

The Political Effect of Tenderness in *Buena Memoria*

by Marcelo Brodsky

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As an Argentinean born in the eighties I grew up hearing the names of the *desaparecidos* under the military dictatorship being recited one after another, like a mantra or an outcry, sometimes in massive manifestations, sometimes in the schoolyard with a few classmates. Their names are always accompanied by the images of their faces in posters, flags or flyers that are raised in the moment they are remembered, invoked, called upon. And there is always another text repeated in response: “Present. Present. Present.” Photos and texts seem to be necessary to account for those absences that are not completely absent, those presences that are not completely present.¹

Every photograph of a *desaparecido* has a complex status, a peculiar instability: What is the status of these images when the referent has disappeared? There are no remains, no bodies, but there are photos. So I ask: Has that person disappeared? What has disappeared? What did they want to disappear?

I was born in 1982, the year of the transition. After the defeat in Malvinas, the military finally called for a general election. The dictatorship was over and yet from then on, we would have to learn how to live haunted by the appearances of

¹As part of the collected materials that form *Good Memory*, there is a video that documents the moment when the names of the disappeared students from the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires were read for the first time in 1996:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXqdmDzpsaI>

the disappeared. Every time I look at a picture of a *desaparecido*, I see an invitation for postmemorial work, understood in Hirsh’s terms, as it “strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (*The Generation* 33). That is also my position when I look and read Marcelo Brodsky’s photographic essay *Good Memory*. “In reading, looking and listening, we necessarily allow ourselves to be vulnerable as we practice openness, interconnection, and imagination and as we acknowledge our own implication and complicity” (Hirsch, “Connective Histories” 339).

The photographer Marcelo Brodsky published the photographic-essay *Good Memory* as a book in 1997. On the cover we see the picture of his class in 1967. It has the marks of Brodsky’s intervention from ‘96. Three students have their faces crossed out. Two of them are *desaparecidos*. One of them was his best friend, Martín.



The Classmates: Altered gigantograph: 69 x 46 in (cover)

On the back cover there is a different image. Brodsky is a little boy laughing and rowing with his siblings in the river. Ahead of him is Fernando, his brother, another disappeared detainee.



Back cover of *Good Memory*

The Book

Good Memory constitutes a nexus between the cover photo, a group memory, an institutional memory and the photo of the back cover, a more private and familial memory. Between them a bridge is built, the “Puente de la Memoria” (“Memory Bridge”), which now exists in the public sphere. “Puente de la Memoria” was the ceremony/installation that took place in Brodsky’s school in 1996 in memory of the institution’s disappeared students. As Brodsky explains in the book:

As part of the ceremony, we mounted an exhibit of pictures of that era in order to transmit what had happened to the school’s current students. / The pictures were something that remained of the ninety-eight disappeared classmates, a tool to convert them into real, accessible people. We had to know what and whom we were talking about. / I decided to include the first year [eighth grade] class picture in the show, altering it by adding my texts and the recent portraits of my classmates as they are now. (58)

The book has then a hybrid look: it is a book of essays, a catalog, an installation and partially an album. It has pictures and texts written and taken by Brodsky but also by many other people. Yet three main sections are recognizable in the book. The first part is more textual than photographic as it contains the essays of Martín Caparrós and Juan Pablo Feinmann, and a poem by Juan Gelman dedicated to his disappeared son. Then we have the photographs and texts from “Memory Bridge,” the largest section of the book, which includes the picture “The Classmates,” the pictures from the exhibition at the school and other images and texts that accompanied that particular project. And finally, we find the pictures of Fernando and Martín immersed in a family or private universe, with Brodsky’s own texts. It is in the course of that relationship between *what once was*, *what was to be* and *what is* that the book becomes an exercise of collective memory of Argentina during the last thirty years.

A temporary link is then established. What ties the stories of these students from ‘67 with Brodsky’s own family history and the viewers of those photos? The

memory of state terrorism. The turning point between before and after is that violence, a violence that in the public sphere affected the private spheres and now follows the opposite course: the memories of that terror overflow the family album, writing another album, another story, collectively.

“The time that passed there is not just individual, it is an era,” Caparrós states in his essay (17). Superimposed on the indexical nature of photography (due to the relationship of proximity between the referent and the signifier), appears the iconic: the chemical image resembles the object (Metz) and, among them, the symbolic, the social convention makes it the sign of an era. I would add that in the photos of the event “Memory Bridge,” where the faces of the students of ‘96 are reflected on the faces of ‘67, some sort of continuous iconicity takes place: the student in the photo in ‘67 looks like the “real” person, the student in the picture in ‘96 looks like the student in ‘67: perhaps even today when I look at the picture, I look(ed) like them. The picture becomes a mirror to me. Although the photo has entered the dimension of collective memory, I still have an intimate relationship with it. In the activity of remembering, in memory work, the public and private spheres have very blurry boundaries. As Annette Kuhn explains when looking at a picture, although part of its message is universal, “it nevertheless seems to speak to me—to interpellate me—in a very particular way” (126).



The Exhibit in the Hall (Brodsky 61)

This intimate relationship between the photo and me, between them and us, is part of the political effect of tenderness that I am describing. Especially taking into account that during the 90’s Argentina was in a period of total impunity and

deception, these images could work against the mechanism of intimidation, in favor of an intimate resonance, understood in Fernando Ulloa's terms:

The first thing needed to create conditions of tenderness is to eliminate intimidation, especially when working in adverse conditions. To create a space where intimidation retrogresses and leaves room for an intimate resonance. When one speaks about intimate resonance, we are not necessarily speaking about intimacies, but what someone says resonates in the other, in coincidence or in dissidence, and there is an answer, which is precisely a consequence of having heard. ("Escenarios" 8, my translation)²

Against Disappearance

Nicole Krauss writes in the dedication of her novel *The History of Love*: "For my grandparents, who taught me the opposite of disappearing." What is the opposite of disappearing? How do you teach that? I would like to read *Good Memory* as an attempt to answer that question, as a quest against disappearance.

While looking at the photo taken by Alexander Gardner of Lewis Paine before his execution, Barthes thinks: "He is dead and I am going to die...the photograph tells me death in the future" (96). Unlike him, when Brodsky observes the pictures of his brother and his best friend, he does not see death in the future; he sees life in the past and in the present. The closure of death does not exist, only the inhumanity of the disappearance. The inhuman feature of the concept of *desaparecido* was openly explained by General Videla himself during the dictatorship:

[The disappeared] as such is an enigma. If the man appeared, he would have an X treatment and if the appearance became the certainty of his death, he would have a Z treatment. But while he is *desaparecido*, he may not have any special treatment. He/It is unknown, he/it is disappeared, he/it has no entity, he/it is not...neither dead nor alive, he is disappeared.³

Quite naturally Videla exposes here the mechanism of dehumanization. The disappeared is not even a "being," he/she/it is "no entity." Not being alive or dead is not having a human condition. That is why I believe that any work against disappearance works against dehumanization and in favor of humanization.

Dr. Gilou García Reinoso, an Argentinean psychoanalyst, in 1984 published her article "Matar la muerte" ("Killing Death"), which deals with the effects of the terrorist procedure of the disappearance of people. She discusses the psychological damage that the particularities of the war waged by state terrorism meant as a threat to the population:

It was not enough to deny the crime. To kill without death. To make disappear; to erase, to deny even death itself. Erasing the categories of the human being on both sides of existence: life and death, both indissoluble.

² All the quotes from texts in Spanish are mine.

³ The video of this press conference held in 1979 is available in YouTube: "Lo Pasado Pensado—Felipe Pigna—La Conferencia de Videla (1979)": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PCzaoEPv10>

Disappearance of individuals, their bodies, their names, their legal existence: NN, twice denied. Disappearance and disappearance of the disappearance. Nobody. Silence. Not naming. If it's not said then it's not: "hasn't happened." (García Reinoso 8)

I find Brodsky's proposal an obstinate attempt not to kill nor keep killing deaths, to stop disappearing the disappearance. As Feinmann explains in his text, "What Marcelo wants to do with this book is to give his brother back the face he had" (18). Twenty years have passed. Brodsky is not denouncing the disappearances, the book's purpose already given; what he does not want is for the memory of his loved ones to become the pure memory of their disappearances. Pointing in the same direction, Caparrós comments: "In our stories without history, we made them disappear a second time, we took their lives from them" (14).

At first one might expect *Good Memory* to be the recovery of their militancy. In order to understand who they were, one needs to understand *why* and *for what* they gave their lives. But no. We know nothing about the situation in which Martín and Fernando were abducted, whether they were militants of any group or what their ideas were. The book is not the story of the ideological struggle, it is not the history of why, nor is it the history of violence. It is rather about resisting violence.

Tenderness

Many of the testimonies of people who were kidnapped and tortured during the dictatorship talk about the process of dehumanization that they had to suffer. Perhaps torture is only possible under those conditions: by turning the prisoner into a thing, de-humanizing him/her, reifying the subject so then there will be nothing in him/her that could allow the torturer to identify himself with his victim: if I were like him, I could not do this to him/me.

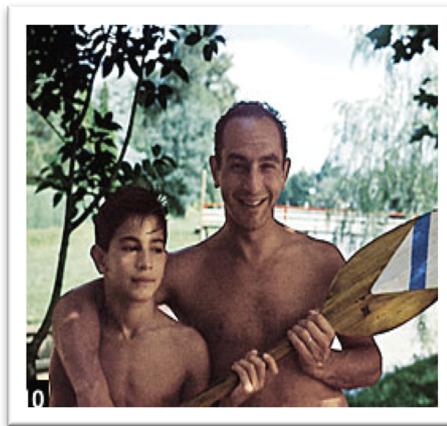
Good Memory is able to go against that basic mechanism of State terrorism. How does one stand against dehumanization but through humanization, by promoting identification with life, with the human condition? What could be more diametrically opposed to an act of violence than an act of tenderness?

Understood in terms of Ulloa, cruelty is the failure of tenderness. In this sense, "cruelty requires a sociocultural device to thrive. Cruelty is not the same as aggression, which is part of human behavior" ("Donde nace la crueldad"). Along the same lines, when I talk about tenderness, I understand it as immersed in a sociocultural realm. An act of violence is not an isolated event, it is part of the dynamic of cruelty, as a social mechanism:

The paradigm of the cruelty device is the table of torture, but cruel action is not limited only to the precise scope of torment, but must be supported by concentric, logistical, political circles that include the beneficiaries of the

policies they are intended to establish through terror. (Ulloa, “Sociedad y crueldad” 1)

In other words, I am arguing that working against cruelty implies an ethics of care (Held), acknowledging that we are individuals with different degrees of dependence and interdependence on one another. *Good Memory* does this by purging the acts and images of violence with acts and pictures of affection, attachment, sympathy, friendship.



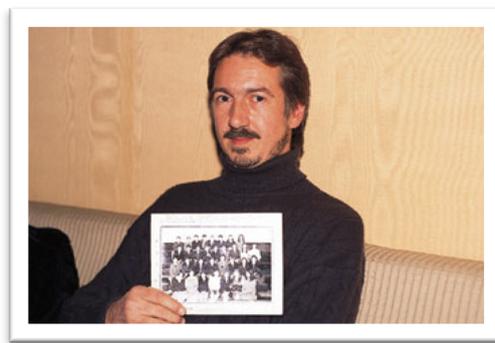
Brodsky 83,72

In “School Photos and Their Afterlives” Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer describe a similar effect in the portraits of the classmates holding the group picture from '67:

As in the weekly demonstrations in which the Madres carry images of disappeared daughters and sons strapped to their bodies,⁴ the classmates in Brodsky’s installation also become embodied signifiers of loss. The gesture in which they grasp their class photo, literally holding their living and disappeared classmates’ memory in their arms and close to their body,

⁴ Diana Tylor describes the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo as “billboards” and “conduits of memory” when holding the images of their sons and daughters in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*.

touching the photo and permitting it to touch them, elicits multisensory modes of apprehension. It transforms that photo into a powerful memorial document. (268)



Brodsky 45, 41

Martín and Fernando's presences are relocated, re-signified. By doing this, Brodsky manages to resist the violence of repetition, which is a very common problem when writing and thinking about violent past events. Many times in the urge to demand justice and remembrance we end up reproducing the same images of terror that the past violent regimes wanted us to see. We end up perpetuating the very violence that the perpetrators promoted, echoing it. On the contrary, relocating these images of care and affection provokes a different effect, the effect of tenderness. This effect is political because it is a social exercise employed to achieve a common health, a greater good. At the same time, it is also political because it challenges the very notion of autonomy that liberalism defends. It reminds us that we are all connected.

This reorganization of the archive is related to Azoulay's concept of "potential history." she asks, "how to write history that does not partake in preserving the constituent violence, history that is not merely its reiteration?" (553). Azoulay calls our attention to the need to reconstruct "the possibilities that have been violently erased and silenced in order to make them present at any given moment" (553). Through photography she tries to make historical moments

reappear at “junctions where other options could have been chosen” (551). In that sense, Brodsky and Azoulay are both trying to (re)construct the public archive of different violent pasts. Also, in both cases the main concept that collapses is that of war (Azoulay).

The Barthesian “Ça a été” (“this has been”) of photography is recovered in Caparrós’s essay as he notices that “photography supposedly does not tell, it shows. If a picture says we exist, we must exist” (16). I believe that Brodsky’s images are revealing more than that. It is not only “this has been” but also how it has been. *Good Memory* shows us that what the dictatorship killed were those lives, those smiles, the father embracing his kids, friends making each other laugh.

Family activities, in a broad sense, are portrayed in these pictures. There is a rescue of the familiar, in Brodsky (as well as in Hirsch, Kuhn, Ulloa and Held), a need to recover the concept of family, the family as a community, not from a heteronormative perspective, but rather as a humanitarian gesture. It is an affiliative gesture we might say, that includes any type of family, and that is evident in *Good Memory* with Brodsky’s best friend, Martín, who is portrayed as a brother. In the same vein, we can read the poem that Brodsky writes to him⁵. “I touched you / but you were not” (73) appears repeatedly in an attempt to recover the human dimension of affection, the contact, the sensitive dimension of experience. Also, Juan Gelman’s poem reads: “Sorrow lead to your warmth / sung in your dreams... I smell your distant solitude” (23). In this same sense, Ulloa thinks about the family:

The familial can be described in many ways, but I want to point out that situation, where, under the imprint of tenderness, a subject is not only made by culture but also a maker of culture. This happens in the family and in any context defined as familiar. If the subject is only made by the culture and not its maker, he is endangered as a subject. Perhaps it is the object of an unfamiliar situation. (“Sociedad y crueldad” 3)

The political effect of that tenderness is the resistance against dehumanization, *unfamiliarization*, crimes against humanity. Even more urgent is such resistance when the crimes are not punished, as it was the case in Argentina in the 90’s. When *Good Memory* was first published (1997), the impunity for crimes committed during the dictatorship was almost total. President Menem had passed his infamous amnesty laws in 1989 and 1990. By asking the Argentinean citizens to forgive the crimes of the dictatorship without a proper trial, without a complete

⁵ “Martín: I saw you / you were the same / but you were not / I dreamt you alive / and left / with your smile at the wheel / to wander / the dreams we had together / I touched you / but you were not / We ran companionable races / like before / on the road that went to the same place / I continued on, alone, / carrying your presence” (Brodsky 73).

investigation of the crimes and, more importantly, without the remorse of any of the perpetrators, the population was subjected to a state of schizophrenia: we were supposed to forgive something that was never made explicit, something that did not exist: Forgive even when no one was asking for forgiveness. Forget something that never happened. I believe that moment could be described as the last recoil of the “percepticide,” a term Diana Taylor coined to explain the process of the self-blinding of the general population during the dictatorship⁶.

That is why the voices of the students during the exhibit in the school in 1996 are so important. Those “post-testimonies” included in the book become now, nineteen years later, the testimony of another era, a period of democracy but when impunity was still ‘killing deaths.’ For example, Berni, is one of the third graders who writes his impressions about the installation:

I looked at all those boys and girls, all those pictures, all those disappeared persons, almost entirely... I wanted to leave and I did. But the unconscious sensation of impotence slowly gave way to the knowledge that there was nowhere to run to. I thought that the feeling of terror came from that time and what happened then. Maybe it was a fear that it would happen to me, the egotistical sensation of insecurity. However, I began to understand that it was power itself I feared above anything else. It was fear of what its impunity could do to me, fear of what I myself could do. /In the present, when dictatorship and death are supposedly distant, for some reason the Terror persists. (68)

Just like Berni’s testimony proves that the cruelty of the dictatorship was still in place during the 90’s in Argentina, finding Fernando’s last picture at the ESMA (Navy School of Mechanics) in 2005 evidences a different sociocultural reality.

Making Amends

Néstor Kirchner's presidency (2003-2007) marked a new turn regarding human rights policy in Argentina. His government created links with non-governmental organizations and recognized human rights organizations. Kirchner reinforced the pursuit of punitive justice but simultaneously worked towards achieving some kind of restorative justice through more symbolic reparations. Amongst other measures, the day of the coup, March 24th, was declared an immovable commemorative holiday,⁷ a new foreword to the commission report,

⁶ As Taylor explains: “The military spectacle made people pull back in fear, denial, and tacit complicity from the show of force. Therein lay its power. The military violence could have been relatively invisible, as the term *disappearance* suggests. The fact that it wasn’t indicates that the population as a whole was the intended target, positioned by means of spectacle” (123).

⁷ This is connected with Elizabeth Jelin ideas on dates and commemorations. She argues that “the official calendar of a country is an arena where the collective past is brought

Nunca Más, was added by direct presidential order,⁸ and the portraits of the Junta leaders were removed from the gallery at the Military College.



President Néstor Kirchner observing the removal of General Videla's portrait in 2004

The very fact that the portrait of some of the Junta leaders had been present for more than twenty years after the end of the dictatorship, occupying a quasi-celebratory place, shows the process of amnesia and impunity about which Berni remarks in his testimony. The picture of Kirchner observing the removal of Videla's portrait becomes part of the work of social memory, it has become a symbol of another time, a time of repair and accountability.



to the present. It is part of the construction of the symbols of the community and the nation" (142).

⁸ The new text, signed by the Human Rights Office, was added to the edition of the 30th anniversary of the coup, before the prologue written 22 years ago by the president of the CONADEP, the writer Ernesto Sábato. That original prologue began: "During the 70s, Argentina was convulsed by a terror that came from both the extreme right and the extreme left." In the new edition, the position of the Kirchner administration can be read more clearly: "We must make it clear, because it is required in order to build the future on firm foundations, that it is unacceptable to try to justify the State terrorism as a sort of game of opposing violence as if it were possible to seek a justifying symmetry" (my translation).

Mural in the streets of Buenos Aires in 2012:
 “Taking down a *cadre*, you formed thousands”

Another very significant reparation was the opening of a museum devoted to commemoration and reflection in the former clandestine detention center at the Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica del Armada (ESMA)—that sinister building where Brodsky’s brother, Fernando, was kept captive. In 2004, sharing the stage with HIJOS, *Abuelas* and *Madres*, Kirchner stated in his opening speech: “I have come to apologize, on behalf of the State, for having shamefully remained silent about so many atrocities during twenty years of democracy” (qtd. in Ros). After that, “together with survivors of this detention center and representatives of human rights groups, he entered the building” (Ros 9). This time the president’s petition for forgiveness addressed the victims directly instead of mediating between them and the perpetrators. This time it was a symbolic pardon that required neither amnesties nor forgetting. Among the most important measures taken by Kirchner are the annulment of the Due Obedience and Full Stop. Casually or causally, that same year, 2005, Brodsky finds the photograph of his brother, the last picture of Fernando, detained at the ESMA.



Brodsky 91

The political effect in this case, the status of the picture itself, changes because it is above all evidence. When Annette Kuhn speaks of photography as evidence of a particular sort, as material for interpretation, she speaks in metaphorical terms: “every photograph contains a range of possible meanings... Photographic images far from being transparent renderings of a pre-existing reality, embody coded reference to, and also help construct, realities” (153). The picture of

Fernando at the ESMA is many things: it is the last trace of his presence in the world, it is what ‘pricks’ me and is the evidence of a real crime. The photo is the proof of his passing through the ESMA. Then the photo of the photo, the photo that includes a hand that we assume is his brother’s, becomes the trace of another moment, a moment of reunion, a different political instance. It is itself an image that can also be read in metaphorical way: Marcelo’s hand tries to touch Fernando’s body—he is looking for human contact again.

In October 2011, the image of Fernando at the ESMA was shown by his mother, Sara, as part of the evidence in the trial for the ESMA mega-cause.⁹ She placed it next to another picture of Fernando before being kidnapped and said to the judge: “Look what they did to my son!” (Dandan). That year Marcelo Brodsky had found the original picture of Fernando taken by Basterra. As he explained in *Página 12*: “the picture was there, but complete. From the shoulders continued downwards towards the waist. And the shirt was visible. A torn, irregular, basic garment. A minimal shirt, wrinkled, wrapping a pubescent body after a torture session” (“La camiseta”). Some of the survivors told Brodsky’s family that Fernando used to workout in his tiny little cell. That object from outside of the concentration camp also wraps Fernando’s body with humanity, with care.

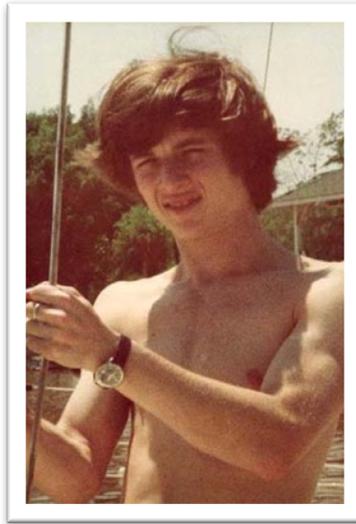
Memory Work

Good Memory is memory work understood as “an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory” (Kuhn 157). As Hirsch and Kuhn both indicate, “memory signals an affective link to the past—a sense, precisely, of a material ‘living connection’” (Hirsch 33). Memory, then, involves an emotional reaction, a physical response. Thus, we can distinguish memory from history because of that living connection.

Memory work is more evident in *Good Memory* if we think about its hybrid status and the ambiguous category of author exposed through its materials. There are around seventy-seven photos in the book.¹⁰ A little more than half of them are pre-dictatorship. The rest of the images are post-dictatorship. Only two of the images exposed were taken during the dictatorship: the picture of Fernando at the ESMA and the last picture taken of Martin in the river in 1976.

⁹ ESMA cause is considered one of the “mega-causes” by the high number of victims and former perpetrators that are involved in the investigations.

¹⁰ It is hard to determine the number of images because there are several reproductions of the same picture, sometimes with small changes.



Brodsky 73

Fernando and Martín are the two main characters in this book and, at the same time, the two main absences. The tenderness of those photos of family and friends, where we see loved and happy people, enfolds the picture of Fernando at the ESMA and the last picture of Martín. The pictures in the family album become memory assistants in a process of remembrance that goes from the personal to the social, and vice versa continuously. Memory work always confronts other versions and adds and erases different materials. But we need to be cautious: *Good memory* can never be a family album; it does not have that linearity or that consistency, or the sense of completion of an album. *Good memory* is as full of photos, texts and symbols as it is of gaps, absences, leaps in time and nonsenses.

As I said above, the collective dimension of the work of *Good Memory* also has to do with the complex authorship of the book. Many of its photos were taken by Marcelo Brodsky, but more than half of the photos in the book were not taken by him. In many of those cases we cannot even find out who took the picture. Something similar happens with the texts. Many of the texts were written by Brodsky, but many were not. Beside Caparrós and Feinmann's essays and Gelman's poem, there are also those very interesting and political testimonies of college students who write about the installation "Memory Bridge."

Perhaps we could refer to *Good Memory* as a work consisting of testimonies and "post-testimonies." We have the testimony of the exile and his personal experience in the voice of Brodsky and his generation. But there is also a sort of "post-testimony" as it gives voice to the present generations rather than to the direct victims, especially in the "Memory Bridge." I mentioned earlier the political dimension of these post-testimonies not only for their content, but also because

they are reflections that, even when they part from something personal, they continue to aim at the social sphere. I believe they are also political because by allowing the kids to speak for themselves there is an act of trust in others, an act of humanization of history: the boys in their testimonies are able to realize that they are like the victims, reflecting about the past in the present.

Another aspect that marks the collective and political dimension of the book has to do with the accumulation of symbols in the pictures: the river, the symbols of the militant left, statues, sculptures, faces deleted. This accumulation certainly speaks of the collective dimension of the book, since a symbol can only be established as such in the social sphere, by convention. Amongst all the symbols that shape *Good Memory*, the river is the most prominent. Our particular river, the Río de la Plata, acquired a different meaning after the dictatorship, as it was the place where hundreds of prisoners were thrown from military airplanes during the cruel “Vuelos de la muerte” (“Death flights”). As a last gesture of humanization, the book ends with the image of the river and a legend: “Into the river they threw them. It became their nonexistent tomb.”

In *Nexo*, another photographic essay by Brodsky published in 2001, the symbolic dimension of his work becomes more transparent. While it still includes family memories linked to the dictatorship in Argentina, it also incorporates elements of the history of Italy and Spain, of exile and of the AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires in 1994. For this reason, in the prologue of *Nexo* Andreas Huyssen remarks on the importance of the public sphere in Brodsky’s work and places it in the tradition of “Memory art”: art that commemorates. Huyssen read Brodsky’s artistic project as mnemonic public art: “an artistic practice that crosses the boundaries between installation, photography, monument and memorial. Its place can be both in the museum or the gallery and in public space” (9). *Good memory* also refuses to be pigeonholed. It is the product of many gazes, many voices, in different times and places. It contains remnants of a family album while denying the completeness of the album; it is an installation, a compilation and the documentation of another installation (“Memory Bridge”). I believe the online version of *Good Memory* is even more collective and participatory, available at zonezero.com. Viewers/readers can click wherever they want, breaking the linear order proposed in the book. This brings up a new question: what can be incorporated in *Good Memory* and what cannot? What materials can be part of a “good memory”? What do we choose to remember?

Good Memory?

Up to this point we have read in *Good memory* the political effect of recovering the human and vital dimension of the *desaparecidos*, the victims of the dictatorship, as a form of resistance against violence and crimes against humanity. The affective dimension of life experience is recovered through images that belong to a familiar world in which there is affection, care and tenderness; thus, *Good Memory* undermines the systematic cruelty of State terrorism.

Without denying the above, I find other equally political decisions in the work of Brodsky. What do we know about Fernando's ideas? What do we know about the reasons why he gave his life? The same goes for Martín: what do we know about his militancy, his convictions? The difficulty in understanding the meaning of the disappearance that appears in the quote from *Catch-22* (epigraph) is the same difficulty that I, as a reader, have when I open Brodsky's book. I want to understand. I need to understand: what is the meaning of their disappearances?

In that sense, Caparrós' essay, which opens *Good Memory*, could be a little misleading because it seems to guide the reading towards materials that are not really in the book. He says: "We spoke of how they were the object of kidnapping, torture and murder, and we barely spoke of how they were when they were subject, when they chose to live destinies that included the danger of death, because they believed that they had to do so" (14). Of course, the exercise proposed here by Caparrós is valid, important and necessary but I do not think that is the memory work that we find in Brodsky's book. In *Good Memory*, we know almost nothing about the decisions that Martín and Fernando made as subjects. Did they belong to a political party or organization? Which one? Were they really willing to die?

I have reclaimed the power of tenderness, of the human dimension and its political importance but in the process another kind of erasure seems to take place. Generalizing, aiming to discover what unites us, we can lose sight of the individuality of each case, we can lose sight of the subject, those subjects that were, perhaps as never before, feeling protagonists of history.

Brodsky's own textual interventions seem to point in that same direction. He cannot make sense out of some materials. For example, the work of recollection and reunion with the classmates does not seem to be "illuminating" something in particular. The texts accompanying the photo series of "The Classmates" are quite vague as they highlight random aspects in the life of each person: their professions, physical features or personality: "he is reserved," "his humor is fine," "she used to lie." Although we can see a common denominator among many of Brodsky's ex-classmates, there is an aspect that is not addressed or interpreted: exile. Many of the

classmates are/were exiled but little is said about why they left the country or why they came back. Likewise, we do not have much information about Fernando or Martín's personalities, apart from Martín's wanting to be a photographer. Their militancy is not recovered; we cannot explain why they were killed. That is a void that none of the photos fills, neither of the texts considers. I wonder then how much of that erasure mechanism belongs to Brodsky's project by choice and how much of that erasure reflects a much broader and more powerful mechanism, as Sarlo argues:

In the case of the *desaparecidos*, postmemory is both an effect of discourse and a particular relationship with the materials of the reconstruction; with the same materials, deceptive and pierced stories or precarious reconstructions are made that, however, claim some certainties even though, inevitably, the gaps of the unknown remain. Therefore, what is unknown is not an effect of the memory of the second-generation but a consequence of how the dictatorship administered the murder. (Sarlo 157)

We have arrived then to that space that is pending, that aspect that escapes this *non-album*: the why. The entire book can be tender and subversive at the same time. It is subversive especially for the time when the "Memory Bridge" took place, during the era of amnesia in Argentina. I wonder, finally, if the political effect of tenderness could also be interpreted as criticism of the armed guerrillas that fought against the dictatorship, with whom maybe Fernando and Martín fought. A political action sustained by tenderness, against violence, would require cooperation, tolerance, respect and solidarity so that the means could finally coincide with the goals.

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