

Memory and Mourning:

Examining the Voids in German and Uruguayan Literature, Art, and Architecture

a. Introduction

I propose to investigate German cultural productions from 1945 to the present and Uruguayan works from 1973 to the present with respect to collective memory and the attempts made by these two cultures to come to terms with traumatic moments in their recent past. In particular, I intend to examine how each society handles the “voids” created by the politically generated catastrophes of the recent past and how they use literature, art and architecture to expose them and to help heal the physical, psychological and metaphorical wounds left by these events. In this thesis the “void” represents historical subjects, people, as well as their potential contributions that are missing as a result of past events, contributions that can never again be recovered or filled. The architect Daniel Libeskind illustrates this definition of “voids” in his Jewish Museum Berlin, where he uses a deconstructivist design to signify the voids in the German-Jewish identity after the Holocaust and the physical and metaphorical absence of a Jewish community. Andreas Huyssen’s “The Voids of Berlin” productively explores how contemporary German society and government have, through architecture and urban space, begun the process of coming to terms with the past, and are trying to “fill in the voids” that were left as a result of the wars, the Holocaust and the division of Germany, owing to the Berlin Wall. In this thesis I intend to extend Huyssen’s research and the work of important trauma studies critics by widening the lens to consider the post-national context and compare the role of the “void” in German cultural products and art to the literature, art and architecture produced by Uruguayan artists in response to the dictatorship.

b. Literature Review

Andreas Huyssen. “The Voids of Berlin” in *Present Pasts*

The article explores the physical voids left in the city of Berlin. The historical context ranges from the Weimar period, Fascism, the 1950s, and period encompassing the construction and Fall of the Berlin Wall. Huyssen conveys the city as a text that is constantly being written and rewritten, and describes Berlin “as something like a prism through which we can focus on issues of contemporary urbanism and architecture, national identity and statehood, historical memory and forgetting” (49).

Eduardo Galeano. *El Libro De Los Abrazos: Imágenes y Palabras*.

This Uruguayan work is a collection of short texts in a poetic language that gives voice to a number of different people including children, exiles, natives, prisoners. In the context of my thesis, this work is an example of how literature is used to counter the “voids” created by the Uruguayan dictatorship and also illustrates how poetic writing can denounce and protest harsh historical realities.

María Figueredo. “El eterno retorno entre la poesía y el Canto Popular: Uruguay, 1960– 1985” in *Revista Canadiense De Estudios Hispánicos*.

The connection between el Canto Popular Uruguayo (CPU) and the dictatorship from 1973-1985 is presented in this article. Figueredo argues that the sociopolitical climate in Uruguay of the 1960s to the 1980s gave rise to the setting to music of poetry since folklore music and popular song responded to the need of having a collective dialogue, at a popular level within the Uruguayan community, especially after the military coup of 1973 (229). She uses this example as a basis for her argument on the cyclical relationship between poetry and popular music.

W.G. Sebald. *Austerlitz*.

This text is a hybrid novel that combines photography and literature in order to narrate the story of the fictional character Jacques Austerlitz and the journey to the recovery of his memory. The theme of memory and forgetting in relation to the Holocaust is central to the work. The psychological void that Austerlitz experiences and discovers in his adulthood through the journey of searching for his parents will be used in my work to illustrate the different forms of voids that were created by the traumatic event of the Holocaust.

Anne Whitehead. *Trauma Fiction*.

This book connects trauma and fiction. Whitehead divides it into two parts, “Theme” and “Style,” with three chapters in each section, and explores how trauma theory is intertwined in the works of authors who use trauma as a theme. To develop her argument she offers close readings of works of contemporary literature including texts by Pat Barker, Jackie Kay, Anne Michaels, Toni Morrison, Caryl Phillips, W. G. Sebald and Benjamin Wilkomirski. She also introduces the reader to key critics in trauma theory such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman.

c. Research Questions

My working hypothesis is that while German cultural productions since the Holocaust and the Fall of the Berlin Wall have evolved from a period that encompassed the theme of mourning and confusion to the current theme of trying to “fill in the voids,” Uruguayan creations from the post-dictatorship period are still heavily focused on traumatic absence and mourning and do not yet attempt to symbolically or physically “fill” the void. Some artists in both countries and cultural contexts,

however, creatively use sound and poetry to counter the “voids” left by a traumatic past and negate historical forgetting and erasure. The following are my research questions:

1. Why do German and Uruguayan societies use literature, art and architecture as forms of healing and of coming to terms with the recent traumatic past?
2. Why has architecture, through museums and monuments, become a prominent form of remembering the past and uncovering the “voids” left by chaotic political situations?
3. How is Uruguayan music, architecture and literature contributing distinctively to the role of mourning and remembering “los Desaparecidos” in comparison to German cultural productions that pay tribute to the Holocaust?

Answering these questions will help my readers understand how traumatic events from the recent past influence literature, music and cultural productions in their society, and how the dynamic relationship between architecture and art can be used as a prescriptive model to uncover, acknowledge and represent “voids” in other societies that have experienced similar traumatic events. Exploring these connections and proving my working hypothesis are extremely relevant in the twenty-first century, where wars between the East and the West are still prevalent, dictatorships continue to exist in many parts of the world, and as a result “voids” of all forms, physical, psychological and metaphorical, unfortunately will continue to develop.

d. Critical Approach

In this interdisciplinary research project I will be utilizing new approaches in museum and memory studies on literature, art and architecture, as they will help me answer my research questions regarding spatial representations of collective memory and their popular representation in society. I will also be drawing upon literary analysis and the “close reading” method in conjunction with some key tenets and

concepts of trauma theory and memory studies since this will allow me to perform an in-depth analysis of the literary and musical works in discussion. Intertwining these two approaches is necessary because I am examining different fields of cultural productions: literature, music, art and architecture. For the analysis of German cultural productions I will also draw upon recent work done on museums and literature in Holocaust Studies, as this important subfield of Trauma Studies has productively been used to analyze specific ways in which memorials, authors and artists have responded to the Holocaust as a traumatic event.

Since my research topic is collective memory in relation to how literature, art and architectural representations are used to highlight and pay tribute to traumatic events in society's past, using trauma theory is prudent as it will allow me to examine how monuments and museums are used to remember; and why literature and music also function as forms of remembrance, although they might not be as immediately popular. I will rely on Anne Whitehead's book *Trauma Fiction* and other trauma studies essays and texts to apply concepts from trauma theory to the study of literature, music, art and architecture. In addition, I will be placing Andreas Huyssen's article "The Voids of Berlin" in dialogue with my own research in order to expand on Huyssen's argument to include literary works as cultural productions depicting "voids". Although these voids will not be physical, the impact of psychological voids on society is just as important, if humanity is to heal and learn from the past.

e. Chapter Outline

Introduction: "*Explaining the Void*" [10-15 pp.]

In this section, I will introduce the topic of German and Uruguayan collective memory in relation to trauma and how it is represented physically and symbolically through literature, art and architecture.

This will begin the conversation towards answering my first research question (Why do German and Uruguayan societies use literature, art and architecture as forms of healing and of coming to terms with

the recent traumatic past?) I will then discuss Libeskind's architectural "void" in the Jewish Museum Berlin, as this concept is central to the research project and will be used through out the work. I will argue that the "void" is not only used as an act of cultural memory in architectural designs, but can also be seen in literature, film and music.

Chapter One: *Filling in the Voids: German Representations of Trauma, Cultural Memory and Absence in Literature, Architecture and Film* [30 pp.]

In this chapter I will explore the topics of the Holocaust and the Berlin Wall as a central part of German history in relation to collective memory as portrayed in German architecture, literature and film. I will briefly touch upon the Jewish Museum Berlin again by placing it in dialogue with Andreas Huyseen's essay "The Voids of Berlin", where he also addresses voids and empty spaces in the city. This will allow me to explore the different types of "voids" present architecturally in German society and make the transition to literature and film. I will use Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* to illustrate the use or non-use of empty spaces in the city of Berlin, and their significance to cultural memory. Peter Weiss's short story "Meine Ortschaft" (a short autobiographical essay on mourning the Shoah, written after Weiss visited Auschwitz- Birkenau in 1964, and had visited the buildings and sites of the museum), and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* will help me connect memory and loss with the architectural representation of the voids. This chapter will therefore address my second research question.

Chapter Two: *Digging up the Past: Uruguayan Music, Literature and Architecture in Response to Political Oppression* [30pp.]

This chapter will explore the subject of the Disappeared from Uruguay in connection to cultural memory and artistic productions. A historical background of the Uruguayan military coup and the events leading up to it will provide the readers with the essential information to understand how the Disappeared became a subject of social and literary importance. Literature and Music produced in response to the dictatorship will be examined, in particular the movement CPU (Canto Popular

Uruguayo), which musicalized poetry into popular song, in the 1970s and 1970s, to oppose the dictatorship. An example from this movement is the Uruguayan poet, Mario Benedetti, and his affiliation with folklore singer, Daniel Viglietti. Their recital “A dos voces,” contains Benedetti’s poem “Los Desaparecidos” that became the song “Otra voz canta- Desaparecidos.” In addition, Eduardo Galeano’s *El Libro De Los Abrazos: Imágenes y Palabras* will help illustrate how memory and loss is portrayed in the Latin American continent, and how they function to depict the stage of mourning that society is experiencing collectively in relation to this traumatic event. The analysis of the literary and musical productions created in direct response to the dictatorship will help me answer a part of my third research question (How is Uruguayan music, architecture and literature contributing distinctively to the role of mourning and remembering “los Desaparecidos” in comparison to German cultural productions that pay tribute to the Holocaust?).

Chapter Three: *Connecting the Lines: Cultural Mediations: Remembering through Literature, Art and Architecture* [30pp.]

This chapter will serve to develop further the connections between Uruguay and Germany from the perspective of the topic in discussion. The aim is to demonstrate how, in these two particular cases, the similar and distinct use of art and architecture to uncover and “fill in the voids” of their cultural past can serve as a prescriptive model for other societies to follow. I will examine once again the Jewish Museum Berlin in comparison to the Museum of Memory in Montevideo by comparing the artefacts they holds, the narratives they provide and the architectural designs of both buildings. This will enable me to prove my working hypothesis that while German cultural productions since the Holocaust and the Fall of the Berlin Wall have evolved from a period that encompassed the theme of mourning and confusion to the current theme of trying to “fill in the voids,” Uruguayan creations from the post-dictatorship period are still heavily focused on traumatic absence and mourning and do not yet attempt to symbolically or physically “fill” the void. In addition, the architectural part of my third research

question will be addressed. A section of this chapter will also be devoted to discuss how sound is used in both cultural contexts to overcome absence and trauma. The Jewish Museum Berlin has, for example, an internal courtyard the Paul Celan Courtyard (Celanhof) and a “memory void” that amplifies the sound of visitors walking on metal plates of cut iron. This can be compared to the use of sound and poetry in Uruguayan performing arts.

Conclusion: “Looking to the Future” [10pp.]

This final section will serve as the conclusion to the research project. Looking back at the three chapters I aim to discover how we can learn to better design and use cultural productions to keep alive the memory of those lost, and how we educate future generations about the past, which might otherwise be forgotten. This can be done by examining the relationship between literature, art and architecture and their collective function in healing the physical, psychological and metaphorical wounds left by traumatic political situations which German and Uruguayan societies experienced in the twentieth-century.

f. Language Preparation

I am fully confident that I am able to carry out this project in the three languages that are required. I am a native speaker of Spanish and have an Honours Bachelor’s of Arts in Spanish and German Studies from York University. During my undergraduate studies, I took ten Spanish language and literature courses, and eleven German courses. In 2013, I completed a three-month internship in Bonn, Germany at the DAAD (German Student Exchange Services) where I had the opportunity to fully immerse myself in the language and culture of that country. In addition, I will also be attending a conference in Warsaw, Poland in June 2017 entitled “Memoria encarnada. Emociones, cuerpos y migraciones en la producción cultural hispánica del siglo XXI”, which has the theme of collective memory of the twenty-first century in Latin America. After the conference, I will also be spending three weeks in Berlin at the Jewish Museum Berlin Archives.

g. Bibliography

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