The Architectural History of Disappearance: Rebuilding Memory Sites in the Southern Cone

The architectural history of the clandestine detention and torture center is a history often concerned more with the future than with the past. For torture centers are often not built as such but instead come to occupy buildings already in use for other purposes. During Spain’s Civil War (1936–39), checas were established, for example, in the basement of the Círculo de Bellas Artes building and in the Atocha train station in the center of Madrid, in convents and private residences in downtown Barcelona, or in churches and parochial schools in Valencia. Early in the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–90), Chile set up detention and torture centers in the National Stadium in Santiago, in the requisitioned private estate of Villa Grimaldi on the outskirts of the city, and in the bellies of naval ships stationed off the coast of Valparaíso. And the military juntas that governed Argentina’s so-called Dirty War (1976–83) oversaw the conversion of a vast network of shop fronts, private residences, auto mechanic shops, factories, hospitals, and public and military schools into makeshift torture centers across the country. Because such sites are mostly ordinary spaces requisitioned for their capacity to fade into the background of the quotidian, they are possessed of varied histories predating, and largely unrelated to, their later use as torture centers. So the architectural history of the twentieth-century detention and torture center begins not with construction writ large but with the careful cultivation of coincidence and invisibility within an urban fabric. This, then, is the architectural history of disappearance.

But these beginnings outlive their political usefulness so that as wars end and dictatorships fall, communities and cities are faced with the question of what to do with buildings and spaces that have housed torture and, particularly in the case of Latin American detention centers, facilitated the enforced disappearance of thousands. Should they work to render visible what was “given-to-be-invisible” or instead, in the name of national unity, strive to minimize the publicity afforded the atrocities these buildings contained? Should these sites remain spaces of exception or be returned to the functioning of the everyday? Should the spaces of torture be memorialized, and if so, to whose memory should they be faithful? What responsibilities do new, democratic governments bear for funding the excavation, restoration, “museumification,” or repurposing of these buildings? And who—in what forum, by what means, within what time period—should be charged with resolving these complicated considerations? The debates attempting to answer some of these questions and put in place practical solutions happen as much in public today as the establishment of these spaces happened historically in secret. Such debates often take place in the...
local or national news; involve architectural competitions, community meetings, government votes, or scholarly discussion; and they bring into conversation competing memories, ideologies, and plans for the future of a nation. The records of these debates reveal that the architectural history of the clandestine detention and torture center is shaped in a present—that is grounded in the desire to reconstruct the darkest parts of a national past in order to inform what kind of future histories will prove the fundament of a “national imaginary.” So the history at stake here is very much a future project, one predicated as much on incompleteness as on action and visible results.

The architectural history of the torture center follows the logic of the incomplete in architectural practice that Andrew Benjamin proposes in *Architectural Philosophy*. In reference to the logic underpinning the construction of Holocaust memorials, he makes the case for “a formal architectural presence that becomes instantiation of the incomplete” in the memorial, and I would add to this, the memory site. The memorial as material manifestation of this incompleteness allows the structure to communicate its own question—the question of how to remember—which, in turn, allows for the generation of memory. The architectural and memorial practices determining the fate of the clandestine detention and torture center enact, indeed must enact, the openness of the questions that call for its reconstruction in the first place. In this way, the contemporary debates in the Southern Cone that take up the question of how to reclaim the spaces of torture make up an architectural history. As Benjamin writes, “The incomplete is not an abstract term. Its force lies in the fact that its field of operation is the already present interarticulation of function and form that defines the work of architecture.” Both architecture and memory are concerned, at the outset, with the incomplete, the open, and the relational.

The concerns about what to do with the spaces of torture are a critical part of the memory boom that has swept modern culture and a postmodern imaginary, at least since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, it has become a well-rehearsed proposition: we are by now so overwhelmed by our efforts to remember, memorialize, commemorate, and monumentalize that we are victims of what Andreas Huyssen identifies as a “hypertrophy of memory” and suffer “memory fatigue” even as we continue to turn to memory and its representation as a cipher for understanding the present. The symptoms are widespread in art, consumer culture, policy making, and certainly academic scholarship. In Huyssen’s estimation, our current obsession with memory is a symptom of a far greater cultural transition indicating that “our ways of thinking and living temporality itself are undergoing a significant shift” and signaling a possible new paradigm “of thinking about time and space, history and geography.” And here Huyssen—in the long shadow of Pierre Nora’s observation that *lieux de mémoire*, or memory sites, become central to a cultural imaginary only when *milieux de mémoire*, or environments that foster collective memory, have ceased to function—identifies the temporal preoccupations of memory as fundamental to how we conceive of, record, and make up space. We see this spatiotemporal relationship borne out in planning how to memorialize, repurpose, or abandon the spaces used for state-sponsored torture, where the desire to influence how the past is seen—literally, how it is made visible—in the future becomes a defining concern of the present.

But even where Huyssen and other scholars of memory studies recognize that “every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence,” scholarship on memory does not often explicitly broach the complications of what to do with the memory of absence itself. For absence is, in memory studies, generally invoked as constitutive of memory or as a remainder or by-product of memory work. But for those artists, activists, and scholars whose work takes up how to represent and memorialize the enforced bodily disappearances carried out by the military dictatorships governing Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, absence is not a remainder of memory work but rather the object itself of memory. And remembering or commemorating the absence that defines the political disappearance systematically generated in the clandestine detention and torture centers of the Southern Cone requires a particular set of memorial strategies. For memorializing death that has been acknowledged, confirmed, and afforded closure employs a different kind of memory work than that which manifested in the face of strategically disavowed and unconfirmed death. The former is a loss mourned; the second is a loss denied.

**The Door to Death Remains Open**

So how to remember, make space for, recuperate a crime against humanity, the very atrocity of which is predicated on denial, the withholding of knowledge and the possibility that nothing ever happened in the first place? The extralegal strategy of disappearance means that the government carrying out the crime denies knowledge of the whereabouts of the abducted person, rejects writs of habeas corpus, and officially disavows the systematic use of illegal detention, torture, and murder as tools of state repression. The concerns, then, accompanying the designs proposing what to do with the physical spaces that have facilitated disappearance...
have to attend to the aporia that lies at the core of disappearance: the door to death remains open. The consequences of the political structure of disappearance and unclosed mourning manifest themselves in the conversations and proposals generating ideas about what to do with these spaces populating the postdictatorial landscape of the Southern Cone.13 In particular, the constitutive irresolution of disappearance shows up in the temporal disjunctions and competing temporalities that emerge in the planning of the preservation, rehabilitation, or destruction of the clandestine detention and torture centers that proved central to the everyday operation of state terrorism under the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile from 1973 to 1990 and the military dictatorships governing Argentina from 1976 to 1983.

This article takes as its point of departure the difficult questions informing decisions about what to do with the spaces of disappearance marking the postdictatorial landscapes of Argentina and Chile. It aims to render legible what is at stake in constructing an architectural history of the torture centers at use under these recent dictatorships even as that history reveals itself to be very much a work in progress and the product of a multiplicity of competing voices, acts, and memorial strategies. Finally, the present article elucidates the ways in which the temporal disjunctions that manifest themselves in the proposals to recover the spaces of torture in the Southern Cone prove fundamental to understanding the political condition of disappearance and the complexities inherent in how to remember, memorialize, or make use of the spaces that housed the disappeared. For one of the central challenges in these proposals is how to conceive of a recovered space that allows the disappeared—the memory of the disappeared—to persist in a temporal register that does not confine them to a debilitating historical moment: that does not, in short, leave the disappeared out of time.

I will look at two proposals put forth as possible options for what to do with the clandestine detention and torture centers littering Argentina and Chile today. In different ways and in different contexts, both proposals confirm that segregating the spaces of torture from a community’s daily life keeps the disappeared at a historical and political remove and that affording these spaces a function allowing for a living memory reintegrates the disappeared into the social fabric from which the military dictatorships took such pains to erase them. The first proposal was presented in 2004 by the Asociación de Ex Detenidos Desaparecidos (Association of Former Disappeared Detainees, or AEDD) in response to a joint national and local call for ideas about what to do with the space of the former Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (Navy Mechanics School, or ESMA), the site of Argentina’s largest clandestine detention and torture center, situated on the northern coast of Buenos Aires (Figure 1). The second proposal I turn to was submitted by the architecture group AGC Concept Architectes (AGC) in collaboration with YH Arquitectos to the 2011–12 Open Architecture Competition “[UN]Restricted Access” that called for designs to reclaim retired military installations around the globe for the benefit of local communities. AGC put forth a proposal titled “Amphibia” to repurpose the space of the Escuela de Ingenieros Téjeras Verdes (Army Engineering School Téjeras Verdes), located on the coast about 70 miles outside Santiago, which under the early Pinochet dictatorship became a prison camp and torture training center for the National Intelligence Service (Figure 2).
The proposal from the AEDD, which I analyze within the larger context of the long and public debate surrounding the decision to turn the space of the former ESMA into the Espacio para la Memoria y para la Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights), provides an example of how the preservation and reconstruction of a torture center runs the risk of restricting the memory of the disappeared to a particular historical moment. Although AGC did not, in the end, win the Open Architecture Competition, their proposal serves as a useful counterexample by opening up the land that housed Tejas Verdes to a temporal register that allows for the integration of the memory of the disappeared into the functioning of everyday life and engagement with the natural world. Both proposals offer viable possibilities for the reclamation of these spaces of torture in the Southern Cone, but they cast the disappeared in different temporal registers. In their divergent designs, they represent competing interpretations of how best to use the built environment to remember the disappeared; how best to build an environment that renders torture visible, legible, and actionable; and finally, how best to use the environment to build a space that allows a community and a nation to engage with disappearance in a present that remains open to multiple temporalities.

The ESMA in the Postdictatorial Landscape

Against a backdrop of crippling economic devastation, increasingly violent civil unrest, and international isolation, “Isabelita” Perón, the third wife and compromised political successor of deceased Argentine president Juan Domingo Perón, was ousted from the office of the presidency in March 1976 by a military junta headed up by Army General Jorge Rafael Videla, who would become the de facto president of the country in the ensuing days.14 The Videla junta was the first in a succession of juntas that governed Argentina by military rule until December 1983, with the aim, particularly in the early years of the dictatorship, of stemming what was deemed by the new government to be a tide of political and social subversion that threatened the traditions of “Western, Christian civilization.” The dictatorship's social
platform, El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (Process of National Reorganization), included the illegal and disavowed detention, torture, and murder of approximately thirty thousand people before it met a crumbling end in the disastrous Malvinas War in the spring of 1982. Democratic elections were held at the end of 1983 and marked the beginning of the long and complex process of national unity in the aftermath of seven years of state-sponsored terrorism, an effort still occupying Argentina today.

At the heart of this attempt at national reconciliation is the debate surrounding the fate of the space of the former ESMA.15 A complex of thirty-four buildings housed on seventeen acres just outside the center of the nation’s capital, the ESMA is the largest and most well recognized of the more than five hundred clandestine torture and detention centers set up by the dictatorship during Argentina’s Dirty War.16 Often called the Argentine Auschwitz, the installation served as the operational center of the military’s national network of torture centers and concentration camps and offered slim possibility for its victims to emerge alive.17 By the time of the coup in 1976, the school was already being used as a clandestine detention and torture center that would facilitate the systematic disappearance of approximately 5,000 victims, only about 150 of whom survived the daily threat of death and “transport” by the now-infamous death flights that disposed of victims, whether dead or alive, by dropping them into the Río de la Plata or the Atlantic Ocean.18

The ESMA has a complicated postdictatorial history. In 1998, President Carlos Menem decreed that the complex be razed in order to build a park that would serve as a monument to “national unity,” but that move was thwarted by opposition from various human rights organizations because of the possibility it would all too swiftly cover over human rights abuses committed by the recent dictatorships.19 Indeed, a successful lawsuit was brought against the government by several human rights groups to prevent Menem’s planned demolition of the ESMA. The ruling of Judge Osvaldo Guglielmino stated that the complex should be preserved in its entirety to protect potential evidence proving the state crimes of the Dirty War.20 In 1999, military officials, including the minister of defense, expressed their opposition to the construction of a museum on the ESMA site, plans for which had been proposed as far back as the late 1980s and indeed approved by the city legislature in 1996.21 The early 2000s saw first the formation and the disbanding (due to internal dispute) of the Comisión de Trabajo para la Fundación del Museo de la Memoria (Working Commission for the Foundation of the Memory Museum) and then the creation of the current Instituto Espacio para la Memoria (Space for Memory Institute, or IEM), now housed on the ESMA site.22 When the now-deceased Argentine president Néstor Kirchner handed the ESMA over to the city government in 2004 to establish what would be called the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, he told the Argentine nation, “I come to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the national government for the embarrassment of having silenced, during twenty years of democracy, so many atrocities.”23 Despite the official apology—for indeed it proved a politically divisive admission—three more years would pass before the navy abandoned the premises and even then did so only after altering or wrecking the buildings on-site to prevent their easy transformation into usable space by the incoming human rights organizations.24

When Kirchner decreed the complex a memory site, its premises were handed over to a coalition of local, national, and international human rights organizations; an advisory board comprising ESMA survivors; and an executive board with representatives from city and state governments.25 The memory site is populated by these diverse groups all working on behalf of human rights but with each also fostering its own political and social agenda. The IEM occupies the buildings that were used to house or torture detainees during the dictatorship or were in some way related to the life of the camp. These include the main building, known as Cuatro Columnas; the Casino de Oficiales, or Officers’ Club, where detainees and torture victims were held and from where they were transported to the death flights; the Pabellón Coy, standing just beyond the entrance; the infirmary; and toward the back of the complex, the mechanics’ garage and the building known as the Imprenta, or printshop.

As the layout of the Space for Memory Institute shows, the IEM shares the complex with various other entities, among them UNESCO, which hosts a graduate program in human rights studies; the two branches of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (the original group split in 1986); the National Memory Archive, which oversees the Latin American Initiative for the Identification of Persons in collaboration with the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF); the Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti, which features exhibition and educational spaces for literature and the visual and performing arts; and H.I.J.O.S., the association of children of the disappeared, who run a space for social and political activism (Figure 3). As a Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, the former ESMA site fulfills its promise. But the space of the IEM, particularly what to do with the nucleus of the camp, the Casino de Oficiales, remains the focal point of much public debate that serves as a record of how, today, the architectural history of the clandestine detention and torture center...
is being constructed and also as an example of the competing temporalities that draft the disappeared as their memory becomes, variously, historical object or historical agent.

The ESMA Debate

The central pavilion of the ESMA, or Cuatro Columnas, is today the headquarters of the IEM and houses a permanent exposition on state terror.26 The other buildings, with the exception of the Casino de Oficiales, house projects related to the preservation and dissemination of materials documenting the memory of state terror. But the Casino de Oficiales has been left as a historical site (Figure 4). The space has not been rehabilitated; the reconstruction the military undertook in September 1979 to cover up evidence of the camp in advance of a visit from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States has not been undone. Minimal informational signs and survivor testimonies are on display to help visitors, who must prepare for a guided tour, to navigate the space (Figure 5).

The Casino de Oficiales is a three-story building with a basement and attic.27 During the dictatorship, detainees were held on the third floor as well as in the basement and an attic known as the Capucha, or “hood,” because prisoners were generally hooded in captivity. The Capucha comprised cells, very low cubic spaces under the rafters of the attic where detainees were kept on mattresses, a room for pregnant detainees, a kitchen, and bathrooms. There was also a storage room to hold the stolen belongings of the disappeared and, eventually, a series of small rooms known as the Pecera, or “fishbowl,” allocated for a press office, library, and workspace where selected detainees would write materials, produce photographs, and maintain archives on behalf of the government. The basement housed rooms for torture, as did a smaller second attic used by the military’s intelligence services, known as Capuchita. The first floor of the building was the ESMA’s intelligence center, and the second and third floors had dormitories for the officers assigned to the Grupo de Tarea, or Task Unit 3.3.2, which was assigned to the ESMA. The organization of the building reveals that the officers were living in close proximity to the disappeared, making it impossible to have been assigned to the ESMA and remain unaware of the space’s use as a clandestine detention and torture center.

The question of what to do with the Casino de Oficiales as well as the ancillary buildings on the ESMA site used in the housing and murder of detainees became a matter of great public interest after Kirchner’s proclamation that the
space would be turned into a memory site (Figure 6). In June 2004, a bipartite commission of the City of Buenos Aires and the president of the nation issued a national call for proposals for the construction of the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights. “In order to guarantee the widest possible participation and stimulate debate,” the call invited proposals from nongovernmental human rights organizations, families of victims, people who had been detained in the ESMA or elsewhere, and a host of other civic organizations including colleges, educational institutions, unions, memory commissions, neighborhood associations, and student centers.28

The commission received numerous proposals for what to do with the space and installations of the ESMA.29 In his article “Returning to the Site of Horror: On the Reclaiming of Clandestine Concentration Camps in Argentina,” Jens Andermann defines the central concerns of the ESMA debate to be whether the entire ESMA site or only those spaces that made up the concentration camp should be memorialized; whether other state or military installations should continue to function on the site; and whether the memorialization of the space should focus only on the camp or also foreground the complex social and political history and legacy of the dictatorship and the revolutionary struggle that opposed it.30 I would further refine this summary to include the debate over the pedagogical function of the space, a matter intimately tied to the historical value of the site, and the aesthetic value it has acquired in the

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**Figure 4** Exterior view of the Casino de Oficiales at the Space for Memory, Buenos Aires, 2013 (photograph by Paul Ryan Katz).

**Figure 5** Visitors’ introduction to the Casino de Oficiales, Buenos Aires, 2013 (photograph by Paul Ryan Katz).
postdictatorship. Some associations wanted the complex to be turned into a museum to honor the legacy of the disappeared; the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo wanted to found a cultural center and an art school; the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (Center for Legal and Social Studies, or CELS), headed by journalist Horacio Verbitsky, called for a space to foster diverse forms of memory, to promote local educational projects, and to cultivate ties with academic institutions; and various neighborhood associations asked for a space for health and daycare centers as well as a recreation center for underprivileged children.31

At the heart of this debate, as this brief list reveals, is whether the site of the former ESMA will be given over to museumification, therein potentially relegating the memory of the disappeared to a static historical moment, or be turned into functional space to house contemporary agencies of change.32 Both options honor the legacy of the disappeared but are loyal to contradictory interpretations of how the disappeared should dwell in time and, more specifically, what kind of present their memory should be engaged in constructing. The potential pedagogical and moral function of museumification cannot be underestimated, but these same qualities are often perceived as muted when sites of atrocity are turned into functional spaces.33 The fear is that returning the space of torture to everyday use will obfuscate the memory of the disappeared. But what if this scenario only provides for a different kind of memory, a memory that avoids historical objectification and instead becomes a catalyst for change, indeed the very sort of change for which so many of the disappeared sacrificed their lives? At stake here is the function of memory and the role architectural transformation can play in deciding that function.

The Madres as well as the H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio or Daughters and Sons for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence), some of whom were born in captivity in the ESMA, outright rejected the establishment of a traditional museum space. In her defense of the creation of a cultural center, Hebe de Bonafini, founding member of the Madres, stated, “We don’t agree with the idea of a museum of horror. We ask the president to open a school of art for the people… Museums are associated with death, with when everything’s over. And here nothing is over. Everything’s just beginning. We have to speak to future generations about life, not death.”34 The H.I.J.O.S. wrote against the dangers of a static memorial space: “The clandestine centers must be a ‘Space for Memory’ in contraposition to the idea of a museum, freeing them from a static and nonparticipative role in time and space. We do not seek an abstract and comfortable memory in those spaces, but rather a memory in action, one that is active and belongs to society as a whole.”35

Some proposals, including those of the H.I.J.O.S. and the Asociación de Ex Detenidos Desaparecidos (AEDD), asked for the preservation of the spaces where detainees had been held to make sure there has been an opportunity to

Figure 6 Cuatro Columnas at the ex ESMA, Buenos Aires, with photograph of the 2007 opening of the Space for Memory in foreground (photograph by Paul Ryan Katz).
conduct all necessary archaeological and forensic work, especially since any evidence found would be used against the military in the ongoing criminal trials. Many groups advocated for partial or total reconstruction of at least the Casino de Oficiales in order to preserve the historical value of the space. In their proposal for the partial reconstruction of the club, the ecumenical Servicio Paz y Justicia (Peace and Justice Service, or SERPAJ) asked for renovations to be decided upon by survivors of the ESMA. These very survivors, under the auspices of the AEDD, went further and called for the entire ESMA complex to be protected as a “material witness of genocide” and for the Casino de Oficiales to be restored to its state prior to the military’s covert rehabilitation of the space in 1979.

The Reconstruction of Disappearance

All of the proposals put forth for the repurposing of the ESMA site are concerned with making visible the disappearance housed by the complex and thereby combating the core function of invisibility that renders disappearance an effective weapon of state repression. They hoped to accomplish this task by addressing the question of how to represent the past in various historical versions of the present for the benefit of future generations. The memory work these proposals take up, then, are burdened with the complicated task of satisfying the needs of competing temporalities in three important ways: they aim to represent pasts often experienced differently; they strive to engage divergent subject–object relations themselves bound by various degrees of historical consciousness; and they treat materials—buildings, plots of land, landscapes—that exist in and express different temporal registers. That these various temporalities are already constitutive to memory, architecture, and the political condition of disappearance means that deciding how to build a space for the memory of the disappeared becomes a task defined by temporal disjunction and competing temporal networks. These multiple temporalities, and the incompleteness they often provide for, end up a defining feature of the architectural history of the torture center.

The appeal for the total and unaltered preservation of the ESMA site put forth by the AEDD foregrounds an important temporal disjunction in the service of remembering the disappeared and the historical conditions that provided for disappearance. In the final analysis, what they call for protects the site of the former ESMA as a space of exception and then also their own experiences of disappearance as a state of exception. Their recommendation is well reasoned and understandable, particularly as they look to the kind of protection and exception from the quotidian that the most visible spaces of the Nazi camp system have received in the aftermath of World War II. But while the proposal may make sense in the short term of the postdictatorship, it runs the risk of keeping the disappeared at a prolonged historical remove that does not protect them in history but rather places them outside lived time.

The preservation and recuperative reconstruction of the site that the AEDD proposes is intimately connected to the fact that justice has not yet been served to those responsible for the crimes against humanity committed at the ESMA and more than five hundred other clandestine sites located around Argentina. The association writes that history has not closed on the Dirty War, that the genocide, both bodily and economic, continues today (Figure 7). The location and duration of detention and the manner of death of many of the disappeared remain unknown; most of the five hundred children born in captivity or kidnapped alongside their parents (but then given to military families or their friends to raise) remain in the hands of their kidnappers and are unaware of their identities; and the repercussions of the economic policies effected by the dictatorship continue to wreak havoc on Argentina. So the association speaks to the long effects of disappearance, to how it functions as a particularly cruel form of state terrorism whose atrocity extends into time far beyond the dismantling of dictatorship.

The proposal also reveals that the AEDD takes a wider view of the role of the ESMA in the dictatorship. While the other proposals identify the Casino de Oficiales as the nucleus of the extermination camp, this proposal identifies the ESMA as the nucleus of the navy’s, or the state’s, overall repression. Where other proposals advocate preserving the Casino for forensic, judicial, historic, or pedagogical reasons, the AEDD proposes preserving the whole site, including the adjacent sports field, which was used as a space to dispose and bury corpses of the disappeared. The association enacts an increase of spatial, and then also temporal, focus. It calls for the historic preservation of the entire complex by putting forth the possibility that the genocide committed by the state continues on in time. More than any other proposal, this one aims to take up space: it seeks to leave a seventeen-acre aporia at the center of Buenos Aires to represent the unfillable void created by the dictatorship. But this striving to take up space, to make disappearance visible, knowable, and locatable, runs the risk of rendering the disappeared fixed in time.

The AEDD rejects the possibility that any educational or public institutions, even those committed to the advancement of human rights, be set up at the ESMA site:

We also oppose the installation of educational institutions or public offices, even though they be dedicated to the promotion
or preservation of human rights. In both of these cases, a routine or daily movement of students, professors, functionaries, employees, members of the public, and providers would be established and would necessitate the installation of a corresponding infrastructure (bars, kiosks, dining rooms, daycares, parking lots) that would empty the content of the places where a genocide was planned, begun, and undertaken. Where there was death, it should be marked, remembered, demonstrated, known that there was death, who died, why they died and who killed them. We should not feign that there is now life. For a good part of our nation, the moment to remember, to know, to apprehend, to understand has only recently begun.40

What the association is really opposed to here is the establishment of routine and daily life on a site where genocide was conceived, installed, and carried out. It is not time, it claims, for the quotidian to occupy this space of exception founded on the denial of death. Death has first to be recognized, evidenced, marked, and this process, at least on a larger scale, is just beginning. The reasoning the association offers for the protection of this space is, at every turn, temporal. Time, or really the effort to forestall time in order to give the public time to work out what has happened, is called upon to preserve space. So the closing down of lived time makes space for the assimilation of historical time. What the AEDD puts forth is that space is needed, literally to the tune of seventeen acres, to make time for knowledge, justice, memory, and presumably also healing.

At the heart of this space sits the Casino de Oficiales. While other associations called for the designation of the Casino also as a historical site, with varying interpretations of what that would mean in terms of preservation, accompanying informational signage, and access, the AEDD advocated for the reconstruction of the space to its architectural condition prior to the rehabilitation the navy undertook in 1979 to hide the existence of the extermination camp from the country and the rest of the world. The association makes an interesting case for this reconstruction: it aims to “reflect the distinct moments of the building that, combined with the representation of such, succeeds in offering an idea of the successive modifications of the place for its ‘more efficient’ performance as a clandestine center, in accordance with how the repressors perfected their machine of disappearance and extermination.”41 The AEDD wants to return the space to its original condition as a torture and extermination camp so that the public will have a better idea of the successive modifications of the place for its ‘more efficient’ performance as a clandestine center, in accordance with how the repressors perfected their machine of disappearance and extermination.

The association advocates a move backward in time in order to represent successive changes forward in time. To a certain extent, this makes sense: the proposal claims that because no detainee ever knew the space of the building as it looks today, the Casino should be returned to its...
original condition in an effort to represent the installations at “their most complex moments.”42 And the association would endeavor to avoid rendering the space static by representing the changes it suffered over time. But it proposes deconstructing—physically, by removing and moving walls—the future anterior of the space in order to reconstruct—by rebuilding walls, doorways, and stairs—the past of disappearance.

It is worth questioning the purpose of rebuilding disappearance, the point of returning disappearance to its original condition. For its original condition was one of invisibility and disavowal. The effort here then is to take apart that which covered up this invisibility in order to render it visible, viewable, and visitable and to make chartable over time the perfection of invisibility. This inclination to go back in time to represent the disappeared both in situ and in time underscores the temporal disjunction at work in disappearance. This temporal dislocation may be part of what the ex-detainees and disappeared hope to reveal, insomuch as it can serve to replicate the condition of being removed from a communal, daily time to the enclosed, historical time that disappearance imposed on the detained. But it runs the risk of trapping the disappeared in that historical dislocation and then within the confines of the protected space of the former ESMA instead of allowing their history to participate in the future construction of living memory. This is to say, the proposed reconstruction aligns this space of disappearance more with the function of monument, as Lewis Mumford understood it, than museum, saddled with the same temporal paradoxes that make monuments destined for obsolence before they are even built.43 In this, the proposal from the AEDD serves as an example of the kind of paradoxes that beset the debates about what to do with the spaces where crimes against humanity have been committed.

The other proposals submitted to the commission charged with organizing the space advocated for a different kind of memory site. Other associations called for the practical use of the space of the ESMA, for the installation of daily living, institutionalization, and education alongside the protected space of the Casino de Oficiales as a historical site. In the end, the commission integrated elements from a variety of proposals. It seems to have drawn, at least conceptually, from the proposal submitted jointly by the Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas (Relatives of Persons Disappeared and Detained for Political Reasons), the Madres de Plaza de Mayo—Línea Fundadora (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo—Founding Line), and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo). These groups’ proposals call for the ex ESMA site to comprise three spaces dedicated to different kinds of memory. One space, dedicated to the past, would interrogate and display the how and why of the genocide; the second, dedicated to the present, would focus on why, and to what end, state terrorism was implemented; the third space would be dedicated to questioning the future, to understanding what kind of country the generation that suffered state terrorism sought to build. To a large extent, and even if the temporal organization of the various associations and institutes that currently constitute the Space for Memory is not as explicitly divided as it is here, this tripartite dedication to representing the past, present, and future is what the commission ended up implementing. And so the disappeared remain present at the ESMA site in multiple modes, locations, and temporalities.

Amphibia

Campamento No. 2 de Prisioneros de la Escuela de Ingenieros Tejas Verdes (Prison Camp No. 2 of the Tejas Verdes Engineering School) was one of the first Chilean detention centers to be established after the coup d’état on 11 September 1973, which unseated Salvador Allende and ushered in what would become the seventeen-year Pinochet dictatorship. Tejas Verdes, about 70 miles southwest of Santiago, had been in use as an army engineering school since 1953. But at the beginning of the dictatorship, the complex was taken over by the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (National Intelligence Service, or DINA), the secret police branch of the Pinochet government, and set up as a clandestine detention and torture center. It operated as such from 1973 to 1976, while also serving as an important on-site training center in experimental torture techniques for DINA officers. The site sits just inland from the Pacific Coast near the resort town of San Antonio and on the banks of the Río Maipo. The camp consisted of separate huts and separate yards for male and female detainees, a sergeant major’s house, officers’ tents, soldiers’ huts, huts for prisoners who were recovering from interrogation, a sick bay, a kitchen, and latrines. The prisoners’ yards were surrounded on all sides by armed watchtowers and eucalyptus trees. To the west lay the beach and to the east, hilly fields populated by grazing cows (Figure 8).

In his 1974 testimonial Tejas Verdes: Diario de un campo de concentración en Chile (published in English translation as Diary of a Chilean Concentration Camp), in which he documents his months of detention and torture at the site, Hernán Valdés notes the proximity of the beach and river, the eucalyptus trees, the apple orchard, and the woods surrounding the camp.44 Of a trip to a makeshift latrine outside, he wrote, “Beyond the small eucalyptus wood, behind a barbed-wire fence, is a maize field. The river’s thirty yards away, curving
round. From this point the river-mouth can be seen in its entirety. The camp’s hidden in a dip in the river bank. The motorists crossing the bridge can’t see us over the railings.\textsuperscript{45} The camp is hidden in the landscape, protected by the curve of the river separating it from the beach. Nature here works to hide terror from view, or rather, man takes advantage of nature to hide terror within. By all accounts, Tejas Verdes was a bucolic setting for the horrors it would host.

Today the site sits largely abandoned, home only to three military supply hangars. The engineering school, while retaining its name, has been moved to a nearby location, leaving, according to the architects at AGC, a “wasteland” where the camp once stood. In 2012, AGC Concept Architects, an architectural group located in France headed by José Miguel Yañez Jaramillo in collaboration with María Dolores Yañez and Pablo Hormazábal, who work under the auspices of YH Arquitectos from Santiago de Chile, submitted a proposal to Architecture for Humanity’s biannual Open Architecture Challenge “[UN]Restricted Access” to repurpose the space of Tejas Verdes.\textsuperscript{46} The competition sought proposals from “the global design and construction community to identify retired military installations in their own backyard, to collaborate with local stakeholders, and to reclaim these spaces for social, economic, and environmental good.”\textsuperscript{47} Architecture for Humanity brings together a global network of community members with architects, design professionals, and disaster specialists and provides training for communities to develop local design solutions that respond to ongoing social problems, fill educational voids, and offer disaster relief in the built environment. The group’s social platform marries collaboration, education, environmental responsibility, and architecture.\textsuperscript{48} The ideals funded and promoted by Architecture for Humanity are wholly opposed to the totalitarian ideologies.
promulgated by the Pinochet dictatorship that systematically organized the torture of more than thirty thousand citizens and the disappearance of at least fifteen hundred. In submitting their proposal to the Open Architecture Challenge, AGC sought support from a nonstate, nonprofit entity committed to rebuilding and empowering communities in the wake of disaster. The reappropriation of this site of torture in this scenario would serve a local community reclaiming for itself what it lost under the dictatorship.

The project AGC submitted, Amphibia, reenvisions the abandoned military installation of Tejas Verdes as an ecocomplex for work and leisure that returns the space both to the natural environment and to the residents of San Antonio, a fishing port suffering from recent economic decline and high unemployment. In designing Amphibia, AGC’s architects sought to build a hybrid transitional space that functions as a dynamic border between the urban and the biological, serves the local population as much as the environment, and provides for a place of reflection and repose as well as action and growth (Figure 9). Above all, Amphibia, from the Greek amphiς (αμφίς) and bios (βιος), meaning two lives, is a space of metamorphosis where multiple dualities might meet, overlap, trespass, and inform each other. It stands in stark contrast to the strict ideologies that defined the detention and torture center once occupying the space. AGC’s design replaces a closed space with an open space that comprises difference, flux, and mutability. In proposing this in place of the prison camp, in lieu of the wasteland the site has become, Amphibia works to dislocate the memory and ruins of Tejas Verdes from the teleological historical continuum of state terror and resituate them in the temporal register of the kairotic, a new space predicated on the instant, the indeterminate, and the open. The space of Amphibia works to instantiate the incomplete.

AGC begins their proposal with a brief introduction to the historical significance of the Pinochet dictatorship and an overview of Tejas Verdes as part of the machine of repression. José Yañez, author of the proposal and lead architect on the project, ends the introduction by foregrounding the timeliness of the project:

In Chile, this critical historical period is still cause for divisions or polarization in our society. It’s a taboo subject that gave way to a period of amnesia, necessary from our point of view for a
democratic transition, as time needed for reconciliation, a collective silence that would allow us to reestablish lost social ties and habits. The year 2013 will mark forty years since the beginning of this conflictive episode. We believe it is the time, the moment, for the city and its inhabitants to take back their history, to afford an urban use to this place/nonplace, to rethink this complicated sector of the urban scene so as to create a strategy of renovation and model appropriation as a response of economic, urban, and ecological sustainability to the demographic, energy, and environmental challenges of future decades.50

Yañez speaks here to the divisions wrought upon Chilean society during the dictatorship and to the possibility that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the Rettig Commission), set up by Patricio Aylwin after assuming the democratic presidency in 1990, did not go far enough to heal the deep social wounds Chile was suffering because it did not bring to trial those who committed crimes against humanity under the dictatorship. He says that the time has come for the people of San Antonio, who might represent the larger nation of Chile, to take back their history and observes that they might accomplish this by affording to the space of the camp some usefulness, some ecologically ethical purpose. Yañez proposes that the residents of the area take control of time by recuperating the space of disappearance. Turning the ruined space into a functional place, he proposes, will help them construct a new history. The proposition of usefulness here is very important. To put the place of the camp to a new use means that there will be new civic and quotidian engagement with the space, new memories constructed, and most important, a new future built where before there was only a past wasting away.

Amphibia comprises five zones, or polyzones, as Yañez calls them, whose borders overlap and spaces bleed into each other (Figure 10). The first is a memorial zone named INIR, from the Spanish for “initiation,” which would feature
a long walkway housing three elevated pavilions from which visitors can view the natural space around them. The second is a pavilion that would house eco-offices for start-ups or small to medium businesses. The third zone of conservation and observation would give way to a suspended aerial pier that would permit the public to view the river delta from observation pavilions while camouflaged within the surrounding environment (Figure 11). The fourth zone would be dedicated to a wall dock that would host beach access in the spring and ecolodges that would host a fluvial resort in the summer (Figure 12). The fifth zone would be an open space set aside for the organic growing of native crops. Amphibia is largely governed by the aim to open up the natural space of the area to the public through reflection, work, observation, leisure, or farming. The space imagined is first and foremost returned to the natural world—that same natural world used to hide the terror of Tejas Verdes from public view—but then it asks the residents of San Antonio to learn about that world, to inhabit it, and to participate in its care and cultivation.

The plan of Amphibia (see Figure 10) shows the relative placement of the zones. Note that the first, the memorial zone, looks out over the largest space of the site, which is the third zone, dedicated to conservation and bird-watching. The business zone is tucked away at the back in the northeast corner, and the space reserved for the river beach and ecolodges spans almost the entire length of the site and runs parallel to the highway. The most functional spaces are situated closest to the town and give way to the more remote spaces of reflection closest to the river and, beyond it, the Pacific Ocean. In this arrangement, the visitors move through usefulness in order to get to a site of observation and integration into the natural world. The implicit provocation here is that the public must put the space to use and only then might they remove themselves into a period of suspense, of stillness and watchfulness. Amphibia proposes a functional memory site, one founded on the premise that new works, daily work, and the construction of new memory will prove a worthy homage to those who were tortured or disappeared within the same space.

The Kairotic Space of Memory
A functional memory site is a complicated space. It allows for remembrance at the same time it allows for new memories to be made in a space engaged with the present. Critics of Amphibia may question the integration of the second (start-ups), fourth (ecolodges and fluvial resort), and perhaps even
the fifth (native crop planting) zones since they will serve as sources of revenue. One risk is that Amphibia might superimpose onto the space of Tejas Verdes a neoliberal space of consumption that will propagate the same economic injustices that helped fuel the dictatorship in the first place. Another risk is that Amphibia could depoliticize or trivialize the space of Tejas Verdes by becoming a site of so-called trauma tourism, a global phenomenon that combines “leisure (tourism) with horror (trauma)” in opening up spaces of historical atrocity to visitors who want to marry their free time with social responsibility. But Amphibia, at least in its conception, manages to avoid both traps by fostering only local and small-scale economic development in the business zones and in the design, described more fully below, of the first (memorial) and third (conservation) zones that lead visitors to a space of memory and reflection with minimal guidance.

In its planning for large swaths of open, natural space on the site of Tejas Verdes, Amphibia aligns itself with other memory sites that have turned to nature as memorial and thus promote a kind of ecoethics, or an ethics worked out by way of the environment. Similar sites include the six million trees that make up the Forest of the Martyrs in Israel to commemorate the Jewish lives lost in the Holocaust; the memorial site of the Nazi concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, which comprises a large, open landscape of heather punctuated by birch, juniper, and pine trees, and burial mounds grown over with natural vegetation; and the memorial channel cut by Swedish architect Jonas Dahlberg into the Sorbraten headland on the Norwegian island of Utoya to memorialize the 2011 mass killings of youth attending summer camp there. These memory sites, like Amphibia, turn to the openness and indeterminacy of nature to provide space for remembrance unbound to the chronological, historical linearity proffered by the museum, the visitor’s center, the guidebook, or even signage requiring a visitor to move in only one direction through a memorial landscape. But such memory sites avoid the trap of the sublime by asking visitors, however unconsciously, to perform the difficult task of memory work while traversing these open spaces. The negotiation of these memory spaces will fall largely to the visitor, thereby handing over agency for the production of memory to the individual instead of to a state institution.

The team at AGC offers up the first polyzone of Amphibia as a natural memorial to Tejas Verdes. Yañez explains: “No vestige of the Tejas Verdes detention camp.
remains. There are three supply hangars that store construction materials for the army on the land. A wasteland of a place, with no activity to speak of, this condition of emptiness drove us to a ‘détournement’ of the notion of memorial, without losing sight of the fact that it would be the center of the proposal. In selecting the reappropriation of Tejas Verdes, AGC had only the bare land to work with. The space of the camp may be a historical site, but they had no standing structure through which to communicate this historicity. So the challenge the team takes on in Amphibia is how to construct a space to register a history, a temporality, represented only by empty space. How they conceived of the notion of memorial had to evolve even as memorialization remained at the core of their design. What they proposed, in the end, provides for a temporal register that drafts history as only one of many possible tools we might use to engage with the past and the environment as an important catalyst for the production of memory.

In their design for Amphibia as a space not explicitly or solely identified as a memory site, AGC avoided the pitfalls of memory that Nora warns us against in his work. Residents of San Antonio and the surrounding area, as well as many Chileans, will know the space they are visiting as the site of the Tejas Verdes prison camp. But even as they acknowledge this, and even as they take time to reflect on the atrocities the space housed, they will also be otherwise engaged with the natural space of the site. This dual engagement with historical memory and nature allows for the production of a historical consciousness grounded in living memory, not the “reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer” that Nora, and certainly Nietzsche before him, tell us renders history an instrument of forgetting. AGC’s design proposes providing limited informational signage at the entrances to the first memorial zone and in the elevated pabellón de vigilia or pavilion of vigil within the zone dedicated, from its elevated vantage point, to not losing sight. Apart from this graphic support, visitors to the Tejas Verdes site will be expected to share in the production of historical consciousness of the space they inhabit, to bring to the site their knowledge of the crimes of torture and disappearance committed under the Pinochet dictatorship, or to leave the site with the knowledge that there are histories to which they are blind. This will make for a varied collective historical consciousness, but it also returns history to the hands of the individual and valorizes personal memory in a way no stone monument can do. Part of what AGC’s design proposes is that new, active memories of engagement with the natural world be superimposed, or in some way interact with, prior memories of recent history. This does not erase the disappeared or deny them their role in a historical imaginary so much as it allows the memory of the disappeared to inhabit various temporalities; not to become sequestered as an object of history but rather to participate in the production of new memory that exceeds the boundaries of the site.

AGC’s design imagines that this first memorial polyzone, INIR, will comprise three pavilions that sit alongside a triangular-shaped elevated walkway (Figure 13). The designs for these pavilions, Yañez explains, are the product of his reading of Valdés’s testimonial work Tejas Verdes. He noticed in the diary a kind of framing effect in which the surrounding landscape was fully visible but remained totally inaccessible to Valdés and the other detainees. In what reads as a kind of material reparation for that limitation, AGC proposes transforming that experience of framing into an experience of contact with nature. The natural memorial they propose is one that brings visitors into direct contact with the natural world—the same world Valdés saw but could not access—framing Tejas Verdes. Along the walkway would stand, first, a pabellón intramuros, an enclosed structure that would allow the visitor a glimpse of the surrounding environment but require that he depend more fully on sound to locate himself; next the pabellón de espera, or waiting pavilion, would provide a view of the hills to the east and of the river to the west; the third, pabellón de vigilia, or pavilion of vigil, alludes to the watchtowers surrounding the prisoners’ yards at the camp but in this case inverts the agency of spectating and provides the visitor with a wide aerial view of the site and the enclosed nature preserve, conceived as an “open air garden-museum.”

The memorial space AGC’s design promises in this first zone aims to frame the landscape while also allowing the visitor to become part of it in sequential stages. The visitor to Amphibia moves from being walled in (which replicates the experience of captivity suffered by the detainees of the camp, particularly if they were blindfolded and had to depend only on sound to identify where they were being held); to waiting and watching (the only explicit agency afforded the prisoners); to a space of vigil or wakefulness that here positions the viewer in full view of the open landscape. This last space might intimate the certain wakefulness or insomnia the detainee would have suffered while in the camp, but it also invokes the ethical possibility of vigil or care, charging the visitor with, as Yañez explains, not losing sight of what happened here and keeping a watchful eye over what will happen to the space in the future. This charge, proffered after the visitor is “initiated” into nature, operates in multiple temporalities; it calls for protection of the memory of past histories at the same time it asks visitors to look out for the present space and what will become of it.
This memory space circumscribed by nature is an open invitation, indeed a call, to inhabit a new kind of ethical space itself marked by a different temporal register, the kairotic. The Greeks distinguished between two measures of time: χρόνος, which refers to the sequential passing of time, and καιρός, which points to an opportune moment, the right moment, an instant filled with significance, a moment ripe with the opportunity for learning. Kairos is a charged and critical point in time, a point of passage to the dynamic and the meaningful.\(^{19}\) Tobias Menely tells us that, for Walter Benjamin, a kairotic measure of time would provide for the possibility of a Jetztzeit, a “now time” that would explode open a linear historical continuum and allow us to engage with “a form of memory, still time, that would make the present legible, a ‘now of recognizability.’”\(^{60}\) Menely works out a correlation between Benjamin’s conception of history and a kind of metaphoric “meteorological legibility,” in which the interruptions and interferences of the weather act out the unexpected ways that history might open up to reveal a moment outside historical measure, a “now time” of recognition.

Amphibia offers up the possibility of a similar legibility but in the natural world more largely understood. The natural memory space that AGC’s design proposes replaces the ruins of disappearance with the space of still time—intramuros, waiting, vigilance—that opens up the kairotic possibility of recognition. So Amphibia turns the space of disappearance into a space open to the opportune, due, and right moment of recognition that might occur outside the linear confines of historical progression. Kairos provides for this recognition, perhaps of a historical event or past injustice, perhaps of something else, but more important, it manifests a kind of memory that renders the present legible. And perhaps the most valuable memorial to the disappeared is one that serves as a cipher for the present. As conceived by the Pinochet regime, Tejas Verdes was a space of exception that proved the dictatorship’s historical teleology; as conceived by AGC, the site of Tejas Verdes is returned to the open space of nature, which operates outside historical time and allows the memory of the disappeared to do the same. The open spaces of Amphibia, coupled with the more functional zones of work, leisure, and sustainability, together make up a site that allows the memory of the disappeared to inhabit new temporal registers predicated on openness and the functioning of everyday life. This means that in Amphibia the disappeared are participants in the construction of new, living memory instead of remaining sequestered in historical event.

Figure 13 Elevated view of the INIR memorial zone and aerial pier traversing the conservation zone at Amphibia, with pavilions at top right and bird observatory to the left (all rights reserved; AGC Concept Architectes).
While Amphibia was selected as one of 24 (of 510) projects to make it to the semifinal round, it did not, in the end, win Architecture for Humanity’s competition. The other entries also proposed the transformation of military space into some kind of civic space, foregrounded ecological sustainability, and demonstrated the need for community rehabilitation. Other projects from Latin America that made it to the semifinals include a proposal to rehabilitate the island municipality of Vieques in Puerto Rico after it had been wracked by sixty years of ammunitions and amphibious trials by the US Navy; a proposal to turn derelict military barracks in downtown São Paulo, Brazil, into a youth sports academy; and a proposal to turn an abandoned police building that houses a lost archive of eighty million police documents in Guatemala City into a large-scale museum and community, cultural, and educational center that will speak to the long heritage of civil conflict and respond to entrenched legacies of violence and silence in that country.61 This last, the Kikotemal’ Rik K’aslem Memorial, won second place in the category of political response in the final round of the competition. Of these proposals, however, Amphibia is the only one to aim to reintegrate into a community and render useful a space of torture, an effort distinct in architectural mandate from the rehabilitation of other spaces in that it has to make room for crimes against humanity in the very structure of the new space it provides for. It remains to be seen, however, whether AGC will garner the funding and the permissions from the city of San Antonio to turn the site of Tejas Verdes into Amphibia; today, the space remains a wasted site of dismantled evidence of state terrorism. But Amphibia, if yet unrealized, serves as both hope for the economically depressed area and as a practical, innovative, and ethical example of how to make space for crimes against humanity in lived time and how to put the memory of the disappeared to use in the present.

The Incomplete

In discussing the politics of memory in contemporary Germany, James E. Young writes:

It may be true that the surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution. In fact, the best German memorial to the Fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial at all, but simply the never to be resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end. Instead of a fixed-figure for memory, the debate itself—perpetually unresolved amid ever-changing conditions—might be enshrined.62 Young’s observation responds to the overwhelming memorial activity that took place in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s in the long aftermath of the Holocaust, but it may be usefully applied to the memory work being done today in the Southern Cone. The debates about what to do with the spaces of torture embedded in the postdictatorial landscapes of Argentina and Chile will not soon be resolved, will never respond to a single version of historical memory, and will never satisfy the various interpretations of present or future political and pedagogical needs. As long as this irresolution remains, the memory of the disappeared persists. And in this in conclusiveness, the many proposals, including those studied here, for how to preserve or reconstruct the spaces of torture in the Southern Cone already serve as textual memorial to the disappeared.

A standing memorial, however, while it might mark a site of atrocity, fulfills hermeneutic expectations of immediate legibility and abiding symbolism that a space of memory need not meet and, one could argue, should not meet. For a space of memory can be entered into, traversed, inhabited, experienced; and in this inhabitation—be it of an enclosed space or of the natural world—a visitor might glean some cognizance of what comprises a space of torture. While the architecture of such a space may vary—again, these spaces were selected for their randomness and invisibility—they have in common that they work to produce a certain foreignness in the world that makes torture a crime that not only exceeds its own temporal boundaries but also undoes the very structures of subjectivity that allow for trust in the world. Holocaust torture survivor Jean Améry describes this “appropriation of the world” when he writes: “If from the experience of torture any knowledge at all remains that goes beyond the plain nightmarish, it is that of a great amazement and a foreignness in the world that cannot be compensated by any sort of subsequent human communication.... Whenever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world.”64 Something of this foreignness in the world, this deep irreversible estrangement, is communicated, albeit in different ways, in the proposals from the AEDD to protect the space of the ESMA and from the team at AGC to repurpose the space of Tejas Verdes. What Amphibia in particular provides for, however, is a space that acknowledges this inherent inadequacy of human communication of which Améry speaks. In opening up the space of Tejas Verdes to a nature preserve, Amphibia asks that visitors inhabit a realm that engages other forms of communication, a space in which human communication may reveal its own inadequacy, and indeed then put this inadequacy to use. The proposal from AGC makes space for the incompleteness of the human world by opening up the space of torture to the openness...
of the natural world. It is a failed compensation, to be sure, but one that acknowledges the inherent failure in all memory sites: the effort to communicate what alone can be experienced.

That both the proposals from the AEDD and AGC work to protect or put to work this foreignness in the world is part of what makes them viable propositions for the reconstruction of spaces of torture and fruitful studies of the kind of contemporary thinking that goes into conceiving of such spaces. The AEDD aims to preserve a foreignness in the world both spatially and temporally in its proposal to preserve the entire space of the ESMA but reconstruct the Casino de Oficiales. In more practical terms, AGC proposes initiating visitors into the open memory space of Tejas Verdes by moving them through a sequence of kinesthetic experiences that aim to replicate, as an aid to the production of memory, the bodily sensations a detainee might have suffered. Amphibia—and this is what makes it an exemplary proposal for how to turn a space of torture into a space of memory—places this foreignness, in the form of memorial, at the center of its site and then opens up that space to the quotidian. But its porous boundaries, along with the explicit instruction that the site be a place of metamorphosis, ask that visitors to the site, and presumably those who will work there, conceive of this foreignness not as an exception but rather constitutive to the workings of the world. In this conception, the memory of the tortured and the disappeared are drafted as integral to life rather than excepted from it.

The project Amphibia, the memory debates, the architectural history of the torture center still under construction all serve as memorial to the disappeared in their irresolution and openness. And this incompleteness is fueled by the multiple temporalities that inform the proposals to reappropriate the spaces of torture and integrate them or not into the functioning of daily life. But time has a certain end here, for where the architecture of memory sites in the Southern Cone instantiate the incomplete, the disappeared remain to participate in the living memory that shapes our present.

Notes
1. I am grateful to José Miguel Yañez Jaramillo, Pablo Hormazábal, and María Dolores Yañez for their generous correspondence about the planning and design of Amphibia, and to AGC Concept Arquitectos for their permission to reprint images from the project. My sincere thanks to Paul Ryan Katz for his invaluable research assistance and photographs, and to Christiane Ingemron for her help with images. Many thanks also to Swati Chattopadhyay and the anonymous reviewer of this work for their thoughtful readings and suggestions, and to the editorial staff at *JSAH* for so carefully shepherding the piece through to publication. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Here the history of the clandestine torture and detention center, as used throughout the twentieth century, differs from that of the later concentration and death camps built for these specific purposes by the Third Reich. For an architectural and sociological study of the latter, see Wolfgang Solosky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).
4. “Given-to-be-invisible” and “given-to-be-seen” are terms coined by Latin American scholar Diana Taylor to describe the social conditioning of the Argentine public to ignore the daily horrors enacted by the military juntas and their paramilitary police forces in order to maintain a semblance of normalcy under the dictatorship. See chapter 5 of Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).
5. See Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), for an analysis of the kinds of competing memories that inform these debates in Latin America; and Elizabeth Jelin and Victoria Langland, eds., *Monumentos, memoriales y marcas territoriales* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores, 2003), for a discussion of these debates in relation to the construction of memorials and memory sites. For reflections on the theoretical and national concerns that have informed how to set up new memory sites in Argentina and how these concerns then play out in their management, see *Sitios de memoria: Experiencias y desafíos, cuaderno I* (Buenos Aires: Red Federal de Sitios de Memoria, 2009); and *Sitios de memoria: Experiencias y desafíos, cuaderno II* (Buenos Aires: Red Federal de Sitios de Memoria, 2011), accessible at http://amn.liderhum.jus.gov.ar/public_red_sitios.html.
7. Ibid.
The political structure of disappearance is such that the rhetoric of the Argentine military junta, for example, redeﬁned human and national subjectivity so that those persons the state identiﬁed as subversives, a priori to their detention, had already been excluded from the protection of the state and did not merit such basic human rights as habeas corpus. In the logic of the junta, disappearance is possible because of the temporal disjunction the state effected in the law and before the law when it retroactively dehumanized Argentine citizens in order to validate a new political system. See Taylor, Disappearing Acts, 148; and Feitlowitz, A Lexicon of Terror, 26–27, for further analysis of how the junta efﬁced and defended this conversion. Judith Butler has extended reﬂections on precariousness as constitutive of human life and fundamental to how we understand that life also provides for a new reading of the temporal disjunction at work in disappearance. Grief, according to Butler, signals a life that matters. Grief attends life at its end, but the potential for grieving makes living that matter.

For a history of the early days of the coup, see Feitlowitz, A Lexicon of Terror; and David Rock, Argentina, 1516–198?: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonso (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Built on land close to the shores of the Río de la Plata ceded by the Argentine military junta, for example, re-deﬁned human and national sub-jectivity so that those persons the state identiﬁed as subversives, a priori to their detention, had already been excluded from the protection of the state and did not merit such basic human rights as habeas corpus. In the logic of the junta, disappearance is possible because of the temporal disjunction the state effected in the law and before the law when it retroactively dehumanized Argentine citizens in order to validate a new political system. See Taylor, Disappearing Acts, 148; and Feitlowitz, A Lexicon of Terror, 26–27, for further analysis of how the junta efﬁced and defended this conversion. Judith Butler has extended reﬂections on precariousness as constitutive of human life and fundamental to how we understand that life also provides for a new reading of the temporal disjunction at work in disappearance. Grief, according to Butler, signals a life that matters. Grief attends life at its end, but the potential for grieving makes living that matter.

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15. For a history of the early days of the coup, see Feitlowitz, A Lexicon of Terror; and David Rock, Argentina, 1516–198?: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonso (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

16. For a history of the debate about whether the term “dirty war” or “genocidio” is a more ﬁtting descriptor of the crimes against humanity committed by Argentina’s military dictatorship, see Antonius C. G. M. Robbens, “From Dirty War to Genocide: Argentina’s Resistance to National Reconciliation,” Memory Studies 5, no. 3 (2012), 305–315.

17. See Pilar Calvente, Poder y desaparición: Los campos de concentración en Argentina (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1998); and Muní Actis et al., Ese infierno: Conversaciones de cinco mujeres sobrevivientes de la ESMA (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2001), for more on the functioning of the ESMA as a concentration camp during the dictatorship.

18. See Horacio Verbitsky, The Flight: Conﬁessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior (New York: New Press, 1996), for retired naval lieutenant Adolfo Sclíngo’s ﬁrsthand account of his participation in the ESMA death ﬂights. Sclíngo was sentenced in April 2005 by the Spanish courts to 640 years in prison, 30 of which he will serve, for crimes against humanity.


21. Wright, State Repression in Latin America, 164.

22. Emily E. Parsons, “The Space of Remembering: Collective Memory and the Re-orientation of Contested Space in Argentina’s ESMA,” 452° Electronic Journal of Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature, 4 (2011), 83–91. See https://www.institutomemoria.org.ar/_cdes/esma_legal.html for the full text of the promulgations from 2000 and 2004 that legally establish the ESMA as a memory site. The creation of the InstitutoEspacio para la Memoria (IEM) was sanctioned by the Legislature of the City of Buenos Aires in Law No. 961 on 5 Dec. 2002; article 10 of said decree states that the IEM will maintain its headquarters on the site occupied by the ESMA. On 8 May 2014, however, this same body issued Law No. 4929, which sanctions the establishment of the Consejo Asesor en Políticas Públicas de Memoria (Advisory Council on Public Policies of Memory), which will maintain its headquarters in the ex Cuatro Columnas building on the ESMA site. Article 7 of this same law also repeals Law No. 961 and dissolves the IEM. The representation of the IEM in the Executive Body of the Ente Público Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos has been replaced by the Subsecretary of Human Rights of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires. The Espacio Memoria, then, will continue to be governed by representatives from the national government, the City of Buenos Aires, and a board of select human rights organizations. The dissolution of the IEM came to the author’s attention after this article was in its ﬁnal stages of preparation, and too late to include the information in the body of the work. But this most recent change of organization only underscores the complex history of the creation and management of the ex ESMA as a memory site and reveals it to be still very much a work in progress. Many thanks to Mr. Manuel Barrientos from the Press Ofﬁce of the Espacio Memoria for his generous correspondence on this matter.


26. The Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos maintains a website with an interactive virtual map allowing visitors to click on different buildings and see a history of their use during the dictatorship and what they currently house: http://www.espaciomemoria.ar/mapa.php.

27. See Brodsky, Memoria en construcción, 50–51, for ﬂoor plans from 1976 to 1979 and the military’s reformulation of the space to build rooms to hide staircases and entryways as well as a small movie room, a dining room, and showers. For a thorough description and maps of the building, see also Muní Actis et al., Ese infierno, 21–26.
28. A copy of the full text of the call can be found at http://ddhhtucuman.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/informe-esma.pdf. Proposals were to be submitted to the secretary of human rights in the Ministry of Justice, Safety, and Human Rights or the subsecretary of human rights of the City of Buenos Aires by 30 Nov. 2004, and would be made public viewable on these organization's websites.

29. In 2005, Argentine photographer Marcelo Brodsky, whose brother Fernando Rubén Brodsky was held at the ESMA and remains disappeared, brought many of these proposals together in his work Memoria en construcción: El debate sobre la ESMA [Memory under construction: The ESMA debate]. The book is a collection of excerpts from the proposals submitted; newspaper articles about the debate; fragments of essays on human rights, art, and memory; and testimony and visual art taking up the history and memory of the Dirty War. The scope and size of the volume testify to how complicated the debate over the ESMA became and the crucial, if polarizing, role the site has taken up in the public's national imaginary. See also Hugo Vezzetti, “Memoria histórica y memoria política: Las propuestas para la ESMA,” Punto de vista 86 (2006), 37–42; and Hugo Vezzetti, “Políticas de la memoria: El Museo en la ESMA,” Punto de Vista 79 (2004), 3–8, for an example of how the ESMA debate played out in scholarly circles within Argentina.


31. See Brodsky, Memoria en construcción, 212–25. In the past, the full collection of proposals has been available at http://www.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/espacioparamemoria, but as of May 2014, the page is no longer accessible.

32. See chapter 1 of Didier Maleuvre, Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), for a more nuanced discussion of the inherent contradictory temporalities at work in the museum.


34. Brodsky, Memoria en construcción, 219: “No compartimos la idea de un museo del horror. Pedimos al presidente abrir una escuela de arte popular… Los museos se asocian a la muerte, a cuando todo termina. Y acá nada terminó. Todo está empezando. A las futuras generaciones tenemos que hablarles de vida, no de muerte.”

35. Ibid., 220, 281. Trans. David William Foster: “Los centros clandestinos deben ser ‘Espacio por la Memoria’ en contraposición con la idea de museo, escapándole al rol estático en tiempo y espacio y poco participativo. En estos espacios no queremos una memoria abstracta y cómoda sino una memoria en acción, activa, de toda la sociedad.”

36. Susana Draper also speaks to multiple temporalities as integral to postdictatorship reconstruction as part of the important work she has done in her recent study of the architectural afterlife of prisons and detention centers in the Southern Cone. She identifies various temporalities at work in the naming, narrative, organization, and marketing of postdictatorship spaces such as the Punta Carretas Prison-turned-mall in Uruguay and the ESMA. See, in particular, chapters 2 and 5 of Draper, Afterlives of Confinement.

37. The full text of the AEDD’s proposal can be accessed online at http://www.exdesaparecidos.org.ar/propuestaesmaedd.htm.

38. Asociación de Ex Detenidos Desaparecidos (AEDD), “Propuesta de la Asociación de Ex Detenidos Desaparecidos para el Predio de la ESMA y el Campo de Deportes,” 4. For more information about the children born into captivity or otherwise disappeared under the dictatorship and the ongoing work of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo to recover the children and their identities, see David Blaustein’s 2000 documentary Botín de guerra [Spoils of war]. For fictional representations of the systematic baby trafficking enacted under the dictatorship, see Luis Puenzo’s 1984 La historia oficial [The official story]; and Gastón Biraben’s 2003 Cautiva [Captive].


40. Asociación de Ex Detenidos Desaparecidos, “Propuesta de la Asociación,” 10–11: “También no oponemos a la instalación de instituciones educativas u oficinas públicas, aunque sean dedicadas a fomentar o preservar los DDHH. En cualquiera de los dos casos se establecería un movimiento rutinario o cotidiano de alumnos, profesores, funcionarios, empleados, público y proveedores e implicaría la instalación de la infraestructura necesaria (bares, kioscos, comedores, guarderías infantiles, playas de estacionamiento) que vaciarían de contenido los lugares donde se plаниficó, se puso en marcha y se concretó un genocidio. Donde hubo muerte debe señalarse, recordarse, mostrarse, saberse, que hubo muerte, quienes fueron los que murieron, por qué murieron y quiénes los mataron. No debe pretenderse que ahora haya vida. Para buena parte de nuestro pueblo recién comienza la hora de recordar, de saber, de aprehender, de comprender.”

41. Asociación de Ex Detenidos Desaparecidos, “Propuesta de la Asociación,” 11: “Reflejar los distintos momentos del edificio que, combinada con la representación, procura dar idea de la adecuación sucesiva del lugar para un cumplimiento ‘más eficaz’ de su condición de centro clandestino, según los represores iban perfeccionando la maquinaria de desaparición y exterminio.”

42. Ibid.: “Los períodos a reconstruir propuestos buscan reflejar los momentos de ‘mayor complejidad’ de las instalaciones.”

43. See James E. Young, “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,” Critical Inquiry 18, no. 2 (1992), 267–96; and Williams, Memorial Museums.

44. Tejas Verdes was first published in Barcelona in 1974 and then again in 1978. It was translated into English in 1975 and published in London. The work was not published in Chile until 1996. The Orion Publishing Group currently holds the rights to works published by the imprint Victor Gollancz. All attempts at tracing the copyright holder of Valdés’s Diary of a Chilean Concentration Camp were unsuccessful. This map of the Tejas Verdes prison camp is reprinted here with thanks to Orion for their assistance in this matter.


46. The full team who designed Amphibia included lead architect José Yañez from AGC Concept Architectes in Valence, France; collaborating architects María Dolores Yañez and Pablo Hormazábal from YH Arquitectos, based in Santiago; Rémy Frapa and Cesar Baille from AGC Architectes and Constanza Neira from YH Arquitectos.

47. A full description of the open call can be found at http://openarchitecturetunelworknetwork.org/competitions/challenge/2011. There were 510 design teams from seventy-one countries who registered for this challenge to transform abandoned, closed, and decommissioned military sites into usable and unrestricted spaces. The judging criteria used by the interdisciplinary jury of thirty-three experts in reappropriating military space considered community impact, economic viability, ecological footprint, contextual appropriateness, and general design quality.


50. Yañez, “Amphibia,” 1: “En Chile este periodo histórico crítico aun es motivo de divisiones o polarización en la sociedad, es un tema tabú, que ha dado paso a un episodio de amnesia, necesaria desde nuestro punto de vista a la transición democrática, como un tiempo requerido para una reconciliación, un silencio colectivo para restablecer los vínculos y hábitos sociales perdidos. En 2013 se cumplirán 40 años del inicio de este episodio conflictivo, creemos que es el tiempo, el momento, que la ciudad y sus habitantes, se apropien de su historia, de darle un destino urbano a este lugar-no lugar, repensar este sector complejo de la trama urbana de modo crear una estrategia de renovación y apropiación modelo (ejemplar) como una respuesta de sustentabilidad económica, urbana y ecológica a los desafíos demográficos, energéticos y medio ambientales de la décadas futuras.”

51. See Draper, Afterlives of Confinement, for a discussion of the consequences of neoliberalism in the reconstruction and marketing of former prison spaces.


54. Dahlberg’s proposal for the memorial site can be accessed at http://minnesteder.no/Jonas_Dahlberg_-Entry.pdf.

55. Yañez, “Amphibia,” 3: “Actualmente no existe ningún vestigio del campo de detención Tejas Verdes, en la parcela existen 3 hangares de almacenamiento de material de construcción perteneciente al ejercito, un sitio eriazo o baldío, sin mayor actividad, esta condición de vacío nos conduce a un ‘détournement’ de la noción de memorial, sin perder de vista que será el centro de la propuesta.”


57. José Yañez, Pablo Hormazábal, and María Dolores Yañez, email to author, 8 July 2013.


61. See http://architectureforhumanity.org/blog/07-9-2012/unrestricted-semifinalists for full profiles of the semifinalists’ projects.


63. In her landmark work on torture, Elaine Scarry describes the “appropriation of the world” as the drafting by the torturer of everyday routines and objects as weapons against the torture victim. I use the term here to also describe the resultant separation from the world itself—a move constitutive to torture—that this process provides for. See Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 38–45.