Bustamante-Brauning, S. (2022). [Re]-appearances online: photography, mourning and new media ecologies for representing the Southern Cone's disappeared on two digital memory platforms. *photographies*, *15*(3), 381-403. https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2022.2096679

[Re]-appearances online: photography, mourning and new media ecologies for representing the Southern Cone's disappeared on two digital memory platforms

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Published online: 18 Sep 2022.

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ARTICLE

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[RE]-APPEARANCES ONLINE: PHOTOGRAPHY, MOURNING AND NEW MEDIA ECOLOGIES FOR REPRESENTING THE SOUTHERN CONE'S DISAPPEARED ON TWO DIGITAL MEMORY PLATFORMS

The practice of enforced disappearances fundamentally alters memorialisation rituals as relatives do not have a body to localise mourning as is possible with processes of death. Families in the Southern Cone of South America (Chile/Argentina) have sought new ways to remember the dictatorship missing who remain in a liminal space between life and death. As a vehicle to represent public grief, photography became vital; families marched with photographs of their disappeared relatives on placards or pinned to their chests. Studies on the importance of photography and disappearance have come some way in elucidating the photographic medium's unique role of in representing the disappeared. However, little scholarship has looked at the role of photography and new media in these histories. Charting the use of photographs in Chile and Argentina to represent the disappeared and their families' grief, this article engages with their suspended mourning drawing on content and visual analysis alongside expert interview data. By analysing two websites that reproduce photographs of the disappeared: www.memoriaviva.com and www.recordatorios.com.ar, the article looks at the use of photography in the digital ecology. Both sites show photography's continued importance for rituals of remembrance and to demand accountability in the present and for the future.

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If photography-as-instrument contains this temporal ambiguity between what *still is* and that which *is no longer* (of the suspended between life and death, between appear and disappear), that ambiguity is put into sharp relief in the photographs of the disappeared.[1]

Now, at the start of a new millennium that has seen the emergence of a new generation of 'memory agents', it is possible that we are facing a paradigmatic shift in the remembrance of Argentina's unburied bodies. The generation of the grandchildren of the victims are the first generation entirely born (and bred) digital. Their strategies of memory will probably thus be determined, in large part, by the skills and aesthetics of social networks and new media.[2]

Introduction

The practice of enforced disappearances profoundly alters memorialisation rituals. Unlike "'normal' processes of death," relatives have no body to localise mourning.[3] Families and activists in the Southern Cone of South America (Chile/Argentina) have sought new ways to remember their missing who remain in a liminal space between life and death. Scholars of memory in Latin America working on the legacies of state-led violence in the region[4] have added unique contributions to the field matching the 20th Century "boom" in European memory studies.[5] Focusing on how "memory entrepreneurs'[6] carved out space on Latin American streets to demand memory, truth and justice when states chose to turn a new leaf and forget the violent past, the grassroots approach sets the region apart from the Eurocentric paradigms of institutionalised memory. Where an entire generation endured kidnappings and enforced disappearance by state terror, photography became a vital vehicle to represent this public grief. Families marched with photographs of their disappeared relatives on placards or pinned to their chests to demand accountability and maintain the visibility of their missing relatives. Studies on the importance of photography and enforced disappearance have come some way to elucidating the medium's unique role in representing these histories when the lack of victims" physical remains created the need for new strategies to materialise the missing.[7] Recent scholarship has begun to look at disappearance and online representation in Latin America following the digital turn.[8] These studies, however, only touch on the role of photography and new media without it being a central focus.

Building on work looking at the specific relationship between photography and enforced disappearance in Latin America, this article explores the uses of online photographs.[9] The disappeared inhabit photographs in a way that opposes standard assumptions of photography's ontological links to death.[10] In contrast to Susan Sontag's assertion that "[p]hotographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading towards their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people,"[11] photographs of victims of enforced disappearance in the Southern Cone of South America maintain vitality not decay. When relatives do not have conclusive proof of the whereabouts of their loved ones, photographs

symbolise life and recovery of identity — which totalitarian states attempted to erase — and a collective call for accountability.[12] The circuits that these photographs have taken from streets, art spaces, and of relevance for this article, online, is one of reactivations through presence-giving, memorialisation and calls for justice. Looking first at the history of photography and disappearance in Latin America, this article then engages with representations of the disappeared on two human rights focused websites: *www.memoriaviva.com* which relates to the memory of the Chilean civic-military dictatorship (1973–1990) and *www.recordatorios.com.ar*, a platform show-casing a collaborative project initiated by families of people disappeared during the last Argentine dictatorship (1976–1983) to publish memorials in the newspaper *Página 12*. Both websites result from human rights activist networks which demanded (and continue to demand) collective memory of periods of state terror in the region. I suggest that although photographs are not a panacea when the question ¿dónde están? (where are they?) remains unanswered, they are a powerful means through which victims' families and activists evoke the identities of the disappeared in the present and for the future and thus subvert the dictatorships' attempts to erase citizens. These photographs confront endemic forgetting through reappearance in the digital ecology.

Contexts & rationale: transnational terror and memory

Mid-20th Century Latin America endured periods of authoritarianism. In South America, many neighbouring countries experienced civic-military dictatorships: Brazil (1964–1985), Argentina (1966–1973; 1976–1983), Uruguay (1973–1984) and Chile (1973–1990), where human rights abuses were common. Although each has a specific trajectory of authoritarianism, there are points of convergence between regimes, shared justice-seeking moments and strategies for memorialising which justify a transdisciplinary analytical lens, particularly in the cases of the last Argentine dictatorship (1976–1983) and the Chilean dictatorship (1973–1990).

Authoritarian regimes in Chile and Argentina colluded in the 1970s through Operation Condor, a transnational repressive mechanism whereby dictatorships in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile exchanged information on persecuted indivi-duals when they crossed national territories. Dictatorships in Latin America did not exist in a vacuum. Cold War geopolitics and the National Security Doctrine (NSD), the USA's and regional attempts to eradicate communism through economic, ideo-logical, and military influence in the region cemented their power. . The USA provided military training and channelled funding to violent regimes targeting inter-nal left-wing groups for extermination, citing national security to justify extreme violence.[13] This shared history connected Chile and Argentina as both civic-military regimes cast themselves as national saviours overemphasising the threat of internal subversion to cement power through brutality.

Moreover, the violence was similar with arbitrary arrests, kidnapping, torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances common in both cases. By over-stating the threat of revolutionary armed groups, the regimes extended their power

and spread fear in society. Violence in both countries was indiscriminate and enforced disappearance aimed to destroy the political ambitions and agency of a whole generation who were "chupado" (sucked up) into the state repressive mechanism and held in secret detention centres where they were tortured, killed, and disappeared. In Argentina, although the period of state repression started before the military coup of 24 March 1976, disappearance became a state tactic from this point onwards.[14]

While the initial human rights slogan used during dictatorships and the immediate aftermath, calling for the disappeared's return, *Aparición con vida* (appear with life)[15] no longer seems possible after 30 years of democratic rule in Chile and Argentina, the demands for truth, memory, and justice remain a powerful call. Drawing on the trajectory of photography as a metonym for the presence and individuality of the disappeared,[16] this article looks at the meanings of memorialising practices that use photography in the digital sphere.

Methods

Using content and visual analysis alongside expert interview data, this article analyses the memorialisation of the disappeared on websites. Interview data with three creators of the underexplored online memory platforms *Memoria Viva* (Chile) and *Memoria Abierta* (Argentina) is complemented by visual and content analysis of website visits and observations over a 6-month period. Narrow readings of specific entries and reflexive, hermeneutical readings of https://memoriaviva.com/nuevaweb/, https://recordatorios.com.ar/ and also the online catalogue for the *Identidad* (Identity) exhibition at the Parque de la memoria https://parquedelamemoria.org.ar/catalogo-identidad/ illustrate my discussions of photography. In this period, I utilised screen grabs and explored the sites' architecture and content to understand the relationship between text and image presented. I highlight reflexive readings in this examination to draw conclusions about these digital memories. My interpretation draws on my embedded knowledge as the child of Chilean exiles, who fled the county following the 1973 coup. Although I cannot speak directly to the experience of having a disappeared relative (although my parents had friends who were disappeared), I attempt — through secondary literatures, primary sources online, and interview data — to highlight some of the complexities of photography's ontology when representing the disappeared online.

Even though these creators have not spoken to each other when designing these web platforms, some synergies warrant further analysis, especially in the respective displays of photographs of victims of enforced disappearance. Looking to a diverse set of extant literature, much from individuals working on and in the Southern Cone, illustrates the relationship between photography and representation of the disappeared. By emphasising the interstice between disappearance, memory, and photography in the Southern Cone and nascent research on new media and photography, my analysis proposes new ways of understanding online spaces for remembering the disappeared. It suggests digital reproductions can trigger memory and call for accountability and justice when online platforms are transformed into spaces where

individuals can locate their incomplete grief, can activate calls to justice, and can create digital shrines to the missing. Using images in the digital ecology promotes intimate acts of remembrance through personal devices and home computers. However, through the sharing, linking, and interactive possibilities of new media the reproductions of these photographs online also promote collective acts of remembrance.

Photography and disappearance in Chile and *Argentina*

Photography's index,[17] its ability to attest to the "irrefutably *there*",[18] or the "that-has-been'[19] of photography is an oft-discussed aspect of the medium's ontology. Such debate intensifies in representing historically traumatic events where photographs become evidence. As Susan Sontag states in her classic text *On Photography*: 'Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading towards their destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of all people.'[20] While Sontag's reflexions on photography and death add valuable insights into what it is to look at photographs of traumatic events, overemphasising photography's metonymical relationship to death does not fully account for how the medium links to life. The medium's role in representing enforced disappearance is complicated by these figures suspension in a liminal space between life and death. Marianne Hirsch, in her study of Holocaust photographs and postmemory, challenges Sontag's   notion   by   returning   to   Barthes"   suggestion   that:

> [I]t is precisely the indexical nature of the photo, its status as relic, or trace, or fetish—its "direct" connection with the material presence of the photographed person – that at once intensifies its status as harbinger of death and, at the same time and concomitantly, its capacity to signify life.[21]

So while photography connects to death it also links to light and life.

To assume photographs deployed to represent Latin America's disappeared evoke death does not fully encompass how photographs are an indispensable apparatus to prove the existence of the missing, that they were irrefutably once here, even though material evidence of their existence is gone as repressive states covered up evidence of their crimes. The figures who inhabit these photographs are the spectres of the living people so cruelly taken away. As Avery Gordon reminds us in her seminal book on hauntings: "A disappearance is real only when it is apparitional because the ghost or the apparition is the principal form by which something lost or invisible or seemingly not there makes itself known or apparent to us."[22] These apparitions are seen through the marches for memory in Argentina when the faces of the missing adorn the street and in other cases individuals describe seeing the ghosts of the missing in urban spaces and employees at memory sites housed in ex-detention centres describe communing with these figures.[23] The photographs of the disappeared do not affirm the death of the missing (which remains an open question without physical remains of the disappeared) but rather a liminal space between life and death,

as Gordon concludes, "the ghost is alive, so to speak."[24] These photographs affirm life whilst speaking to the tragedy of individuals who are still missing suspended between life and death.

Photographs of the disappeared are in this constant dialect of absence and presence, life and death, or as Chilean cultural critic Nelly Richard suggests in the quote which opens this article between "appear- disappear."[25] Photographs of the disappeared, reproduced at marches and online, not only attest to Barthes' *noeme* of photography, the indexical "that-has-been",[26] they suggest what still is. The figure of the disappeared, through active links with families and activists who demand their reappearance are still able to demand justice and accountability for past state violence. The collective struggles of a generation who were disappeared and their relatives' insistence on not letting them be passive victims of history, through slogans such as "aparición con vida" (appear with life) or "vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos" (they were taken alive, we want them alive) points towards life as much as it does to "inconclusive death" of disappearance.[27] Photographs persist as the "open wound" left by disappearance rather than that of a definitive death.[28] Relative's grief is interrupted, suspended so they are unable to actively mourn.

Social science and humanities scholarship on enforced disappearance and photography often focuses on public demonstrations in print media rather than online[29]; and in artistic responses to state terror in the Southern Cone.[30] As Jean Franco's early study on the role of photography and gendered activism in Latin America showed, it was women — often mothers — who refused to accept that their disappeared loved ones were dead: "To speak of 'death' would allow the past to be forgotten; it would become history".[31] Photography enabled families of the disappeared to resist the double disappearance of loved ones becoming history through denials, amnesia and impunity in the dictatorship and post-dictatorship period and, in so doing, moved away from photography's death drive towards its role in denoting political activity. Mothers who carried their loved one's photo, commonly either from identification documents or family albums,[32] pinned to their chest at public demonstrations "transformed the docile portrait or, in the case of the photocopies, the disembodied mechanical reproduction of a bodily organ into a public punctum".[33]

Relatives resisting the finality of death for their missing opposed exhumations and financial compensations as they believed these would take agency away from the symbolic figure of the disappeared.[34] As long-time president of the *Association of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Mothers Association)* Hebe de Bonafini — a group which resists exhumations and financial compensation which they believe confirm the definitive death of their children and deny the disappeared the ability to demand justice — states: "Our children are not cadavers. Our children are physically disappeared but live on in the struggle, ideals and [political] compromise."[35] Photography alludes to these principles even if di Bonafini's views do not represent all the relatives' views on exhumations.[36]

Argentine sociologist Ludmila da Silva Catela has noted three characteristics of disappearance "the *lack of a body*, the *lack of a moment for mourning* and of *a tombstone*."[37] The body, she suggests, is an "essential *locus* for death rituals".[38] While disappearance

created acute grief for the relatives, families transformed this pain into political action. Photographs imperfectly restored life to the disappeared, enabling a hybrid ritual of remembrance where families localise some of their pain, even if they would never be able to mourn loved ones.

The prospect of state financial compensations and exhumations led to a split in the *Mothers* into two branches: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Foundational Line and Bonafini's Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. For some, the possibility of evidencing — through material remains — what happened to their loved ones is part of the process that might lead them to mourn their loved ones even if other opinions, such as those expressed by Bonafini, attempt to employ the suspended status of disappearance to enact political agency. Another split in activist groups is that of relatives of disappeared people and those representing people executed for political reasons. Both Chile and Argentina have separate entities representing these groups. The use of photography in each contexts differ. The photograph representing an individual known to have been killed by the state takes on a memorialising function, linked to a definitive death, where photographs of the disappeared represent a truth-seeking component which appeals to the liminal figure of the disappeared. The issue of reparations in transitional justice literature are extensive with some arguing, using the *Mothers association* as an example, that financial compensations and state attempts at reconciliation "[...] can *also* function as a mechanism that attempts to placate victims demands for criminal justice [...]".[39] Early state reparations including "material" financial compensation and the "symbolic" reparations of exhumations and memorials proposed by the transitional government worked on the presumption of death of the disappeared, something that the *Mothers Association* would not accept.[40]

Identity

During the repression in Argentina, political prisoners taken to clandestine detention centres had their identities stolen, and prisoner numbers replaced their names. As Argentine social scientist Pilar Calviero put it:

> Numbers replaced names and surnames, living people who had already *disappeared* from the world of the living now *would disappear* from themselves through a process of "emptying" that attempted to leave no trace. Bodies without identity, dead without a body or name: the disappeared.[41]

According to da Silva Catela[42] and Richard,[43] photographs return identity to the all-engrossing category of *the disappeared*. The images help reconstruct an individual's history and struggle by representing an individual with ideas, desires, and life stories. These photographs also substitute the gravestone through rituals in public spaces.[44] Camila Loew also discusses this relationship in the context of remembering dictatorship victims in Spain. Photographic portraits return identity to "silenced subjects" and, she suggests, represent the dialectic of individual and group identity as they: "[...] both grant a personal, exceptional stance to each

witness and at the same time construct a collective identity [. . .]".[45] It is the dualism of the individual and the group which is also displayed by the photographs of Latin America's disappeared.

As a result of the critical absence of bodies and the state's attempt to destroy individuals' identities, photographs become a heuristic device. When confronted with the possibility or impossibility of giving tangible presence to the missing, this imperfect surrogate is sent out into the world to demand justice, insist on remembrance, and return identity to those made nameless by the state. Sociologist Vikki Bell analyses the role of photographs of the disappeared taken in detention centres as a biopolitical call for *"aparición"* (to appear/appearance) when used in law courts and art spaces and suggests they propose a "politics of the *present*" at odds with a politics of memory or the past.[46] Drawing on poststructuralist theories, Bell's astute contribution ponders the problems of representations of the disappeared and how their uses might enact a "pulling [the disappeared] out of 'documentation' and back to a ceremonial or at least celebratory presentation of one intimately known and loved."[47] She asserts the need to question how these images allow the disappeared to live on or die.[48]

Again, the liminality of disappearance complicates the photograph's role as nurturing life or death. A memory studies lens is as much about the implications of the past and its meanings in the present and the future. Even the archive in Derrida's seminal essay Archive Fever warns against "*an archivable concept of the archive*".[49] Memory, like the archive, "is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow."[50] Both allude to the present and to the future as well as the past.[51]

In the second of the quotes that opened this article, Argentine cultural memory scholar Jordana Blejmar anticipates digital technology's central role for the future generation of memory agents.[52] The digital turn has transposed photographic representations of the disappeared into these online spaces. The following section examines this phenomenon drawing on content analysis and interview data from two case studies.

Digital memories

Memoriaviva.com (MV) has its roots in the 1980s international solidarity movement and exile activist networks in Europe and launched online in the 1990s. The site recently underwent a redesign in 2021 in preparation for the upcoming 50th anniversary of the coup in Chile in September 2023, with an updated design and the addition of added sources related to dictatorship victims. The websites' "about" section describes it as a "Digital archive of human rights violations [committed] by the military in Chile (1973–1990)", and centres on four lists of information: 1) detained disappeared people, 2) people executed for political reasons, 3) Criminals, and 4) detention centres. The site gathers names of victims of dictatorship violence with photographs, dates of detention, dates of birth, political affiliations and reproduces information published in available truth

commission data and press entries related to judicial cases. This website includes alphabetical lists of executed and disappeared people and human rights abusers. Where other online memory organisations rely on Chilean state funding, MV relies on volunteer backing and maintains its identity as a grassroots platform linked to the the exile community. The site's continued presence nearly 30 years after it launched results from what one of its creators told me is the perception that post-democratic Chile failed to sufficiently address human rights abuses committed during the dictatorship.[53]

Recordatorios (reminders/commemorative cards) is a microsite created by and featured on Argentine human rights alliance Memoria Abierta's website and is a collaboration with left-wing newspaper Página 12. Memoria Abierta was founded in 2000 by a group of human rights organisations (including the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Foundational Line)[54] to preserve documentation, create an oral testimony archive and promote memory of the last dictatorship, the activism against state terror and the quest for justice.[55] This initiative, which is now more than twenty years old, emerged in the context of the prevalent forgetting and impunity that defined 1990s Argentina under the Carlos Menem presidency (1989–1999). During this period, high-ranking military officers serving sentences since the 1985 Trials of the Junta were given pardons and the so-called impunity laws created endemic official forgetting. One was a statute of limitation on bringing new cases for historical human rights abuses, and the other absolved lower-ranking military personnel of responsibility. This period was one of intense activism on the streets as families continued to demand the truth of what happened to their loved ones. Since the repeal of the impunity laws and a state discourse promoting remembering of dictatorship violence, organisations such as Memoria Abierta have been in a more stable financial situation even if denial of dictatorship human rights abuses continues to be an issue.

Recordatorios contains digitised entries of commemorative texts published daily in print in Página 12. The initiative began in 1988 when the fledgling newspaper (founded the year before) began publishing texts written by dictatorship victims' families, especially those of disappeared people. The first of these was submitted by Estela De Carlotto — president of the Grandmothers/Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo human rights organisation — on the 10th anniversary of her daughter Laura's killing. This initiative has since developed organically with multiple *recordatorios* published daily, usually surrounding anniversaries of a person's kidnap by state forces.

Through these curated and connected media, the platform narrates the history, uses and context of *recordatorios* and shows the importance of this initiative for families to enact rituals of remembrance and demand justice and accountability in the present.[56] Within this ever-evolving archive, the disappeared are transformed and given new meaning through activating the archive of images of the disappeared with the messages written for them by their relatives. The *recordatorios* are a means through which relatives commune in an affective way with their missing loved ones and attempt to fill the void left when families do not have a body or grave to localise a loved one's death and mourn them. Celia Van Dembroucke, discussing the print *recordatorios*, outlines how each entry can tell the story of the social-political moment

they were published in and how they are subject to change through time.[57] These entries also facilitate synchronic and diachronic readings when reproduced on Memoria Abierta's website as users can then see the change between subsequent anniversaries of an individual's disappearance.

The "variations" section of the microsite alludes to these differences in relatives' demands in specific moments and accounts for the changes in memory discourse and justice in Argentina. An example of this was my search of Ana María Woichejosky de Tonso's *recordatorios* — one of the victims I first encountered listed in an automatically generated gallery display on the variations section. The earliest text published for her on 07–11-2001 makes direct reference to the Full Stop (1986), and Due Obedience (1987) impunity laws mentioned above, and the amnesties given by President Carlos Menem. In 2003, the Néstor Kirchner administration (2003–2007) declared these laws and amnesties unconstitutional changing state memory policies related to the dictatorship past. The subsequent *recordatorios* written for Woichejosky de Tonso turn to more familial memories of this person in contrast to the more urgent appeal to justice of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The photographs accompanying these entries also change, in the first of Woichejosky de Tonso's *recordatorio*, it shows a studio headshot of her looking like a 1940s or 1950s cinema actor, her head is tilted to one side and her gaze looks off into the distance (See Fig. 1). The later photograph shows her in a more informal pose outdoors in jeans, a denim jacket, and a white striped t-shirt; she looks slightly older, and the photograph evokes a later era likely the 1960s or early 1970s suggested by the clothes she is wearing (See Fig. 2). Writing different texts and including diverse photographs shows that families demands change over time as do the photographs they chose to represent their missing relatives.

An embedded video shown on another part of the *recordatorios* site shows Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Foundational Line member Beatriz Lewin's photo album of *recordatorios* which she cut out of the newspaper and compiled. She discusses how she shares her curated albums with other group members, demonstrating how these texts constitute an impromptu shrine with which relatives come together, share, and enact remembrance.

Returning to *Memoria Viva* (MV) and my interview with one of its founders they described families' difficulties in temporarily relinquishing photographs of their loved ones for digitisation and inclusion on the website. For them, this was akin, my interviewee felt, to losing their loved one again. Their initial misgivings were soon dispelled once they saw them on the website. Contrary to century-old views about the loss of aura due to reproduction,[58] locating photographs on MV lent these photographs some legitimacy, returned some aura to these images which became a site of ritual significance again. This founding member told me that relatives had contacted them to say that they had visited *Memoria Viva's* entry of their loved ones on an anniversary, such as the birthday of a missing person. This suggests that the website, with pictures and life details of a disappeared person, become a hybrid site, a virtual tombstone, for families who have no physical grave with which to mourn their loved ones. Families use digital media in their homes as part of their private rituals of remembrance.
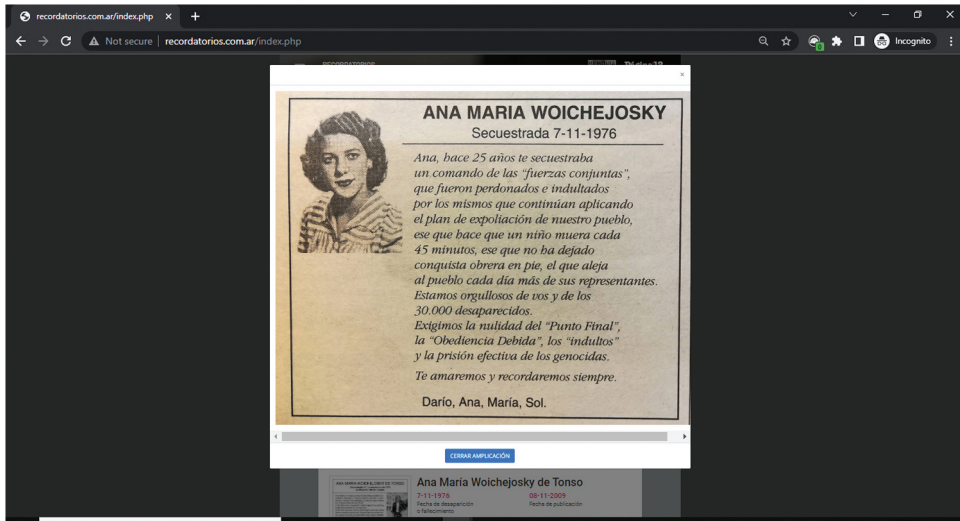
Fig. 1.   My own screengrab from recordatorios.com.ar reproduced with permission of Memoria Abierta. This shows the earliest recordatorio written for Ana Maria Woichejosky disappeared 7–11-1976 with text written by her family. Source: Colección Recordatorios Pagina/12 — Archivo Memoria Abierta.
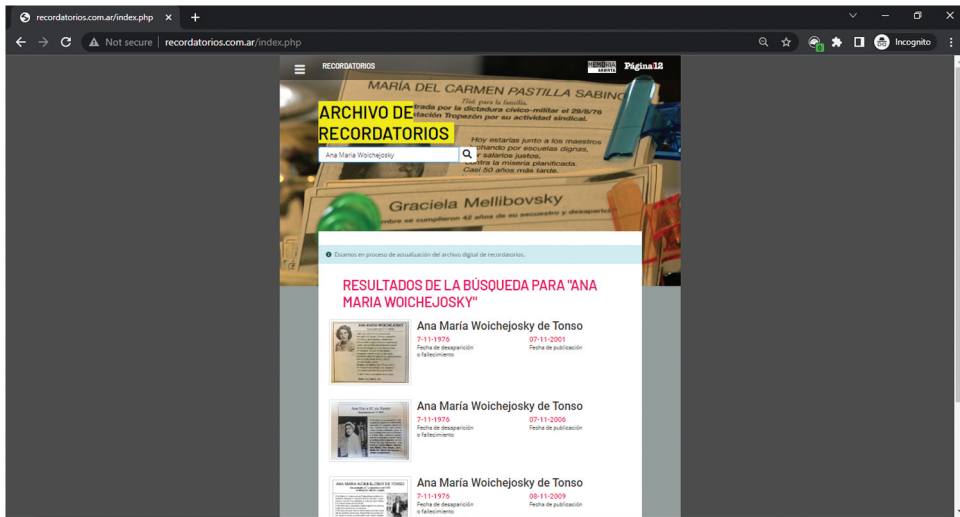

Fig. 2.   My own screengrab from recordatorios.com.ar reproduced with permission of Memoria Abierta. This shows all recordatorios written for Ana Maria Woichejosky disappeared 7–11-1976. Source: Colección Recordatorios Pagina/12 — Archivo Memoria Abierta.

The phenomenon of online remembering is also seen on Facebook memorial pages when an individual's account is posthumously transformed into a memorial page. Rhonda McEwen and Kathleen Scheaffer suggest these memorial pages allow "a

continuing bond between the deceased and the living."[59] Although the remembrance's meaning in the representation of disappeared people remains distinct from that of known deaths, the digital ecology has changed the rituals, practices and mnemonic responses to these processes of remembering. Others go further, suggesting through Facebook memorial pages: "The dead never really die; but rather are perpetually sustained in a digital state of dialogic limbo."[60] In the case of the disappeared, we must also add the indeterminate state of existing between the living and the dead. The disappeared reside in online sites in this disrupted state, or incomplete mourning, where the disappeared never die.

Where MV's entries were imbued with ritual significance even though some families were initially reluctant to share photographs of their relatives, recordatorios.com.ar is both archive and online iteration of an offline commemorative practice of writing messages to disappeared by relatives. The gallery featured on the landing page opens up recordatorios published on the same day and month a visitor lands on the page and goes some way to replicating the daily memorialising gesture in the print newspaper. What is missing on the online visit to this page, however, is the experience of reading recordatorios within the context of the news, which, according to Van Dembroucke, provoke readers into confronting the reality of Argentina's disappeared in a quotidian way.[61] To see this photograph of those unjustly abducted and disappeared by the state next to the images of those who have died "normal deaths" in the obituaries section of the newspaper provokes a daily confrontation with Argentina's past. These 'inconclusive deaths'[62] of disappearance contrasts news that is not always related to Argentina's dictatorship past.

Digital reproductions can provoke emotions through recordatorios and Memoria Viva. Indeed, Marie Shurkus has made a cogent examination in this journal of how Roland Barthes' writing on the index and photography's affective phenomenological proposition can connect individuals with the past in the present and she reminds us, "this is not a referent that is exclusive to the analogue process because Barthes" special referent is not located in the picture as much as it is located in the body of a viewer who was also a witness.'[63] It is through recognition that Shurkus proposes an affective schema for reading images through the viewers' body. Such embodied responses come to define photographs of the disappeared. The specific frames for viewing these images, either online or offline, are not necessarily important, but as Shurkus reminds us, it is the individual viewers who create the punctum of an image. She suggests, discussing an image depicting a missile attack on a building that because 'the affective ground is laid'[64] it can cause post 9/11 New Yorkers to think about the Twin Tower attacks of 11 September 2001 even when the image does not depict this event.

I add in countries such as Chile and Argentina an affective ground is laid when viewing images of the disappeared and that online spaces are another way to consume these images. There is experiential knowledge for societies that have undergone traumas of this magnitude where these photographs appeal to both individual remembrance and to the larger collective societal memories of trauma. These images conjure symbolic meanings such as State Terror, a lost generation, and the quest for truth, justice and remembrance. The communion that families

make with their loved ones by creating the commemorative *recordatorios* is embedded in these images accompanied by texts. The relationship between text and image breeds new life into these photographs through the memories, grief and loss expressed by those who knew the missing best.

Mutable photographs

In the *recordatorios* microsite section titled "resignifications", there is information on commemorations written for young people killed by the state in democratic Argentina. On seeing the *recordatorios* for dictatorship victims, Mariano Wittis' mother, a young man killed by the police in 2000 in Buenos Aires province, felt compelled to write one for her son. R*ecordatorios* published by families around Jorge Julio López's disappearance in September 2006 add his case to the dictatorship disappeared. López was a crucial witness in the trials against dictatorship agents, and many suggested his testimony led to his forcible disappearance. The ground is already laid for the reception of the images to take on the symbolic meanings for how to represent absence. Digital media enables a diachronic way of reading commemorative acts by being able to access multiple archives and entries with substantial ease.

The mutable characteristics of these photographs also highlight the lack of fixity of photographs and memory. These ontological questions of photography's status in the digital ecology have led Joanna Zylinska — drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's philosophy — to discuss, "liquid photographs."[65] In her conclusion, Zylinska draws on Sara Kember's work to ponder the difficulties of digitisation and the overwhelming fears of loss and possibility that digitisation and photographic archives pose by appealing to "photography's 'life-like' status. [.] both in its amateur and art forms it is capable of carving out new passageways in life, and of life, by moving us, and making us move, in myriad ways."[66] Photographs ability to shift, change, and to move us plays out in the photographic archives of the disappeared.

An example of this occurred during Mauricio Macri's right-wing memory rollback[67] government (2015–2019) in Argentina. Santiago Maldonado — a young man protesting with the indigenous Mapuche community in Patagonia — disappeared following a confrontation with police. National and international human rights organisations suggested Maldonado was the victim of enforced disappearance. Although it is inconclusive whether Maldonado's death was due to accidental drowning or state repression, the case reminded many of the dark years of the last dictatorship. Photographs again represented this disappearance in the post-transitional landscape, drawing on extant strategies of human rights advocates to represent the dictatorship missing. During Maldonado's disappearance, thousands took to the streets, and human rights groups, such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, demanded his "aparición con vida" (appearance with life). A multitude of Maldonado's portraits moved through the streets of Buenos Aires, symbolically suggesting: "we are all Santiago Maldonado", and "one more disappearance, is one too many." In a *recordatorio*

published on 28 September 2017 for Aldo Omar Ramírez, authored by the Commission for Memory, Truth and Justice in the North Zone, a photograph of a bearded Maldonado accompanies a more formal image of Aldo Omar Ramírez a dictatorship disappeared person (See Fig. 3). Both men are smiling.

The accompanying text reads:

Look carefully at them
One of these young men disappeared 40 years ago, the other one month ago.
Of both they said/say that they looked for them, they did something.
Of one, they said that most likely he was travelling around Europe. Of the other they said he was travelling around Argentina.
One was taken by the armed forces, the other by the gendarme
One in dictatorship, the other in democracy.
Coincidences that break my soul.
That close up my throat. They weaken me. But I look at them.
I recompose myself. I shout. I wake up and ask for them.
WE HAVE MEMORY, WE LOOK FOR TRUTH AND WE ASK FOR JUSTICE
LOOK CAREFULLY AT THEM
WHERE IS ALDO RAMIREZ'S [sic] BODY
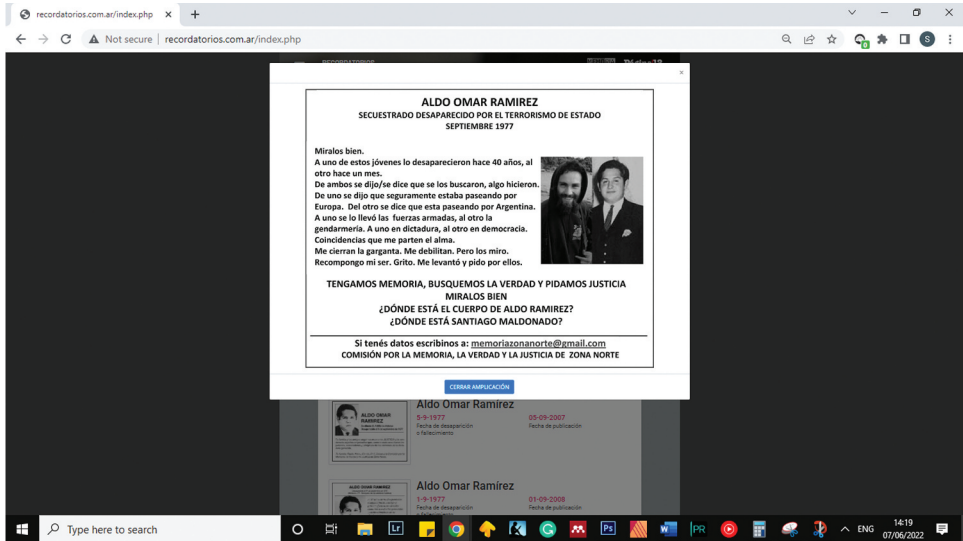WHERE IS SANTIAGO MALDONADO.[68]

Fig. 3.   My own screengrab from recordatorios.com.ar reproduced with permission of Memoria Abierta. This shows a recordatorio written for Aldo Omar Ramrírez disappeared in September 1977 alongside an image of Santiago Maldonado who was disappeared at the time the recordatorio was written in democratic Argentina. Source Colección Recordatorios Pagina/12 — Archivo Memoria Abierta.

The above text shows the strategic use of the repertoire of images of Argentina's dictatorship disappeared to demand accountability in democratic Argentina. The two men are placed together, and the author/s of the text insist on the need to look at their photographs even through grief. From this pain, the text suggests, come the demands to seek justice and remember these two men. This text was published before Maldonado's body was discovered on the 17 October 2017. Human rights groups were quick to employ photographs of Maldonado both at street demonstrations and through online campaigns on Twitter and Facebook[69] utilising the affective ground of photographs of the missing to demand Maldonado's re-appearance with life. In her writing on virtual archives of the Armenian genocide, Leshu Torchin describes how '[v]irtual archives draw upon [a] framework of testimony in realising their potential for animating memory, hailing publics and forging political transformation'[70] It is this call to remembering and action which archives such as *recordatorios* and *Memoria Viva* can provoke, especially when making demands for accountability in the present.

Identity revisited

Identidad (Identity), a seminal exhibition held in a central art space in Buenos Aires in 1998, demonstrates the critical role of photography's heuristic potential of [re-] materialising the disappeared to promote truth, justice and memory in Argentina. The exhibition was co-curated by a group of artists and the human rights activists the *Grandmothers of the Disappeared* — a group trying to find more than 300 children born in clandestine detention centres given to families close to the military through illegal adoptions. The physical displays included mirrors with which spectators could look at themselves and identify with the disappeared and ask themselves whether they might know the identity and whereabouts of children born in captivity and still missing. In an online video accompanying the post-pandemic 2020[71] restaging of *Identidad* (identity) at the Parque de la memoria in Buenos Aires, a child of the disappeared, Adriana Garnier-Ortalani, discusses photography's vital role in her journey to prove her identity. She evocatively describes her adoptive father recognising her face in that of one of the disappeared seen on one of the *Grandmothers'* poster campaigns. After this photograph grabbed his attention, he felt compelled to visit *Identidad* in 1998 to confirm his suspicions:

> My dad, who was a taxi driver, saw a poster of a disappeared girl when he was going wondering the streets who was very similar to me [. . .] he got very anxious and went to find my mother to go to that place [the identity exhibition] and he said to her, I saw a girl very similar to Adriana. And they always had doubts about whether I was a daughter of a disappeared [person] because they bought me in a hospital, a sanitorium, and when they saw that they got very anxious again because, if they had that *ghost* - that I might be the daughter of a disappeared person - they always had it. This confirmed it for them, or almost did. [72]

Garnier-Ortalani's account typifies the lacuna left by enforced disappearance and the theft of children during the last Argentine dictatorship. It reinforces photography's primary role in helping identify children of the disappeared. Her experience speaks to how photographs shape and influence people's present lives. Photographs are not just passive relics or bystanders to describe the past. The difficulty Garnier-Ortalani's adoptive parents had confronting these photographs reveals the uncomfortable power the medium has in identifying the living with the spectral disappeared. Garnier Ortalani's father could not deny his own adoptive daughter's identity when a photograph pulled him out of his complicity and forced him into the protective urge of denying his daughter her truth. A photograph drew him into its drama and forced a radical confrontation with the past.

According to da Silva Catela, photography is one of the means with which children of disappeared people get to know their parents and is a central tool for these individuals to " . . . reconstruct their history and start to construct their own identity."[73] The above account given by a child of a missing person cements the central role photography has in the journey towards rediscovering one's history. Where the disappeared represent "inconclusive deaths",[74] photographs show the disappeared alive, sitting for their identity cards or at family celebrations. Da Silva Catela suggests photographs "vivify".[75] In the liminal place where the disappeared reside, likely dead but without material proof of their fate, photographs become a way to materialise these figures. As da Silva Catela contends, "[. . .] what they wanted to hide through disappearance was revealed bit by bit in the photographs of thousands of faces, in diverse rituals and places[. . .]".[76] My discussions with a founding member of *Memoria Viva* show that online platforms can be another site for these rituals of communing with the missing. Photographs of the disappeared now inhabit the internet's vast space where they can attest to the affective links families have with their disappeared relatives.

Conclusion

Photography is a surrogate for the bodies of the disappeared and opens ritual space for grieving. It is not a panacea as families continue to look for answers to what happened to their loved ones, where they are now, and for individuals responsible for their disappearances to be brought to justice. The medium's ontological links to death do not adequately denote calls to life, reappearance, and identity photographs of the disappeared engender, whether shown at public demonstrations in exhibition spaces, or online. These photographs enact remembering through which the disappeared re-emerge and live. Photographs have not only helped children of the disappeared connect with their identity, but they have also created an imperfect site for families to localise grief even when reproduced online. The radical shift since the digital turn has increased mutability of these photographs and produced experiential knowledge for societies that have undergone traumas. The photograph appeal to individual and collective remembrance and digitised archives of the disappeared highlight both the

singularity of authoritarianism's victims — through a process of restoring identities — and uphold the collective force of the missing and those who intimately knew them to call for political action in the present. Photography's ontology and its assumed links to death are problematised in photographic representations of the disappeared, which historically appealed to life and continue to enact presence — in a dialectic with absence — in the digital ecology. Disappearances expanded the meaning of grief where mourning was suspended by erasure and without truth. Understanding these extended digital practices provides a framework to better understand the central role that digital memorial practices will take for societies that have undergone traumatic events where the digital ecology becomes another site for these distinct memorial practices. Latin America's disappeared, also now residing online in photographs, will inspire a new generation of digital natives to continue to remember, seek justice and look for the truth.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1.   Richard, "Imagen-Recuerdo y Borraduras", 165 (Ital in original. My translation).
2.   Blejmar, "More A (Cyber) Damsel", 1–2.
3.   da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*, 114.
4.   Jelin., ed. *Las Conmemoraciones: Las Disputas*; Jelin, *Los trabajos de la Memoria* Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice*; Richard, "La Crítica de La Memoria"; Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*; Villalón and Wilson, "Building Memory".
5.   Winter, *Remembering War*; Huyssen, *Present Pasts*.
6.   Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors* Translated by Rein and Godoy-Anativia, 33.
7.   See da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*; Feld, "¿Hacer visible la desaparición?"; Franco, "Gender, Death and Resistance; Longoni, 'Fotos y Siluetas'; Magrin, 'Fotografía, Desaparición Forzada de Personas'; Larralde Armas, 'Fotografía y Desaparición'; Blejmar, *Playful Memories*; Blejmar et al., *Intantáneas: Fotografía y Dictadura*"; and Miles, "Rephotography and the Era of Witness".
8.   Blejmar, "More A (Cyber) Damsel"; Sosa, "Viral Affiliations"; and Zícari, 'Silhouettes: Choreographies of Remembrance.
9.   Bell and Di Paolantonio, 'Presenting the (Dictatorial) Past; Crenzel, "The Ghostly Presence"; Avery Gordon, "Ghostly Matters"; Blejmar, "Spectres and Spectacles of Disappearance".
10. Roland. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 14; Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 70.
11. Sontag,70.

12. da Silva Catela, 'Lo Invisible Revelado, 342; Longoni, "Photographs and Silhouettes", 6.

13. Feierstein, "National Security Doctrine in Latin America".

14. Calveiro, *Poder y Desaparición*, 18.

15. I utilise Bell's translation which emphasises the importance of the call of *aparaición con vida* as a manifestation of families' rallying cries of "vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos" (they took them alive, we want them alive) Bell, "On Fernando's Photograph".

16. da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*, 129; Longoni, "Photographs and Silhouettes", 6.

17. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce Vol 2*, 9.

18. Sontag, 70.(Italics in original).

19. Barthes, 77.

20. Sontag, 70.

21. Hirsch, *Family Frames*,12.

22. Gordon, 63.

23. Crenzel, 260.

24. See note 22 above .

25. Richard, "Imagen-Recuerdo y Borraduras", 165.

26. See note 19 above..

27. da Silva Catela, "Sin Cuerpo, Sin Tumba". 57; da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*, 115.

28. Cristina in da Silva Catela, "Sin Cuerpo, Sin Tumba" 99; Schindel, "Inscribir el Pasado", 80.

29. da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*; Feld '¿Hacer visible la desaparición?; Franco; Gordon; Van Dembroucke, "Absent Yet Still Present".

30. Fortuny, *Memorias Fotográficas*; Blejmar, *Playful Memories*; Miles; Bell; Longoni, "Photographs and Silhouettes"; Villanueva, "La Dialéctica de lo visible".

31. Franco, 75.

32. Richard, "Imagen-Recuerdo y Borraduras", 167; Longoni, "Fotos y Siluetas".

33. Gordon, 109.

34. da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*, 128.

35. de Bonafini in Ibid., 128 (My translation).

36. This is actually one of the contentions which caused a split in the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo between Di Bonafini's Association of the Plaza de Mayo and more horizontal Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Foundational Line that have not taken the same stance on exhumations and compensation.

37. Ibid., 121 (translation my own/italics in original).

38. Ibid., 114 (translation my own/italics in original).

39. Claire Moon, "'Who'll Pay Reparations on My Soul?' 1 Compensation, Social Control and Social Suffering", *Social & Legal Studies*, 21.2, 187–99 (Ital in original).

40. Moon, 193.

41. Calveiro, 47.

42. Da Silva Catela, "Sin Cuerpo, Sin Tumba", 101.

43. Richard, "Imagen-Recuerdo y Borraduras", 167.

44. da Silva Catela, "Sin Cuerpo, Sin Tumba", 101.

45. Camila Loew, "Portraits of Presence", 21.

46. Bell, 73 (Ital in original).
47. Bell, 80–81.
48. Bell, 73.
49. Derrida and Prenowitz, "Archive Fever", 27. (Italics in original).
50. Ibid.
51. I have challenged Bell's concept of memory previously in my unpublished master's dissertation (2015).
52. See note 2 above..
53. My interviewee agreed to be quoted in my PhD research and associated publications although asked to remain anonymous.
54. The groups include: the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights; Good Memory Civil Association; Legal and Social Study Centre; Homage to the Vesubio and Protobanco Victims Commission; Northern Zone Memory, Truth and Justice Commission; Relatives of the Detained Disappeared for Political Reasons, Argentine Historical and Social Memory Foundation; Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo- Foundational line; and the Peace and Justice Service.
55. https://memoriaabierta.org.ar/wp/sobre-memoria-abierta/.
56. Van Dembroucke, 68.
57. Ibid., 68.
58. Benjamin, *The Work of Art.*, 7.
59. McEwen and Scheaffer, "Virtual Mourning and Memory Construction" 71.
60. Kern, Forman, and Gil-Egui, "R.I.P.: Remain in Perpetuity", 3.
61. Van Dembroucke., 121.
62. da Silva Catela, "Sin Cuerpo, Sin Tumba", 57; da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*, 115.
63. Marie Shurkus, 'Camera Lucida and Affect, 80.
64. Ibid.
65. Zylinska, "On Bad Archives".
66. Zylinska, 150.
67. This is my term which I use to define a government which challenged the narratives on the number of disappeared during the last dictatorship of 30,000 held by human rights organisations and concerned these groups with government interventions in human rights institutions in the country.
68. My translation.
69. see Santiago Mazzuchini, "Los Usos Políticos de La Fotografía".
70. Torchin, "Since We Forgot", 84.
71. The exhibition was planned before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic but delayed by the closure of the Memory Park's buildings during the pandemic. An online version of the exhibition was available on the organisation's website.
72. Garnier-Ortalani, Exposición IDENTIDAD, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCI3m6rHNYk (Italics and translation my own) all URLs Accessed and checked 31.03.2022.
73. da Silva Catela, "Sin Cuerpo, Sin Tumba", 101.
74. See note 28 above.
75. da Silva Catela, *No Habrá Flores*, 129; da Silva Catela, "Lo Invisible Revelado", 339.
76. Ibid., 342.

Funding

Disclosure statement

Data Sharing Access Statement

Due to the limited scope of the study and the risk of participant reidentification, consent to share the underlying interview transcript was not sought at ethical approval stage.

Ethics

Ethics approved by Faculty Research Ethics Officer, Faculty of Arts, University of Bristol Ref: 116,615, Interviewees gave informed consent in writing prior to the start of the study. All request for anonymisation have been adhered to and agreed by participants.

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