenters. Neier, like so many other scholars, reminds readers that on the day Bastille was stormed in 1789, none of the seven convicts who were freed were political prisoners. “That did not prevent the fall of that institution from coming to symbolize the triumph of liberty over tyranny” (Neier, 1995: 393). With that admission, Neier seems to recognize what is described herein as the Bastille Effect. As we shall learn over the course of this book, the Bastille continues to resonate in the popular imagination as a reminder of political repression. In contemporary times, its symbolism also reflects democratic reforms, human rights, and holding perpetrators of state crime accountable.

Neier also attends to developments in the southern cone of Latin America, correctly noting that those dictatorships used the tenets of the Cold War to justify repressive measures in an effort to stamp out “subversion.” Neier draws on the persecution of Jacobo Timerman, an Argentine editor and publisher, who in 1977 was imprisoned and tortured. His status as a journalist with international credentials gave the last dictatorship pause, thus sparing his life. After a military tribunal ordered his release from prison, Timerman was placed under a bizarre form of house arrest in which government agents moved into his Buenos Aires apartment with him. Two years of political pressure from abroad culminated in his expulsion from Argentina. While in exile, his writings, most notably his book *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (1981) aided the campaign against the junta. Among those moved by Timerman’s autobiography was newly elected

US President Ronald Reagan. His predecessor, President James Earl Carter, had imposed an arms embargo on Argentina owing to its abysmal record on human rights. Reagan was considering lifting the ban on arms sales; however, the compelling narrative painted by Timerman prompted him to reconsider. In 1983, the last dictatorship in Argentina collapsed amid international condemnation.

Neier concludes by underscoring the impact that writings by political prisoners ultimately have on repressive governments. They provide an important literary source that serves to enlighten the general public on matters of human rights. The next section of this book, "Diagrams of Control," focuses on three crucial underpinnings of political imprisonment, namely economics, religion, and architecture. Those social and physical institutions together also shape how sites and symbols of political confinement enter the collective consciousness, as embodied in the Bastille Effect.