

# THE SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CELL OF PUNTA DE RIELES: A PLACE WITH STORIES TO TELL

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## Abstract

*Different people remember the same place differently. The question posed by my research is about how to create a visualization of a place that presents different personal recollections. My research addresses this issue through a case study: the visualization of a women's political prison, located in Punta de Rieles, Uruguay, during the Uruguayan dictatorship (1973-85). The visualization will be based on the memories recounted by these women. My research will result in a written report and an audiovisual installation. The installation will provide an immersive experience centered on the solitary confinement cell. The implementation suggests changes in lighting in the solitary confinement cell as the main formal expression of the variations in the women's testimonies.*

**Key words:** visualization, subjectivity, memories, immersion, prison.

## 1. Precedents

During the Uruguayan dictatorship hundreds of women were incarcerated for political reasons. Today, these women are aiming at including their testimonies into the collective memory of Uruguayan history. Contributing to the issue of autobiographical testimonies there are also other testimonies of women's experiences in prisons and testimonies of victims of concentration camps.

Two fields of inquiry are relevant as a general framework of this research: Foucault's study [1] in the modern prison; and the work developed in psychology in the understanding of autobiographical memory.

Visual references relevant to this research are the imagery of prisons in the film industry, immersive visualizations in virtual reconstructions of archaeological sites, and digital art installations.

## 2. Objectives

The objective is to create a visualization of a place that presents different experiences of the same place expressed in personal testimonies.

## 3. Methodology

In 2002 I conducted nine in-depth interviews with Uruguayan women, former political prisoners. These testimonies are the main data in my research. They are oral testimonies containing subjective recollections in the form of complex and dense personal narrative. The naturalistic inquiry method of qualitative analysis developed by Lincoln and Guba [2] is being used to analyze these testimonies.

The process of creating the visualization is based on the categories or themes that emerge from the analysis of these interviews. The visualization will be implemented into an audiovisual installation where the observer experiences the stories surrounded or immersed in the visualization. Centering on the experiences recounted on the solitary confinement cell, the installation will use the variation of the rendering of light inside the cell to express the variation on the experience recounted during the testimonies.

## 4. Observations

Although the research is not yet complete (I am in the process of implementing the visualization), there are preliminary findings that can be discussed.

The prison is remembered differently changing from one testimony to another. Furthermore, the structure of the narrative in each testimony is consistent with what the general literature in memory suggests: each testimony is structured around a personal life theme. Indeed, each testimony brings a different highly personal experience of the place.

The analysis of the testimonies shows that the meaning of the place emerges not as a result of an average abstract experience, but through concrete singular individual experiences.

## References

1. Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Penguin Books Ltd: London, 1977.
2. Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E., *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: SAGE Publications, 1985.