Writing and Reading Memories at a Buenos Aires Memorial Site: The Ex-ESMA

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ESMA, an infamous center for torture and extermination, now houses a memorial museum. It first opened in 2007 and was subsequently rethought and remodeled. Museological interventions modified the museum script and the visits’ format. This article explores the (re)construction of memories through the communication process between the site and its visitors. It asks: What are the differences between the previous space and the modified one? How do changes affect interactions between visitors and the space? I review the authorial intentions of curators and public responses to the space to trace the evolving debate over what the museum’s script should include/exclude, changes in official memorialization policies and the perceived impact of the space of memory/museum on visitors.

Keywords: Argentina; state terrorism; human rights; memorial museums; museum visitors

Introduction

ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada [Navy School of Mechanics]) was an infamous center for torture and extermination during the last Argentine dictatorship (1976–83), a regime under which an estimated thirty thousand people were disappeared. Quintessential lieu de mémoire, it stands in the memory landscape of Buenos Aires as an obstinate reminder of mass human rights violations. Fewer than two hundred of the approximately five thousand people taken to ESMA survived. The building now houses a memorial site/museum in the space that was once the headquarters
of the dictatorship’s brutal repression: the Casino de Oficiales (Officers’ Club Building). The Space for Memory at the Casino first opened to the general public in 2007 but it was subsequently rethought and remodeled. After closing for remodeling in October 2014, it reopened in May 2015 as the space now called Museo Sitio de Memoria ESMA (ESMA Site of Memory Museum). In addition to changes in the physical space, museological interventions changed the script of the museum’s narrative and the visitors’ experience of the museum.

This article explores ESMA’s role in the transmission and (re)construction of collective memory through the process of communication that occurs between the site and its visitors. Simple questions guide my inquiry: What are the differences between the first Space for Memory and the modified museum? What goals motivated the modifications? How did people interact with the original Space for Memory? How do the changes affect interactions between the visitors and the space? What potential impact does visiting the new iteration of the museum have on audiences? I review the authorial intentions of curators and public responses to the space to trace the evolving debate over what the museum’s script should include/exclude, changes in official memorialization policies, and the perceived impact of the space of memory/museum on visitors. I argue that, regardless of the messages encoded in the site by the authors/curators, the ways visitors read and decode messages are difficult to predict. Audience responses may be determined less by the museum’s constructed text than by the heterogeneous uniqueness of the visitors’ experiences and expectations. ESMA does not speak in a vacuum; as Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman remind us, a memorial site depends “upon its audience to voice—or betray—its vision of the past into the future.”

My analysis is based on information gathered through a combination of methods: (1) participant observation during fifteen visits to the site (from its opening to the general public in 2007 through December 2017); (2) comments in the visitor books, accessed in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016; and (3) interviews with site administrators, tour guides and visitors. I begin by discussing the concepts framing my analysis and then focus on Phase 1 of the project, which lasted from September 2007 to October 2014. I discuss the original Space for Memory, the authorial intentions that governed the space, visit dynamics and perceived effects on visitors. Next, I consider the “Under Construction” Phase, from October
2014 to April 2015, commenting on the rationale and goals for modifying the site. Finally, I analyze Phase 2 of the project, which launched in May 2015, and discuss the new script and physical layout, the administrators’ assessment of the modified space and the space’s perceived effect on visitors.

Phase 1 was designed and implemented during the administrations of Presidents Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner; the “Under Construction” Phase and the initiation of Phase 2 took place during the latter’s term. In December 2015, President Mauricio Macri was inaugurated and the coalition Alianza Cambiemos took over governance of the country. This change generated a new political context and marked a shift away from the Kirchner administrations’ human rights policies, which centered on a strong commitment to truth, justice and memory. The new president, Macri, had promised during his electoral campaign to put an end to the “human rights deals” (el curro de los derechos humanos). Once in office, Macri stated that he had no idea if the disappeared were “nine or thirty thousand” and he refused to get involved in “this senseless discussion.” Consequently, his administration has withdrawn support for memory and justice processes in the country, including support for pursuing the trials of repressors accused of crimes against humanity, though no specific policy has affected the new museum.

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Ex-ESMA is a thirty-five-building compound that covers seventeen square hectares. It is administered by the Ente Público Espacio para la Memoria y para la Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Public Institution Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights). Located in a residential neighborhood, it faces a wide avenue lined with upscale condominiums. The compound’s internal streets are bordered by trees that evoke a bucolic landscape rather than a space of terror. When the navy left the premises in 2004, the buildings were given to several institutions and human rights organizations. ESMA houses the only Buenos Aires museum focused on that period, but it coexists with other memorials. In the aftermath of state terrorism, an array of memorialization initiatives proliferated in the city, ranging from efforts to identify buildings that housed torture centers to community initiatives such as tiles marking
locations where the disappeared had lived or worked. For Ilan Stavans, the city as a whole is a “conglomerate of memorials.” Even without visiting this museum, citizens and visitors constantly stumble over this past.

Turning ESMA into a space for memory initiated a process of deliberation over what should happen in the former space of torture and how and why it should be done. Many voices, including those of survivors, relatives, human rights activists, artists and intellectuals, debated suggestions and advanced different, and often competing, proposals. In designing memorial sites, key concerns include deciding what history to tell, how to tell it and to whom. Defining “what” and “how” is a complex procedure. Planners must decide on the appropriate content and form, how the site will encode the messages to be transmitted and how publics might interact with the space and be affected by it. These discussions are typical of memorial initiatives that include various, and often conflicting, opinions about a project’s potential effects and what should be included and excluded. Agreements are the outcome of long debates and negotiations about the various memories of a historical period, decisions shaped by an array of factors including the historical proximity of the event and political ideology. Indeed, considering memorial landscapes as arenas allows them to be seen as political stages where powers compete to impress upon society their own versions of events; they become spaces for memory performances.

It is essential to any memorialization initiative to determine how the end product will affect the public and what types of reactions/actions it will trigger. Still, visitor studies are scarce so we know little about how memorial sites perform or whether they are attaining their goals. The few studies offering empirical data about visitors’ experiences include: Irit Dekel on the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin; Katherine Hite on US students visiting ESMA; Rachel Hughes on the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes in Cambodia; Patrice A. Keats on former European concentration camps; and Sharon Macdonald on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg. This gap in research is shared by museum studies in general and the underdeveloped and undertheorized subfield of audience studies in the field of “media memory.”

Moreover, it is difficult to study museums because they are unlike written texts, particularly due to the “non-verbal nature” of some of their messages and the fact that audiences “enter and move within them,” taking photos and talking, activities integral to the culture that visitors
at heritage sites consume and produce. Exchanges among visitors and between visitors and guides are key. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking highlight the importance of understanding these exchanges, noting that visitors usually go to museums in groups and “utilize each other as vehicles for deciphering information, for reinforcing shared beliefs, for making meaning.”\(^\text{15}\) This accords with Paul Ricoeur’s observations about the activity of reminiscence as “making the past live again by evoking it together with others, each helping the other to remember shared events or knowledge, the memories of one person serving as reminder for the memory of the others.”\(^\text{16}\) The dynamics of the visits that I have observed over the years provide examples of these concepts of collaborative memory processes.

Visiting places that embody what Macdonald defined as the “difficult heritage” of a nation has been labeled “trauma tourism” by Laurie Beth Clark and Leigh A. Payne, “dark tourism” by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, “dutiful tourism” by Rachel Hughes, and the “new tourism of witness” by Marianne Hirsh and Nancy K. Miller.\(^\text{17}\) Visitors to these sites are referred to by Marita Sturken as “pilgrims,” “tourists of history” and “tourists of memory,” as “accidental tourists” by Cecilia Sosa and as “voyeurs of traumatourism” by Diana Taylor.\(^\text{18}\) To what category do ESMA visitors belong? They are heterogeneous in nationality, age, gender, class, relationship to state terrorism, historical knowledge and political ideology. They include survivors from the site, relatives of those last seen there, victims’ friends, activists and the public in general, which includes students, researchers, people curious about the place and even former ESMA students and members of the security forces. They come from Buenos Aires, the Argentine provinces, other parts of the Americas, the United States, Europe and many other countries. Some arrive with friends or relatives, a few by themselves, others in groups from schools and institutions. Age, especially for Argentineans, is a crucial factor because it determines visitors’ relationship with state terrorism. Some belong to the generation that experienced the terror firsthand, some were born and grew up during that period and others were part of the post-dictatorship generations who have secondhand knowledge of what happened.

This means visitors occupy an array of different categories, including pilgrims and tourists of memory, those who come because they feel it is their duty and those who want to learn. In many visitors, multiple labels may intersect. Visitors bring different “entrance narratives” shaped by the
factors outlined above. Moreover, visitor experiences are influenced by their expectations from the museum. Motivation, expectations, previous knowledge, beliefs and interests constitute the “visitor’s agenda,” which “influences behavior and learning.” The diversity of visitors suggests that the history inscribed in ESMA attracts them to the site. What varies are their particular interests in this history.

I have observed the visitors firsthand, administrators and guides have provided additional information about the visitors, and those posting comments in the visitor books often share details about themselves, but there are still gaps in the data. Visitors were/are not asked to register age, gender or nationality. People provided their name, ID number and contact information when registering for Phase 1’s guided visits. In Phase 2, they just show up without providing any information.

**Phase 1: The Space for Memory (September 2007–October 2014)**

In Phase 1, which began when the compound was taken away from the navy, survivors, relatives of the desaparecidos, and activists were key in deciding on the design and use of the ESMA in general and the Casino building in particular. In the site’s first three years (2004–2007), visits were limited to survivors, relatives, activists and special groups, mainly from organizations and institutions. The Space for Memory at the Casino opened to the general public in September 2007. In 2010 I interviewed Ana Maria Careaga, who was, at that time, the director of Instituto Espacio para la Memoria (Space for Memory Institute, IEM, dissolved in May 2014), the institution that administered the Casino and the buildings directly linked to the repression: the central building known as Four Columns, the Coy Pavilion, the medical center, the vehicle service station and the printing shop. At that time, the number of visitors was steadily increasing. In 2008, the Space for Memory’s first full year open to the general public, 5,677 people toured the site; there were 7,867 visitors in 2009. By September 2010 a total of 25,219 visitors had toured the Casino since it was taken away from the navy. For Careaga, the privilege of that historical moment was that the main protagonists of this history, those who had been at the forefront of the struggles for memory, truth and justice, were still alive. These activists were integral to defining and consolidating
public memory policies that could outlive them. In this phase, the aim was to discuss what took place at ESMA within the national and regional context of state terrorism. How to do this was subject to debate, but the consensus was that the places where prisoners had been tortured and housed should remain as the navy left them, without reconstructing how they looked during the dictatorship. Information was to be provided by guides and signs that would feature quotes from survivors’ testimonies. Careaga noted, however, that decisions about the public use of those spaces continued to evolve. Administrators were aware that the fluctuating ways in which societies remember and the politics of memory might shape future changes.

During this period, guided visits were the only way to tour the site. Groups walked through the empty spaces accompanied by the guides’ voices. The guides’ narrative followed a flexible script, constantly updated with new information—such as references to a testimony at a trial for crimes committed at ESMA—and shaped by visitors’ comments and questions. Memorial sites and museums construct “scripts” that tell visitors what to look at and how, why a particular object, installation or architectural site is special and what stories each one embodies. A team of guides was responsible for narrating this script, informed by survivors’ testimonies and published studies about that period. The first guides were part of the collective that developed the site during its recuperation process. They were not handed a script. Survivors, members of human rights organizations, designers and guides collaborated in the creation of the narrative. The result was based on what survivors and human rights organizations thought should be included. The text of the signs placed in the building formed the backbone of the script. The guides’ training included studying critical texts—historical accounts, proceedings from the 1985 trials, etc. The core of the guides’ knowledge came from their numerous long conversations with survivors. They got to know them, toured the site with them and spent time talking with them about their experiences and daily routines while disappeared; these conversations provided very different information than testimonies at a trial. The first guides trained those who joined later.

The guides I interviewed noted that the dialectical nature of the visits often deviated from the prepared script, with each tour adapted to the audience. The guides aimed to turn each visit into a collective project.
The idea was that each group of visitors walked together through the site *accompanied* by the guides rather than led; all members of the group participated in constructing the visit and shaping the form it took.

In analyzing my six visits during the Phase 1 years, I identified several co-authors of the script that guided each visit to the Space for Memory. Each visit produced its own unique script, collaboratively created by various authors. These co-authors included the space/site itself, in the form of the spatial narrative of the memorial landscape; the posted signs featuring information and the survivors’ narratives; each guide’s narration as they accompanied different groups of visitors; and the visitors themselves and what they shared through their comments and questions. Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia is useful in capturing the function of this co-authorship. Discussing the novel, Bakhtin referred to a “double-voiced discourse,” produced by the character and the author, which are “dialogically inter-related” as “if they actually hold a conversation with each other.” He refers to “a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships.” These observations reflect the many interactions between ESMA’s visitors and the diversity of voices co-authoring the script. Visits to the site became temporal and physical spaces for breaking silences, a forum for discussing the past, an arena for memory battles and a stage for memory performances.

**GUIDED VISITS IN PHASE 1**

Visits to the Space for Memory followed a certain chronology. First, the tour group gathered and the visitors briefly introduced themselves, providing information about their entrance narratives and agendas. People shared who they were, why they had come, their expectations for the visit or something about how the dictatorship had affected them, such as: “we brought the kids so they’ll learn more about this part of our history;” “I have disappeared relatives”; “I studied next door and cannot believe I’ve been so close to so much horror” (a reference to the Raggio technical school adjacent to the Casino). After the introductions, the guide provided background information about state terrorism—a summary of dates and events, the role of ESMA and the crimes committed there. Each group was comprised of twenty to twenty-five people from diverse backgrounds.
and the guide’s information was geared toward a heterogeneous audience. Next, the group walked to the Casino, following survivors’ accounts of the “routes” they had taken as prisoners when they were abducted and brought to the site. As visitors walked, the guide narrated what had happened and where, identifying the points of access to the compound and Casino, describing the first torture session in the basement and pointing out the “dorms,” the “offices” where slave labor was performed, the “maternity ward” for pregnant prisoners, the officers’ rooms.

Over the years, I observed that some elements were consistent from one tour to the next, while some dynamics varied. At the beginning, when the site was newly opened, there was not much talk. People were silent, as if needing to concentrate to process information. They were shy to ask questions, carefully inspecting each other, though some broke down and were comforted by a friend’s hug. As time passed, I observed changes in visitors’ attitudes, their interactions with each other and with the guides, the public sharing of comments and the emergence of heated debates. Some visitors were quiet and listened to the guide or only whispered comments to their friends. Others interrupted, either confirming or challenging what the guide or other visitors said, asking for more information, advancing their own versions of the events discussed. The time spent in introductions and background talk increased over the years as there were more voices co-authoring the script.

What did visitors say and write?

The guided tours prompted the emergence of a rich mosaic of memories, revealing visitors’ need to speak, voice concerns and find answers. Visitors discussed state terrorism, guilt and responsibility for human rights abuses, the role of the military, society, corporations and the Catholic Church, and related cultural productions such as films and music. Their comments illustrated many facets of their interactions with the site and the emotional responses it prompted. People often told intimate stories about what had happened to them or their families, friends and acquaintances. What follows is an outline of recurrent themes that arose in comments people made while touring the site, those they wrote in the museum’s visitor books, and observations shared by the guides.
Visits created a forum for broadening the public sphere of memory and human rights. Visitors shared experiences, recommended books and films, linked the past with the current political environment and exchanged phone numbers and emails. They discussed how the 1978 World Cup, hosted by Argentina at the peak of the repression, had acted as a public relations campaign for the dictatorship, including rumors that the game had been arranged to secure Argentina’s triumph. I heard a priest mention the supposed responsibility of Jorge Bergoglio, provincial superior of the Society of Jesus from 1973 to 1979, Archbishop of Buenos Aires at the time of this visit, now Pope Francis, for failing to protect two Jesuit priests before they were abducted; both survived their disappearance at ESMA. People commented on censorship, self-censorship, journalism’s performance and the few media that shrewdly challenged the dictatorship. Some pointed to the realization that torturers and assassins are not easily identifiable as “beasts” different from the average person. One woman recognized her former neighbor among photos of ESMA’s torturers: “One imagines that those who were here have monster faces, but he was the neighbor who cared for his grandchildren and puppies and loaned me the grass trimmer.” The practice of stealing children was a frequent topic of visitors’ comments. Approximately five hundred children, most of them babies born in captivity, were taken by the dictatorship and their mothers then disappeared. Walking by the “maternity ward” and hearing about the prisoners who gave birth there, a woman told me of a baby offered to her mother; her mother had refused the child. Rumors circulating at the time had made her suspicious of the baby’s origins.

Mourning rituals and homages

What happened inside the Casino is etched into the building. Memory has made its mark, giving the site a quasi-sacred aura. The guides explained that a unique emotive communion happened within the building, which enabled them to “let the building do the talking.” Visitors’ comments reflected this sense of listening to the building: “After a long time of hearing about our terrible history, the physical contact with this place is shattering” (September 9, 2009). “Simply being here is very strong; incommensurable, painful, asphyxiating” (June 24, 2011). The site also
became a space for connecting with similar situations around the world and remembering and denouncing past and current abuses, as one visitor wrote in the visitor book: “Grandchild of someone ‘gassed’ at Auschwitz, child of forced deportees, a deeply moved Jew with memory; yes, we come here to remember and never forget” (September 21, 2009).

The space facilitated the creation of homages and mourning rituals. The guides described relatives of ESMA’s victims touching the walls of the places where their loved ones had been imprisoned. In the absence of a grave, this became the last site known to have been inhabited by a mother, a son or a brother. The spaces became memorial sites, which are “places where the dead can be spoken to, where the dead potentially reside in their absence.”27 Comments in the visitor books suggest that the site enabled conversations of mourning: “Wishing to embrace every place in this building; to caress and to kiss the memories of our unjustly dead people” (September 21, 2009). One of the most powerful moments I witnessed came at the end of a visit, during the tour stop at the prisoners’ “dorms,” which were called Capucha (hood, named after the hoods that prisoners had been forced to wear at all times). While gathered there, a visitor proposed a moment of silence for reflection. The fifty people in the group held a minute of silence in that space where so many atrocities had taken place—an act of memory I had never experienced during my other visits.

Questioning society’s role: Public mea culpas

Society’s role in state-sponsored terrorism is not well understood. According to the guides, young people, in particular, demand to know how average people responded to the violence. The guides referred to questions such as, “What was the guy living across the street doing?,” which illustrate how difficult it is to understand how a torture center could be inserted in a neighborhood that was unaware of the horror taking place. Some people who were children during the terror feel very critical of the ways families, key institutions and society in general hid what was going on, as demonstrated by the following comment in the visitor book: “I was just thinking about my life and where I was during 1976–1983 … seven years of darkness, of systematic denial, of religious, political, familiar, social complicity…. What happened dad/mom/ teacher/nun/priest/neighbor? Answers were evasions, distortions” (June 11, 2008). I observed passion-
ate discussions about society’s complicity, such as the one prompted by an Italian visitor who asked, “How many Argentineans knew about this? Why didn’t they do anything?” Several visitors responded with stories about fear and a society paralyzed by terror, describing neighborhood raids, checkpoints and repression at universities.

There were references to what people knew, ignored or should have known. The guides addressed the persistence of silence and guilt, expressed in comments such as “I didn’t see” and “I didn’t know.” The space triggered the articulation of public mea culpas and reflections on society’s failure to respond, as expressed in comments during the visits such as, “Up to what point we didn’t see, didn’t hear?” “Why was I unable to end this?” (June 7, 2012) and in the visitor books: “I’m leaving this place asking myself: where was I during those years?” (January 20, 2008). Repression was centralized in the Casino but thousands of ESMA’s students and workers coexisted with the horror. Some were direct accomplices, like “the greens,” teenage officers-in-training who performed tasks ranging from serving as wardens to raping prisoners. A few former ESMA workers have returned to tour the premises, made statements about those years, and even left contact information for sharing their experiences. One wrote in the visitor book, “I’m an Argentinean who worked in ESMA in 1979…. Today, after so many years, I came back and toured the buildings where they tortured people. I felt pain, because I cannot believe that these things happened” (August, 1, 2008).

Praising Argentina’s memory and human rights policies

Most visitors praised Argentina’s human rights policies, including ESMA’s conversion into a memorial site, the tour’s design and the professionalism of the guides. Comments in the visitor books commended Argentina as a model to follow: “There are not enough words to express how extraordinary is this work of the Space for Memory in Argentina; an example for the whole world!” (August 20, 2010). Visitors also highlighted the importance of designing memorial sites while pursuing justice, recognizing the limitations of memory initiatives that are not accompanied by official policies challenging impunity: “A model of how you rescue a country’s historical truth while simultaneously judging the dictatorship and torturers” (January 7, 2011). I noted an increase in appreciation for Presidents Nestor and Cristina Kirchner for their human rights policies, particularly from
young people. Several factors have contributed to challenging impunity for torturers, mainly four decades of constant struggle on the part of human rights activists, but many visitors recognize the Kirchners’ commitment to human rights matters related to state terrorism.

During guided tours, multiple narratives came together to co-author the visit script. These interactions generated a dialogical space for the ongoing transmission and reconstruction of memories, illustrating the dynamics of remembering communally through exchanges. Regardless of the site’s design and the guides’ narratives, each ESMA visit was unique and unpredictable.

“UNDER CONSTRUCTION” PHASE (OCTOBER 2014–MAY 2015)

When I landed in Buenos Aires in April 2015, the Casino was closed for remodeling. For seven months, the guided visits took on a transitional format. The initial gathering of the group, introductions and background information about state terrorism and ESMA remained the same. But then, rather than following the prisoners’ route, the groups toured areas of the compound where other buildings linked to the repression are located. The visit ended in the main salon of the Four Columns building, around a large-scale model of the Casino so that visitors could see its layout and visualize where prisoners were housed, tortured and performed forced labor. On these tours, visitors walked through large open spaces, which often led the groups to disperse, allowing fewer conversations; standing with a group of twenty-five people observing an architectural model did not match the experience of being inside the Casino.

Two weeks before the new Site of Memory Museum’s inauguration, I interviewed Valeria Barbuto, who represented human rights organizations at the public institution that administers the Ex-ESMA compound. She explained the goals that had guided the redesign of the site, what they were doing with the building and why. She also gave me details about the remodeling and the new permanent exhibition, which I summarize below.28

In 2012 administrators began discussions about creating an exhibition in the Casino and turning it into a site museum.29 They invited museologist Alejandra Naftal to lead the project and organized a team of professionals to refurbish the building and install museological interven-
tions. The project was a joint initiative of human rights organizations, the human rights secretariat and the nation’s president. The idea was to develop strategies to facilitate communication with younger generations through a dynamic exhibit with targeted content, language and formatting. Another objective was to increase the number of visitors; Phase 1’s guided visit format was unable to accommodate more than twenty-five thousand visitors per year. The planning team looked for ways to shorten the duration of visits to the museum from the average of three hours visitors spent at the site during Phase 1. They also wanted to change the format of the visit so that visitors could come at any time. This would require strategies to allow those with little knowledge of the historical period to visit the museum without guides.

The reimagining of the museum required adherence to certain guidelines. For example, the building cannot be altered because it can still be used as evidence in court, so the team chose to install large screens and signs to display text and videos. These were held in place by movable cement bases that did not require perforating the walls. The team decided not to display replicas of how the Casino looked when it functioned as a torture center. The new ways of visiting also offered visitors different itineraries that did not lead them along the survivors’ route of Phase 1.

Eight months passed before I returned to Buenos Aires and toured the remodeled site, though I had imagined it through Barbuto’s description and seen it online via coverage of the new museum’s inauguration.

PHASE 2: SITE OF MEMORY MUSEUM (MAY 2015–PRESENT)

I first visited the new Site of Memory Museum at the Casino in December 2015; I made seven more visits in 2015, 2016 and 2017. I checked the visitors’ books in December 2015 and December 2016 and I also regularly checked the museum’s Facebook page and the Ex-ESMA compound website, as well as receiving periodical notifications about the activities organized there. In December 2016 I interviewed Alejandra Naftal, the museologist who had led the remodeling of the building and the curation of the permanent exhibit, who was now the director of the new museum.

Below, I describe how the site has been modified and analyze how these changes shape interactions between the visitors and the new site. I
follow with an account of the site administrators’ perceptions about the new site’s performance. I then discuss preliminary findings about visitors’ experiences of the new site.

How is the new site different from the previous site?

The open spaces that characterized the building during Phase 1 were filled with museological interventions and interpretative devices providing information about state terrorism and the crimes committed at ESMA. Videos, panels, screens and audio recordings were installed throughout the building to talk to the visitors. People can choose to visit the Casino by themselves, opt for a guided visit or join parts of a tour and continue on their own. There are audio guides in Spanish, English and Portuguese (a downloadable app). Visitors no longer walk through deserted rooms or fill in blanks based solely on their previous knowledge, the narration of the guides and the stories other visitors share.

Although alterations to the building were not legally permitted, a wooden walkway for visitors was installed in Capucha to protect the floor. The floor also features a display case demarcating a small space called a “cucha” (an expression used to refer to a dog’s “bed”), which served as each prisoner’s cell and where they slept on a thin foam mattress—deviating from the “no replicas” premise. Large monitors screen videos, mostly of testimonies at the ESMA trials (those held in 1985 and the current ones). Other interventions include photos projected on the walls to recreate how the space looked while functioning as a torture center. For example, in the “pañol” (storeroom) area, where repressors stockpiled goods stolen from their victims, we see images of loads of clothes, furniture, electronics, refrigerators and other spoils of that war.

Guided visits start in a large room with giant images projected on the walls. These provide historical background information about state terrorism and Argentina’s political history from the first decade of the twentieth century up to 1983, when the country returned to civilian rule. Images show demonstrations, police repression, military coups, and statistics of disappearances, stolen babies, unemployment and foreign debt edited together in a fast-paced music-video style accompanied by a loud soundtrack. While this may be an appropriate approach for younger generations, others find it confusing and hard to follow. One review posted
on April 14, 2017, on the museum’s Facebook page warns others about “much sonorous contamination” in the museum because visitors must try to read texts and listen to the guide while the videos are playing very loudly. This is the only such criticism in a total of eighty reviews as of July 2018, however, which suggests that the format suits most people or at least is not a concern that prompts visitors to write comments. Guided visits end in another lecture hall, where projected images provide information and statistics about ongoing trials, including photos of the accused, the crimes they committed and details about those sentenced and serving time. The editing and soundtrack of these images mirror those of the introductory video. These entry and exit projections play at regular intervals, allowing all visitors to watch them several times.

Consistent with the objective of increasing the number of visitors, the new museum is open Tuesday to Sunday (weekends were not included during Phase 1). There are four guided tours per day on weekdays and three per day during weekends. Regular hours are complemented by a special tour held on the last Saturday of each month at five in the afternoon. The “5 p.m. visit” is led by a special guest, usually someone recognized for their work in human rights and/or their actions related to the events of state terrorism and ESMA. The guest guides include survivors, those born at the site (now in their late thirties/early forties), relatives of the disappeared, writers, journalists, lawyers and artists. I have not participated in any of the “5 p.m. visits,” but they seem to mirror the guided tours offered during Phase 1; a newspaper article about these visits labeled them “guided performances.” Naftal commented that many interesting things happened during these visits and I am intrigued by the interactions that may develop. Based on the videos posted on Facebook, dialogue seems to be minimal during these visits, if it happens at all. People are silent, listening attentively to the speaker(s). But we cannot analyze the dynamics of these visits on the basis of a few video clips. I wonder if horizontal/equal power conversations occur during these events, as they did in Phase 1, or if these may be limited by the audience’s reverence for the authority and aura of those leading the visit.

The museum organizes an array of activities and installations, such as a photo exhibition titled, “About ESMA: Screenings on the Wall,” in which photographers displayed images on the Casino’s interior walls and participated in a panel discussion to mark the exhibition’s closing
The events are another example of interventions that generate forums for discussion.

How do these changes shape the interactions between the visitors and the site?

My eight visits to the museum included individual and guided tours, and tours that combined both styles. My first visit took place seven months after the museum opened, during the first month of President Macri’s administration; my final visit was made two and a half years after the museum opened. I identified the following differences in my visits to the new museum from my visits during Phase 1.

In the museum’s new incarnation, the guides keep a low profile and provide less information. This is consistent with the planners’ directive to reduce guides’ interventions and let videos, texts and recordings do the talking. The museological interventions (panels, signs, screens) have reduced the open physical spaces. At times, visitors now walk through narrow corridors; there is less room for groups to gather and conversations to form. This results in a shrinking of the dialogical spaces. Visitors to the new museum are more passive, reading texts in silence and asking fewer questions. The conversations between visitors are minimal and there are fewer interactions between visitors and guides. There are also fewer observable instances of visitors evoking the past together or helping each other remember. Reduced dialogue means no breaking of silences or sharing of stories, no spaces for debating memories and no stages for performing memory. Without the kind of group introductions present in Phase 1, fellow visitors and guides do not know who the people are who come to the museum, why they are there or what expectations they have for their visit. This means less information about visitors’ entrance narratives and agendas. Furthermore, eliminating the option of following the survivors’ route, an itinerary that can only exist in a site museum or a replica of that site, puts distance between visitors and the events that happened there. This may shape visitors’ perceptions of the prisoners’ ordeal, resulting in a more mediated way of relating to the events that weakens the power of the site museum.

I also observed that the new museum offers previously unavailable possibilities. It is open more often, provides a greater variety of ways to
visit and no longer requires advance booking. A person can tour the site in silence, without listening to a guide, and find information in panels, videos and audio recordings. This type of tour offers visitors an official uniform script that is not altered by interventions from the guide or other visitors. Visitors can repeat their visit, skip areas or return to specific spots, deciding for themselves what to see and what to ignore. The videos include key information, such as the trials testimonies, which are particularly valuable as the only other way to access these testimonies is to attend the hearings or watch broadcast clips.

One main addition is the “5 p.m. visit,” which, as noted, includes the opportunity to tour the site accompanied by ESMA survivors and Nietos (grandchildren, that is, the children of desaparecidos, who had been born at ESMA and other torture centers, stolen by the dictatorship and eventually found and recuperated by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo). Except during some special visits, the regular ESMA guides were/are not survivors, unlike at other memorial sites/museums such as Villa Grimaldi in Chile. The video clips of a visit led by twenty survivors in August 2017 shows the powerful moment when they introduced themselves, each stating their name, the date of abduction and the period during which they had been disappeared at ESMA. In sharing their memories, they made explicit references to the building and the routes they took: “Everybody who arrived entered through that door; cars stopped there.” “In this basement, they tortured us and we performed slave labor.” According to the video, the visit led by several Nietos was equally powerful. In remembering what happened to them and their parents, they also made strong links with the space, as one man who had been born at ESMA noted: “The place that connects me more with this history and my mom is this little room where my mom was; the only three days that I spent with my mom were here.” From the videos it seems that these tours attract many visitors (between seventy and one hundred). Posting the videos on Facebook allows the wider public to virtually follow these special tours with survivors.

How do Museum administrators assess the new site’s effectiveness?

When I interviewed Alejandra Naftal, the museum had been open for a year and a half. We discussed the rationale for the changes to the museum site, script and visits’ format. I asked how the museum’s administrators
assessed its performance; we discussed the project’s successes and challenges, potential solutions to problems that have arisen and future plans.34

Curators’ intentions

Naftal explained that one objective of the museum remodeling was to institutionalize international standards for the site that would help it to denounce state terrorism and avoid propaganda. Visitors, including prejudiced ones, would leave the new ESMA without any doubt that people had been systematically tortured and killed there. For Naftal, this was not achieved during Phase 1, when the tours were highly dependent on each guide and lacked a strong institutional component. Further research can assess what visitors take with them when they leave, but participants in the Phase 1 guided visits seemed convinced of the atrocities committed at ESMA. By installing museological interventions, the site gained an institutional character and consolidated a status that is difficult to dismantle. However, memorialization and the institutionalization of memory pose challenges. Discussing the impact of memorials, Stavans wonders about the danger “when collective memory is institutionalized” and questions “who is in charge of this institutionalization.”35 In ESMA’s case, this institutionalization was led by the administration of President Cristina Kirchner.

The museum’s design and script were the subject of many debates and disagreements, including between the participant human rights organizations and the government. The proposal was revised several times before consensus was reached, but this is not surprising as Argentine human rights organizations and activists are heterogeneous and many distinct memory groups exist within them.36 While there might be agreement about what happened and the need for truth and justice, what is remembered and how it is remembered will always be contested.

The redesign sought to prevent mirroring some of the Shoah’s memorialization trends and the Disneyfication of the space. Indeed, the trivialization of memory initiatives is a concern; superficial memory-themed parks, as Stavans notes, risk turning “suffering into tourist kitsch.”37 The danger of turning the ESMA compound into a Disney-like theme park was also a concern voiced by those critical of the project, some ESMA survivors included.38 Site administrators are pleased with the changes and feel their objectives have been met. For the administrators, the introductory video is compelling, positioning the visitors to understand the historical context
that surrounds the museum. Interestingly, Naftal linked this video’s effects with the visitors’ behavior; after watching the video, people are subdued and respectful. This comment contrasts with analysis of people’s behavior at other memorials, such as visitors sunbathing at Berlin’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. I should mention that visitors’ reverent attitudes during Phase 1 suggest that the site itself inspired respect, and I never witnessed impolite behavior.

The administrators intended the site to be a place for homage and reparation and a place of reflection for the victims, their relatives and those committed to the history, as well as for Argentineans who have no idea of what happened at ESMA. The museum was conceptualized and designed with younger generations in mind because this is an audience mainly comprised of those without direct experience of state terrorism. Decisions about changes to the site were guided by new parameters and contexts. New generations of visitors bring new expectations and entrance narratives, shaped by age, gender, social class, education and prior knowledge about the issues. These younger visitors have more distance from the events of state terrorism and less contact with those who lived under it. Public knowledge about this time in the country’s history is increasingly mediated.

The new visit script and its potential effects on visitors

The new site is clearly now a museum and no longer a center for torture and extermination. Naftal believes that people do not need to come to ESMA to learn about what happened; for that, they can read a book or watch a movie. They come to ESMA to have an experience, to embody the memories that pervade the country’s history. According to Naftal, empty spaces do not help visitors have an embodied experience. Dialogue is needed and “walls don’t talk.” These statements contradict the comments of some visitors who noted that visiting the Casino was part of their learning process—“Coming here was the only thing I was missing to fully understand the horror,” wrote one visitor in the visitor book (September 13, 2010)—and, highlighting the power of empty space, one visitor I interviewed explained: “What’s impressive is that they didn’t touch anything … it allows more freedom to your imagination and thoughts” (January 22, 2015). I agree with Naftal, however, on the need for dialogue, which was central to visits during Phase 1. What has changed in
Phase 2 is the way the dialogue occurs. Images, sounds and panels have reduced dialogical spaces but guarantee that when dialogue does occur, it is with an institutionalized and uniform message, defined by those who implemented the changes to institutionalize the site.

Naftal noted that during Phase 1 the guides did the talking, not the empty space. She referred to dialogue between visitors as an “assembly,” which was something that administrators sought to eliminate. She explained that certain visitors tended to dominate the group and, as a result, instead of listening to a guide, people had to listen to what everybody said. Naftal argued that the museum is a public institution supported by the state’s commitment to justice, so it must act as an official representation of what happened there. People can talk afterwards, in their homes, workplaces or schools. This may be the case, but it is not clear what effect this policy has on those who visit by themselves and do not have spaces for discussion or people with whom to share their experience. Phase 1 visits created that space. The new site does not allow reflections and conversations, either before or after the visit. The fact that visitors’ voices do not have space to interact with the museum’s official narrative discourages discussion of this narrative and the incorporation of additional knowledge and alternative stories.

Naftal also discussed perceived changes in visitors’ responses under “Macrismo” (the political ideology of President Macri). She argued that some people identified the site as a stronghold of the “Montoneros Kirchneristas” (an allusion to associations between the Kirchners’ administrations and the Peronist left’s support for the Montoneros political organization, many members of which were disappeared at ESMA). These people, who evidently opposed the Kirchners, would probably have refrained from visiting the site before the renovations because of their feelings about the previous government and the space’s appearance. These comments indicate the benefits of institutionalization, which includes depoliticizing the space—a long-term goal aimed at minimizing ties with specific administrations and securing a perception of objectivity in relation to state terrorism. Since the institutionalization process took place during Cristina Kirchner’s administration, we should explore further whether the intention to detach the museum from ties with the Kirchners’ administrations was successful and how it influences those who now visit the site.
In the view of the museum’s administrators, the previous phase had played a very important and productive role in developing the site and the remodeling has improved on what was established in Phase 1. Although it is of course hard to know if all of the visitors understand what happened at ESMA, Naftal argues that all those who come to the site, for whatever reason, whether it is to tour the Capucha or listen to a survivor’s testimony, learn something. She contends that the information provided at the end of the visit about ongoing trials encourages visitors to believe that there is hope in justice. Administrators point to the success of the new site; it is receiving good word-of-mouth publicity and the number of visitors has increased. In its first three years (May 2015–May 2018), more than 130,000 people visited the museum. They included 30,561 high school students, 9,436 students from universities from Argentina and around the world, 29 members of embassies and consulates, and 9,871 visitors who participated in special activities such as temporary exhibits and the “5 p.m. visit.”

Researching visitors

Gathering information about visitors is a priority for museum administrators. Although researching publics is very expensive and data collection and analysis are labor intensive, administrators are conducting an “artisan” evaluation project based on information provided by the guides. After each visit, the guides prepare a data sheet about the group they led, its composition, what was observed and the most frequently asked questions. I was allowed access to some of these files. The data sheets allow for audience analysis and help administrators develop and adjust methods for data collection. They also help to assess the number and characteristics of visitors, such as individual vs. institutional visits, and guided vs. self-guided visits. Since demographic information is not requested of visitors, I assume that any data about gender, ages and nationality are based on the guides’ observations and/or what visitors shared during their visits. This informs decisions about the role of guides as well as letting administrators see what types of visitors come during weekdays as opposed to the weekends. While guides now have less active roles, they are still gathering useful data about visitors.

The training the guides now receive is directly linked to the institutionalization of the site. Arguing that guides are part of the exhibit, Naftal
highlighted the need to professionalize this group of fifteen (as of 2016) very committed young women and men. They had been working for over a year on an agreed-upon script and, from what I observed, they mainly follow the outline offered by the signs, screens and videos and answer visitors’ questions. Administrators profiled each guide to determine how best to match them with the demographic groups that visited the site. In 2016 Naftal was considering bringing in coaches to instruct the guides in various aspects of communicating with visitors—from voice modulation, when to stand up and when to speak or be silent, to how to adapt the material to different groups of people.

What do visitors say about their experience?

My own information about how visiting ESMA affected visitors came primarily from publicly shared comments in the museum’s visitor books and on its Facebook page. Overall, these comments were similar to the ones that appeared during the years of Phase 1, which suggests that the renovations have not significantly changed the experience of visiting the space. In other words, the new museum script triggers reactions comparable to those triggered by the previous script. This finding points to the complexity of decoding patterns, or how people make meaning of the messages encoded in texts. It further calls for more research about the relationship between the texts (the museological interventions), the visit format and the experiences that visitors share via this medium. Some comments are made by individuals and some are left by groups from institutions and organizations. Recurrent themes include: praise for the site, appreciation of the guides’ work, homages to the disappeared, recognition of Argentina’s policies of memory, truth and justice as examples to follow, sharing of feelings while touring spaces of terror, promises of “never again” and reflections and questions about how this horror was possible. However, compared with comments posted in the first years, there are fewer personalized homages and intimate reflections. There are now few, if any, conversations with the dead and the disappeared. This could be partially because the site is no longer a memorial space where, citing Sturken again, “the dead can be spoken to.” It also suggests that those who experienced the dictatorship or have closer ties with what happened at ESMA have already made their visit(s) or may visit again but do not write comments. The initial period...
of mourning and personal encounters may be over. Years have passed and there has been an evolution in contexts and visitors.

The museum has its own website. At first, it shared a website with all the institutions located at the Ex-ESMA Space for Memory and Human Rights. In my view, this minimized the museum’s online presence; it became just one institution among many. Posts on the museum’s Facebook page are mainly announcements of the activities they organize followed by photos and videos of these events. As of July 12, 2018, there were 12,439 “Likes,” and 12,648 “Follows,” and 80 “Reviews,” many of these without comments (comparable to “Likes”). Those with messages offer rich information about visitors’ experiences, particularly about emotions felt during the guided “5 p.m. visits” offered on the last Saturday of the month. Although there is not yet much interaction between people responding to posts and creating threads, this may become a new space for people to talk. Another emerging source for visitors’ comments are websites such as TripAdvisor, which lists the ex-ESMA in “Things to do in Buenos Aires.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT/CONCLUSIONS

The modified site, new script and visit format mark a major change from the previous site, script and visit format. The space now reflects the project’s goals, including concern about future generations, the need to consider changes in the visiting public and the evolving political and cultural contexts.

Phase 1 offered a space in which perfect strangers, people who had just met and might never see each other again, were able to write memories together. The visitors openly engaged in the activity of reminiscence or, as Ricoeur described, people evoked the past together, with one person’s memories “serving as reminder for the memory of others.” That space for incorporating multiple narratives and co-authoring the script is gone. But there are other spaces where visitors can discuss their experiences, such as at home, in the workplace or at school and digital spaces. There are now fewer observable interactions among visitors and between visitors and guides. Nonetheless, there are new ways to observe visitors’ behaviors—for example, where do visitors stop? To what do they pay attention? When are they distracted? To which places do they return? Where do they take...
photos, including selfies, a trend that is gaining popularity? The “5 p.m. visits” are an opportunity to observe visitors’ behavior and how interaction with a special guide affects their ways of relating to the site and what is asked and shared. Other activities, such as the photo exhibition mentioned above or panels, also bring people to the museum and have the potential to generate spaces for discussing this past. Without a doubt, the number of visitors has increased, which was evident on each of my visits as well as in the museum’s statistics.

The Ex-ESMA Space for Memory and Human Rights compound houses several institutions including the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, H.I.J.O.S. (organization of daughters and sons of desaparecidos, political activists, and people forced into exile during the Argentine dictatorship), the Cultural Center Haroldo Conti, the National Archive of Memory and the Malvinas Museum. Over the years, there has been an increase in the activities organized by these institutions, which means that the new museum at the Casino may become confused with other buildings and no longer be the main referent for the compound. People use the space in different ways. Musical events, debates or film screenings attract people who may approach or ignore the headquarters of the repression. As one guide observed in 2010: “beyond the Casino itself, people experience the compound as a whole.” She was concerned about the coexistence of sites that specifically embody the horror of the past alongside those being renovated and given new meanings, often moving from repression and pain to creation and joy. The resignifying of buildings and the processes through which signifiers are loaded with new signifieds seem likely to affect interactions with the memory museum and its script.

Regardless of the specifics of the museum’s script, visitors become vicarious witnesses to the crimes committed at ESMA. They are encouraged to imagine the pain and suffering of those who were tortured, assassinated and disappeared there. There is a responsibility that witnesses are called to assume. As secondary witnesses of the horror, what do they do with their knowledge? Do they share it? Do visits shift ways of thinking and prompt actions? The answers depend on the context, particularly the visitor’s distance from state terrorism events. Avery Gordon writes of the presence of “ghosts” who haunt us and warn us that “what’s been concealed is
very much alive and present.” For many of us, thousands of disappeared are still a very vivid presence. But what about the younger generation and future generations? As time goes by, it is up to them to deal with the responsibility of witnessing because “[it] is the vicarious witness that carries the memory of the trauma event into the future when all known survivors are gone.” It is essential that we determine the best way for the memorial museum to generate dialogue with these future generations.

I previously addressed the institutionalization of the space and the reasons behind the redesign of the site. In these times of evolving official policies of truth, memory and justice, will ESMA become an untouchable bastion for the promotion and defense of human rights? Does institutionalization secure independence from fluctuating political environments? What happens when the generational distance increases, when there is only the institutionalized script with few other sources for memories because the witness generation is gone?

As the new museum suggests, the original project, developed when the navy was evicted, was different from what has recently evolved and what may be approved in the future. The new museum represents the institutionalized memorialization of the space; a process that, as noted, was subject to some disagreement. There will always be tensions in the ways Argentineans remember. What will remain constant is that, regardless of authorial intentions, museological interventions, museum scripts and changes in the visit formats, visitors will always have the last word. They know what happens to them during the visit and what they take home when they leave.

In a 2006 discussion of memorials/museums and referring to ESMA, Horst Hoheisel, the well-known designer of monuments and counter-monuments, argued that the best ESMA memorial would be to spend some years debating what should be done there. This would avoid a rush to design something shaped by political ideology and interests. Hoheisel was obviously pointing to the risks of institutionalization. More than a decade has passed since his remarks and the Casino’s opening to the general public, and almost five years have passed since the inauguration of the new museum. Can we assume that this institutionalization of memory will remain untouched and unchallenged? Institutionalization does not guarantee that future debates will not prompt changes. It is likely that the museum’s
official narrative will face challenges in the future, just as other memory museums have been subject to such discussion and potential revision.46

If the Site of Memory museum aims to preserve the memory of events of state terrorism and educate younger generations, administrators need to continuously assess how these goals are being achieved and make modifications to ensure that ESMA continues to meet its goals as an institution for the effective transmission and (re)construction of memories. This will include continually developing activities that complement and even question the permanent exhibit script. These activities may include special exhibitions or workshops, particularly ones that generate spaces for dialogue and discussion and appeal to younger generations. Memory construction is a continuing and open-ended process. It is critically important to maintain an awareness of tensions and fissures, listen to different voices, accept that new interactions between visitors may result in new scripts and experiences, and to leave the debates open to avoid the fossilization of an official memory.

NOTES

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5. Thirteen human rights organizations that denounced Macri administration policies asked the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (CIDH) for a public hearing, which took place on October 24, 2017. The organizations raised issues ranging from official discourses that denied and relativized state terrorism’s magnitude to the weakening and dismantling of agencies contributing to judicial investigations—e.g., the elimination of a division working in children’s appropriations (term used to refer to the stealing of an estimated 500 children, most of them babies born in captivity from political prisoners who were then disappeared. The children were given to military families, supporters of the regime, or in adoption), and a reduction in the number of archival workers researching armed forces’ documents that provided key information for reports and expert witnesses. See, “Informe sobre el proceso de Memoria Verdad y Justicia en la Argentina,” https://www.cels.org.ar/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Informe-proceso-de-MVJ-2017.pdf; Video of the CIDH hearing, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-rQigATaic (both accessed June 26, 2018).

6. For a catalog of Buenos Aires sites connected to memories of state terrorism (e.g., memorials, murals), see Max Page, ed., Memories of Buenos Aires: Signs of State Terrorism in Argentina (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), an edited translation of a publication from the organization Memoria Abierta (http://memoriaabierta.org.ar/wp/) (accessed June 10, 2016).


centration Camps: Imagining the Trauma of Another,” *Traumatology* 11, no. 3 (2005): 171–87; Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage*.


22. Author’s interviews with Ana Maria Careaga, former director of Instituto Espacio para la Memoria (IEM), June 8, 2010, and August 4, 2011, IEM, Buenos Aires.

23. Statistics provided by IEM on September 28, 2010, via email to author; includes visitors from 2005, 2006 and part of 2007 when the Casino was not yet open to the general public.
24. Author’s interviews with Ex-ESMA guides: Andrés, Luz, Mariana, Mariano, Pablo, members of Equipo de Guías del Espacio para la Memoria, June 10, 2010, IEM, Buenos Aires. All the cited information about the guides is from these interviews.


28. Author’s interview with Valeria Barbuto, representative of the Public Institution Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights that administers the ex-ESMA, April 28, 2015, Ex-ESMA, Buenos Aires.

29. Talks about a memory museum were not new. As early as 1999, the Memoria Abierta organization coordinated a symposium to discuss a future museum. Other meetings took place in 2004, 2006, and 2007. In 2011, the Instituto Espacio para la Memoria and the Sociedad Central de Arquitectos launched a contest seeking proposals for projects to adapt the Four Columns building to house a museum.


33. In July 2018 the video of the visit led by survivors had 2,200 views, and the one led by grandchildren 1,100.

34. Author’s interviews with Alejandra Naftal, director of Museo Sitio de Memoria ESMA, December 20, 2016, Ex-ESMA, Buenos Aires. All information provided by Naftal is from this interview.


36. For example, not all chapters of H.I.J.O.S hold the same opinions about memory policies; there are two separate organizations of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo; not all ESMA survivors, relatives of the disappeared or human rights organizations attended the inauguration of the new museum.


40. Museo Sitio de Memoria ESMA, July 2018 Newsletter (distributed by email).
41. Mentioned in Photo Exhibit panel, December 17, 2016.
42. For example, I scheduled an interview with a visitor and discovered that he had visited ESMA many times but never entered the Casino.
44. Keats, “Vicarious Witnessing,” 175.
46. Recent museums have faced and/or are facing challenges to their original scripts. The cases of the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Santiago, Chile, and Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social in Lima, Perú were discussed, respectively, at the seminar “Villa Grimaldi y el debate de los museos de memoria,” Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, July 13–14, 2011, and at two workshops at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú, Lima, June 13 and 15, 2018.

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