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Ephemera and the Politics of Memory in Argentina's

Archivo de la Memoria Trans

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Introduction

Archiving is one of the central methods of memory collection and the formation of community. In the case of transgender archives especially, collecting and physically recording artifacts and historical documents play the pivotal role of recounting and fortifying the history of sexuality. K.J. Rawson writes, “Transgender-specific archives function as “a technology of identity” (Rohy 2010, 354): as the central collection parameter, “transgender” becomes legitimated as an identity through the rich historical lineage that the archive evidences.” (Rawson, 25) The use of archive as a “technology of identity” permits it to be adaptive and malleable to its audience in order to fulfill its persuasive purpose. However, archives in general also have the power to reflect social hierarchies and heteronormative norms that control the general media. Archiving transgender materials is important for community building and collective memory. As such, it has to be treated as a powerful and dangerous mechanism with the ability to reflect or to challenge the wider culture (Rawson, 25).

As a result, this paper will discuss the impact of digital queer archives through an analysis of *Archivo Nacional de la Memorial Trans en Argentina*, or National Trans Memory Archive in Argentina, an archive that showcases archival material from the era of the political dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970’s - 1990’s. It will investigate the methods used by digital archives such as these ones and their abilities to impact the collective history and family formation of trans women through the use of ephemera.

LGBTQ Rights in Argentina

Historically, LGBTQ+ rights in Argentina have been largely progressive compared to other Latin American countries. This is the result of the increase of rights as a response to the

post-transitional democratic government that emerged after the dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla, who ruled from 1976 to 1983 (Pousadela 701). During the dictatorship, sexuality was not considered a human right and members of the LGBTQ community, specifically trans women, were targeted by discriminatory policies. Police edicts declared the illegality of trans people and allowed them to be arrested and fined for simply walking down the street under the policy that “scandal” was not permitted. Antiquated policies such as these were in place in Argentina until 2000. Although the regime ended in 1983, there was still sex based discrimination throughout Argentina and violence disproportionately affected “travesti” women. Additionally, police investigations were infrequent and it was uncommon for there to be any justice or movements to protect trans women. The 1990s brought increased social visibility within the gay community. Many bars and clubs opened and took advantage of the newfound liberalization. However, trans women still were invisible, even in gay settings. This is largely as a result of the perception of “travestis” as “men who dressed up as women in order to prostitute themselves” (Pousadela 704).

The perceived threat of “travestis” as prostitutes to the wider culture of Argentina created the lack of visibility that continues to deprive trans women of rights in Argentina. After the transition to democracy in Argentina, many of the trans victims of state terrorism were made invisible and were left out of victim lists. For example, the commission appointed to investigate disappearances after the dictatorship, the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, does not mention in its final report that over 400 queer people had been disappeared (Brown, 121). Being part of the trans community at that time was equal to living in hiding and being persecuted, criminalized, discriminated against, segregated, and violated. This chronic invisibility of trans women has continued despite advances. Today, “travesti”-trans communities

still suffer discriminatory acts as well as physical, verbal, economic, social, and institutional violence. Additionally, there are high rates of hate crimes and no guarantees of good medical care, access to housing, education, or job placement (UNESCO). Exclusion from educational systems has made it so that the trans population does not have access to labor markets.

Consequently, 90 percent of trans women make their living through sex work. This profession exposes these women to violence as a result of clients or from police (UNDP). In Argentina today, almost all trans people live in poverty. Many are expelled from their homes in their youth because of a rejection of gender and identity and are more likely to experience suicidal thoughts throughout their lifetimes. All of these factors have led to an average life expectancy of 35 to 40 years for “travesti”-trans people in Argentina (UNESCO).

Despite these examples of marginalization and prejudice, Argentina has some of the most progressive policies in regard to transgender rights in the world. When the dictatorship ended, sexual rights began to be understood as human rights and public opinion progressed deeply to include the LGBTQ+ community within the process of democratization in Argentina. In 2009, the Gender Identity bill was introduced in Argentina which would allow trans people to change their names on identity papers and give them the right to gender affirming care. 66% of the inhabitants of Argentina’s main cities were in favor of allowing changes to identity papers and 75.7% were in favor of allowing access to gender affirming medical care. This bill was pushed mostly by the ATTA, Association of Argentinean Transvestites, Transsexuals, and Transgenders, an activist group that fought for the rights of the trans population in Argentina. The push for this identity bill was in response to the legalization of gay marriage, which occurred in 2009 and revealed the opportunity for progress within Argentina (Pousadela 704).

There have been many integral organizations that have led to the current progressive policies in Argentina with regard to LGBTQ+ rights. The main precedent of the current Argentine LGBT movement was the Homosexual Liberation Front (FLH) which was founded in 1971. The group dissolved with the emergence of the dictatorship. Following the end of the dictatorship, the Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA) emerged and was officially recognized in 1992. The CHA primarily focused on fighting biased police edicts and increasing the gay community's visibility. One of the most influential groups currently that promote human rights for the LGBTQ+ community in Argentina is the Argentine LGBT+ Federation (FALGBT). The FALGBT pioneered the fight for the legalization of gay marriage in Argentina and played a large role in the Gender Identity Law which passed in 2011 (Pousadela 706).

The FALGBT is a national network and social movement that drove the creation of the two bills mentioned. The organization was led mostly by younger people and women or people in the LGBTQ+ community. It was so successful as a result of its many allies within the Argentine institutional systems. The FALGBT's connections to the executive and judicial branches of the Argentine government allowed them to forcefully assert the imposition of these bills. Additionally, the FALGBT is particularly powerful because of its united front and ability to create consensus. The organization promotes visibility and education as a way to create public consensus and gain support for government initiatives using mass media and journalism to inform the public. This has allowed the organization to create a strong unanimous effort. Mass media and journalism has also played a large role in LGBTQ+ activism because it allows for the promotion of first person stories, which is one of the most powerful tools against abstract discrimination. Although it is important to distinguish LGBTQ+ movements and specifically trans movements in Latin America, the FALGBT shows the effectiveness of these activism

techniques. The development of technology and digital forms of activism has promoted the necessity and accessibility of these forms of activism (Pousadela 712).

Archivo Nacional de la Memoria Trans de Argentina

One of the digital forms of activism that have been developed as a tool to increase the visibility of the trans and “travesti” community of Argentina has been the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans de Argentina* (ATM). ATM is a digital platform which brings together images and stories showing the recent history of the trans-travesti community in Argentina with the goal to “protect, create, and vindicate the memory and recent history of the trans community in Argentina through the protection of its documentary heritage” (UNESCO, trans: Hannah Lipskar). The archive contains around 15,000 pieces, including photos, videos, audio recordings, newspaper clippings, letters, personal diaries, official documents, and clothing. The project is run by trans and travesti people in Argentina and seeks to amplify the voices of trans people, because the stories of the trans community have so often been dominated by cisgender voices. Currently, the ATM is a construction of trans artists, activists, journalists, researchers, and conservators. The archive is a creation of a shared memory of the violations of rights that the community has suffered, while also creating a memory of celebration and moments of happiness (UNESCO).

ATM was originally started by Claudia Pía Baudracco and María Belén Correa, both founders of the ATTA in 1993. Baudracco, a trans woman, was a founding member of the transgender rights movement in Argentina and advocated for laws that would increase punishments against perpetrators of hate crimes against trans women (awid). Additionally, Correa is a prominent trans activist who has played a large role in movements such as the ATTA and has founded the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Trans Persons as well as the Santamaría Foundation (Museo Moderno). Baudracco and Correa wanted to create a space that

did not exist before where trans survivors of the age of persecution in Argentina could share their experiences. The project began casually as a way for Baudracco to collect photos of her friends in order to remember their lives. After Baudracco's death in 2012, Correa, who was exiled in the United States, created a Facebook group to unite exiled trans women from all around the world who had survived persecution. Within the Facebook group, more and more people began to share images and stories. After two years, this virtual trans community created by Baudracco and Correa united to construct a collective memory archive, which is the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans de Argentina*. In 2014, the photographer and artist Cecilia Estalles compiled all of the shared information digitally into the archive that it is now. Currently, the oldest piece in the collection is from 1936, but the archive focuses heavily on the 1990s. Since its creation, it has been exhibited in many different countries, such as the Haroldo Conti Cultural Center in Buenos Aires, the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, and the virtual platform of the Tate Modern Gallery in London (UNESCO).

The archive is compiled from donations made by trans women, and, slowly, beginning to include donations from trans men and non-binary people. Each individual donation is constructed into an album following the life of an individual person chronologically through their lives: infancy, adolescence, education, transition, and then their current lives. This form of archive is able to show the shared events and experiences of trans people in Argentina such as activism, struggle, incarceration, exile, love and friendship, and celebration. Additionally, this form of archival collection has allowed for creating a community and a chosen family for a community that has often been abandoned by their biological families (UNESCO).

The main page of the website is a collage of different images of trans women, which changes every couple of minutes to show an entirely new set of people. There are options to view

the history and background of the archive, visit the catalog, and watch videos. Additionally, there is the option to view “Wikitrans,” a collection of different phrases, people, or policies that relate to the trans-travesti experience in Argentina and their definitions. The site also advertises publications and published works related to ATM. There are also ways to connect with the archive on different social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube (ATM). The format of the website itself emphasizes its goals of education and community in the struggle against transphobia.

The physical arrangement of the archive plays an integral role in achieving its goals. As mentioned, the ATM arranges its collection on four levels: “Fonds”, which is the name of the protagonist of a set of documents, “Section,” which is the material support and type of document that is being recorded, “Series,” which describes the different life stages that a photo might represent, and “Number,” to indicate whether an artifact is simple or composed (Salerno). The construct of the archive allows for the audience to formulate their “frames of recognition,” which, according to Judith Butler, “allow us to recognize a living life, paving the way for the following political and ethical implications: respect, protection, preservation, and conditions for thriving” (Salerno). This recognition is dependent on schemas of apprehension and intelligibility and the ATM’s methods of describing and arranging records produce an ontology that allows trans people to self recognize on their own terms (Salerno). The ATMs structural formal additionally allows for the creation of a calendar, with the ability to bring together different events within the same framework. The archive transforms individual memories into cultural and collective memory. The creation of a shared past of any social group requires the organization of the private and intimate memory into a wider lens (Salerno).

Ephemera

One of the central methods by which the ATM uses its content to increase trans visibility and education is through the use of ephemera. Ephemera describes what remains after a physical act has passed. It is defined as “items of collectible memorabilia, typically written or printed ones, that were originally expected to have only short-term usefulness or popularity” (Oxford Dictionary). Another popular definition of ephemera is “minor transient documents of everyday life” (Northumbria). It is usually referring to printed or written material that is not meant to last for a long time. These can range from postcards to movie stubs and lottery tickets. However, some ephemera are intended to last the test of time and create a bridge between the past and present (Northumbria).

Ephemera in the context of archiving queer history represents the traces and remains of historical memorabilia. It is the remains embedded in subtle and passing queer acts. Through these remains, ephemera summons the resources of queer experience and collective identity that have been lost as a result of the past of strictly face-based medical and legal discourses where the meaningfulness of the mundane is negated. Queer history is always an effective history of emotion and a collection of potentially unstable ephemera (Killen). The ATM is one of these sources that strives to conserve queer history and documentation through ephemera. The ATM, through its documentation of queer ephemera, grants social recognition to trans women and allows them the spaces to formulate identity formation, community building, and social stratification. The trace of history that the archive provides through collection of photos starting as early as the 1930s creates an Argentinian queer community across time (Killen).

Archival documentation plays the role of legitimizing and preserving social and legal hierarchies. It is a place of power and privilege as well as a site where social change can occur.

Queerness, which has been lost in a space of heteronormativity, moves away from that path as the ATM recreates hierarchies and alters the understanding of what kinds of evidence matter in an understanding of history (Muñoz). Archives such as the ATM establish the role of the digital and visual in capturing queer moments. Archival recognition of queer life gives importance to moments after they have passed and draws them into contemporary trans moments. Archives interrupt narratives of linear progression through their unstable and ever changing organization and their relationality across time. The desire for queer history which has been neglected for so long is fulfilled through the work of archives such as the ATM through the collection of ephemera through the creation of a communal history (Killen).

Ephemera is present in the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans* as it is an archive of emotion. The photos and collections that are featured are not about the subjects themselves, but rather they are about the emotions and history that they produce. Photography particularly has the ability to reference the embodied shared experiences that are central to queer life. Photographs are ephemeral rather than just recording fixed moments in time and have ever shifting meanings which rely on their imagined and actual audience. The photos in the ATM nostalgically recall the past of trans lives in Argentina and the struggle of the dictatorship while at the same time evoking new emotions and thoughts. Each moment represented in a photograph recalls another moment to connect it to the present (Killen).

Additionally, data that exists on digital archives may be available, but only ever partially. For example, alongside every image documented on the ATM is only a brief description. It names the person featured in the photo, the photographer, the year the photo was taken, the place it was taken, the form of photography that it is (ex. silver print), conditions of access, the series it is in, and a very brief description.

Fondo	Eugenio Talbot Wright
Autoría	Desconocida
Fecha de toma de la imagen visual	1977
Lugar de la imagen visual	Córdoba Capital, Córdoba, Argentina.
Proceso fotográfico	Impresión plata gelatina
Condiciones de acceso, reproducción y uso	Sin restricciones
Serie	<u>Infancia</u>
Observaciones de contenido	Eugenio a los 4 años aproximadamente

This level of description moves the focus of the photographs away from the subject of the photo itself. It allows for meaning to only exist in the photos' relationship to the audience and their conceptions of gender and sexualized bodies (Killen). This lack of detailed description is very present in the archive and central to its goal of creating a shared history and community and using the archive to promote visibility on the terms of the trans women that are featured.

Ephemera in the Online Environment

The *Archivo de la Memoria Trans* has platforms on Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook. In this section, I will analyze the way that they engage with these forms of social media, and the responses that the public has. Social media such as the ones mentioned above have the power to reach a much wider audience than simply a website, and can directly address and work towards the goals of spreading education and awareness about the trans/travesti experience in Argentina in a way that physical spaces could not. During the dictatorship in Argentina, many trans women were exiled across many geographical boundaries. The use of social media, such as Facebook which was used by María Belén Correa to create the trans archive in its beginning, directly challenges this act of exile by connecting and creating community across physical boundaries.

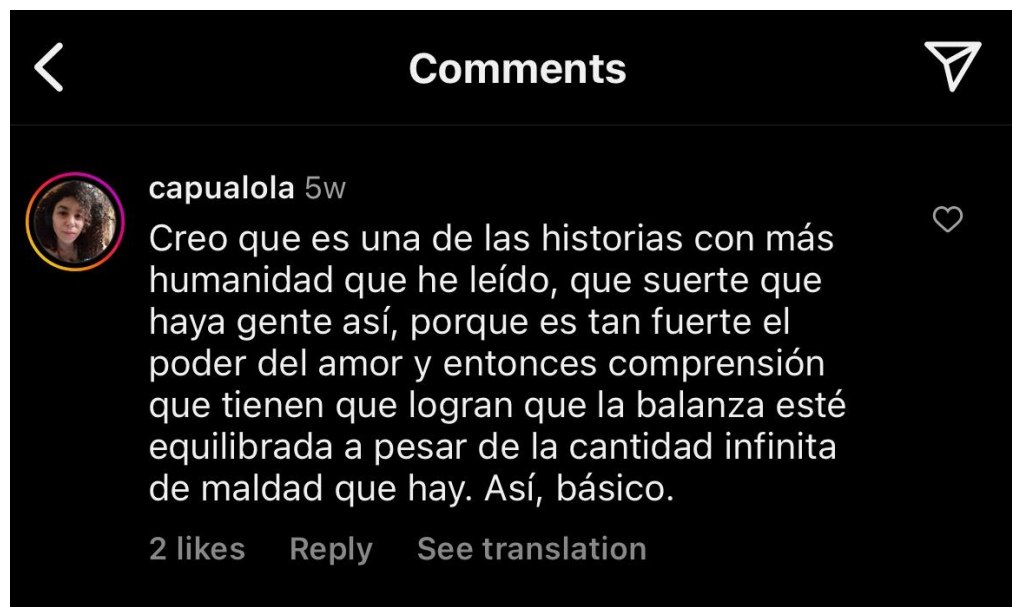
The archives Instagram, with the handle @archivotrans, uses the site to share the stories of individual trans women that are on the website itself, as well as to advertise the work of the archive such as books that are being released and marches that are being held. The account has 83.5 K followers, showing that it is widely supported.



The above image is a post made by the ATM on their Instagram page. The caption below describes that the image is of Sonia Hernández. The caption is written by Sonia in the first person. She writes that the photo is from the year 2000 at the baptism of her goddaughter. The caption then continues to describe Sonia's relationship with her goddaughter, who is now 23. Sonia describes that, at the baptism, she had to discuss with the priest and tell him that she didn't have any female documentation. The priest responded that there was no problem and that he would address her with her chosen name and not mention that she was not biologically a woman. Sonia describes that the child was given to her by order of a judge along with two other children, because their mother had left with a man. She was devoted to raising the children well, while working as a prostitute at night to support them. Sonia describes that the children never saw her

as a prostitute. She writes, “I returned at dawn, changed, took off my makeup, and by day I was the mother” (trans: Hannah Lipskar).

Most of the posts on the Instagram page mimic this one, with personal stories from the individual lives of trans women. Sonia’s post accumulated 5,565 likes and all of the comments were positive. The 88 comments almost all included emojis of red hearts or smiling faces and ranged from expressions of gratitude to confessions of emotion. One comment, written in Spanish, roughly translates to “ I was moved by the story, mainly, to know that the church has a light of humanity without judgment.” Another wrote, “Sonia, I love you.”



The screenshot above shows a comment that translates to, “I believe that this is one of the stories with the most humanity that I have read, how lucky that there are people like this, because the power of love is so strong and understanding that they have to balance the scales despite the infinite amount of hate that exists. So simple.” Comments such as these show the extreme positive impact on those that engage with the archive’s Instagram account.

Two comments on the post made references to the novel, *Las Malas*. *Las Malas* describes the everyday lives of travesti women in Argentina and their sufferings and celebrations. The

story focuses on the mother figure of the group of travestis, La Tía Encarna, and her experience of motherhood after finding a baby in the park where the women were working. La Tía Encarna then baptizes the baby as “El Brillo de los Ojos,” which translates to “The Brightness in One’s Eyes.” The novel exposes the happiness and suffering that involves life as a trans woman, and the abuse and aggression that is faced daily. The responses to the Instagram post that call upon this novel show that many of those that are engaged with these posts are familiar and engaged with other sources that describe and seek to vindicate the memory of travesti/trans women in Argentina. This is evidence of the importance of this form of digital activism. This platform allows for the sharing of information and creation of a community that understands the struggle of the trans/travesti community. It also creates a space where those who are not as familiar can learn from others and interact in order to be more educated. As a result, the ATM creates an online and collaborative space where trans people and allies can share content that continues a cycle of uplifting and vindicating the memory of trans women.

Additionally, the online environment is the ideal place to gather ephemera and use it to further the goals of visibility and education. The digital turn in trans activism has played a key role in shaping trans archives and senses of belonging (Simonetto & Butierrez). Jian Chen and Lisette Olivares discuss in their article, “Transmedia,” discusses the media created by and for queer people in a “post-digital” age (Chen & Olivares, 245). Through the use of Instagram as a form of sharing queer ephemera, the ATM transforms the relationship between “aesthetics, politics, and technologies of cultural representation” (Chen & Olivares, 246). Transmedia, especially social media such as this Instagram post by the archive rely on social contact and active interaction rather than static representations. Due to this, social media posts play a crucial role in the “post-digital” conceptions of the ephemeral. Shifting networks and interrelated

references allow for social media posts such as this one to reflect dominant institutions and wider culture. Additionally, the article describes that “transmedia approach recognizes that commercial intoxication relies on sustaining the out-of-world feeling of having been transported across space and time” (Chen & Olivares, 247). Instagram and other transmedia represent material objects that have the ability to go beyond a specific moment. Just as individual photographs are specific moments that are elevated to a more significant meaning, the Instagram post of Sonia Hernandez challenges normative timelines and understanding in order to further the goals of the ATM.

Specifically, the Instagram photo posted of Sonia Hernandez shows a passed singular moment in time. Baptisms are religious rituals that occur frequently and are very important within a specific moment, but then lose their significance as time progresses. The elements of the photograph itself do not show anything particularly jarring or significant. Sonia is shown in a black dress as a priest in a white gown pours water over a baby's head. In the back, another woman watches as the event takes place. Every element of the photo itself is ephemeral – the events featured in the photo were never meant to carry community significance or play a role in formulating a shared memory. They were meant only to represent an individual moment in time and a singular experience for Sonia and her goddaughter.

This is true for most of the photos that are featured on the archive's Instagram and throughout the archive in general. The photos feature seemingly trivial and random moments; two women smiling together in white dresses, a woman sitting with her dog, a couple kissing, and a close up and battered portrait of a face. Alone, each of these photos lose their meaning and become lost in ephemera, as temporal moments in time. However, when put within the same context in this digital format, there is new meaning reassigned, as more similarities between the images are discovered. Through this form of archival collection, it is discovered that each photo

features a trans woman and magnifies the celebrations and suffering that each woman experiences. By organizing these seemingly random artifacts of trans life in Argentina, the social media platforms of the AMT create a “digital village” where meaning can be created through the comparison and contrast between other artifacts (Murthy). While the ATM as an archive creates meaning and gives significance to the random objects and ephemera submitted by trans women through organization, the digital and social media platforms give power to the meaningful objects by amplifying them and allowing them to reach a wide audience that is not constrained by geographical location.

Public Intimacy in Archive

Video platforms are extremely valuable and used often by the archive in order to mix media and convey the message of the platform in a unique way. The format, as previously mentioned, of the catalog that the archive shows organizes different donated images from trans and travesti survivors in Argentina organized into individual people as well as important life events. These events include infancy, activism, exile, correspondence, Carnaval, celebrations, sex work, daily life, professional life, and more. However, these images are also available to be seen and browsed as physical works. The archive has released many physical books and publications that showcase the amazing donations. The digital nature of the archive’s website, however, provides a more personal and conclusive story of what life for trans women looks like in Argentina. One way that ATM achieves this goal is by creating videos that show the contents of a collection of photos with a voiceover telling stories that relate to the photos. Hearing the voice of trans women tell their stories allows the audience to visualize and experience the photos that are being displayed in a unique way.



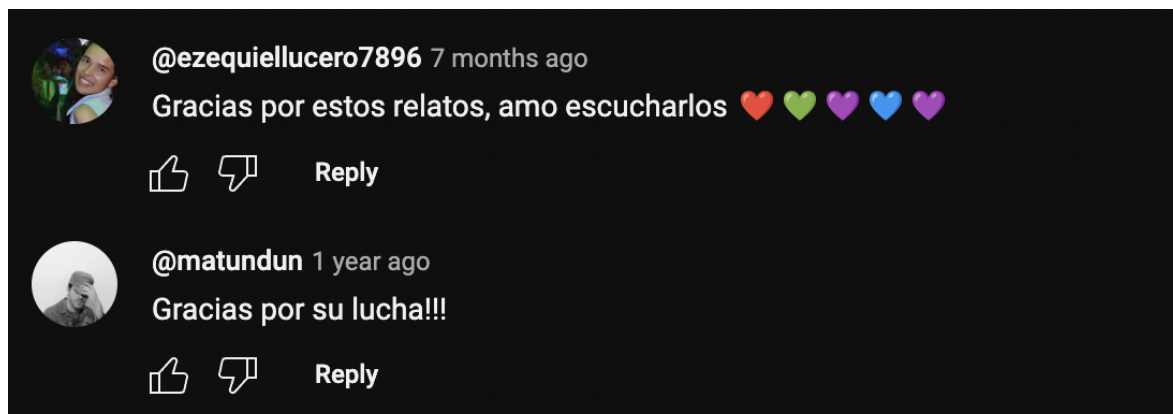
The image above shows a still from a video published on the archives website called “Álbum fotográfico: Vida cotidiana.” The video shares the stories of three trans women’s daily lives while showing pictures from the archive’s catalog. The first story is a travesti woman speaking about her experience of adolescence. She describes coming out to her family in 1976 and receiving support and love from her immediate family. Strikingly, she also talks about being supported by the health system in her pursuit of transition and gender affirming care. She tells about the struggles of having to choose between pursuing an education and being her true self as a trans woman and the ultimate decision that her identity had to come first. In 1978, she told how, after growing her hair and borrowing her sister’s clothes, she moved in with a community of other travesti women. In the voiceover, she says that, until she joined the community, “creía que era sola en el mundo, ya que jamás había visto una [persona trans].” This roughly translates to the fact that she felt that she was completely alone in the world and had never seen another trans person before in her life. She lists every name of the other woman that she lived with and highlighted their impacts on her life as she navigated the dictatorship and the growing abuse from police as she began prostituting in order to have enough money for food and shelter.

Through listing the names of every woman she has lived with, this story highlights the deep importance of relationships and chosen family in queer and trans culture.

Another story featured in the video was a trans woman describing her friend Tete Rojas. She tells the story of the parties that her friend held and then eventually that she passed away. The story follows Tete's death and the priest using her birth name and incorrect pronouns to describe her at her funeral mass. She describes the entire crowd getting up and yelling until the priest finally had to use her chosen name, Tete Rojas. She says that Tete used to always say, "Cuando yo me muera, una luz se apagará en Buenos Aires," meaning that when she died, a light would go out in the city of Buenos Aires. She ends by saying how much she misses Tete.

Finally, the last story of the video describes the life of a travesti woman who was put in a detention facility during the dictatorship. She describes the constant abuse that her and her peers experienced while in the facility, but also the huge relief that the 30 days of detention provided for them. The 30 days represented time where they didn't have to worry about being chased and hit by policemen or worry about where they were going to sleep the upcoming night. Although she describes the time period as being humiliating and degrading to her personal identity, she also asserts that her and her community's pride was stronger than any humiliation.

The video ends finally with the last page of the collection of physical images and the voiceover saying, "De eso hablaremos más adelante..." (On this, we will take more later...). The video itself is 8 minutes long and has 1,938 views, 30 likes, and no dislikes. The video has



two comments that express gratitude and love for the women and their stories. They respectively roughly translate to, “Thank you for those stories, I love hearing them” and “Thank you for your struggle!”

This video, presented by the ATM, shows the daily lives of trans women in Argentina during and around the time of the dictatorship. Oftentimes in the discussion of trans people, straight people in psychological archives or medical archives tend to feature the more monumental life events of a trans person’s life such as their transition or the abuse that they faced in extreme and singular circumstances. This video alternatively decided to showcase the daily lives of trans women; the continuous struggles they faced day to day, the celebrations they had, the relationships they built, and more. This decision, along with the decision to include voiceover, allows the audience to view the individuals in the stories as real people, and not simply a concept to investigate or criticize. The ability to disseminate this message to thousands of people as a result of digital media amplifies this message.

The photos shown in this video released by the ATM fall into the category of vernacular photography. Vernacular photography describes the photographic genre comprising family photos and(everyday or ordinary photographs with the central aim to capture an individual moment. Additionally, vernacular photography exists as an important form of ephemera, as it is meant to exist only within a specific moment in time. An article by Cole Rizki describing a physical installation of the trans archive describes vernacular photography as “banal moments of being-together” (Rizki). For example, one collage of photographs shown in the video, as shown in the photo below, feature a group of trans women making a toast over a drink, and another shows a group of 8 trans women smiling for a photo together. These photos feature generic and unassuming conventions of daily life. However, these images inscribe women within the

everyday familiar scenes of life, rather than sensationalize them into constant spectacle. By including photos in albums and videos such as these ones, the ATM makes these photos matter, and by extension, gives value to the lives of trans women through moments of curation (Ritzki).



Even further, Argentina's history of protest and dictatorship also assigns meaning to vernacular photographs such as those featured in the video. During the dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a pattern of forced disappearances where people that challenged the ruling power were taken from their homes and often tortured and killed. In protest to these forced disappearances, many Argentine mothers organized and marched as the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo to mobilize for their children who had been disappeared. In protest, the mothers held photos of their children's National Identity Document photos. By using these photos, the mothers challenged the state by using photographs created by the government to challenge them to take responsibility for the disappearance of their children and challenge the status of the government (Rizki). In the same way, this video and these vernacular photographs taken from the most intimate settings of trans life, challenge the status of family and intimacy by inscribing trans celebration and banality onto an aspect of life often represented my

heteronormative and exclusionary examples. By placing these images of trans familiarity within this video and this catalog, it can be identified within the long history of image as protest within Argentina and challenge the meaning of intimacy.

This video also amplified the importance of community and resilience in the trans community. Each story spoke of struggle and abuse faced as a result of the dictatorship in Argentina. However, each story also spoke of the pride, hope, and strength that was used to overcome these obstacles and the importance of finding a community to help find that strength. The first story talked about feeling alone in her identity, but finding a community to show her that she had a support system. The second mentioned the story of a close friend and the impact she had on the storyteller's life. And the third spoke of a group of friends surviving through the abuse in a detention center. In the third story, the storyteller explicitly says, "Sufríamos mucho, es verdad, pero nuestro orgullo y nuestra identidad de género era mucho más fuerte que todas esas humillaciones." This storyteller is saying that, although they experienced struggle, their pride in their gender identity was stronger than any humiliation. This example highlights the significance of gender identity. The ability for the storyteller to place their pride for their identity over humiliation, which extended to extreme violence and harassment, emphasizes the unmatched importance and euphoria that accompanies trans freedom. This video plays a pivotal role in educating listeners in the nature of the daily lives of travesti women, such as the importance of chosen family and resilience in the face of adversity.

In the video that I described above, "Álbum fotográfico: Vida cotidiana.", the storytellers whose voices overlay the progression of photos never reveal their names to the audience. Additionally, all of the pictures feature different people without any description. The intimacy and emotion of the photos themselves speak louder than any facts about the subjects

could(Kellin). The contents of the photos and stories told in the video feature seemingly unimportant aspects of the daily lives of trans women, something which is consistently neglected. However, through the context of the archive, these objects of apparent unimportance take on a new meaning of nostalgia and shared history due to their audience. Due to the ephemeral nature of the contents of the video, they become powerful enough to evoke a visibility and challenge the norms of heteronormativity that have been established by other literature on trans lives, which completely deny trans everyday life as evidence.

Household Ephemera and the Family





In its catalog, the ATM also features many correspondences between individuals, such as this birthday card. The card, although it was meant to commemorate one day in the calendar, adopts meaning and importance as it represents visibility of trans maternity and the importance of household ephemera in meaning-making for children.

The above images are found in the catalog of photos in the ATM labeled “Correspondence (Letters and Postcards). The description alongside the picture tells the reader that the letter was given to Julieta González (“La Trachyn”) in 1986. It also details that it is a card sent from Julieta’s goddaughter, Valeria, to celebrate Julieta’s birthday. The front cover of the card shows a cartoon-style kangaroo drawn holding flowers and wearing a hat and bowtie. On top of the animal, it says “Esta es una buena ocasión...” meaning, “This is a good occasion.” The next page of the card is another image of the smiling kangaroo with the words, “Para pegar el gran salto! ¡Vamos todavía que el mundo es tuyo!” This means “To hit the big jump! Come on, the world is yours!” On the last page, the card says “Felicitaciones” (Congratulations) and is signed by Valeria.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of maternity in regard to trans women has often been dismissed and criticized. By providing access to these cards, the ATM increases visibility for trans women in Argentina experiencing motherhood and validates their experience. By highlighting the close relationship between González (La Trachyn) and her goddaughter, Valeria, travesti maternity is normalized and celebrated. Additionally, by placing this on a digital platform, these postcards also provide education for those who have never before seen trans women within the context of motherhood. Even further, the idea of caring for a child, in the context of motherhood, additionally amplifies and validates trans maternal experiences. The ideas of maternity encapsulate caring for others and taking on the role of protecting children. By elevating this aspect of trans life, the ATM emphasizes and praises the abilities of trans women to play the roles of caring and motherly figures. This postcard continues to elevate and embrace the individual experiences of trans women by placing the audience within the personal lives and relationships of the individual women.

Additionally, the postcard sent from Julieta González's goddaughter, Valeria, to Julieta for her birthday, provides only a brief and relatively vague description. The description only describes who sent the letter, who it was sent to, and that it was for a birthday. The life story of Julieta Gonzales as well as the nature of the relationship between her and her goddaughter are not included in the description and are likely not to be found in any other online platform. Instead, the postcard, which could have just been thrown out over time, represents trans motherhood and enforces a nostalgia for this element of trans history. The decorated postcard itself as a material object is unimportant, but its ability to evoke a shared emotional response of family connections and motherhood (similarly to "Las Malas"), surpasses its materiality and emphasizes the importance of the ephemeral in queer archive. Sam McBean writes, "the past is

not something that is over, but something that has unexpected life in the present” (Kellen).

Digital spaces such as the ATM encapsulate this idea by using the ephemera to connect to the present and the past of queer life through ephemeral objects like photographs and postcards. Its accessibility allows the engagement of an audience in the meaning-making of the material and continues to reassign different meanings to the content so that it continues to change and adapt to contemporary trans experiences.

Ephemera is also a valuable tool in understanding trans family and intimacy. The postcard from González’s goddaughter not only represents maternity by increasing the visibility of trans motherhood, but also demonstrates the value of chosen family through the use of ephemera. In Kate Pahl’s article, “Ephemera, mess and miscellaneous piles: Texts and practices in families,” she analyzes the importance and the methods for meaning-making for children in the home. Pahl writes that meaning making for children emerges from the ephemeral texts and artworks they create in the home. Children’s communication is primarily visual, oral, and artifactual so children’s texts within the home become traces of practice. She explains, “Parents and children within homes exist within and co-create a complex shifting landscape in which children share living space and a number of different and interconnecting practices...” (Pahl, 145). As a result of this, children’s texts reflect the playing out of habits and home narratives. Children’s text as ephemera reflects the transformative nature of family narratives and habitus. Traces of children’s ever-changing intimate relationships with family stories and self-presentations can be seen in the ephemera produced within the home (Pahl).

The birthday card written by Valeria to her godmother Julieta González, a trans woman, represents the significance of children’s texts as ephemera, especially in the context of chosen family and trans motherhood. The birthday postcard shows the transformative nature of family

narratives. Just as ephemera is inconsistent and constantly changing, the ephemera of childhood texts reflect every changing status of family and the ability for family and motherhood to encapsulate more than simply biological relation. The importance of ephemera in the development of intimate familial relationships and the transformative nature of children's texts emphasizes the importance of chosen family and the importance of trans maternal relationships. Just as family traditions and history are passed down through ephemera, trans and queer knowledge relies on the passing down of ephemeral content through interpersonal connections or archives. Through the act of passing down queer knowledge, this demonstration of the importance of chosen family furthers the ATM's goal of educating and providing visibility for the value of trans relationships.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of ephemera used in the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans en Argentina*, this paper has analyzed the ways in which digital archive is used to assign meaning and significance to artifacts of queer life. Ephemera, a concept which describes objects that are meant to represent only a specific moment in time, is rewritten by the ATM through cataloging and organization in order to become significant representations of collective memory and queer education. The role of digital activism, as seen through the *Archivo Nacional de la Memoria Trans*, allows for moments of daily trans life to be given significance and allows for trans women to gain a position of visibility and acceptance within wider culture.

This paper has analyzed the ephemera in the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans* through multiple lenses. It has analyzed the role of ephemera in the online environment and the ability for an individual Instagram post to encapsulate the scope of the trans experience in Argentina.

Additionally, this paper has demonstrated the role of public intimacy in the collection of queer ephemera through an investigation of a video released by the ATM. Through the use of family photos and vernacular photography, the archive compiled artifacts meant to memorialize one specific moment in time. However, by placing these images within albums and collections, it allows them to be identified within long histories of image as protest within Argentine history. Finally, this paper studied household ephemera and how objects such as birthday cards had the ability to provide a lens into understanding trans family and intimacy.

This research has revealed that the collection of ephemera in the form of archives has the ability to create a shared history and community for trans women in Argentina. Without queer ephemera, trans women would be forced to remain invisible within the history of the Argentine dictatorship and denied a future of success and equality in Argentina.

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