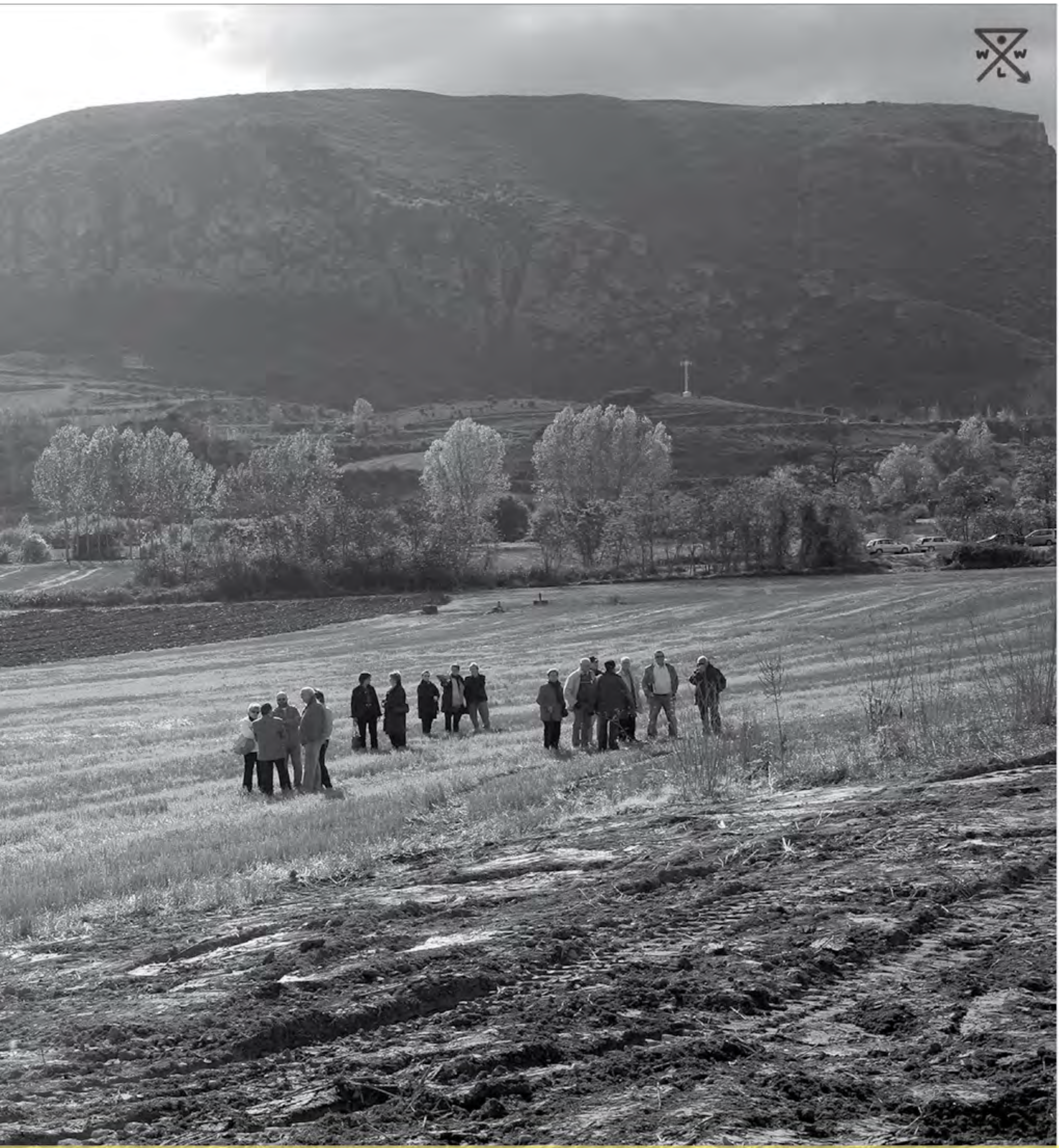

WRITING WITH LIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHY - ETHNOGRAPHY - DESIGN

JANUARY 2022 - Issue no. 01

Alejandro M. Flores Aguilar and Lee Douglas in discussion at a Wenner Gren-funded workshop and exhibition at the Masur Gallery in Lockhart, Texas. 2018.

WRITING WITH LIGHT MAGAZINE

After several years restricted to on-line slideshows, Writing with Light has entered into a new publication phase with a print and digital magazine format. Our magazine foregrounds photography and ethnography by expanding upon the serial photo essay with a commitment to design that binds together writing, photographs, and layout. This commitment to designing with words and images on a fixed page makes the best of both print and digital media. Designing for print publication allows us to focus on what we consider to be the ideal experience: to hold on to the magazine, to feel the paper between your fingers, to flip from one page to the next and back again, all the while listening to the material presence as pages rustle, fold, and brush into one another. Thus we foreground the physical encounter with our magazine and yet we know that this is not enough. The danger of such a limited print run would ensure that it remains obscure and inaccessible to many people who would otherwise be interested. And so it is to be circulated digitally, at no cost, in the stable layout provided by the PDF format.

We call this approach "print forward" design. The aim is to design first for print and second, for digital distribution. Our neologism of print-forward-design assigns the printed page pride of place *en route* to the digital, with its remarkable capacity to circulate and its speed of distribution. From the 1920s through the 1960s pictorial magazines like *AIZ, VU, LIFE*, and others proposed a new relationship between reportage and the photographic image. The construction of a visual narrative over multiple pages engrossed readers. The essay was its own argument that sustained a pulsing entanglement of individual images set against a textual narrative within a broader ecology of relations. Design is an elaboration of the photographic essay, yet too often it is overlooked and undervalued.

We have cultivated and nurtured the idea of Writing with Light for over five years. And not just the idea of literally writing with light and its possibilities, but also the very specific thing in your hands or on the screen in front of you: *the magazine*. Margaret Bourke White's stunning photograph on the cover of the first issue of *Life* in 1936 inaugurated a new photographic public in the USA with the mass dissemination of the illustrated photographic magazine. Outside of the American context, similar editorial projects—like *VU* and *Regard* in France, *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* in Germany, the Soviet Union's *SSSR na Stroike*, Japan's *Asahi Camera*, and *Umbral* in Spain—also flourished. They not only captivated publics but created new ones. During more than six decades, these projects foregrounded photographic storytelling through design, situating it as a dominant media form in everyday visual culture. They once offered a "rich ecosystem of multimedia representation and provided an important transactional frame where artists, authors, advertisers and readers coalesced into communities not just through printed text, graphic work and image, but also, and most especially, through photography." (*Developing Room*).

Our goal with this publication is to explore the possibilities of the photo essay, not only as a mode for communicating ideas, but also as a catalyst of communities and debates, to reflection and narration. Paying attention to photographs and written compositions through design, we look forward to exploring how ethnography and its practitioners can think with images to address complicated times. ❖

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Undoing Absence

Reflections on the Counter-Forensic Photo Essay

Lee Douglas

> "Forensics is, of course, not simply about science but about the presentation of scientific findings, about science as an art of persuasion. Derived from the Latin forensis, the word's root refers to the 'forum,' and thus to the practice and skill of making an argument before a professional, political, or legal gathering."[1]

In their treatise on "forensic aesthetics," Eyal Weizman and Thomas Keenan make an important link between the investigation of crimes, evidence, and public forums.[2] Unearthing the Latin root of the word forensics reveals for them a relationship so obvious that its reiteration becomes groundbreaking. Forensics—a field that brings together scientific expertise and legal procedure—is at its heart, they argue, a practice of presentation and persuasion. Evidence is transparently collected and revealed, but this collection and revelation must also be exposed and performed. Evidence must be constituted as such, and this public performance and presentation produces a particular kind of aesthetics. Consequently, Weizman argues, forensic practice extends across fields of action. It requires a "field", or site of interpretation, but also someone who can translate and explain. It demands narration. It also necessitates a public assembly, a political collective willing to see, listen, and witness. It is within the "dynamic and elastic territory"[3] that forensic science inhabits, that images and objects become evidence, "things submitted in an effort to persuade."[4]

The indexical and indeterminate nature of photography situates the medium as a particularly apt tool for traversing these multiple operations. Photographs reveal and show; they also narrate and tell. Like words, photographic imprints of evidentiary traces can be mobilized and juxtaposed; they can be woven together to tell stories and communicate experience. In the long aftermath of political state violence, where forensic techniques and technologies are deployed to unearth the remains of those disappeared by repressive regimes, the photographic gaze belongs to a witness, to someone who observes the act of recuperation and the undoing of bodily absence, processes that inevitably extend beyond the exhumation site itself. But, how are these images activated? What stories do they tell? What publics do they create?

This inaugural issue of *Writing with Light Magazine* brings together the work of both photographers and anthropologists. Responding to different forms of dictatorial, paramilitary, and fascist violence, they have approached photography—and, by extension, the photo essay form—as a powerful tool for narrating, evidencing, and making sense of systematic, state-sponsored programs of bodily erasure. In their own unique ways, the works included in this issue grapple with the evidentiary potential of the photographic image. At the same time, these photo essays—many originating from larger, more extensive projects—also engage the medium's indeterminacy by inhabiting and interrogating the poetic, political potential of visuality, but also forms of visual narration, acts of knowledge production that occur with and through photographs carefully arranged on the page. Here, questions of design—issues of sequence, placement, and form—are not only aesthetic, but also deeply political. In this process, the photo essay is situated as a possible presentation to a forum. It is photographic evidence, visual testimony, that can be presented to an audience ready to interpret and see. Perhaps, in this case, the photo essay also plays an active role in constituting and delineating publics who can witness, although from a temporal and geographic distance, the effects of political violence. Despite their diversity, the photographic works presented here are unique. They describe and respond to specific histories of violence in concrete ways. In doing so, they reveal individual and collective experiences with projects of recuperation, in which disappeared bodies are recovered and silenced life histories are made publicly audible.

Following Alan Sekula's writings on the relationship between photography, evidence, and humanism,[5] Thomas Keenan uses the term counter-forensics to describe "the adoption of forensic techniques as a practice of 'political maneuvering,' as a tactical operation in a collective struggle, a rogues' gallery to document the microphysics of barbarism."[6] Despite their particularities, the photo essays showcased in this issue certainly meet this definition. They reverse the forensic gaze, normally reserved for representatives of states, their courts, and their official institutions. More specifically, these photo essays interrupt state-sponsored disappearance—that tactic, so often used to combat dissidence, struggles for equality or liberation, and calls for structural political change.

The photo essays in this issue challenge absence by documenting the reappearance of human remains, but also by narrating the process of search and recovery, whereby the fragmentary traces collected, safe-guarded, and examined by victims' kin are pieced together to explain a loved one's unexplained, unconfirmed death. These "pedacitos" or pieces, notes photographer Gustavo Germano, are part and parcel of undoing disappearance, evidencing loss, and narrating life histories shaped by a non-linear accumulation of clues and signs. These photo essays are counter-forensic in that they produce bodies of knowledge that evidence crimes and combat absence. They are counter-forensic because they bring into view the mechanics of political violence, whereby states forcibly waged war on the bodies of everyday citizens. They are counter-forensic in their ability to produce knowledge that honors the memories of those whose lives were so violently interrupted.

The labor exerted to bring this editorial project into being has been, like previous Writing with Light initiatives, profoundly collective. At the same time, the themes explored and the questions posed in this inaugural issue are also deeply personal and linked to my long engagement with the intersections between forensic science, photography, and memory politics in post-dictatorship Argentina, Chile, and Spain. My own trajectory as an anthropologist and image-maker, deeply committed to understanding how the past is mobilized in the present, has made me particularly attuned to how the different evidentiary practices produced at these intersections circulate transnationally and how, in turn, they are locally deployed to produce forms of knowledge that narrate silenced histories, while also opening new possibilities regarding the articulation of alternative political futures. More specifically, this experience has inculcated an awareness that mass grave exhumations and the deployment of counter-forensic expertise are not singular events, but rather part of a global phenomenon, in which mass graves have been transformed "from sites of commemoration into epistemic resources" that make it possible to reconstruct past crimes and, at times, enter evidence into courts of law.[7]

The three photo essays included in this issue put into conversation the work being done in only three specific contexts: Guatemala, Argentina, and Spain. Equally important work can be found in a multitude of other contexts across the globe. In bringing this work together, our editorial collective was keen to put into conversation the remarkable visual work being done in each of these locales, places where political violence and forced disappearance are linked to specific histories of repression. At the same time, cognizant of the Anglophone nature of this project, our hope is to introduce the phenomenal photographic work being done by photographers, anthropologists, and activists working in these contexts to a wider audience. As such, the selection of works showcased here are just some examples of the visual labor exerted to situate mass graves and individual stories of recuperation into both epistemic resources and sites for the production of alternative bodies of knowledge.

Two men, children of individuals who fell victim to fascist violence in 1936, observe an exhumation carried out on a small hill, located at the outskirts of Tudela in Navarre. The location, now located at the foot of a National Highway, used to be known as Urzante. The town no longer exists. Summer, 2011.

Whether indicative of what Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus have described as "the forensic turn"[8] or what Weizman himself has described as "the era of forensics,"[9] this speaks not to the proliferation of political violence, as well as their opposite: collective mobilizations—often sustained by victims' kin and other memory activists—committed to shedding light on the mechanics of necropolitics and, in the process, to renarrating intimate experiences with violence. In what Zuzanne Dziuban describes as "the epistemic shift towards bodies and objects,"[10] counter-forensic practice plays an important role in demands for recognition, wherein the weight of forensic evidence situates it as "a powerful tool in memory making" while also accentuating its "discursive, performative, and affective qualities: the ability to materialize and 'authenticate' the past and to invite individuals and societies to relate affectively, practically, and interpretatively to the past it embodies."[11] This poses the question: What kind of forensic evidence is the photographic image? What affective and interpretative possibilities does the photo essay make possible? What ethical issues arise when photographs of human remains circulate, thus becoming decontextualized from the lives and relations of those who disappeared?

The photo essays in this issue narrate investigations into the systematic violence carried out in radically different contexts. By juxtaposing work from Guatemala, Argentina, and Spain, we do not seek to conflate the particularities of state violence and disappearance. Nor do we seek to skip over the very specific ways in which forensic techniques and technologies have been deployed in each context. Most importantly, placing these histories in conversation is not meant to erase the very unique weight that photographic projects, like those included here, have played in the articulation of local memory politics. However, I do believe that situating these photo essays in near proximity makes it possible to consider an alternative visual history, a counter-forensic gaze, where the forensic image is a performative inversion of absence. Like the mothers of Argentina's disappeared, who so artfully inverted the "national spectacle of disappearance" by attaching snapshots of their missing children onto their chests as they circled public squares, these photo essays do not simply evidence absence.[12] Instead, they undo it.

This undoing is achieved through the kinds of witnessing that are made possible through the photographic work showcased in this issue. The image sequences that follow, in many ways, demand and inhabit forms of narra-

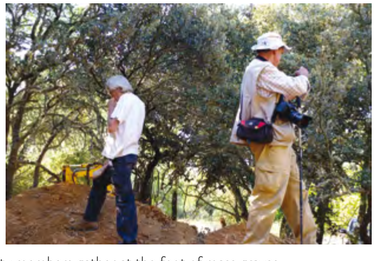
tion. However, they also operate in counter-intuitive, non-narrative ways. In both cases, they give way to a kind of seeing and knowing that speak to the important role that image-making plays in the forensic process and in post-violence attempts to undo and make sense of bodily absence. In this spirit, the photo essay that accompanies this introductory text puts into conversation instances in which experts, victims' kin, and activists engage the counter-forensic gaze in mass grave exhumations in Spain. They are photographs about witnessing and seeing, about looking down and around, about projecting one's attention to the surrounding landscape. The images, but also the moments captured by the activation of the gaze, are an attempt to undo absence.

We open this issue with the work of anthropologist and media-maker Alejandro Flores, who uses collaborative research methods to consider how Ixil elders reconstruct their experiences resisting the coffee-plantation economy in the 1970s and 1980s, when Guatemala's counterinsurgent "scorched earth" policies were developed. Flores' photo essay, entitled "The Forest Welcomed Our Dead," documents the 2018 restitution of remains recovered in San Juan Comalapa, Chimaltenango years before by Guatemala's Forensic Anthropology Foundation. It portrays a single ritual event of return and reburial in a much longer and complex forensic process of searching for and identifying the missing. The series is followed by excerpts from conversations between Flores and members of our editorial collective. The decision to include this dialogue, which took place against the backdrop of the global pandemic, is a product of our desire to provide a look into the editorial process, in which Flores' ethnographic text—together with his far more vast archive of images—were a source of further inquiry and reflection. In this sense, the process of creating the photo essay, rather than the image sequence itself, becomes a rich arena to consider how the ethnographic and photographic gaze can be activated to produce alternative forms of knowledge. The conversation reveals the multiplicity of presentations and forums that emerge through acts of visual narration and considers how photographic practice can be constituted as a kind of witnessing that produces and gives weight to new testimonial forms.

Next is a collaborative photo essay produced by Spanish photographers Clemente Bernad and Álvaro Minguito. Here, color images are juxtaposed with somber photographs in black and white; each diptyque responding to a particular set of keywords that point to the particularities of forensic practice in Spain, where exhumations are public events that occur at the unruly bounds of legal procedure. The photo essay traverses unique approaches and registers and, in doing so, establishes a visual dialogue between two very different bodies of documentary work produced in conjunction with the labor of Spanish historical memory and the exhumation of mass graves. While Minguito's images focus on the labor of recuperation, Bernad's images document the moments when traces of fascist violence are unearthed and revealed. Producing and bringing into being forms of evidence not recognized by courts of law, Minguito and Bernad are part of a "community of practice"[13] that through image-making "learns to see forensically."[14] Here observation is a practice that not only introduces new ways of collectively constructing alternative historical narratives, but also an act of imagination in which victims of franquismo are active agents in bringing into being other political futures. Here, the poetic and political potential of the photo essay lies, not in its status as document, but in its ability to produce dialogue and reflection.

The issue concludes with selections from Gustavo Germano and Vanina de Monte's project *Contradesaparecido*, where Germano's search for information regarding his brother Eduardo's disappearance in 1976 is narrated on the page. Unlike Germano's previous project *Ausencias*, which used family portraiture to make visible absence, *Contradesparecido* documents the fragmentary evidentiary traces that were received, recovered, and found in his search for his brother's remains. The photo essay presented here is one itinerary from a far more intricate visual map that narrates the accumulation of information and the passing of time. It is this laborious process of collection, narration, and re-narration that not only facilitates forensic recovery, but also the possibility of undoing disappearance. As photography scholars Jordana Blejmar and Natalia Fortuny note in their accompanying text, the layering of evidence demonstrates that the lives of the disappeared demand narration. In this piece, photography and design bring together the bits and pieces of evidence, those *pedacitos*, that made it possible to recover Eduardo's remains. The resulting photo essay undoes disappearance by rendering Eduardo's history both visible and narratable. Here a visual map of bodily absence that tracks and traces the precarious evidentiary traces left by forced disappearance constitute the very gaze that challenges the mechanics of state-sponsored disappearance.

In his work on forensic architecture, Weizman describes buildings as "receptive sensors on which events are registered."[15] Buildings, like bones, are witnesses that carry with them material inscriptions and clues that can reveal how acts of violence played out. Photography is also a sensor, a technology that records and tells. But, there is also something specific about the role that photography plays in mass grave exhumation projects. Photographic imaging technologies, as we know, are historically entangled with documentation projects that have sought to create and reinforce categories of deviance and difference. The forensic photographic gaze is, in this sense, decidedly not counter-forensic, but rather deeply embedded in power structures that have often reinforced state violence. What happens when the technology par excellence for documenting crimes is deployed to make visible systematic plans of elimination? If anything, the photo essays presented here demonstrate the extent to which photographers and, even, anthropologists can inhabit and reimagine the forensic gaze. Narrating projects of recuperation through images certainly mobilizes photography's evidentiary potential, its ability to say this happened, this life was lived.[16] However, I would argue, photographers also move away from this purely evidentiary stance. In their investments and through their desires for exposure and justice, they sense and recognize other possibilities and registers. Like buildings, photographers are also sensors, bodies that experience and document absence being undone. In the photo essay form, images sequenced and placed on the page provide sensorial entry-points into the experience of witnessing moments of reappearance and recovery. They speak to how photographic practices are transformed from mere instances of documentation into defiant acts of contextualization, where intimate experiences with the violence of disappearance are made evident, not only through what they make visible, but also through what they make narratable, audible, palpable, and real. ❖



Forensic experts, volunteers, memory activists, and community members gather at the foot of mass graves. Looking on and over, peering in, gazing out, they hold vigil as human remains are uncovered, collected and removed. San Justo de la Vega, León - Summer 2012 and Monte de Estépar, Burgos -Summer 2014.

Forensic methods provides experts and memory activists with a view from above. This distanced perspective, often reserved for historians, makes it possible to see and understand the pervasive nature of Francoist violence. As one forensic team member once remarked, "Exhumations make evident that the Spanish earth is lined with mass graves." Photographs from exhumations in Urzante, Navarre — Summer 2011 and Monte de Estépar, Burgos — Summer 2014.

Endnotes

1. Keenan, Thomas & Eyal Weizman. 2012. *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of Forensic Aesthetics*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, p. 28.

2. Ibid.

3. Weizman, Eyal. 2014. "Introduction: Forensis." In *Forensis: Forensic Architecture*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, p. 1.

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5. Sekula, Alan. 1978. "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *Massachusetts Review*, 19, no. 4: 859-883. See also Sekula, Allan. 1986. "The Body and the Archive," *October*, 39, Winter: 3-64; Sekula Alan. 1993. "Photography and the Limits of National Identity," *Culturefront* 2, no. 3: 54-55.

6. Keenan, Thomas. 2014. ibid. p. 59. See also Sekula Alan. 1993. ibid.

7. Weizman, Eyal. 2011. *The Least of All Possible Evils: A Short History of Humanitarian Violence*. London/ New York: Verso Books, p. 109.

8. Élisabeth Anstett & Jean-Marc Dreyfus, 2015. "Introduction: Why Exhume? Why Identify." In *Human Remains and Identification. Mass Genocide, Violence and the 'Forensic Turn.'*, E. Anstett & Jean-Marc Dreyfus, eds. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 4.

9. Weizman, Eyal. 2011. ibid. p. 112.

10. Dziuban, Zuzanna. 2017. "Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field." In *Mapping the "Forensic Turn:" Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, ed. Zuzanna Dziuban. Viena: New Academic Press, p. 19.

11. Ibid., p. 26.

12. Taylor, Diana. 1997. *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War,"* p. 194.

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14. Douglas, Lee. 2021. "Seeing Like a Scientist: Subjunctive Forensics and Shared Ways of Seeing in the Spanish Forensic Archive. *Huarte de San Juan - Historia e Geografía*, no. 28: 143-165.

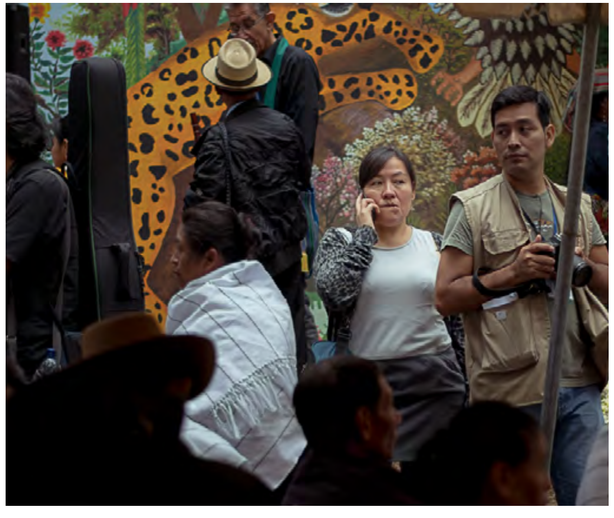
15. Weizman, Eyal. 2014. ibid. p. 5.

16. Barthes, Roland. 1980. *Camera Lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang.

THE FOREST WELCOMED OUR DEAD

ALEJANDRO M. FLORES AGUILAR

In the geopolitical context of the Cold War, Guatemala endured a 36-year civil war. It was fought between state military forces and a number of left-leaning revolutionary politico-military organizations. Beginning in the 1950s, State military forces, backed by the U.S.A., took over political power in the country.



Through the 1970s and early 1980s some insurgent organizations received considerable support from Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in both urban and rural places. Guatemala's military implemented a counter-subversive strategy in the 1980s which focused on the repression of populations that were considered to be potentially supportive of the guerrillas. This inaugurated terrible manifestations of state violence against Indigenous peoples, and ended in numerous massacres, forced disappearances and, eventually, a genocide.

From 1981 to 1989 a military detachment (*el Palabor*), settled in San Juan Comalapa. This village in the Department of Chimaltenango became a deathscape where more than 200 innocent men, women, and children were brutally murdered and clandestinely buried. Guatemala's counterinsurgency armed forces extinguished those suspected of potentially sympathizing with, or eventually supporting, the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP).

Three decades of deeply committed struggle, carried out by the National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) alongside the professional work of Guatemala's Forensic Anthropology Foundation, eventually offered some 'dignity' to the dead and 'closure' to victims and their families. The human remains of one hundred and seventy-two victims were exhumed and analyzed. Only a handful of them could be identified. The majority of the remains are nameless. They finally received a proper farewell on July 21, 2018 in a reburial ceremony.

This part of the forest has been transformed into a spiritual sanctuary covered with medicinal plants which have reclaimed the land. According to widows and activists, it is now watched over by non-human entities that returned to inhabit the mountain. "Hoy, este bosque da la bienvenida a nuestros muertos" ['Today, this forest welcomes our dead'], said Rosalind Tuyuc, CONAVIGUA's leader, during one of her most moving speeches.

Photo essay by Alejandro M. Flores Aguilar, 2018

Fig. 1 Alejandro Flores Aguilar, 2018

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SPACE OF DEATH

The text and images that follow are an edited selection of the conversations between anthropologist and photographer Alejandro Flores and members of the WwL Editorial Collective. Inspired by Alec Soth with Francesco Zanot's Ping Pong Conversations, the decision to publish in this format emerged from the realization that the editorial process created a potent space for discussing and working through the ethical and political implications of photographic practices that engage with political violence and the material traces left in its wake.

Lee Douglas & Craig Campbell

in conversation with Alejandro M. Flores Aguilar

We've read your unpublished essay "El retorno del espectro: Pensar fotográfico en el espacio de muerte" ("The return of the spectre: Photographic thinking in the space of death") and looked through your album "The forest welcomed our dead." The twenty-page essay features a single photograph while the album consists of fourteen images and a single page of text meant to contextualize the photos. Both reflect upon the official reburial ceremony of 172 men and women, adults and children, who were murdered by Guatemalan counterinsurgency forces in the 1980s.

We'd like to engage you in a conversation about your writing, photography, and more specifically, the reburial event and how you have been reflecting on the relationship between photography and violence. For us, this is an effort to triangulate different modes of participation, depiction, description, thought, and analysis. In particular, we are wondering about how some of your theoretical and political contributions are being made through the images themselves.

In your album there is only one photograph where your presence is revealed. By proxy our presence—the presence of the viewers—is revealed, too. In this picture (Fig. 1) two people look toward you or somewhere near you. By looking at the camera they acknowledge—more than any other picture in this series—the presence of a photographer. Impossibly we might even imagine that the figure wearing a hat in the distance is *you*, reflected in a mirror, holding hands at waist height, like the reflection of Velázquez that appears in his famous work, *Las Meninas* (Fig. 2). So reflecting on this moment where you are seen being seen and when we, the viewers, become implicated and complicit, we ask: Why photography? What does photography allow you to do that you could not achieve with the written word?

Fig. 2. Selection from Velázquez's Las Meninas

The analogy between my photograph and Velázquez's ***Las Meninas*** is fascinating. Of course, there is an important difference between the two images when we consider the place of seeing—the role of the gaze—in the painting and the photograph. Considering the relationship between violence and the economy of the "gaze" is fundamental here. In Velázquez's painting, the viewer ponders who looks back into the reflection; why and from what position does the seeing subject direct their gaze. In *Las Meninas*, it is as if the spectator is placed in a virtual space on one side of the mirror; this is a voyeurist gaze from one side of a Gesell chamber. The painting poses the question: What kind of visual exchange takes place in this specific image? What power relations are being reproduced? Does the gaze reproduce violence? We can surely re-visit Foucault's discussion of the spectator who views *Las Meninas* and how they occupy a blind spot within the field of observation. Foucault identifies how the person viewing the painting contributes to a kind of double invisibility and even bears some form of complicity. While Velázquez's painting does not capture a violent scene, Foucault's analysis draws our attention to the power dynamics implicit in the gaze.[1]

Perhaps, we can also explore the specific photographic event in its own complexity and context. Since some of the people in my photograph are looking directly at the camera, I would like to unpack an argument developed in the original essay that you previously mentioned. Specifically, I want to pause on the question of who is allowed to look back—to return the gaze—towards this kind of void, where State violence not only occurred, but also became monstrous and massive. Who dares to gaze into a *deathscape*?[2] Or towards a *space of death*? Building on anthropologist Michael Taussig's work,[3] this kind of gaze could mark the closure of possibilities for understanding not only violence but the world; the post-Hegelian dialectics between victimizers and victims, a place where hope surrenders to terror. It is also important to understand how built-spaces of death were designed by the state in order to foreclose the possibility of seeing—and thus to eliminate the possibility of remembering—the violence that the counterinsurgency was capable of committing against civilians, particularly members of the Indigenous Kakchiquel population, in this specific case, or Ixiles, in the case I have been studying over the last decade. The erasure of the gaze also means that the relatively new ability to look back at—to witness—the crimes against humanity committed by the Guatemalan State becomes fundamentally political, particularly when considering people's persistence in unearthing and making visible what was hidden from view. This has radical implications: the reconstruction of memory by reopening the possibility of remembering.

Here, I am thinking about the families of the missing and the social and forensic anthropologists who use photographs in multiple ways. For instance, both displaying portraits of missing kin or exhibiting ***in situ*** forensic photographs have powerful effects on people. Both of these things happened in the event portrayed in the abovementioned selection of images. So, what do these images and the practices associated with them do? First and foremost is the grief of the victims' kin. The portraits also reappear the missing, there in the very place, once again made visible, where they were forcibly disappeared. But also, when they are exhibited, forensic images allow us to see the systematic scientific work carried out in the process of disinterring those massacred. In other words, it can be revealed (here, I'm thinking in semiotic terms) that the act of photographing such a space of death has an indexical force in terms of justice and politics: something happened there, in that particular place. *This* place. The photographs point to the fact that this site is not only a place of death (like any other cemetery or burial plot), but also a crime scene: a place where the State committed terrible acts of violence against 'its own' people. At the same time, the photographs taken that day are proof of endurance, that life continued after years of violence and that the space of death has lost its power. So, photos allow both, to see the crime scene and to find the nuances regarding its intended effect on power.

This brings us back to the debates about photographs of "*desaparecidos.*"[4] I believe that the use of photography by the National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) and the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) disrupts and even subverts the power relationships that emerge in relation to the non-reciprocity of seeing, initially created by Guatemala's counterinsurgency. And I believe this is related to the idea that state-agents are trying to dodge criminal prosecution for human rights violations. It is also linked to a political stance that aims to perpetuate the non-reciprocity that is fundamental to such economies of seeing. However, and this is the second part of my hypothesis, that goal becomes impossible. Sooner or later the State, hopefully, will fail. After all, the state is ultimately a complex set of (what Derrida would call) aporias in which possibility is a contingency of the impossible. The public, victims' kin, and scientists will stubbornly try to look back. They will persist. And most likely, they will succeed. So, I would probably rephrase the question and ask what role photography plays in the context of forensic and social anthropology, especially in making the State's project of erasure (of invisibility) impossible. Why is it relevant (if it is at all) to reorganize and make impossible the non-reciprocal economy of seeing/gazing created in these spaces of death? In other words, how can anthropological uses of


Christian Vium, 2018

photography contribute to re-politicizing and countering the effects of power that originally emerged in this space of death, rather than functioning in complicity with State violence? Here, we could talk more about the role of *spectrality* in subverting this power relation, but perhaps we leave that for the following questions.

> **This is a fascinating discussion that allows us to start thinking more about that cluster of entangled things, ideas, and performances that we call evidence. Before we get to the question of "spectrality," we'd like to explore a few more of the ideas you have raised. Also, there is something here that is still unanswered. You give a strong explanation of how photography is mobilized by different activist organizations and forensic anthropologists to counter the State's attempts to enforce an invisibility of violence. Yet, we also wonder what your own photographs are doing. For us, they powerfully triangulate these different interests and contextualize them in relation to lived complexity (bodies, places, the world becoming). Is this also the pull of photography for you, or is there something else?**

The point is to understand not only how we think about photographs, but how we think through and with photographs: as you put it, *the complexity of the world becoming*. This first differentiation is important, because thinking about photographs—making photographs specific objects of study—is common in cultural and area studies. In those fields, photographs are manifestations of material culture and social phenomena in themselves—which is of course correct. However, I believe we're going in a different direction, because thinking through and with photographs is related to what visual ethnographers seek to achieve in our epistemic-ethnographic practice. We are researchers and photographers (videographers, or audiographers, etc.), and we create sensorial materialities that can be both research findings and research objects. For us, photographs are a means of expression and representation, a central part of our methodology, essential to our aesthetic-epistemic activity, and also our objects of study. I believe that this particular overlap is what provides fertility to the soil of our academic work. For instance, publishing a paper in an academic journal is not the same as producing a photo or film essay produced in collaboration with communities that are engaging in the creation of transdisciplinary methodologies and plural epistemologies, nor is it the same as exploring the politics of affects by creating soundscape installations with communities being affected by the implementation of aeronautic infrastructures (in this respect, Marina Peterson's work is fascinating).

Just to be clear, I do not intend to make value judgments or reinforce a hierarchy between registers, disciplines, and genres. I simply want to point out that what has been mobilized in sensorial ethnography (visual, in this case) is different from what mobilizes the analysis of cultural materiality as an object of study.

I make a heuristic distinction between at least three basic ways of using photography ethnographically which I call: *the supplementary, the performative, and the reflexive*. Supplementary photography is the most common in all types of social studies. It is rooted in practices that deploy photographs as pure illustration to supplement written texts. The second use, what I call the performative, is more complex, because it requires making photographs perform something, in ways similar to contemporary art practice. For instance, what our friend and colleague, Cristian Vium does. He uses photography to recreate visual installations of other photographic images produced decades before, thus creating ethnographic interventions in spaces where some form of colonial violence took place.


Fig. 4. Alejandro M. Flores Aguilar, 2018

This is something we have seen often in Guatemala, when artists, human rights activists and/or the *hijos* of the disappeared use photographs of their missing or murdered relatives to make *empapeladas* that cover public spaces and saturate voids of a blank wall with the presence of those who directly experienced the effects of State violence. Working with absence, the photographer Daniel Volpe has created a series of portraits that make visible those who are missing or were killed by the State during the war and that produce similar performative effects (see this: www.danielevolpe.com/?page_id=18). I believe that the exhibition of photographs organized by the Foundation of Forensic Anthropology for the reburial ceremony in the San Juan Comalapa clandestine cemetery also has this performative force. In fact, the whole installation was intended to disrupt the invisibility created by the Guatemalan State in an attempt to hide the crimes committed in this specific space of death. And here we see how the interaction of forensic anthropologists, human rights activists, and victims' kin is essential to producing that specific performative force.

Finally, I want to pause on the reflexive use of photography in ethnographic practice. This is more related to the way in which we both do and think through fieldwork with images; how we pose questions, produce ideas, and develop hypotheses *in situ*, when we are confronted face to face with sociocultural or political phenomena and visually interact with those assemblages of social diversity. This works in a similar way to written ethnographic practices, such as taking field notes. But photography (as well as the larger spectrum of sensorial methods) allows us to think beyond what written practices do. Doing visual ethnography can be—I want to believe—a way of thinking and un-worlding postcolonial spaces. Observing transcultural entanglements and sensorially understanding realities where power inequalities are extreme—which in cases like that of Guatemala, where the state exercised genocidal policies—is also a process of perceiving and understanding the angle of vision in which those inequalities are being countered by those *victimized*. This also contributes to developing communitarian strategies to visually think about and represent the nuances of those realities. This is at the heart of a long tradition of ethnographic practices that are fundamental to increasing the complexity of debates regarding the *contemporary* and to deepen notions of democracy and politics. If we can easily agree that ethnography is the method that "traditionally" belongs to the anthropological discipline, we should ask ourselves what specific role it has in this post-colonial, multinational, non-reciprocal exchange economy, more or less in the logic expressed in Mauss' *The Gift:* something that goes beyond common utilitarian ethics that flattens the meaning and complexities of social diversity under one specific ontological way of understanding, seeing, and depicting reality.

I suppose we can keep correlating "world" with "ontology," "epistemology" with "knowledge," "aesthetics" with "sensoriality," "ethics" with "practice," and "politics" with "power." This is why I find Rancière's notion of democracy so appealing, because his post-Althusserian notion regarding the disruption of the "police" intersects with ethics and aesthetics. The "police" are not only the agents that ideologically interpellate the subject with the call of authority . . . "Hey, you, there!" . . . but also the actors who have the power to partition the sensible. They are the ones that tell you: "Keep walking, there is nothing to see!" The whole point of doing transdisciplinary visual ethnography, in my opinion, is to understand plurality in those realms where the relation of aesthetics to democracy and ethics is transfigured. In order to explore the complexity of variables that are traversed by sociohistorical forces, resistances, and struggles, those variables must be visualized differently from those hegemonic depictions produced in dominant State-aesthetics: the State practices of producing fields of visibility-invisibility regarding its own use of violence. Epistemological writing cultures, such as academia, also participate in this process of visualization, especially when it is a commoditized industry, like in the United States, that over time tends to be more cryptic, highly specialized, frequently extractivist, and author-centered.

I argue that the State—at least the Guatemalan State in the post-counterinsurgent era—actively struggles to create a monistic point of view, a hypercharged trope that excludes other sensorialities that are fundamental to other forms of doing politics. Thus, one of the most relevant ethical roles of transdisciplinary collaborative visual ethnography (or the reflexive use of visual methods) is to comprehensively dispute the field of vision produced and sustained by dominant politics in order to broaden understandings of democracy.

Regarding these ways of understanding the use of sensorial-ethnographic practices, it is important to highlight that they appear contingently, depending on what is significant to the subjects in that specific moment in time and space and on how those nodes of significance intersect with the collaborative ethnographic project. For instance, I wrote a whole paper about this photograph (Fig. 4) because it expresses the interaction of these three heuristic movements and the deep relationships between families, human rights activists and the forensic anthropologists involved in exhumation projects. The specific photograph was exhibited and used as a performative intervention in a space of death. It is a photograph that reveals the end of a social relation, the social contract, marked by a State murder that has a particularly amplified indexical force because of the blindfold covering the eyes and the rope tying the hands of the victim. Those are both literal and metaphorical expressions of the significance of the spaces of death created by the counterinsurgency during the war and the process of counterinsurgency State formation that followed it. But people also


Alejandro M. Flores Aguilar, 2018

interacted with the photograph. The image played a function, allowing spectators to see a visual representation of the broader forensic narrative while also rebuilding the social by enabling other relations, thus making the goal of the State impossible: contemporary people can see into that formerly invisible space; their hands are not tied; the unearthed ground makes visible what was supposed to be unseen.

Summing up, I made a photograph *in situ* of this interaction as a visual note that transformed into a visual essay; it was a way of thinking about the sensorial phenomenality that was taking place and its political implications. It is, as I believe Kathleen Stewart would put it, a "brief composition of precarity... [a] register of the singularity of emergent phenomena,[5]" which is some kind of event that triggers unexpected forms of social relations, plurality, movement, and incommensurabilities.

> **Let us continue to explore the comparison between your photograph and Velasquez's *Las Meninas*. Together these images point our attention to the act of witnessing, which in the case of the photograph, is a delayed act of witnessing that occurs as a result of and in reaction to what forensic techniques and technologies make visible. Unearthing mass graves also unearths visual and material evidence of past crimes. As we have discussed throughout this exchange, this also brings us to the concept of 'dignity.' When acts of violence are secret or hidden from view, the act of exhuming mass graves publicly makes these events (re)witnessable. This is often discussed in relation to the restitution of dignity. It is by seeing and witnessing that crimes of the past become directly linked with individual human lives, rather than generic victims. In the Spanish context, forensic expert Francisco Etxeberria has often discussed the importance of exhumations and the restitution of remains as places where "carne y hueso" (flesh and bone) meet. For Etxeberria, the living give meaning to the material remains that are recovered. Forensic science uncovers and reveals, but it is the social worlds that are constituted in these rituals of return where meaning is given to lives lost. Capturing that moment, transforming it into a portrait, makes the event something that can be witnessed once again, in the future. It is the starting point for an alternative collective narrative. For us, this is key when we consider what is meant by the concept of dignity. Is dignity the constitution of a narrative that can be publicly enunciated and recognized? Why are forensic photographs so powerful in this public call for recognition? In line with these reflections, we are interested in how this concept of dignity is used in the Guatemalan context. What weight does this concept carry? What kinds of dignity are sought and what rituals are equipped to restore it? To what extent is this concept linked to the production of new forms of knowledge—new narratives—regarding the past? And, how is photography entangled in or extricated from the forms of recognition that emerge from mass grave exhumations? Does photography provide a unique mode of (re)witnessing? Does it make it possible to collectively narrate the violence of the past or even imagine alternative political futures?**

This is a complex question. I deeply admire the work of both forensic anthropologists and families of *desaparecidos*. The technologies and techniques that allow them to make visible what is supposed to remain concealed is part of the post-genocide political struggle. Like "dignification," other concepts also emerge when discussing this: reconciliation, peace, reparation, forgiveness. As Rosalina Tuyuc stated in a recent interview [https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/10/from-where-i-stand-rosalina-tuyuc-velasquez]: "Forgiveness still is far away from our reality."

From the project *Historia Ixil del Siglo XX*.
Flores Aguilar in collaboration with Ixil-University, 2016

She is one of the leading activists in Guatemala who has been working in the struggle to find *desaparecidos* for over four decades. Her father and her husband were forcibly disappeared in the 1980s. Tuyuc is one of the founders of the National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA), an organization that advocates for justice, peaceful resistance, and countering the genocidal violence that the State carried out against Mayan communities in Guatemala. One can hardly imagine the exhibition and event I photographed in San Juan Comalapa in July 2018 without the work of human rights activists like her.

Visual elements play multiple complex roles in political struggles that emerge in the aftermath of violence. I agree with Etxeberria, but would perhaps pull at a different thread. I think it's also important to consider the recomposition of the sensorial, which allows for and constitutes a broader practice of democracy. Given that both witnessing and re-witnessing belong to sensorial registers, a potential form of reconciliation in a country like Guatemala will take place when the regime of the sensible is restructured. Forms of making and doing politics have a long trajectory here and are already recognized on some level, but they also have been excluded from political institutions.

I think it is necessary to carry out a number of transdisciplinary studies to understand the relation of re-witnessing to politics and aesthetics. And with any transdisciplinary process, I think about the aesthetic-epistemic spaces that are not foreclosed exclusively by the conditions of possibility created in the "academic market," in which we are permanently pushed to work individualistically in order to make our academic careers. Conversely, it is a practice that builds upon long-term ethical engagements with local actors, who are not only "objects of study," but active subjects who produce knowledge and who transform social realities. That is precisely what is so fascinating in the kinds of relationships that families and human rights activists establish with some researchers, because they enact practices where the lines differentiating between doing research and making community are blurred.[6]

Let me tell you about my collaborative transdisciplinary work. In order to relocalize the place of enunciation, to focus on memory as it relates to life experiences and communities, the Ixil University has done a number of projects that visually engage with not only spaces of death but also spaces of politicization. These visual-epistemic experiences in the Ixil territory—or, at least the ones in which I had the opportunity to take part—can be divided into, at least, three moments: first, a photographic project carried out in 2015-2016 about 20th century history; second, a project about memory and politicization carried out in 2016 and; third, a video ethnography that started in 2020 and continues today with the support of the Wenner-Gren's Fejos Postdoctoral Fellowship in Ethnographic Film.

The 2015-2016 project was named *Historia Ixil del Siglo XX*. It focused on how the violence experienced by Ixil people started long before the beginning of the war in the 1970s. Ixiles started countering State violence more than forty years before the first act of armed propaganda committed by the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* in 1976, with the *ajusticiamiento* (execution) of *el tigre del Ixcan*, which is commonly seen as the event that inaugurated the armed conflict in Ixil territories.

The methodology was complex. Ixil researchers designed methods that were specific to both oral forms of producing and sharing knowledge unique to Ixil culture and more orthodox qualitative social science methods. In order to understand if the canonic periodization of history made any sense in their communitarian spaces, Ixil students/researchers asked community elders about how history is periodized by scholars and the State. Building upon that knowledge production practice, they developed more comprehensive perspectives regarding the place of violence in relation to the embodiment of memory. The research team[7] did this for more than seven months and then prepared a number of performative re-enactments in order to create a photographic series regarding 20th century Ixil History. Some examples can be seen below.

The research findings and the photographic re-enactments were finally exhibited and publicly displayed during five days of Mayan new year festivities (the short Mayan month) and the graduation day in Nebaj's municipal hall.[8] In doing so, researchers had the opportunity to explain to other members of the community how their transdisciplinary epistemological practice was carried out and how they developed community-based hermeneutics. It was very exciting to see these interactions and to observe how the use of photography could have an effect in discussing history and memory in such spaces, where memorials are usually petrified monuments or murals painted on walls.

The 2016 project[9] focused on oral history and the reconstruction of memory from the perspective of elder guerrilleros who had staged an armed revolt against private coffee-plantation, *finca* capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s, when Guatemala's counterinsurgent "scorched earth" policies were deployed. This transdisciplinary

From the exhibition for *Historia Ixil del Siglo XX*.
Daniel Perera, 2016

methodology focused on creating bridges of communication between conventional qualitative research methods—specifically related to oral history and memory—and communitarian epistemologies commonly practiced in Ixil territory that have been systematized by local intellectuals from Ixil University. The outcome of that experience was a book that included nineteen life stories authored by Ixil researchers. It is also the first publication edited by Ixil University.

The 2020 project *(see pg.22 of this magazine)* brought the book to the people that shared their life stories with our team in 2016. This book was made specifically for them; it was not intended to be shared publicly. Perhaps in the future, we will publish it for a broader audience. It is something we are still discussing. These decisions are part of a complex process that depends on a number of contingencies outside of our control (such as migratory processes, changing contact information, or even death). However, it has been very interesting and enriching in many ways.

This work is a point of departure, from which to continue this transdisciplinary research. With the contribution of my partner Lizeth Castañeda, my closest Ixil friend and colleague, Feliciana Herrera Ceto, and with the support of the Wenner-Gren Fejos Postdoctoral Fellowship in Ethnographic Film, we are currently working on a video-ethnography with former guerrilleros from Maya-Ixil territory. For this project we have also received the support of the *Alcaldía Indígena Ixil* (the ancestral indigenous authority) in Nebaj. This has been fundamental because it has allowed us to observe and be part of more complex sets of social and cultural relations within the Ixil community. The project has been hindered, though, by the pandemic, which has created delays and required us to design new filming strategies to ensure the health and wellbeing of participants.

This project is titled *Raised Gaze in Ixil Time: Towards a Minor History of War*. We are working towards two main outcomes: a multimedia archive and an ethnographic film-essay. The archive builds upon an already existing memory repertoire that includes video portraits of Ixiles that rose up in arms in the 1970s and 1980s and interviews with Ixil researchers that participated in the first phase of the project in 2016. The recorded narratives revolve around their motivations, experiences, the meanings produced in and through their memories. They explore how this community's social fabric was produced and reproduced during a time of internal conflict. In creating this archive, we seek to gain a more nuanced understanding of what happened during the war by trying to push beyond the (sometimes) oversimplified narratives regarding state violence and victimhood. We also hope to engage in the production and reproduction of sociopolitical agency within the reality of this Ixil community. The video archive also aims to support visual self-narrated/self-representation strategies in order to de-territorialize canonical historical discourses that tend to portray Ixiles as subjects lacking political capabilities. The objective here is to understand how people remember resisting and countering State violence and taking part in processes of political organization during the war.

The film-essay, on the other hand, focuses on narratives regarding the future and the social production of utopia from the perspective of former Ixil *guerrillas*: the imagination of a time beyond the traditional east-west political trope regarding economic development imaginaries that were contested during the Cold War. In other words, this part of the project explores how armed revolt also entailed disputes regarding the utopian horizons of expectation within the specific socio-cultural context of the Ixile community. This film-essay also highlights the participation of young Ixil intellectuals who took part in the first phase of this research project in 2015-16. Ultimately, it will explore how younger generations connect with those that participated in the war, and how this connection enables the production of alternative modes of understanding the relation of social practices and time.

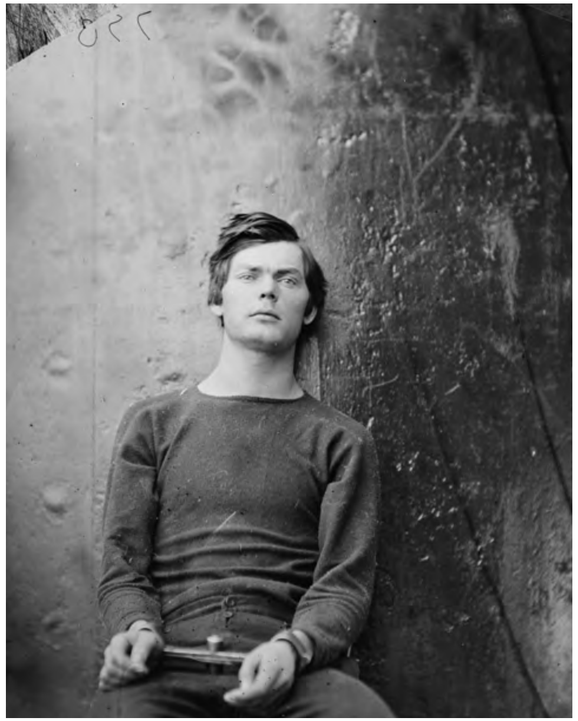
In short, I believe it is important to frame the processes of re-witnessing in relation to these transdisciplinary, collaborative, knowledge sharing experiences while also keeping two things in mind: 1) avoid focusing exclusively on the relationship between visual production and mass violence and; 2) develop a comprehensive approach capable of paying attention to what people remember and forget and how they embody and feel those processes. In other words, I think it important to consider how the production of knowledge is also the production of memory and how both are intersected with sensorial registers of politicization. Perhaps, in this line of work, the key is to understand what potentially triggers processes of healing that articulate with the collective narrative that you mentioned in the question. But I believe that healing overlaps with reconstructing memories of politicization, narratives regarding participation in the resistance before, during, and after the "big violence." It is fundamental to consider how different expressions of State violence were present before the emergence of counterinsurgency, and how resisting and countering that violence was an essential expression of individual and communitarian sovereignty.

To conclude, if we think about Velásquez as a point of reference, probably it is important to consider what initiates the dislocation of hegemonic points of view and the force of the gaze that looks back into the eye of State-power and violence. In other words, what kind of ethnography is needed to produce not only forensic images of the enormous crime scene that is Guatemala, but also all of these other visual narratives that seek to reconstruct the politicization of peoples directly affected by structural violence, war, and genocide? What kind of ethnography is needed to create visual narratives capable of overcoming the petrification of victimhood that happens in some analyses, in order to better approach the value of political sovereignty and the right of Indigenous peoples to counter colonial and postcolonial violence? I would propose that one central element in dignification, and also in healing, is a deeply rooted need for restoring the possibility of visualizing the violence exercised by the State and the fact that this violence has no justification. Politicization is a strong source of dignity. To heal, perhaps means to restore, to re-legitimize, the imaginary dependent upon the kind of dignity inherent to having been part of political processes intended to overcome structural oppression. In other words, to rebuild the possibility of a future.

Related to this previous question—this comparison between Velazquez's portrait and your own also brings our attention to the photographer, the person who creates, frames, and produces the image. This is something that you address throughout our exchange. We would be interested to hear more about how you envision your role in observing events like the one we have been discussing here. Are you observing as an anthropologist or an image-maker? Is this about observing and documenting or about narrating the event being photographed? Do your photographs capture or narrate? What meaning is being produced? And is it important for you to position yourself in these ways? Lee Douglas has often found this intersection between the anthropologist who observes and the photographer who photographs to be difficult to articulate, in part because there are very real ethical concerns that seem to come to the surface when photographs of recovered remains are used. She notes: "In my experience, after spending much time with forensic teams and victims' kin, I have become accustomed to seeing this type of horrific image. I am also sensitive to experts and families' desires to make these images public and the need to also balance these desires with real concerns about how these images circulate." Can you reflect on how you address these concerns, how they are articulated in the Guatemalan context, and what this means for anthropologists who integrate the production of images into their research practice?

It is difficult for me to make such a distinction that marks being an anthropologist as something different than being an image maker (a photographer and videographer). At least I don't see it very clearly in my ethnographic practice. I would, though, consider two perspectives to tackle such inquiry, particularly in relation to the question of ethics, which is related specifically to the philosophy of practice (and not mor-

Two sisters watch as the remains of their mother and four small siblings are exhumed. The sisters were present that day in August of 1982 when soldiers shot their loved ones, but they managed to escape. Nebaj, Guatemala.Johnathan Moller, 2000



Lewis Payne. Alexander Gardner, 1865

als in the more conservative perspective). On the one hand, I consider that a more relevant distinction revolves around what a photograph can do in a different set of social relations. What I mean is that photographs *are* social relations, they don't happen outside that reality. Therefore photographs both participate in power relations and they also depict relations of power. These two elements imply different questions regarding ethics. In other words, photographs are made, and they circulate in a specific context of time and space, and their significance, their meaning, is ethically emergent in relation to those contexts.

That is, I believe, the paradox that Roland Barthes finds in Alexander Gardner's portrait of Lewis Payne, when he states, in *Camera Lucida*, the well-known phrase: "He is dead and he is going to die…" Barthes discovers that Payne is alive in that portrait, but at the same time, that he is about to be executed. In that image he is both a man who is alive but also a man who died more than one hundred years ago. There are two expressions of ethics that are different and depend on two sets of social relations: the act of making a photograph and the act of killing with the "legitimacy" of the State. The question, on our side, is thus what ethics is implicit in seeing and making seen, the act of State violence.

That paradox can also be the double bind that makes photography spectral: Firstly, photography freezes the moment of past horror, which implies that it can make perceptible an act of violence. Secondly, photography allows you to develop self-awareness of time in relation to the set or power relations in which you participate and then to connect them to the forms of violence that the State exercises over people. And in that regard, I believe that the questions of depiction and narrative shouldn't be placed in a sort of Kantian categorical imperative discourse nor in a utilitarian ethics. While the Kantian categorical imperative would imply a universal ethical value, such as "killing is wrong," utilitarian ethics would make a calculation over what situation would harm fewer people (which is probably something behind the logic of counterinsurgency rationality).

Perhaps in most of these cases, ethics is relational and situational and depends upon how you deal with the complexity. Your work depends on how you socialize in the places and spaces where multiple forms of interaction are taking place and how well are you aware that your presence becomes immediately a part of those interactions. This is something I like from activist anthropology, because one point of departure is to examine the non-reciprocal pathways through which power and violence circulate. From that vastly problematic point of view, it poses the ethical questions situated in the politics of ethnography.[10] They invest time and work in understanding the ethical conundrums from a point of view that intends to destabilize the position of power that all anthropologists have, particularly in post-colonial, post-counterinsurgent re-

Manuel Godinez, el Autodefensor 1989-2015. Daniel Chauche, 2015

alities. And I believe this is something that matters not only to visual anthropologists, but to everyone.

To sum up, I would pose the questions a little differently: Why? With whom? For what purpose is it important to make images and to narrate something with them? And, particularly, how?

And here, for instance, I believe it is fundamental to see beyond the anthropological discipline. There are photographers who have done serious work in terms of what we could understand as the job of visual anthropologists and/or visual archivists. Just to mention two examples: 1) Jonathan Moller spent more than a decade with a 4x3 medium format camera working side by side with the *Comunidades de Población en Resistencia*. He accompanied the peace process and was also there for some of the first forensic excavations: https://www.jonathanmoller.org/guatemala-our-culture-our-resistance-1993-2001/

The other photographer I would mention here is Daniel Chauche, who has been making a historic record of visual expression in Guatemala since the 1970s with his medium format camera.

There is, of course, a big difference between these two photographers. Moller engaged directly in making photographs of the effects of war and counterinsurgent violence. Chauche's broader approach, through different projects, showed how the country appeared to him during his lifetime (that coincided also with the counterinsurgency war). So, these two examples, I believe, embody a robust way of understanding the role of ethics (as something different from morals) in terms of a philosophy of practice. And this ethics is very old-school, if you want, because it is something that contemporary photographers and even many anthropologists tend to do less and less: I mean, spending a decade or a lifetime on a specific project, or a portfolio of visual projects, doing it systematically and consistently. Who does that nowadays? I fear that the practical guide to contemporary photography is more directed towards the acceleration of the possibilities of taking photos and to circulate them as quickly as possible. There is an ethical implication in Ansel Adams' idea of distinguishing between the act of taking photos and making photographs. In order to make a photograph you get involved in the complexity of social and political realities you are portraying. When you take a photo, you do something else.

Here the link to the short film I made about Chauche's documentary style, in case you want to see it: https://www.extra-urbano.com/pile_portfolio/chauche-y-el-autodefensor/

In earlier conversations, you asked rhetorically, "What role does photography play in the context of forensic and social anthropology, especially in making the aim of the State impossible?" This is in line with the hope often associated with photography in its evidentiary force. Yet we might also ask in what ways photography supports the aims of the State. Here we're thinking about what often gets called propaganda: carefully scripted visual language originating with institutions of power. There is an aspiration that the kind of making visible you explore will achieve a destabilization of the State (or at least its efforts to obscure its own obscene acts of violence towards its citizens).

Here we could think about photographs in terms of Walter Benjamin's characterization of fascism as the aestheticization of politics, which is something carefully explored by scholars that study Nazi Germany and their propaganda machine. I believe cinema has a fundamental spot in this too. I would prefer, however, to enter into a different territory here.

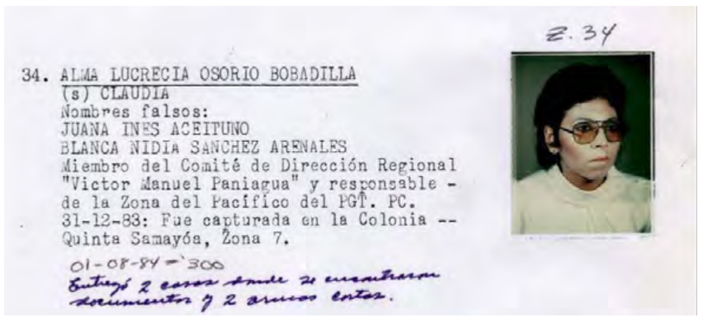
On the one hand, in Guatemala, there are examples of state propaganda that was used during the counterinsurgent war, but I'm not sure if photography was the primary visual register used for that intention. What I have studied, for instance, is the propagandistic use of drawings in order to depict the Other, the enemy, as a dehumanized and demonic monster that threatened the nation by infiltrating local communities. Here are some examples from the collections of a well known human rights activist in Guatemala (*following page*).

You can see how these visual representations reproduced not only the Schmittian friend-enemy binary, but also the idea of politicization as something that came with a process of dehumanization. The guerrilleros depicted in these propaganda flyers are part human, part animal and are juxtaposed to the fully human image of Christ and the civil patrols (*patrulleros*) recruited by the military to 'protect' the community. I understand that this kind of propaganda analysis is lacking in the case of Guatemala. Analyzing the state's use of propaganda images could be really helpful to understand the reproduction of hegemony in relation to the reproduction of cultural forms.

On the other hand, beginning in the second half of the 20th century, the state relied increasingly on the use of photographs to control and surveil civilians. Such uses of the photograph can be divided into at least two main categories: The first was related to those who were controlled and stigmatized through the labels of "deviant" and "criminal." The second was related to those who were considered subversive and who were politically repressed, disappeared, and killed by the State.

In relation to the first category, Jose Manuel Mayorga, a photographer and visual artist, provides an excellent example. In 2013 he exhibited in Antigua, Guatemala a series of high-contrast ID or, police booking photographs recovered from the National

A community health promoter examines an infant in the clinic. Communities of Population in Resistance of the Sierra, Quiché, Guatemala. Johnathan Moller, 1993



Top image from Personal collection of Flores Aguilar.
Bottom image from National Security Archive.

Lizeth Castañeda, 2020

Police Archive in a collection he named "Encarnación, selección de los registros de ménades y otras fuentes del Archivo de la Policía Nacional".[11] He also published a book with the same name, containing short essays and images from this collection. Regarding our conversation on ethics, it is important to highlight that Mayorga's intervention revolves around a technique of exaggerating the contrast of the photos, so that some level of anonymity can be achieved. His work leads us to understand how photographs were used by the State to keep control over "legal" and "illegal" sex workers. In the first case, it was done in a registry called *el registro de menades*.[12] *El registro de menades* was a form of control over these women, exercised by the State in *cervecerías, cantinas,* and *bares*. These businesses had records of each woman "employed" containing information regarding their names, age, place of birth, everything related to their identity and their sexual health.

Mayorga also showed in the exhibition that there was another album/register titled *el registro de delincuentes* (registry of delinquents), which contained photos of clandestine sex workers, that were independent from *bares, cantinas* and *cervecerías*. In the first case, even though the registration was "voluntary," it allowed the State to keep sanitary control over these women. Yet, it also gave them some limited sort of legal recognition. Whereas in the second case, to be clandestine was to be identified as a delinquent, an even more vulnerable situation. I consider it important to point out two aspects here. Versions of *el registro de ménades* were also practiced in Mexico and in France. We could think in terms of Foucault's philosophy of the visual, and propose that this was entrenched with the logic of the panopticon. In other words, we can return here to the conversation we had above regarding non-reciprocity in the economy of seeing in relation to State-power.

Further, it is possible to juxtapose the aforementioned registers with other practices in which the State used photographs as paths to enforce itself and commit acts of violence. For instance, to keep records of the people that its repressive apparatuses would disappear. Such is the case of the *Diario Militar*, which in 1999 was given to a researcher from the National Security Archive, and is quintessential to understand how the State used ID photos in processes of political repression. This document had detailed information about political activists, including names, place of detention, pseudonyms, and photographs that were torn from their *cedulas de vecindad* (Guatemala's national ID registry).[13]

The screenshot above is from one of the records of *el diario militar*.[14] The register includes the woman's name, her supposed pseudonyms, to which organization she belonged, where she was captured and (probably after being tortured) what information she gave: *entregó dos casas donde se encontraban documentos y dos armas cortas*. You can even see the date and the code indicating that this person was killed: 01-08-84=300 (the number"300" means that the person was murdered.)[15] This dossier is a unique document—most State information regarding extrajudicial executions and disappearances has been destroyed or hidden—it helps to understand how ID photos were used as systematized records of people being repressed in the 1980s. The photographs, relocated into police files, index the violence of forcible disappearance, including torture.

"The death squad dossier, smuggled out of Guatemalan military intelligence files in 1999, is the only known document of its kind, revealing the fate of scores of Guatemalan citizens who were 'disappeared' by the army during the mid-1980s. The military logbook is now the focus of collective legal action being brought by more than a dozen of the families of victims before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights." (K. Doyle)[16]

It is important to continue exploring the hypothesis regarding the non-reciprocity of seeing during the war; the role played by the blindfold—literal and metaphorical—in the practices of State violence. A dear colleague and friend, Manolo Vela-Castañeda, has done extensive research on State violence and clandestine centers of detention. Some days ago he came to eat at my home, and I showed him some photographs of the San Juan Comalapa reburial ceremony. After some moments contemplating each one of the photos, he described to me how the procedure of disappearing began not only with the kidnapping, but also with the covering the of the subject's head with a paper bag, a *capucha* (fabric hood) or a newspaper blindfold, so that he or she could not see anything, even when he or she was executed.

In other words, when the State blinded the *desaparecido* something complex was taking place: it was very likely the beginning of torture, but it was also the beginning of the execution: not allowing the subject to see was central in the practice of State violence. Some survivors have told Vela-Castañeda how sometimes the blindfold shifted a little and allowed them to see some shadows and abstract forms reflected in the floor or a wall, and how that allowed them to develop a minimalistic and horrific sense of place that otherwise was visually mutilated.

And here we return again to the idea of how the State's efforts towards concealment can eventually fail and to think about how some of these ID photos are being used today to *empapelar* [cover] public spaces as forms of action carried out by human rights activists.

Lucila, (1966) GT PN 18 DSC CUI: T 3339438

Alicia, (1989) GT PN 49 DSC CUI:T 742337

From the series *Encarnación Selección de los Registros de Ménades y otras fuentes del Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional.* Jose Manuel Mayorga, 2012.

The section about ID photography is fascinating, and here we would respond by also touching upon a similar phenomenon in Latin America's Southern Cone. As Diana Taylor has noted, during the military dictatorship in Argentina, mothers of desaparecidos used state-issued ID photographs to contest the Junta's public declarations that victims had simply disappeared, vanished from thin air. These identity card portraits were undeniable proof that real-life individuals had in fact been rendered absent. Mobilizing behind these photographs, mothers demanded that their children be recognized as missing persons. Their acts made absence present. The forensic photograph, however, is evidence of a crime committed; it confirms death. In some contexts, like in Argentina, this has been interpreted by some[17] as something that can potentially de-politicize the search for the disappeared. In others, like that of Spain, it is the forensic photograph that proves the very crimes being denied.[18] What role have these different types or genres of photography played in Guatemalan memory politics? What are the expectations around what these photographs can do? Does this articulate with a larger culture of secrecy regarding the counter-insurgency and what the state allows and prohibits from being seen and said?

The concept of "repertoire" that Diana Taylor coins in *The Archive and the Repertoire* is paramount to understanding the practices of reconstructing memory in different moments and cases. On the one hand, we have the archive, which contains an organized and somehow disciplined form of storing documents, photographs, maps, and cultural materials within a specific rationality. On the other hand, the repertoire has this performative force in which memory is embodied in modes of remembering and eventually reenacting history.

I believe we have plenty of examples that demonstrate how rich the memory repertoire is, from Guatemala to Chile or Argentina. But the key here is to understand the performative role of these repertoires in the sense that they express embodied memories and the collective process of creating and transmitting not only knowledge, but also affects that are contingent upon concrete political demands and actions. We have a twofold conversation here: on the one hand, the point of view of the long-term systemic historic violence that has moments in which it increases in magnitude and intensity and becomes genocide (which is the case of Guatemala).

On the other hand, the different expressions of countering those forms of violence in the performative practices of those affected by it. What tools are communities using to embody memory in order to create this repertoire of cultural forms and practices that will allow them to remember and also to forget the violence of the State? Here I follow the psychoanalytic tradition in terms of understanding memory not only as a practice of remembering, but also of sublimation and oblivion. This is why, for instance, the histories we develop at the Ixil University aim to work with the memory of resistance, insurrection, and politicization (and not only of victimhood). One of the goals of genocidal violence is to sublimate the possibility of representing and developing performative rituals that remember sovereignty and political autonomy. This is done by such regimes in order to produce a social mistrust to past and future processes of politicization. One of the qualms that we have encountered in these transdisciplinary projects with Ixil intellectuals is that some communities have embraced the politicization and the "justification" of State violence. In other words, it has been normalized that politics justifies repression and even genocide.

Fortunately, that is not the complete picture. As described above, in the Ixil region they have produced their own repertoire of memorial artifacts and performances such as the commemoration of *el día de la dignidad del pueblo Ixil*, which memorializes a massacre committed in 1936 against six *B'oq'ol Q'esal Tenam* (Ixil ancestral authorities) who defied the abuses associated with the coffee-plantations' *finca* capitalism and the State supporting it. In contrast, if you see the trends of canonic discourse regarding the beginning of the war, most academics and even the State trace it in the midst of the 1970s, with the first armed propaganda actions carried out in Chajul by the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and frame it in relation to the Cold War and the rise of the counterinsurgent State. But in that particular context, counterinsurgency was a prolongation of violence that was inaugurated a long time ago in the Ixil region; this is something that Ixiles have struggled against since long before the 1970s. From the perspective of local Ixil ancestral authorities and intellectuals, there was a non-declared war going on in the region since late 19th century, with the establishment of coffee plantation capitalism and, particularly, since the massacre of 1936.

The embodiment of memory or, "the repertoire" in Taylor's terms, is complex and depends upon each reality. In the case of Ixiles, they have created their own forms of embodying memory, without the taking part of any *mux* or *kaxlan* (settler and/or foreigner). For instance, some of my Indigenous colleagues at the Ixil university carried out a performance in 2017 to remember that massacre, but also recreated dances such as the Chavela Ju, which is a performance of how Ixiles have defied colonial and *finca* State power. Some of the visual collaborations we have done in this regard revolve around the production of those other aspects of the Ixil repertoire, as a form of practical memory, which already involves a practice of action, a form of ethics.[19]

Photography has a special place in the production of the embodied repertoire of memory, but we must also try to make an effort to also see beyond its literal, indexical function, in order to understand the process of politicization which is more complex and broader than what the conventional field of vision of human rights allows to see. ❖

Lizeth Castañeda, 2020

Alejandro M. Flores Aguilar, 2018

Endnotes

1. Foucault, Michel. 2007. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* Repr. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge.

2. I recommend consulting the Argentinean project of *paisajes de la memoria, carried out by the Comisión Provisional de la Memoria:* ***https://www.comisionporlamemoria.org/investigacion/paisajes-de-la-memoria/el-proyecto/***. Also how spaces of death become spaces of memorialization. See: Sidaway, J.D. (2010). *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembrance* (A. Maddrell, Ed.) (1st ed.). Routledge.

3. "The space of death is preeminently a space of transformation:through the experience of death, life; through fear, loss of self and conformity to a new reality; or through evil, good." In: Taussig, M. (1984). Culture of Terror—Space of Death. Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26(3), 467-497. Retrieved March 30, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/178552

4. As Jelin puts it: "La fotografía actúa al revés de lo que usualmente se piensa: más que para mostrar presencias, se convierte en una herramienta que exhuma una ausencia violenta y la llena de un nuevo significado esperanzador, como las composiciones intergeneracionales, o el linaje visto a través de una hija de desaparecidos, ahora embarazada." Jelin, E. Las tramas del tiempo.Familia, género, memorias, derechos y movimientos sociales. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2020.

5. Stewart, Kathleen. 2015. «Chapter 12: Precarity's Forms». In *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology*, 221-27. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. P. 221

6. Some examples include the work of Ana María Cofiño, regarding sentiments experienced by relatives during the exhumation in San Juan Comalapa. Cofiño A. "A flor de piel Aproximación etnográfica a los sentimientos de las mujeres kaqchikeles en la exhumación de San Juan Comalapa, Chimaltenango, 2003-2005", Tesis de Licenciatura en antropología, Universidad de San Carlos en Guatemala, 2007. Or the work of Alison Crosby and M. Brinton Lykes, who consider reparation and female *protagonismo* in the aftermath of genocide A. Crosby, M. Brinton "Más allá de la reparación: Protagonismo de las mujeres mayas en las secuelas del daño genocida", Cholsamaj, Guatemala. Lykes has also worked in collaboration with victims and relatives of the missing in the Ixil region on the photography book *Voices and Images: mayan Ixil Women of Chajul*.

7. The Ixil researchers that took part of this project are: Pablo Ceto (U-Ixil's rector) Elías Solís, Feliciana Herrera Ceto, Cristina Solís, Vicente Raymundo, María Terraza, Gerónimo Sánchez Cedillo, Pedro Raymundo, Agusto Samuel Raymundo Cedillo Juan Luis, Kala's Ceto, Gaspar Cobo Corío, Diego, Pedro Cedillo Raymundo y Miguel Jacinto Raymundo, Elena Brito Herrera, Santa Roselia de León Calel.

8. All photos are available here: https://www.extra-urbano.com/pile_portfolio/historia-ixil-siglo-xx

9. The Ixil researchers that took part of this project are: Pablo Ceto (U-Ixil's rector), Juana Ordoñez Cruz, Miguel Pérez Torres, María Terraza, Gerónimo Sánchez Cedillo, Vicente Jacinto Raymundo, Augusto Samuel Raymundo Cedillo, Miguel Enrique Jacinto Raymundo, Santa Roselia de León Calel, Magdalena Terraza Brito, Martina Terraza Brito, Manuela Canay, Petronila Puente Sánchez, Rosa Mendoza Caba, Gaspar Cobo Corío, Diego De Paz Brito, Domingo Daniel Cedillo Cobo, Juana Herrera, Juan Carlos Terraza, Feliciana Herrera Ceto, Pedro Raymundo Cedillo, Juana Córdova Toma, María Toma Toma, Juan Luis de la Cruz, Rosa Ramírez Chávez.

10. Hale, Charles R., ed. 2008. *Engaging contradictions: theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship*. Global, area, and international archive. Berkeley: University of California Press.

11. This Police Archive, and its photographic register, was lost for many years and rediscovered by accident in 2006. It contains registers from the late 19th to the late 20th centuries. Today, there is an ongoing dispute between different organizations, scholars and the State, which has retaken control over it. This something that makes it vulnerable because this archive has also been a source of information to carry out investigations for cases of transitional justice in Guatemala, has been a primary source for people that still are trying to find their missing relatives, and a resource for scholarly research. In order to prevent this contingency, the University of Texas at Austin made some years ago partial reproduction of the archive with more than ten million scanned documents that can be consulted here: https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/es

12. I suppose the name is inspired in the mythological greek female characters directly related to the god Dionisio and it can also be somehow related the the word meninas, which is already something very interesting for the first reference of the reflection

13. Just a few weeks before we finished this conversation a case was opened in Guatemala's courts that is based on the evidence analysed in *el diario militar.*

14. This was analyzed by Sonya Perkic some time ago: Perkic-Krempl S. (2017) El Diario Militar: Caso de desaparición forzada de Alma Lucrecia Orozco Bobadilla.

15. Dirección de Archivos de la Paz. 2011. La Autenticidad del Diario Militar, a la luz de los documentos históricos de la Policía Nacional. Guatemala, GT: Secretaría de la Paz, Presidencia de la República.

16. Found in: https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//guatemala/logbook/index.htm

17. This issue is discussed in Adam Rosenblatt's book ***Digging for the Disappeared***.

18. Cf. Douglas, Lee. "Seeing Like a Scientist: Subjunctive Forensics and Shared Ways of Seeing in the Spanish Forensic Archive." *Huarte De San Juan. Geografía E Historia* 28 (2021). PDF Download.

19. Here are some examples: https://www.extra-urbano.com/pile_portfolio/chabela-ju/

PHOTOGRAPHING FORENSICS

The Poetics & Politics of Spanish Exhumations

Clemente Bernad & Álvaro Minguito
Introduction by Lee Douglas

In September 2000, Spanish journalist Emilio Silva published "My Grandfather is also a *Desaparecido*"[1] in the local newspaper *La Crónica de León*. In the article Silva publicly narrated an intimate personal history that had only been recounted via hushed family whispers during the six decades that followed his grandfather's disappearance. Silva's op-ed offered a scathing critique of Spain's collective celebration of Augusto Pinochet's detainment in London. Why, Silva asked, could Spain address the human rights abuses committed in Chile, but not address those committed under Spanish dictator Francisco Franco? By describing his grandfather's death as an act of disappearance, Silva imported a new category of victimhood that had previously been reserved for describing acts of violence elsewhere. Most importantly, he questioned the collective institutional silence that had held a tight grip on Spanish society both during and after Francisco Franco's long reign.

By reframing victims' deaths as a kind of disappearance, Silva also reframed what had previously been described as inter-community, war-time violence as part and parcel of a broader strategy of intentional, strategic bodily erasure. By extension, he cracked open public debate regarding the long-silenced histories of those who had been persecuted and killed for their political allegiances, family ties, or social class. What had once been a "public secret" was now demanding collective recognition.[2] The following month, forensic experts uncovered the remains of Silva's grandfather and twelve other men who had been accused of leftist inclinations. His grandfather's crime: advocating for public secular education for local children. The exhumation, unrecognized by Spanish law, gave way to a vibrant social movement that would reconfigure the weight of Spain's dark past in the present to make possible collective reimaginings of alternative political futures. Highly complex and, at times, heterogenous, the Spanish historical memory movement achieves this by mobilizing forensic methods to unearth, both literally and narratively, evidence of Francoist violence.

The following photo essay showcases the work of two Spanish photographers, Álvaro Minguito and Clemente Bernad, who have documented the exhumations that have been carried out in Spain since 2000. Due to contemporary interpretations of Spain's 1977 Amnesty Law, which bars official institutions and courts of law from recognizing the crimes that produced Spain's mass graves as such, these events exist at the unruly edges of legal procedure. Over the course of more than two decades, forensic teams made up of highly trained experts and committed volunteers have developed strict protocols for how to carry out this work. However, the investigations themselves are not recognized by judges or courts of law. In this context, photography plays a central role. Photographs, like those by Minguito and Bernad, document these investigations. They record the unrepeatable act of making visible the physical traces of violent crimes. They are also evidence of unrecognized, unnarrated events. Perhaps, most importantly, the production and circulation of these unsettling images play an important role in making public what has been hushed and kept silent. In doing so, they provide small windows into the complex ways in which histories of violence are reconstructed and narrated in contemporary Spain.

In my own work with forensic experts and image-makers, I argue that exhumations are part and parcel of a "subjunctive science" in which forensic techniques and technologies are deployed to uncover and circulate irrefutable evidence of fascist violence and its everyday effects on public opinion in Spain. Circulated "as if" they were evidence submissible to courts of law, forensic photographs—like human remains—are evidence of crimes. They are also something else. Their epistemic flexibility, their ability to fluctuate between the poetic and the political, between the sensorial and the evidentiary, situate these images at a place where evidence and narrative intersect.

The following photo essay is a collaborative endeavor, in which Minguito and Bernad, unpack the complexities of photographing unearthed remains. Like many image-makers, they do this through the images that they juxtapose and the questions they pose. The resulting photo essay does not propose concrete answers, but rather reflects on the role that images play in denouncing violence, the ethics of circulating photographs of human remains, and the narrative potential of images that make visible that which is denied. Images, captions, and a series of keywords point to public debate about the role of forensic photography and human remains in the struggle to recognize these crimes. They evidence and show. They narrate. They also interrogate. They reveal new possibilities and forms of engagement, where images of the dead and the collective investigations that animate them are a point of departure for other forms of political recognition. ❖

This collaborative photo essay is the product of conversations between photographers Clemente Bernad, Álvaro Minguito, and Lee Douglas. The image on the left is the proposed layout created in this process. While the images begin as digital photographs, their design was borne through touching, moving, and placing images on the page. It is through these interactions and image-driven conversations, that we reflected on the role that images have in mediating alternative forms of knowledge in Spain.

Endnotes

1. Silva, Emilio. 2000. "Mi abuelo también fue un desaparecido". Published in *La Crónica de León* on October 8, 2000. *Desaparecido* means disappeared or disappeared person. Prior to 2000, it was used to refer to individuals who were sequestered and killed by military dictatorships in Latin America. The word references disappearance as a strategic form of political violence, whereby victims' bodies vanish, thus eliminating the possibility of burying the dead.

2. See Taussig, Michael. 1999. *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

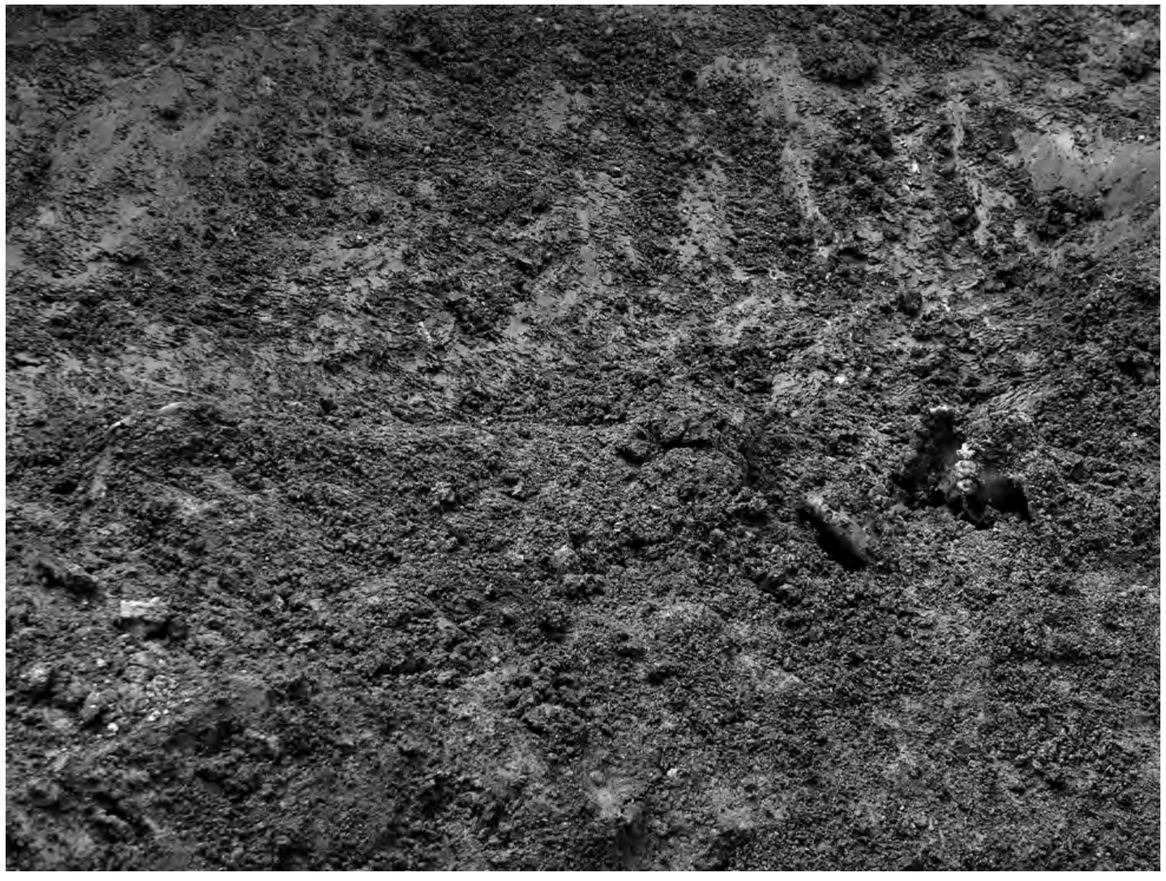
evidence; explanation; narrating facts

Human remains recovered at multiple exhumation sites. Since 2000, human remains have been collected and stored at a lab started by physical anthropologist Luis Ríos at the Autonomous University in Madrid. The remains, once identified, will be returned to surviving relatives. March 28, 2011.

Santa Inés, Burgos, 2006. Ceremony during which exhumed remains are returned to victims' kin in Covarrubias, Burgos. In the image, forensic expert Francisco Exteberria presents a technical report that details the exhumation process and the scientific analysis of recovered remains.

objects; the materiality of memory and recuperation

Valentín Villanueva's niece holds a photograph of her uncle, whose remains were recovered from the Valdenoceda Cemetery in Burgos and later identified. Photographs are often the only objects with which to remember and know those who were killed. April 16, 2016.



Berlangas de Roa, Burgos, 2004. Exhumation of remains belonging to 5 residents from Haza, Burgos, including the town's mayor, who were detained and assassinated in August of 1936.

territory;

landscape; a landscape full of mass graves

More than 75 years after their murder, the bodies of 13 victims were recovered in a common grave located at the foot of a highway in La Mazorra in Burgos. Victims, who were granted no trial, were executed with their hands tied behind their backs. Their crime: refusing to support General Francisco Franco's fascist coup. Residents' oral testimonies played an essential role in locating the mass grave. May 6, 2011.

Ameyugo, Burgos, 2005. Victims' kin and residents during the localization of a mass grave located near kilometer number 306 on the old N-1 Highway. The mass grave was never found.

forensic labor outside the norm;

Loma de Montija, Burgos, 2011. An exhumation of the remains belonging to 24 individuals assassinated and buried in a mass grave in November 1936. More than half of the skeletons had their hands tied behind their backs.

lack of protocols; unruly edges of the law

Under heavy rain, physical anthropologist Luis Ríos, member of the Aranzadi Science Society's forensic team, visits a site where remains from a mass grave were recovered 3 years prior. April 11, 2014.

acts of recuperation;

Under the gaze of neighbors and relatives, student volunteers uncover the remains of 24 individuals who fell victim to nationalist violence during the Spanish Civil War in Estépar, Burgos. April 3, 2015.

ethics; cranium

Villamayor de los Montes, Burgos, 2004. Exhumation of 46 individuals imprisoned in the Provincial Prison of Burgos on September 24, 1936. They were later assassinated and buried in the areas surrounding the highway to Madrid.

Fustiñana (Navarra), 2005. Mass grave from which 7 residents of Murchante, Navarra were exhumed. The victims were assassinated on November 20, 1936. In the photograph, members of the forensic team situate their bodies in the exact positions in which the bodies were found.

The body of a Spanish Republic loyalist is uncovered during an exhumation. The victim was buried in his military uniform, unique to the Cyclist's Battalion, after refusing to support the fascist coup d'état in July 1936. Palencia, Castille and León, October 8, 2011.

the past in the present;

making the hidden visible...

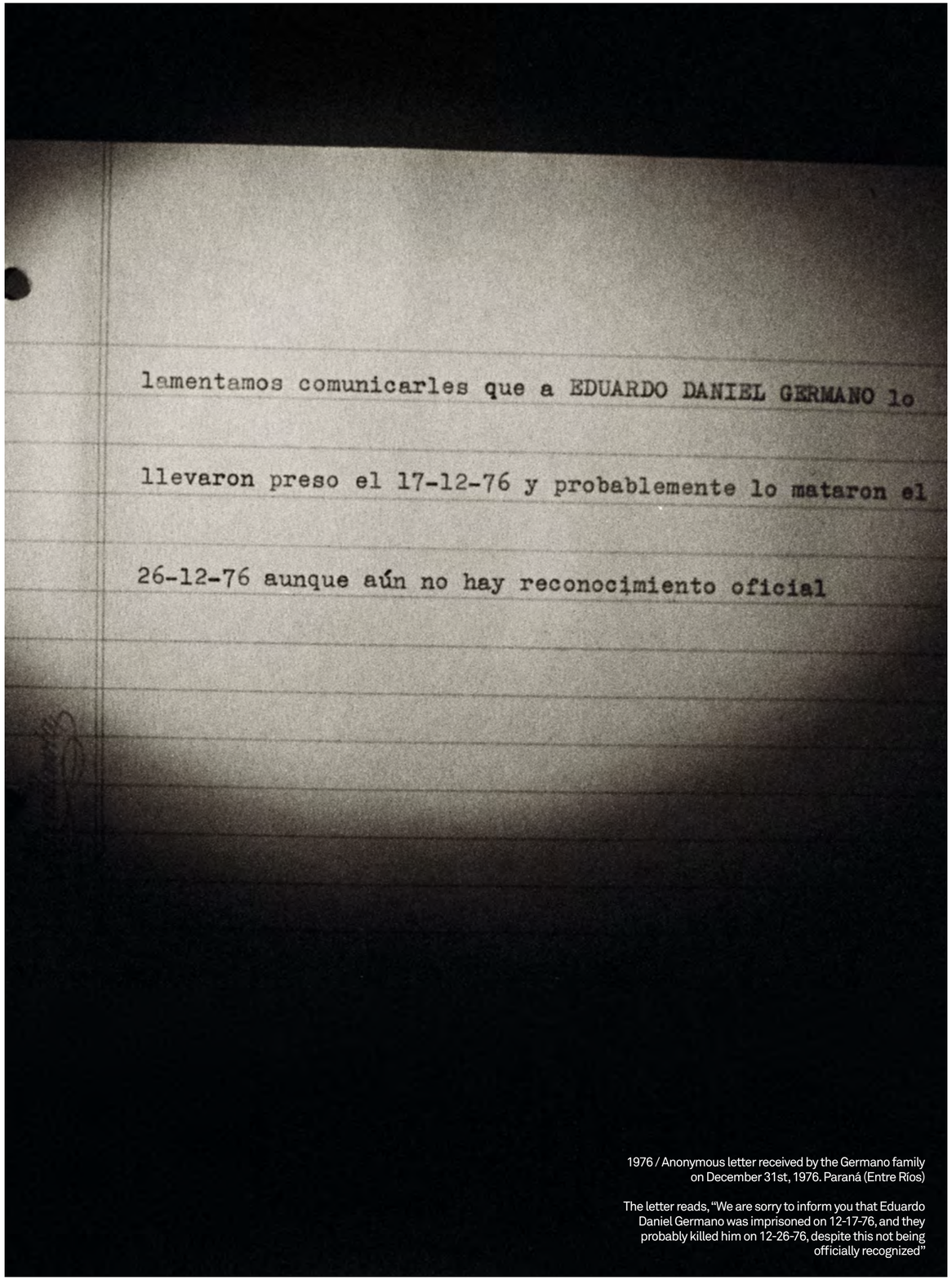
Villamayor de los Montes (Burgos), 2004. Exhumation of 46 individuals imprisoned in the Provincial Prison of Burgos on September 24, 1936. In the photograph, a wedding ring appears on a victim's finger.

Victims' kin stand at the foot of a grave on a rainy day, waiting to give data and DNA samples to forensic specialists. This information will be compared with the biological and physical data connected to recovered remains. La Mazorra, Burgos, May 7, 2011.

CONTRADESAPARECIDO

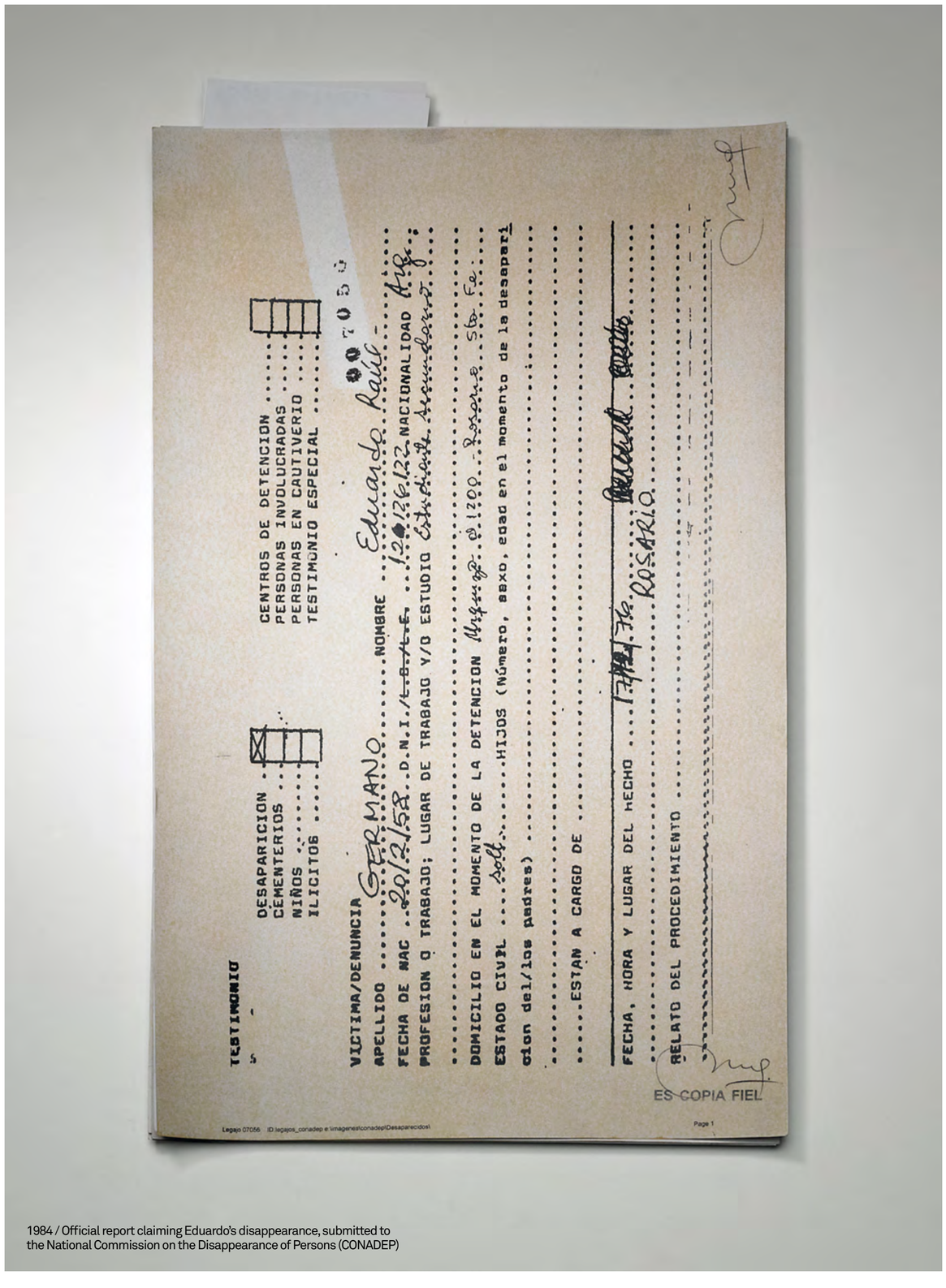
1960 / Eduardo Raúl Germano,
at two years old, in Villaguay (Entre Ríos)

1975 / Eduardo Raúl Germano with his friends and comrades in the canteen of the La Salle School. Paraná (Entre Ríos)



1976 / Anonymous letter received by the Germano family on December 31st, 1976. Paraná (Entre Ríos)

The letter reads, "We are sorry to inform you that Eduardo Daniel Germano was imprisoned on 12-17-76, and they probably killed him on 12-26-76, despite this not being officially recognized"



TESTIMONIO

DESAPARICION
CEMENTERIOS
NIÑOS
ILICITOS

VICTIMA/DENUNCIA GERMANO Eduardo Raúl

APELLIDO ..... NOMBRE .....

FECHA DE NAC 20/2/58 D.N.I. 12.136.122 NACIONALIDAD Arg.

PROFESION O TRABAJO; LUGAR DE TRABAJO Y/O ESTUDIO Estudiante Secundario

DOMICILIO EN EL MOMENTO DE LA DETENCION Mitre 9?? Rosario

ESTADO CIVIL Soltero HIJOS (Número, sexo, edad en el momento de la desapari

ción del/los padres)

.....ESTAN A CARGO DE .....

FECHA, HORA Y LUGAR DEL HECHO 17/12/76 Rosario

RELATO DEL PROCEDIMIENTO

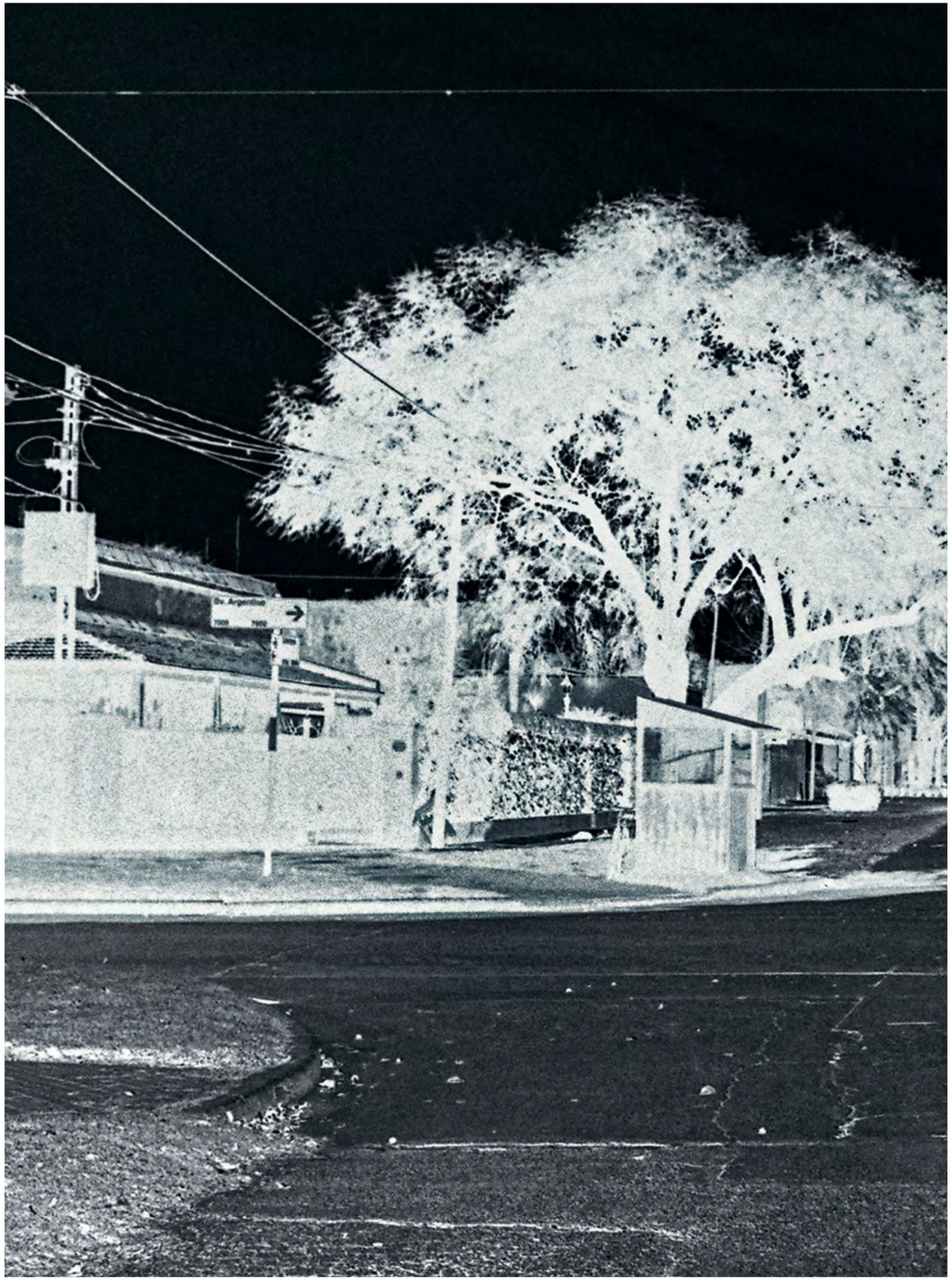
ES COPIA FIEL

Legajo 07056 ID legajos_conadep e:\imagenes\conadep\Desaparecidos\

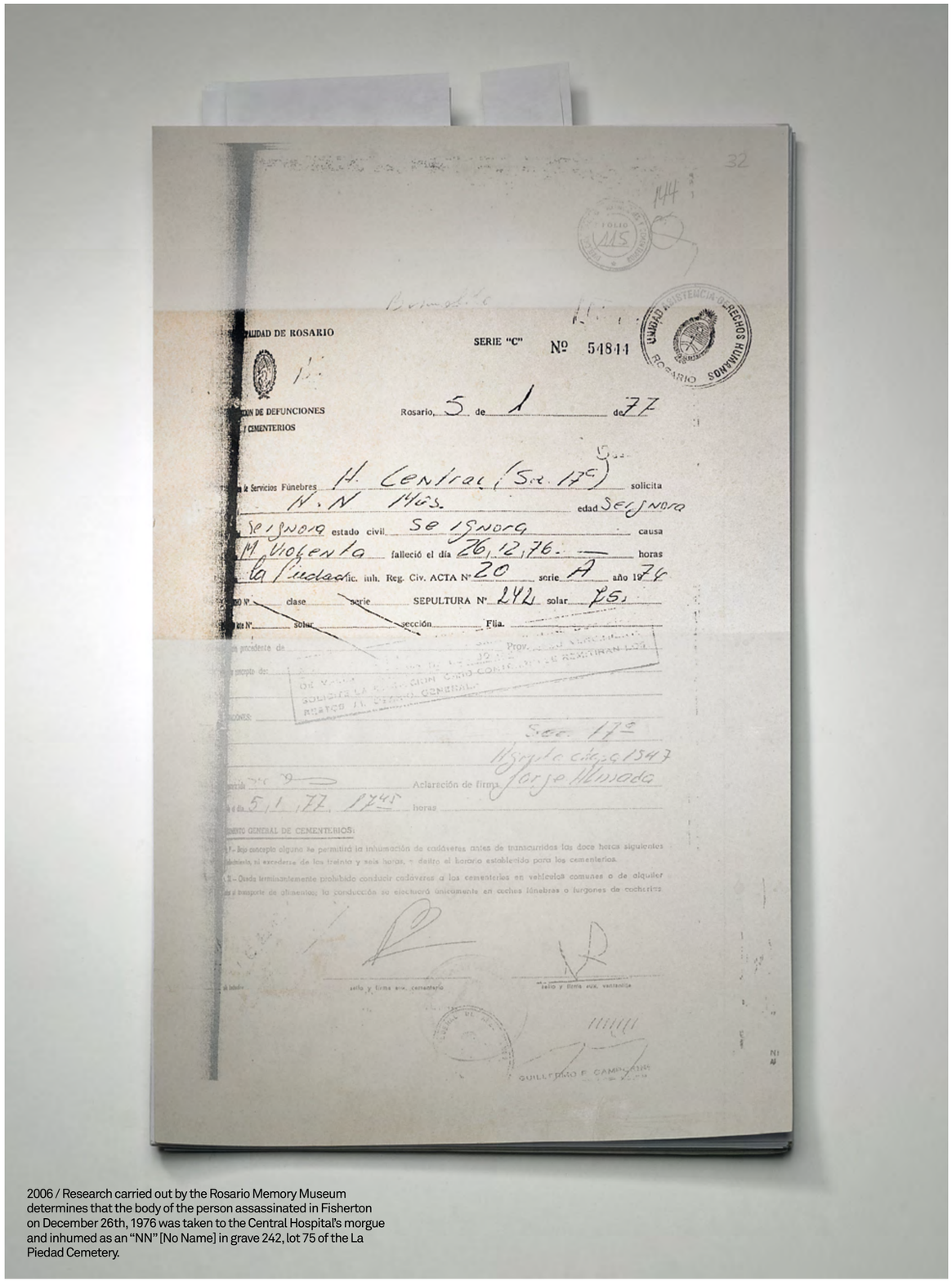
Page 1

1984 / Official report claiming Eduardo's disappearance, submitted to the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP)

Sign with Eduardo's portrait used by his family in "Memory, Truth, and Justice" demonstrations



1984 / After researching press archives from December 1976, Guillermo Germano identifies the place where his brother Eduardo was likely assassinated. Barrio Fisherton, Rosario (Santa Fe)



SERIE "C" Nº 54844

Rosario, 5 de 1 de 77

Hospital Central (Sec. 17ª)

N.N 14 años.

Soltero estado civil Soltero causa

M. Violenta falleció el día 26.12.76. — horas

La Piedad lic. inh. Reg. Civ. ACTA Nº 20 serie A año 1976

clase serie SEPULTURA Nº 242 solar 75

solar sección Fila.

procedente de Prov.

Sec. 17ª

Aclaración de firma Jorge Almada

5.1.77. 1745 horas

2006 / Research carried out by the Rosario Memory Museum determines that the body of the person assassinated in Fisherton on December 26th, 1976 was taken to the Central Hospital's morgue and inhumed as an "NN" [No Name] in grave 242, lot 75 of the La Piedad Cemetery.

2010 / Survivors' testimonies point to the fact that Eduardo passed through the Clandestine Detention Center overseen by the Information Services housed at the Santa Fe Provincial Police Headquarters in Rosario during the Christmas holiday in 1976.

2011 / The Argentina Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) exhumes, under judicial order, grave 242, lot 75 of the La Piedad Cemetery (Rosario)

▶ **DERECHOS HUMANOS.** Detenido y desaparecido por la dictadura militar en 1976

Identifican los restos del militante entrerriano Eduardo Germano

Los restos del entrerriano Eduardo *Mencho* Germano, detenido desaparecido en Rosario por la dictadura militar en 1976, fueron identificados por el Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense. La familia pidió a la Justicia que entregu sus restos el día en que se cumplirán 38 años de su secuestro, el 17 de diciembre, para trasladarlo a Paraná y sepultarl en el panteón familiar.

Los restos de Germano habían sido localizados en una de las 123 tumbas exhumadas por el equipo de antropología forense en 2011 en el cementerio de La Piedad de Rosario, y ahora fueron identificados.

Eduardo Germano nació el 20 de febrero de 1958 en Villaguay (Entre Ríos). Con 16 años fue elegido presidente del Centro de Estudiantes del Colegio La Salle, de Paraná, y comenzó a militar en Montoneros. En julio de 1976 fue detenido durante nueve días en el centro clandestino de detención del Escuadrón de Comunicaciones del Ejército, en Paraná. Una vez en libertad se trasladó a la ciudad de Rosario, donde vivió clandestinamente.

El 17 de diciembre de 1976, cuando tenía 18 años, fue detenido y desaparecido por la dictadura militar en la ciudad de Rosario, un día antes de un encuentro que había previsto mantener con sus padres. Su cuerpo y el de la persona que lo acompañaba fue volado con explosivos junto a la estación transformadora de energía en el barrio de Fisherton. El operativo estuvo dirigido por el jefe de Servicio de Información de la Unidad Regional II del Ejército Argentino, Agustín Feced.

El hecho fe presentado a la prensa como un "enfrentamiento" producto de un "atentado frustrado". Las mismas figuras con las que el gobierno militar ocultó miles de los crímenes de lesa humanidad que cometió desde su instauración en 1976.

La causa sobre los enterramientos de personas asesinadas por la dictadura en el Cementerio de La Piedad se inició en 1984 y estuvo paralizada por las leyes de impunidad (Obediencia Debida y Punto Final) hasta su derogación durante la presidencia de Néstor Kirchner.

Germano fue detenido y desaparecido en Rosario por la dictadura militar cuando tenía 18 años.

Un estudio realizado por un equipo del Museo de la Memoria de Rosario estableció la probabilidad de que el cuerpo de Eduardo Germano fuera llevado por personal policial de un destacamento cercano a Fisherton al Cementerio de La Piedad el 5 de enero de 1977 y enterrado en una tumba como NN.

La solicitud de exhumación de esa tumba fue incorporada a la sa sobre las exhumaciones p abogada de la familia German ra que se incluyera en las excav nes realizadas a finales de 201 el Equipo Argentino de Antropo Forense. Carmen y Guillermo mano se presentaron en 2004 querellantes en la causa que i tiga las responsabilidades de tín Feced en el terrorismo de E durante la última dictadura m

COMUNICADO. Apenas se su novedad, la familia de Gern emitió un comunicado confir do el hecho. "Los restos de E do fueron localizados en una 123 tumbas exhumadas por el po Argentino de Antropologí rense en 2011 en el cementer La Piedad de Rosario, donde s cían enterramientos de asesin en falsos enfrentamientos fra dos por los agentes de la dict ra", dice el escrito

"Después de 38 años de l por la verdad esta se hace pr te de forma incontestable. H pasado por muchas situacio lo largo de estos años, pero s pre tuvimos claro que no quer venganza, que buscábamos v y justicia, y el camino era la m ria y la lucha. Nuestro padre F falleció en 2002. Nuestro herm Guillermo en 2009 y nuestra m Carmen en 2012. Los tres luch hasta el final de sus días por la verdad y exigir justicia por E do y por todos los desaparecid podrán ver el acto de entrega, sus restos descansarán por fi tos. Por fin nuestro hermano vu casa", expresa el escrito de la fa

Gustavo y Diego Germano

▶ **Expresiones**

nítida y coherente con los derechos humanos en

AL MARGEN

La familia de Germano solicitó al juzgado que lleva la causa la entrega de los restos de Eduardo para el día 17 de diciembre, cuando se cumplirán 38 años de su detención ilegal. Ese mismo día serán trasladados a Paraná donde serán enterr... el 18 de di... ciemb... famili... Carme...

manos de Edu... agradecimien... ganismos de D... instituciones, a... liares nuestros... y a la sociedad... a lo largo de es...

Asimismo, e... Ríos, a través de... ticia, la Subsec... Humanos y el ... Verdad expres... moción que pr... ción de los res... Eduardo Raúl G... detenido-desa... ciembre de 197...

"Con la emo... dentro, hacem... abrazo a la fam... ramos la mem... men, padres de Eduardo, quienes lucharon hasta sus últimos días por desandar el camino del olvido y la impunidad. Y a Guillermo, su hermano, que junto a los organismos de derechos humanos sedimentaron en la provincia los pilares de las políticas públicas que nos han permitido construir mayores niveles de Memoria, de Verdad y de Justicia", expresa el comunicado.

"Asimismo destacamos la ardua labor científica del Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense y la tarea jurídica de los abogados querellantes. Trabajo que toma un sentido más profundo y contundente en el marco de la irrevocable decisión de Néstor Kirchner de hacer de los derechos humanos una política de Estado", señalaron.

2014 / Eduardo's remains are identified, returned to his family, and inhumed next to his mother Carmen, his father Felipe, and his brother Guillermo in the Parque de la Paz Cemetery. His mother, father, and brother all deceased before his remains were recovered and identified. San Benito, Paraná (Entre Ríos)

REVELATIONS

By Jordana Blejmar & Natalia Fortuny
Translation by María Fernández Pello and Lee Douglas

In the project, *Contradesaparecido* (*Counterdisappeared*), Gustavo Germano and Vanina de Monte delicately map the life of Eduardo Germano, who was eighteen years old when Argentina's military-civic dictatorship kidnapped him on December 17th, 1976. His life, like all lives, started far before his birth. In this photo essay, echoes of his life continue to resonate decades after his disappearance. This project, a family scrapbook of sorts, and its documentary weight, unfolds through a visual narrative that explores the different spaces marked by his transit through the world. A succession of images almost absent of text present a story to be deciphered from subtle clues. The space of the family photo album is interrupted by the authors' narration of a violent collective history. As the protagonist's life is (re)constructed, the viewer begins to identify his facial features, to retrace his life's steps through his affective experiences, the places he occupied, his political convictions, and the personal documents left behind.

There are photographs of activist, *militante* Eduardo that point to his youth, when he was the student president of the La Salle School Student Center and a member of the left-wing Peronist organization *Montoneros*. Through this single image, public struggles and political tensions inhabit domestic life, making their way to the family photo album. A portrait of Eduardo positioning his fingers to make the "V" for Victory occupies a privileged place in the narrative. The original, reproduced next to a second cropped image that removes Eduardo from the groups of friends surrounding him, is reproduced first in color only to reappear as the black-and-white, photocopied ID image used in documents related to the judicial case surrounding his disappearance.

If Germano's 2008 series *Ausencias* used photographs of the disappeared to make visible the affective universe of their surviving relatives, *Contradesaparecido* proposes something different, perhaps even, an alternative path. The project first shows Eduardo sheltered by the networks of family, friends, and colleagues that surround his everyday life. It, then, turns to focus on his subsequent experience as a *desaparecido*, a journey that extends beyond his life, in which his body and name carve a path during more than four decades. *Ausencias* presented the (spectral) voids left by disappearance. *Contradesaparecido*, on the other hand, seeks the inverse: to make visible the material traces left by a disappeared person, both his remains and the marks his life made on this world.

This long-term project, started some years ago, attempts to rectify the way in which Eduardo's life history is written. Whether deliberately or through complicity and incompetency, his story is plagued with conjecture, inconclusive clues, and disjointed testimonies. Amidst the pieces of fragmentary and cryptic documentation that narrate his disappearance is an anonymous typewritten note originally sent to the Germano family. The author's identity would only be revealed many years later. In three devastating lines, it communicates a succinct, yet uncertain, message: "They probably killed him."

Contradesaparecido interrogates the authority of documents—be they are photographic images, scientific report, or legal proof—as evidence of crimes. At the same time, it highlights the mechanisms designed and deployed by the dictatorship, to conceal truth, to make the media complicit, to bring about state pardons, and to silence witnesses. Like the chemical processes unique to analogue photography, in which a latent image is hidden until developed and revealed, this photo essay also seeks "to reveal," a verb rooted in the Latin *revelare* that means to remove the veil, to provide information about something previously ignored or secret. It reveals what documents from the past hide, but also the places where Eduardo was present: the family home in Paraná, the square where he possibly met his partner and *compañera* Norma, the apartment in Buenos Aires where he went to look for her shortly before his disappearance, and the street corner where he finally was abducted.

In the photographs, landscapes are devoid of people. There are building façades, steps, and peeling walls. Houses do not look like homes. Photographed from the outside, seen from the sidewalk, protected by railings, the structures are unwelcoming. Who lived between their walls? Were they shared, inhabited by different families and groups? What role did their inhabitants play in this story?

The façades speak of a public space that no longer belongs entirely to its occupants but rather to the neighborhood, to its passers-by, to both friends and strangers. What cities do these corners belong to? There are also images of bars, spaces that in Argentina are the fora for politics, meeting places that host conversations between friends, places for waiting and anticipating what is to come. What collective conversations took place around these tables? What futures were brought into being? Undoubtedly, these spaces were also sites of more sinister encounters, where the dictatorship's *patotas* [paramilitary henchmen], gathered to make plans. A fact confirmed by a statement made by a firefighter, who after being trained in the same police school as other local perpetrators, was charged with the task of collecting the bodies of the dead. In the pictures judicial buildings and institutions also appear with force, bringing to life the public sphere in which pilgrimages are made, bureaucracies interrogated. They make up the institutional path of loss.

Georges Didi-Huberman[1] suggests that by interrogating what we see, things from buried spaces and lost times begin to look back at us. Everything that survived the Argentine state's systematic plan of disappearance—streets, walls, and façade thought to be neutral, insignificant, and superfluous by perpetrators—offers its own testimony. These things, says Didi-Huberman, are the "bark of history."[2] (2014)

Here, images are gathered and juxtaposed to give an account of an investigative quest that also narrates the history of a journey, of multiple journeys: from Paraná to Santa Fe; from Santa Fe to Rosario, from there to Buenos Aires, only to return to Rosario, where Eduardo was kidnapped, where on December 26th, he and his fellow comrades were murdered in a police drill. There is something in these journeys, but also in the way that Eduardo's disappearance and murder were covered up and kept from view, that is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's persecution and death in 1940. Their fates, surely, resonate with and point to the dead ends that have marked the lives of those persecuted and murdered by the past century's totalitarian experiments. It is of no surprise that several years ago, Gustavo visited the *Passages* memorial that pays homage to the German philosopher in Portbou. With a decidedly Benjaminian spirit, *Contradesaparecido* reconstructs a crime scene, as well as the complicities and collaborations that made the crime itself possible.

What does it mean to counter-disappear? Is it an exercise in elliptical narration that respects voids, lacunae, and gaps in stories kept by the living? Does contesting and reversing absence in the name of truth and justice carve a path that is the inverse of disappearance? Is it to find and bury the bones of those who are absent? Contesting the in-betweenness of disappearance—a state of being that straddles life and death—counter-disappearance is forged before absence, underlining a permanent will to remember through anticipation, to capture the evanescent nature of a life and its stubborn, elusive but unequivocal presence. ❖

Endnotes

1. Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2006. *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg´s History of Art,* PA: Penn State University Press.

2. Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2014. *Bark*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

***Writing with Light Magazine* is an illustrated visual anthropology periodical. The core aim of the magazine is to support, develop, and publish photo essays that take seriously the contribution of design and photography to the production of critically creative ethnography.**

The Writing with Light Editorial and Curatorial Collective is an initiative that started in 2016. Over the last 6 years, the Collective has overseen the publication of photo essays in collaboration with *Cultural Anthropology* and *Visual Anthropology Review*. During this time, the Collective worked to break new ground by developing peer-review protocols for assessing photo essays as valuable contributions to scholarly discourse within Anthropology. In 2021, the collective began working on a new iteration of this project. We are always open to ideas and collaborations though we do not accept individual photo essays that are not part of a call for contributions.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank the photographers and writers who contributed their work and time to this inaugural issue of *Writing with Light Magazine*. We are excited and humbled to showcase their work, and we hope that this is a point of departure for future collaborations. We would like to note that some of the contributing photographers are professional image-makers. As an independent, self-funded project, we would like to also recognize the time and labor that was contributed by our collaborators.

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Ameyugo, Burgos, 2005. Victims' kin and residents during the localization of a mass grave located near kilometer number 306 on the old N-1 Highway. The mass grave was never found.

Photograph by Clemente Bernad

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