The magazine of the EUROM - European Observatory on Memories

December 2023

Observing *Memories*

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DEEP VIEW

ARNAUD SAULI & ANIA SCZCEPANSKA

Filming the archaeology of the Shoah

GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

Seeing time, fragment

EUROPE INSIGHT

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OVERVIEW

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Whose memory? New museums and (political) narratives in Slovenia

EUROM is led by **Fundació Solidaritat de la Universitat de Barcelona** with the support of the programme Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values of the **European Union**.

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The European Observatory on Memories (EUROM) is a transnational network of institutions and civil society organizations committed to research and promotion of remembrance policies and memorial initiatives. Its main goal is to promote collective and citizenship memories through a plurality of approaches and diverse perspectives. EUROM is led by the University of Barcelona's Solidarity Foundation with the support of the programme Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values of the European Union. Meet our partners at: www.europeanmemories.net/network

Legal deposit: B 27726-2017
ISSN 2565-2923
ISSN (online) 2565-2931

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Observing *Memories*

Magazine of the **European Observatory on Memories**

University of Barcelona's Solidarity Foundation

Seventh issue: December, 2023

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COVER PICTURE

"Carrero Blanco's car", sculpture by Fernando Sánchez Castillo (2007), one of the pieces of the exhibition "The Democratic Skylight. Politics of Life and Death in the Spanish State" curated by Germán Labrador in 2023.

In 1973, the assassination of Luis Carrero Blanco - then Prime Minister of Spain - came as a major collective shock. The staging of the attack, claimed by ETA (6th Assembly), fuelled all sorts of fears and fantasies. It also had a strong symbolic impact: heralding the end of a generation of military men, who, after having promoted the Civil War and its crimes, knew how to exploit their command of the state in their favour. Thus, in 1975, the dictator Francisco Franco died, but the regime's violence did not end there.

(Excerpt by the curatorial text).

EDITORIAL

Introducing our new issue of *Observing Memories* proves to be quite a challenge against the backdrop of bombs falling near our homelands, the loss of lives among civilians of all ages and the repeated violation of human rights, starting with the fundamental right to life. I want to make it clear that I condemn all forms of violence, particularly the kind perpetrated by political powers, States and armed groups. At this very moment, they are destroying and torpedoing civilian spaces in Gaza. We should take a moment to reflect on the year 1861 when an international declaration was signed for times of war, explicitly respecting medical units, hospitals and ambulances. However, how many wars have transpired since then, and how often has this international declaration been ignored?
It is imperative to condemn violence. Those who disregard international law regarding contemporary violence show both a lack of wisdom and responsibility. To avert present-day violence, we must explore every possible avenue to protect lives. Every single life matters. We dedicate ourselves to examining past instances of violence from the vantage point of the present – not only as an exercise in knowledge and discipline but also as a universal right. The right to memory serves as a collective legacy of learning, potentially a preventive measure, and certainly a source of enrichment and fortification for our democracies, which are inherently fragile, volatile and fluid.

At the European Observatory on Memories, our commitment to transnational work is steadfast. As always, we engage in analysis, reflection, observation and active social and cultural involvement to assert the right to bring the past into the present as a fundamental citizen and civic right. It is the responsibility and duty of the State, those in power, and public administrators to uphold and champion this right.

From EUROM, we present our most critical and reflective public platform: the annual magazine *Observing Memories*. Once again, we commend the abundance and excellence of the contributions and analytical insights made. Our gratitude goes to the authors who have made this new issue possible. The central, though not exclusive, theme of this volume revolves around the image, spanning analogue, digital and audiovisual formats. In the realm of public memories, digital production is burgeoning, offering nearly infinite realms for reinterpreting and transmitting the legacies of the past. It also unlocks avenues for artistic creation and applications that the traditional – perhaps outdated – analogue world could not fully explore. Each day, countless memorial transmissions take place through numerous channels, systems and personal or collective creations in the digital universe.

Similarly, the current volume reflects EUROM's increased and deeper involvement in networking with institutions, professionals and civil society associations across various parts of the globe. It is the culmination of 12 years of collaborative efforts, horizontal work and an ongoing comparative analysis of processes, examples and diverse realities within the field of memory studies. In this regard, we have provided a platform for colleagues from various disciplines, introducing new experiences and institutions that, drawing from their accredited expertise, shed light on projects, recent creations or reflections. Much like Jonathan Safran Foer in *Everything is Illuminated*, a young man exploring the memory of his family through geographical traces, images and objects from the past embarks on an initiatory journey of his personal memory that evolves into something collective, universal and shared. This encapsulates EUROM's overarching goal and, specifically, this seventh issue of our magazine.

Once more, the intertwining and comparison of plural memories draw us into intricate and fascinating realities. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the improper appropriation of historical terminology in political and journalistic discourses within the European and international arenas. We need to be vigilant about these inappropriate uses that power, States, or certain interest groups are increasingly employing. The trivialisation, historical relativism and terminological frivolity concerning past international genocides, the Holocaust, dictatorships, etc., are recognised, as is the use made of victims in the justification of policies.

EDITORIAL

We have selected one of the artistic pieces by the author and friend Fernando Sánchez Castillo for the cover of the magazine, not as a rhetorical choice, but with a hint of irony. The image, as the central theme, is interpreted from the present as a piece artistically reproduced, with an unequivocal evocation of past events. This decision concerns us in the cautious interpretation of the dangers posed by current antidemocratic trends. The rise of far-right movements, nostalgic for totalitarian regimes and systems, must also and can fall. We also delve into the magnificent exhibition featuring the piece in a dedicated section of the magazine.

It is interesting that the European Commission incorporates memory programmes into the broader Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. This constitutes an expansion of the field of memory studies, a cause that EUROM has long championed. What is termed "social transfer of knowledge" at university level finds practical expression in multidisciplinary and multidirectional networks or platforms, engaging citizens in participatory processes that embody values of equality and democratic progress. Hence, from these pages, we aim to shed light on the small yet significant contribution that persistent, transnational, comparative and collaborative efforts at the horizontal level bring to ensure professional diversity and interconnectedness. Such endeavours are vital for constructing societies that are more just and free, devoid of the many forms of violence often orchestrated in offices far removed from the realities of citizens and social justice.

In this year's issue, our focus is on the power of images and audiovisual media as channels for transmitting memory. To explore this theme, we collaborated with philosopher George Didi-Huberman, who cautions against the temptation to freeze images in the eyes of past scholars. He reminds us that images encapsulate time – a time that reflects the perspectives of those photographed, those taking the photograph, and those observing it. Consequently, a revealing dialectical movement emerges. We also sought the expertise of filmmakers Arnaud Sauli and Ania Szczepanska, who candidly share their insights in a sincere conversation. They discuss their respective viewpoints and some of the dilemmas they face when addressing the Holocaust behind the camera, covering motivations, the landscapes of the Shoah and its evocations, the daily lives of people impacted, the narratives conveyed by objects, and the treatment thereof.

On the 50th anniversary of the fateful coup d'état by General Augusto Pinochet in Chile and the death of Salvador Allende, we wanted to interview the acclaimed filmmaker Patricio Guzmán. Introduced by the specialist in documentary cinema, Nancy Berthier, Guzmán highlights some key aspects of his work as a film director and the relationship he has established over the years between his films and the memory of the Chilean dictatorship.

In the section dedicated to memory policies in Europe, Professor Jenny Wüstenberg deconstructs the concept of "democratic memory" to precisely analyse the types of relationships that can genuinely be established between "memory" and "democracy". Meanwhile, historian Olivier Wieviorka underscores the political significance of the memory of the Second World War. Among

its diverse applications, it has played a role in consolidating supranational structures such as the European Union in the past and in fostering discourses of confrontation between countries in the present.

In the section featuring short articles, we have the collaboration of museologist Kaja Širok, who delves into the intricate relationships between the world of museums and politics in Slovenia. Moreover, researcher Ana Paula Brito explores the realm of museums and traumatic memories in Brazil. Additionally, the director of the Rivesaltes Camp Memorial, Céline Sala-Pons, and historian Nicolas Lebourg provide insights into the origins, evolution and current challenges of the memorial facility. Meanwhile, Professor Dominique Trouche describes the key aspects of Günter Domenig's architectural intervention in the Documentation Centre on the Nazi Party Rallying Grounds in Nuremberg. Lastly, writer Marta Marín-Dòmine commemorates the 100th anniversary of Jorge Semprún's birth by reflecting on his figure and thinking.

In the reviews section, we feature insights from photographer Ana Sánchez, who provides an overview of the exhibition on the air-raid shelters of the Spanish Civil War held at the Model prison in Barcelona. She served as the curator for this exhibition alongside historian Xavier Domènech.

Additionally, Ricard Conesa offers a brief overview of both the exhibition *El Tragaluz Democrático* [The Democratic Skylight], for which the EUROM team produced a series of accessible audiovisual reports and interviews, available on our website. He also touches upon the recent book about the former women's prison in Les Corts (Barcelona) and the associated memorial space – a project closely connected to our organisation. Furthermore, we present a review by our colleague from the Fundació Solidaritat UB, Marc Díaz, focusing on museums addressing Soviet repression in Kazakhstan.

And lastly, in the section dedicated to our EUROM network partners, Vojtěch Blodig, the director of the Terezin Memorial, provides insights into the evolution of this memorial established in 1947, tracing its journey to the present day. He explores the various episodes it has witnessed throughout the history of former Czechoslovakia and the current Czech Republic. Additionally, he outlines the ongoing efforts they are undertaking to raise awareness of the Holocaust memory.

I hope you find the magazine's contents interesting and enjoy reading it, at least as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

Jordi Guixé
Director of the European Observatory on Memories

DEEP VIEW

Filming the archaeology of the Shoah: *shared perspectives from Auschwitz and Sobibor*

A conversation between
Arnaud Sauli and Ania Szczepanska

1. Arnaud Sauli and Ania Szczepanska at the Kulturalna bar (Warsaw). The phrase in Polish hanging on the wall on the right means: "Just because we don't talk about it doesn't mean it doesn't exist"

Arnaud Sauli made the documentary film *Sheol* in 2022, dedicated to the material traces of the Sobibor extermination camp. By following the work of archaeologists and architects of the museum under construction, the film shows the tensions at the heart of memorial work on the Shoah. His film received the grand prize for historical documentaries at the *RDV de l'histoire* in Blois and has been selected in many festivals.

Ania Szczepanska is a researcher at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne and a film director. Her work and films are informed by her research on the history of Poland and more broadly on the visual and cinematographic archives of the Communist period in Eastern Europe. She is currently making a film on archaeological excavations carried out and filmed at Auschwitz in 1967.

Based on their respective experiences, the two discuss the role of documentary cinema in memorial work and the writing of the history of the Shoah.

Ania Szczepanska: In biblical Hebrew, the word sheol designates a place that is not easy to define and is subject to many different interpretations. It is a place where the living do not go and seems to have a mixed nature, combining the singular and the universal, the closed and the open. *Sheol* is the collective "grave" of the dead, capable of expanding to accommodate new arrivals. It can also be considered a place of rest without transcendence. It is not the equivalent of Hell, but rather a purgatory or, as Professor Tabor explains, a "dark and deep" region, "the Pit", or even "the land of oblivion".

After a few seconds of images of life taken from pre-war family archives, your film *Sheol* fully opens with wide shots of landscapes filmed in southeast Poland, around the small town of Wlodawa, 250 km from Warsaw. Three shots in bird's eye view, then still shots of the forest, contemplative, on the ground, with no human presence. A striking shot

2. Sous la terre de Polin, Ania Szczepanska © Bachibouzouk-Les poissons volants

3. Sous la terre de Polin, Ania Szczepanska © Bachibouzouk-Les poissons volants

shows us rails that end in a bush, rails that are no longer in use, yet continue to be inscribed in the landscape, like a piece of abandoned wasteland. We enter your story through this nature, dotted with traces of forgotten infrastructure and scattered individual houses.

Sheol was the reason for your first trip to Poland. That was a trip to a rarely visited and little filmed region, less filmed than the forests around Auschwitz. Could you describe these places and what you saw in these spaces and these landscapes when you travelled there? In Polish, the word for "landscape" (*krajobraz*) consists of two words: "country" (*kraj*) and "picture" (*obraz*). If I start with landscapes, it is also because it is a motif already present in your previous films. In *L'enfance d'Aharon* (2018), for example, Appelfeld speaks of the Carpathian region as a place of origin, an imaginary space of childhood, then a place of the extermination of the Jews. You had also known this country or these countries of Poland with the help of literary stories, films and archive images, but this is the first time that you went there to film archaeologists at work, on the grounds of the former Sobibor extermination centre. "What did you see" during these trips and why did you choose to show us these landscapes? Is it because it is a cinematic figure imposed in any film that deals with the *Shoah* (after Lanzmann's *Shoah*)? Or is it because these landscapes produced *something* in you, in interaction with your knowledge about "what happened there"?

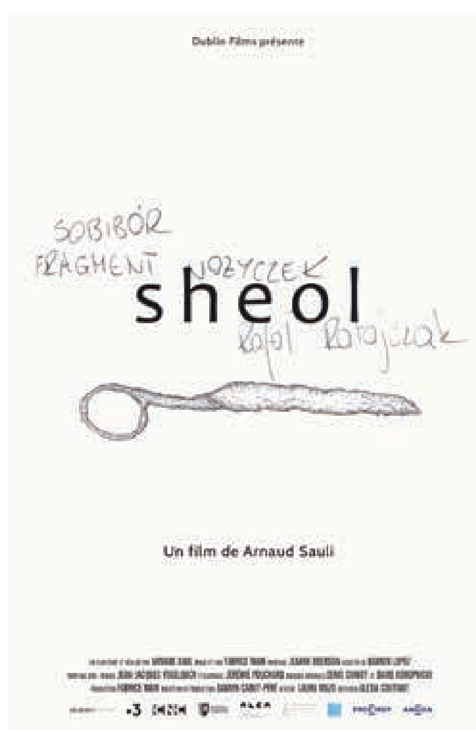
Arnaud Sauli: The film had to be given a name that conveys both the sinister magnitude of the event and our obligation to the exact place where it occurred. This idea of a place where the dead stay for an indefinite and variable amount of time disturbed me by how it could connect things that are unexpected today: first of all, *Sheol* is a very concrete place, with a materiality, just as much as it includes a more abstract questioning about the fate of the dead and their souls. The shifting thought of time attached to it, as well as the indefinite character of the dead residing there (who were good, bad or both) may indicate to us that it is in fact about a crossing, a passage that is always under way. So the place contains all the emotions: mourning, hope, despair, anger and fear, questioning us. What should we do with this place, with the memory written there, with those buried there? This is the obligation to which archaeologists, workers, architects and museum staff respond. The film also attempts to do this, with a particular psalm in mind that gave the film its title:

For in death there is no remembrance of thee. In the grave (Sheol), who shall give thee thanks?

Psalms 6.5 Ketuvim (Hagiographa)

You ask me to describe the landscapes as they were seen on successive trips. This reminds me of crossing the same landscape, several times, during which your gaze settles on successive layers. We only see once into the present, but knowledge, habit and memory bring nuance to the gaze and create optical effects, depth of field, transparency and overlap. There is therefore a first time, which is very important because the retina is supposed to be untouched by these images and will be overwhelmed by the discovery, and sometimes saturated. However, the mind is weighed down with stories, images from films, photographs and the imagination that they have produced in us. So our gaze hesitates between astonishment and the quest for confirmation: does it match what I know or what I expect? Visual emotions can be contradictory: the city of Lublin is so important in Polish Jewish history and an enormous amount of imaginative work is required to visually re-inscribe this history in a quest for traces. Yet the concentration camp, which became the State Museum at Majdanek in November 1944, remains almost intact, like its crematorium ovens and one of its gas chambers. I am terrified by the height of its ceiling (1.90 m max) and the crushing feeling it produces in me. Then there is a crossing, alternating agricultural plains with isolated habitats and dense forests. I cannot help but receive them and "read" them in light of the possibilities of escape and stalking in open ground or, on the contrary, in the shelter of trees, in a continuity and discontinuity of risks. We then approach what would become the epicentre of the film: the small town of Wlodawa, the Biala lakes, the hamlets of Zlobek and Sobibor Stacza and Sobibor forest bordered by the Bug river to the east. Wlodawa, a Jewish town and trading crossroads before the war, the industrial flagship of the military tannery of the former Soviet bloc, is a deprived border town today. I learned that the mainly Ukrainian non-Jewish population was displaced after the war. We must then think that the people we met did not witness the event. Closer to Sobibor, 10 km away, the peasant hamlets show a certain human and sociological continuity. It is summer and I see that this forest is crossed in all directions by gatherers, hikers, cyclists, loggers and lovers and that 10 km away we have never heard of Sobibor. I then understand that this landscape is seen and experienced from many different points of view and experiences and that its present fiercely resists historical reduction. But it is the forest that produces this cognitive and emotional dissonance in me in the first place. This is indeed the place (*"das ist das Platz"* according to the famous *Shoah* formula). The monumental pits covered with shards of white marble according to their exact layout bear witness to this. But it is a varied place where nature is not only the land of the event. Nature gains ground, loses it, produces food, materials, regenerates, bears the traces of murder and adapts to it. This is what I tried to translate through images by searching for this temporality specific to nature, as well as the micro gazes that can account for these many different forms of life when juxtaposed, which of course include death.

This Polish word for landscape, which you have taught me, gives a good account of what one can experience when faced with the landscape of Sobibor: it is the country, the place as a territory, but also the singular gaze of the person who looks at the picture, as well as that of the person who painted it.



4. Sheol poster. Arnaud Sauli ©Dublin Films

5. Sheol. Museum display case. Arnaud Sauli ©Dublin Films

6. Sheol. The archaeologist Wojtek Mazurek. Arnaud Sauli ©Dublin Films

I would like to return the question back on you because your perspective, as well as your work on similar subjects, is different. You, who were born in Poland and are currently working on *the landscape of the metropolis of death*, to echo Otto Dov Kulka: how do you look at this landscape, these traces? How do you allow yourself to be taken in by this landscape with a renewed perspective or, on the contrary, how do you let go of your sensitive and historiographical heritage? You know that many people in Jewish communities view Poland as a gigantic cemetery with rather hostile inhabitants.

Ania Szczepanska: To answer your question, I propose a detour through the eyes of a writer who is dear to us both. When we were talking about literature, you recently told me that Imre Kertesz's book *Être sans destin* was a turning point in your desire to make films and that his unique perspective had moved you to seek out another form of language, cinema. Do you remember the character's arrival at the Auschwitz camp in *Être sans destin*? His arrival in what he calls the "beautiful concentration camp"? The narrator says that the first day is the one that has remained best engraved in his memory. He regards this new reality like "a visitor in prison" and uses writing to try to rediscover his initial perception of the place upon his arrival. Yet, in what we usually call the "concentration experience", he first sees the "beauty" of the landscape. He is sensitive to the brightness blinding him: "A red ray, fine and sharp, appeared somewhere behind us, and I understood: I was witnessing the sunrise". The expanse of the meadow astonishes him and he sees himself playing football there with his friends. He sees the children playing ball before simply writing: "the place where they are asphyxiated is very beautiful".
This perception frightens us. Above all, I see it as a way to capture the truth of a landscape in its complexity, its nuances and its history. Kertesz says he owes this perception to "our deceptive habits which I believe, in the final analysis, are those of human nature". I cite these phrases from *Être sans destin* because they force us, simply and compellingly, to become aware of the historicity of a perspective on a landscape. Kertesz's writing forces us to dissociate the place and its uses. Our gaze is at the intersection of the two, in a temporal depth that does not consider coherence or clarity.
To come back more specifically to your question: Poland was my birthplace. After emigrating to France with my parents at the age of five, in 1987, the Polish countryside, that of Mazovia—a region southeast of Warsaw around the city of Minsk Mazowiecki—was where I spent all my summer holidays as a little girl and teenager. When I crossed the Polish forests to go to the Auschwitz Museum, where I shot my film on archaeological excavations in 1967, the pine forests that I crossed very much resemble the forests of Mazovia where my paternal grandparents lived, in a house bought by my parents in the late 1970s. Above all, they embody this nature that was the setting of our childhood games, our mushroom, blueberry and blackberry picking. We jumped in the fine sand pits, characteristic of pine forests, with my brother, because we had transformed them into a life-size amusement park. So of course, when I regard and film these landscapes today, I also consciously or unconsciously have in mind the shots filmed by Lanzmann's cameraman, Jimmy Glasberg, in

Shoah and other books and films that brought about this "Return to Poland". Historians of the Shoah sensitive to visual sources have helped me to think about and accept this palimpsest that characterises the unique way we grasp a landscape, because *the landscape of the metropolis of death* of which you speak was for me that of experience and learning about life more than anything. It is a living "picture" (*obraz*) that has built my sensitivity to nature and my deep joy in touching the clay, caressing the humus of the trees and even experiencing the stings of nettles.

This is also what I appreciated in your film *Sheol*: you make room for those who continue to live around the forests of Sobibor, for the Sunday cyclists who stop before the archaeological excavation site for a few moments before resuming their walk. In your film, the Poles are no longer just those people who smiled in front of Lanzmann and announced the extermination of the Jews with actions that have become metonymical of the Shoah.

This leads me to ask you a delicate question: the characters you chose in your film have unique relationships to "what happened there" during the Second World War. This past roughly lives in their present and also guides their professional activities in the memorial institutions that you explore. But it seems to me that your approach suspends judgment towards them. Is this suspension even possible and under what conditions can it take place?

Arnaud Sauli: When we approach a place as full of death and dead people, loaded with affects and history as Sobibor, and we wish to perceive it in the present, in what it summons in us and in the interactions that it provokes with the beings who pass by there, stay, work or are simply in the vicinity, we must first "see" these different kinds of presences, the gazes that these people exert in all their nuances. Because for me, it is about successfully seeing and then showing what Sobibor continues to create in us. To succeed in this, I must accept that Sobibor produces things in others that I would not have even imagined possible, so I must shift my gaze.

If we then imagine a mental and emotional map of a place such as Sobibor, we realise that the mass graves are at its centre and that the crossing of the land from the ramp at the edge of the railway line towards the gas chambers at the immediate proximity of the graves is its backbone. Everything literally revolves around this centre, like a vortex that sucks the thoughts, emotions, opinions and projects of those revolving around it into a whirlpool. This vortex of pain is the subject of very strong conflicts in what men wish to do with it to remember what took place there, and the form they wish to give it for the future. They are rabbis like Michael Schudrich and want us to think of the place above all as a cemetery where we leave the dead in peace, finally protected from desecration, looting or damage caused by wild animals. They are architects like Piotr Michalewicz and Marcin Urbanek, members of the new intellectual and artistic Warsaw bourgeoisie who are in charge of conceptualising a new memorial-museum. Their perception of the event and the place is based on a left-liberal political and moral opinion on how Poland is not mourning its Jewish community lost in the Shoah. It also has to do with performative issues specific to a plastic project in such a place; the proposed architectural plan takes precedence over the place itself in creating its message, while aiming to express humility and self-effacement. It is also part of a certain spirit of the times through its desire for emotional distancing, promoting modern educational enlightenment for future generations who will no longer have living contact with witnesses of the time. They are also archaeologists like Wojtek Mazurek and Yoram Haimi, who have been working on the site, "in" the site, in its bowels, for almost twenty years. They have dug thousands of objects out of the ground, silent witnesses to mass murder, most of them coming from rubbish pits left by the Nazis. They have identified mass graves and uncovered the foundations of the gas chambers. They have both a material and hands-on relationship to the place because touch plays a central role in their perception. Their relationship to it is also romantic due to the emotional power of working in specific, daily contact with horror. And yet, these archaeologists with incredible enthusiasm and dedication would like to see the improbable idea of a virtual reality Sobibor

memorial come into being where we could *in situ* visualise the buildings "as they were at the time" in 3D. Finally, there are the museum employees and their routines, as well as the excavation site workers, building construction workers, neighbours, tourists and visitors. They are almost all Polish and all work to educate about and preserve the memory of the Shoah in Sobibor. So of course I have a different point of view than Lanzmann on "the Poles" because Sheol is a film in the Polish language, with Polish faces and Polish bodies. I have a duty to let the image and sound have their nuances, imagination and conflicts. They are neither a group of witnesses leaving a church on a Sunday morning, nor anti-Semitic farmers. They are individual members of a society that confronts its past, sometimes fiercely, each with a unique story and an intimate relationship with Sobibor. It does not matter if they are museum directors, a young unemployed person in Wlodawa, an archaeologist-folk guitarist in Chelm or a hipster architect in a trendy bar in Warsaw.

Ania Szczepanska: In this gallery of characters that you describe, who live and think about the place with different intents, you choose to film some and not others. It seems to me that you give the archaeologist Wojtek Mazurek a central place in your film: the one to which viewers will feel closest and whose point of view they will embrace with the most sensitivity and humanity. Why did you make this choice? Is it because Mazurek is the one you felt closest to emotionally and intellectually?

Arnaud Sauli: Wojtek is the first main character from Sobibor who entered into my imagination even before I started writing the script for the film. I learned of his archaeological investigation in an article published in the *Times of Israel* in 2012, accompanied by a photograph of him holding a spade at the bottom of a ditch. I wrote to him a few years later to meet him and test out my initial intuition, which never left me. I like characters who can embody and carry the dramatic arc of a film. Wojtek, who is a generous and humble enthusiast, embodies complex issues linked to the Shoah on Polish soil on a daily basis with great humanity: he is not Jewish, but has something of a Tzadik (the somewhat mystical wise man that is the instrument of moral justice in Ashkenazi tradition); he is Polish and he is entirely devoted to the memory of the victims of Sobibor. He does not compromise on anything since the integrity of their memory is at stake. He is the one who helps us to read the landscape of extermination by linking the appearance of nettles to a change in soil acidity due to the many human remains. His actions as an archaeologist on the grounds of an extermination centre have the power to make the traces of extermination visible and tangible, which is of course a sensitive subject for the film. The man touched me deeply. We became friends, but his ability to embody these issues in Sheol is due to his inner truth and their staging through cinema.

Naturally I have elective affinities with some of the characters in the film, reluctance with others and frustration about unfinished business with certain individuals, but I always try to treat them fairly, with the same empathy. I do not think that I am suspending my personal judgment in *Sheol*, or in other films, but I do think that it is neither the essence of the film nor its most interesting aspect for viewers in relation to the people presented to them and to the problems they face. I find it much more interesting to show that each character engaged in Sobibor, or nearby, holds some truth or knowledge, that they propose a possible and unique way to approach the issue of memory in the place, that their necessarily excessive commitment testifies to a certain form of exclusive appropriation of the place and that their conflicts and frustrations belong to them and show issues where egos are at play. So of course I exercise judgment on the moral importance of wanting to give the world a 3D representation of the gas chambers and mass graves of Sobibor. I exercise judgment on the somewhat puffed-up effects that give us the opportunity to emotionally experience not belonging to Sobibor, faced with a concrete wall that obstructs our view of the graves. I also exercise judgment on the public administrations' restricted and financial vision of

the memory of the Shoah in certain places in Poland of which Sobibor is a part, but I think that it is more interesting to confront it with the possibility of perceiving the nuance, imagination and complexity of the points of view at work.

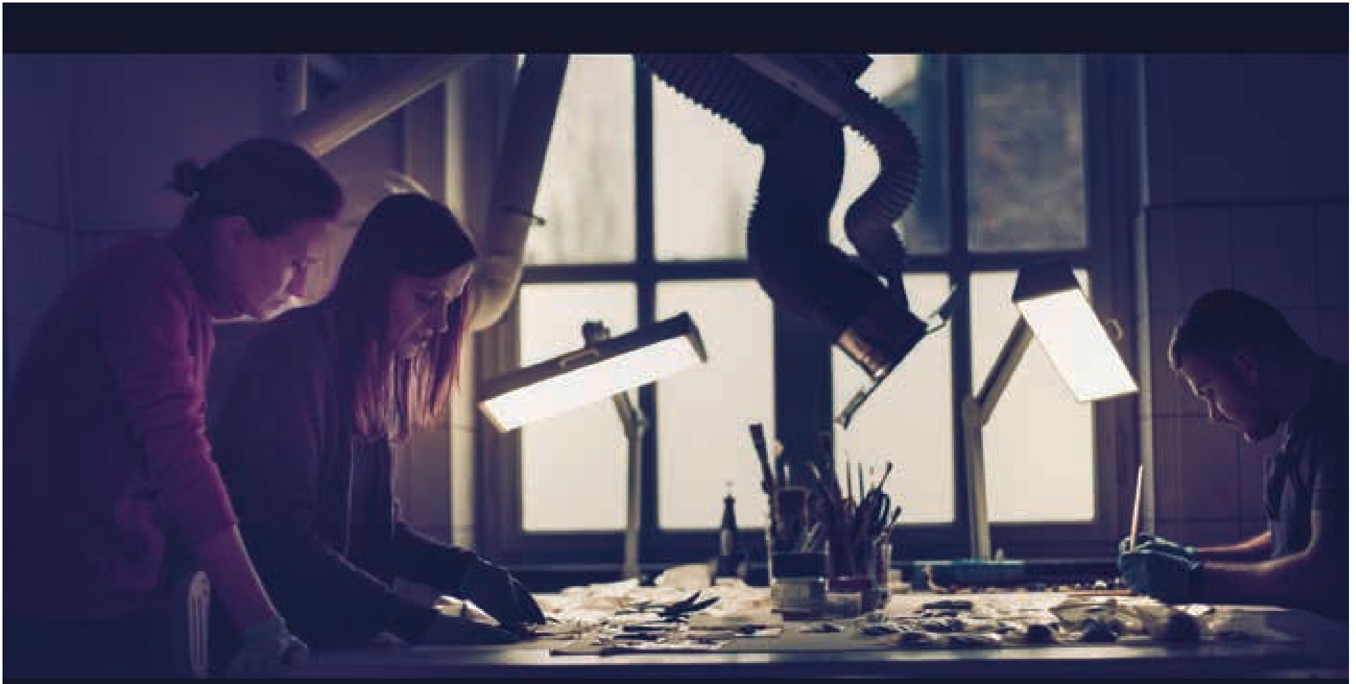
In fine, and this is my point of view and the one expressed in the film, Sobibor cannot be reduced to any of these disputes or to any of these people individually. No memorialisation effort can be truly satisfactory despite everyone's good intentions because any synthesis, even if that were possible, would likely euphemise the place and freeze its use in a set of norms that make any imaginary world difficult.

By answering your question about the main characters at work around Sobibor, I touched on a fundamental issue regarding sites of the genocide in Poland: one of material memory through the discovery and fate of objects belonging to the victims. This is a question with a historicity almost contemporary with the Shoah and reemerges today with the disappearance of its witnesses. It produces problems related to the ownership, conservation and exhibition of these objects. What is your perception, both as a historian and filmmaker, of an issue that is at the heart of your work?

Ania Szczepanska: The material traces of the Shoah are in fact part of a long history. Remember that in the immediate post-war period, objects were used as evidence in trials, where they were presented sealed or represented in photographs. The question of reparations, in which the material question was central, only took shape much later, as part of financial compensation policies put in place in the 1990s. For example in France, the Mattéoli mission recommended the establishment of the Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliations (CIVS) by decree in 1999, which defines the damage resulting from the spoliations of material and financial property giving right to compensation or restitution.

In my research, the question of objects from the Shoah was posed differently. The starting point was a study seminar organised in Paris in 2010 by Annette Wieviorka and Piotr Cywinski on "the future of Auschwitz". It dealt with exploring the future of the site from an ethical but also a material perspective. As the historian notes in the introduction to the seminar: "The idea of bearing witness (...) has been transferred from men to material traces in the illusion that they escape from time. However, to use the title of a novel by Vassili Grossman, *Tout passe* ("Everything flows"), even if the rhythm of the passing of time is not the same for men, material constructions or trees". During this seminar, which marked me intellectually and emotionally, I was able to discover the short documentary film *Archeologia*, created by Polish filmmaker Andrzej Brzozowski in 1967 and somewhat forgotten since. The film showed archaeological excavations carried out by archaeologists from Warsaw near Krematorium III. Research led me to the Lodz Film Studio (WFO), where I discovered that the filmmaker initiated these digs in the film's production file. The incredible story of these 16,000 unearthed objects, whose detailed lists I discovered, fascinated me and I wanted to follow their thread.

A few years later, in 2016, it was by rewatching Brzozowski's film that the curators of the Auschwitz Museum were able to recover these thousands of objects from the Archaeology Institute in Warsaw before studying them, inventorying them, restoring them if necessary and adding them to their collections. These thousands of objects made a very significant contribution to the museum, accounting for 10% of the collections. It was also a scientific challenge for the conservation laboratory. Certain materials such as plastic store very poorly, especially when the object in question spent 20 years underground, followed by decades in cardboard boxes and in unusual conditions. Can and should we keep everything? What life stories can these objects support? As Marcel Cohen puts it in his book *Sur la scène intérieure*, when he questions the 60-year conservation of an egg cup, a "modest" and "faded" object, a familiar object if ever there was one: "Is it abusive to see the very quality of this memory, its texture, something as uncertain as the reflection of an aura?"



7. Sous la terre de Polin, Ania Szczepanska © Bachibouzouk-Les poissons volants

These questions lie at the heart of the film *Sous la terre de Polin* that I am currently making. They raise purely cinematographic questions about the incarnation of the dead that these objects represent and about time (the time they are found, restored and transmitted). With extensive experience in film and a taste for experimental images, my camera operator Pawel Sobczyk works on the materiality and texture of images. We are working to invent filming devices to vary scales of observation, from the infinite smallness of objects to sweeping landscapes. It is with this variation of scale and this attention to materiality and to the brokenness of objects, for example, that I would like to construct the visual language of my film.

The creation of this film is prolonged academically in my work as a historian. It led me to begin research to understand the policies to acquire, conserve and exhibit objects to better understand the choices made at the Auschwitz Museum. These research trips to Germany, Israel and Poland will give rise to a collective publication that will compare the words of those who work on the memory of the Shoah from this materiality: archaeologists, curators and other professionals who interact with academic and school environments. "Everyday objects", the scope and nature of which we must attempt to define in relation to other groups (human remains, works of art, etc.), their narrative through literature and cinema, but also their multiple functions, will be the subject of a report that is currently being written and will be published in the *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah* in 2025.

And you: what have you learned from the distribution and circulation of your film *Sheol*, particularly in France, Spain, Switzerland and the United States, about the role that documentary films can play in these discussions, which are both questions concerning researchers in the humanities but also eminently political questions that affect states' polices of memory? Is screening the film in Poland problematic?

Arnaud Sauli: This is a thorny issue inherent to any documentary film on the history of the Shoah. It first asks about the alleged universal nature of film audiences. When we film sites like Sobibor or Auschwitz, the public is in fact mixed, with sometimes contradictory and even irreconcilable expectations. *Sheol*, for example, found an audience of historians in France where it circulated among the community of researchers and gave rise to fascinating discussions. But it also came under heavy criticism from descendants of victims of the

8. Sous la terre de Polin, Ania Szczepanska © Bachibouzouk-Les poissons volants

9. Sous la terre de Polin, Ania Szczepanska © Bachibouzouk-Les poissons volants

10. Sous la terre de Polin, Ania Szczepanska © Bachibouzouk-Les poissons volants

11. Sous la terre de Polin, Ania Szczepanska © Bachibouzouk-Les poissons volants

four convoys that left France for Sobibor, because the film did not consider the specifically French memorial dimension of the extermination. I will also say that archaeologists, who sometimes suffer from a type of "inferiority complex" compared to historians in terms of contemporary history, have taken up the film with enthusiasm and are screening it in packed rooms in many festivals linked to the discipline. They are very sensitive to the moral and material dimension of their *praxis* shown in the film, as a form of recognition of their contribution. But this distinction is not active everywhere: during a screening at the El Born Centre for Culture and Memory in Barcelona, I noticed a keen sensitivity to the issues of the film. The audience was non-specialist, but it was also reminded of powerful issues sending them back to an obfuscated memory of the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia, of historians, archaeologists and anthropologists working together on the mass graves of 1936. The audience was less historically and emotionally close to the genocide of the Jews, but showed a remarkably acute intellectual sensitivity to the questions posed by the film. Perhaps the famous universality of film lies there, in the ability to mirror questioning based on empathy.

There is still one issue that bothers me: the film has not yet been seen in Poland, despite the strong desire and support of everyone involved and despite its character, rooted in Poland today. The State Museum at Majdanek, the supervisory authority of the Sobibor branch, refused to screen the film and even to be associated with it. Wider distribution on television is not on the agenda, unlike what took place in France.

Ania Szczepanska: Here, the fate of your film perfectly confirms the wars over memory concerning the writing of the history of the Shoah in Poland, which have been revived since the PiS (Law and Justice Party) returned to power in 2016. Evidence of this includes the struggle over what has been called "the new Polish school of the history of the Shoah" and the attacks it has regularly suffered since the 2018 law was enacted against researchers who "sully the image of Poland". As Jean-Charles Szurek and Annette Wieviorka write in the introduction to their collective work *Les Polonais et la Shoah* (2019): "The political regression of a Poland returning to its nationalist fundamentals is articulated with a coordinated effort of historiographical backsliding". That your film *Sheol* has been *non grata* in Poland so far, proves the climate of fear in which the heads of institutions have been working into, but it also implicitly confirms the political power of cinema.

DEEP VIEW

Seeing time, fragment

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How do we see time? How does time become sensitive? These are questions that we could never stop asking, as each time, each answer is called into question in the specific duration and condition of visibility of each new experience. It would be too easy to address this question at a metaphysical level, where time would be elevated to some all-too-ideal "transcendental condition" and where seeing it would be reduced to some excessively concrete and down-to-earth experience, that of a simple immanent, even illusory condition of sensitivity. Let us not create artificial ontological hierarchies too quickly: this is the trap into which generalist philosophers or hurried theoreticians often fall. We grasp time only through our experience of the psyche, the body and the space around us; we only identify ourselves in the visible through a certain perception of duration, memory, desire, before and after—a certain "tremor of time". Separating the visible from time might make certain words clearer and less ambiguous; but in reality that would make things—and especially relationships—incomprehensible and disembodied. We would therefore have to understand how *seeing* and *being in time* are inseparable and even mutually *understand each other*.

Seeing time—an experience that particularly engages all the necessary contribution of images to the knowledge of history, including political history—is really doubling one's experience of time, if it is true that seeing already "takes time". For *seeing is time*, whatever you do: time

1. The epistemological temptation to immobilise seeing and the object of seeing like a butterfly nailed to a cork board. Picture by allispossible.org.uk, CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

put in rhythm by the very reciprocal movements of the visible and the seer. These movements are complex and never end. The academic separation between the “arts of time” and the “arts of space” (from which pictorial, sculptural or photographic images proceed) is a very naïve simplification, if not a dangerous one. To see is first to see this, then suddenly that. Seeing perpetually changes the nature of what is seen as the constitution of the seer. It is to open the eyes, but also to close them (otherwise the eye will dry up and die), thereby producing the “jerky” rhythm of eyelids opening and closing. It is to get closer (because you can’t see anything too far away), but it is also to take a step back (because you can’t see anything that sticks too close). It is to stand in front, but also sideways and in all directions. Doesn’t our gaze continually shift here and there, in a head that keeps turning right and left, up and down, all led by a body that never stops moving in space? Isn’t seeing also sometimes seeing through tears and through emotions in general? Isn’t it, in the dark, for example, no longer being able to distinguish what appears to us, a phenomenon (external, objective) or a phosphene (internal, subjective)?

All the difficulty in this ever-changing experience of the visible and in what it can teach us consists in not reducing its complexity, in *not closing up* what we experience in the order of the sensitive, whether before an event in which we would be witnesses or before a visual document that would itself bear witness to such an event. On both the theoretical and practical levels, we would need to know how to *not immobilise* the images, meaning to not isolate them from their own capacity to make perceptible a certain moment, a certain duration, a certain memory, a certain desire… in short, a certain *human time* where the objective and subjective dimensions of time are combined in what we call history. Yet this effort—leaving their labilities, their movements and even their turbulences to the sensitive and to time—is by no means easy. There are so many obstacles.

For history experts, the temptation to immobilise images—a way of simplifying them and thereby simplifying the lives of historians themselves—has been expressed by their reduction to a simple functional status, that of "visual documents". The image then serves as a pure and simple "iconographic index" in history books, as can be seen in what nevertheless remains one of the masterpieces of the *Annales* school. I am referring here to *The Royal Touch* by Marc Bloch. This is a way of reducing images to a *function* by reducing it to an *imitation* of factual reality, a *representation*—as so many approaches to the image as history and art theory were resolutely deconstructed by Wölfflin, Warburg or Riegl, not to mention Walter Benjamin or Carl Einstein. Of course, the heirs of the *Annales* school certainly paid ever-increasing attention to images as "monuments", and not solely as documents, of history. Yet they have most often done so by continuing to employ a notion of representation that presupposes reducing images to the status of a convenient "mirror of mentalities", without taking note of the fact that the mirror, in the images—and by the images—is very often broken.

For visual arts experts, the epistemological temptation to immobilise seeing and the object of seeing—like the entomologist who kills his favourite butterfly to pin it to a cork board and can thereafter stare at it, calmly, with a gaze as dead as the animal itself—is often no less so. We immobilise the object of seeing when we consider it above all as a text to be deciphered, an enigma to be solved. Didn't Erwin Panofsky envisage iconology as the discipline dedicated, before the images, to "solving the riddle of the sphinx"? But isn't it simplifying the image to suppose it as a "key" of interpretation that could open all its doors? However, the subject of seeing is immobilised when it is reduced to an assigned, irremovable "place of the spectator", whether to confirm the rule of the perspectivist "point of view" of humanism, or else to establish a modernist system of vision according to which the visible object should be absolutely "specific" so that the act of seeing is extricated from all duration and all "psychology" (which, with regard to our concrete experience of images, will quickly appear as a pure and simple view of the mind, even a meaningless categorical imperative).

Images are something quite different from butterflies pinned to a cork board for the scholarly (but perverse and deadly) happiness of the entomologist. They are both movements and times, all unstoppable and all unpredictable. They migrate through space and survive in history, as Aby Warburg said. They transform, they change appearance, they fly here and there and they appear and disappear in turn. They have their own "lives", and these very "lives" are what interest us and "look at" us, much more than the shedding of dead skin that they can leave entirely at our disposal. The best way to look at images would therefore be to know how to observe them without compromising their freedom of movement: therefore, looking at them would amount to *not keeping* them for oneself but, on the contrary, to letting them be, to *emancipating* them from our own fantasies of "seeing integrally", of "universal classification" or of "absolute knowledge". It is by proceeding in this way—and therefore by accepting the risk of a principle of perpetual incompleteness with regard to our will to know—that the subject of seeing will be able to *emancipate itself*, according to Jacques Rancière's apt expression.

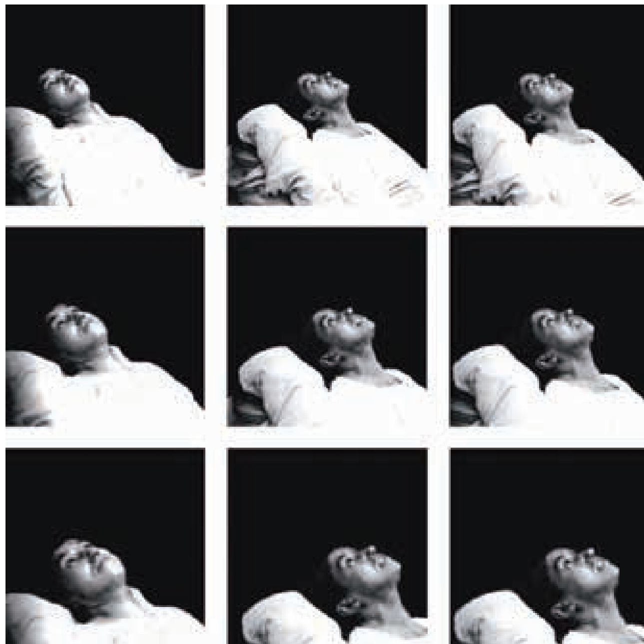
Through this vocabulary, we sense that an *epistemological* decision relating to images always carries an implication that, from the *aesthetic* register, passes very quickly to *ethical* questioning and to the *political* position of the problem. To respond to the request made of me here to evoke, even briefly, these passages from knowledge and the sensitive—or from *knowledge of the sensitive*, even from *sensitive knowledge*—to the political field as such, I must undoubtedly recall how the notion of *position* mobilises, so to speak, all the modalities that I have just listed. What had struck me in the photographs of hysterical women made as early as 1875 at the Salpêtrière by Charcot and his assistants was that, where we were supposed to have visual documents reflecting a pure clinical category, I actually discovered a host of *sensitive* aspects in each image that tore away, so to speak, its own *intelligible* alibi of epistemic representation.

These images certainly showed *poses*, such as typical gestures and "passionate attitudes": in short, instances of stopped time and movement likely to be synthesised into "pictures" setting the stage for a "complete and regular" attack of hysteria, as the doctors said. Yet upon closer inspection of the images, we discovered something else: an occasionally exorbitant supplement that turned upside down any rule of meaning, as well as visibility. First of all, they were *pauses*: durations. One example is when a foot stretched out to the lens showed that it had stretched out and started moving because it was blurred, unlike another part of the body. The blurred area then gave thickness to the time of the take, just as it gave motility to the still image. Even more, she showed something of a fight, of a struggle with the desire of the photographer: a *counter-pose*, in brief. The foot thrown forward was also a kick aimed at the camera itself. With this gesture of defiance or this aggressive demonstration, the patient was saying—or even shouting— *no!* to the protocol supposed to provide visual knowledge of her suffering. In this sense, we can say that she was *taking a position* when she had simply been asked to *strike a pose*.

Against these medical photographs that attempted, under the cover of objective knowledge, to *take power* over her body in crisis—according to a typically fetishising and alienating visual device—the hysterical woman sometimes therefore made of her suffering the suffering of an ethically "mistreated" woman under the cover of being medically "treated", a power of counter-effectuation. She would then happen to *take a position*, as if her symptom itself was equivalent, at such times, to something like an uprising. The "sharing of the sensitive" between the seen body and the seeing body having become asymmetrical, alienating and disagreeable, it swiftly turned to insurrectional confrontation. This made it clear—thanks, notably, to Michel Foucault's studies on the combined history of madness and the clinic—that this first "field of images" was a political field through and through.

It then appeared that being *before the image* was nothing like a comfortable face-to-face, since the object of seeing never stopped moving in space and time—or, better, through multiple and heterogeneous times—just as the seeing subject itself never stopped experimenting with new postures or points of view. Even before the innocent frescoes of Fra Angelico, it was necessary to take a position and, in particular, to reverse or *go up* the conventional hierarchies of top and bottom, of iconography and "décor", of resemblance and dissimilarity, of figure and place. In the three-term relationship that plays out between an image, its object (whose view is constructed there) and its subject (which constructs its vision there), we therefore find this structural need of position everywhere. The photographed hysterical woman is not content with striking a *pose*: she tries, in the best of cases, to snatch a *position* from her status as a "woman-object". The image itself is not content to take its *place* in a vaster whole, the pages of a medical journal in the case of the Salpêtrière or the cells of the Dominican convent in the case of Fra Angelico: this place proceeds from a montage where each figure takes on meaning, in fact, to assume its *position* in relation to all the others.

Finally, the seeing subject cannot be satisfied unless it is purely passive, of having a certain *posture* before the image: it must therefore construct a position capable of affirming something in the image on the basis not of the immobility or univocity of the gaze, but of a regulated variation of it. It then appears that any position stems from a *dialectical movement*. Not from a dialectic conforming to school diagrams, where everything always ends well, like in Hollywood films, via a "synthesis" or a "reconciliation", but on the contrary from an uneasy, infinite, incompletable or irreconcilable dialectic. It is this very movement, alternately *cheerful knowledge* and *restless knowledge*, that a whole generation of modern thinkers will have carried out, readers of Nietzsche as much as of Hegel, and for whom a non-standard dialectical imagination made it possible, precisely to develop positions that were both rigorous and inventive, observant and critical, close and distanced. Even before the Frankfurt School and the "negative dialectic" dear to Adorno—whose history Martin Jay was able to trace under the suggestive title *The Dialectical Imagination*—I think of this constellation formed in the early decades of the 20th century by Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, Carl Einstein and Georges Bataille.



2. "Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière" (Jean Martin Charcot,1878).

3. Aby Warburg in the United States of America, about 1895.
Unknown photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

It is probably not by chance that, of these four individuals—to which it would be possible to add a few others, of course (I am thinking in particular of Ernst Bloch and his magnificent political theory of "wishful images")—two committed suicide out of political desperation. Both occurred in 1940: on 5 July by Carl Einstein and on 26 September Walter Benjamin. Both sought to escape the Nazi yoke after having fought all forms of fascist ideology in Europe for years. Aby Warburg had died in 1929, four years before Hitler came to power, but he had had plenty of time to sense the coming catastrophe, as evidenced in particular by the last plates of his *Mnemosyne* atlas of images, where the motives of theocracy converge with those of the fascist dictatorship against the backdrop of a long history of European anti-Semitism. As for Georges Bataille, he had feverishly sought a political path that was not one of fascism, bourgeois liberalism or Stalinism (a communist and libertarian path, quite close to what Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre called "revolutionary romanticism"), but rather one between Nietzsche and surrealism.

4. Walter Benjamin in a library. Picture by Helvetiafocca, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

5. Georges Bataille in 1943. Unknown author, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

6. Carl Einstein in Ibiza, 1923. Unknown author

What remains striking in this barely sketched picture is that all these thinkers made images the privileged operators (or crystals) of the historical and political dimension as such. They put time at the heart of the image and the image at the heart of time. Having all read Freud carefully, they understood that whether mental, literary or plastic, an image not only represents someone or signifies something, but *manifests a desire*. Yet this is a desire like all desire, meaning one *complicated by memory*. Thus, the images manifest: they lift themselves up and they also sometimes lift us up. They make it clear that politics is first and foremost a matter of subjectification and imagination, of desire and memory. That they do so acting as a symptom, as often happens, does not prevent them from being fundamentally political, for the very reason that, voluntarily or not, they *take a position* between one thousand and one possible things: reminiscence and forgetting, wish and refusal, a public place and a private space, reasoning and fantasy, a feeling of solidarity and a solitary gesture, knowledge and non-knowledge…

7 | 8. The participants of the second edition of the project Route to Exile visit the Memorial Passages to Walter Benjamin in Portbou (Alt Empordà). The monument is a work by Dani Karavan. Picture by the project Route to Exile, 2022.

8

The bright future of memory

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The memory of the Second World War clearly remains very much alive. To give just one example, the conflict triggered in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 by Vladimir Putin explicitly evoked the ghosts of the Great Patriotic War, with the master of the Kremlin aiming to "denazify" his neighbour.

The significance of memory-related issues in today's world results first of all from the harsh experiences of the people living between 1939 and 1945 (or as far back as 1937, if we include the Marco Polo Bridge incident and the Japanese conquest of China). The Second World War is indeed characterised by incredible violence unleashed on the world. An unprecedented phenomenon, this violence primarily struck civilians, victims of the extermination undertaken by the Nazis, the enslavement of millions of workers in Asia and Europe, the merciless repression imposed by totalitarian regimes and massive bombing by the Axis and Allied Powers. This war was also first and foremost framed as one of nationalism. Instead of fighting in the name of Marx or Lenin, the communists in both Russia and China put a damper on their red dogma and chose to exalt the nation, as confirmed by Stalin's famous speech of 3 July 1941. Therefore, in their intimate circles, the survivors of the great ordeal and their descendants hold on to an experienced memory of the Second World War that is passed down to future generations intact or distorted. Some memories, notes the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami "refuse to sink into oblivion, no matter how much time has passed and regardless of the fate that life has in store for us. These

1. Japanese Embassy in Seoul and watched from behind a bronze statue of comfort women. PIcture by Sakaori, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons/licenses/by-sa/4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

memories keep all their intensity and remain in us like the keystone of our inner temple". That being said, collective memory is not just the addition of individual memories. Its collective (and therefore social and political) dimension is largely shaped by the action of institutions, whether associations, parties or the government (in its local, regional or national variations). However, this management has proven to be highly problematic.

Honouring the dead

Collective institutions have above all sought to pay tribute to their dead. According to Victor Hugo, this is because "those who died for their country have the right that the crowds come to their tombs and pray". However, this seemingly obvious undertaking has run up against severe obstacles. For example, in a France ravaged by destruction and shortages, the public authorities were hardly eager to waste precious raw materials. They were also stingy when associations and political parties asked to install headstones and build monuments. As a general rule, moreover, the names of the victims of the conflict were purely and simply added to the monuments that had flourished after the First World War in all the communes of France. Yet the problem, all over the world, lay in knowing which categories of victims were appropriate to honour. Indifference and ideological biases got involved. The fate of the

2. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, U.S. Ambassador to France Denise Bauer and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley arrive at the Normandy American Cemetery for events commemorating the 79th anniversary of Operation Overlord and the invasion of Normandy during World War II, June 6, 2023. (DoD photo by Chad J. McNeeley).

Jews provoked nothing but indifference in post-war Europe and the unique nature of the Shoah was not discussed until the 1970s. It was therefore in the 1970s that a memorial effort was undertaken in France by affixing plaques on schools, for example. However, ideological assumptions had just as much weight. In the Soviet Union and in Poland, the public authorities concealed the Jewish identity of the dead when they did not deny it, both because of a still-vivid anti-Semitism and out of loyalty to a Marxist-Leninist heritage that promoted social class over any other determinant of identity. On a radically different level, West Germany was uncertain about disclosing the fate of fallen soldiers, particularly regarding the distinction to be made between the men of the Wehrmacht and the combatants of the SS. Some theatres of operation posed no problem, such as North Africa. Rommel indeed benefited from his accepted—if not consistent—reputation of having waged a "war without hate", to use the title of his posthumous memoirs. On the other hand, the perpetrators of the plot of 20 July 1944 waited for many years to be placed in the spotlight. In 1956, 49% of the Germans questioned were opposed to giving the name of Stauffenberg to schools. And while five barracks were named after former resistance fighters in 1961, others were named after Nazi generals, including Eduard Dietl (one of the Führer's favourite leaders) and Ludwig Kübler (sentenced to death in absentia for war crimes in Yugoslavia in 1947). Finally, some groups tried to defend the interests of their constituents. In France, those conscripted into the Compulsory Labor Service (STO) tried to obtain the title of "labour deportees", which they were refused after long and unsuccessful campaigns.

From this point of view, memories were reconfigured according to sensitivities and changes in the political and geopolitical context. Thus, the fall of the Berlin Wall made it possible to integrate into the collective memory groups that had been ignored, if not persecuted, under Stalinism. Finally, the rapes suffered by German women during the arrival of the Red Army gradually became worthy of mention. Similarly, East German authorities had covered up the hundreds of civilian suicides in the West

3. Utah Beach D-Day landing site, towards the south. Manche, Normandy, France.. Picture by Jebulon, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Pomeranian town of Demmin. The local museum presented them as victims of "acts of war and disease", while the destruction of the historic centre was claimed to result from the self-defence of the "Soviet friends" who had liberated the population from fascism. The Christian Democrat municipal team elected after reunification set the record straight, particularly by collecting testimonies. However, the memory of this tragedy has been (and still is) exploited by the AfD, the far-right party that organises an annual demonstration "in memory of the many innocent children, women and men who lost their lives in April-May 1945". That said, other categories of victims are still awaiting justice. Often of Korean origin, the so-called "comfort women" who had been forced into prostitution in Japanese brothels have still not received the symbolic and material recognition that they were entitled to expect from their tormentors. The truth is that the Japanese authorities are reluctant to stitch the open and bleeding wounds of the past.

Divergent policies

In fact, the public authorities have conducted divergent—if not antagonistic—policies in terms of memory. As we have said, the Second World War left a deep mark on contemporaries. Such had been the case, though to a lesser extent, of the millions of combatants in the First World War. In order to deal with the pain, resentment and claims of these wounded people, states' only alternative is to try to appease the anger or to make cynical use of it.

The first option was taken in Western Europe. Rather than stoking the flames of hatred, the authorities tried to extinguish them. This policy was notably followed by France and Germany, which were anxious for reconciliation, deemed essential after three deadly conflicts. The construction of Europe provided both a framework and a perspective, but the impetus was also bilateral. On 14 September 1958, Charles de Gaulle invited Konrad Adenauer to his secondary residence, La Boisserie, while the Élysée Treaty signed in 1963

4. A WWII photo portrait of General Charles de Gaulle of the Free French Forces. Image cropped by Emiya1980 using befunky.com. Office of War Information, Overseas Picture Division.

5. Vladimir Putin during an operational meeting with permanent members of the Security Council on November 25, 2022. Picture by kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

initiated close cooperation between both states, including the twinning of French and German municipalities (more than one thousand in 1981), intertwining their peoples as close as possible. Of course, this policy did not make a clean sweep of the past or suddenly eliminate old reflexes. While the French Parliament unanimously made war crimes imprescriptible in 1964, West Germany protected its former Nazis for many years, though the Frankfurt trials of 1963 did mark a change by putting 22 former SS soldiers who had worked in Auschwitz in the dock before their victims. Be that as it may, reconciliation tended to prevail over anger, as the ceremonies celebrating D-Day suggest. Until 1984, the commemorations were first and foremost dominated by Anglo-Americans. The French, led by de Gaulle, did not want to recall the memory of D-Day, from which France had been excluded, and which was the prelude, as de Gaulle described it, to a new US occupation. The man of 18 June therefore refused to visit the beaches of Normandy in 1964. The ceremonies therefore gave pride of place to the former leaders (Omar Bradley in 1969, for example). This configuration did have ulterior motives. By acting in this way, the Anglo-Americans undoubtedly wanted to recall that the Second World War had also been won in the West, while the Soviets reasonably recalled that the Red Army had carried the brunt of the effort until June 1944. Perhaps they also wanted to show that the democracies remained united in the face of the Eastern bloc. By exalting the solidarity of Great Britain and the United States united to triumph over Nazism, the commemorations fulfilled this purpose marvellously.

However, everything changed in 1984 under the leadership of President François Mitterrand. The ceremony became a civilian one, in that it granted primacy to heads of state and no longer to soldiers. As such, Ronald Reagan, Queen Elizabeth and others came to the beaches of Normandy. The number of nations represented also increased. The first to be included was West Germany. In 1984, Chancellor Helmut Kohl ruled out attending, explaining that he had no reason to celebrate “victory in a battle in which tens of thousands of Germans had died”. In

6. Meeting of François Mitterrand in Caen during the 1981 presidential campaign. Picture by Jacques PAILLETTE, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

1994, however, he was indignant at having been pushed aside by French Minister of Veterans Affairs Louis Mexandeau. “Here was a perfect opportunity to celebrate the reconciliation of the different belligerents before the world, giving the ceremonies the value of bestowing official forgiveness by the Allied nations”. At last, in 2004, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder came to Normandy and marked a turning point by explaining: “the victory of the Allies is not a victory over Germany but a victory for Germany”. In the same vein, the Soviets were also included, as Vladimir Putin was invited to the 2014 commemorations.

The message sent during the ceremonies has also evolved. Over time, it has promoted two lines of thought. On the one hand, D-Day was no longer presented as a military operation leading to victory, but as an enterprise of peace, freeing Europe from Nazism and ushering in Franco-German reconciliation. In this spirit, Operation Overlord is also considered the beginning of the construction of Europe, as François Mitterrand said in 1984: “The adversaries of yesterday have reconciled and are building the Europe of Freedom together. May they now dare to go beyond themselves to overcome the contradictions of a common victory that has brought us peace”. In 1994, he added: “Reconciled, the adversaries now walk in step”. This is clearly an act of construction or, if you may, of storytelling. Eisenhower certainly did not think that he was laying the groundwork for the construction of Europe. He sought above all to annihilate the German armies and not to achieve an improbable reconciliation between France and Germany. Yet this vision was accepted. Today, it shapes how we represent the liberation in general and Operation Overlord in particular.

However, other countries have not embarked on this path and instead cynically use the sad passions of their peoples for other ends. Far from carrying out a memorial reconciliation with Germany and Russia, Poland recalls the very real suffering it endured, a memory reawakened by the attack against Ukraine. Similarly, at the height of the 2015 crisis, the Greek authorities were quick to evoke the occupation of Greece between 1941 and 1944, stressing in passing that Germany had not compensated the country for the suffering inflicted.

In Europe, as in the world, the paths of memory are therefore being undermined. The issue is not about the memory that individuals, or even groups, retain of a trying period that left an enduring mark on millions of people and their descendants. Rather, it is about the definition of policies of memory. After the First World War, governments used the memory of the sacrifices borne to challenge the Treaty of Versailles. Germany had never stopped demanding its revision, as the Weimar Republic had done longer before Hitler. Italy had endlessly exploited the theme of a "mutilated victory". Japan, considering itself unjustly wronged, had engaged in nationalist one-upmanship. These trends did not resume after the Second World War for two main reasons. First, the Cold War prompted governments to channel popular resentment. At a time when Moscow was condemning Berlin to a gruelling blockade before building the Wall of Shame, Western Europeans could hardly give free rein to their demands, especially if they were counting on the young Bundeswehr to shoulder a share of their joint defence. Second, this was especially that case since Europe was embarking on the construction of the Common Market and the European Union, which supposed relative moderation in terms of memory. This double constraint does not mean that all the disputes were settled. Thus, the German Democratic Republic denounced the protection that its western neighbour provided to former Nazis and undoubtedly helped to make some embarrassing revelations to embarrass the authorities in Bonn. Yet neither Poland, nor Hungary nor Czechoslovakia could express their pain over the drama of Katyn or the conduct of Soviet troops in 1945. With the fall of the Berlin Wall on the one hand and the aggression against Ukraine on the other hand, these safeguards have been broken. The memory of the Second World War therefore risks plotting a new course. In view of Vladimir Putin's cynical evocation of the Great Patriotic War and Poland's aggressive tone, we believe that the reconciliation initiated in Western Europe has had its day. Far from being placed at the service of peace, the memory of the Second World War now risks being brandished to justify and legitimise new tensions and even new conflicts: a very discouraging prospect indeed.

7. The Motherland Calls, the compositional centre of the monument-ensemble "Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad" on Mamayev Kurgan in Volgograd, Russia.
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Memory and democracy: *a complex relationship*

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In the past few years, the question of what societies should remember and how it matters has shifted squarely into the spotlight. In 2020 and 2021, almost no day went by without front-page reports about statues being torn down or street names being changed.

Whether these transformations were driven by protestors or governments, they were always part of larger debates about what kinds of values are represented through cultural symbols connected to legacies of colonialism, racism, white power, dictatorial rule, patriarchy and more. Underpinning these discussions is the idea that what we decide to set in stone, what we commemorate in our public spaces, matters for how we are governed and how our societies are constituted at a deeper level. Civil society activists and policy-makers – whether they are friends or foes of democracy – tend to assume that public memory "does something": it either helps us to build more democratic, peaceful and reconciled societies or it can erect a barrier to doing so. However, scholars have recently argued that this assumption is not well-founded empirically (Gensburger and Lefranc, 2020; Pisanty, 2021; David, 2020). After all, if remembering past instances of racist and antisemitic violence is so impactful, why do we still see so many racist and antisemitic attacks? Similarly, why do conflicts keep flaring up after transitional justice processes? While I will not wade into this discussion here, it is clear that the causal connection between public remembrance and various policy outcomes is not well evidenced. A first step in that direction needs to be a more systematic understanding of what a "good" – or democratic – memory actually means. This short article attempts to explain the different elements that I believe we need to consider in a conceptualisation of democratic memory.[1]

1. Please note that my reference point here is always public memory – made up of the existing and emerging memorial landscape, non-physical memorials such as anniversaries, but also significant public debates. In other words, public memory is always at least to some extent sanctioned by the state, although it may still be contested. While private and clandestine forms of remembering are highly significant, they complicate the operation of remembering and this discussion falls outside the scope of this article.

1. The empty pedestal of the statue of Edward Colton in Bristo. Picture: Caitlin Hobbs, CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Memory and democracy in theory

The most sustained thinking about the relationship between memory and democracy has happened in the literature on transitional justice and democratization. Of course, this is a highly complex matter, but we can roughly say that there are two relevant positions here – one emphasising the importance of building strong democratic institutions after the end of an authoritarian regime – a goal that often necessitates forgetting the past, not prosecuting perpetrators, or giving amnesties in order to get buy-in to the new state from elites and "the masses". The other position is that the establishment of democracy fundamentally needs the development of particular types of norms. This means facing up to the past, hearing the voices of victims and memorialising their experiences. Anne Sa'adah calls these two pathways the "community of behaviour" in which citizens respect the rules and institutions of the state (but it doesn't much matter what they believe) and the "community of conviction" in which democratic values are internalised. The former is established through an "institutional" strategy, which is concerned primarily with the absence of violations and the reliability of the citizenry. The latter is the result of a "cultural" strategy that seeks to create a trustworthy citizenry with a self-sustaining democratic spirit (Sa'adah, 1998). This issue is one that West Germany faced during the postwar period, with so many former Nazis and fellow travellers at all levels of society after the high levels of general support for the Nazi regime. As Jeffrey Herf pointed out, the "inherent tension between memory and justice on the one hand and democracy on the other would appear to have been one of the central themes of postwar West German history". (Herf, 1997:7). Not only is remembering the past not always good for democracy, then, but not all forms of remembering are democratic – just think of the continued reverence for militaristic and fascists symbols after 1945. So the question is: what kind of memory is good for democracy? What is democratic memory and could undemocratic memory be good for democracy under certain circumstances? To consider these questions, we can conceptualise democratic memory in four different ways, none of which by themselves are sufficient to guarantee that public remembrance will have a positive impact on democratic governance. What is important is how they interact in particular historical settings as various actors contend over how the past will be represented in the public space.

Representative memory

First, democratic memory can be understood in terms of the minimalist or electoral definition of democracy: it represents the view of the majority (or the will of the people). Memory can thus be democratic in that public memory culture corresponds to what the majority in society believes to be an acceptable depiction of the past. Importantly, this does not necessarily mean an historically accurate representation, but one that feels like it is "telling the right story" – and has majority support. However, what does it mean when a majority supports a narrative of the past that analysts believe is fundamentally opposed to democracy? This was the case in the wake of the Holocaust in Germany. Contrary to the commonly held assumption, Germans in the period immediately after WWII did not remain silent about the past so much as they remembered it in a highly selective manner. As soon as the Allies allowed it, there was indeed a significant amount of civic activity to commemorate the war experience – but the overwhelming majority did not address or take responsibility for the perpetration of the Holocaust. Thousands of memorials were built to remember "German victims" – people who died or lost their homes fleeing west from formerly German territories, victims of Stalinism and the uprising in the GDR in 1953, as well as POWs.

2. Memorial to Victims of Stalinism, Steinplatz Berlin, 1951. Picture: Jenny Wüstenberg.

This public memory very much had majority public support in West Germany, as well as support from the democratically elected government. Certainly, there were also efforts, especially by survivors, to commemorate the Holocaust and Germans' responsibility for this genocide – but these groups were not well-supported by the state or by majority public opinion. Thus, at this point in time, the dominant forms of public memory were indeed democratic in the representative sense, supported by a high level of civic social capital and legitimized by an at least formally democratic state – though of course the presence of former Nazis at all levels of government in the Federal Republic of Germany should give us pause. However, no observer would define the memory culture in the 1940s and 50s in West Germany as democratic: the societal norms being fostered by dominant public memory in the immediate post-war era were not conducive to democratic values.
The same could be said for the state of public memory in the Russian Federation today. Though independent research is currently challenging, it does appear that most Russian citizens wholeheartedly support the state-driven and -endorsed celebration of Soviet (and by extension Russian) victory in the Great Patriotic War, whereas a reckoning with Stalinist and Post-Stalinist oppression is side-lined and even persecuted (Gabowitsch, 2023).

Legitimate memory

The second element in an assessment of democratic memory would be that a democratically elected government or state supports it through resources and official recognition, so it has electoral and institutional legitimacy. Here, the notion of resilient institutions that uphold the letter of the law and can keep citizens "on board" with memory culture is important, but there is also an element here of keeping citizens "in line" – meaning that the state to some extent has the role of protecting the memory narratives that voters have given the government a mandate for – even when it means practicing some level of surveillance and policing of counter-memorial activity that has democratic objectives. Thus, we might argue that the memory policies of the Polish government up to 2023, which was democratically elected, hold a certain level of democratic legitimacy.

However, they have been strongly criticised by Polish civil society leaders, as well as by international institutions and observers, for undermining critical historical research and an honest working through of complex legacies of resistance, collaboration and complicity during the Holocaust. On the flip side, the German Democratic Republic is an example of a dictatorial state that (at least nominally) promoted public commemoration of the experience of persecution by the Nazis, probably mostly against the resistance of the general public. Thus, democratic state legitimacy is no guarantee of democratic public memory, while non-democratic states can promote norms that may be seen as a component of democratic remembrance.

3. Macron undertaking an act of commemoration at Memorial de la Shoah. January 2020. Picture: US Ambassador to France. Public domain per 17 U.S.C. § 101 and § 105 and the Department of Copyright Information

Normative memory

Third, memory could be democratic because the kinds of narratives that it evokes help to develop values that are important for democracy, such as tolerance for difference, inclusion and taking care of the weak in society. This notion is supported by the "community of conviction" idea, as well as by recent work on democratic backsliding. Thus, Levitsky and Ziblatt have argued that certain norms are crucial, serving as "guardrails of democracy" that underpin the spirit of democracy in a way that just following the letter of the law would not be able to do (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). All democratic systems rely on unwritten codes of conduct – and the same is true for democratic memory. Of course, the flip side is also true: some norms are detrimental to democracy, whipping up nationalist sentiment, silencing complex and traumatic experiences and so forth. And these are usually underpinned by particular mnemonic narratives. In West Germany during the 1980s, myriad local initiatives emerged that sought to remember the Nazi past and the Holocaust from the ground up, carefully working through continuities, exposing perpetrators and commemorating victims in a way that helped to address discrimination in the present. Eventually, this resulted in a decentralised landscape of memory, as well as influencing historical education and the institutionalisation of memory, but the cultivation of these mnemonic norms initially happened mostly against the resistance of the state and majority public opinion. Similarly, Indigenous activists and intellectuals in Australia (like in other settler colonial states such as Canada or the United States) have worked to publicise and commemorate the history of colonial violence, dispossession and (cultural) genocide for decades, while arguing that this memory is crucial to addressing continued racism and disenfranchisement. It has been a long a struggle against the Australian state and the public – a division that was again reinforced by the failed campaign for the "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament" in 2023.

4. Protest for Voice. Brisbane Community rally in support of voting Yes for The Voice at the Referendum in Australia. September 17, 2023. Picture: Panthus, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Fourth, memory can be democratic in the sense of it being driven by grassroots or civic memory work. This connects to Robert Putnam's notion that social capital (fostered through civic associations) is what fundamentally "makes democracy work". (Putnam, 1993). Putnam and others in this tradition argue that civil society helps people to articulate their interests and demands to government and therefore shapes what the state does. Moreover, civil society fosters "habits of the heart" – skills and public spiritedness in the citizenry that are indispensable for the public good (Tocqueville, 1954). This argument was initially put forward simplistically to mean that civic engagement is automatically good for democracy. As I have argued with respect to Germany, civil society groups have fundamentally influenced the memorial landscape and the institutions governing memory, though it was not always for the benefit of democracy, as right-wing and populist grassroots work has been just as influential (Wüstenberg, 2017). Yet what is interesting is that the idea that civic memory equals democratic memory is a strongly-held belief among many memory activists themselves – and crucial to their identity. This was central to the efforts of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (Image 5) (Iturriaga, 2019; Jelin, 2021) long before they were globally recognised as pioneers in the struggle for democracy and against forgetting. Today in the United States, we see a vibrant cast of civil society activists working to de-commemorate Confederate and colonial symbols (and often replace them with statues that recall traditions of resistance, anti-racism and democratisation) (Gensburger and Wüstenberg, 2023), even as the majority opinion in many (Southern) states and legislatures uphold such anti-democratic legacies. At the same time, civil society actors that seek to protect these legacies, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, are also numerous and strong (Levi and Probulus, 2023). In other words, a lively mnemonic civil society is not by itself a driver of democracy.

5. Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo at the ESMA transfer ceremony on October 3, 2007.
Picture: Mónica Hasenberg, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Concluding thoughts

Bringing together these different (and sometimes clashing) elements of democratic memory suggests some important points that warrant further consideration and research. For one thing, it is clear that if our objective is to create deeply democratic societies with a vibrant and critical approach to the past, the process of remembering how societal majorities and various interests are symbolically represented or changed over time matters just as much as the content of public memory. Second, memory is never set in stone as "democratic" because it can never operate in isolation and must always be understood in relation to the transformation of society and its historical discourses. This is because the narratives about the past that support democratic norms changes over time. Even when a dominant public memory was the outcome of a democratising process (as was the case in West Germany), this does not mean that we can stop thinking about how to engage the public in that memory. For example, today there is an urgent need to address how German memory culture can reckon with histories of colonialism and racism and speak to an increasingly multi-cultural and multi-past population. Finally, and maybe most importantly, democratic memory per se does not prevent violence against minorities or discrimination. As statistics in Germany show, the very strong position and support for remembering the Holocaust does not mean that racist, anti-Semitic, transphobic etc. attacks do not happen at an alarming rate. These ideas of course do not provide prescriptions for how to design memory policies that support democratic consolidation, but they do offer the beginnings of a framework for thinking through the complex relationship between memory and democracy in different local, national and transnational settings.

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INTERVIEW

Patricio Guzmán, *memory or life*

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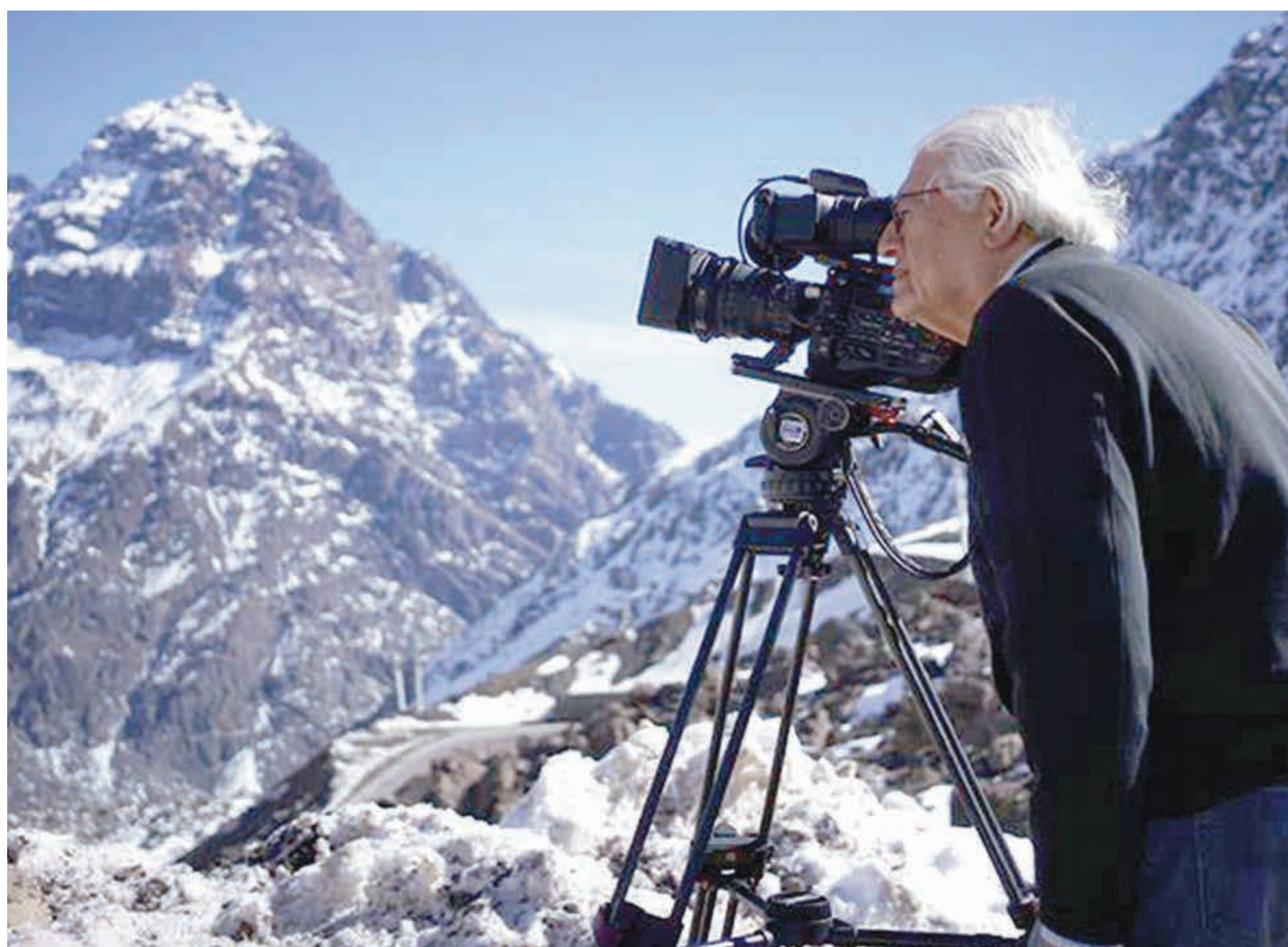
It is not an easy task to talk about Patricio Guzmán in just a few words; nor would it be in a few pages, or even a book. Few filmmakers in the world have so powerfully made me feel the way that documentary film, more than any story, is capable of expressing the intense and dramatic heartbeat of history, or how two seemingly opposing dimensions such as historical transmission and poetry can be combined with such delicate balance. The Chilean filmmaker is today a notable figure in the history of film, widely recognised for how he has managed to preserve and transmit the history and collective memory of his homeland using a fully mastered cinematographic language, which blends historical rigor with powerful artistic sensitivity.

Born in 1941 in Santiago de Chile, Patricio Guzmán showed a true passion for film from a very early age and trained in Madrid at the former Madrid Film School. But the event that was to mark his life, and naturally the course of his cinematographic career, was the coup d'état of 11th September 1973, in Santiago de Chile, which overthrew Salvador Allende's democratically voted government and brought the military dictator Augusto Pinochet to power. What would his films have been without this tragic event, the imprint of which has been etched on the majority of his works? The short films that the then young filmmaker had made prior to the fateful date were going in different directions, and did not reveal the way in which, tenaciously and obsessively, this event would become the core of his film work and of his life, by being examined, or rather, dissected by the precise scalpel of his lens. His famous documentary trilogy The Battle of Chile (1975-1979) which, in the aftermath of the fatal coup, bore witness with highly dramatic images, not only to the events, recorded with daily devotion, but also to the ideas and hopes that were soon to be dashed. The Battle of Chile (1975-1979) was a milestone in committed film at the time.

Following on from this somewhat "initial" account, his documentary choices to date have varied hugely. But the aspect which, some forty years after the events, established him as a filmmaker on the global stage was another trilogy, comprising three feature length films Nostalgia for the Light (2019), The Pearl Button (2015), and The Cordillera of Dreams (2019). This time from the perspective of memory, expressing it with a unique and perfectly recognisable style, which explores the past through the present, entangling timelines and deepening the reflection with global echoes. I must confess that my favourite film of his is Nostalgia for the Light, whose story fascinatingly blends the activity of scientists star-gazing in the Atacama Desert with the search for relatives who disappeared during the dictatorship. Past, present and future intertwine, to the backdrop of Chile's tragic political history, leading to a philosophical reflection expressed in captivating images in a story guided by the recognisable gentle voice-over of the director.

Lauded and awarded prizes, Patricio Guzmán's work is a model to be followed, in particular among new generations of directors, for whom film continues more than ever today to be a powerful tool to condemn and resist against the dictatorial regimes which, beyond Latin America, have spread during the century and continue to do so, unfortunately. His legacy will undoubtedly live on in the history of film for his defence of a tireless "obstinate memory", to paraphrase the title of one of his films, to build a fairer future.



1. Patricio Guzmán during the shooting of The Cordillera of Dreams (2019). Promotional image.

Interview with Patricio Guzman

1. Patricio Guzmán, 2013 Giza Eskubideen Zinemaldia - Festival de Cine y DDHH. Picture by Argazkia /Iñigo Royo CC BY-SA 2.0 DEED Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic

1. **The year 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of Chile's coup d'état, the death of Salvador Allende and the beginnings of the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. Your three-part documentary film *The Battle of Chile* (1975-1979) is a documentary monument to the historical memory of these events that transcended borders. How do you regard your documentary films after all these years? How have you dealt with these events and how does today's Chilean society deal with them?**

PG: I am happy that I can make a documentary film about the reality facing Chile every three years. That gives direction to my life as a filmmaker.

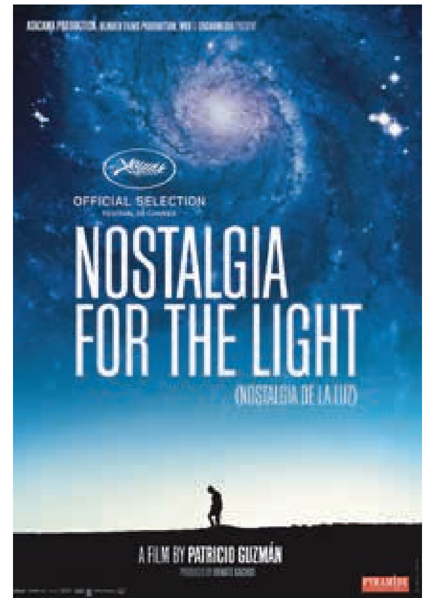
Chilean society tackles the issue with the same spirit it has always shown, divided into roughly two factions.

2. **The memory of the political and social struggles and repression experienced in Chile is the cornerstone of your films. To explore the subject, you have made use of artistic language, metaphor and geography, which are very much a feature of films such as *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), *The Pearl Button* (2015) and *The Cordillera of Dreams* (2019). Is artistic language the best tool for conveying the memory of a traumatic past?**

PG: That's... This is what comes to mind every time I start a film. It's personal. Every artist has their own language that makes them tick.

3. **In this issue of *Observing Memories* we wanted to examine documentary film and photography as vehicles for the transmission of memory. What makes documentary film different from other vehicles? What makes it special? Moreover, what are the limitations documentary film might encounter when it comes to conveying memory?**

PG: Here you are talking to me about different things. I never envisage transmission channels.



2 | 3 | 4. Posters of the movies "Nostalgia for the Light" (2010), "The Pearl Button" (2015), and "The Cordillera of Dreams" (2019). This trilogy by Patricio Guzmán addresses the lasting impacts of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship.

I make cinematographic films because it is my profession and I learned to do so in my youth when I was studying; then comes experience, time, years and style and one's personal life.

The other issue is the difference between a documentary and other films. For a good film that difference is not that significant, first it has to be good so that it gives something to the viewer that touches and interests them. Then there are many differences, in the crew size, in the writing style, in the openness of the script and/or the set. There is also the fact that there are no actors, they are real-life characters who want to be involved, and then the budget is much smaller.

4. The world of television platforms has borne a major impact on film development, both in terms of production and distribution. What influence can these platforms have on the evolution of art-house documentary filmmaking?

PG: Well, it is a very topical and far-reaching issue. First you realise that it poses a threat to the cinema that we all used to frequent to watch a film on a proper big screen and enjoy it. The protracted Covid period has shown that people watched everything at home or on their computers because the cinema was no longer in operation. New film-watching habits came to the fore. Today, here in France at least, people are tending to revert to the cinema, precisely because it is not the same and that culture cannot be replaced by a "click". Production and distribution, which have always been difficult for documentaries, remain a real concern, and new financing, production and distribution methods have emerged.

5. Who were your main influences in documentary filmmaking? Which current documentary films and filmmakers catch your eye the most and why?

PG: Your question is the makings of a book. The first films that moved me when I was 17 years old and that I saw in Chile were films like *Mondo Cane* by Gualtiero Jacopetti, *The Living Desert* by Walt Disney, *The Silent World* by Jacques Yves Cousteau and Louis Malle, Night and *Fog* by Alain Resnais, *Las Callampas* by Rafael Sánchez, *European Nights* by Alessandro Blasetti, *My Struggle* by Erwin Leiser, and *To Die in Madrid* by Frédéric Rossif.

Today in each country, there is a group of some 20 top documentary filmmakers whose cinematic language is outstanding. But if I were to name just a few, it would be unfair to all the others.

6. In *My Imaginary Country* (2022) you address the state of affairs in Chile from the revolts and social unrest of 2019 to Gabriel Boric's victory in the 2021 elections. What role has the memory of 1973 played in the demands made by the social movements that led the uprisings?

PG: In my opinion, there is almost no connection between them, apart from the fact that cultural aspects such as slogans, songs and music as cultural heritage are repeated. As far as I can see, the demands have been echoed for decades, even beyond Chile, for a more decent and fairer life. What was unexpected was the "explosion" effect.

7. After the draft of the new Chilean constitution was rejected in the 2022 referendum, what are the future prospects you see for your country?

PG: It's hard to answer from where I am and even in the country it's hard to answer. We will have to wait and see. I am much more of a filmmaker than a politician; I've filmed these events with enthusiasm and hope, like many Chileans of my own generation and others.

8. What influence has Pinochetism exerted on Chile's current right-wing? How useful can the politics of democratic memory be in curbing the ultra-right?

PG: Well, I am not an expert in socio-political matters. Nowadays it seems that the Chilean right wing is acting as if it had won for another thirty years. I think that is far from guaranteed.

5. Meeting of Salvador Allende in Concepción, 1971. Archivos Historia

9. The Chilean dictatorship's sites of memory have a certain history and some, such as Villa Grimaldi, portray the image of a country concerned about their preservation and dissemination. Where does Chile stand right now with regard to its sites of memory? What challenges must they face in the current political climate? How can this type of heritage be used for the development of audiovisual products?

PG: Many films have been made on the subject of memory in Chile and I believe that they will keep on being made.

10. You have lived in Europe since you had to leave Chile in the 1970s and you now reside in France. What do you think of the memory policies that have been developed in Chile and how do you regard those pursued in France and in Europe? What are their strong and weak points, and what are the main challenges they are up against?

PG: Many new films are made every year in Europe about the Second World War. France is an exemplary producer of documentary films, far outstripping the production of other countries and thus contributing to the world's cinematic memory.

6. Gabriel Boric, president of Chile (2022). Picture: Paulo Slachevsky

OVERVIEW

Whose memory?

New museums and (political) narratives in Slovenia

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In March 2021, on the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the independent state of Slovenia, Janez Janša's government established the (national) Museum of Slovenian Independence. The official reason for its creation was due to criticism from a number right-wing politicians who argued that Slovenian museums neglected the topic of national independence and failed to cultivate the values on which the new country was founded. This was strongly opposed by the historical profession, as at least three Slovenian museums were already dealing with the subject of the twentieth century and created several exhibitions on the subject of independence. Unofficially, the new museum served the needs of the then-ruling Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) for the realisation of its own ideological vision of the Slovenian independence effort. According to their line, SDS President Janez Janša was at the forefront of the events of 1991 and chiefly responsible for the separation of Slovenia from Yugoslavia. In January 2023, the new government, led by Robert Golob, merged the newly created museum with the older National Museum of Contemporary History, establishing a new museum for the research and interpretation of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The decision was met with a fierce reaction from the Slovenian right – they threatened civil disobedience and claimed that the new government was pushing the country back towards the old totalitarian model.

1. Part of the permanent exhibition “Slovenians in the 20th century”, which tells the story of the independence and democratisation of the country; Jože Suhadolnik/DELO

Claiming that museums are apolitical is a lie. Museums are political entities and can never be neutral. Whatever we do, the relationships between institutions, the subjects we address and the collections we create reflect the subjective biases of the researchers and curators who are entrusted with a subject. In other words, no two curators would create identical exhibitions on the same themes and yet each interpretation can be valid and based on professional guidelines. According to the modern understanding of the mission of museums, the interpretation of individual museum collections is in constant interaction with the state of society and its needs. Today, museums are confronted with questions of restitution, answers to the traumatic legacies of colonialism and totalitarian systems, the discovery of atrocities against humanity and the question of responsibility for heritage in times of military conflict. All these issues reinforce the notion that museums do not exist and do not operate in a vacuum.

In recent years, museums have turned to working with their communities, giving voice to the vulnerable and the forgotten. New exhibition approaches are oriented towards more modern and democratic practices, creating spaces that foster diverse dialogue where we strive daily to overcome the stereotypical perception of museums as spaces for (only) political narratives. I am fascinated by the idea of getting to know the world through the testimonies of people, to search for (hi)stories around us. It is through individual

2. When the government of Janez Janša appointed the new director of the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia in February 2021, a sign bearing the word "SHAME" (sramota) appeared in front of the museum; Jože Suhadolnik/DELO

family stories, their virtues and their traumas that we can understand the complexity of our everyday life and the intricacies of collective memory. The stories of individuals, their experiences, creativity, knowledge, doubts, views on society and personal values are an invaluable resource in the search for answers about ourselves, our society and anchors of collective memory. As the foundation of our social and cultural identity, memory is the key to understanding our environment, as well as our attitudes towards interpretations of the past and national belonging. The sacralisation of selected memories legitimises what we understand today as national interpretations of ourselves. We are inclined to perceive museums as relevant and ethically binding institutions that strive to tell broader, more complex stories and outline events through a range of interpretations and personal experiences. Unfortunately, in the last few decades, following the collapse or dissolution of the old forms of government, we have also witnessed many museums fall into neglect or close down as they were no longer suitable for representing politically appropriate interpretations of their nation's past. The creation of new museums or unannounced changes in museum administrations reflect the need of current governments to preserve suitable interpretations of their nation's past.

During times of radical social change, the field of interpretation of the past is one of the first to require an overhaul. Political and social changes require a new understanding of the past and repressed memories are called upon to build a national collective memory. The removal of taboo topics of recent national history in the late 1980s and early 1990s triggered a wave of historical revision across Europe and influenced a new appreciation of museums in the following decade, especially those dedicated to the history of the Second World War, established to tell the story of victorious struggles of national liberation. New politics of remembrance demanded new national narratives and Slovenia was no exception.

The example of the Museum of National Liberation, founded in 1948, which lost its independence in the late 1950s, regained it in 1962 as the Museum of the People's Revolution and was renamed the Museum

3. Home Guard building in Ljubljana, built in 1899. under restoration. The Archive of Slovenia will operate in the renovated building, expected in 2024

of Contemporary History in 1993, confirms the efforts to politically construct socially suitable public institutions. Viewed more broadly, the phenomenon of the creation, rise and destruction of the red museums of Yugoslavia is a story of a collective "struggle of values" and the creation of new ones based on the rejection of the heritage that the museums of the revolution kept. The most successful transition from a politically established museum to an open and participatory national institution is represented by the Museum of Contemporary History. After the independence of Slovenia, the reformed museum began to systematically collect, preserve and present the history of Slovenians from the period before the First World War to the present day, with special emphasis on the period of independence and the democratisation of the country. The employees of the museum were already collecting objects and other material evidence of the birth of the new state during the period of the formation of the country and throughout the transition process. They met with actors and recorded their stories, collected the works of famous photojournalists and founded several collections. In the decade after the proclamation of the new country, they prepared a high-profile exhibition entitled "United in Victory – the Independence of Slovenia", which presented the steps towards the independence of the new country on the fifteenth anniversary of independence. A year later, it was briefly displayed at Ljubljana Castle and after its closure in late 2007, it became a part of the museum's permanent installation. Collections of objects and exhibitions on the theme of independence are now part of the regular programme not only of the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia, but also of several museums throughout Slovenia. It is precisely because of the systematic data collection and research on this period, the exhibitions and publications, that the criticism of the government in 2021 resonated so much more in public, as state institutions did not deal with this period and these topics were socially neglected.

4. Renovation of the old military building on Roška street (Domobranska vojašnica), where the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia will be located and where the government of Janez Janša wanted to set up the new Museum of Slovenian Independence. Photo: Nik Erik Neubauer, Dnevnik, 2023

The project of the Museum of Independence was announced in November 2020. Despite the public's reluctance, it was established by an Act of Government in March 2021. The mission of the new institution was based on acquiring collections from the process of the democratisation of the Republic of Slovenia and the national struggle for independence. The Ministry of Culture announced that the museum would operate in the previously approved new premises of the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, which has not yet been built. The Ministry also stressed that the collection strategy of the new museum would be determined by qualified experts, appointing journalists, publicists, historians and a theologian to the museum board, all of whom were supporters of the government. In September, the newspaper Večer published an interview disclosing the name of the acting director of the new institute, who had never worked in a museum and, according to the regulations, did not meet the legal requirements to occupy the position.

The news about the opening of the new museum caused a stir among the public and professional circles, with several institutions and almost 200 experts publishing an open letter strongly opposing the clearly ideologically based museum that seemed like a vanity project of the ruling party. The government's repeated criticisms and accusations that Slovenian museology and historiography did not do enough to preserve the narrative and memory of the events that led to the creation of the independent country were directed primarily at the management of the Museum of Contemporary History. Public (and politically motivated) complaints about the lack of appropriate content appeared regularly, with information about the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of independence. The latter, however, was in the domain of the government and its needs to consolidate the political and media discourse about who is responsible for the liberation of the country. Thirty years after the country achieved independence, the need to regulate the narrative about the Slovenian spring and the events during the war of independence became one of the government's chief concerns. The fact that anti-corona measures prohibited gatherings and public protests at the same time was convenient. Although

gatherings were banned, people came together every Friday to cycle through the cities, protesting against the government and its increasingly militant rhetoric of running the country.

The battle of merit over who led the country to freedom was nothing new, as there have already been controversial clashes in the interpretation and memories of the same events. New, polar opposite stories of the same participants in the events came to the fore, following the attempt to erase certain actors and highlight others. The tendency for new historical reinterpretations and the establishment of the cult of deserving heroes found its place in the new museum, where the right wing wanted to offer its vision of the events of thirty years ago. All the content and the location of the museum were only part of the authorities' efforts at the time to recognise the European resolution on remembrance as the only possible interpretation of the past and to establish state-regulated, narrowly profiled views of the past both through the programmes of the school system and the commemoration of new days of remembrance. The rhetoric was based on glorification of the concept of patriotism as the highest love for the motherland, a negative attitude towards immigrants, contempt for life under the communist regime and the mythologisation of Slovenian independence. One of the historians commented that the creation of the new museum was an attempt by the regime to cement our hold on the past, its attempt to ideologically erase and forget events and people that were not relevant to the consolidation of the suitable narrative. It was also clear that the activities of the newly established museum took place without the involvement of experts from other museums, institutions or researchers working on the topic, excluding public discussions about the content of the museum collections and any announced participatory activities that would involve the public in creating the museum.

5. Temporary premises of the Museum of Slovenian Independence. Photo: Luka Cjuha, Dnevnik, 2023

6. Temporary exhibition in the Museum of Slovenian Independence. Photo: Luka Cjuha, Dnevnik, 2023

After the elections in May 2022, which were won by recently founded Svoboda (Freedom) party, the new government announced that all unreasonable decisions made by the previous government would be overturned. In October 2023, the new government announced that it would merge the Museum of Independence with the Museum of Contemporary History to once again form a national museum dedicated to researching and presenting the nation's history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It justified the creation of a new museum because both national museums had similar collection policies and both employed experts to perform the same public service tasks. In terms of transparency and the conflict over the collection of the same material, the new government argued that funding both institutions was an inappropriate use of public money.

The right wing reacted harshly by encouraging civil disobedience and declared that the new government was pushing the country back into the old totalitarian systems. The right-wing Association for the Values of Slovenian Independence (VSO) strongly opposed the idea and declared that it would "use all available democratic means" to preserve the museum as an independent entity. In January 2023, the two museums were merged and a new institution was established. This decision was supported by the largest veterans associations and most of the public. At the same time, Prime Minister Golob stressed that independence was the joint effort of the entire nation and not of any single political party, expressing the opinion that this topic should be left to historians. Two months after the hostile reactions of the right-wing parties and the announcement of the civil disobedience campaign, SDS filed a motion of interpellation against the government. The reason for the interpellation was the abolition of the independent Museum of Slovenian Independence and several actions that SDS deemed contrary to the provisions of the Slovenian Constitution.

We know that the frequency of government interpellations in any given country depends on its political context, but this was certainly the first time

that the one government was interpellated for closing the museum, whose premises were still being built and collections had yet to be put together, with no networks and professional standards to follow.

Why, thirty years after the birth of the country, did right-wing political parties feel the urge to build a new museum and what had been missing from those that already existed? Did the longing for a new museum spring from the need to transform and interpret collections and memories in light of the events of the thirty years following independence or were the thirty-year-old memories no longer suitable to meet current political needs?

The answer is of course subjective, as was the whole article about the establishment of the new museum and the dispute on how many museums a country needs. Moreover, I was not an outside observer in this story, but an active participant in media conversations. As the former director of the Museum of Contemporary History, I was also the person accused of insufficient patriotism and neglect of the theme of independence. I left the museum in January 2021 and over the next two years I was the frequent target of lies and criticism about the work that the museum did not fulfil.

I know it sounds radical, but when it comes to museums, I believe the community knows more than a select few. I also believe that a curator's work is subject to professionalism and ethics, which imposes on each of us the responsibility to respect legislative regulations and to take care of our heritage. Museums can potentially serve as agents of change rather than of political reckoning. I imagine the museum of the future as a place of shared memories and stories told about our (shared) past, which do not divide future generations, but connect them.

The mission of museums is to work for the benefit of society, to be accessible, to be inclusive and to think outside established social frameworks. This is also reflected in the new definition of the museum, which emphasises diversity, democracy and sustainable development. In the first point, the task of museums is to communicate ethically, professionally and cooperatively with all communities, from political elites to marginalised groups that have not yet found their place in permanent museum settings.

Outside the established frameworks of knowledge and curricular learning, there is a world of life experiences, untold stories, repressed memories, family tragedies and diverse emotions that reveal the extraordinary narrative potential of our social environment. Our job is to empower these stories and give them a voice.

Museology of Traumatic Memories and Democracy in Brazil

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After the Covid-19 pandemic and the profound grief caused by the loss of loved ones, the unfulfilled right to mourn and the global tragedy that isolated people worldwide, I expanded my focus beyond what I had been studying regarding the memories of the dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). I realised that the research methodology and the necessary sensitivity in addressing this topic could and should be applied to other traumatic memories, such as the pandemic itself and various social traumas that we often avoid confronting in Brazil with our characteristic approach to conflicts, the "Brazilian way of doing things".

In Brazil, the vaccine rollout against the virus was significantly delayed, not due to financial constraints but because the then-president, Jair Bolsonaro, a vaccine sceptic, took months to secure vaccines. Instances of overpricing were later uncovered during the procurement process, leading to investigations by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the pandemic.

Unfortunately, my mother did not receive the vaccine in time and passed away with severe lung issues, unaware of her infection. It took me a long time to process my grief and transform it into a call for action. Over time, I began to connect this personal experience with my work on memories of state violence, acknowledging that trauma is no longer confined to the realm of therapy and psychoanalysis. It extends across various disciplines beyond the social and human sciences.

As I observed efforts to communicate and reinterpret traumatic memories of the dictatorship in Brazil, which received significant public investment since 2002, particularly with the establishment of the Amnesty Commission, I recognised that there are many other forms of violence that Brazil still refuses to address today. These include the genocides resulting from colonial invasions of native peoples, transatlantic trafficking, high rates of

violence against young Black individuals in communities, discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals and the persecution and disappearance of human rights advocates. This reluctance to confront historical crimes is partly responsible for the continued growth of such issues, with the 1964 dictatorship being the largest and most discussed case so far.

During the presidencies of Fernando Henrique (1995-2003), Lula da Silva (2003-2011), and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), federal resources were invested in producing books, films, monuments, plays, signage for memorial sites, research funding and memorial construction, among other initiatives aimed at preserving and redefining memories related to the dictatorship. In 2014, the federal government received the National Truth Commission's findings in response to civil society's demands. Unfortunately, these efforts were not sustained during the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), who denied the dictatorship's existence, highlighting that Brazil had experienced memory policies driven by specific governments rather than enduring state policies on these memories.

1. Mother of Ana Paula with her daughter. Brazil, 1989. Personal collection.

2. Ana Paula demonstrating in front of a vaccine post against COVID-19, wearing a t-shirt bearing the word Luto/a and holding a photo of her mother with her daughter. Brazil, 2021. Personal collection.

3. Attack against democracy in Brazil on 8 January 2023. Photo: Marcelo Camargo. Agencia Brasil

Research on the Integration of Brazilian Museology with Dictatorship Memories

Considering this active engagement with traumatic memories of the Brazilian dictatorship compared to other human rights violations in Brazil, I investigated whether disciplines like museology have been actively involved in reflecting upon the memories of the dictatorship as portrayed in the Sites of Memory and Conscience (SMCs) scattered across various states, such as Ceará, Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Paraná, Pernambuco and São Paulo. Many other states also have ongoing projects in contention.

My initial investigation focused on works published after the delivery of the National Truth Commission Report in the fields of social and human sciences in national academic production. Within the field of museology and related disciplines (history, the social sciences and anthropology), I identified 22 works published between 2014 and 2022. My search encompassed dissertations and theses from museology graduate programmes, articles from academic museology journals, records from museology events, records from national events in museology-related areas and the central repository of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel of the Brazilian Ministry of Education. These materials included four PhD dissertations, three Master's theses, 11 articles and four essays/experience reports.

The central question of my research revolved around whether Brazilian museology had been proactive in analysing, reflecting on and contributing to regional efforts to memorialise the dictatorship. For more detailed information about the methodology and specific results of this research, I refer you to the repository of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in the work titled "The Museology of Traumatic Memories" (BRITO, 2023), which delves into the dynamics of museology's engagement with this theme. In Brazil, there are undergraduate, Master's, and PhD programmes in Museology across the country. It is also important to mention the National Museums Policy, which provides conceptual foundations and legal regulations for the field, as well as the Federal Council of Museology, which regulates professional practice in the country.

Practical and Investigative Aspects of the Museology of Traumatic Memories

This strand of museological studies originates from reflections on the traumatic memories of the dictatorship, but extends beyond it. The Museology of Traumatic Memories is concerned with investigating, preserving, reframing, communicating and managing memories associated with traumatic historical events, including genocides, dictatorships, wars, internal armed conflicts, natural disasters and other impactful events for a community. Its objective is to engage with the social memories of historical traumas, fostering contemporary debates to strengthen the defence of human rights.

Its foundational principles emphasise acknowledgment of conflicts and disputes regarding official public memory and underscores the significance of democratising historically marginalised memories to promote civic awareness, particularly from a decolonial perspective. It is important to recognise that working with memories of human rights violations affects both researchers and the researched subjects. Claiming neutrality in research on crimes against humanity is untenable, given the multidimensionality of social memory. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge and navigate divergences and disputes surrounding the public recording of official memory, using these discussions as an intergenerational catalyst to combat hate speech and prevent future crimes.

In Brazil, the "escrevivência" (term referring to the writing that is born from the life experience of the author and his people), promulgated by the Afro-Brazilian linguist and writer Conceição Evaristo, has gradually been well received in the Academy. For Evaristo (2016), writing springs from the experiences and memories of the individual who writes.

Some recurrent themes in the works examined contribute to a broader understanding of the field, highlighting nuances specific to museology. For instance, most museological institutions addressing traumatic memories often emerge from social demands but retain little or no institutional memory. Challenges in handling testimonies, designing exhibitions, facilitating educational interactions and managing these institutions are also critical aspects explored in the research. Some pertinent questions include:

On exhibitions: Is it mandatory for memory institutions dealing with historical trauma to list the names of victims, and how should they select which names to include when the list is extensive? How can these institutions effectively explain these crimes to different age groups and should they allow immersion in violent content? What are the primary considerations in exhibition design (expography) and should curatorship be collaborative and dynamic rather than permanent?

The experiences documented in the research suggest that the text is often not the most significant expographic element in an exhibition. Instead, an exhibition focused solely on presenting trauma-related content may be perceived as insufficient. Many Sites of Memory and Conscience have incorporated spaces for reflection and hope following immersion in distressing content. These observations represent a bridge between theory and practice.

Regarding educational mediation, which plays a pivotal role in visitor engagement, managing conflicts and memory disputes that arise during exhibitions or are brought by the public requires ongoing training and development. Additionally, questions about the role of emotion in processing traumatic memories and how educational programmes can strengthen individuals' rights to memory and freedom of expression merit further exploration. These inquiries contribute to the broader dialogue within the field, particularly as museums work towards decolonisation.

The field of museology also grapples with the concept of participatory management. While participatory management can enhance institutional sustainability in various dimensions, it is essential to consider the boundaries and potential risks associated with involving social actors in decision-making processes especially direct

victims. This includes determining the extent to which a museological institution should engage in historical reparations in consideration of long-term consequences.

Many provocations in the research underscore the importance of examining musealisation experiences related to historical traumas individually. While each experience is unique, collective reflection on these experiences contributes to a broader body of knowledge that can advance the cause of democracy.

The pedagogue Paulo Freire (1987) once argued that "men are not made in silence but in words, in work, in action-reflection". His words inspire us to generate knowledge with an active and hopeful approach, one that transcends mere observation and instead motivates action. Freire reminds us that "hope is born from the verb 'to hope'". The Museology of Traumatic Memories can serve as a powerful tool for societies to address enduring issues that span generations and risk being exploited to promote forgetfulness and impunity for heinous crimes. This movement has long called upon museology in the Ibero-American region, as evidenced by discussions at the Santiago Round Table (1972).

Strands of research such as New Museology, Critical Museology, Social Museology and Sociomuseology have significantly enriched the field's understanding of its potential. However, there is still much work ahead to transition from contemplation and emotion to effective action as a society.

In Brazil, the first Sites of Memory and Conscience related to the dictatorship resulted from civil society groups, mainly former political prisoners and the relatives of victims who recognised the importance of honouring democracy's struggles. Over time, these sites expanded to encompass a broader range of voices, social actors and interpretations, all contributing to a heightened cultural awareness that nurtures the democratic spirit of society.

4. Lula announces his New Growth Acceleration Programme (PAC). Its expense proposal includes the creation of the Museum of Democracy. Photo: Agencia Brasil.

The Strength of the "Young Girl" of Brazilian Democracy and the Promise of a New Museum

Perhaps we must strive to view democracy as a living entity that requires daily care and attention, extending beyond legal frameworks and institutional norms. This perspective allows us to focus on the wounds and legacies left by systematic violence in democratic societies.

Democracy in Brazil is relatively young, like a young girl, with her most recent rupture occurring in 1964 and persisting until the adoption of the current Constitution in 1988. However, on 8 January 2023, terrorists from various regions of the country attempted to overthrow the young girl of democracy by invading the federal capital's three branches of government. Their attempt was unsuccessful.

If we consider the historical records and narratives surrounding this 35-year-old democracy's birth, we can surmise that her inception was fraught with pain, akin to a difficult childbirth that spanned 21 years. We can imagine a delivery room filled with tension, with many members of the healthcare team unable to fully assist in the birthing process. Historians recount that the delivery did not occur as society had envisioned, but rather through the only feasible means to ensure a healthy birth.

What the terrorists in Brazil on 8 January failed to realise is that the young girl of democracy has now grown into a woman. A woman is inherently

resilient and Brazilian democracy has withstood the polarisation that divided the country during the last presidential election in 2022. This period witnessed intense political rivalry that ignited hatred and even led to violence and murder in various parts of the country. Debates about whether Brazil experienced a dictatorship or a military regime, among other contentious topics, persist among progressives and conservatives.

Memory preservation practices and strategies have also played a role in this polarisation. Notably, the Association of Relatives of Victims of 8 January has protested against the arrests of terrorists by the Federal Police. Some municipalities, such as Porto Alegre, attempted to declare 8 January "Patriot Day", but this effort was suspended by the Federal Supreme Court.

A heated public debate surrounds these issues. The federal government announced plans to establish a Museum of Brazilian Democracy immediately after the attack, seeking approval from the National Congress for a budget of R$40 million to support this cultural institution, which aims to explore the evolution of democracy in the country, including the events of 8 January. Some musealisation efforts related to the attack, such as the exhibition "Reflections of the Senate – 100 Days of the Invasion", have already been initiated by the government.

In 2014, the National Truth Commission recommended the creation of a museum of memory to continue the work initiated during the commission's investigations. However, no federal museum dedicated to this topic has been established yet. It remains unclear whether the proposed Museum of Brazilian Democracy will collaborate with the idea of a museum of memory focused on human rights violations investigated by the commission.

With the recent recreation of the Ministry of Culture, an inter-ministerial working group has been formed to plan the Museum of Brazilian Democracy's establishment. In September 2023, a seminar will convene at the Government Palace to engage with the public and gather input on expectations for this new national memory institution.

The federal government has demonstrated a willingness to address traumatic issues from the past that continue to impact the present and shape the nation's future. Other commitments include the creation of a Slavery Museum, which is proposed to be located at the Cais do Valongo archaeological site in Rio de Janeiro, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In this context of struggles and disputes, a discussion on the museology of traumatic memories emerges. It is discussed in a country that selectively chooses which trauma memories to confront publicly, illustrating a wider oscillation that is not unique to Brazil but experienced across the region. Neighbouring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean also grapple with political difficulties when confronting traumatic memories and human rights abuses, often relying on museology as a vital tool for addressing these issues.

I conclude with a passage from the song by Gozanguinha (1945-1991): "Memories of a time when fighting for your right is a deadly defect". In Brazil in 2023, it is both possible and encouraged to engage in conversations about traumatic memories and human rights violations. This was not always the case, and it remains challenging in many other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean today. Now I speak directly to you. Where are you reading this from? Are you reading these words I wrote from a free country? If so, what have you been doing with that freedom? If not, I hope this text can embrace you and, in some way, strengthen you. While memory alone does not guarantee a future free of atrocities, it does empower society to pursue active hope together.

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OVERVIEW

The Rivesaltes Camp Memorial: *the institutionalisation of a memoir*

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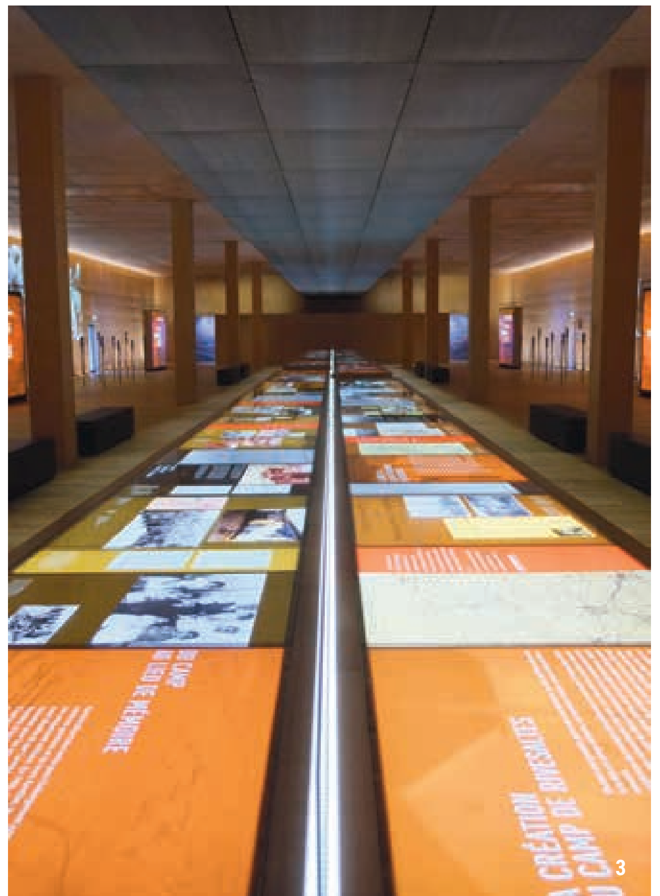
Céline Sala-Pons
Director of the Memorial of the Camp of Rivesaltes

In 2015, the Rivesaltes Camp Memorial [MCR in French] was inaugurated in the Pyrénées-Orientales department of France, several kilometres form the Franco-Spanish border. This inauguration marked the patient construction of the memorial process of a camp that had been omitted from the collective memory for a long time. This camp was originally a military camp, built in 1939 for the colonial troops from Senegal, Madagascar and Indochina. However, from 1939 to 2007 Spanish refugees fleeing the Franco regime, foreign Jews, French gypsies, prisoners of war from the Axis countries, collaborators, colonial auxiliary soldiers from the French army and civilians fleeing postcolonial nations, illegal immigrants... were grouped together and detained there. Although the MCR today stands as a pilot site of the most recent policies on remembrance, its construction was complex, from absolute oblivion to the citizens' movement claiming it, to its eventual establishment.



1 | 2 | 3. Rivesaltes Camp Memorial. ©HuguesArgence

Social phenomenon and citizens' movement

In the aftermath of the war, the permanence of the use of the site on the one hand and the general remembrance of political deportation on the other, explain **why the camp was not given much attention**.

Thus, when a conference was held in Rivesaltes in July 1945 by former internees from Buchenwald they urged the former political internees of Rivesaltes to join the Society of Deportees of the Resistance. However, there was no internment here, and, on the other hand, no mention was made in the post-war period to issues relating to the place and to racist deportation. The demonstration by the guards organised by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) two days before the camp was due to close is another very evocative example of the gap between the way the camp is remembered today and the way it was remembered at the time of the Liberation[1]. Likewise, following the legislation adopted by the Federal Republic of Germany concerning "compensation for national-socialist persecutions" (1956), the German ambassador in France received requests to compensate Spanish refugees who had been in Rivesaltes in the spring of 1940. He contacted the prefect of the Pyrénées-Orientales department, to obtain information to be able to process these cases. The process between social memory demands and legal innovation is striking, but the prefect's response asserted that the Groups of Foreign Workers, made up of Spanish internees, "comprised almost the entire population of the Rivesaltes military camp", disregarding the other internments and, in particular, the special camp that housed 7,148 Jews [2]. On this subject, false information was circulated for a long time, arising from the first memorial institutionalisation.

The first attempt to understand the history of the Rivesaltes camp was by the president of the Departmental Committee of Liberation (CDL), Camille Fourquet. He undertook to write a series of reports for the Second World War History Committee, an inter-ministerial body linked to the Presidency of the Board, founded by decree (17th December 1951). However, on the second page of his document, Fourquet wrote that he did not believe there were any survivors from the conveys that left Rivesaltes. This statement was constantly repeated, until the early 2000s, by the management of the Rivesaltes memorial project – which subsequently financed the works of the historian Alexandre Doulut, demonstrating that there were 84 survivors. Thus, the storytelling of the place is simultaneous to its mythification.

However, there is **no social memory of the place**. A scandal led to the revelation. Under the signature of journalist Joël Mettay, the Roussillon daily newspaper *L'Indépendant* of 8th May 1997 revealed that a private individual had found bundles of original documents relating to Jewish internees from the Rivesaltes camp at the Perpignan waste disposal site. In its context, this revelation is all the more significant because it was preceded by the "Jewish file" scandal in 1991. Serge Klarsfeld revealed the existence of such an object that had been kept after the war. The affair turned out to be false, but stirred up public opinion to such an extent that in 1997 it became known as the "Rivesaltes Jewish file affair". Similarly, in 1993, the local elections in Perpignan, prefecture of the Pyrénées Orientales department, were marked by the desecration of the town's Jewish cemetery, which the National Front (FN; the largest city to support Le Pen since 2020) denounced as a plot to undermine it – according to the discursive strategy model used during the anti-Semitic desecration of Carpentras in 1990 which launched a wave of profanation in France and beyond. The prefect conflated the desecration and discovery and stated that the journalist was part of a plot to destabilise the election. After claiming that the documents were false, he pursued the journalist for concealment of files, with the support of the ADPO. In fact, the investigation by the

1 Letter from the camp major to the prefect of the Pyrénées-Orientales department, 13th December 1945, Departmental Archives of the Pyrénées Orientales Department (ADPO) 38W66.

2 Letter from the prefect of the Pyrénées-orientales department to the ambassador of the RFA, 12th April 1968, ADPO, 1260W68. Alexandre Doulut, *Les Juifs au camp de Rivesaltes : Internement et déportation (1941-1942)* , Paris, Lienart, 2014.

Judicial Police revealed a lengthy malfunction in the archive services that had led to the documents being disposed of.

Nevertheless, the very day Joël Mettay's article appeared, the writer Claude Delmas decided to launch a petition entitled *"Mémoire ou amnésie collective"* ["Collective memory or amnesia?"], **calling for the creation of an MCR**. The document was quickly co-signed by national political and artistic figures. A collective was set up; its principle declaration stated that the MCR should be "multi-community", as it constituted a "civic" project in the face of the return of "fascism". The collective pulled out all the stops. It organised a screening in Perpignan of Swiss director Jacqueline Veuve's film *Le Journal de Rivesaltes* (1997), based on the diary kept by the nurse, Friedel Bohny-Rieter, who worked to save many Jewish children from the Rivesaltes camp. The article in the local press describes the reactions of the public: "How could such horrors have happened there, on the land that our parents crossed to go to the vineyard... How is it that these events have been hidden for so long?"[3].

Remembrance policies

The collective received high-profile political support (Simone Veil), but first it had to oppose local political projects. The town council of Rivesaltes wanted to create a large area for spreading the sludge from the area's water treatment plant. The block where the administrative detention centre for illegal immigrants (CRA) is still located would be surrounded by this sludge, as well as blocks J and K, both of which had participated in the special camp used to round up Jews before being sent to Drancy for Auschwitz.

However, the **citizens' movement found support in the president Christian Bourquin**, a socialist, who became head of the Departmental Council in 1998. The Departmental Council set up a "Remembrance Commission" bringing together various associations and began the process of setting up the MCR.

This participatory nature is currently being highlighted by the MCR, which has set up a virtual reality experience, the scenario for which was created by classes of secondary school students from Rivesaltes, while the next edition of the collections of testimonies will be chosen by the Remembrance Commission.

In 2005, the department launched a tender for projects for the building. 46 projects were submitted. Five teams were interviewed, with very different proposals. **Rudy Ricciotti's** team was selected, proposing a large concrete block level to the ground at the entrance, but gradually sloping upwards to the sky without ever going higher than the roof of the barracks. The building has enormous corridors and is windowless, illuminated only by the patios, and thereby echoing the testimonies of the internees narrating their wandering through the camp with the sky as their only escape.

The surrounding barracks are not affected, as the MCR is buried in the heart of the former assembly square. The annotations left by a member of the jury on the copy of the file in our possession show the points of enthusiasm: "finally!", when an educational area is mentioned, "yes", when it is stated that the site should contain artistic productions by members of the various "communities" that passed through the camp in order to show human resistance to violence. While the emphasis on "communities" was highly valued in the prefiguration of the site, it was subsequently set aside in favour of a **universalist conception**.

On the other hand, since the MCR opened in 2015, the care taken in the artistic and cultural productions has proved to be a permanent feature. It is also worth noting that the idea of a windowless building is reminiscent of a note produced for the citizens' collective by August Bohny, the husband of Friedel Bohny-Rieter. In it, he suggested that the MCR should be a "windowless building on the Perpignan side, a high wall without windows". The jury's final report chose the project, highlighting how it "has a quality of simplicity and adds

3 *L'Indépendant*, 3rd December 1997 ; archives of Nicolas Lebourg.

4 | 5. Rivesaltes Camp Memorial. ©KevinDolmaire

remarkable integration: it is mimetic. It follows the existing traces of history and the structure of the space. It has a very beautiful shape. This project is indisputable in its respect for the horizontal nature of the site. It is in keeping with the site thanks to its remarkable aesthetics. It is a reflection of the site, which makes it an appropriate project."[4].

Because of its imposing size (230 metres long and 20 metres wide), its discrete colour that mimics the ground, and the way it is buried into the ground, the building provokes a unique effect in visitors (more than 50,000 in 2019). In fact, it is **the first object of cultural mediation on the site**. The aim is not just to help to remember, but to become **a tool to raise political awareness, around a sensitive project based on memory and exile, built and experienced with a scientific, cultural and artistic programme that seeks to go beyond the only known history of the place, now rewritten in the permanent exhibition that covers 1,000m^2**.

It must be a **tool that creates a link with the territory** from a **cross-border perspective**, and can contribute to regional planning by pooling synergies, on both sides of the border.

The concept of an MCR as the humanist flip side of the place of ostracism that the camp was is at the heart of the building's current project, running from 2022 to 2027. As a way of learning from our mistakes as a country, the MCR must turn the camp's excluding structure into an integrating one. The fact that it opened in the year that France was hit by the jihadist attacks of January and 13 November makes sense in terms of its duty to prevent radical thinking – judicial stakeholders such as the *Protection judiciaire de la jeunesse* [Youth Protection Office] have been visiting with increasing numbers of clients in recent years.

2015, when it opened, was also the year of the Syrian refugee crisis, transformed into moral panic by the far right. On the first day of lectures at the site, in 2007, one of the authors of this article was challenged by a member of the audience on the inhumanity of people in 1939. In response, he asked what he would think if 475,000 refugees once again asked to return to France, as they had in February 1939. This person seemed to find such a remark

4 Archives from the MCR.

5

totally incongruous. But that is what the MCR is all about: **reminding people that tragedy is always within easy reach, and that actions count**. 2023 began with a temporary exhibition on the genocide of the Yezidis.

Conclusion

In the 2000s, once the memoir had been completed, the Rivesaltes camp became part of the local youth entertainment circuit. Rave parties, paint-ball sessions and life-size role-play games were held there. All these activities were free of charge, and were sometimes part of a real method of appropriating and using the site – for example, the first Grandeur Nature events were held there on account of the space available.

However, from 2007 onwards, the organisers were creating a history of the site and incorporating it into their scenario. This was a **sign of acceptance, even resilience**. This process is not yet complete.

The MCR has not yet reached maturity. Like the memory of the place, this public establishment for cultural cooperation is slowly taking shape.

Born of a **citizens' project**, made possible by the political will of local institutions, it seeks to preserve its civic roots, participate in local and transnational ecosystems, while also wanting to grow and be useful to the European societies it serves.

The challenges are vast: incorporating colonial history, the subject of so much tension in present day France, is one of the major challenges. Rehabilitating the history of all those whom France has relegated as undesirables, by inserting this rigidity into the history of reactions to globalisation, is a future challenge.

Producing historical knowledge is a decisive step forward. Walter Benjamin spoke of how the city becomes a landscape that opens up to him and a parlour that encloses him. **Today, the MCR is a parlour or chamber of memories: it only makes sense if it opens up a historical landscape, in other words, one that holds past, present and future tensions.**

Günther Domenig, architecture as mediation
The case of the Third Reich Congress Hall in Nuremberg

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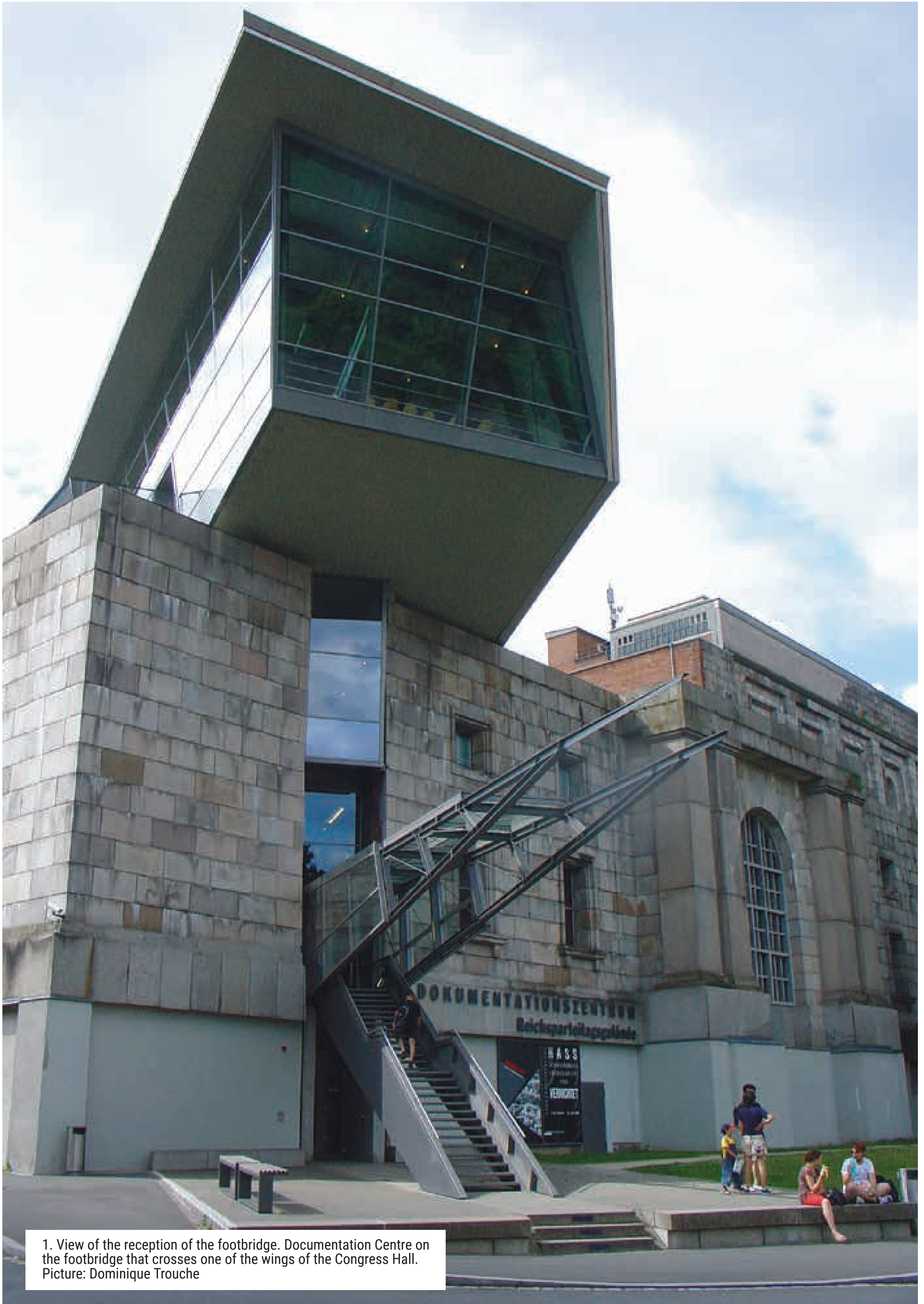
The Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rallying Grounds in Nuremberg, designed by Austrian architect Günther Domenig, is located in the former Congress Hall built during the National Socialist regime. The centre comprises a permanent exhibition, an educational forum and a bookshop. The centre's unique feature is a glass and steel footbridge that spans the north wing of the Congress Hall.

The role and function of this architecture, as conceived by Günther Domenig, is part of the issue of heritage and how it is passed on. The aim is to question the tension caused by the presence of two completely opposed architectures and how they are linked via the footbridge. What kind of mediation and transmission of memory and history does the footbridge offer? In the words of Georges Didi-Hubermann, did it allow us "to look at the images and see what they have survived. So that history, freed from the pure past (that absolute, that abstraction), helps us to open up the present of time" (2003, p. 226)?

Nuremberg: from imperial city to Documentation Centre

Linking Nuremberg to the Holy Roman Empire (Brockmann, 2006, p. 13), National Socialism made it the "ideological capital" of the Third Reich. For Freddy Raphaël and Geneviève Herberich-Marx, the Nazi regime "deliberately exalted the memory of the great craft and commercial city of the Middle Ages and obliterated the existence of the industrial metropolis" (1988-1989, p.103). Nazism therefore used it to construct its mythology of a glorified past, a heterogeneous imagination marked by the "annexation of antiquity"



1. View of the reception of the footbridge. Documentation Centre on the footbridge that crosses one of the wings of the Congress Hall. Picture: Dominique Trouche

2. The footbridge inside the room.
Picture: Dominique Trouche

(Chapoutot, 2008). For Friederike Hansell, the city had “to create a cultural and spiritual rebirth in Germany” (2008-2009, p. 257) based on two myths: “the Führer myth, viewed to be sent by providence as a national saviour, and the myth of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, a national community founded upon collective uplifting experiences and feelings” (p. 256).

In 1927 and 1929, the Nazi regime held its first two congresses in Nuremberg. They were subsequently cancelled by the city council, but were reinstated in 1933, when Hitler was elected Chancellor. On 15 September 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were promulgated. Albert Speer, Hitler’s architect, drew up a plan for Nuremberg comprising various buildings of imposing proportions and shapes[1]. Work on the Congress Hall, built by architects Ludwig and Franz Ruff respectively, began in 1935. Shaped like a horseshoe, it was modelled on the Colosseum in Rome. It could accommodate almost 50,000 spectators. Although work was interrupted in 1939, the Congress Hall remains a monumental building measuring 275 by 265 metres and stands 57 meters high.

After the Second World War, the Congress Hall was used as a warehouse. Important discussions took place there and the city officially launched a reflection on this legacy. In the autumn of 1991, the Congress Centre Group recommended the creation of a Nazi Party Congress Site Information Centre to complement the permanent exhibition. The project to build the Documentation Centre in the north wing of the Palace was launched in 1994. It opened on 4 November 2001. Though currently undergoing renovation, its reopening is scheduled for 2025.

1. On this 11km^2 site, which includes a lake and a zoo, six main elements were planned: the Luitpold arena, the Zeppelin pitch or stadium, the Champ de Mars, the German stadium, the Grande Rue and the Congress hall.

3. View from the footbridge on the other side of the Congress Hall. Picture: Dominique Trouche

Domenig's architectural device as mediation

Günther Domenig's architecture is part of the deconstructivist movement. He wanted to break the monotonous architecture of Congress Hall and propose the exact opposite, as Stephen Brockmann reports (2006, p. 273). As an architectural device, the footbridge questions more particularly the shaping of the ideology of National Socialism (Abensour, 2006, p.13).
Rudolf Arnheim talks about the "dynamics of visual perception" of a building (1995, p. 56). The footbridge has a dynamic whose perception is both spatial and temporal. Two modalities of mediation reflect it: transparency and crossing.

Three sides of the footbridge are made of glass: the ceiling and the right and left sides. The glass is transparent, giving a 360° view of a very imposing room that is closed and windowless. For Olivier Aïm, transparency "is a way of writing 'as is'" (2006, p. 34). The architectural device gives immediate and total access to this room, but

the glass also acts as a spatial divider that constrains visitors' movement (Kranzfelder, 2006, p. 147). The visitors stand both outside and inside. They are invited to look differently, to level their gaze at the historical meaning of this architecture, contributing to its symbolic deconstruction.

The footbridge also involves a crossing. In the shape of an arrow, it pierces the entire left wing of the Congress Hall. Ludwig and Franz Ruff's building therefore appears fallible and destructible. The crossing is to be understood as a passage that invites you to assume a development. This form of mediation also contributes to the implementation of a symbolic deconstruction of the architecture of National Socialism. In this sense, the very characteristic of the footbridge is to induce a moult, a metamorphosis. Yet passages are, as Louis Marin points out, "dangerous places, perhaps because they are not places but spaces of crossing. They can only be identified from what they cannot be, the starting point and the end point" (Louis Marin, quoted by Martin de la Soudière, 2000, p. 11). What the crossing can be is therefore subject to the possibility, as well as the impossibility, of a metamorphosis in the visitor.

Transparency and crossing are combined in the architectural device of the footbridge. These two methods of mediation carry with them constantly confronting dichotomies: included *and* excluded, near *and* far, inside *and* outside, past *and* present. The device therefore invites us to look at and practice two diametrically opposed architectures, possibly inducing reflexivity. Ultimately, transparency and crossing produce a "relationship to": a relationship to the historical legacy of the National Socialist regime and, consequently, to its memorial construction. In this way, the incorporation of the footbridge into the Congress Hall aims to abolish the will to omnipotence and the intention of eternity carried by the architecture of the National Socialist regime.

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4. Exterior view, on the other side, of the low-angle footbridge. Picture: Dominique Trouche

5. Interior view of the footbridge. Picture: Dominique Trouche

OVERVIEW

Jorge Semprún: *writing in tension*

Marta Marín-Dòmine
Writer

On 10 December 2023, Jorge Semprún Maura would have turned one hundred years old. Commemorating a life means considering the different times in which it has been led, both personal and family-related, in addition to a strictly historical timeline. To begin, then: Jorge Semprún Maura was born in Madrid, into a wealthy family formed by the couple of Susana Maura, daughter of Antonio Maura, who served as president of the government several times during the reign of Alfonso XIII, and José María Semprún, a diplomat. Susana Maura died in 1932 and José María Semprún married Annette Litschi, the German governess of their seven children. The coup d'état in July 1936 took them by surprise while they were on holidays in the Basque Country. The family then embarked on a journey that would take them to France, Switzerland and the Netherlands. When the war had ended, they settled in Paris, where Jorge Semprún studied philosophy at the Sorbonne.

In 1941, young Semprún joined the Resistance and in 1942 he joined the Spanish Communist Party, which operated between France and Spain. Nevertheless, he continued to do clandestine work in the Jean-Marie Action network. In September 1943, Semprún was arrested by the Gestapo in Joigny, in Burgundy, and sent to the Buchenwald Nazi concentration camp as a French political deportee, where he remained in contact with the camp's clandestine communist organisation.

After the camps were liberated in 1945, Jorge Semprún moved back to Paris. The return to everyday life was difficult for him, like so many other survivors. He would record this in his written work, especially the difficulty of writing about his experience in the concentration camp. Starting in the 1950s, his activity in the Spanish Communist Party became intense and risky for the next two decades because it was clandestine, as he was forced to cross

1. Jorge Semprún in 1970. Photography extracted from *Primera Plana* magazine. Year VIII number 408, November 1970, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Public Domain

2. Jorge Semprún, at La Comédie du livre de Montpellier, May 23, 2009. Picture: Dinkley/CC BY SA 3.0

the border and carry out activity in Spain, forcing him to adopt several personalities under different names. The best known of these names was Federico Sánchez, and he also transferred the experience to his literary work. After democracy was restored in Spain, Semprún served as the Minister of Culture under the government of Felipe González. He left the office in 1991.

His literary career began with the publication of *Le grand voyage* in 1936, in which he tangentially explains the experience of the Nazi camps, since it is a story about the transport of deportees from Compiègne to Buchenwald. It would be in 1994, with the publication of *L'Écriture ou la vie*, that his actual experience of the camp itself would appear in his literary work.

Jorge Semprún's work is marked by ambiguity, paradox and opposition, the most relevant of which is that of writing or living. This characteristic has also influenced his reception: is it not significant that he is considered both a Spanish and a French writer, and therefore that his writing can testify to the experience of the deportees of one or the other country? Does this ambiguity of reception not also say something about how the memory of political deportation has been passed down?

It must be understood that Jorge Semprún began to write about his experience as a deportee in French. Moreover, he did so in France

during the 1960s, a context politically marked by Communism, building a testimonial recreated in both film and literature that focuses on the hero who strives to embody a morally unsullied resistance figure in the deportee survivor. It is in this context that *Le grand voyage* was published, which was translated into Spanish under the title *El largo viaje*, published by Seix Barral first in Mexico in 1965 due to the imperatives of Franco's censorship, and later in Spain in 1976.

Notably, *Le grand voyage* appeared in France shortly after the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, in 1961, an event of great impact because it raised the survivors of the Nazi camps as central testimonial figures. It was also an event from which Spain was quite left out.

L'Écriture ou la vie appeared in France in 1994 at a time of social fear of the resurgence of neo-Nazi groups not only in France, but in Europe. Therefore, the book resonated greatly among readers who considered it necessary to be informed about the Nazi camps and to use this knowledge of containment to prevent it from happening again. The book soon became required reading in French schools, while in Spain it defined Semprún as an author dealing with the subject of concentration camps. We remember that it was only in the 1980s that Primo Levi's first texts became known in Spain. The delay in discovering these two authors led to entangled memories, making it harder to distinguish between the Jewish experience of the extermination camps (Levi's case) and the experience of the political deportee (Semprún's case). Jorge Semprún always made this distinction and in fact demanded it, almost as a moral imperative.

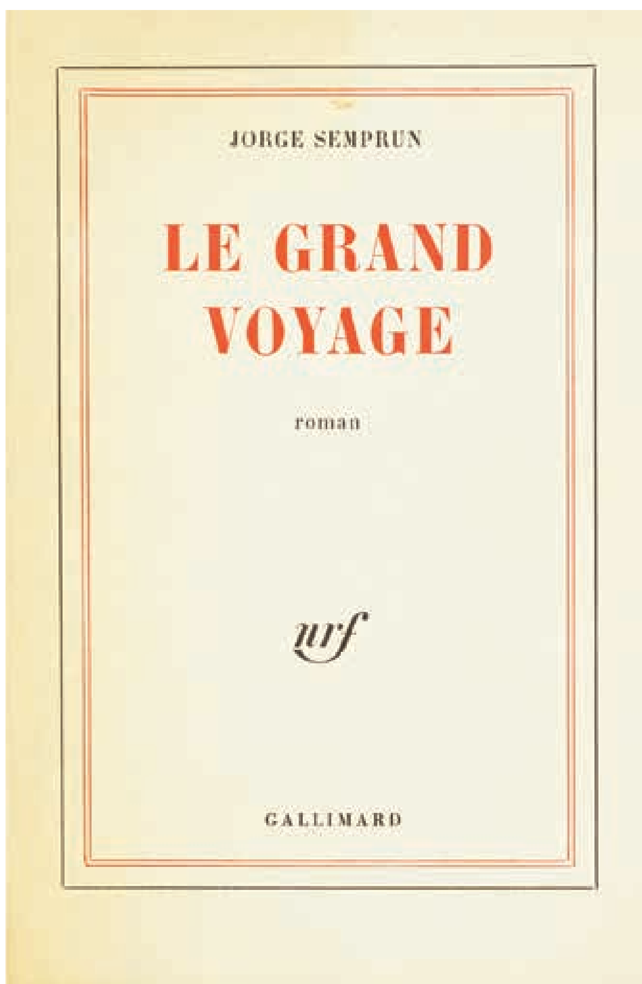
The construction of memory in Semprún's work can be reminiscent of Proust. In other words, he makes use of a dynamic moving back and forth between the past and the present that is not done through leaps in time, but by seeing relationships between the reality of the present, with the past, so that the world is seen through the various layers that one's own experience has built up. However, Semprún's work is not about recovering a "lost object". According to the experience of the camps, there is no nostalgia for the past, only pain. Hence the construction of the dichotomy between writing or living.

At least as a literary construction, this tension explains Semprún's late entry into the world of testimonial writing, though we know that there are also political reasons, as he wrote in *Autobiografia de Federico Sánchez*. As I mentioned above, the Communist Party was interested in building an image of the resistance figure, and not the destitute image of the Nazi camp survivor.

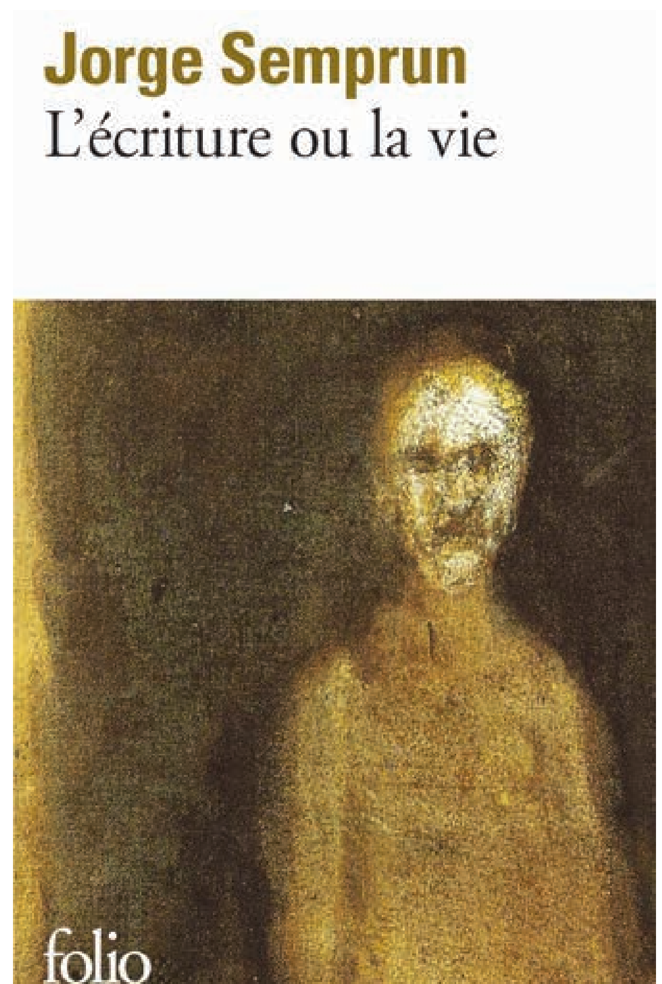
Despite the dichotomy between writing and life that presides over Semprún's literary work dedicated to his deportation to the Buchenwald camp, his perspective is never rigid, since he understood the word "testimony" not as absolute truth, but as a possibility of truth. This is what he stated in the prologue he wrote for *El no de Klara* by Soazig Aron (2003): "narration does not aim to reconstruct a documentary truth, but to create a spiritual reality".

To finish, I would like to mention an interesting feature of Semprún's testimonial work that makes it somewhat easy to read despite the tragic content. I am referring to the short duration of the narrative voice within the camp. The past is reconstructed narratively through chains of thought that lead us outside the concentration camp, so that we can open ourselves to reflecting on other topics ranging from history to more subjective issues such as experiences of love. This technique allows us to temporarily avoid the concentration camp issue and helps us to identify with other aspects of the narrator's life or existence at the same time. In other words, as readers, we are often "outside the camp".

The constant flashbacks that characterise Semprún's literature remind us that the narrator's life should not be interpreted as frozen in an experience, but rather makes sense both in the periods before and after the deportation. It is a life that has to do with politics, but also with knowledge. All this knowledge—we could call it academic knowledge—will act as a guide. It will be the Virgil of Semprún's work, which will rescue us as readers from a knowledge otherwise impossible to share, that of the Nazi camp. But it also saves the author, who sees himself trapped in the dichotomy between writing and life.



3. *The long voyage*, cover of the first edition published by Gallimard, Paris, in 1963



4. *Literature or Life (L'Ecriture Ou La Vie)*, Memoir by Jorge Semprun, 1994

REVIEW

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

Air-raid shelters in Barcelona, *the legacy of underground resistance*

Ana Sánchez
Journalist and photographer, specialising in cultural communication and historical memory

From 30 March to 30 July, galleries 3 and 4 in the former La Model prison played host to the photography exhibition . It is the product of a research study that made it possible to portray, for the first time from an artistic perspective, forty of the shelters listed during the Spanish Civil War in the Catalan capital. If the damaged buildings and scars of the last war that the city lived through still remain visible above ground in Barcelona, an extraordinary testament to solidarity and resistance survives today below ground, which has been documented by the photographer Ana Sánchez and the historian Xavier Domènech.

The systematic bombing of Barcelona made the rearguard a battlefield for the first time and it became a testing ground on the brink of the Second World War. But while the city was offered to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as a site for experimenting with the technology of destruction, its citizens took centre stage in a remarkable show of collective resistance: the construction of a pioneering underground defence network for the whole city. The 1,322 listed shelters comprise a civic, historical and architectural heritage that is unique in Europe, although in the city's imaginary it is still vague and kept quiet, with piecemeal and deliberately blurred documentation in the collective memory.

In this context, photography is a tool to bring them into the present, a way of rekindling the light beneath the ground. Today, these spaces retain an astonishing beauty that exudes the full power of the past. The photographs capture this strength with a distinct Baroque light, warm and defined, and with a temperature akin to that of incandescence. The lighting is low-key, which is respectful of the chiaroscuros and half-lights and shows a clear orientation, to generate volume and depth through contrast. These images also show the

1. Factory 14 shelter © Ana Sánchez

lives that have been lived for eight decades in the subterranean darkness: while the twisted and rusted cables betray the mark of time, life continues to burst forth today from roots in the rubble. A life that resists the relentless urban transformation of the above ground, seeping into underground Barcelona through the slabs of concrete that sealed off some of its galleries.

Of the more than four hundred spaces researched by the exhibition curators, the exhibition features a selection that illustrates their different types and their adaptation to the places where people lived and worked: communal, private and factory shelters, collectivised and institutional work spaces and those for political leaders. Many of these shelters have been shown for the first time, such as the shelter at the headquarters of the Junta de Defensa Pasiva (Passive Defence Board), located on Passeig de Gràcia, the Escola Popular de Guerra (People's War School) shelter, found in the Escola Pia de Sarrià, and the Damm factory shelter. As a whole, the display of 170 photographs reveals a city beneath the city that is still riddled with holes in the present, and helps to (re)discover another memory of Barcelona in times of war.

2. Casas factory shelter © Ana Sánchez

3. Shelter in the square Plaça Tetuán, mirror © Ana Sánchez

Communal shelters: the "Barcelona model"

Communal shelters, created at the initiative of the citizenry under the watchful eye of the institutions, are the most numerous. Women, older men and children took part in the construction of spaces intended as libraries, public washrooms and centres for future cultural affairs. This model of passive defence was christened in London as the "Barcelona model" and was advocated by the most progressive sectors in an intense political debate in the run-up to the Blitz, which ended with the victory of the conservative movement and a commitment to private shelters. The exhibition has included eighteen examples, among them the air-raid shelters in Plaça Tetuán, the Hospital Sant Pau, the squares of Plaça de la Revolució and Plaça del Diamant in the Gràcia neighbourhood and Refugi 307, the latter two of which can be visited.

Factories, collectivisations and shelters

When the coup d'état failed in Barcelona, the city's economy saw a major transformation. On the initiative of the workers, a widespread movement was launched to collectivise large and medium-sized enterprises, which were taken over by the workers. Moreover, Catalan institutions, by creating the Comitè d'Indústries de Guerra (War Industries Commission) in August 1936, encouraged the conversion of almost half a thousand factories into production centres to ensure war material supplies. The shelters built in the Elizalde factory, the Damm factory and the F-14 (one of the Republican Government's foremost weapons centres, located in the Escola dels Salesians in Sarrià) are just some of the industrial hiding places and caches in this section of the exhibition.

Home shelters

The experience of bombing in the midst of a war that lasted three years became a horrific everyday experience. City life coincided with times of horror, and shelters also became day-to-day living quarters for children and adults. In some cases, they even made their way into the home with the construction of private shelters. Obviously, this could only be afforded by those who had the resources to build a shelter in their own home. These ones are the most unknown, as they do not appear in any census and are often completely forgotten, even in family histories.

Institutionalism and life

As of October 1937, Barcelona was the capital of the Spanish Republic and the Catalan, Basque and State governments lived there until the end of the Civil War. The shelters assigned to the personal protection of political leaders such as Lluís Companys, under

4. Shelter on the street Carrer Toledo © Ana Sánchez

5. Shelter in the passage Passatge Simó © Ana Sánchez

the Palau de les Heures, or Juan Negrín, in the garden of the Pedralbes estate lent to the head of the government of the Second Republic by the Roviralta family, demonstrate the efforts made to maintain institutional life amidst the bombs. This section includes the bunker located under the house of Doctor Andreu on Avinguda Tibidabo, an initiative of the Soviet consul Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko (one of the heroes of the October Revolution), the Generalitat Government of Catalonia's shelter and the Escola Popular de Guerra (People's War School) shelter, in the building of the school Escoles Pies de Sarrià.

Spaces used as shelters

Stations on the underground network or the Sarrià urban and suburban train station were used as shelters. These underground facilities were estimated to be able to hold 200,000 or 300,000 people, i.e. 30% of the population of a city with a population of one million at the time. While initially undeniably of great use, they would prove to be insufficient, and the image associated with the bomb shelters in Barcelona, unlike that which has remained of the underground in cities such as London, would be the large-scale construction of shelters.

The exhibition at La Model also included some fifty objects found in the archaeological work carried out in different shelters, which provide an insight into life amidst the bombs.

International Conference: *Shelters. Citizens, Memory and Subsoil in Europe*

On 16 and 17 March, coinciding with the 85th anniversary of the March 1938 bombing of the Catalan capital, the international conference *Shelters. Citizens, Memory and Subsoil in Europe*, organised by Barcelona City Council and the UB Solidarity Foundation's European Observatory on Memories (EUROM), explored the Catalan experience in relation to that of other European capitals during the Second World War. The historian Keith Lowe, a renowned Second World War expert, the Frenchman Gilles Thomas, an expert on the subsoil of Paris, and the archaeologists Gabriel Moshenska and Carme Miró were among the roughly twenty experts and civil society representatives who analysed the memorialisation of these spaces, their current uses and the narratives that shape their memory today.

Exhibition catalogue

1.322: Una mirada fotogràfica als refugis antiaeris de Barcelona [1,322: A Photographic Overview of Barcelona's Air-Raid Shelters]. Barcelona City Council, 2023

REVIEW

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

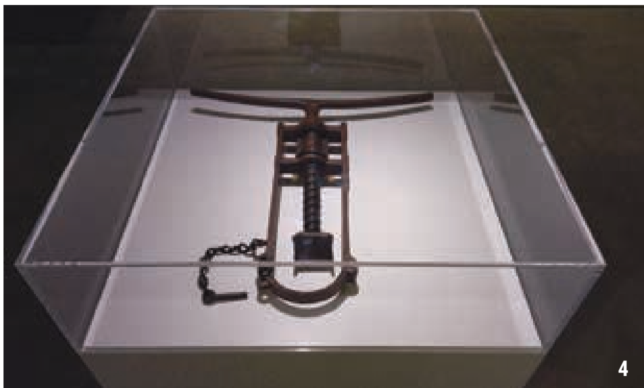
The democratic skylight: an illuminating exhibition

Ricard Conesa Sánchez
Historian, project officer
EUROM

"It ends up being an exhibition where you don't really know if it is about history, art history or aesthetics. It does not come from any of these disciplines and it comes from all of them at the same time". This is how Núria Ricart, a professor of Fine Arts at the University of Barcelona, described the exhibition *El tragaluz democrático. Políticas de vida y muerte en el Estado español (1868-1976)* ("The democratic skylight: policies of life and death in Spain (1868-1976))". This multidisciplinary vision is one of the great milestones of this original exhibition that could be seen in the new hall of La Arquería Art Centre in Madrid from March to July 2023. But beyond this quality, it is perhaps its daring approach that has drawn the most attention of its visitors. As its curator, Germán Labrador, explained: "What the exhibition seeks is a radical estrangement of our own history and a deconstruction of the myths that have articulated it on a national level, putting in the foreground struggles for life, for dignity, the demands of subjects and groups that had been denied in a modernity implemented according to the needs of the capitalist market and the nation-state".

A large amount of paintings, sculptures, posters, photographs, videos, archival documents, publications and objects of various kinds (from a garrot, or a whip made of wood, leather and wires, to folkloric elements such as a big head or a giant) populated an intense tour through two floors of the impressive La Arquería. Walter Benjamin's theories underlay this constellation of fragments of a collective past that glimpsed constant tension

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7. Art pieces and objects displayed in the exhibition (EUROM)



8 | 9. Fernando Sánchez Castillo explaining his artistic piece and a group of students visiting the exhibition (EUROM)

between popular struggles to expand their rights and freedoms on the one hand and the repression imposed through the modern state on the other. It was *El Tragaluz* (The Skylight”), the powerful device created by Antonio Buero Vallejo in his science fiction story—a machine that allowed people in the 25th century to see post-war Spain—the allegorical door that introduced visitors to the exhibition, where they would see pieces of their past projected onto their present.

The ability to connect all these pieces to create a complex and powerful story only lies within few people’s reach, and to listen to Germán Labrador explain his construction process is to behold a cascade of subtle ideas and images that speak to each other, complement each other, intertwine and confront each other throughout the exhibition. In June, EUROM wanted to interview Labrador, who is also a professor at Princeton University and director of public activities at the Queen Sofía National Museum Art Centre (MNCARS). He recently gave us the opportunity to film a report that can be seen in the different videos found on our website and our YouTube channel.

The exhibition was divided into four major sections. The first started with the civic struggles of 1868 and the Sexenio Democrático until 1936; the second focused on the years of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939); the third was primarily about Franco’s dictatorship; and the fourth and final section was dedicated to the origins of the democratic transition. There was a firm and determined commitment to begin chronologically with one of the various democratising moments that the country underwent as far back as the 19th century, when several of the demands that form the basis of current freedoms originated: the abolition of the death penalty, the end of slavery, demands for women’s rights, secularism and religious freedom, freedom of the press, rights of association and many, many more. The construction of the modern state and all its repressive machinery, which it would develop in the colonies and in the Iberian peninsula itself, assembled under a powerful nationalism with a Catholic legacy, leaves a deep mark throughout the exhibition. In fact, one of its strengths is how it weaves colonial violence in Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, the Rif and Guinea into the Spanish historical narrative. In one of our interviews, CSIC anthropologist Francisco Ferrándiz, an advisor to the State Secretariat for Democratic Memory (SEMD) and the promoter of the exhibition, told us how this portrait of colonial violence had been rejected by certain parts of current public opinion. The exhibition hit the nail on the head because it explained “that in some way we are educated with this idea of the civilisational empire, etcetera, etcetera. And if you question it or take the point of view of the victims of colonisation, there are people who find that… unsettling”. It was foreseeable that this exhibition would collide head-on with the conservative and far-right wave that is currently

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10 | 11. Reproduction of the statue of Las dos Marías, from Santiago de Compostela, and the cardboard bigheaded Negreta, from Vilafranca del Penedès (EUROM)

sweeping Spain (and Europe) and that seeks to restore the old myths of an anachronistic history of heroes and battles, empires and national feats.

The portrait of modernised and industrialised violence during the Spanish Civil War (what better example than the aerial bombardments, also heirs of colonial practices and a testing ground for the world war that would come later?) was contested by forms of resistance and solidarity in the fight against fascism. And although the systemic repression and the necrophilic death cult of General Franco's dictatorship was reflected in the "immense prison" that the country became, with its "martyrs" and "fallen", parades, canopies and banners, exhumations, tombs and monuments, the exhibition leaves an important matter very clear: "the forms of dignity of the anti-fascist struggles did not simply disappear in April 1939: they endure in memory, in language, in the imagination, as the capital of utopias. They are an incorruptible school".

The final touch to the exhibition were the different artistic pieces, including "Seis jóvenes" ("Six Young Men") by Juan Genovés, and the reproduction of the destroyed car carrying Admiral Carrero Blanco, General Franco's right-hand man, a work by the ever-provocative and brilliant Fernando Sánchez Castillo. Although it was initially planned for the chronology of the exhibition to reach the present day, it is a total shame that this last section was not carried out, leaving the transition as the ending point. Let us hope that the publication of the promising catalogue can compensate for this encroaching feeling of wanting more. Above all, let us hope that the State Secretariat for Democratic Memory continues to support these types of exhibitions, which are so necessary in the Spanish "memory" scene, exhibitions that add complexity to the past and challenge our present, with original approaches and unusual compositions, daring and capable of making us rethink the cultural heritage of the struggles for democratic freedoms that have brought us here (and the potential of their legacy).

Exhibition: *El tragaluz democrático. Políticas de vida y muerte en el Estado español (1868-1976)*. Curator: Germán Labrador Méndez. Production: Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with the Cortes and Democratic Memory; State Secretariat for Democratic Memory (SEMD); Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda – Fundación ENAIRE; Acción Cultural Española. Location: Centro de Arte la Arquería. Nuevos Ministerios (Madrid, España). Dates: 24 March 2023 – 23 July 2023

REVIEW

MUSEUMS

Museums dedicated to Soviet political repression in Kazakhstan

Marc Díaz Planas
Researcher and educator in human rights
University of Barcelona's Solidarity Foundation

There are currently four museums that specifically focus on political repression during Soviet times in Central Asia. One is in Uzbekistan and the other three are dotted around Kazakhstan.

Spanning an area more than four times the size of France and with almost 20 million inhabitants, today's Kazakhstan is in many respects still the result of the Soviet past: colonisation and above all Stalin's deportations, as well as the internal mobility driven by the system itself, have shaped the demography of today's Kazakhstan. For example, this accounts for the fact that 15 per cent of the population is Russian with Kazakh citizenship. In political terms, it is considered an authoritarian state, officially committed to a policy of inter-ethnic harmony, while promoting the language and identity of the Kazakh ethnicity. The economic structure also owes much to the Republic's role in the USSR's economic organisation.

Moreover, Kazakhstan is a major site in terms of the history of political repression and especially of the Gulag system. Some of these sites have been commemorated as memorials and museums, as part of a policy of remembrance that began with independence and was tentatively implemented so as not to upset Moscow. These include the ALZHIR Museum and Memorial complex of Victims of Political Repressions and Totalitarianism, the KarLag Museum and the Museum of Political Repression.

If we begin the itinerary from the northern steppes, approximately 30 km from the brand new capital Astana, we will come upon the "**ALZHIR**" Museum. It was popularly known as the "Akmolinsk camp for wives of traitors to the Motherland", or the "26th point" of the

1. Arch of Sorrow in Alzhir Museum-Memorial complex. Picture by Marc Díaz Planas.

"Karaganda Corrective Labour Camp" (KarLag), an extensive compound of prison and labour camps. More than 18,000 women were held there between 1938 and 1958, and today the memorial complex, inaugurated in 2007 by President Nazarbayev, stands on the site. The big Arch of Sorrow, visible from a distance, marks the entrance to the site that is surrounded by a row of 14 marble plaques, each of them placed by the embassies of the countries of origin of the prisoners held in ALZHIR. There is one glaring absence: no Russian Federation plaque, despite the fact that the vast majority of the women prisoners were Russian or originated from Russian territories. Metres away lies the two-storey building that houses the museum itself. The first floor is dedicated to the various events surrounding Russia's takeover of Kazakh territories from the 19th century to the early years of Soviet rule. Only the second floor is devoted strictly to this labour camp and the women prisoners, with a modest but commendable mention of the efforts made by survivors to preserve the memory. Outside the museum, a few metres away, it is worth visiting the first attempts made in 1989 to bear witness to the former site of the camp: a half-rusted metal structure bearing the name "ALZHIR" and a humble monument erected at the very height of glasnost on the initiative of women prisoners, their families and the leaders of the local kolkhozes [collective farms in the former Soviet

2. Monument to the victims of repression in Alzhir, Akmol. Picture by Marc Díaz Planas.

Union]. Finally, the modernity of the ALZHIR Museum is in contrast to the neglect of one of the mass graves located on the outskirts of the village, with no signs and littered with rubbish. Only a metal fence encloses the site where four monoliths, two also from 1989, stand in memory of the anonymous women buried there.

Continuing south, after an approximately four-hour train journey, we reach the town of Karagandy. On the outskirts is the **Museum of Memory of the Victims of Repression in the Dolinka Settlement**, also known as the **KarLag Museum**. For many years, the region was one of the main coal mining sites in the entire Soviet Union and the KarLag labour camp provided the workforce for this activity. Today, the town is a living testimony to Stalin's repression: many of its inhabitants are the children and grandchildren of Germans, Poles, Koreans and other people deported in the 1930s and 40s. The museum is located in the village of Dolinka, in the camp's administrative building, which was almost in ruins until it was rebuilt in the late 2000s in keeping with its original design. Although officially opened in 2001, it did not open to the public until 2011. During its time in operation, from 1930 to 1959, sources reveal that between 800,000 and 1 million prisoners were held there. In contrast to the ALZHIR complex, almost the entire museum is specifically focused on the KarLag (only one of the 30 exhibition spaces is not devoted to an area directly related to the camp). Also noteworthy

3. Room in Kartag Museum. Picture by Marc Díaz Planas.

is the basement, the most experience-oriented part of the visit, which exudes an oppressive atmosphere with recreations of interrogation and torture rooms, although there is no evidence that such "activities" took place in these spaces. One of the last rooms concerns the partnership with a research and education initiative run by a local private academic institution.

Outside the museum, if we cross the town to the south, we reach what is known as the Mamochkino cemetery. Here visitors will see a fenced-off plot of land, which depending on the time of year is thick with grass, covering part of the mass graves where an unknown number of children who died in the KarLag "archipelago" were buried. The space contains several small monoliths erected on the initiative of the church and private individuals, as well as a dozen old metal crosses put up by relatives. Today's relatively well-kept appearance, including a sign in Kazakh, Russian and English, is due to maintenance work carried out five years ago by several local and academic institutions.

The third case is in the far south of the country, traditionally more urban and commercial: the **Museum of Victims of Political Repression** in the city of Shymkent. Set up in 2001, it proudly claims to be Kazakhstan's first museum on the political repression of 1937-38. At the centre of the exhibition hall is an eerie sculpture evoking the repression,

surrounded by panels featuring Kazakh nationalist intellectuals from the early 20th century. There are seven exhibits with photos and document facsimiles, two of which deal specifically with the political repression of the 1930s. The visit ends in a Hall of Sorrow with the names of local victims. Furthermore, the museum is located a few metres from the huge memorial in Gloria dedicated to the struggle and the fallen in the Great Patriotic War, the Second World War in the West. It might be a model example of a Soviet memorial in Victory – common in many former Soviet cities – were it not for the fact that it was inaugurated in 2010. All this makes for a good metaphor for the coexistence (or cohabitation?) of different narratives about the Soviet historical past in Kazakhstan: on the one hand, one that glorifies what the USSR meant and its goals, and another that disassociates itself by asserting a Kazakh tradition and identity and bringing its repressive dimension to the fore. All this goes beyond the anecdotal and also affects memory policies and the place that Soviet history occupies in the collective imagination. Finally, and in conclusion, there is an uncritical view of the subject matter. In addressing Stalinist repression, many events in Tsarist Russia, or the demands for self-government in the late 1980s, are dealt with at length, while more contemporary cases of political repression are overlooked.

4. Mamochkino cemetery in Dolinka. Picture by Marc Díaz Planas.

Secondly, the discourse of national demands runs through the content and approach of two of the museums, ALZHIR and Shymkent. This can be seen in the abundance of spaces devoted to *national history* events that predate the political repression of the 1930s through to the 1950s. This approach somewhat blurs the museum's subject matter and thus the endeavours to remember the political repressions of this period.

Last but not least, we should also draw attention to the quality and well-maintained facilities of the three museums. Their accessibility, both in terms of the options for getting there and the price of admission, should also be underlined. The same applies to the availability of information on the exhibitions, which are in Kazakh, Russian and English (with the exception of the Shymkent Museum), as well as the availability of audio-guide and guide services, also in English. This might be surprising given the low number of visitors, another issue that would be worth investigating.

5. Memory of Glory, Shymkent. Piture by Marc Díaz Planas.

REVIEW

BOOKS

The memorial is the process: Les Corts women's prison

Ricard Conesa Sánchez
Historian, project officer
EUROM

On 14 December 2019, the monument dedicated to the now defunct women's prison in the Barcelona neighbourhood of Les Corts was inaugurated. However, the monument does not claim to be "the memorial". Instead, the memorial is everything that surrounds it. It is the place and the connection it has established with those who gather there on a regular basis to engage in a myriad of activities, as Jordi Guixé explains at the beginning of this book, the memorial is the process, and this process has been underway for some time now.

Fernando Hernández Holgado, historian at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), specialist in the field of women's prisons under the Franco dictatorship, contributes a key chapter to the book, a chapter on the history of Les Corts women's prison. From the prison's predecessor (the Amalia Prison) to its closure in 1955, its demolition and the construction of a large shopping centre that opened in 1974 on the site of the former prison. The republican penitentiary reform, like so many others, was cut short by General Franco's failed coup d'état and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the same year that the prison first opened. Its beginnings were marked by the conflict in the Republican rearguard, with political prisoners of all kinds, from collaborators with the rebel side to anti-fascist victims of reprisals (anarchists and Trotskyists). Nevertheless, the situation would bear no comparison to the inhumane conditions that would be endured once Franco's troops entered the city in 1939 – although the building was originally intended to accommodate around one hundred inmates, the peak of its occupancy was reached in August that same year, when it held 1,806 women and 43 children. Hernández painstakingly documents the type of prisoners incarcerated (political, common, foreign, those who were shot or died of illness), the cruel governance of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, and the incidents involving the prisoners' resistance and self-organisation, as well as their escape attempts.

While Hernández Holgado presents the history of the women's prison, Núria Ricart documents in her chapter the commemorative events and actions that have taken place in its memory. Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Barcelona, Ricart is a specialist in monuments and memorial spaces in the public space. This is also demonstrated in her recently published and outstanding book, *Arte público y memoria. Lenguaje y transmisión en los monumentos a las víctimas* [Public Art and Memory. Language and transmission in monuments to victims]. Since 2006, with the construction of the website www.presodelescorts.org by the Associació per la Cultura i la Memòria de Catalunya (ACME, Catalan Association for Culture and Memory) and the various unsuccessful attempts to mark the site – then unmarked and utterly invisible to the public – a process fraught with ups and downs began, with relentless efforts by different groups to keep the memory of the site alive. The shopping centre's endeavour (with the support of the district) to appease the demands with a small, hidden plaque bearing an aseptic text in 2010 only further fuelled the flames and prompted the different groups involved to rally together even more. Seminars, activities, tours, performances, plays, documentary screenings, street marking, book presentations, commemorations every 8 March and 14 April... a broad process of citizen participation driven by the Plataforma Futuro Monumento Cárcel de Les Corts [Platform for the Future Monument to Les Corts Women's Prison], founded in 2013, whose extensive programme of activities over the last few years is recorded on its blog. One of the high points was the installation of five monoliths in 2015, on the corner of Carrer Güell and Carrer Europa, where the monument would be inaugurated four years later: a redesign of the same space conceptualised by the team led by Núria Ricart herself, whose main focus would be six huge rocks of different origins from the peninsula, from the same place where many of the prisoners came from. Nonetheless, as the authors emphasise – and as the people who breathe life into it day after day confirm – this is not a monument marking the end, it is just another step, the memorial is the process, and this site remains – and must remain – an unfinished place.

1 | 2. The Memorial Site of the Les Corts' Women Prison was inaugurated in 2019, after years of work and vindication by the Platform Future Monument Presó de dones de les Corts. Pictures: Barcelona City Council.

RICART, Núria; GUIXÉ, Jordi; HERNÁNDEZ, Fernando (2022) *Un lugar inacabado. Espacio de memoria, Monumento Cárcel de Mujeres de Les Corts.* Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València.

RICART, Núria (2022) *Arte público y memoria. Lenguaje y transmisión en los monumentos a las víctimas*. Madrid: Catarata.

Terezín Memorial and the memory of the Holocaust *in Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic since 1945*

Vojtěch Blodig
Deputy Director
Terezín Memorial

On 6 May 1947, the government of the Czechoslovak Republic decided to set up a Memorial to National Suffering in Terezín as a reminder of the fate of those who passed through it during the Nazi occupation. Later renamed the Terezín Memorial, it was the only institution of its kind on Czech soil. It was established on the site where the largest Nazi persecution facilities in the country operated.

When the Memorial was established, its staff sought to stress the fate of the Jewish victims in Terezín. Consequently, the Jewish Cemetery and the Crematorium in Terezín were included in the memorial. These decisions were made by the Jewish religious community in Prague. At the time, there was a consensus among all the political parties that the Memorial should be kept in its original state as a place of remembrance to all the victims of Terezín. Some publications about the Terezín persecution facilities were published from 1945 to 1948, including the first survivors' testimonies, many of which described details of life in the Terezín Ghetto. The most important of those publications was the testimony of Rabbi Richard Feder from Kolín, one of the great personalities of spiritual life in the Ghetto.

After the Communists seized power in February 1948, the situation changed rapidly. Communist Czechoslovakia's foreign policy towards the state of Israel became hostile, following instructions from Moscow. This was reflected in the focus of the Memorial's activities, which were closely connected with the orientation of state policy.

This situation was evident in the form and content of the Memorial's first permanent exhibition, opened in the Small Fortress Museum in June 1949. The theme of the exhibition was the role of the Communist faction in the Czech resistance movement against the

1. The National Cemetery in Terezín.

Nazi occupation. The history of other groups of freedom fighters was reduced, as was information about the fate of the Jewish inmates of the Terezín Ghetto. At the time, there was practically no reminder of the existence of a Jewish Ghetto in the town of Terezín. On 15 December 1952, a proposal to set up an exhibition about the Terezín Ghetto in one of the houses in the town of Terezín was discussed in the committee in charge of the Memorial, though it was ultimately rejected because information about the Ghetto appeared in the exhibition in the Small Fortress Museum. It is quite significant that this discussion was held in the hysterical, anti-Semitic atmosphere around the so-called Slánský trial. At the time, there were many anti-Semitic trends. However, the democratic traditions of pre-war Czechoslovakia (connected mainly with the personality of former president T. G. Masaryk) were more powerful than Communist propaganda and Nazi propaganda during WWII. The vast majority of the population did not take part in the campaign against the Jews. Nevertheless, this post-war history tarnished Czechoslovakia's reputation.

This more direct anti-Semitism was replaced by anti-Zionism in the mid-1950s. For the Terezín Memorial, the consequences were the same, because everything related to Judaism and Jewish history was suspect to the authorities.

2. Delegates of the scholarly conference in Terezín Memorial.

3. View of the permanent exhibition in the Ghetto Museum in Terezín.

The first change in the Memorial's activities occurred in the first half of the 1960s. It was decided that the Memorial should be transformed from a monument with one exhibition into a research centre with its own collections of documents and objects, including collections related to the former Ghetto. Of course, this positive development still had its limitations. The Memorial's activities remained within the Communist ideological system, which put considerable restrictions on change. Positive shifts were possible only as part of a vast liberalisation of the Communist Party and, subsequently, of society as a whole.

The Prague Spring in 1968 made the Memorial's working conditions more favourable. After a long period of silence, the need to establish a Ghetto Museum in the town of Terezín was stressed once again by the Memorial's new leadership. At the time, preparations began to establish the Ghetto Museum, as did work on the architecture of places of remembrance at the Terezín Memorial, such as the Jewish Cemetery and Crematorium, the National Cemetery, the site at the Ohře River (where ashes of Terezín Ghetto victims were thrown into the water) and the Crematorium and surroundings of the former concentration camp in Litoměřice. This positive development continued even a few months after the Warsaw Pact armies' invasion of Czechoslovakia, but was scaled down under pressure from the occupation authorities. The Stalinists returned with what they called normalisation. Unfortunately, this also entailed the return of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist policies.

At the time, plans to establish the Ghetto Museum were not stopped immediately, but the essence of the content had to be changed. A document written in April 1973 lists the main tasks of the Terezín Memorial: "One of the greatest (tasks – V.B.) is to build a Ghetto Museum, the need for which, in a period of rising Zionism whose aggression threatens world peace, is especially urgent. Yet elsewhere in the world, there is so much evidence proving that imperialism is what upholds racism and that it was the Socialist order that stood in its way, as it was the Soviet Army that liberated Auschwitz and Terezín, as well as other places where Jews were liquidated... In this spirit, we are ready to set up a museum in one of the concentration camps that Fascism established throughout the world. Nor will we forget the concentration camps in Vietnam and in Israel" (Terezín Memorial Archives, I.N. 85). Instead of paying homage to the memory of the victims of the Terezín Ghetto, who perished directly in Terezín or in death camps in the East, the museum was planned to become an instrument of propaganda. So after a very short period of liberalisation in which the real story of the Holocaust was presented, a new period of regression began.

Fortunately, the aforementioned anti-Semitic design of the museum was not implemented, as the building intended to house the Ghetto Museum was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior and the Permanent Exhibition of the National Security and Revolutionary Traditions of Northern Bohemia, as it was called, was to be established there. To create such a museum on a site connected with the memory of tens of thousands Jewish victims of the Holocaust was an indication of the arrogance of the regime. The new museum stood empty. It received no regular visitors, with the exception of organised groups, and there was no evidence of the former Ghetto in the town of Terezín. The results of such a policy were dangerous. After so many years, many young people did not even know of the existence of the Terezín Ghetto. The Small Fortress was the only symbol of the history of Terezín in World War II.

On the other hand, we must mention that some positive changes in the Memorial's work from the late 1960s remained. The art collection gained many valuable works made in the Ghetto and a great number of valuable modern artworks dealing with anti-war themes. The professional processing of archive documents also improved to a degree, a picture library was established and a collection of survivors' testimonies was recorded. Most importantly, research on the history of the Terezín

4. Replica of the Terezín Ghetto´s dormitory in the former Magdeburg Barracks.

Ghetto and the Final Solution of the Jewish Question did not completely stop, though it was not practically possible for the researchers to publish the results of their work. This situation was similar to that of researchers working in the Jewish Museum in Prague. However, after democratic change came to the country, this previous fine work and research enabled the staff to establish the Ghetto Museum quickly and to present the history of the Holocaust. The regime's anti-Zionist orientation continued in the 1980s. Nevertheless, a memorial plaque for the Jews transported to Terezín was unveiled, a small exhibition about the Holocaust was created in the Crematorium at the Jewish Cemetery in Terezín and a scholarly conference about the mass murder of the prisoners of the Terezín family camp in Auschwitz was held in March 1989. These events were the first signals of the coming changes.

The "Velvet Revolution" in November 1989 created a new situation in Czech society and in the orientation of state policy, including a new attitude towards Jews and Judaism. After 40 years, relations between Czechoslovakia and Israel reverted to what they had been before. Many former Terezín Ghetto survivors came to Czechoslovakia for the first time since 1948. Survivors from Czechoslovakia established the Terezín Initiative, an organisation supporting remembrance activities, research and education on the Holocaust. From the beginning, the Terezín Initiative supported the activities of the new leaders and staff of the Terezín Memorial by helping to establish the Ghetto Museum and develop research on the history of Holocaust. These activities were also strongly supported by new Czechoslovak President Václav Havel, who became a member of the Board of Directors of the new Ghetto Museum. Václav

Havel addressed the Czech population several times, explaining the suffering of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and he visited Terezín with Israeli Presidents Herzog and Weizmann in 1991 and in 1996.

After a long wait, the "Velvet Revolution" set the stage for the implementation of the plans that had emerged during the reform movement in the 1960s. As early as 1990, the building which housed one of the Homes for Youth during the Ghetto period was vacated and preparations began to build a new museum in terms of technical and material provision and content. It was eventually opened to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the deportation of Jews from Czech soil and the establishment of the Terezín Ghetto. The Terezín Initiative, which was then an organisation associating former Terezín Ghetto inmates, systematically supported the Memorial's new management in commemorating the victims of the Terezín Ghetto, thereby redressing all the wrongs committed by the previous regime. First and foremost, it was crucial to convince the country's new political leaders of the need to create a new system to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

In the early 1990s, the Terezín Memorial became an institution directly administered by the Ministry of Culture. This was conducive to an overall upgrade of the quality of its work, helping Memorial to surmount the burdens of the past fairly quickly and to win recognition and a reputation at home and abroad.

Emphasis was mainly put on the development of research on the Holocaust. Contacts were set up again with institutions and scholars abroad. A number of international scholarly conferences about the history of the Nazi occupation were held in Terezín in the 1990s. Almost all these conferences were dedicated to the history of the Holocaust. However, there was also other work connected with the previous work of the Terezín Memorial. After building the Ghetto Museum and starting the scholarly research on the history of the Holocaust, the next goal was to prepare a new exhibition tracing the history of the Gestapo Police Prison in the Small Fortress Museum in Terezín. A new display, set up shortly thereafter in the Crematorium in the Jewish Cemetery, proved to be highly needed as well. The existing one, which dated back to the 1980s and was noted for its modest extent, gave rise to the newly emerging permanent exhibition. Another permanent exhibition was organised relatively soon afterwards: the Art Exhibition of the Terezín Memorial and the Litoměřice Concentration Camp 1944-1945. Another important task was to begin research on the history of the detention camp for the Germans, which was housed in the Small Fortress from 1945 to 1948, which was followed by the creation of a new exhibition on this controversial issue in recent Czech history, which had previously been a strict taboo.

During the 1990s, all previous exhibitions from the time before the "Velvet Revolution" that had been inadequate and inaccurately presented the history of the repressive facilities in Terezín and Litoměřice were replaced by new ones. Seen in this light, the newly created exhibitions in the former Magdeburg Barracks were required to upgrade the quality of their museum presentations significantly, while new displays were expected primarily to present the culture and arts in the Terezín Ghetto. Symbolically, the new premises opened in the fiftieth anniversary of the Terezín Memorial, while a replica of a typical Terezín Ghetto dormitory and the exhibition entitled "Music in the Terezín Ghetto" were unveiled. The permanent exhibition "Art in the Terezín Ghetto" was opened in 1998, another on "Literary Work in the Terezín Ghetto" was opened in 1999 and a third, "Theatre in the Terezín Ghetto", was opened to the public in 2000.

On 26 November 2001, the new permanent exhibition of the Ghetto Museum called "Terezín in the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' 1941-1945" was opened.

This involved completely new educational efforts. Brand-new educational programmes were devised for young people of different age groups, which

turned out to be of even greater demand for schoolteachers. Growing out of fairly modest beginnings, a multifaceted system of educational programmes began to take shape, now ranking among the Terezín Memorial's key and highlighted branches.

Remembrance events play a key role in commemorating the tragic past, associated with reflections of the challenges and threats to our times. The most important of these events is the Terezín Commemoration, which has grown to be the main act of remembrance in honour of the Czech victims and victims from many other European countries who passed through the Nazi repressive facilities in Terezín and Litoměřice, as well as those who perished in other parts of Nazi-occupied Europe. The actual significance of this event, held in the National Cemetery in Terezín, is stressed each year by the attendance of top-ranking officials representing Czech political parties, civic associations and unions, as well as ambassadors of the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition and the survivors of the Nazis' repressive facilities. Unfortunately, the number of these most important participants of the commemorative rallies is shrinking...

It is symptomatic of the great importance of this event that Czech media outlets are keen to cover it; in the past few years, the Terezín Commemoration has been regularly broadcast live by Czech TV.

The Terezín Commemoration is always preceded by an act of remembrance at the former execution ground in the Gestapo Police Prison in the Small Fortress, held in honour of the victims of the last wartime execution, just before the end of the war, on 2 May 1945. The event is also dedicated to all other victims of this infamous repressive facility.

However, acts of remembrance are also held to honour the victims of the other totalitarian regime that ruled the country for several decades. Symbolic in this regard is Dr Milada Horáková, a leading democratic politician jailed in the Gestapo Police Prison during the war. As soon as the war ended, Horáková joined the struggle for the future orientation of Czechoslovakia; soon after the Communist dictatorship came to power, she was sentenced to death in a politically motivated show trial and executed. A commemoration is held in the Milada Horáková Memorial Hall in the Small Fortress every year in June to mark the anniversary of her execution. This event is organised in conjunction with the Confederation of Political Prisoners.

In the research sector in general, the Terezín Memorial expanded the processing of documents from the domestic and foreign archives,

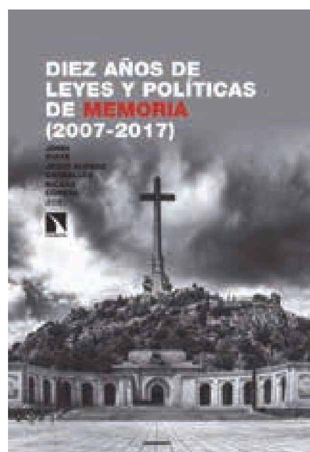
as well as recollections of survivors, plus the research results gained by the Memorial's partner organisations and individuals. Collection items kept by the Terezín Memorial have been systematically digitised and an increasing amount of its files has successively been made available to researchers and the general public on the Memorial's website, together with search engines for databases of former inmates. In addition to the Department of History, other specialised sections of the Terezín Memorial, namely the Department of Collections and the Department of Documentation, have been participated in implementing this project. Through these activities, the Terezín Memorial has definitely contributed to modern historiography, museology and education. Making such data available to the public also helps to educate adults and younger generations, thereby preventing the falsification of history, the denial of historical facts such as the genocide of the Jews and the phenomena of neo-Nazism, xenophobia and racial intolerance.

The activities of the Terezín Memorial maintain a permanent emphasis on the memory of the Holocaust today. Interest is great and many young people are discovering more about this earlier unknown chapter of the history of their country. Some are even discovering their Jewish roots after a long period of forced assimilation. The number of Czech visitors to the Terezín Memorial has been increasing faster than that of foreigners. We hope that this positive attitude of the Czech population will grow as a result of new education and media influence. However, racism is still a problem in our country. It is connected mainly with the situation of the Roma minority, but there are also those who deny the Holocaust. Learning from the memory of the Holocaust therefore remains important not only for the memory of the victims, but also for education about democracy and the danger of racism.

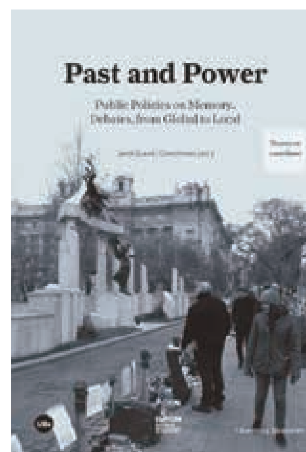
5. Participants of the teachers training seminar organized every year under the title "Holocaust in Education".

Other EUROM Publications:

Sarajevo, amor meu. Jovan Divjak. Entrevistes (amb Florence La Bruère) [Bellaterra Edicions, 2022]



Diez años de leyes y políticas públicas de memoria. Jordi Guixé, Jesús Alonso Carballés, Ricard Conesa (Ed.) [Catarata, 2019]

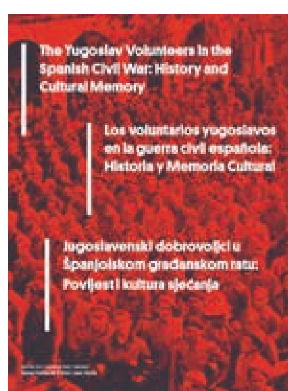


Past and power. Public Policies of memory. Jordi Guixé (Ed.). [Edicions UB, 2016]

Commemorative books

Ventotene 80. 89th Anniversary of the Ventotene Manifesto. [EUROM, 2021]

Schuman 70. 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. [EUROM, 2020]



The Yugoslav Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: History and Cultural Memory. Vjeran Pavlakovic and Oriol López Badell (Ed.) [2020]

Along the wall strip. Berlin, 30 years under transformation. [El Globus Vermell, 2018]

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Traces of Sobibor extermination camp (Poland). Still image of the documentary film "Sheol" (Dublin Films, 2022), directed by Arnaud Sauli.

Fundació Solidaritat Universitat de Barcelona
Universitat de Barcelona
Co-funded by the European Union