



Daniel Palacios González

Making Monuments from Mass Graves in Contemporary Spain

Resistance through Remembrance

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Les Bergers d'Arcadie (1637-1638) Nicolas Poussin. Public Domain.

Introduction: Et in Arcadia Ego

Abstract

This introduction presents how the bodies buried in mass graves during the Spanish Civil War and Dictatorship became conceptualized as monuments. It defines monument practice and reveals that we are not addressing simple reactions that respond to the formal logic of tradition; on the contrary, these monuments around mass graves are a political expression of the people's resistance. The introduction concludes by acknowledging the importance of monument-building strategies and suggests that the book contributes to the critical understanding of heritage and the renewal of the memory studies discipline as championed by the Heritage and Memory Studies Book Series published by Amsterdam University Press.

Keywords: mass graves, monuments, Spanish Civil War, dialectics, consciousness

Night falls. A group of idyllic-looking shepherds are standing at the edge of a road, where the soil is compacted. The trees are crowned with leaves, and some are yellowing. It could be late summer, the cool evening air condensing the day's humidity into a vast cloudscape. Even though it is getting dark, these people are standing around and looking carefully at a stone structure with very specific characteristics. It is not accidentally placed in the middle of the landscape. It is not a large boulder. The ashlar are expertly carved. This form gives the stone an importance, despite its location in an apparently unconnected space. No one would make the effort to carve the ashlar, transport them, and build a structure without a specific purpose. As observers, therefore, the shepherds assume that such a construction, in such an environment, has some kind of meaning in their society. The stone offers them information in this specific place. Two shepherds on the left are reading an inscription. Two on the right have already read it and are commenting on it. Their faces are sombre and the young man that a woman is leaning on shows some surprise or disbelief. This gives the impression that

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the information provided by the inscription has substantially altered the way he perceives his reality. Something has shocked him. What is written under the finger of the kneeling shepherd is: "ET IN ARCADIA EGO." Although doubts have arisen, due to the vagueness of the wording and the possibility of mistranslating the Latin from our current perspective, Erwin Panofsky clarifies that the phrase can only be interpreted in one way: Death is present even in Arcadia.¹ Death has insinuated itself into the shepherds' bucolic reality. Nevertheless, death is not explicitly represented in the painting.

This doubt about the meaning of the inscription may have arisen because, nowadays, our relationship with Latin culture is a distant one. The interesting thing about this bucolic scene is that the presence of death is in no way made explicit in the shape of the structure, yet the form acquires meaning in the environment. It is not an ordinary stone structure. It invites us to stop and consider its message. An unequivocal message that challenges the reader. The surprise and drama stem from the fact that Arcadia was an ideal country described by Publius Vergilius Maro, Virgil. However, the goodness of its inhabitants and the marvellous nature expressed in *Bucolica* X 4–6 is imaginary; it is a country that never existed. As Panofsky observes, Virgil omitted the descriptions of Arcadia by Publius Ovidius Naso, Ovid, who described it more crudely in the *Fasti II*: Arcadia was a place where there would be no civilization at all; rather, it was inhabited by beings ignorant of the arts and resembling beasts. Panofsky points out that "[i]t was, then, in the imagination of Virgil, and of Virgil alone, that the concept of Arcady, as we know it, was born- that a bleak and chilly district of Greece came to be transfigured into an imaginary realm of perfect bliss."² Thus, Arcadia went from being a violent place to an idyllic and utopian country, which is how we encounter it in Romantic literature and art.³ Let us now leave Virgil, Ovid, and Poussin in the past, and instead turn towards the idea of Arcadia as a *myth*. Such a reading may prove to be suggestive, revealing. I invite the reader to use "*les Bergers d'Arcadie*," as I did. As an image that can help us to understand an entirely different context in time and space.

At this point, Virgil might be considered the poster boy for an Arcadian marketing campaign. Because of him, Arcadia is still interpreted as a

1 Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Garden City, 1957), 296.

2 Panofsky, 300.

3 Erwin Panofsky and Gerda Panofsky, "The 'Tomb in Arcady' at the 'Fin-de-siècle,'" *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 30 (1968): 287–304.

utopian country today, as a paradise, as a place we could even imagine as a holiday destination. Arcadia lives in our imagination as an exotic destination to which one could fly and land, once again, in bucolic, rural life. A simple but memorable slogan could work: *ARCADIA IS BEAUTIFUL AND DIFFERENT. VISIT ARCADIA*. Or even simpler: *ARCADIA IS DIFFERENT*. Arcadia's economy would be based on tourism, flourishing as, year on year, millions of tourists would flock to its shores. And contemporary rhapsodes would compose songs expressing the virtues of Arcadia as paradise.

*Among flowers, dances, and joy,
 My Arcadia was born, the land of love
 Only God could make such beauty
 And it is impossible that there could be another
 And everyone knows it's true
 And they cry when they have to leave
 That's why you will hear this refrain
 Long live Arcadia!*

There would be nature, gastronomy, heritage, sun, beaches, and football, because Arcadia is usually the champion in these areas as well. "Because Arcadia is the best" confirms the rhapsodist. Many would therefore ask in confusion, "What does Arcadia have to do with death?" But the inscription that the shepherds found on this roadside structure is unmistakable. And it would not be the only construction of that kind. There are many others, and they leave no doubt.

These shepherds migrated to the city. They were descended from parents who did not want to talk about the past, and whose children were not taught its importance. The challenge was the modernization of Arcadia, and the construction of a utopia. But if we read not only Virgil, but also Ovid we will see that Arcadia was not always a utopia. Even though they left the dead behind, there where they were buried, we encounter these constructions, like the one represented by Poussin. Death is also present in Arcadia. And in a massive way. It is not clear to us exactly where it is present: here, perhaps the corpses are inside the structure, under it, or somewhere in the landscape. Although they do not realise it, this construction is not the only one, there are hundreds of them, and they all bring the presence of death to the world of the living. Death is everywhere because it was part of a repressive scheme for the establishment of a regime of terror. Arcadia exists, and it is not a utopia. It is called the Kingdom of Spain, and *SPAIN IS*

DIFFERENT,⁴ *SPAIN IS THE BEST*.⁵ It receives millions of tourists a year who are oblivious to all this violence.⁶ The country is a large mass grave and these artefacts scattered across the land remind the living of it. The dead bodies are integrated into these architectural forms that have survived from antiquity and bear witness to the violent past. They write the history not taught in schools. International legal frameworks today talk about “genocides.” The press and academic literature talk about “victims.” But the humanities and social sciences have historically explained it to us in other terms.

The myth established by Alexandre Kojève is revealing in this respect: the dialectic of the master and the slave. Herbert Marcuse interpreted Kojève’s synthesis as a revitalization of Hegel’s studies in post-war France, which highlighted “the inner connection between the idealistic and materialistic dialectic.”⁷ Kojève quoted this passage from Hegel: “Self-consciousness is in and for itself while and as a result of its being in and for itself for an other; i.e., it is only as a recognized being,”⁸ which Hegel develops in the first epigraph of the fourth chapter of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* of 1807.⁹ A text that presented an explanation of human existence itself through subjective experiences. This passage adopted by Kojève illustrates a circumstance in which two beings meet. This encounter triggered a particular situation: One of them would have seen the other as nothing more than an “animal.” And he could have ignored it, but he realizes that he is not an animal, and that perhaps the other also wishes to be recognized as a “being.” So, he becomes a risk, and from this arises the need to deny him in a struggle for the recognition of his being for himself.

In this sense, following Gerald Brenan’s thesis, until 1931 the State was defined as the *Ancien Régime*. Even then he said:

4 *SPAIN IS DIFFERENT* is one of several versions of an advertising slogan that was popularized by the dictatorship in the 1960s in order to promote tourism. Alicia Fuentes Vega, “Aportaciones al estudio visual del turismo: la iconografía del boom de España, 1950–1970,” (PhD, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015), 66–75.

5 This statement and my version of the verses above come from the song popularized by Manolo Escobar, *Que viva España* (1971), composed by Leo Caerts and Leo Rozenstraten. José Manuel Gómez, “Así nació el Y viva España,” *Tiempo*, no. 1624 (2013): 58–59.

6 In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Spain registered a new record in tourist arrivals, in a trend that has been dragging on since the 1960s. Carlos Molina, “España rozó los 84 millones de turistas en 2019,” *Cinco Días*, 20 January 2020, https://cincodias.elpais.com/cincodias/2020/01/20/economia/1579518415_556581.html.

7 Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 440.

8 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 108.

9 Hegel, 102–116.



Spain is one of those countries with an undeveloped, primitive economy which is divided by a fairly definite line into two sections. Above are the upper and middle classes, say one-fifth of the population, who vote, read newspapers, compete for Government jobs and generally manage the affairs of the nation. Beneath are the peasants and workmen, who in ordinary times take no interest in politics, frequently do not know how to read and keep strictly to their own affairs. [...] It is easy to see therefore why Spanish politics of the last two hundred years gives such an impression of inconsequence and futility. The people took no part in them.¹⁰

However, a radical change in the political landscape took place. The republican parties won the elections. The unstable regime was forced to accept this outcome. Even though the legal framework of Alfonso XIII's monarchy did not recognize the possibility of proclaiming a republic, local governments took the initiative, and the first Republican flag was raised over Eibar town hall.¹¹ Thousands joined them all over the country. On 14 April 1931, the Spanish Republic was established for the second time in history. It was endowed with a constitution that established it as a liberal democracy on a par with other European states. This was a break with the tradition of Spanish liberalism, which had always yielded to monarchical and clerical powers.¹² A secular state was proclaimed.¹³ Universal suffrage was established, including women who were now actively participating in politics.¹⁴ Equality in the eyes of the law was proclaimed and the division of state powers was established.¹⁵ Work

10 Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 87–88.

11 Unai Belaustegi Bedialauneta, "Gipuzkoa y las raíces de la II República: del pacto de San Sebastián a la proclamación de la República en Eibar," in *Pensar con la historia desde el siglo XXI: actas del XII Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea*, ed. Pilar Folguera et al. (Madrid: UAM, 2015), 4439–58.

12 Manuel Álvarez Tardío, "Libertad, poder y democracia: un debate trascendental en la España de la Segunda República," *Historia Contemporánea* 0, no. 43 (2012).

13 José María Cayetano Núñez Rivero, "La configuración constitucional del Estado laico en la Segunda República española," *Laicidad y libertades: escritos jurídicos*, no. 13 (2013): 201–40.

14 Ana M. Aguado, "La República de las ciudadanas: libertad, ciudadanía femenina y educación durante la Segunda República," in *La Constitución de Cádiz. Genealogía y desarrollo del sistema educativo liberal: XVII Coloquio Nacional de Historia de la Educación. Cádiz, 9–11 July 2013*, eds. M. Gloria Espigado Tocino et al. (Cádiz: University of Cádiz, 2013), 577–88.

15 Rafael Escudero Alday, "Las huellas del neoconstitucionalismo. Democracia, participación y justicia social en la Constitución Española de 1931," in *Constitución de 1931: estudios jurídicos*

became a social obligation and land reform was planned.¹⁶ Minimum wage and holiday pay was created.¹⁷ The statutes of autonomy of the regions brought a possibility of self-government within the Republic,¹⁸ and schools were built and literacy and cultural democratization campaigns began.¹⁹

In no way was it a revolutionary project, not even like the liberal revolutionary projects that shook Europe until 1848.²⁰ Reform and moderation marked the political agenda. Nevertheless, the new framework, with legalized parties and trade unions allowed for a change in the subjective conditions of people's self-perception. Now, in the young Republic, they were able to see themselves as historical subjects, as beings. And, as Kojève noted, in the perception of one of the beings of oneself that Hegel described, it was terrifying for the one who used to be the only conscious being: that the other would cease to be an animal and could become another being. The self-conscious being that previously dominated reality will provoke it, will force it to begin a fight to the death. The risk of the self-perception of the other, of self-consciousness, would trigger the total negation of the other: the physical elimination of the one who may be a potential risk to its own self-conscious existence.²¹

Again, the Hegelian passage seems to talk about those years. The leader of the Spanish Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, stated that:

If this is to be achieved in some cases by violence, let us not stop at violence [...]. Dialectics as the first instrument of communication, yes, is fine. But

sobre el momento republicano español, eds. Sebastián Martín Martín, Luis Ignacio Gordillo Pérez, and Víctor Javier Vázquez Alonso (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2017), 101–24.

16 Maria Antonia Ferrer i Bosch, "Consideracions sobre la reforma agrària de la segona república," in *La II República espanyola: Perspectives interdisciplinàries en el seu 75è aniversari*, ed. Montserrat Duch Plana (Tarragona: URV, 2007), 121–44.

17 Fernando Valdés Dal-Ré, "El Derecho del Trabajo en la Segunda República," *Relaciones laborales: Revista crítica de teoría y práctica*, no. 1 (2006): 291–321.

18 Àngel Duarte Montserrat, "Republicanism, federalism and autonomías: de los proyectos federales de 1873 a la Segunda República y los Estatutos de Autonomía," in *Los nacionalismos en la España contemporánea: ideologías, movimientos y símbolos*, eds. Jean-Louis Guereña and Manuel Morales Muñoz (Málaga: Centro de Ediciones de la Diputación de Málaga (CEDMA, 2006), 187–206.

19 Alejandro Tiana Ferrer, "La educación en la Segunda República," in *Las dos repúblicas en España*, eds. Ana Martínez Rus and Raquel Sánchez García (Madrid: Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 2018), 259–80.

20 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (London: Abacus, 2014).

21 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Raymond Queneau (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 13.



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there is no other acceptable dialectic than the dialectic of fists and guns when justice or the homeland are insulted.²²

During the Republic, the Spanish Falange undertook terrorist activity as part of a “strategy of tension.” The aim was the “social construction of fear.” This objective was inherent to José Antonio Primo de Rivera’s plan for the organization to become a paramilitary force at the service of the army, with whom he conspired to seize power.²³ The killings carried out by Falange, reactionary sectors of the military police named Civil Guard, and other armed groups, were intended to dramatize the disorder in order to prepare for the *coup*.²⁴ The aggressiveness of the landowners in rural areas, together with the monarchist elites, the reactionary military, and the urban fascist bourgeoisie was latent in the face of republican reform.²⁵ These men, who had perpetuated exploitation and injustice for centuries, seemed ready to take violence to its ultimate extreme, conscious of their being and their place in the world, they could accept no other place in it. They had to stop the dialectical course of history and, if that was not possible, they would move forward by eliminating the other to establish themselves in a new dominant position. Thus, in May, Emilio Mola signed a top-secret order for the future coup plotters:

The action will have to be extremely violent in order to diminish the enemy, who is strong and well-organized, as quickly as possible. Of course, all the leaders of political parties, societies, or trade unions who are not in favour of the movement will be imprisoned, and exemplary punishments will be applied to these individuals to nip rebellious movements or strikes in the bud.²⁶

22 “Si esto ha de lograrse en algún caso por la violencia, no nos detengamos ante la violencia [...]. Bien está, sí, la dialéctica como primer instrumento de comunicación. Pero no hay más dialéctica admisible que la dialéctica de los puños y de las pistolas cuando se ofende a la justicia o a la Patria” (translated by the author). Joan Maria Thomàs, *Lo que fue la Falange: la Falange y los Falangistas de José Antonio, Hedilla i la Unificación. Franco y el fin de la Falange Española de las JONS* (Barcelona: Plaza Janés, 1999), 31.

23 Roberto Muñoz Bolaños, “Escuadras de la muerte: militares, Falange y terrorismo en la II República,” *Amnis: Revue de civilisation contemporaine Europes/Amériques*, no. 17 (16 July 2018).

24 Sergio Vaquero Martínez, “La autoridad, el pánico y la beligerancia. Políticas de orden público y violencia política en la España del Frente Popular,” *Historia y política: Ideas, procesos y movimientos sociales*, no. 41 (2019): 66.

25 Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

26 “Se tendrá en cuenta que la acción ha de ser en extremo violenta para reducir lo antes posible al enemigo, que es fuerte y bien organizado. Desde luego, serán encarcelados todos los directivos de los partidos políticos, sociedades o sindicatos no afectos al movimiento, aplicándoles

Mola's instructions came months after the victory of the Popular Front at the polls. The outgoing government of the Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights (CEDA) was supported by the Radical Republican Party, which stopped the reforms and repressed the 1934 revolution. Finally, on 18 July 1936, the attempted coup took place and Mola gave the instruction that initiated the mass murders on 19 July 1936:

It is necessary to create an atmosphere of terror, to leave a feeling of domination by eliminating without scruple or hesitation anyone who does not think as we do. We must make a great impression, anyone who is openly or secretly a supporter of the Popular Front must be shot.²⁷

According to historians such as Santos Juliá,²⁸ Julián Casanova,²⁹ Francisco Espinosa,³⁰ and Paul Preston,³¹ the number of people killed is estimated at between 100,000 and 130,000. However, researchers believe that these numbers could be even greater if even more archives and files were declassified and investigations were carried out village by village.

The insurgents began the offensive determined not to be denied by these newly self-aware people, flourishing under the wing of republicanism. Thus, they unleashed a process of systematic and treacherous assassinations. The timid republican reforms could not be tolerated. The colonial army, the landowners, the bourgeoisie, the Church, and the nobility lost their *raison d'être* as absolute masters of reality, as the only beings to exist in society. Any other being aspiring to existence had to be annihilated for the survival of the regime in this struggle to the death. The existence of hundreds of mass graves throughout the country is the most obvious material testimony to the extermination plan. However, not all were killed. A logic that underlies Kojève's approach to the dialectic of master and slave:

castigos ejemplares a dichos individuos para estrangular los movimientos de rebeldía o huelgas" (translated by the author); Paul Preston, "Franco y la represión: la venganza del justiciero," in *Novísima. II Congreso Internacional de Historia de Nuestro Tiempo*, ed. Carlos Navajas Zubeldia, Diego Iturriaga Barco (Logroño: Universidad de La Rioja, 2010), 59.

27 "Es necesario crear una atmósfera de terror, hay que dejar sensación de dominio eliminando sin escrúpulos ni vacilación a todo el que no piense como nosotros. Tenemos que causar una gran impresión, todo aquel que sea abierta o secretamente defensor del Frente Popular debe ser fusilado" (translated by the author); Julián Casanova Ruiz, *República y Guerra Civil* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2007), 199.

28 Santos Juliá, ed., *Víctimas de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2006).

29 Francisco Espinosa Maestre, Francisco Moreno Gómez, and Conxita Mir, *Morir, matar, sobrevivir: La violencia en la dictadura de Franco* (Barcelona: Booket, 2004).

30 Francisco Espinosa Maestre, *Violencia roja y azul: España, 1936–1950* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010).

31 Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust* (London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2008).

That is to say: if both adversaries perish in the fight, ‘consciousness’ is completely done away with, for man is nothing more than an inanimate body after his death. And if one of the adversaries remains alive but kills the other, he can no longer be recognized by the other; the man who has been defeated and killed does not recognize the victory of the conqueror. Therefore, the victor’s certainty of his being and of his value remains subjective, and thus has no ‘truth.’³²

Death is the end of the consciousness of the one who perishes. The one who is killed ceases to inhabit the natural world and the survivor no longer has an other by whom to be recognized as master. He can no longer expect anything for himself if he has annihilated the other. Hence Kojève points out:

Therefore, it does the man of the Fight no good to kill his adversary. He must overcome him ‘dialectically.’ That is, he must leave him life and consciousness, and destroy only his autonomy. He must overcome the adversary only insofar as the adversary is opposed to him and acts against him. In other words, he must enslave him.³³

This is how the policy towards those who survived the annihilation can be understood. The new regime needed not only to be recognized as the master, but it also needed slaves. They were the exploited people who were becoming self-aware through political parties, trade unions, masonic lodges, and other organizations during the Republic. In addition to the systematic humiliation of the defeated and their families,³⁴ there were practices of enslavement of political prisoners³⁵ and the systematic exploitation of labour, which meant not only the loss of the prospect of reform, but also a regression in labour rights and ownership of the means of production.³⁶ The post-war society was a society condemned to hunger and misery.³⁷

The preservation of the memory of repression, which refers to a specific reality, is confronted with external material limitations to the development

32 Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 14.

33 Kojève, 15.

34 Enrique González Duro, *Las rapadas: el franquismo contra la mujer* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 2012).

35 Isaías Lafuente, *Esclavos por la patria: un antídoto contra el olvido de la historia* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2018).

36 Glicerio Sánchez Recio and Julio Tascón Fernández, *Los empresarios de Franco: Política y economía en España, 1936–1957* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2003).

37 David Conde Caballero, “Tiempos sin pan. Una etnografía del hambre en la Extremadura de la postguerra” (PhD, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2019).

of the act of remembering itself: although initially the Dictatorship based its repressive system on coercion, violence and exclusion,³⁸ in the Transition it derived its power from a “Pact of Silence,” which denied the existence of the crimes.³⁹ Moreover, the violence took a different form, but continued to be present in the country, and the years were marked by terrorism, repression, and a dirty war on the part of the State – a State that did not favour the deconstruction of the hegemonic narrative established by the Dictatorship.⁴⁰ The generational transmission of the memory of those who were murdered remained in the hands of families and activists, who finally acted on the margins of an educational system based on forgetting the recent past.⁴¹

Located in these spaces and times, families and activists opted for different strategies to make memory go beyond mind and showed the importance of associating memory with physical places. In this case, places linked to the memory of repression, where the corpses of those who had been murdered since 1936 might have been buried: mass graves. In this sense, the forms chosen to communicate these memories are symptomatic of the need to define a place and establish a certain order. Initially, this took the form of placing stones, crosses, and flowers on the mass graves despite the repression. Subsequently, these spaces were progressively claimed and defined in the final years of the Dictatorship. These forms gave way to the construction of enduring structures such as monoliths, gardens, and sculptures when the bodies themselves were not exhumed and integrated into vaults, columbaria, pyramids, or obelisks in the years of the Transition. Actions that have continued to be reproduced up to the present day after a new wave of exhumations.

These are forms that could represent a persistence of strategies of memorization from antiquity, which reveal how, in times of crisis, these kinds of forms return, following Aby Warburg’s idea of *Nachleben der Antike*. These are forms that integrate the subject of representation itself into the image that represents it, in the interior of the object. Warburg described these situations as imitation by identification or *nachahmen*, which could come to

38 Julio Aróstegui Sánchez, “Coerción, violencia, exclusión. La dictadura de Franco como sistema represivo,” in *Franco, la represión como sistema*, ed. Julio Aróstegui Sánchez (Barcelona: Flor del Viento, 2012), 19–59.

39 Roldán Jimeno Aranguren, *Amnistías, perdones y justicia transicional: el pacto de silencio español* (Pamplona: Pamiela, 2018).

40 Mariano Sánchez Soler, *La transición sangrienta: una historia violenta del proceso democrático en España (1975–1983)* (Barcelona: Península, 2010).

41 Enrique Javier Gutiérrez Díez, *La asignatura pendiente: la memoria histórica democrática en los libros de texto escolares* (Madrid: Plaza y Valdés, 2020).

imply the idea of *einhüllen* as covering, enveloping, or, above all, as George Didi-Huberman noted, it is translatable as “burying.”⁴² A rapport between body and image that Horst Bredekamp describes as one of the possible *Bildakten*, a “Substitutive Image-Act,” a process of substitution in which “bodies are treated as images and images as bodies.”⁴³ Is this not simply a matter of a play of forms and meanings? Not at all. Such an interpretation would be full of limitations and idealism. These forms were not devoid of social meaning; they were used in a context of material limitation where there was no other possibility for the communication of memory. In addition, their construction represented a desire to communicate and while they form part of a certain funerary tradition, at the same time they are more specific insofar as they are “social actions”:

By “action” is meant human behaviour linked to a subjective meaning on the part of the actor or actors concerned; such action may be either overt, or occur inwardly- whether by positive action, or by refraining from action, or by tolerating a situation. Such behaviour is “social” action where the meaning intended by the actor or actors is related to the behaviour of others, and the action is so oriented.⁴⁴

Thus, following Max Weber’s definition of “social action,” the mere fact that people find themselves applying some apparently useful procedure they have learned from someone else, such as the reproduction of traditional or ancient forms in creating memories out of mass graves, would not in itself constitute social action. The nature of social action lies in the fact that the producer, through the observation of others in society, has become familiar with certain objective facts and directs his action towards these facts. To Weber, social action would be causally determined by the action of others, but not significantly so.⁴⁵ In this context, it is possible to see that the decision to communicate the memory of those who were murdered will pass through affections, but also through values and criteria of rationality.⁴⁶ Thus, the

42 George Didi-Huberman, *Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg’s History of Art* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018).

43 Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts as a Systematic Approach to Visual Agency* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 137.

44 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: a New Translation*, ed. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 78–79.

45 Max Weber, *The Interpretation of Social Reality*, ed. John E.T. Eldridge (London: Nelson, 1972), 77.

46 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 101.



social action of producing a physical structure to mark the mass graves would acquire a meaningful character, as it is not arising in an inter-individual context, but rather implies a given social reality.

Therefore, through these bodily actions, through remembrance services and intervention in the places, memory is communicated. It is done by remembering, creating structures using the mass graves, and visiting them as part of rites and ceremonies despite the material limitations for remembrance. The production of these forms in a society dominated by repression since 1936 produces a manifestation of consciousness for those who remember. As Valentin Voloshinov says: "Consciousness can harbour only in the image, the word, the meaningful gesture, and so forth."⁴⁷ This meaningful gesture of producing a new image by means of the bodies buried in the mass graves, trying to influence the society that has ignored their existence for decades, is an action that starts from a communication of the memory beyond the mind where the social memory was kept. This is how the *monument practices around mass graves* could be defined. These practices that have evolved around the mass graves are thus the object of the present book.

From the outset, the reader will observe how the aesthetics of these monuments are distinct from the post-minimalist aesthetics of the counter-monument to victims as defined by James E. Young.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, this is precisely why they should not be disparaged and instead assigned a place within the history of art, as Yayo Aznar claims; for perhaps they are conceivably much more valuable than counter-monuments and state memorials. Although it is assumed that the building of these memorials is for the purpose of remembrance, their function seems to entomb the murdered in stone and condemn them to oblivion, thereby cleansing the conscience of the perpetrators.⁴⁹ As a result, these monument practices have been interpreted by José María Durán Medraño as a dialectical montage, in which historical consciousness is demonstrated. The fact that these monuments have been erected over mass graves resonates in the present, in the State having tried to eradicate their history, that of

47 Valentin Nikolayevich Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York; London: Seminar Press, 1973), 13.

48 James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993).

49 Sagrario Aznar Almazón, "Convocar (o no) espectros: monumentos, memoriales y otras formas del desasosiego. Novena y última sesión del 'X Curso de introducción al arte contemporáneo. Problemas fundamentales del arte actual', CENDEAC / Murcia / 15 de diciembre de 2021" YouTube, 21 December 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ve1-frjPywU>.



the struggle against fascism. Thus, these monuments become “forms of social existence.”⁵⁰

Contrary to the reading of the monument as the embodiment of an idea (the Republic, the Democracy, the Victims), the montage intervenes in the idea of memory itself. The monument as montage would not be a *trompe l'oeil*, like so many nineteenth-century monuments, nor would it be satisfied with the superficiality of gimmicky deception, as we see in counter-monuments. On the contrary, as montages, these monuments do not try to represent reality, but instead they artificially construct an image through which the structure of relations, which constitutes reality, is exposed. For Durán, the monuments related to mass graves studied here signify more than memory. They instigate a critical recognition of social reality subject to multiple relations. The communities and collectives that have erected these monuments have done so precisely to steer the historical narrative, by placing the past in the present.

Interruption, which Durán identifies as a key to Bertolt Brecht’s dramaturgy, eliminates the easy identification between audience and hero. These monuments question the subject by repudiating the narrative of the “Fallen for God and Spain” and the crosses erected by Spain’s Catholic fascism. They are constituted as social spaces that transform the subject into a political one. Consequently, to focus on the funerary aspect of the monuments is to be oblivious of the reason for a monument to the people murdered. Instead, it is the political instrument employed to resist war, fascism, or repression. Thus, Durán states:

To speak of monuments around mass graves, we should not refer to the monument as a political practice or expression; rather, we should refer to it as a political practice which deploys the monument as a strategic device or simply as an available artefact. [...] Therefore, it is not so much the object which is important but what happens to people and communities involved in building these monuments to mass graves; that is, the social interaction and the forms of interpolation set in motion by these monuments.⁵¹

50 José María Durán Medraño, “Qué hacen las personas cuando levantan monumentos sobre las fosas comunes,” in Rafael Tormo Cuenca, *IP30. Memòria de la desaparició. Habitar l'oblit* (Valencia: Adjuntament de València, 2023), 91–105.

51 “Al hablar de monumentos sobre fosas comunes no nos deberíamos referir al monumento como una práctica o expresión política; sino que a lo que nos deberíamos referirnos es a una práctica política que se despliega en el monumento como un dispositivo estratégico o simplemente como un artefacto disponible. [...] Por ello, no es tanto el objeto lo importante como lo que hacen

And this did not require counter-monumental forms such as those chosen by state memorials worldwide, but rather flowers, stones, self-organization, fundraising, local artisans, and historical consciousness.

With regard to this practice of making monuments from mass graves, the aim of this book is to contribute to the critical understanding of heritage and the renewal of the memory studies discipline as championed by the Heritage and Memory Studies Book Series published by Amsterdam University Press. It is a study dedicated to highly conflictive practices of making monuments, which have gained heritage value in recent years, while they risk disappearing owing to exhumations. Undoubtedly, most of the scientific literature published in relation to the memory policies and practices in contemporary Spain have ascribed key importance to mass graves and their exhumation. There are outstanding contributions, such as those of Francisco Ferrándiz,⁵² Layla Renshaw,⁵³ Alfredo González Ruibal,⁵⁴ and Zahira Aragüete Toribio,⁵⁵ which are available in English for the international reader. Nevertheless, monument practices remain unexplored territory in these studies. This book respectfully attempts to redress this omission.

Moreover, the book aims to promote the renewal of Memory Studies from an interdisciplinary perspective, as well as contributing to a greater degree of insight into the remembrance of the Spanish War and Dictatorship. Combining ethnographic methods with the concept of art history from below, the book analyses these grass-roots monument practices, shifting the paradigm of the study of memory from high culture and violence to popular culture and resistance. The book therefore responds to the questions instigated by this book series to address not only mass violence, but also to critically evaluate the politics of heritage and the dynamics of memory. The following pages will illustrate that current discourses based on ideas

las personas y las comunidades cuando levantan monumentos sobre fosas comunes; esto es, la interacción social y las formas de interpelación que estos monumentos ponen en marcha” (translated by the author); José María Durán Medraño, “Qué hacen las personas cuando levantan monumentos sobre las fosas comunes,” in Rafael Tormo Cuenca, *IP30. Memòria de la desaparició. Habitar l'oblit* (Valencia: Adjuntament de València, 2023), 105.

52 Francisco Ferrándiz, *Contemporary Ethnographies: Moorings, Methods, and Keys for the Future* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2020).

53 Layla Renshaw, *Exhuming Loss: Memory, Materiality and Mass Graves of the Spanish Civil War* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

54 Alfredo González-Ruibal, *The Archaeology of the Spanish Civil War* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2020).

55 Zahira Aragüete-Toribio, *Producing History in Spanish Civil War Exhumations: From the Archive to the Grave* (Cham: Springer, 2017).

of “justice” and “human rights,” linked to practices of forensic exhumations and archaeological excavations of mass graves, contrast radically with the popular practices of remembrance developed over decades. Reclaiming the history of monument practices around mass graves not only challenges the hegemonical memory established by the Spanish dictatorship, but it also calls into question the authority of the “forensic turn” and international humanitarian standards. It demands a re-evaluation of certain archaeological and forensic practices, which, in search of “scientific truth” and “dignity for the victims,” perform iconoclastic acts of destroying these monuments, disregarding their significance, and discriminating against their campaigners.

The conflicts around mass graves between science and people’s knowledge, and between depoliticized human rights and political struggles, demonstrate the critical relevance of these memorial practices whose history is continued to the present day in the making of new monuments for recently discovered mass graves. Therefore, the fate of the monuments and practices studied here is fundamental to understanding the effectiveness of counter-narratives to the hegemonic memory in contemporary Spain. This resistance through remembrance began more than eighty years ago, with a simple but transcendent gesture: the offering of flowers.

