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# Galician Memorials: Civic Activism and Shortcomings

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*Abstract*

Memorials in Galicia have helped spark civic activism in favor of commemorating the Second Republic and denouncing the fascist uprising and ensuing Franco regime. However, even when used as vehicles of progressive thought and values, all memorials inevitably participate in a conservative discourse because of the hierarchy they establish between the artist and spectator. It is not a process of collaboration. The main drawback of memorials is that they produce the illusion of materializing history and acting as permanent reminders of historical events and figures. As they are attributed properties and functions they do not possess, they become fetishes. A different form of art is required to bring the general public into the commemorative process.

*Resumo*

Os monumentos conmemorativos en Galiza axudaron a impulsar un activismo cívico a prol de recordar a Segunda República e denunciar o levantamento fascista e conseguinte réxime. Porén, aínda cando se empregan como vehículos de valores progresistas, todos os monumentos participan inevitabelmente dun discurso conservador debido á xerarquía que establecen entre o artista e o espectador. Non é un proceso de colaboración. A meirande desvantaxe dos monumentos é que producen a ilusión de materializar a historia e actuar como recordos permanentes de eventos e figuras históricas. Ao aporlles propiedades e funcións que non posúen, deveñen en fetiches. Unha nova forma de arte é precisa para involucrar a cidadanía no proceso conmemorativo.

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## Introduction

In Galicia, research on the Second Republic and Franco dictatorship is carried out almost always within the field of history. Despite that these events affect a myriad of phenomena in current day society, there is a tacit rule in the humanities according to which only historians are capacitated to produce scholarly work on history. The result is an incomplete rendering of the consequences of the traumatic past in the present. In order to examine the weight of the havoc wrought

by forty years of fascism<sup>1</sup> on current day attitudes, identity, political affiliation, the power structure, and much more, collaboration from all the humanities is necessary. Understanding the intricate presence of the past is indispensable for harnessing it for progressive purposes.

The concept of 'historical memory' gained force in Spain especially after the 2002 exhumation of the common grave in Piedrafita de Babia (León). Brought forth by the 'memory boom' that took off in the late 1970's via memoirists —many of whom were witnesses and/or victims of atrocities— historical memory refers almost always to the traumatic individual stories and experiences caused by political injustices that are left out of traditional and typically hegemonic historical accounts. Oral historians also played a central role in the memory boom by recording individual narratives. As the prime material of history from below, the movement to 'recuperar la memoria' has led to the creation of more objective narrations of the past. The voices of those who were excluded are now chronicled subjects in their own right.

Historical memory is transmitted by dint of diverse vehicles. In Spain, novels and movies have been two central cultural outlets. The abovementioned exhumation was a watershed event because images of real bodies reached everyone.<sup>2</sup> No previous memory site had been so effective in encouraging collective memory work of the Franco regime's atrocities. Memory sites can be immaterial like literature and film or they can physically exist in public space like the common graves, memorials, and other landmarks. The latter have received some attention by Republican sympathizers who see in them a reflection of their heritage and the means for preserving it.

Notwithstanding, Republican places of memory are steadily disappearing; for example, the bullring of Badajoz —where approximately 2,000 Republicans were executed over two days— was leveled in 2002 by order of the governing Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura. The building placed in its stead is the Palacio de Congresos Manuel Rojas —a conference center that has expurgated all traces of the atrocities.<sup>3</sup> In Galicia, the edifice used for the Rianxo concentration camp was razed in 2003 to enable a construction project that did not materialize due to the economic crisis. Architect César Portela, under the aegis of the Partido Popular de Galicia (PPdeG), turned the Island of San Simón —a core Republican symbol— into a kind of spa resort. In Valencia, part of the terrain of the Los Almendros concentration camp was recently developed into a shopping mall. The PSOE administration, in cahoots with the Partido Popular (PP) municipal government of Madrid, demolished the Carabanchel prison —in 2008— in the face of strong civil resistance.<sup>4</sup>

1

I am aware that some scholars do not consider Franco's regime 'fascist'. Among those who do, I find particularly convincing Navarro (2004) and Amin (2014).

2

The first (scientifically conducted) excavation in 2000 of the 'Trece de Priaranza' (León) did not have the social repercussion and media coverage as did that of 2002.

3

See the Youtube 'Palacio de Congresos de Badajoz' (2014), which —posted by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports— excludes any mention of the mass executions.

4

For the story of this episode, see Ortiz (2013). Hers is the first study in Spain to chronicle the events surrounding the destruction of a Republican memorial and the civic resistance to preserve it.

I employ the term 'memorial' (in Galician and Spanish *monumento conmemorativo*) instead of 'monument' (*monumento*) because memorials usually commemorate tragic events while monuments celebrate heroic episodes of victory. See Marita Sturken (1991: 120–22). Furthermore, there is a broad range of complexity in memorials; they can be as simple as a plaque on the ground, on a wall, or on a mound (*monolito*); or they can be elaborately aesthetic works of art.

Memorials erected in the post-Franco period are significantly different memory sites from those mentioned in the previous paragraph. The surviving material of concentration camps, prisons, and other places where trauma was inflicted is usually given more symbolic power by communities because of having 'witnessed' the events. The preservation of these places is of fundamental importance because, among other reasons, they allow us to see a tiny part of what the victims and executioners saw. Though heritage in itself cannot remember —only people can do this—, material evidence of the past wields a powerful influence in the West's psyche. The razing of the bullring in Badajoz and the reconstruction of San Simón dealt a blow to Republican historical memory, as did the removal of the Vel d'Hiv in Paris (in 1959) to the memory of the Holocaust. Authentic material traces help make the events more visible and lasting in individual and collective memory.

Memorials<sup>5</sup> are erected to fill in gaps of oblivion left by the march onward of time and policies of homogenization and erasure. Memory sites come into existence, as Pierre Nora famously stated, because modern societies have uprooted people from their history, customs, and traditional remembrance: 'There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory' (1989: 7). The past events and figures societies choose to remember are the bedrock of their identity, hence marking that memory is an attempt to preserve it and perpetuate it. 'Memorials', Nicholas Capasso explains, 'provide fixed places in a chaotic, shifting landscape onto which groups can project shared symbols to consolidate notions of pride, heritage, power and self' (1990: 57).

The first Galician memorial was placed in the old part of Pontevedra city in 1986. It is the bust of Alexandre Bóveda, one of the founding members of the Partido Galeguista (the Galicianist Party which merged with the Frente Popular) and the motor behind the Galician Statute of Autonomy. More memorials were erected across Galicia in the 1990s and their number doubled in the 2000s, especially during the period of the bipartite government (2005–2009). Moreover, the Historical Memory Law, decreed in 2007 by the PSOE administration, aided monument making via subsidies.

The Historical Memory Law was significant insofar as it was the first time a post-transition governing party openly favored Republicanism over Francoism. But it fell short by not changing the status of commemoration as a private affair. It delegated to private entities the work of exhumations and commemorative activities in general. It did not require all fascist symbolism to be removed from the public sphere and it did not create public spaces of dialogue. The government instituted a victim politics because, while acknowledging and providing reparations to the victims of the Franco regime, it ignored the murderers and the reasons that fueled their acts (Vinyes 2012: 28).

Upon its return to power in November 2011, the PP disabled the Historical Memory Law. The few exhumations that have taken place are funded by private entities such as a Norwegian electricians union that donated 6,000 euros in 2014 to the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARMH) (see Campelo 2015). In the meantime, Spain is the second country in the world —after Cambodia— with the most bodies in common graves (see Gordillo 2013 and Junquera 2013). Its denial to provide subventions for excavations has given the international human

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For a succinct journalistic account in English, see Badcock (2015).

7

Even more alarming is the passive attitude vis-à-vis dictatorships. Vicent Navarro quotes a survey conducted by *El País* in 2002 in which forty percent of young people (between fourteen and eighteen) expressed that dictatorships were necessary or that it did not matter whether a country had a dictatorship or not 'siempre y cuando hubiera orden y progreso' (2002: xiii).

rights community a stronger leverage point for demanding justice. The UN has criticized the PP government for refusing the victims' basic right to recover the bodies of their predecessors and to know the truth of what occurred. In November 2012, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ordered that the 1977 Amnesty Law, which exonerated the Franco regime of its crimes, be repealed. In October 2014, the Argentine judge María Servini de Cubría requested the extradition of seventeen ex-members of Franco's regime involved in crimes against humanity. Not long after the rejection of this request, the United Nations urged the Spanish government to allow the extradition.<sup>6</sup>

The strength of right wing ideology in Spain is correlated to the oblivion of this country's fascist past. The de-authorization of the Second Republic and its defenders is a mainstream phenomenon. Most of the youth does not identify with the Second Republic; they do not view it as a legitimate system or see the struggles of today as similar to those of the previous democracy.<sup>7</sup> Under these circumstances, it is difficult — if not impossible— for the youth and future generations to embrace a progressive culture. Vicent Navarro insists that a culture of anti-Francoism is prerequisite for progressive thought and action: 'No puede haber en España una cultura auténticamente democrática mientras no haya una cultura antifranquista, para la cual se requiere una viva memoria histórica' (2002: 213). If Republicanism continues to be a minority experience and perspective, an anti-fascist culture cannot become hegemonic.

### The Struggle to Acquire Public Visibility

Exhumations and memorials act as icebreakers of fear-induced silence. The former are a particularly potent tool for deconstructing the Francoist fallacies that make up the 1978 Spanish constitution's backbone and continue to be acknowledged by mainstream society. The core fallacy is expressed as 'todos tuvimos la culpa'; i.e., both Nationalists and Republicans were guilty of the Civil War. The Amnesty Law, passed in 1977, is the corollary of this falsity. While the criminals of the dictatorship were not held accountable, the Republican system, its figures, and ideals were delegitimized. Officially, Republican heritage is still an embarrassment for the Spanish state.

The silence imposed by the regime did not end in 1977 when the first democratic elections were held. Much of the first generation that suffered or witnessed crimes is still afraid to talk publicly about the trauma. The inequitable transition to democracy, engendered and enacted by high officials of the dictatorship, led many to view the democratic system as an extension of the regime, which in their minds could return at any moment. Much of the second generation inherited the trauma via silence and dysfunctional, often violent, behaviors. Very common symptoms this generation manifests are submission to authority, passivity, and indifference vis-à-vis politics, as demonstrated by studies on the trans-generational transmission of trauma (see Miñarro & Morandi (2012); and Valverde (2014)). Third generation adults often evince similar symptoms as their parents, but others have broken the curse, as it were, and sought to know the truth and seek justice. Emilio Silva —the founder of the ARMH— is arguably the most famous 'grandchild' of the war who turned his search for knowledge into a grass roots activist movement.

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The bipartite government —the coalition between the Partido Socialista de Galicia (affiliate of the PSOE) and the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG)— promoted an array of commemorative activities designed to obtain witness accounts of crimes against humanity. For example, the university-run Proxecto Interuniversitario 'Nomes e Voces' and the Barco da memoria (a boat exhibit that visited eighteen coastal towns in the summer of 2006) were effective in gathering hundreds of recorded testimonies.

The exhumations and memorials have persuaded thousands of first and second hand witnesses to tell their stories. Revitalized by public recognition and homage, many have come forward to share their private memories of trauma.<sup>8</sup> In the absence of a state sponsored politics of memory, it is only these grassroots initiatives that can provide some sense of public recognition and closure to first and second generation witnesses of the war and dictatorship. Furthermore, the flow and exchange of stories create a community in which direct personal memory becomes cultural memory (Ashplant, Dawson & Roper 2000: 18-19). The Republican memory community has grown and become influential, but as a marginalized entity it cannot take the reigns of cultural production.

The Galician memorials were placed mostly by private groups that usually had to bend over backwards to obtain permission. The struggles to secure space are remarkably similar. The source of rejection has come primarily from municipal governments, which play a crucial role in the process. The hegemonic Partido Popular de Galicia (PPdeG) has been very much opposed —except on rare occasions— to memorialization, while the main party of the opposition, the Partido Socialista de Galicia (PSdeG), has also objected in several instances to commemorating Republicanism. The leftist Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG), the third biggest party until 2013, has a much more progressive record in this regard.

The most successful memorial projects —the most effective in drawing attention to the traumatic past— were initially turned down by the municipal administrations. The case I examine in this article took place in A Coruña city and is representative of several other instances in which rejection on behalf of municipal authorities to place a memory marker stoked a popular reaction that led to debates in local and regional newspapers. Pro-Republican journalists, who have also played a core part in Galicia's commemorative processes, defended the victims' right to publically honor their dead while their articles pressed political leaders to explain their positions. The debates and quarrels that ensued exposed what post-Franco society has so successfully suppressed: denunciations against Francoism in the political realm and mainstream media. These ideological conflicts bring to the fore the resiliency of the Francoist fallacies, upheld by supporters of oblivion, and provide the left opportunities to discredit them.

The seed of the A Coruña memorial —erected on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2010— was Dolores Ares who sought to honor her anarchist grandfather, José Torres Regueiro, murdered by the Francoists shortly after the uprising. Dolores' mother Laura Torres, who was seven when the events occurred, told her daughter the story of José. Laura was seven-years-old when her father was arrested: 'Cuando llegué a Coruña mi madre estaba llorando y no entendía nada; y mi hermana la mayor me dijo que habían cogido a papá' (Interview conducted by the author). Laura's pregnant mother, Consuelo Meitín, was arrested the next day and spent two years in jail. Like most Spaniards who survived their loved ones, Consuelo was not allowed to publicly mourn her husband: 'Mi madre se murió a los 93 sin saber dónde estaba' (Interview conducted by the author). Laura never knew why the fascists came for her mother, though she suspects Consuelo worked as liaison for the resistance: 'Ella no me explicó eso [...] No hablaba por temor, pero no era muy tímida y tampoco le preguntaba' (Interview conducted by the author).

Once she was released from prison, Consuelo tried to investigate the whereabouts of her husband, but the Civil Guard 'le dijo que no siguiera

See, for example, 'La aplicación de la memoria histórica, "lúdica y cultural"' (2015).

mirando si no quería que le hicieran a sus hijos lo mismo que a su marido y hermano' (Interview of Dolores Ares conducted by the author). Dolores underlined the support she received from Santiago Macías, the vice-president of the ARMH, who first advised her to obtain her grandfather's death certificate from the civil registry office. Dolores then went to the municipal government in order to request permission to place a plaque in the city cemetery honoring her grandfather (Interview conducted by the author). This request took place in January 2008 when the PSDEG governed the municipality in coalition with the BNG. The mayor Javier Losada was cherry-picked by the previous PSDEG mayor Francisco Vázquez, who is famous throughout Spain for his reactionary politics. A Coruña is one of the cities in Spain with the most Francoist street names, although the election of Xulio Ferreiro and his party *Marca Atlántica* in June 2015 has begun to change this.<sup>9</sup> Vázquez and his PSDEG confederates refused to remove fascist names and other insignia by alleging that they are historical symbols that should be preserved (Monge 2010: 50).

An official from the municipality answered Dolores' request by offering her a wall in the basement next to the ossuary. Feeling thoroughly ridiculed by this proposition, Dolores consulted Macías, who advised her to find a group to back her project. Dolores asked the *Comisión pola Recuperación da Memoria Histórica (CRMH) da Coruña* to sponsor the building of a memorial in honor of all the victims of fascism in A Coruña city. The CRMH enthusiastically supported the cause and requested funds from the Ministry of the Presidency headed by María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, which in January 2010 granted the entity almost 30,000 euros to carry out the memorial project. The Zapatero government was much more friendly to pro-Republican (private) initiatives than was the PSDEG municipal government of A Coruña, which adamantly rejected the project.

Two issues of the proposed memorial particularly concerned Losada and the PSDEG: its location in the Santo Amaro cemetery, which is highly visited, and the etchings of the names of 567 victims. Indeed, Losada wrote to the president of the CRMH da Coruña, Manuel Monge, contending that A Coruña already had two memorials, that of Isaac Díaz Pardo on O Campo da Rata and Pepe Galán's in the Portiño. Both these memorials, especially Galán's, are on the periphery of the city. Losada further suggested that 'quizais o máis oportuno sexa buscar un lugar axeitado fóra da Coruña, nalgunha das localidades do entorno' (Losada 2010). The mayor announced a month later in *La Voz de Galicia*: 'El monumento que representa a todos los ciudadanos [Díaz Pardo's] ya está ubicado y lamento que algunos quieran desvirtuar el acuerdo y la unidad de lo que ha sido una gran pérdida para todos' ('Vítimas' 2010). This is a typical rationalization wielded by PP politicians, but it is by no means uncommon in PSOE or PSDEG circles.

Meanwhile, the CRMH invited historians of the *Proxecto Interuniversitario de Nomes e Voces* to investigate the fascist crimes in A Coruña and ten surrounding municipalities. The CRMH's intention was to acquire an objective rendering of the total number of victims and their names — beginning with the uprising and ending in 1977—, to be etched on the memorial. The CRMH also organized an array of activities (workshops, lectures, handing out fliers, discussions with passersby) designed to divulge the facts of Francoism and invite the public to participate in the recovery of memory. First and secondhand witnesses came forward and told their stories. The CRMH's interaction with the city helped increase popular support for the memorial.

Losada finally caved in —thanks to pressure from the BNG, the other governing party in the coalition— one month before the subvention expired. But he refused to grant the Santo Amaro cemetery (where hundreds of murdered Republicans lie in a common grave), which was ideal for maximizing the memorial's symbolic effect. A grassy area along the Avenida de Navarra was offered and accepted. The inauguration was impressive; firsthand witnesses were able to have their loved ones publicly honored, Republicanism was celebrated as a necessary path for contemporary society, and famous left wing and nationalist figures attended.<sup>10</sup>

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For a discussion of this memorial in the context of another argument, see Thompson 'Tres monumentos' (2014b). The inauguration was filmed and can be seen online ('Inauguración do memorial na Coruña' (2010)).

## Drawbacks

Even when used as vehicles of progressive thought and values, all memorials inevitably participate in a conservative discourse because of the hierarchy they establish between the artist and the spectator. It is not a process of collaboration. Under the auspices of the civic group spearheading the initiative, the artist conceives and executes while the public receives the message. The discourse is similar to that of authorized heritage, which according to Laurajane Smith 'constructs heritage as something that is engaged with passively [...] the audience will uncritically consume the message of heritage constructed by heritage experts' (2006: 32). There are few, if any, heritage experts involved in memorialization in Galicia, but the one-way communication and passivity to which Smith alludes are certainly salient characteristics in this context.

The main drawback of memorials is that they produce the illusion of materializing history and acting as permanent reminders of historical events and figures. As they are attributed properties and functions they do not possess, they become fetishes. The civic movements in Galicia that were founded specifically to erect a memorial disappeared once the objective was achieved. Vilagarcía is a case in point. The pilot behind the memorial in this town, Margarita Teijeiro Suárez, founded and led the *Coordinadora pro-monumento a las Víctimas del Franquismo*, which dynamized the Republican community, infuriated the conservatives (especially the PSDEG mayor Javier Gago), and united the bickering parties on the left. But once the memorial was erected in 2004, the association disappeared and the left regressed to its divisions. In the meantime, the sixty-six names on the bronze memorial are so rusted they are barely legible.

Contrary to fetishistic and wishful thinking, memory markers are not eternal and they do not remember. It is the practice, the intangible heritage, and not the material what maintains meanings and cultural knowledge (Smith 2006: 54). Some Galician memorials are used ritually; civic groups or political parties hold gatherings every 14 April (the day the Second Republic was declared) or 18 July (the beginning of the fascist uprising). However, in spite of the fact that ritual is a form of intangible heritage, it is very limited due to its rigidity and mechanic nature. It can work for those who embrace the commemorative cause, but not for those who are disconnected from it. Generally speaking, only those involved directly in monument making —the civic groups, *asociaciones de memoria*, family members of the victims, and (on occasions) political leaders— have an emotional investment in the memorial. For the rest of society, especially the younger generation, symbolic markers go unnoticed; 'there is nothing

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There are exceptions, but they are few and far between. In Galicia where I have thus far carried out most of my research on memorials, the only incidence I know in which the PPDG supported commemoration was in Ponte Aranga. The mayor Alberto Platas accepted—in April 2011—the CRMH da Coruña's initiative to erect a memorial in the town square.

in this world as invisible as a monument', Robert Musil famously declared (1987: 61). Interface between the past and the present is quite complex and memorials do not appeal to the majority.

Andreas Huyssen's reflections on postwar and contemporary Germany are useful for elucidating the deceitful facet of monuments. He suggests that the abundance of them signals a kind of overcompensation: 'The more monuments there are, the more the past becomes invisible, the easier it is to forget: redemption, thus, through forgetting' (1999: 193). According to this scholar, monuments do not foster constructive memory work, but act as burden-lifters. In Spain, this guilt syndrome does not exist. Many descendants of the Franco regime are members of the PP and feel proud of their fascist heritage. Indeed, it could be argued that this is the part of society most affected by Republican memorialization, as is manifested in its unanimous rejection of it.<sup>11</sup>

However, the idea that memorials 'remember for us' and thus lead us to divest ourselves of the responsibility of remembering is very much alive within the Republican community. Many Republican memory sites in Galicia have become useless because they are not used for educational purposes or commemorations. Liz Sevckenko contrasts the static nature of *lieux de mémoire* with 'sites of conscience' whose 'memorializing practices' (2011: 114) are produced from critical analysis of 'the relationships between memory and action' (2011: 115). The key is to 'identify specific strategies for sites in different political contexts to play a more intentional role in addressing current social issues' (2011: 115). A site of conscience entails a group of stewards (or experts) in heritage studies and human rights who organize interactive activities for the general public. The ultimate objective of these commemorative practices is to foster a culture of human rights that questions and understands its purpose through heritage and historical memory.

Existing and future memorials in Galicia would be more effective if several recurring deficiencies were remedied. One of the core failures of these markers is that they do not succeed in transmitting their purported message. To be able to effectively conjure an episode, a figure, an experience, etc., the message must be presented clearly. An aesthetic expression of abstraction can work well, but if it is not emplotted, let alone explained, it will fail. Explicative plaques are indispensable for an effective monument's discourse.

An illustrative antimodel of transmission is José Loureiro's iron rod and boxes of ashes in the municipality of Fene. The artist explained that the box shapes at the base symbolize the murdered missing in common graves scattered across Spain. The rod that comes out of the boxes connects the memory of the dead with present-day collective consciousness (Personal interview conducted by the author). Notwithstanding that this is an interesting explanation that makes the memorial come alive, as it were, no one except the artist seemed to know this interpretation when I researched the memorial in the summers of 2011 and 2012. The only information provided is an inscription that reads '2006 Ano da Memoria'.

Memorials become less invisible when they invite the public to interpret their aesthetic. A similar defect characterizes the memorial in Tui erected in 1999. The artist Silverio Rivas explained that the human-like figure conveys on the one hand solitude; the solitude and horror the victims felt at the end of their lives (also the horror felt by the victims' family and friends). It also can signify the reappearance of the murdered. Alfonso





*Memorial by José  
Loureiro (Fene)*

Daniel Castelao's famous etching entitled 'Non enterran mortos, enterran semente' has made its way into many contemporary discourses on Franco's atrocities. The shingles on the wall also perform a symbolic function; when it rains the water tumbling down resembles tears. The memorial is therefore eternally crying. The hole in the wall can be interpreted as a window or door facing Portugal on the other side of the river. Thousands of Republicans escaped death by fleeing to Portugal (Personal interview conducted by the author).

But as in the case of Loureiro's work in Fene, the public in general does not know this interpretation. A model example in both aesthetic and clarity is Pepe Galán's iron walkway, which lies four kilometers to the south west of A Coruña city. Inaugurated in 2008, it looks out to a cove known as O Portiño and pays homage to nineteen victims of a failed escape in 1937. Until very recently, this event was forgotten by most. Antón Patiño Regueira, who acted as link that terrible night for the escapees, was the promoter behind the commemoration of this event. The CRMH da Coruña took Patiño's advice and organized a contest for the best sculpture.

Galán provides interpretative cues for his walkway. Knowing these indications enables the spectator to imagine the concrete traumatic event. On a plaque, it is explained that the stairs going down on one side of the walkway can symbolize the escape and the stairs going up the return of memory. It is a space of movement, of leaving and returning. There are two six-meter-high lamps on either side and underneath the names of the nineteen victims. The lamps are bright blue and come on at night. One of the lamps blinks as if imitating a heartbeat and hinting at the continued presence of the victims. The names inscribed on the plaque are filled with lead, the material with which the escapees were murdered. The names of the men illuminated by the light are present; their ghosts are there at the crossroads, the escape and the return.

The emplacement of a memorial is also a fundamental factor too often overlooked. A case in point is the traffic circle at the east entrance of the town Boiro. The BNG mayor I interviewed, Pepe Deira, had laudable ideas about recovering and asserting the town's Republican heritage, but aside from this *lieu de mémoire's* prominent ugliness, a traffic circle is probably the worst place for commemorative art. Likewise, the sculpture of Juana de Capdevielle was placed next to the highway close to the town Rábade. Capdevielle, a left wing librarian from A Coruña, was murdered and dumped on the side of this road, but not at the site of the memorial. It is difficult to see the sculpture not only because it is along a road, but also because of the trashy-looking storehouse behind it. The artist, Luciano



*Memorial  
in Boiro*

Couselo, said he wanted his work to be placed at a more visible location, such as the town plaza (Personal interview conducted by the author). Another example is Marcos Escudero's reading woman on the highway of Mos, which is located very close to where the victims were murdered. After the memorial was erected, it was decided to 'humanize' the area by building an asphalt parking lot, which seems to asphyxiate the woman and what she represents.



*Memorial by Luciano  
Couselo near Rábade*

Memorial making is done all too often without taking 'surrounding texts' into consideration. Apart from the aforementioned absence of heritage experts, the influence of *feísmo* (see Martínez Suárez 2006) —the acceptance of it— certainly plays a role in these mistakes of emplacement. The first erected memorial, the bust of Alexandre Bóveda, is located in one of the classic plazas in the old district of Pontevedra —the city where



*Memorial by Marcos  
Escudero (Mos)*

Bóveda lived at the time of the insurgence. It is an effective memory site to the extent that every August seventh —the date of his execution— there is a large commemorative event. But the conspicuous presence of Burger King inevitably affects the meaning of the memorial. The concept of symbolic accretion explained by Owen Dwyer (2004) is useful for elucidating this question. A memorial is a text whose meaning is ineluctably influenced by surrounding texts. Symbolic accretion can be allied in the event that the surrounding text (or texts) augment the intended meaning of the memorial. Or it can be antithetical if the text or texts diminish the intended meaning. This is obviously a case of antithetical symbolic accretion.

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For a more complete rendering of this question, see Thompson 'No Monte Furriolo' (2014).



*Bust of Alexandre  
Bóveda (Pontevedra)*

Abandonment of a memorial can lead to extreme degradations, such as that of the mural on O Monte Furriolo in the province of Ourense. Hundreds were slaughtered here. The initiative to make the wall was impressive as were the testimonies and historiographic studies published at the time of the inauguration (see Álvarez 2008). The memorial provided relief to survivors and descendants of the killed. However, I visited it in the summer of 2013 and encountered the mural colorless and vandalized. 'Franco' and 'Rojo Muerto Rojo Bueno' were spray-painted in big letters. And crosshairs were painted over the head of the victim depicted. I returned in the summer of 2014 and found the mural in identical condition.<sup>12</sup>



*Memorial at  
O Monte Furriolo*

One of the main errors in erecting this mural was its location. It is very out of the way and the road that leads to it is used by few. But abandonment can lead to similar degradations regardless of the location. Acisclo Manzano's tall metal spirals —located on the university of Santiago de Compostela campus and commissioned by the university— has an interesting symbolic

reading, which the artist explained to me. In the summer of 2014, I interviewed fifty passersby and not one knew what the memorial was supposed to represent. One man I interviewed had children who entered inside; he yelled at them to get out. This seemed strange to me, but later I understood why. A group of three young women told me that the youth who partake in ritual *botellones* on the weekend use the memorial as a urinal. In a similar way, the A Coruña memorial I discussed in the previous section has also been degraded. When I interviewed the artist at the memorial in 2012, both of us remarked the copious amount of feces that covered the ground. During the interview, a young man came down with a dog that defecated. The artist (Valdi) asked him to take the animal elsewhere and the man answered defensively that it was the municipality's responsibility to keep the site clean.



*Memorial by Acisclo  
Manzano (Santiago  
de Compostela)*

### **A New Approach for Engaging the Public**

Beyond the shortcomings I have pointed out —lack of interpretive cues, inappropriate emplacement, abandonment— the primary reason behind the memorials' ineffectiveness once they are erected resides in the lack of engagement with the public. For a commemorative project to have a lasting effect, the public has to be involved and have a stake in it. In the last analysis, the memorials do not go far enough. They lack strategies for engaging the rest of society and future generations.

A different form of art is required to bring the general public into the commemorative process. In new genre public art, as practiced and theorized by the likes of Suzanne Lacy and Judith Baca, the relationship between the artist and the community becomes the central part of the artwork. The countermonument tradition upholds this tenet to a certain extent insofar as monuments are designed to invite spectators to become more active. An interesting example is Jochen and Esther Gerz' aluminum pillar (in Harburg, Germany), which was gradually lowered into the ground until disappearing. The plaque encouraged passersby to write or etch their thoughts and feelings on the pillar. The erroneous idea that a monument can embody eternal remembrance was mocked (Young 1993: 28-37). Another example is the Monument to Che Guevara in Rosario, Argentina, made of melted keys donated by the public (Morrison 2011).

But countermonuments are limited to offering only metaphorical engagement. They are not created by the public. They are a product of the artists' imagination. Judith Baca's mural paintings can serve as a template

for creating a new collaborative art in Galicia and the rest of Spain that focuses on the democratic achievements of the Second Republic and the violations of human rights committed by the Franco dictatorship. The mural paintings she directs represent diverse ethnic communities' histories in her native Los Angeles. In the face of architecture and city planning that have worked to divide and diminish minority communities, Baca argues that 'murals have been the only interventions in public spaces that articulate the presence of ethnicity' (1995: 136). The artistic process consists first of the participants learning about the history via workshops. Once knowledge is acquired, they create the images together. Baca and accompanying artists (usually her graduate students) do most of the painting and give the final touch, but the rest of the group generates to some extent the images and also paints (Personal interview conducted by the author).

A new genre project in Spain could take Baca's *modus operandi* one step further. The participants would create most of the images, do most of the painting, and give the mural its final touch. The artistic quality would not be that of Baca's; however, those involved would feel the work to be more theirs than that of the artist. The first half of such an enterprise would combine workshops that fuel the artistic creation, which would also be conducted during this stage. An artist would work alongside to help the group to convert the images into designs.

The second segment would be the painting of the mural. Depending on its size, as many as twenty-five could take part, while the total duration of the project would be approximately one month. By eliminating the hierarchy between the artist and the public, this proposed undertaking could have very beneficial consequences for democratic thought; especially if it were performed in several places and became a yearly activity. Through creating their own Republican heritage, the participants would likely become connected to the past in a more direct and relevant way.



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