

## Architectural Designs

The Bastille emerged as a potent expression of the French monarchy, which chose to deliver “a show of force, in order not to have to use force” (Godechot, 1970: 86). Like other prisons in the Paris network of confinement, such as Saint-Lazare and the Conciergerie, the Bastille was recognized for its unique architecture, which was bolstered by a bad reputation. It had been built in medieval times not as a prison but as a citadel. In fact, the word *bastille*, or *bastide*, means fortress (BnF, 2010). The Bastille’s transformation from castle to prison was ridiculed during the reign of Louis XIV by poet Claude Le Petit, who was executed in 1662 for writing licentious verse. With notable disdain for the Bastille, he wrote: “What’s the use of this old wall in a ditch? . . . this unmanned castle, which is no use as a fortress, but tries to be a prison!” (Godechot, 1970: 87). Despite that barb, the Bastille stood the test of time, due in large part to its imposing structure. Blueprints of the Bastille accurately specify its elaborate design, floorplan, and architectural ambition (BnF, 2010: 21). The rectangular layout was surrounded by massive walls 100 feet high. Eight round towers were suitably named, including the Liberté, and select prisoners were free to walk about the inner courtyards, which were decorated with ornate Doric doorways. The entrance to the Bastille was guarded by two drawbridges over a moat filled with water from the Seine. Perhaps as an outward sign of the Bastille’s slow decay, the moat was dry by time it was stormed in 1789.

In the popular imagination, the Bastille endures as a subject of artist Hubert Robert, whose painting of its demolition remains a defining image of the prison. Pictures, posters, and postcards continue to depict the Bastille as a magnificent projection of royal power. But it is important to separate fact from fiction: Robert took artistic license to make the Bastille appear even taller than it actually was—thus giving the structure a “Babylonian eminence” (Schama, 1990: 389; see figure 15).

Robert’s rendering of the Bastille was greatly influenced by his visual mentor Giovanni Battista Piranesi, whose *carceri d’invenzione* (imaginary prisons) entered the subconscious madness of the prison labyrinth. “Certainly, the elevation of the



FIGURE 15. “Hubert’s painting of the demolition of the Bastille.” A popular postcard in Paris celebrates the painting of the Bastille by Robert Hubert. © retrowelch 2022.

Bastille in his painting, with tiny figures scampering jubilantly over its battlements, suggests an immense Gothic castle of darkness and secrecy, a place into which men would disappear without warning and never again see the light of day until their bones were disinterred by revolutionary excavators” (Schama, 1990: 389). Robert’s Romantic aesthetics contributed to the seemingly virtuous Revolution, yet he would be arrested and imprisoned in 1793, and narrowly missed the guillotine due to an error in the processing of the condemned (see Bailey, 2016; Catala, 2013).

This chapter explores the architectural designs of institutions holding political prisoners by attending to the logic of their original plans as well as to their afterlives. As we survey numerous former sites of political imprisonment—and later memorialization—evidence of the Bastille Effect allows us to appreciate how place is remembered, reinvented, and repurposed for public experience. Those physical and cultural transformations speak to the manner in which the previous purposes of prisons and detention centers are eclipsed by symbols of defunct political regimes, emerging as metaphors for democratic reform. Toward that end, two architectural motifs are explored. Discussion begins with a critical examination of *panopticism*, especially the visual power that the surveillance produces over its subjects. Next, we offer a close look at the phenomenon of *illusion* whereby

certain sites were deliberately modified to distract and deceive inspectors in search of evidence of human rights violations. As diagrams of control, those expressions of architecture were aimed not only at those confined but also at the wider population kept under the watchful eye of the authorities.

#### POWER OF PANOPTICS

The work of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) is an important element of any sophisticated commentary on crime, punishment, and social control (Bentham, [1787]1995). In the 1770s, Bentham proposed a solution to the English penal crisis, which had been compounded by horrific prison conditions. With futuristic flair, he unveiled plans for the *ultimate penitentiary*, to be known as the panopticon, from the Greek, meaning “everything” and “a place of sight” (Welch, 2011a, 2011b). Bentham’s inspiration for the design is traced primarily to reformer John Howard, who had inspected many prisons in the British Isles, including Ireland. Also known as the “inspection house,” the panopticon departed from standard designs by placing an indoor guard tower in the center of the floor plan and surrounding it with several circular tiers of cells. The layout maximized surveillance, providing guards inside the tower with a complete and continuous view of the prisoners confined to their individual cells. Adding a theatrical element, each cell was fitted with an exterior window, which allowed natural light to illuminate the space from behind. Perhaps the most insightful critique of the panopticon was issued by Foucault, who in *Discipline and Punish* examines the subtleties of social control that distinguish the panopticon from other penal institutions. He reveals how the panopticon couples geometry with economics, thereby refining the mechanics of social control. In other words, the circular design of the institution would render the prison population more visible, making the entire institution more efficient since fewer guards would be needed to implement adequate supervision (see Alford, 2000).

Foucault maintains that the key to prisoner control is constant inspection through two forms of power. First, panoptic power is visible, and second, it is unverifiable. “Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment: but he must be sure that he may always be so” (Foucault, 1977: 201; 1996). Due to the omniscient—God-like—presence of the guard tower, prisoners could never be sure when they were being observed. Foucault notes that the target of social control is not so much the convict’s body. Instead, it is the prisoner’s consciousness, because continuous surveillance establishes a permanent presence in the mind. “Hence, the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1979: 201). It is that dystopian function that prompted author Aldous Huxley to deride the

panopticon as a “totalitarian housing project” (Johnston, 1978: 20). Although the plans to construct a panopticon were seriously considered by some Members of Parliament, it never won complete approval in England. Elsewhere, similar circular prisons were built in Holland, Spain, and the Isle of Pines off the coast of Cuba. In America, the design of the panopticon was modified, at the Virginia Penitentiary, the Western Penitentiary (Pittsburgh), and, later, Stateville Correctional Center (Joliet). Panopticism continues to permeate penal architecture in various forms as a means to enhance visibility and control over the prison population (see Jacobs, 1977).

The Kilmainham Gaol stands out for its unique Victorian design, which draws heavily on panopticism and the power it produces. Inside, the use of architectural space reinforces the transmission of heritage as visitors are escorted to the East Wing. Creating a moment of suspense, the tour guide pauses patiently for all members of the group to gather at the entrance. The large door to the East Wing is kept shut as the guide says a few well-chosen words about the power of Victorian prison design. Then suddenly he flings open the door and visitors are immersed in the grandeur of a spectacular atrium. It has been said: “Architecture matters because it lasts, of course. It matters because it is big, and it shapes the landscape of our everyday lives. But beyond that, it also matters because, more than any other cultural form, it is a means of setting the historical record straight” (Sudjic, 2006: 23). The East Wing does not disappoint. With Victorian authority, it delivers a sensation of power and awe. The guide does not interfere with visitors’ absorption of the architectural splendor, allowing them to practice space and mill around without any specific itinerary (see McConville, 1995; figure 16).

Spatial effects are further complemented by curatorial statements that tutor tourists about the architectural significance of Kilmainham. A poster titled “The Victorian Prison” establishes a scholarly—and nationalist—tone, first in Irish followed by English:

The Victorian age was the great age of prison design and construction. At no time before or since have so many new prisons been built. As late as the 1970s, over 40% of the prisons in use in Great Britain and Ireland had been built during Victoria’s reign (1837–1901). The Victorians placed great faith in the power of prison to reform offenders, and regarded prison architecture and design as critical to the process.

Like other Victorian prisons, Kilmainham was modeled after Pentonville penitentiary in London. The plan was well ahead of its time, eliminating corridors, installing catwalks, and illuminating the entire vaulted space with a skylight. A placard continues the narration: “This design combined separate confinement with the greatest possible level of inspection by prison staff, in a manner that echoes Bentham’s *Panopticon* (‘all-seeing eye’).”

Because political imprisonment was so tremendously significant to Kilmainham’s purpose, it became “the most secure county prison in the Kingdom,” according to a poster. Moreover, by recognizing select political prisoners, Kilmainham—in



FIGURE 16. “The Atrium of Kilmainham.” At Kilmainham prison in Dublin, visitors are invited to explore the Victorian architecture. © retowelch 2022.

its afterlife—performs heritage in ways that connect important historical events. Eamon de Valera is among those Irish luminaries featured in the exhibit. Upon his arrest in the 1916 Rising, “de Valera would have been the fifteenth man executed at Kilmainham had he not been saved by his America citizenship.” De Valera joined the anti-treaty side of the civil war and was subsequently imprisoned, becoming

the last prisoner at Kilmainham in 1924. De Valera was later elected as the Irish *taoiseach* (prime minister) and then as President of Ireland (Visitor's Guide, n.d.; see also O'Dwyer, 2010).

In Belfast, Victorian prison architecture is commemorated at the Crumlin Road Gaol, which held both Loyalist and Republican political prisoners until 1996. As noted earlier, the recent conflict does not dominate the narrative. A single placard simply states: "As the prison population exploded due to the start of The Troubles and also the introduction of internment (arrest without trial) in August, 1971, it was common to find up to four prisoners to a single cell." Attention swiftly turns away from political prisoners and toward the institution—its lack of sanitation (and use of chamber pots) as well as its overcrowding, in that more than 1,400 prisoners were held in a prison designed to hold between 500 and 550. Overall, a leading narrative on the Crum is its status within the Victorian tradition. Dating back to 1841, the institution was designed by esteemed architect Sir Charles Lanyon, who based it on the radial plan of Pentonville prison (London).

Much like at Kilmainham, steel and glass predominate the interior design besides maintaining the thrust of Victorianism as an imperial project (see McConville, 1995). Tour guides at the Crum attempt to follow a script on Victorian architecture, but controversies over the Troubles inevitably surface. Directly across the street on Crumlin Road is a Victorian-style courthouse, also designed by Lanyon. The building has regrettably fallen into decay, but in earlier times, its symbolic presence shaped the history of the Troubles, for it was there that political prisoners—most of them associated with the Provisional IRA—stood trial before being sentenced. Adding a subterranean intrigue, the courthouse and the Crum are connected by a dark tunnel into which visitors are escorted. Halfway through the passageway, the guide stops and points to the ceiling, which was reinforced with extra cement to prevent its collapse in case the IRA detonated a car bomb directly above on Crumlin Road (see *Souvenir Guidebook to Crumlin Road Gaol*, n.d.; Greg, 2013).

Other architectural modifications speak to the significance of the Troubles. While touring the prison yard, the subject of escapes gets ample treatment, since Republican prisoners had earned a reputation for dramatic "breakouts" as far back as the 1920s (see McEvoy, 2001). More recent escapes from the Crum are now part of Republican legend, including the nine "Kangaroos" who scaled the wall in 1971. To reduce the risk of escape, and the subsequent humiliation of prison authorities, the perimeter wall was retrofitted with a protruding metal barrier that deformed the original design. Other politically tinged accounts have shaped the heritage of the Crum, most notably the fate of the Suffragettes. In the run-up to the First World War, women agitating for the right to vote were imprisoned in the A-Wing. The Suffragette movement was marked by bomb threats and hunger strikes, prompting a novel response by prison staff. Instead of force-feeding the suffragettes, they were temporarily released until their health was restored, then

rearrested and returned to the Crum. “In this way, the government sought to prevent the Suffragettes gaining martyr status” (*Souvenir Guidebook to Crumlin Road Gaol*, n.d.; Grant, 2019). Against that logic, the Suffragettes are currently honored at the “Crum” by placing a mannequin—dressed in a period costume—behind a large Victorian window pane in the vestibule (see Grant, 2019).

In South Africa, many former penitentiaries have been transformed so as to celebrate political prisoners for their role in dismantling apartheid, the racist apparatus that brutally separated Blacks from Whites until the early 1990s. Chief among those sites is Robben Island off the coast of Cape Town, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years before emerging as the President of South Africa (Mandela, 1994; Welch, 2015). In Johannesburg, tourists are invited to visit the Old Fort, Number Four, and the Women’s Jail, where the power of panoptics is visually displayed. The interior provides a classic example of Victorian design in which form and function create a unique blend of semiotics and architecture. As Robin Evans so insightfully recalls in *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750–1840*, “[prison] architecture, once the emblem of social order, was now one of its fundamental instruments” (1982: back cover; see also Bender, 1987).

The Women’s Jail is a departure from the traditional neo-Gothic fortress of the neighboring Old Fort in that it embraces panopticism, which puts more emphasis on its interior than its exterior. As a consequence, internal messages on confinement are more nuanced, fusing the religious with the rational so as to promote prisoner reform. Deferring to Beccaria and other enlightened thinkers, John Howard conceded: “We have too much adopted the gothic mode of correction by rigorous severity, which often hardens the heart; while many foreigners pursue the more rational plan of softening the mind in order to [encourage] its amendment” (Bender, 1987: 22, 261). As they stand at the epicenter of the atrium at the Women’s Jail, visitors get a sense of the power contained in the space, which once functioned as a command center for the guards. There, they experience the jail’s semio-technology, in particular the concentric geometry that dictates both its design and its purpose. According to Evans, circular architecture can be traced from the temple to the chapel, to the roundhouse theatre, to the model penitentiary. “In the temple, the circle was used for its symbolic panorama of architecture, sculpture and painting to be contemplated by the observer. In the prison, however, the properties of the circle were employed otherwise, establishing the authority of the gaoler by displaying not the architecture and its decoration, but the inmates and their activities” (Evans, 1982: 414; Welch, 2015).

To reiterate, panopticism unites geometry with economics by relying a circular design to reduce the number of guards need to provide adequate supervision. It also projects a sense of morality by imitating Christian beliefs in an all-knowing God so as to promote personal reform. In fact, Bentham ([1787]1995) cited the 139th Psalm in positing that the invisible guard in the central tower performed an executive power analogous to that of an omniscient deity who could see everything

at all times. A poster in the Women's Jail quotes Bentham's reasoning: "Rather than confine prisoners to medieval dungeons, he said they should be under constant surveillance by the all seeing eye of prison authorities." Thus panoptics materialized through the radial plan, with corridors connecting to a circular gallery supported by classical columns. Tall, vaulted windows flood the interior space with natural light. Much like the guards who once patrolled the jail, visitors practice surveillance by standing at the epicenter and gazing down each hallway. Its appealing form, however, deceitfully hides its main function. Audrey Brown, Director of Research at the Women's Jail, explains:

Unlike the men's section, which does not conceal its primary purpose, this space beguiles the eye and misleads the mind. The light-filled atrium and the cells radiating off it conceal the very essence of a jail—punishment and subjugation. The architecture of the Women's Jail might be more subtle than that of a male prison in terms of power and control, but it is just as violent.

A brochure reinforces the mission of the former prison as a place of learning: "Built in 1909, the grace of this Victorian brick building obscures the pain and humiliation suffered by the many women detained within it. The Jail held black and white women in separate sections. The infamous murderess, Daisy de Melker was held here, as were prominent political prisoners Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Albertina Sisula." With respect to its afterlife animated by signifying-value, curators add that "the building has been transformed into a temporary exhibition that honors the contribution of women in the struggle for freedom in South Africa" (Constitution Hill, Visitor's Brochure; see also Segal, 2006). In that sense, the entire institution serves as a metaphor for a new society in which women are recognized for their political contributions.

In a suburban district of Seoul (South Korea), the Seodaemun Prison History Hall has also shed its profane history; in its current incarnation, it is now a place of memory. As a symbol of oppression and terror, it "preserves and displays Seodaemun Prison signifying the suffering and pain of Koreans during the modern period" (Seodaemun Prison History Hall, English version brochure). As a living memorial, the site honors independence and pro-democracy activists who were jailed, tortured, and martyred (Seodaemun Prison History Hall, 2010). Seodaemun prison was opened in 1908 during the Japanese occupation to imprison members of a growing Korean resistance. A poster contains an image of the City Gate (at Street no. 101 of Hyeonjeo-dong) at the edge of the prison. The caption reads: "Japanese imperialists installed a large-size prison around that area as a tool for ruling the colony." By the 1930s, the prison had been expanded to accommodate a huge influx of Korean political prisoners. Indeed, the "Japanese imperialists" established so many prisons in the main cities on the Korean peninsula that it transformed the country into one enormous prison. A map dotted with prisons sites illustrates the massive scope of the colonial project (Welch, 2015).

With its neo-Gothic façade joined by three watchtowers, the Seodaemun prison conforms to the radial plan (i.e., spoke and hub). Visitors are able to recognize the economy and strength of the circular diagram as they enter the Central Prison Building. A sign describes its architectural form and function: “This 2-story central building was built in 1923 as a way to connect the 10th-11th-12th jails for effective surveillance along with office works and ideological persuasion.” Deep inside the institution sits the “Monitoring Location of Warder”: an elevated wooden platform fitted with a large desk and chair. An open gate invites visitors to step into the station to practice surveillance and gaze down the long corridor of cells. Compared to the panopticon, the optics of the radial plan are compromised since the supervision of prisons is linear-intermittent rather than circular-continuous; thus, the guard must walk the length of the tier to peer inside each cell (Welch, 2011b). To compensate for that extra task, the cell blocks at Seodaemun are equipped with a “PAE TONG.” That simple device allows prisoners to get the attention of the guard by pushing a stick out from their cell, to within view of the guard seated in the monitor booth.

Like other modern prisons, the interior of Seodaemun was constructed with thick walls separating the cells not only for security reasons but also to prevent political prisoners from communicating with one another. Curators reveal how prisoners circumvented the design by staging mannequins on both sides of the cell wall as they sent tapping messages similar to Morse code. Meanwhile, outside in the prison yard, Japanese guards maintained a strict regime to separate Korean political prisoners. Conspicuously present is a circular exercise yard inspired by Benthamite architecture. Known as a “Gyeokbyeokjang,” the semicircular brick structure is arranged with pie-chart symmetry containing ten separate slices. An observation platform is situated at the hub, where the guard has a complete and uninterrupted view of each prisoner confined to a wedge stretching 15 meters. There, visitors can position themselves as the inspector to experience the power of panoptics; conversely, they are allowed to enter one of the individual yards to gain the perspective of a prisoner. The exercise facility was designed to maximize monitoring; the individual compartments prevented the prisoners from communicating with one another. The authentic sitedness of the “Gyeokbyeokjang” is complemented by a photograph that verifies its profane past (Welch, 2015).

A tour of the institution is more than just a survey of its architecture. The exhibit celebrates the resistance as a successful pro-democracy movement, thus embracing a unique version of a Bastille Effect. After 36 years of hardship, Korea was liberated in 1945. Later, under Korean rule, the prison was repurposed to hold pro-democracy activists who challenged the despotic regime. “Seodaemun Prison was a symbol of the 80-year journey to freedom. Now, the site has been reborn and Seodaemun Prison History Hall, echo[es] to the world the invaluable importance of freedom and peace” (Seodaemun Prison History Hall, English version brochure, n.d.). Just as Nora (1989) suggests that memory is attached to places,

Seodaemun prison is remembered as “The Place of Independence and Democracy” (Seodaemun Prison History Hall, 2010).

As discussed earlier, the former prison in Montevideo known as Miguelete enjoys an afterlife as a space for contemporary art. Visitors are encouraged to explore the exterior as well as the interior of the institution; in doing so, they come to appreciate its architecture, which was inspired by Bentham and critiqued by Foucault. Vintage photographs posted around the compound demonstrate the power of optics, highlighting the awesome radial plan with its central hub towering over prisoners in the yard. A placard titled “Panoptico” honors the architect Juan Alberto Capurro who designed Miguelete, stating that the central watchtower “generated in the prisoners the certainty of being watched.” Taking a more activist tone, the containment wall of the prison is scrawled with graffiti suggesting a general awareness of surveillance: “The Big Brother observes us from the Foucaultian panopticon.”

As a final example of the power of optics, we return to the National Stadium in Santiago to consider how panopticism merges with spectacle – a dramatic event displayed to a mass audience. While Foucault delves into the disciplinary power of the panopticon, Guy Debord (1967) proposes that the spectacle is yet another instrument for dehumanizing subjects. To reiterate, upwards of 20,000 prisoners were processed through the National Stadium in the early stages of the 1973 military coup. Journalists captured the surreal nature of the *penal stadium*, where armed soldiers in the infield observed prisoners confined to the bleachers. In response, prisoners internalized the gaze not only of the soldiers but also of the authoritarian Pinochet regime. Those photographs are scattered throughout the memorial site of the National Stadium as visitors—secondary witnesses—grasp the enormity of state repression.

#### ILLUSIONS OF ARCHITECTURE

Panopticism, simply put, gains power by allowing everything to be seen. Conversely, illusion refines power by prompting viewers to see something else, thereby concealing the truth and evidence of human rights atrocities. In *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War,”* Diana Taylor deciphers how the military dictatorship performed power and projected authoritarian control over civil society. She also draws on Guy Debord (1967), who critiqued a society of spectacles that locks individuals into an economy of looks and looking. As a locus and mechanism of repression, spectacles forge certain impressions even while erasing other images from public view. Toward that end, *Disappearing Acts* remains focused on how the military junta used the spectacle to produce a form of power that manipulated the population “and render[ed] it passive and blind though the theatrical control of the visual sphere” (1997: 222; see also Andermann 2012; Brown, 2009).

In Buenos Aires, the Casino located at the ESMA compound offers visitors lessons on the spectacle as well as illusion. Under the direction of the curators, those secondary witnesses are subjected to a unique form of temporal performance that allows them to view the past and present simultaneously (Clark and Payne, 2011). That split consciousness enables them to grasp that the Casino is both a former clandestine detention site and a memorial space. By design, visitors come to understand how evidence of repression was initially concealed, then subsequently revealed. The tour guide points to key features of infrastructure that were modified in an effort to mislead the 1979 Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. Those inspectors were responding to the testimony of survivors who had found refuge abroad. Since detainees were hooded during their captivity, they had to describe their surroundings by tracking their movements (e.g., walking down stairs) along with recognizable sounds (e.g., the noise of an elevator). Anticipating the inspection, the junta plotted to throw the commission off the trail by removing sections of the main staircase in the Casino and boarding up the elevator. As a result, inspectors might (mistakenly) conclude that the testimony of the survivors did not match the physical layout of the Casino. Such inconsistencies might then raise questions about the accuracy—or veracity—of the survivors. However, in 2010, while ESMA was undergoing its transition to a memorial space, evidence was uncovered that corroborated the survivors' testimony.

Both the renovated staircase and the elevator shaft are displayed for visitors to view, thereby dissolving the illusion. Some brief text repeats testimony by survivors and in doing so facilitates the performance of space: "I was taken down the stairs, I also counted the steps, I did it to entertain myself, but I had the feeling that there was a lift (elevator) somewhere as an engine could be heard" (Vasquez, 2010). Visitors are encouraged to gaze at the modified railing of the staircase, which appears to bend in the direction of a lower level (which does not now exist). Evidence of the elevator can be found at two locations in the building. In the basement, a section of a wall has been cut open, creating a window into which visitors can see the springs of the shaft; it is deliberately illuminated to intensify the act of visual absorption. Correspondingly, a wall upstairs has a slightly different shade of paint. Upon closer inspection, visitors—*spectators*—can see that it is here that the doors of the elevator had been removed and replaced with sheet rock. To reinforce a performance of space, scripted statements are posted: "We went down to that Basement by the lift which was very noisy, there was also a door that made a big noise when we left the Basement, they were like locks made of thick metal sheet" (Soffiantini, 2010).

As another act of illusion, a bathroom on the first floor of the Casino has its door wide open for visitors to look inside. That compartment represents another ruse by the military. The bathroom was installed after a telephone booth was removed in order to deceive the inspection team. The telephone booth was well-known to the survivors since upon their detention they were forced to call their

family and say they were fine. In some instances, they asked for money or property to be transferred to the military. Andrea Bello (2010) recalls: “I was told that I would be able to phone home on condition that I would not tell them I was a prisoner. I phone home, my mother answered she was shocked and asked ‘What happened? We have been looking for you for four months. They took everything in your house. And I said, ‘Well mum don’t worry, everything is all right,’ I was trying to calm her down, she was really distressed.” Suddenly, Bello breaks the illusion: “My mum pressured me and I said: ‘I’m detained’ and they hang up, of course.”

The buildings at EMSA were originally a mundane naval training academy and were not designed to be soundproof. Consequently, when the compound was repurposed as a clandestine detention, torture, and extermination center, it could not completely conceal the junta’s repression. Since the survivors were hooded during their captivity, they had to describe their surroundings by sounds they heard from the outside. Their testimonies corroborated claims that ESMA was indeed a site that did exist, thus bolstering the legal claims against the military. An initial task faced by investigators was to find the precise location of the clandestine site. With the aid of testimonies describing certain noises, the secret detention center was eventually revealed. Several survivors reported hearing car engines on a nearby street (i.e., Del Libertador Avenue), trains on a nearby railway (i.e., the Belgrano Norte Line), and planes taking off and landing at a nearby airport (i.e., Buenos Aires City Airport). Survivors also recalled hearing children from the nearby school (i.e., the Raggio school) and football fans chanting for their favorite teams (i.e., River Plate and Defensores de Belgrano Clubs). Confirming the location of clandestine site, Carlos Loza testified: “We immediately identified the place. Firstly, we were oriented because of the movement of planes and trains. . . . We looked and we identified the place as the Navy Mechanics School” (Loza, 2010).

Other survivors recalled what they heard during the 1978 World Cup, which was held in Argentina that year (despite international condemnation). When a goal was scored, they could hear fans cheer through a television being watched by the repressors, and seconds later they could hear the actual crowd. So they knew that ESMA was very close to stadium. So that visitors understand the importance of these discoveries, curators put on display a darkened room hauntingly lit by the glow from a television set. The room represents what the repressors routinely did while on duty, and in doing so, it reminds visitors of the banality of their atrocities.

The strategic use of sonics enhances the performance of space at ESMA. Most conspicuously, video monitors are scattered around the interior of the Casino, allowing visitors to spectate and listen to the court testimony of survivors. Touring the actual site being described adds to the dynamics of cultural transformation: a profane space (where atrocities were committed) becomes a sacred space (where tragedy is memorialized). As mentioned earlier, the “fishbowl” (*pecera*) is located in the attic (*capucha* or hood) of the Casino. Visitors are invited to step into that restricted space, where select detainees were subjected to a form of forced labor,

known as “recovery process,” aimed at altering their political ideology. “[Captain Jorge ‘Tigre’] Acosta, a man of great cleverness baptizes it and said: ‘this is a recovery process.’ . . . The Tasks Group members called themselves ‘the Sorbonne of the anti-subversion: We do not only destroy, we reconvert enemies.’ That was their vision” (Gras, 2010). The “fishbowl” (then and now) consists of a row of tiny cubicles where detainees were kept under constant surveillance by CCTV. Graciela Daleo comments on the degree of panopticism: “The Fishbowl . . . had those acrylic panels that allowed them to see us from anyplace, it was partly made of hardboard and transparent panels to the ceiling. But over the time, in fact, I gave it another meaning: we, the same as fish in a fishbowl looked like normal people that were leading a normal life, but the same as fish when they are in a fishbowl, they are not in the sea, they are imprisoned, but to the outsider it looks as if they were normal fish. Well, we were that” (Daleo, 2010; see also Feitlowitz, 1998).

The “fishbowl” was central to media operations: prisoners were kept busy writing press releases and translating newspaper articles for the junta. Curators transport visitors into the “fishbowl” by navigating them through the cubicles covered with newspaper clippings. Audio speakers fill the room with sound of typewriters, thereby replicating a surreal workplace that was concealed deep inside a military compound. The strategic use of sounds is a common performative technique in memorial spaces, for it further activates the power of place.

The illusion produced by transforming urban buildings into clandestine detention centers has been exposed at numerous other sites in Buenos Aires. In the residential neighborhood of Floresta can still be found the inconspicuous Automotores Orletti. In its original incarnation, the mundane place was used as an automotive repair shop. Under the last dictatorship, Orletti was repurposed as a hidden site for political confinement. As a major hub for Operation Condor, Orletti, codenamed “El Jardín” (The Garden), held upwards of 300 detainees not only from Argentina but also from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Paraguay, and Uruguay (between May and November 1976). Numerous posters and storyboards outline the role of Orletti in the cross-border operations of Condor. On a closed door, a sign designates the room as an office that housed repressors from Uruguay and Chile who carried out interrogations and torture on detainees specifically targeted by those countries (see Timerman, [1981]1998). A sign above the entrance reminds the community that Orletti has a new place identity committed to memory and the promotion of human rights.

The spatial afterlives of Orletti underwent several transitions. When agents from Operation Condor abandoned the building, it resumed its function as an automotive shop, then in a strange twist of events the space was used as a sweatshop for “slave” labor from Bolivia. In fact, it was the detection of the sweatshop that led to the discovery that it had previously been used as a clandestine detention center. In its current form, the memorial space does not attempt to shed much of its past life. Especially compared to the sanitized space of ESMA, Orletti still looks

like an auto shop cluttered with equipment and tools. Pictures of the disappeared (identified by nationality) are arranged across a wall. Nearby mugshots of the repressors are captioned as genocidal criminals, thus conveying a sense of justice. Storytelling institutions, such as memorial spaces, often rely on performance as a curatorial technique (Casey, 2003; Williams, 2007). Likewise, the tour of Orletti concludes with a dramatic tale of escape in which detainees seized a weapon from a dozing guard and literally shot their way out. The scene is re-created by a guide, who activates the electronic gate so that visitors can see the bullet holes punctured the metal curtain. The spatial afterlife of Orletti is properly grounded in its tragic history: plaques located outside explicitly link the site to Operation Condor (see Sorbille, 2008).

The recovery project aimed at shattering the illusion of architecture—and “normalcy” under the last dictatorship—unfolds at other former detention sites in Buenos Aires, including “Olimpo,” where many political prisoners were transferred before their extermination. Formerly an automotive depot for the federal police, the clandestine center was repurposed by the military to hold detainees (from August 1978 until January 1979). Military personnel code-named the center “Olimpo” in perverse homage to the Greek gods. While detainees were being tortured, guards bragged that they had the power over life and death (Sorbille, 2008: 118). The initiative to recover the site stemmed from a local battle for memory on behalf of the victims. The site now serves as a community center offering lectures, workshops, and various human rights activities (Welch, 2020b).

Much of the compound was demolished by the military in an effort to erase its profane past, but there remain the skeletal frames of the detention buildings surrounded by a fortified containment wall separating “Olimpo” from the residential neighborhood (see Lopez, 2013). For several square blocks, the afterlife of the site is animated by political murals condemning the last dictatorship, including a stencil that reads “NN”—symbolizing the mass graves where victims with “no names” were buried. Murals and graffiti add texture to a residential neighborhood whose residents still grapple with the memory of that particular site. Striking the proper emotional register is profoundly important in establishing a memorial space. As Draper correctly points out, Olimpo, ESMA, and many other sites avoid the trap of promoting some sort of morbid fascination with torture. Draper goes on to describe those sites as having a complex and open persona: entering the compound, visitors are likely to find “themselves confronted with very incompleteness that characterizes these ruinous spaces” (2011: 143).

A mysterious site known as Virrey Cevallos provides a final example of the illusions of architecture embedded in former detention centers in Buenos Aires. During the last dictatorship, the townhouse was hidden in plain sight along an unassuming street just blocks from Congress. Virrey Cevallos, currently an “Espacio Para La Memoria,” was previously used by the air force, police, and other intelligence agencies to hold numerous kidnap victims, though the precise number

of those held captive there has not been determined. As a memorial space, Virrey Cevallos contains sparse commentary from ex-detainees, who were often hooded during their confinement. Survivors recall that the small cubbyholes deprived them of natural light and proper ventilation. Curators navigate visitors by orienting them to the period when it operated as a clandestine site. A floor plan showing rooms is labeled: “You are here . . . Cells where the kidnapped remain.” On the mezzanine level, visitors peer through an opening in a wall located over the staircase where guards monitored the comings and goings of military personnel. For a detention site intended to remain clandestine, Virrey Cevallos was noticeably noisy: survivors described the blaring sounds from vehicles delivering the kidnapped. Residents next door later testified hearing cries for help from detainees being tortured during interrogation sessions. At the time, however, they were too frightened to report such violence, adding to the illusion of normalcy (see Feitlowitz, 1998). When the nation transitioned to democracy, the building remained vacant and unnoticed until 2003, when a group of residents—“*Vicinos de San Cristobal Contra La Impunidad*”—seized the property as part of a broader campaign to condemn state terrorism. Soon after, they lobbied successfully to protect Virrey Cevallos as a historic site offering public seminars on human rights (“*Virrey Cevallos*”). With the power of place, those physical and cultural transformations offers local evidence of a Bastille Effect.

#### CONCLUSION

At the outset, we were introduced to Hubert Robert, whose painting of the Bastille relied on stark visual techniques to create the illusion of larger-than-life monarchical power. Such fascination with the Bastille extended to other artists who re-created the prison’s exterior as well as its vast interior. Since those images predate photography—which otherwise might authenticate the architectural designs—viewers tend to give the artist the benefit of the doubt. In doing so, the audience relies on the artist’s version of the Bastille. At BnF (Bibliothèque nationale de France) in Paris, an exhibition on the Bastille (2010–2011) displayed an array of related artworks, including “*La Bastille vue par un artiste*” (The Bastille Seen by the Artist). The artist in question was Jean Honoré Fragonar whose sketches of the Bastille possess a style strikingly similar to that of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (BnF, 2010: 148–50). Recall that Robert was also inspired by Piranesi’s “imaginary prisons” (*carceri d’invenzione*), which delved into the illusion of architecture to deliver a deep psychological effect on his viewers.

As conveyed through the tours at Kilmainham, the Women’s Jail, and the National Stadium, the psychological impact of panopticism is carefully managed so as to enhance visual power over political prisoners. Much like the artists who projected their vision of the Bastille, authorities rely on prison architecture to penetrate consciousness by erecting surveillance systems. Bentham and Foucault

frequently draw attention to the God-like power contained in notions of the omniscient deity. That diagram of control benefits from other secular interpretations as well. For instance, the panopticon was founded during the Enlightenment as part of a quest to instill order and control through observation, symbolizing what Virilio (1994) called the utopian vision machine. Visitors at the former prisons discussed here experience not only the space that once held political prisoners but also the broader power of panoptics. On display, the illusions of architecture found in the modification of the Casino at ESMA speak to the power of the last dictatorship as it attempted to throw human rights inspectors off the trail.

The memorialization of former prisons in Buenos Aires constitutes a recovery project aimed at dismantling the illusion of architecture—and “normalcy”—under the last dictatorship. As noted, many residents in Buenos Aires were at least subconsciously aware that certain buildings were being used by the junta to commit state crimes. Amid the “dirty war,” psychoanalyst Juan Carlos Kusnetzoff introduced the concept of “percepticide” to suggest that “the perceptual organs, too, soon became a causality of the engulfing terror” (1986: 95; Suarez-Orozco, 1991: 942). Through the “failure to recognize,” denial is among the first coping mechanisms to be activated in response to death (Vaillant, 1986: 128). As the number of disappearances reached critical mass, Argentines developed “a passion for ignorance” (Corradi, 1987: 119) coupled with “conscious and unconscious strategies for knowing what not to know about events in their immediate environment” (Suarez-Orozco, 1991: 469). To reverse the psychological effects of the last dictatorship, human rights groups use the afterlives of detention sites to heal the collective wounds of the nation. In the chapters that follow, critical attention is turned to the technologies of power aimed at transforming the mind (through propaganda), the body (through torture), and society at large (through genocide).