

The Valley, the Monument, and the Tomb: Notes on the Place of Historical Memory

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The Place of Memory

“With one foot in the present and the other in the past, Spain today stands straddling the unfathomable abyss.”

—John Crow. *Spain: The Root and the Flower* (356)

The place of historical memory in Spanish culture today is difficult to locate. It may seem odd to begin with such an understatement for what has become, in recent years, such a polemical and widely disputed topic as “historical memory”—the phrase itself open to any number of interpretations, critiques, and paradoxes. However, when we talk about historical memory, memory’s history, memory’s relation *to* history, and the ways in which it is mutually (though not always discernibly) entangled *with* history, we are, more often than not, talking about memory’s cultural coordinates. Put simply, the question of memory’s place, its location and status, is by equal measure a task of *locating or placing* it as a historical as well as contemporary social, political, and collective concern.

This essay seeks to embark upon a deeper understanding of the place of memory broadly understood both in terms of specific, local, and physical/geographical sites (mass graves, monuments, memorials, tombs) and as a political and social structure of concern circulating (though challenging to demarcate) within contemporary Spanish culture. With that in mind, the discussion that follows is guided primarily by two questions, one of temporal and spatial consideration, the other a question of politics: where is the place of memory in history, in the landscape, in recollections, commemorations, and representations of the past in the present? And, how

Memory and Its Discontents: Spanish Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century

Hispanic Issues On Line 11 (2012)

do we place memory? Which is to say: how do we figure, reconfigure, and position it within the network of cultural frames that we rely upon for accessing and understanding—collectively or individually, publically or privately—the past? In contemplating where and how to place memory as well as where and how memory has been placed socially, politically, and culturally, this inevitably also implies thinking about the symbiotic relationship between memory and history—how are they compatible or antagonistic categories of knowledge? How do their frameworks reciprocally inform and complicate, awaken and disturb one another? As processes and practices, what might each reveal or conceal about the other? And, last but not least, as structures of concern, how might memory address history, and history memory?

In order to guide my reader, I outline a brief roadmap here. The following pages offer some preliminary remarks on the relationship between memory and history to situate my analysis, leading into a brief overview of both the importance and prominence of historical memory in recent cultural production and some of the more crucial claims in the on-going historical memory debates in Spain. Bridging that overview with a discussion of the design, objectives, and legacy of the monument *Valle de los Caídos* (Valley of the Fallen), the later portion of this essay delves into a close reading of the structure itself as a point of departure to detail some of the ways in which, recently, the monument has been re-appropriated in an effort to problematize the values upon which it stands. These re-presentations, I propose, interrogate the concept of monumental memorialization and enact a form of counter-memory that contests, delegitimizes, and reworks constructions of history and historical memory that formerly came to dominate cultural identity under Francoism. Finally, I will end with some brief comments on the importance of incorporating loss and a politics of mourning into a paradigm of historical memory as guiding principles that might make the task of locating memory in—or out of—history a more inclusive, productive, and responsible one.

Insofar as underscoring the relevance of framing loss or calling to mind what has been lost to thinking historically, one of the things this essay insists on is, as mentioned above, a politics of mourning. This should not be confused with a political strategy for closure, per se, but rather a *being* with wounds, a politics of living with ghosts.¹ I draw on the concept of mourning neither as a willed departure from nor as a “laying to rest” of the past, but as a mindful embrace of that which has been lost and therefore of that which defines us, as a community of citizens, as individual subjects and, at our most basic level, as human beings. I wish to stress that my readings attempt to think about mourning (as process and politics) not as closure, or “coming to terms with,” but rather, as Wendy Brown so compellingly suggests, “making the past an outrage to the present”—a point to which I will return later (171).

Memory's place, and by extension the act of placing memory, whether in or out of history and politics (some would argue that such distinctions are impossible to make), I want to suggest, is less about pinpointing one key area or definitive realm where memory "works" and more about discovering the subtle nuances, the always tenuous, fragile folds of memory's work in the social, political and even personal fabric of our lived experiences and relations. This also necessarily means contemplating how memory operates both thickly and thinly—showcased in monumental forms as much as exhibited in the miniature, quotidian details of everyday life. Likewise, questioning memory's place or role in the term "historical memory" invites us to think about the ways in which it allows history to either disappear or re-emerge, the ways in which memory engages with history as something buried, lost, or forgotten, or, conversely, the ways in which memory activates history as a wavering, spectral entity that can either inundate or "hover over" the present, staking its claim and thus unhinging time from itself in a feat that actualizes the past in the present (Brown 153). For some, this undoubtedly means conceiving of history as untimely. Without wishing to disarm that claim, I would like to foreground my analysis with another, related claim: that partaking in historical memory should not be mistaken for only having memory of what has passed, but also (and more challenging) an awareness of how history affects the present, how it is not distant or severed from what is contemporary, immediate, now, but always delicately tethered to it, to the present, understood as a time not invaded but illuminated by history. Walter Benjamin understood the present as a temporal sphere (the "time of the now") where the past emerges in flashes that we must recognize rather than allowing it to remain lodged in the vault of history, too often understood historically as that which is "no longer."² This also, and perhaps most importantly, means thinking about the ways in which loss remains, the ways in which losing things shapes our experience of the present.

Furthermore, and as a final disclaimer, I am careful throughout this essay not to conflate "history" with "the past," since, as my argument will reveal, I am less interested in the linear, chronological understanding of history or "the historical" that often tends to be confused with the "once was" or a time prior to the present. Rather, my argument aims to engage with a notion of history as an active part of the present, in which the past may "flash up," to invoke Benjamin again, at the moment of its threatened disappearance. This means, that throughout this essay I understand the term "present" as a fluid, dynamic container of temporalities in which the past is not so much retrievable as it is both active and activated, both potentiality (potentially present even if invisible or spectral) and actuality. In other words, I aim to consider how history is not dislocated from the present but, on the contrary, how it is always instigated into the now through memory's conjunctions.

The Work of Memory

“Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists”
—Pierre Nora. “*Between Memory and History*” (1)

In his introduction to *Realms of Memory*, Pierre Nora suggests that the location of memory—which he understands as a place or site—is bound to loss or rupture:

Our curiosity about the places in which memory is crystallized, in which it finds refuge, is associated with this specific moment [. . .] a turning point in which a sense of rupture with the past is inextricably bound up with a sense that a rift has occurred in memory. But that rift has stirred memory sufficiently to raise the question of its embodiment: there are sites, *lieux de mémoire*, in which a residual sense of continuity remains. *Lieux de mémoire* exist because there are no longer any *milieux de mémoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience. (1)

In the context of Spain, this rift might easily translate into gaps or holes in collective memory of the past, and especially of the Civil War, after decades of repression and silence under Francoism. These “rifts” have sparked over the course of the last ten years a virtual explosion of political productions and investigations centered on the embodiment of memory, in which what is at stake, drawing on Nora’s analysis, is both a concept of place and the materialization or actualization in the present of what has been lost (i.e. where memory is “housed,” but also *how* it is “housed” and how it resurfaces in another time). At the forefront and perhaps the most notable example of this widespread interest in memory’s work has been the series of exhumations and archaeological excavations conducted throughout Spain of “*fosas comunes*” (mass graves) from the Civil War. The first exhumation, initiated in October 2000 by journalist Emilio Silva in search of the remains of his grandfather, believed to be murdered by nationalist soldiers and buried anonymously, led to the subsequent founding of the ARMH (*Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*), a politically neutral, non-governmental organization dedicated to realizing the work of mourning for all those who wish to give a proper name and burial to a past that, for whatever reason, haunts them. Since the creation of the ARMH, dozens of other organizations have mobilized around similar projects, ranging from the more politically charged Communist Party’s Forum for Memory (*Foro por la Memoria*) to government appointed truth commissions that have decision-making power regarding reparations for those who suffered crimes

committed under the dictatorship (Ferrándiz 9). In the midst of the surge of these activist organizations, in the 2004, the then newly appointed PSOE party, led by President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, passed the unofficially titled “Law of Historical Memory.”³ Two years later, after having received much critical attention (and criticism), the government declared 2006 the “año de la memoria histórica” (Year of Historical Memory) and finally the official legislation passed by the Congress was implemented in 2007.⁴

This return to history through the digging up of the past, which in this context has involved a literal digging up of the improperly buried dead, is, in effect, a response to the “rift” in memory that Nora describes. Indeed, it is memory’s “loss” that has activated a popular demand to recover what has been unknown or, rather, what has been unspoken about the past by unearthing the dead. This movement—what Jo Labanyi has referred to as part of the on-going “memory boom” in Spain (“The Languages of Silence” 26)—has sparked substantial attention from the cultural sector as well, ranging from major blockbusters in literature and film such as Javier Cercas’s critically acclaimed novel, *Soldados de Salamina* (published in 2001, and later made into a film directed by David Trueba in 2003), Guillermo de Toro’s *El espinazo del diablo* (2001) and more recently *El laberinto del fauno* (2006), to name only a few examples, to smaller US-based grassroots projects such as the Spanish Civil War Memory Project, an audiovisual archive of the Francoist repression headed by University of California San Diego Professor Luis Martín Cabrera.⁵ These literary, cinematic and oral history projects all attest to the popular demand of examining the Spanish Civil War and its indelible impact on memory formation in the present. Distinct yet equally critically oriented works invested in rethinking memory and its political legacy during and after the dictatorship include, among many titles, the well-known documentary *Las fosas del silencio* (2003), directed by Montserrat Armengou and Richard Belis, the anthology of essays *La memoria de los olvidados: un debate sobre el silencio de la represión franquista*, edited by Emilio Silva, or in scholarship Joan Ramón Resina’s groundbreaking volume *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, which in many ways anticipated and foregrounded much of the current work being done on memory, history and the *transición* (Transition), to the more recently published critical anthology *Unearthing Franco’s Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain*, edited by Carlos Jerez-Ferrán and Samuel Amago.⁶

While these aforementioned examples share a desire to seek justice by responding to former silences, their work has not come without considerable criticism. One figure who has consistently critiqued and rejected the concept of “historical memory” is prominent intellectual historian Santos Juliá, whose essays and books dedicated to a variety of topics including the Second Republic and the victims of the Civil War have had an enormous

influence on the language used in the historical memory debates, consistently teasing out terminological incongruencies, and always in favor of a more critical and historically accurate vernacular. On the other hand, on the side of outright backlash frequently aligned with neo-conservative rightwing political groups are the numerous voices in favor of debunking the myth of silence, forgetting, or repression under Francoism. One such voice fairing from the extreme right is the Spanish journalist and chief Franco apologist, Pío Moa, a figure who has gained immense popularity in marketing “balanced” versions of history by writing about the “other” side of victimization, a move that has sought to legitimize the nationalist insurgency against the Republic in titles such as *Los mitos de la Guerra Civil*, and, more controversially for its unabashed praise of dictator, *Franco: Un balance histórico*.

This brief gloss here, only a handful off a lengthy list of projects all dedicated in one way or another to historical memory, is not meant to be reductive or oversimplified, but rather serves as a condensed snapshot of memory “at work” in Spanish culture and politics today. The cultural and political clashes that have ensued from the shared and contested meanings attributed to the vast archive of memories of a historical event that undeniably scarred the country, has played out in another arena: the debate over the legislation of historical memory. It is to this debate, entrenched in a highly politicized rhetoric of binaries—reconciliation/recuperation, forgetting/remembering, closing/opening wounds—that I will now turn.

Divisions: The Debate Over Historical Memory

Up until now I have been discussing some of the ways in which memory both interacts with and impacts history on a theoretical level as well as in the particular context of Spanish culture today. In terms of the actual debates, there are essentially two separate yet related issues on the table—the first, the appropriateness of the term “historical memory,” and the second, what is at stake, or, what the law aims to gain, in advocating “historical memory.” Also worth mentioning is that the intensely heated public debates over what constitutes historical memory and how to legislate it unfortunately have tended to lump the main “actors” involved (politicians, activists, the mass media, journalists, historians, anthropologists, cultural theorists, and family members) into two opposing sides—those in favor of reconciling the past, frequently understood as a code word for “forgetting,” and, on the other side, those in favor of “recuperating” the past—an equally unattractive if problematic term for some given its hint at both the past having been lost and therefore the subsequent need to recover, reclaim, or possess it again.

In addition to this polarization between those who promote “remembering” and those in favor of “forgetting” (to be sure, an oversimplified version of the actual tensions underlying the debates, yet nonetheless rendered such by the media), there is also an opposition between “history” and “memory.” But, how exactly do these terms negate or oppose each other? If we consider memory’s subjective, even wavering qualities—the fact that it denotes multiplicity, instability, and is “always evolving” as historian Cazorla-Sánchez tells us—then it seems only to strike a serious imbalance with the concept of history, if we assume the latter to denote a set of strictly static, stable, and un-evolving ideas, facts, figures (Cazorla-Sánchez 242). Simpler yet, perhaps the paradox of the term “historical memory” is that while the former traditionally is understood as something one approaches methodologically and objectively, the latter is thought to be something one approaches personally, emotionally, and even uncritically. Whereas history categorically has been equated with that which is proven and provable, measurable and thus verifiable, memory oftentimes is regarded as “just a story”—one that may be real though not necessarily accurate (at least not “historically” accurate). The issue of accuracy, authenticity, and “true” versions of history (as opposed to memory’s inaccuracy and bias) has become part and parcel of the binary logic underlying these discussions. All of this, of course, has created another kind of “rift”—one arguably much more complicated if only for its highly politicized (and oftentimes emotionally charged) divisions—about the nature and main objectives of political, legal, and governmental action in support of (or against) historical memory.

Despite being responsible for initiating the memory debates and drafting the first bill that would ultimately lead to declaring 2006 the “Year of Historical Memory,” the Left (and this is certainly how the conservative press treats them—as a united front composed of the Socialist Worker’s Party (PSOE) and all other parties left of center, though their solidarity on this particular issue is not always clear-cut) seems to lack a critical discourse for articulating why historical memory is paramount not just as a way to wrest with the past but more so as an indispensable component for the present and future of politics. Though the law itself amply (and somewhat ambiguously) calls for an extension of rights and measures (*medidas*) “en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura” (Ley 52/2007) (in favor of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and the dictatorship), the measures it ostensibly legislates are never clearly stated.⁷ Political scientist Omar Encarnación has observed that “[t]he law’s main goal, as Zapatero himself has noted, is not to punish anyone for crimes committed in the past but rather to correct the historical record by ‘rehabilitating the memory of the vanquished’ and by ‘rebuking the Francoist myth perpetuated by the politics of forgetting of the post-Transition years that the victors were right’”

(“Pinochet’s Revenge” 46). While the President has been criticized time and time again for a weak political stance in support of the law and for defending his party against attack from the opposition rather than defending the law on its own grounds, more radical leftist groups have criticized the law itself not because it fails to identify what should be considered unjust, but because it fails to state clearly in what legal terms it will bring those unjust acts to justice. The World Socialist website, a publication of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) outlines some of these shortcomings:

The bill aims to divert this striving for the truth into safe channels for the Spanish ruling class. Not only does it continue the decades-long cover-up of the crimes of fascism, but it enshrines in law the claim that all sides in the Civil War were equally guilty [. . .] Article two of the bill recognizes and declares as unjust the sentences, punishment and any other form of personal violence generated by political and ideological causes during the Civil War and the dictatorship (until 1975), ‘regardless of the side or zone where the citizens suffered them.’ [. . .] And, despite declaring the fascist sentences and executions unjust, the bill makes no firm commitment to overturn them in Spanish law or bring those responsible to justice. Point three, article seven declares that the new law ‘will omit any reference to the identities of those who took part in the events or legal proceedings that led to sanctions or condemnations.’ Those who ordered the executions, those who carried them out and those who defended them will remain free from prosecution as they have done under successive administrations. (Stuart)⁸

Notwithstanding the absence of any concrete guidelines for prosecuting those who committed crimes under Francoism, the legislation has been viewed widely, though not universally, as a positive step in the right direction. Though consensus for approaching or “recuperating” historical memory gained serious momentum after 2004, according to Encarnación “there is none on what exactly is to be remembered” (“Pinochet’s Revenge” 49). In other words, there is no consensus on what object, event, experiences, or names, should be remembered *historically* (and in this case backed by government funds), which is to say, there is no consensus on what thinking or remembering historically is or means.

Scholars such as Ángel Loureiro have argued that this lack of consensus is indicative of the need to approach the “plurality” of memory, an insightful point, that also has raised the serious question of institutional support—which memories (in the plural) will the government financially support and thus politically and culturally legitimize? The sense of urgency and responsibility surrounding the articulation of personal memory spawned by

“the recent rapid emergence of the ghosts of the Spanish Civil War, who had lain for six decades under a shroud of silence,” in large part, has come to define the project of historical memory in Spain, as anthropologist and ethnographer Francisco Ferrándiz notes (10). Yet, what role do private acts of remembrance (the unjust deaths and burials of family members, being only one example) play in the public work of memory sanctioned under law? More pressingly, how and why should individual matters of memory be incorporated into the collective organization of retrieving history? The fact that there are no guidelines for understanding or accepting what is to be included in the process or work of historical memory is perhaps the main obstacle to there being any clear method for adjudicating what the limit of historical memory actually is, ironically, a limitation in itself.

Not part of any consensus on the need for historical memory, however, is the neo-conservative Right (most vocally headed by the Popular Party [PP]), increasingly magnifying the already contentious source of bipartisan rivalry with their effort to convert the past into a bona fide no-man’s land, all too often ignoring it, or, in the worst cases, denying any opportunity to return to it, especially when it involves revisiting the vexed subject of Francoism. Their most consistent, though highly problematic, argument is that engagement with the past, and in particular, political sponsorship of the “Ley de Memoria Histórica” (Law of Historical Memory) runs the risk of opening old wounds—wounds that, as the Right claims, have been closed since the initial period during the mid-1970s of transition to democracy after the dictatorship. Likewise, right-wing perspectives never cease to return to the legal side of institutional forgetting, as evidenced in consistent recourse to the 1977 “Ley de Amnistía” (Law of Amnesty) which they claim was not only a necessary but also effective solution to dealing with (i.e. forgiving and forgetting) crimes committed under Franco.

At the same time, the Left’s answer (one can conjure up any number of official declarations made by Zapatero, for instance) to unnecessarily “opening wounds” is repetitive and oftentimes without nuance, arguing that the end result of the law will be to “close wounds” that have remained open for decades. It may be obvious that this kind of statement, while certainly well-intentioned, lacks substantial rhetorical impact in simply reversing the same language used by the Right. The point, in fact, might be *to open wounds* or, at the very minimum, to reflect on why and how such wounds have remained open for such an extensive period of time, which might also lead to a serious, critical reflection on the state of democratic politics in Spain during the last three and a half decades.

In spite of oppositions—or perhaps because of them—the resurgence in and widespread media attention given to historical memory has not eliminated altogether the symptoms of silence, as several scholars have noted (Graham, Labanyi, Cazorla-Sánchez, among others), a point further underscored by the institutional ambivalence towards if not complete

absence of any discussion about how to educate new generations about the Civil War and the Dictatorship (scholars from different fields also have noted the absence of any plan to construct a museum dedicated to narrating the Civil War and the years under Francoism). In the best of scenarios, certain material remains have already been removed from the public spaces after the law went into effect, making the law, in the words of one New York Times reporter, “largely toothless and symbolic” (Kimmelman). In the worst of cases, these symptoms—continued silence, ambivalence, absent narratives—persist in the disputed proposals to eliminate Francoism’s material legacy—place names, statues, shields, etc.—and the cultural violence they yield, which the law vaguely outlines in several articles, and which, according to historian Cazorla-Sanchez, results in “the neglect of monuments erected by Francoists, which . . . still act as testimony [sic] the dictatorship’s perverse and inhumane interpretation of the past” (242).

The material legacy that has raised more than a few eyebrows, and for good reason, is the monumental and tendentious Valley of the Fallen, currently closed for unspecified renovations. The monument has become somewhat of a political sore spot as well since it is virtually untouched by the law, falling under a protection clause that ensures the preservation of buildings and sites of historical importance (Encarnación “Reconciliation After Democratization” 453).⁹ Groups such as the *Asociación Para la Defensa del Valle de los Caídos*, an organization, as the name suggests, dedicated to defending the monument, vehemently campaign for its protection and conservation. This is only one example of how right-wing mobilization around a public site that commemorates the Spanish Civil War—the country’s largest—has functioned as a strategy to reject more conservative interpretations of the law, perceived to be its rewriting or “erasing” of history. The question at stake, however, is one that brings us back to those I outlined at the beginning of this essay. If locating sites of memory—*lieux de memoire*, recalling Nora’s term, where memory remains or resurfaces—works as a critical response to “rifts” in memory, then what to do when the place of memory itself, a place of *commemoration*, constitutes such a rift?

Monumental Memories, Monumental Legacies

“The Valley, too, he decreed, must have ‘the grandeur of the monuments of old, which defy time and forgetfulness.’”
—Giles Tremlett. *The Ghosts of Spain* (47)

If there is one thing critics and historians agree on, it is that the monument simply cannot be ignored. Yet the question remains: what to do with the

Valley of the Fallen, Franco's colossal mausoleum and monument constructed between 1939–1959 in honor of those "fallen" in the Spanish Civil War. [Figure 1] What will be the legacy of the monument and Franco's tomb housed within it? How to establish responsibly a narrative that would be didactic, informative, and just?



Figure 1. The Valley of the Fallen.

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Located thirty miles outside of Madrid in the foothills to Sierra de Guadarrama mountains, the Valley of the Fallen holds a large monastery, an underground Basilica carved out of rock, and one of the largest stone crosses in the world, standing at an imposing 500 feet tall and featuring at its base representations of the four gospel evangelists and a giant *pietà* overlooking the main entrance. A curious article on leisure time in Madrid from the February 1970 issue of *Boys LIFE* magazine describes the Valley as “the most impressive sight” in Spain and attributes the monument’s construction to “Franco’s act of expiation for the savage role he played in the bloodiest civil war of our time, in which 300,000 Spaniards died, and Fascism took over the nation” (Hano 76). Though a “wonderous work,” the article continues, that “never lets you forget that it marks one of man’s most ghastly works—war,” the true allure of site is “its moment of meditation” (76). This last phrase “moment of meditation” is intriguing to say the least, given its emphasis on the definitive temporal nature of the site (“moment”) and the

manner in which it bears strong connotations of contemplation, thought, and even arrest (“meditation”). Arguably the monument’s founding principles negate the concept of representing a temporary arrest, in favor of constructing the permanence and transcendence of the regime’s heroic sacrifice endured for the “victory” of the “glorious crusade.” The official inaugural decree from 1 April 1940 states:

Decreto de 1 de abril de 1940, disponiendo se alcen, Basílica, Monasterio y Cuartel de Juventudes, en la finca situada en las vertientes de la Sierra de Guadarrama (El Escorial), conocida por Cuelgamuros, para *perpetuar la memoria de los Caídos de nuestra gloriosa Cruzada*. La dimensión de *nuestra Cruzada*, los heroicos sacrificios que la *Victoria encierra y la trascendencia* que ha tenido para *el futuro* de España esta *epopeya*, no pueden quedar perpetuados por los sencillos monumentos con los que suelen conmemorarse en villas y ciudades los hechos salientes de nuestra historia y los episodios gloriosos de sus hijos. (Decreto)¹⁰

(The Decree of April 1, 1940, stipulating that Basilica, Monastery, and Military Quarters be erected in the land located in the hills of the Guadarrama Sierra [The Escorial], known as Cuelgamuros, to perpetuate the memory of the Fallen of our glorious Crusade. The dimension of our Crusade, the heroic sacrifices that the Victory won and the transcendence that it has had for the future of Spain is epic, they cannot remain perpetuated by simple monuments as those often used in towns and cities to commemorate the prominent facts of our history and the glorious events of its children.)

Is it not only the landscape (differentiated here from the simpler monuments erected in towns and villages) but also the discourse surrounding the Valley of the Fallen that is, from its conception, saturated with religious, nationalist, Falangist, and imperialistic overtones.

But at its heart, the monument was designed not to show the horrors of war, as *LIFE* magazine proposes, nor to perpetuate memory, as the decree tells us, of such horrors, but rather to consecrate war, to glorify and sanctify it within the visual and discursive logic of imperial Christian-militarism. Katherine Hite correctly notes “Franco’s conception of the monument was not a simple link between church and state. The Valley evokes the memory of the historic Crusades” embedded within a “doctrine of redemption” (117). Indeed, the notion of redemption is an implicit objective of the site, a point further underscored in the Valley’s prominent feature as a “lugar de meditación, estudio y reposo en que las generaciones futuras brindan tributo de admiración a los que les entregaron una España mejor” (NO-DO 848A) (place of meditation, study, and rest in which future generations pay a tribute

of admiration to those who gave their lives for a better Spain) in the specially commissioned 1959 newsreel “XX aniversario de la Victoria” (XX Anniversary of the Victory), which celebrated the inauguration of the Basilica in conjunction with twenty years of peace under Franco.¹¹

To date, the scholarship on the Valley of the Fallen has been both extensive and interrogative—often probing into the politics of memory that the monument forges and forecloses. The interpretations of the Valley, though vast, most consistently have questioned the *kind* of memory (in the singular) that the site both produces, and, of course, commemorates. To that end, it has been considered “indisputably, the most conspicuous monument, which brings together bodies and an architecture of lies” (Cazorla-Sanchez 242) as well as the “sanitization of painful memory: a triumphalist monument to the dead in the Civil War which excludes any mention of the Republican dead and converts the Nationalist ‘fallen’ into ‘glorious martyrs’” (Labanyi “The Languages of Silence” 32). Often (though, again, not universally) seen as a problematic display of what Jo Labanyi has called the “Fascist will to power” (“The Languages of Silence” 32), the site stands, according to another reading, as a solitary, fortress, an “eternal edifice lodged into and elevated above the earth,” and a place haunted by “political machinations and lies” (Hite 111).

The lack of information, curated exhibition or museum at the monument regarding its actual construction also has been a contentious issue and one which relates back to the idea of redemption as one of the Valley’s guiding principles. Scholars like Labanyi have written on the ways in which the Valley still “silences the story of Republican prisoners who built the monument” (“The Languages of Silence” 32), unfortunately, a point the law currently does not seek to correct.¹² And in an article on “coming to terms with the past,” historian Helen Graham analyzes the “violence of exclusion of the defeated” asserting that “[h]istory itself became a weapon in this work of exclusion” not only under Francoism in general, but also specifically with the “vision” for the Valley (29). Graham notes that “work in 1940s Spain was presented as a way in which the ‘sinful’ could redeem themselves. Prisoners became slave laborers: 20,000 worked to hew out of sheer rock the basilica [. . .] Republican labor battalions were also used by the army and hired out to private enterprise. The state agency responsible for overseeing them was called the committee for the redemption of prison sentences through work” (30). Thus, while the site honors those who demonstrated exemplary acts of “heroismo y santidad que se dieron durante la Crusada sin ninguna debilidad, sin ninguna apostasía, y sin ningún renunciamento” (qtd. in NO-DO 848A) (heroism and saintliness that were demonstrated during the Crusade without any weakness, without any apostasy, and without any renunciation) it patently ignores the suffering and pain endured in the monument’s construction.

Despite the monument's name, which is ambiguous enough to suggest that it commemorates *all* those fallen during the Civil War, the site in fact only seeks to memorialize (or "never forget," a subtle yet significant difference) those who fought on the "victorious" side. As a "one-sided monument to Franco's Nationalists," it is neither peaceful nor reconciliatory, but overtly hostile (Encarnación "Reconciliation After Democratization" 441). Like redemption, which implies a sense of futurity and salvation after the absolution of sins or forgiveness, the word reconciliation, from the Latin "re"/"conciliare," suggests a "bringing back together"—an appropriate concept for bridging the divisions underlying the Civil War. Yet the only return written on the walls, both literally and figuratively, is a synthesis between postwar Spain and the myth of Spanish national unity born in the fifteenth century after the Crusades and during the reign of the Catholic kings. In fact, those "saints and martyrs" for whom the Valley stands are, according to the commemorative newsreel, only comparable with "los registrados durante la persecución contra los cristianos en Roma" (qtd. in NO-DO 848A) (those captured during the persecution of the Christians in Rome).

The language used to discuss the Valley of the Fallen is striking to say the least—sins, redemption, reconciliation, absolution, sainthood, martyrdom, heroism—and brings to mind the landscape context—that is, the physical setting of the monument, its sheer size alone is enough to call into question what is (or can be) remembered in this place at all? The fact that its monumentality lacks particulars, or we might say, details in the plural, means that in amplifying those values that ostensibly "built" it, the monument paradoxically eclipses those that were literally built *into* the monument—exploitation, suffering, pain, slavery, injustice. This omission is the void that the monument both bears and overshadows—the one that is inscribed in its edifice, pervading its landscape, yet remains unnamed and thus unseen. The Valley of the Fallen, we can conclude then, in monumentalizing its defiance of "el olvido" (forgetting), in fact, re-inscribes the logic (and burden) of forgetting into its very foundation.

In his work on the nature of commemoration, US Civil War monuments, and the inevitable omissions inscribed within them, Dell Upton writes that omissions are a contradictory yet integral part of such sites of remembrance: "Selectivity and absence are the content of these monuments, not unfortunate omissions: *the unseen forces the scene to confess*" (177, emphasis in original). In the same way that the exhumations provoke us into contemplating the unnamed corners of history, the invisible and untold substructure of the Valley's historical site, which continues to be protected today, constitutes an important omission that, however ironically or belated, reveals the truth rather than masking it. This absent narrative is, in effect, the unseen that, as Upton powerfully suggests, "forces the scene to confess" (177).

That commemoration may take the form of monumentalization is certainly not a new concept (any number of monuments in Washington DC, for example, certainly would confirm this). However, in the case of the Valley of the Fallen the site's endowment of monumentality—both as national, mythic, and sacrificial legacy, and as architectural artifice—comes at the cost of losing sight of commemoration. In other words, the monumental proportions so blindingly fundamental to the site have obscured the work of memory to the point of negating its own principles. Saturated with symbolism, the egregiously unmarked burial site of thousands of anonymous dead from both sides of the political fence (and, as already mentioned those from the losing side whose physical labor erected the monument) means that commemoration, in this context, buries the dead twice over—by relying on the dead for its “humic foundation,” to draw on Robert Pogue Harrison's concept, and by turning the memory of that foundation into an architectural marvel that obliterates the presence of the dead through omitting their names and narratives.¹³ This singularity at the core of the Valley's construction constitutes the perpetuation of memory taken to a monolithic yet illogical extreme, one that, I argue, actualizes the ghostliness of its site. While there are lasting remainders that supposedly will live through the ages in the stone and mortar, in the crypt, and in the valley, there are constant reminders of what is missing in those places. In the end, the very indestructibility of the monument does not *remember* (or bring to remembrance) the destruction upon which the monument was predicated in the first place, as much as eradicate the fact that destructive forces, war, and death *are* its foundation. Put somewhat differently, what is problematic about the Valley is that while it commemorates something that is abstract and absent (a mythic notion of history), it makes absent that which is so undeniably present (the dead who are buried there). It is this act of visual and discursive “absenting” that the monumentalization (and structural concretization) of memory enacts at the site—not in a gesture to represent or bring to mind the past, but instead to force upon the landscape a notion of history that is, in every sense of the word, decidedly artificial.

Memory's Edge: The Practice of Counter-Memory

“Me hablan de preservar la memoria histórica en un intento de reconciliación y acepto el concepto, ¿pero dónde está reflejado aquí el recuerdo del sufrimiento físico y de la humillación intelectual de los miles de presos políticos que fueron obligados a edificar este monumento? ¿Dónde está el museo que narra esta tragedia?”
—Leo Bassi. *Declaración de Cuelgamuros* (n.p.)¹⁴

(They talk about preserving historical memory with an attempt at reconciliation and I accept the concept, but where is the memory of physical suffering and the intellectual humiliation of thousands of political prisoners who were forced to construct this monument reflected here? Where is the museum that narrates this tragedy?)

Between the dispute over preservation and access, and between demolishing or re-constructing the monument, the question still remains: what is to be done with the Valley of the Fallen?¹⁵ In the previous section, I suggested that the site is an example of what we could call an “empty commemoration” because it celebrates a notion of history imbued with a constant yearning for or a nostalgic return to the past, while the traces of history upon which it is founded flash up as phantom remains that, puzzlingly, remain unrecognized. The real question for us today is one of mourning losses not as history is monumentalized or solidified in the bedrock of a fixed idea of history stuck in the past, but rather as the past “flashes up” and shapes the present, to evoke once again Benjamin’s photographic phrase.¹⁶ The question is not how history can gather, access, or even recuperate memory, but rather what memory holds in store for history, how memory illuminates history’s dark edges.

As a way of bringing this discussion to a close—one which, I hope, will not conclude but instead open up further discussion on historical memory, commemoration, and the monumental legacy of the Valley of the Fallen—I will outline two examples of the ways in which the monument has been re-presented recently. These re-appropriations, I propose, recast the monument’s legacy into the realm of counter-memory, in which the formerly “shared” and dominant meaning ascribed to the site is contested through fictional narratives.

Álex de la Iglesia’s 2010 feature *Balada triste de trompeta* (*The Last Circus*) is a film, in many ways, about the monumentality of loss. Not surprisingly, the Valley of the Fallen monument bookends the narrative, which tells the tale of the Spanish Civil War and the Transition through the perspective of a reject circus clown, who after inheriting his father’s professional legacy finds himself destined to repeat the same violence that ended his father’s life. Towards the beginning of the film, we see the construction of the monument, through the representation of the father as one of the prisoners condemned to “redeem” himself through slave labor. Similarly, at the film’s end, in a climactic chase scene that leads the three main characters (the love triangle comprised of two circus clowns and their mutual love interest, a trapeze artist) to act out their interpersonal conflicts on the monument’s gigantic cross. What is important to note is that *Balada*’s re-imagining of the Valley as a site of return (to one’s personal, familial history and inheritance), also hinges on the replaying of violence, horror,

and profound loss that “live on,” so to speak, in and through the monument itself. Central to the film’s narrative, the intertwining of this logic of repetition and loss, clearly evidenced in a culminating scene in which the lady love interest and Christ-like figure plummets to her death after diving off the edge of the cross, reconfigures what and how the monument perpetuates. It is not the memory of a heroic defeat or a nationalist legacy, but the story of an inherited and thus repeated and repeatable violence as monumentally horrific as it is inexpressible—a point that the film underlines in the final scene, in which the rival clowns (one “happy,” the other “sad”) sit face to face, in an intense physical display of their prescribed circus personalities (respectively, hysterical laughter and uncontrollable sobbing, which, in their fullest expression, appear exactly the same), yet unable to utter a word about the trauma they have experienced together. In the end, what Álex de la Iglesia’s film so brilliantly capitalizes on is the notion of monumentality *as* an expression of repetition and loss—two concepts that denote mutually constitutive yet mutually conflicting categories of experience dominant in contemporary Spanish culture and, as we have seen, present in the Valley of the Fallen.

Like *Balada*, which establishes a connection between the monumental and profound, indescribable loss, the second example I wish to discuss takes the notion of monumentality, radically empties it of signification by aligning the site with the trivialization of memory and converts it into a place of tourism and thoughtless consumption. On January 25, 2004 famously polemical actor, political activist, performance artist, comedian, circus performer, and provocateur (cultural agitator is also how he frequently is credited), Leo Bassi stated the following in the “Declaración de Cuelgamuros,” his counter-decree to the monument: “[p]or razones humanas, éticas, políticas y religiosas este lugar me ofende como pocos lugares en el mundo. No entiendo cómo, cuando han pasado casi 30 años desde su transición a la democracia, España puede tolerar la existencia del Valle de los Caídos” (for humane, ethical, political and religious reasons this place offends me like few places do in the world. I do not understand how, when nearly thirty years have passed since its transition to democracy, Spain can tolerate the existence of the Valley of the Fallen).¹⁷ The declaration expresses and implores a sense of outrage at not only the monument’s construction, but also its maintenance in the contemporary cultural imaginary. In addition to proclaiming the inappropriateness of the site and its legacy, characterized as “profundamente grotesco y tétrico” (profoundly grotesque and grim), Leo Bassi actually outlines four actions to be pursued in the revamping of the monument: the honorable return to and burial of republican President Azaña in Spain, the removal of the graves of Franco and José Antonio Primo de Rivera and their honorable reburial in another cemetery, the construction of another monument to reconciliation and all those fallen during the Civil War, and finally that the Catholic Church

desecrate the monument. For as serious as this call for action may appear, more incendiary is Bassi's provocatively half-comedic, half-serious call for the conversion of the Valley into "Franco Landia," a theme park akin to Disneyland in which history would be displayed as a series of monumental and consumable attractions "para toda la familia donde todo sería mejor, más seguro, y sin la tormenta de pensar en ideas políticas" (for the entire family where everything would be better, more secure, and without the torment of thinking politics).¹⁸

Carefully positioned between the outright absurd and the politically engaged, Leo Bassi's performative gesture and cultural re-conceptualization of the monument is quite brilliant. Why? Because it over-charges an already over-charged and highly politicized place in order to empty it of meaning. The declaration Bassi makes—obviously symbolic since it has no legal or governmental basis—is a way of toppling the persistent presence of Fascist power that the monument projects, not by destroying it physically, of course, but by enacting something much more imaginative and dramatic (for some it would even be blasphemous)—reinvesting it with new meaning that calls attention to the way in which its foundational monumentality is truly vacant.

Though I may be in the minority with my reading of what, for some, might very well be nothing more than a mere circus act (more literal in the case of Álex de la Iglesia, more metaphorical in the case of Leo Bassi), what I find so intriguing about both examples is not only the attention that each gives to the Valley of the Fallen (the former re-inscribing a narrative of loss and violence, the latter emptying any signification of power to elicit the idea that the monument is a site of empty consumption), but also the way in which they draw on the act of commemoration as an opportunity to express history's resurfacing in and contamination of the present. The violence that the film conveys mixed with the offense and indignation professed in the declaration are both, in a manner of speaking, acts of representation that illustrate how history is, in the words of Wendy Brown, "an outrage to the present" (171–72).¹⁹ Making history an outrage is, as Brown so compellingly tells us, not only the opposite of bringing it to closure or even "reconciling" the past, but rather constitutes a manner of "exploding or reworking both the way in which it [the past] has been remembered and the way in which it is positioned in historical consciousness as 'past,'" which she continues, "demands that we redeem the past through a specific and contemporary practice of justice" (172). To express this outrage through representations of history and historical memory is, if we follow Brown's thought, not the path to closing wounds, which inevitably leaves the possibility for their re-opening, but, more productively, an acknowledging of wounds *as they open* in the present, which is to say as history flutters in and out of the present as something conjured or unconjured, as something to be addressed and not dismissed.

Burial Sites

“Outside the crypt, silences are breaking down. Within the crypt, the ghosts
are there.”

—Katherine Hite. *The Valley of the Fallen: Tales from the Crypt* (119)

In an interesting article titled “Trampas de la memoria” published in 2006 in *El País*, Santos Juliá begins by quoting Tony Judt’s *Postwar*: “Memory is a poor guide to the past”—that is, an improverished way of accessing and understanding history because it is “selectiva, contenciosa y partidista, porque el reconocimiento de un hombre es la omisión del otro” (1) (selective, contentious, and partisan, since one man’s recognition is another’s omission). Juliá contends that “el olvido” (forgetting) in the Spanish post-dictatorship was not a case of “amnesia” or careless oblivion, but “resultado de la decisión política de que el pasado no interfiriera en la voluntad de abrir un futuro que librara a España de la dictadura por medio de la clausura de la Guerra Civil” (the result of a political decision to not let the past interfere with the will to open a future that would liberate Spain from the dictatorship through closure with the Civil War), and concludes that what is at stake today it is not memory in need of recuperation but truth in need of knowledge (1–3). In a similar vein, Ángel Loureiro, in the same article as cited earlier, claims that the debate on historical memory today is “not truly about knowledge of the past, but in its best and most well-meaning instances, it is about new ways of viewing history itself, and about a new sense of history as grievance” (227).

Throughout this essay I have alluded to the fact that memory needs to be not only located in its multiple sites and manifestations (however challenging or problematic they may be) but also placed consciously, carefully, and mindfully. If there is a need to return to or, conversely, depart from the past it must be done in such a way that recognizes history’s “seepage” in the present, how it overflows into “the now,” recalling Benjamin’s phrase once again. The demands that historical memory has and will continue to place on us, as critics, but more importantly as human beings, cannot be easily answered with commemoration sites alone. Nor can it be addressed effectively by eliminating or ignoring the need or desire to commemorate, to bring to remembrance something formerly silenced or the continued pain of profound and inexplicable loss. Unburying the dead may not be the only (or even the best) way to respond to historical memory’s fragile demands. Yet allowing burial sites to remain in the time capsule of historical monuments, or equally disturbing, in unmarked places—known yet unnamed—does not seem to account for a proper (or adequate) response either.

I offer the two examples—Bassi and De la Iglesia—not because they provide artistic solutions to the complicated problem of historical memory, but more so because they call attention to another side of the danger (in the form of symbolic violence and outrage) intrinsic to conceiving of memory as something that recovers or buries history, rather than something that constitutes and is constituted by history. They are texts that reconfigure the place of memory in understanding and approaching history and propose an alternative perspective on memory that avoids affective (what Loureiro calls “pathetic”) rhetoric and unproductive recourse to sentimentalism that “recuperates,” in favor of representing a counter narrative that fictionalizes and thus accounts for loss, reactivating the past as a force that infiltrates and alters the present.

That the debates surrounding the complicated terrain of historical memory fail to settle on a notion of history as something tied to the past, and begin to do the work of recognizing that its irretrievability, its loss, is something that the present must negotiate constantly, is only a step in the right direction. Memory does not have to be a poor guide to the past, if the past is understood as something that lives and informs the present, rather than something to be “retrieved” because it somehow lies outside of or is separated from the present. That the debates should begin engaging with a concept of history as grievance is all too important and does not have to necessarily negate the idea of “looking for the truth,” as Juliá, Loureiro, and others advocate we do. The work of mourning, indeed the *task* of engaging with history’s ghosts and, moreover, living with them in the present, is about locating truths in their diverse articulations and sites, in both the monumental and the miniature. It is about a politics of acknowledging that the past touches and, we are reminded, wounds the present, but in that wounding, opens possibilities in which we may choose to engage with history for the future, in the words of Wendy Brown, “providing not just a method of consulting the past but a means of redeeming or transforming it, and thus a way of recovering the past that paradoxically loosens its grip on our political psyches at the moment it is addressed consciously and deliberately” (172).

How will we ever responsibly move away from the logic of retrieving the past, if we fail to recognize and mourn what has been lost?

Notes

1. See Derrida; Brown; Labanyi, “Introduction: Engaging with Ghosts; or, Theorizing Culture in Modern Spain.”
2. See Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” and *The Arcades Project*.
3. For a brief discussion of the media hype surrounding the law’s unofficial name see Labanyi, “The Politics of Memory.”

4. See Labanyi and Encarnación. See also *Boletín oficial del estado* for the official, complete document detailing the law.
5. This audiovisual archive can be accessed online: <www.libraries.ucsd.edu/speccoll/scwmemory/about-eng.html>
6. Of course, these critical anthologies and monographs have also, in turn, opened the gate to more serious attention to historical memory in art forums, public debates, academic conferences, and special issues. For instance the US-based 2005 academic conference “Franco’s Mass Graves” at the University of Ohio or the Special Issue on “The Politics of Memory in Contemporary Spain” in the *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, Vol.9, No. 2, 2008, to name only two of several examples.
7. See *Boletín Oficial del Estado* for document 22296, Ley 52/2007, de 26 de diciembre <www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2007-22296>.
8. One such example of deficient leftist reaction to injustice cited by Stuart is the following: “The PSOE are opposed to prosecuting the fascists—many of whom have been senior members of the PP and its forerunner the Popular Alliance—because it would further discredit the institutions established after the fall of Franco. Manuel Fraga, a senior minister under Franco and a close personal friend of the dictator, was instrumental in forming the Popular Alliance (AP) into the PP in 1989. The Popular Alliance was stuffed with former Franco ministers, including Laureano López Rodo, Federico Silva Muñoz, Licinio De La Fuente y De La Fuente, Cruz Martínez Esteruelas, Gonzalo Fernandez De La Mora. Fraga groomed José María Aznar for the job of president of the PP. Aznar became prime minister in 1996.”
9. See *Boletín del estado oficial*. Artículo 16 “Valle de los Caídos” of the law, which states: 1. El Valle de los Caídos se regirá estrictamente por las normas aplicables con carácter general a los lugares de culto y a los cementerios públicos. 2. En ningún lugar del recinto podrán llevarse a cabo actos de naturaleza política ni exaltadores de la Guerra Civil, de sus protagonistas, o del franquismo.
10. The decree can be accessed online at: <www.generalisimofranco.com>
11. See NO-DO No. 848 A. See also NO-DO 848 B.
12. *El País* recently has reported that exhumations in Valle de los Caídos are “impossible.” See Junquera. See also the newspaper’s archives on historical memory, accessible online: <www.elpais.com/todo-sobre/tema/Recuperacion/Memoria/Historica/202/>
13. See Harrison.
14. See <www.leobassi.com/archives/bassibus/declaracion_de_cuelgamuros.html>.
15. Some have suggested alternative plans, such as the destruction of the monument by literally emptying it of its contents and reburying the dead entombed there in an alternative, honorable site. Other suggestions entail revamping the monument and its public perception by annexing a museum that would narrate both sides of the political conflict. While the debate continues as to what the legacy of the monument both is and should be in the future, the truth of the matter is that the Valley of the Fallen is already been re-appropriated in cultural production.
16. See Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”
17. See Leo Bassi’s official website: <www.leobassi.com/archives/bassibus/declaracion_de_cuelgamuros.html>
18. See Jon Snyder’s Blog entry on “Spanish kitsch and camp” for a reading of parody, kitsch and political value in over-performance of traditional nationalist identity <www.despabilarse.blogspot.com/2006/03/spanish-kitsch-camp.html>. Also, for a brief discussion of the relationship between historical memory and consumption, see Cazorla-Sánchez. For an image of Leo Bassi at the Valley of the Fallen, declaring it “Franco Landia,” visit: <http://epreader.elperiodico.com/APPS_GetPlayerZSEO>.

aspx?pro_id=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000001&fecha=20111010&idioma=0&doc_id=226716fa-8094-4c9d-b264-290c8953d6a1>. For an image of Bassi's "Franco Landia hinchable," visit: <<http://www.publico.es/espana/369365/el-fantasma-de-la-inquisicion-resucita-a-golpe-de-querella>>.

19. Brown's notion of "making the history as outrage to the present" draws on Norbert Bolz and Willem van Reijen. See her chapter "Futures—Specters and Angels: Benjamin and Derrida."

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