Acts of Witnessing: Site-Specific Performance and Transitional Justice in Postdictatorship Brazil[1]

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Since emerging from dictatorship in 1985, Brazil has faced the dilemma of virtually all societies undergoing re-democratization: how to redress human rights crimes committed under the previous regime and prevent their recurrence. The Brazilian state has adopted some transitional justice measures (financial reparations, monuments and other memorial projects) and is in the midst of undertaking others (a national truth commission).[2] Over the past twenty-five years, artistic and cultural works engaging with Brazil's authoritarian past and transitional justice process have proliferated. They can be found in literary fiction, memoirs, plays, music, films, *telenovelas*, art installations, and performance protests, to name a few. This burgeoning corpus is the product of the democratic transition, but it also acts upon and brings about change within that very political environment.

The present article examines a prime example of this complex phenomenon: a theatrical work entitled *Lembrar é resistir* that was written and performed for the express purpose of marking the recovery of a notorious site of repression in the historic center of São Paulo.[3] It argues that the power of the work came from the specific ways in which the embodied actions of the performers and spectators mediated the latter's encounter with the materiality of the prison cells and transformed the spectators into witnesses. The site in question was the building that had served as headquarters for the state political police, known by its acronym DOPS (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social).[4] Behind its imposing façade, DOPS agents executed with brutal efficiency their mandate of monitoring the population and repressing any person or group deemed subversive. A clandestine detention center consisting of several prison cells occupied part of the ground floor; interrogation and torture were carried out on an upper level.

In 1998, Belisário dos Santos Jr., then Secretary of Justice of the state of São Paulo, donated the building for use as a cultural center. Prompted by the approaching twentieth anniversary of the controversial Amnesty Law (which was the successful culmination of mass mobilizations united around slogans demanding "broad, general, and unconditional amnesty" for the politically persecuted, but which also amounted to a self-amnesty for military and police perpetrators), a small group of state government officials and former political detainees with established reputations in theatre obtained authorization to interrupt scheduled renovations of the building in order to stage a performance that would tell the story of the DOPS and the people imprisoned there. The play opened on 9 September 1999.

Lembrar was staged at a time when the military dictatorship was still mostly absent from public debate in Brazil. Although the families of the regime's fatal victims and their supporters have called for truth and justice for over three decades, the Brazilian State long ignored these demands. Unlike Argentina and Chile, which implemented relatively bold transitional justice initiatives (including truth commissions) immediately upon returning to civilian rule, Brazil waited a full decade after the military left power to implement its first timid step (a reparations program) and only in 2005—that is, several years after *Lembrar* closed—began to move from what historian Nina Schneider describes as a "politics of silence" to embrace a deliberate "politics of memory" ("Breaking" 199). Moreover, until recently there has been little public pressure on the State to reckon with the authoritarian past; rather, Brazilian society remains largely indifferent to demands for truth and justice (202).

The success of *Lembrar* illustrates the important role that culture has played in Brazil's transitional justice process. In a context in which neither the State nor the public has taken the lead in constructing collective memory of a difficult past, the task has fallen to artists, writers, and other cultural producers who intercede in Brazil's memory politics out of "historical necessity" (Ginzburg 557). In the Brazilian case, then, culture is clearly a privileged arena in which alternative memories can circulate and be discussed. Under the right conditions, such works can even stimulate new transitional justice projects, which is precisely what occurred in the case of *Lembrar*.

Staging Ruins

Ruins are an important symbol of Latin America at the turn of the millennium. By simultaneously evoking past, present, and future, they serve

as a "material embodiment of change" that constitutes "a fertile locale for competing... stories about historical events" (Lazzara and Unruh 1). This is particularly true for countries in the region that are emerging from periods of authoritarian rule, as Idelber Avelar explains: "Images of ruins are crucial for postdictatorial memory work for they offer anchors through which a connection with the past can be reestablished" (2). Material ruins steeped in trauma, such as the old DOPS building, have enormous potential to catalyze struggles for memory and justice in transitional societies. "The physical site, the material object, matters," writes sociologist and memory scholar Elizabeth Jelin, but only "insofar as it [can come to represent] an embodiment of a given meaning and certain historical message" ("Public" 147). A site's catalyzing potential is latent, in other words, until some person or group ("memory entrepreneurs," in Jelin's parlance)[5] calls attention to and interprets what happened there. The very buildings that once housed clandestine detention centers certainly constitute hard evidence that torture and other crimes occurred. This evidence is powerful and could conceivably even be used in criminal prosecutions (Brett, et. al. 29), which is precisely why human rights groups struggle so persistently to wrest these sites from military or police control (and why the military or police occupants oppose such efforts with equal tenacity).[6] Yet, in spite of whatever material proof they may provide, such territorial markers should not be confused with memory itself; rather, they are merely "vehicles and material supports for the subjective labors of memory" (Jelin, "Public" 147).

DOPS agents in São Paulo had tried to obliterate the evidence of their presence (and illegal activities) in the building before vacating it in 1983, the year the political police force was officially disbanded. They took special care to remove most of the political detainees' graffiti from the prison walls, but left the cells themselves mostly intact.[7] The surviving structure of the cells was physical evidence, to be sure, proving without a shadow of a doubt that DOPS agents had once imprisoned people in the building—something that authorities had vehemently denied. Nonetheless, it provided hardly any clue as to who had been detained there or why, much less how those detainees might have suffered and resisted. This is where *Lembrar* came in. The creators and performers took advantage of what little material proof remained and used it to evoke the building's clandestine past. Or, to put it another way, *Lembrar* exploited theatre's unique capacity to make visible the invisible.

What exactly was *Lembrar*? The creators called it a play, but as one reviewer observed, the work was somehow "ao mesmo tempo mais e menos

que teatro" ("Terror" 6). The dramatic text certainly did not fit a traditional, Aristotelian definition of drama. For one thing, there was no protagonist, except the building itself. Of course, such deviation from classical convention often makes for great theatre,[8] but *Lembrar* is not a masterpiece of dramaturgy, nor was it intended to be. Given only a week to produce a rough draft, dramatists Analy Álvarez and Izaías Almada borrowed liberally from existing plays about the dictatorship, cobbling together a series of eight loosely connected scenes, one for each room or cell the audience would visit during the performance. While there are some very powerful parts, overall the dramatic text comes across as choppy, the language stilted, the characters one-dimensional.

Leading the audience on a tour of the building's ground floor, *Lembrar* dramatizes the history of the DOPS, with an emphasis on the courage and resistance of the people imprisoned there and in similar detention centers at the height of the repression between 1968 and 1975. The characters include three DOPS agents: the head detective (based on the notorious torturer Sérgio Paranhos Fleury) and his two underlings Andorinha and Mão de Vaca. The remaining eleven characters are prisoners. A few are based on real people, such as Thiago (de Mello, the poet), the Priest (Frei Tito Alencar de Lima), and Hilda (wife of murdered revolutionary Virgílio Gomes da Silva). Actress Nilda Maria, who had been incarcerated in the DOPS, plays herself. Other characters are archetypes: the Singer, the Mother, the Torture Victim.

The playwrights attribute the dramatic impact of *Lembrar* to the DOPS building.[9] But more than that, the play owes its power to the various ways in which live performance mediated the audience's encounter with the site and turned each spectator into a witness. *Lembrar* was indeed "ao mesmo tempo mais e menos que teatro." It was part play, part guided tour, part testimony, and part government-sponsored transitional justice initiative.

The Site of Repression as Archive

The relationship between the physical space of the DOPS and *Lembrar* recalls Diana Taylor's formulation of the archive and the repertoire as separate but often complementary systems of knowledge transmission. The *archive* encompasses material evidence such as documents, photographs, and bones, whereas the *repertoire* refers to the sort of embodied acts we associate with dance, ritual, and other kinds of live performance (*Archive* 19-20). In this case, assigning the old DOPS building to the realm of the archive seems particularly appropriate for at least three reasons. First, the site has intrinsic value as material evidence, as previously mentioned. Second, the

entire purpose of the political police before and during the military dictatorship was to conduct surveillance and then to generate and analyze an actual archive of intelligence reports. Over several decades, DOPS agents carefully amassed, recorded, and stored millions of pieces of information about any person or group that might be a potential "enemy" of the state (which turned out be a rather elastic category).[10] The very reason for the building's existence between 1940 and 1983 was to serve as a base for gathering this information and as a warehouse for storing it. As such, the building was, quite literally, an archive. Third, materials subsequently discovered in this real-life DOPS archive (which had been removed from the building and eventually, after the Regulatory Law of Habeas Data of 1997, relocated to the State Archive of São Paulo) were incorporated into *Lembrar*.

Spectators experienced the powerful interaction of the archive and repertoire from the moment they arrived, when each received a modified reproduction of the actual fingerprint card (*ficha*) that, during the dictatorship, was included in the file of every incoming political prisoner. The front of the card consisted of a form for the recording of basic identifying information (name, address, marital status, profession, complexion, hair and eye color, height, and so on); the back contained two rows of five blank spaces for fingerprints. The cards represented the real-life archive amassed by the political police, a cache of hard evidence that revealed just as much, if not more, about the Brazilian state's monitoring of the population over several decades as it did about the objects of that surveillance. Every entering spectator had his or her right thumb inked and pressed onto a card, thus participating in the embodied act of having one's fingerprints taken and experiencing firsthand the transformation of one's own body into an archive—one that could be mined, often through interrogation and torture, for information.

The playbill also alludes to the DOPS archive through the arrangement of old black and white photos of the cast and crew members in the form of a "Wanted" poster under the heading "BANDIDOS TERRORISTAS PROCURADOS PELOS ÓRGÃOS DE SEGURANÇA NACIONAL." The poster urges viewers encountering any of the people pictured to seek out the nearest police officer or call one of the phone numbers provided (in reality these numbers were informational hotlines for *Lembrar*). The photo of playwright Izaías Almada was an actual mug shot recovered from his DOPS file.

Finally, the dramatists of *Lembrar* borrowed from yet another archive: literary works produced during the dictatorship, including the poetry of Thiago de Mello and the corpus of published plays comprising Brazil's

resistance theatre of the 1960s and 70s. They took passages from three such plays: Lauro César Muniz's *Sinal de vida* (the protagonist of which, Marcelo Estrada, is a character in *Lembrar*), Chico de Assis's *Missa leiga*, and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri's *Ponto de partida* (about the murder of journalist Vladmir Herzog[11] in a different São Paulo political prison). By incorporating these plays into *Lembrar*, Álvarez and Almada rendered homage to theatre practitioners who together represented a major front of resistance during the military dictatorship.

Above all, *Lembrar* was about the embodied act—carried out by performers and spectators alike—of entering, exploring, and reclaiming the material ruins of the DOPS, a space long forbidden to the public. In the words of Belisário dos Santos Jr., who made the decision to donate the site for use as a cultural center (and, along with dramatist Analy Álvarez, had the idea for *Lembrar*):

> [A] peça precisava ter essa história das pessoas irem ocupando progressivamente as celas. Então, era uma coisa um pouco mágica, de você, ora como preso, ora como testemunha invisível, você ter que 'reocupar' [o prédio]. A reocupação tinha que ser feita de uma forma extremamente simbólica também, e portanto a peça de teatro era importante para que as pessoas se sentissem como atores do processo. (qtd. in Almeida 22)

Lembrar mediated spectators' encounter with the DOPS, transforming them into witnesses, not only belated witnesses of the building's grim history, but especially—as the quote above suggests—into real-time witness-participants in the reclaiming of this notorious site of repression.[12]

Acts of Witnessing

As Taylor explains, performance shares certain affinities with the act of bearing witness, making it an ideal modality for provoking reflection on the traumatic experiences that took place inside the DOPS building. Witnessing, like live performance, "is a live process, a doing, an event that takes place in real time" (*Archive* 167). Performance is therefore uniquely suited for transforming ordinary people into witnesses. This quality is all the more pronounced in site-specific works, which, as Laurie Beth Clark points out, "allow the place to 'speak' its own memory of atrocity that happened within its walls and convey the feeling to visitors" (87). Clark describes how performance can convert spectators into belated witnesses of the site's "memory of atrocity," a conversion that is clearly evident in the case of *Lembrar*. Yet

the play staged in the DOPS transformed spectators not only into belated witnesses of the acts of brutality and courage that took place in the building during the dictatorship years, but also into real-time witness-participants who took part in a ritual of reoccupation designed to re-signify the premises as a symbol of remembering (*lembrar*) and resisting (*resistir*).

Before the dramatic action even begins, spectators are tacitly asked to play the role of political prisoners through the distribution and filling out of the arrest cards. The closing of the street door and the emergence of two of the main perpetrator characters, Andorinha and Mão de Vaca, signal the beginning of the play proper. The first lines, spoken by the former, reinforce the audience's role in this first scene:

> *(Encarando a todos, diz com voz autoritária)* Atenção que eu quero muita ordem e paz no meu plantão *(aponta para a porta de entrada)* [.] Depois de ultrapassada aquela porta, não há aqui nenhum inocente... são todos culpados até prova em contrário... [.] Vamos ficar todos em silêncio e com as mãos pra trás... todos! Sem exeção[.] *(Dirigindo-se a alguém do público)* o senhor aí, mãos para trás... (Álvarez and Almada 3)

As he speaks, Andorinha paces back and forth in front of the spectators, leaning in to sneer menacingly at some of them before picking up the pile of fingerprint cards lying on a nearby table. He thumbs through the cards, calling out names of spectators at random. Unbeknownst to the audience members, a "spectator" in their midst is actually an actor in street clothes. When Andorinha calls out "*com surpresa e satisfação*" the name of Marcelo Estradas, this spectator-turned-character "*levanta a mão timidamente*" (3).

Andorinha and Mão de Vaca immediately launch into a barrage of questions about Marcelo's involvement in the opposition and the identity of his associates. Although they barely touch the prisoner, the scene is the most violent of the entire play. As Severino João Albuquerque contends, when it comes to conveying violence in the theatre, indirect suggestion (for example, through verbal or other cues) can be much more dramatic and powerful than staging physical acts of aggression (94). This was all the more true in *Lembrar*, where the sheer proximity between performers and spectators—often only a few feet—precluded staging acts of physical aggression. As the two interrogators harangue Marcelo, they slowly close in on him and shout with increasing fury. At the precise moment when the two agents seem on the brink of physically assaulting the prisoner, all three men suddenly freeze at the sound of a woman's scream off-stage (Álvarez and Almada 4) accompanied

by the flickering of the lights (signaling the use of an electric shock machine). After a pause, the dramatic tension continues to build as the interrogators shift tactics and begin threatening their quarry:

> ANDORINHA. Acho bom o senhor ir começando a se lembrar, porque a turma lá de cima é barra pesada, não amacia pra ninguém...
>
> MARCELO. (*Leva a mão à boca*) Acho que vou vomitar... (4)

Soon after, Andorinha grabs the prisoner and shoves him through the door leading to the prison wing. As the terrified Marcelo is led away, he looks back beseechingly at the audience. Andorinha orders everyone to remain silent, effectively preventing any unscripted interventions by the spectators.

What are the implications of positioning spectators in this way, as political prisoners? Does this anti-Brechtian tactic collapse the distance necessary for the audience to engage in critical reflection? Does *Lembrar* cross a line by encouraging a facile or inappropriate identification with real-life prisoners? While risky, the strategy seems justified in this case. After all, the performance derives its power from the experiential element. The point is to succumb to the temptation of imagining oneself as a political prisoner.

Furthermore, by positioning spectators as detainees at the outset, *Lembrar* indulges this inclination toward identification, but also manages it. As the first scene draws to an end, audience members file into the next room (an elevator lobby) and are quickly repositioned as witnesses of the building's partially imagined history. Mão de Vaca immediately assumes the persona of a tour guide, treating the audience as curious visitors and referring to the political prisoners as *them* ("eles") rather than as *you all* ("vocês"). The abrupt change in his demeanor and the distinction he makes between the audience and the political prisoners communicate the change in the spectators' status; the audience members are no longer to play the role of detainees, but rather from this point forward they will be expected to assume the role of witnesses.

In the second scene, Mão de Vaca escorts the audience into a small office sparsely furnished with a desk, a single chair, and a battered filing cabinet above which hangs a portrait of President Emílio Garrastazu Médici.[13] It soon becomes evident that the group has entered the inner sanctum of Sérgio Paranhos Fleury, one of Brazil's most notorious police torturers.[14] Delegado Fleury sits behind the desk tinkering with a small hand-held radio and begins talking with Andorinha and Mão de Vaca as if the audience were invisible, imposing the fourth wall and thus reinforcing the audience's new position as belated witnesses of the building's history. At one point in the conversation, Andorinha reinforces the impression by looking straight at (or through) the

assembled spectators and remarking with a shudder, "Gozado, às vezes tenho a impressão de que a gente está sendo observado" (Álvarez and Almada 8). This line highlights not only the unexpected proximity of actor and audience, but also the fact that the scene enacted, in which perpetrators openly discuss torture and the system by which high-ranking military officials rewarded torturers, is precisely one without any witnesses in real life.

Of the three DOPS agents, Andorinha in particular is a caricature of the sadistic torturer. Everything about him suggests a thug rather than an officer of the law, from the thick gold chains visible under his half-unbuttoned shirt to his navy skullcap. He chews on a toothpick throughout the performance, accentuating his coarseness and distorting his features into a permanent sneer. Andorinha repeatedly and conspicuously scratches his genitals, wipes his nose, and even spits on the floor. Every gesture, every line of this character is calculated to repulse the audience. As the three agents prepare to interrogate Marcelo Estradas, Andorinha fantasizes out loud about raping one of the young female prisoners, illustrating his intentions with a lewd gesture. He asks Fleury for permission to increase the voltage on the electric shock machine, imitating the involuntary muscular spasms of electric shock victims and laughing with his colleagues.

This living portrait of the monstrous torturer notwithstanding, *Lembrar* disabuses spectators of the notion that human rights abuses were carried out by a few rogue agents with a sadistic streak; rather, it emphasizes that torture was a widespread, systematic practice engineered by the very military leaders who disavowed any knowledge of it. A recording of *Lembrar* made by TV Cultura shows Fleury and Mão de Vaca standing directly underneath the portrait of Médici while they speculate on their prospects of winning a cash bonus for arresting and torturing as many suspects as possible. The positioning of the two men beneath Médici's smiling image visually connects the military government (and the president in particular) with the DOPS agents and their human rights crimes, in a silent (but no less eloquent for that) denunciation of the military perpetrators. By contrast, representations of the dictatorship in mass culture have historically tended to downplay the role of the military (both as an institution and in terms of its personnel) in human rights crimes. In such portrayals, military officers are either conspicuously absent or depicted as benevolent paternal figures.[15]

Once Mão de Vaca escorts the audience out of the Delegado's office and into the corridor where the prison cells are located, he resumes his role as tour guide, eliminating the fourth wall once again. This time *Lembrar* re-

inforces the audience's role as witness through the use of performatives. By repeatedly announcing that spectators are witnesses (as opposed to prisoners), the performers make it so. "Os senhores são testemunhas. Estão me levando para ser torturada," one woman calls to the audience as she is dragged away (Álvarez and Almada 17). Even the DOPS agent Mão de Vaca reminds the audience members of their proper role: "Vocês serão testemunhas de que estão todos sendo muito bem tratados..." (9). Again, by drawing a line between the spectator ("vocês") and the actors in the cells ("todos aqui"), the guard emphasizes that the spectators are not to revert to their initial subject position of imagining themselves as political prisoners at a critical juncture when the audience is entering the first prison cell. Moreover, Mão de Vaca's performative—which is laden with irony since what the audience witnesses is actually the mistreatment of the detainees—alludes to the many ways in which Brazil's military governments tried to control what people saw, for example by censoring the media and by attempting to divert attention with patriotic spectacles (its ambitious public works projects,[16] the 1970 World Cup). *Lembrar* thus continues the tradition of Latin American oppositional theatre of the 1960s—what Taylor calls a "theatre of crisis"—in which playwrights "alert their audiences to the danger of political theatricality" (*Theatre* 6).

As the DOPS agent leads the audience down the hallway, spectators pass in front of the three cells and catch their first glimpse of the political prisoners, some of whose haggard faces press against small barred windows set into the heavy cell doors. Up until this point, the audience has had no contact with the political prisoner characters, except Marcelo Estradas. As of scene three, spectators spend the remainder of the performance locked up with Marcelo and the other detainees. Scenes three through six consist of four autonomous vignettes that unfold in the four cells that line the corridor; they dramatize the loneliness of solitary confinement, the plight of women prisoners, the psychological impact of torture, and the resilience and courage of torture victims, respectively.

In these scenes the play shifts some creative agency to the spectator, albeit in subtle ways. In scene three, the audience members enter a cell where they encounter Thiago, who recites a fragment of a poem by poet Thiago de Mello, "Faz escuro mas eu canto," while adding his own inscription to the wall:

> *Pausa. Ele olha as paredes. Elas estão cheias de inscrições. Ele olha ao redor e encontra um pedaço de carvão ou pedra esquecido por alguém. Toma-o e escreve a palavra* Amor....

> É preciso que Amor seja a primeira
> palavra a ser gravada nesta cela,
> para servir-me agora e companheira
> seja amanhã de quem precise dela. (Álvarez and Almada 9-10)

After pronouncing these lines, Thiago silently turns to offer the writing implement to members of the audience so that they might record their own messages. This invitation, which was spontaneously initiated by actor Walter Breda in one of the first performances and subsequently became ritualized, creates an opening for spectators to take part in the process of symbolically reclaiming the DOPS as real-time witness-participants. Witnessing becomes "a live process, a doing" (Taylor, *Archive* 167) as audience members inscribe their own new meanings on the very surface where real-life prisoners recorded the dictatorship's crimes thirty years earlier.

In the final two scenes (seven and eight), several key characters address the audience, usually directly, reminding each spectator that witnessing is not just about watching and listening, it is about acting upon what is seen and heard. As an active process, bearing belated witness to the suffering of others brings with it the real-time responsibility of taking action so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. Scene seven commences in the *recreio*, where the prisoners gather after overhearing Andorinha report the news that an armed militant organization has abducted a foreign ambassador and is demanding the release of 70 political prisoners as ransom. The character identified simply as Mother immediately sits down and begins to compose a letter out loud to her son:

> Mas o mundo não há de ficar assim para sempre e você tem que estar preparado para o Brasil que há de vir. É preciso que vocês dêem conta do recado daqui pra frente. *(Deixa de escrever e fala com olhar absorto)* [.] Vocês tem [*sic*] a tarefa de construir um Brasil digno, meu filho, sem injustiça social, nem violência. Foi pra isso que lutamos. A mancha deste episódio só se apagará definitivamente quando pudermos viver numa sociedade mais justa, mais ética e mais solidária. *(Agora fala para o público, ainda como se estivesse escrevendo)* [.] Essa é a esperança de hoje que deverá ser levada por vocês, como bandeira, para os anos que virão... (Álvarez and Almada 21-22)

The transition between the singular *you* ("você") to the plural *you all* ("vocês") and Mother's direct gaze at the audience make clear that she is directing these words to each and every audience member. It is as if by the very act of attending the play, the spectators have tacitly accepted the role of real-

time witness-participants, a position that entails the responsibility of doing something about what they have seen and heard.

As the audience looks on, the prisoners receive word that the priest is among those who will be released in exchange for the ambassador. A detainee named João Gregório echoes Mother's words as he explains to the clergyman why it is so important that he take advantage of the opportunity to be released: "Vai e manda de lá um clarão de luz para esta noite escura. Vai e registra como puder, onde puder tudo o que você viu e viveu aqui, para que as futuras gerações possam saber que a nossa história recente também foi escrita com sangue" (26). The prisoner's plea is directed not only at the priest, but also implicitly at the spectators, whose exit from the DOPS is likewise imminent.

In the last scene, prisoners and audience enter the final room and discover the outline of an empty noose projected onto one of the brick walls, an image that evokes the dictatorship's murder of journalist Vladimir Herzog, which officials staged to look like a suicide by hanging in a clumsy effort to cover up the real cause of death (torture). Enraged, one of the female prisoners, Nilda, turns to the spectators and beseeches them in the words of a character from Guarnieri's play *Ponto de partida* to spread the truth of what really happened: "Vai, gritem, exponham, resolvam..." (Álvarez and Almada 28). The choice to restage Herzog's death—albeit in an abstract way—in the final scene of *Lembrar* is highly significant, since this real-life event is widely credited with giving impetus to the mass mobilizations demanding amnesty and an end to the dictatorship. By evoking Herzog as a symbol, the play encourages spectators to follow the footsteps of the millions of Brazilians who demanded truth and justice more than twenty years earlier.

In a sort of epilogue, the actors slip out of character. One actor assumes the role of narrator and informs the audience that, "[d]enunciado incontáveis vezes nos tribunais militares brasileiros, o crime de torturar jamais foi apurado ou punido" (28). Another explains that in 1978 a federal judge found the state responsible for Herzog's death, which was ruled a homicide (in what, one might add, could be considered a precursor to the transitional justice process in Brazil). The assembled actors cheer this small victory of truth over deception and secrecy.

Curiously, the last to speak are the three actors who play the perpetrator characters. It is Andorinha who "liberates" the spectators, inviting them to explore the space on their own and reflect upon what they have just seen (29). Mão de Vaca declares that the building will never again be used

for repression (an allusion to plans for the building to function eventually as a cultural center), but warns that that the reoccupation of the DOPS is only the first step and that each spectator must remain "atento e forte" (29). This call to the audience to be alert and strong suggests that the creators of *Lembrar* sought to transform spectators into real-time witnesses not only of the process of reclaiming the building, but also—and especially—of the legacies of dictatorship in the present, including the continued absence of justice and accountability relating to past and ongoing human rights crimes. The Delegado concludes by paraphrasing a quotation by Adorno and Horkheimer that serves as an epigraph to the dramatic text (and is printed on the program), declaring, "E para estar atento e forte não basta lembrar o passado, mas resgatar as esperanças do passado" (29). In the final scene, the actors (all of whom were in their 50s and 60s and who had come of age during the dictatorship) pass on the responsibility of remembering and truth-telling to an audience consisting primarily of young Brazilians who had no direct experience of the repression, thereby widening the circle of memory and witnessing.

Conclusions

This article has argued that *Lembrar é resistir* transformed audience members not only into belated witnesses of the history of the DOPS building, but also—and perhaps more importantly—into real-time witnesses who participated in reclaiming the building as well as confronting the absence of bold legal and political responses to dictatorship-era human rights crimes. Drawing on the work of Jelin and Taylor, it demonstrated that the physical site itself did not constitute memory; rather, memory was activated through performance, that is, through the embodied actions of performers and spectators. By analyzing the range of actions embodied by participants in the performance, this article has illuminated the subtle ways that the play mediated the audience's encounter with this space.

Identifying and analyzing the objectives of *Lembrar* is one thing; measuring the production's success in achieving those goals is quite another. To do so would entail an in-depth study of spectators' actions upon departing the DOPS at the end of the performance, a task rendered virtually impossible by the more than ten years that have passed since the closing of the play in 2000. Nevertheless, there are some indications that the creators at least partially achieved their objective of transforming spectators into actor-participants in their truth-telling project. First and foremost, the play was so successful that its originally planned run of one week was extended

by more than a year. All told, an estimated 20,000 people attended the play (some more than once), an impressive number in modern Brazilian theatre. Word of mouth must have been a significant factor in this success, since the small production budget did not allow for a sustained advertising campaign. Moved by what they saw and experienced, spectators recommended the play to others, helping to extend the play's run and drawing the attention of the media, including a feature on MTV Latin America (Ferraz 7). In fact, *Lembrar* was such an astounding hit that a spin-off was staged in Rio de Janeiro the following year. The TV Cultura network also televised a recording of the original São Paulo version.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is also possible to evaluate the play's success in transforming the DOPS from a symbol of repression into a site of memory and thereby advancing the goals of transitional justice. *Lembrar* contested yet also eventually fell victim to the politics of silence in force at the time. In the short term, it failed to have a sustained effect. In December 2000, state government officials ordered the closing of the play so that renovations of the building could resume. The play was pulled from the space even though there was more than enough funding and audience demand to keep it running indefinitely. At least one participant in the project, playwright Izaías Almada, speculates that the state government canceled *Lembrar* for political reasons:

> Então, tudo isso acabou, por quê?... Aí entram, e eu digo isso com a maior franqueza, aí entram até fatores de natureza ideológica, porque algumas pessoas que participaram do processo, não tinham a noção do que estavam fazendo e, quando perceberam, falaram: "ai, meu deus do céu, isso aqui é uma coisa de comunista. Por que estou fazendo isso?"... [O] espetáculo foi pensado supostamente por alguns progressistas e liberais, mas quando eles perceberam do que se tratava, trataram logo de podar aquilo. (qtd. in Almeida 87)

Almada hints strongly that some of the same state government officials who initially sponsored *Lembrar* later moved to close it down, alarmed by the play's powerful denunciation of the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of dictatorship-era human rights crimes.

When the building finally reopened to the public in 2002, the space where *Lembrar* had been staged was hardly recognizable. The cells remained intact, but the walls had been covered with a coat of drab grey paint and a few framed newspaper and magazine articles. Inaugurated as the Memorial da Liberdade, the renovated cells bore little resemblance to the space that had served as the stage for Álvarez and Almada's play only a few years earlier.

Indeed, the euphemistic name and uninspiring renovations virtually erased the meanings that the cast and crew of *Lembrar* had sought to inscribe upon the site.

Over the long term, however, *Lembrar* did make a difference by paving the way for a significant transitional justice initiative. Following the State's shift to a new politics of memory around 2005, the memory of the play was eventually reactivated. In 2006, Brazil's Ministry of Human Rights launched a new cultural initiative called "Direito à memória e à verdade," which aimed to restore dignity to the fatal victims of the military dictatorship. One of the centerpieces of this project was the inauguration in January 2009 of a new Memorial da Resistência in place of the earlier Memorial da Liberdade. The new memorial resurrects and reworks key ideas from *Lembrar*: namely the focus on resistance, as its name suggests (although I would argue that it also dilutes the play's potent condemnation of human rights crimes). The designers render explicit homage to *Lembrar* on a panel conspicuously placed at the entrance of the memorial, recognizing the performance's role in securing the location for memory work.

Put in perspective, *Lembrar* illustrates how cultural works can have a concrete impact on memory politics. As Jelin points out, transitional justice projects tend to beget other transitional justice projects: "the unfolding of one policy sets the stage for others" ("Public" 156). Over the long run, the play helped open up a space—in both the literal and figurative sense—for the Memorial da Resistência and for transitional justice more broadly.

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Notes

[1] I'm grateful to Leila Lehnen, Nancy Gates-Madsen, Sophia Beal, and the anonymous reviewers for their generosity in providing suggestions and comments on this article. I'd also like to thank Belisário dos Santos Jr., Annita Malufe, Izaías Almada, Analy Álvarez, Ia Santos, Cristina Bruno, and Kátia Felipini Neves for their enthusiastic support of this project.

[2] The term *transitional justice* refers to the various measures that new democracies adopt in an effort to redress human rights crimes committed under earlier authoritarian regimes. These measures may include not only criminal trials, but also truth commissions, reparations programs, institutional reforms, monuments and memorial projects, and so on. For an overview of transitional justice politics in Brazil, see Schneider, "Breaking the 'Silence.'"

[3] Theatre has responded to and helped advance a variety of transitional justice projects throughout Latin America. In 1990, Ariel Dorfman wrote the play *La muerte y la doncella* shortly before the publication of the Rettig Commission's final report in Chile; the work explores the limitations of such

official truth-seeking bodies. In 2002, Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission relied on the theatre troupe Yuyachkani to help raise awareness about its public hearings and to encourage potential witnesses to come forward. Extending the scope beyond transitional justice, performance protests, such as *escraches* in Argentina (which publicly shame, or "out," accused perpetrators by creating a spectacle at their homes or workplaces), have denounced impunity and pressured governments to adopt bolder transitional justice policies. In the months leading up to the inauguration of Brazil's national truth commission in May 2012, youth in that country began organizing their own version of perpetrator "outings," known in Portuguese as *escrachos* or *esculachos*.

[4] The São Paulo DOPS was established in 1924 with the purpose of maintaining "uma vigilância mais séria e permanente em torno das atividades desintegradoras dos princípios tradicionais da Religião, Pátria e Família" (qtd. in Pinheiro and Sader 80). In 1940, it moved into the building it would occupy until being deactivated in 1983. Both the Vargas and military regimes imprisoned and tortured political opponents there. Sometimes the acronym DEOPS (Departamento *Estadual* de Ordem Política e Social) is also used.

[5] See Jelin, *State Repression* 33-34.

[6] Former sites of repression such as the ESMA (Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada) in Argentina and Villa Grimaldi in Chile are two notable examples. In Brazil, the State Archive and human rights groups fought with—and eventually prevailed over—the Civil Police for the right to occupy the DOPS building in Rio de Janeiro (Catela 74-75). A modified version of *Lembrar* was staged in that building, but was not as successful as the original.

[7] During several visits to the Memorial da Resistência (which now occupies the space where *Lembrar* was staged), I noted that the docents emphasized that it was the DOPS officers themselves who purposely destroyed the graffiti on the cell walls before vacating the building. I presume that the guides stress this point not only as an example of how the dictatorship attempted to cover up its repressive activities, but also to illustrate the challenges that memorial designers faced in attempting to recreate what the space looked like during the period in question—and to deflect accusations that the designers of the earlier state-sponsored Memorial da Liberdade, which occupied the space from 2002-2008, had (intentionally or not) effaced the markings.

[8] A prime example is Argentine dramatist Griselda Gambaro's *Información para extranjeros*, a sophisticated site-specific play written before the Argentine dictatorship that has much in common with *Lembrar*. Spectators of Gambaro's work are led through the rooms and corridors of an anonymous house (not an actual former site of repression) where they witness scenes that promote reflection on political violence and disappearance.

[9] Almada told an interviewer, "Acho que o protagonista do espetáculo é o espaço.... [E]sse espaço tem uma importância muito grande, talvez maior que a própria dramaturgia incipiente. O espetáculo é bonito não pela dramaturgia, ele é bonito... principalmente por causa daquele espaço" (qtd. in Almeida 65).

[10] For an overview of the archives recovered from the defunct state and federal political police forces, see Catela.

[11] Journalist Vladimir Herzog was tortured to death in a São Paulo prison in October 1975. Security agents attempted to cover up his murder by staging it as a suicide.

[12] My distinction between these two levels of witnessing in the play—belated and real-time—is indebted to feedback from Leila Lehnen.

[13] Emílio Garrastazu Médici's presidency (1969-1974) coincided with the harshest phase of the military dictatorship.

[14] This character is explicitly identified as Fleury in the dramatic text.

[15] See, for example, Atencio 54.

[16] See Beal.

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