

## Article

# Outlining the Victims of the Holocaust and the Argentinian Dictatorship: Jerzy Skapski's *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* and Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel's "El Siluetazo"

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**Abstract:** In this article, I examine two case studies of spatial representation of atrocity and trauma: Jerzy Skapski's poster *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* (*Every Day at Auschwitz*) (1974), published in the October 1978 edition of *The Unesco Courier*, and the aesthetic/activist action known as "El Siluetazo" (1983), which was created by Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel, and carried out as a memory-activist intervention by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and the Argentinian public on 21–22 September 1983. To examine the interconnections of Holocaust memory within these two case studies, I follow Michael Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory and Astrid Erll's conceptualization of transcultural and travelling memory. In particular, I analyze how Skapski's use of silhouettes to spatially depict the victims of Auschwitz is adopted and transformed by the Argentinian artists and public to denounce the disappearance of 30,000 of their compatriots. I argue that in outlining the figures of the victims of the Holocaust and the Argentinian dictatorship, respectively, these creative works exemplify the transcultural use of silhouettes originating in Holocaust memory and the multidirectional influence, derived from their organic connection, of spatial visualizations of absent bodies as they commemorate and make present the victims of these traumatic histories.

**Keywords:** *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia*; "El Siluetazo"; Holocaust memory and aesthetics; silhouettes and absence; Argentinian dictatorship (1976–1983); detained-disappeared; memory-activism; multidirectional memory; transcultural memory; Latin American memory



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## 1. Introduction

Beginning with the memory boom of the 1980s and continuing in recent decades, Holocaust memory and aesthetics have travelled across the globe as this historical trauma has been examined from transcultural and globalized perspectives.<sup>1</sup> With such efforts, commemorative tropes and aesthetics, in particular those pertaining to spatial representations of Holocaust memory, have been adopted and transformed by numerous artists and scholars as they reflect on the destruction of European Jewry during the Nazi regime and on other traumatic histories. This is highlighted in this article as I examine two case studies of spatial representation of atrocity and trauma: one depicting the victims of the Holocaust, in particular those of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and the other portraying a different historical trauma, the victims of the Argentinian dictatorship (1976–1983), in particular the 30,000 detained-disappeared. The works I reference are Jerzy Skapski's poster *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* (*Every Day at Auschwitz*) (Skapski 1974), published in the October 1978 edition of *The Unesco Courier*, and the aesthetic/activist action known as "El Siluetazo" (1983), which was created by the visual artists Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel, and carried out as a memory-activist intervention by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and the Argentinian public on 21–22 September 1983.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the dictatorships of the 1970s–1990s in the Southern Cone of Latin America (in

particular in Argentina and Chile, as well as in Uruguay), abductions, torture, long-term imprisonment, and/or disappearances became prevalent and characteristic of the military regimes, with so-called subversives being disappeared by state forces, and the latter denying their involvement in these crimes (Crenzel 2011, pp. 1–2).<sup>3</sup> In our contemporary context, the term “*desaparecido*” has become paradigmatic in the politics of memory until this very day” (Baer and Sznajder 2017, p. 29), as Baer and Sznajder (2017) contend in *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era*. With the two works examined in this article, I analyze how Skąpski’s use of silhouettes to spatially depict the victims of Auschwitz is adopted and transformed by these Argentinian artists and the public to denounce the disappearance of their compatriots. In placing both works in dialogue with one another, the direct connections and influences, as well as differences, are highlighted. This leads to a fruitful discussion of multidirectional and transcultural memory representations of the Holocaust and the Argentinian dictatorship.

These cross-cultural connections begin with the pieces themselves, as Skąpski’s publication of the poster in the internationally circulated and multilingual magazine, *The Unesco Courier*, gave the work a global audience and reception.<sup>4</sup> This is a magazine which aims to “[bring] its readers local perspectives on global issues from some of the world’s leading thinkers” (UNESCO n.d.). The poster was then seen by the three artists in Argentina in the final years of the dictatorship as they sought a way to represent the country’s detained-disappeared (Flores 2008, p. 91). Directly influenced by Skąpski’s silhouette aesthetic, a fact Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel have publicly discussed on multiple occasions, the Argentinian “*Siluetazo*” adopts the silhouette aesthetic to represent the absent presence of the 30,000 disappeared persons across the center of Buenos Aires.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, “*El Siluetazo*” also adds an activist dimension to the initial commemorative layer depicted in *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia*. Moreover, what becomes evident when placed in dialogue with one another is how both works focus on the space occupied by the bodies of the victims, emphasizing their absent presence to commemorate and denounce their persecution. Thus, I argue that in outlining the figures of the victims of the Holocaust and the Argentinian dictatorship, respectively, these creative works exemplify the transcultural use of silhouettes originating in Holocaust memory and the multidirectional influence, derived from their organic connection, of spatial visualizations of absent bodies as they commemorate and make present the victims of these traumatic histories.

To examine the interconnections of Holocaust memory and the silhouette aesthetic utilized in both case studies, I follow Michael Rothberg’s (2009) notion of multidirectional memory as defined in his seminal work *Multidirectional Memory* and Astrid Erll’s (2011) conceptualization of travelling and transcultural memory, introduced in her article, “Travelling Memory.” Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory encourages us to understand memory, and Holocaust memory in particular, not as competitive, but rather as a tool that can highlight other histories of trauma. As he argues:

far from blocking other historical memories from view in a competitive struggle for recognition, the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories—some of them predated the Nazi genocide, such as slavery, and others taking place later, such as the Algerian war of independence (1954–62) or the genocide in Bosnia during the 1990s. (Rothberg 2009, p. 6)

Rothberg’s theorization particularly speaks to the reciprocal encounters and effects between memories of diverse historical traumas and the Holocaust, and in this case, the Argentinian dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> Following this perspective, multidirectional memory not only furthers our understanding of “*El Siluetazo*” and the Holocaust memory aesthetic derived from Skąpski’s poster, which the Argentinian artists adopted, it also prompts us to re-interpret *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* from a decentered or non-Eurocentric perspective, and allows us to re-envision the impactful piece of this Polish Christian artist.

Moreover, Erll's theorization of transcultural memory also aids our understanding of how the silhouette aesthetic, as depicted in Skapski's poster, travels across geographical and cultural landscapes and is adopted and transformed in the Argentinian dictatorial context.<sup>7</sup> Erll conceives transcultural memory as "the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory" and focuses on "their continual 'travels' and ongoing transformations through time and space, [and] across social, linguistic and political borders" (Erll 2011, p. 11). Following Erll's transcultural perspective, this article encourages us to think about space and Holocaust memory differently, focusing on the space that paper can provide (in diverse formats and as memory carriers), and how these particular aesthetic forms travel as artists utilize them to represent the absent bodies of the victims of both the Holocaust and the Argentinian dictatorship.

Here, I will add a caveat. Even when placing two works in dialogue through the lens of multidirectional and transcultural memory, it remains crucial to remember that each historical context has its own specificities and should not be conflated with other historical traumas, as Debarati Sanyal (2015) points out in *Memory and Complicity*. She argues:

Memory's entanglement of distinctive and asymmetrical sites of trauma (slavery, the Holocaust, colonialism, or terror) can shake up established traditions of remembrance and belonging, allowing new ones to emerge. Yet it can also drive us to dangerous intersections, where difference is eclipsed into sameness, where identification leads to appropriation, or where political uses of memory collide with the ethical obligations of testimony. The recognition of proximity and connection between different histories can function as both a structure of engagement and an alibi for abdication. (p. 2)

What Sanyal emphasizes in her examination of complicity and the migrations of Holocaust memory, specifically in French and francophone literature and film, but which can be applied across the globe, is how these connections between different historical traumas can have positive impacts (as transcultural and multidirectional memory conceive), but can also lead to "dangerous intersections", where one historical trauma appropriates elements of another and discourages constructive dialogues of commemoration. This is not to say that Sanyal does not agree with Rothberg's concept, as she does use it as a point of reference in her text and is open to the "'multidirectional traffic of memory'" (Sanyal 2015, p. 7). However, she makes us aware of the problems intrinsic to such cross-cultural approaches. As she contends: "If memories travel around our global cultural landscape, I see their confluence as a dangerous intersection as well as a productive multidirectional site" (p. 7). Sanyal reminds us that these dialogues can also lead to negative outcomes, with "collisions and confluences" and tensions between ethical representations and appropriations (p. 7). With the two case studies examined in this article, I argue that there is a multidirectional and dialogical encounter between these two memory cultures as a result of the organic connection between the Argentinian artists' action and the Polish artist's depiction of the victims of the Holocaust; however, I also aim to highlight their distinctions and unique characteristics to avoid unintentional appropriations and tensions between the two historical traumas that these artistic and activist works represent and reflect on.

## 2. *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia*: Spatial Representation of Absence through Silhouettes

Polish artist Jerzy Skapski's 1974 poster *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* (*Every Day at Auschwitz*) was published in the October 1978 issue of *The Unesco Courier*, "Teaching human rights: education's fourth 'R'". This quarterly magazine first emerged in 1948, just three years after the end of the Second World War and two years after the creation of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), with the general aim "to promote UNESCO's ideals, maintain a platform for the dialogue between cultures and provide a forum for International debate" (UNESCO n.d.). Its structure included articles, artworks, letters to the editor, and news from UNESCO. In 1978, the magazine was published monthly, except in August and September, when it was published bi-monthly,

with a subscription rate of 35 French Francs per year or 3.50 per issue (UNESCO 1978b, cover and p. 3). It was available in 19 languages (including Spanish, English, and French), in more than 100 countries (including Argentina and Poland) (UNESCO 1978a, p. 35; 1978b, p. 35), and considered “a best-seller as a periodical, with more than two and a half million readers around the world” (UNESCO 1978b, pp. 32). That year’s October issue was “devoted to the problems of the teaching of human rights” as a way “[t]o mark the 30th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*” (UNESCO 1978b, p. 3). It is in this issue that we find Skapski’s poster, which depicts the victims of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp by outlining 2370 silhouettes and reproducing them 1,688 times in each copy of the magazine’s edition. Analogous to the days the camp was operational and representing what was then thought to be 4 million victims murdered at Auschwitz, Skapski uniquely utilizes both the space of the page and the reproducibility of the print medium to commemorate the victims of the destruction of European Jewry during the Nazi regime. In doing so, he abstractly and spatially portrays the victims of the Holocaust and demonstrates the scale of suffering to a global audience.<sup>8</sup> A few years after its publication, the Argentinian visual artists Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel, were directly inspired by Skapski’s spatial depiction of death to create life-size paper silhouettes in order to denounce the 30,000 disappeared persons during the country’s fascist dictatorship (1976–1983).<sup>9</sup> These were pasted by the public throughout the Buenos Aires city center during the third annual *Marcha de la Resistencia* (Resistance March), a 24-hour protest march held on 21–22 September 1983.<sup>10</sup> With this new iteration of the silhouette aesthetic, originally found in Skapski’s poster (and Polish Holocaust art more broadly), a memory-activist dimension was added to the spatial representation of absence.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, the Argentinian project points to a transformation in the travelling silhouette aesthetic. It also nuances the viewer’s interpretation of Skapski’s commemorative poster, when read from a multidirectional and transcultural memory perspective. Let us examine the silhouette aesthetic of Holocaust commemoration in Skapski’s piece and Polish Holocaust art more closely.

The use of relics, negative spaces, shadows, and silhouettes to depict the absence left by the murder of the victims of the Holocaust has come to characterize a distinct aesthetic of Holocaust art, as numerous artists have adopted these elements to represent the victims of the Nazi destruction of European Jewry.<sup>12</sup> Different artists (survivors, Jewish, non-Jewish, German, second generation, etc.) have utilized diverse aesthetic approaches in their work to emphasize this trope.<sup>13</sup> Silhouettes and figures in particular are used to represent the physical absence of victims and the presence-of-absence trope, which is an aesthetic approach that emphasizes the loss of an individual’s life by depicting how they are no longer there.<sup>14</sup> This trope can highlight the physical absence of a person by employing shadows, figures, or negative spaces to evoke their presence; in doing so, it allows the artist to represent the unrepresentable, the loss of 6 million Jewish people, and provides a way to commemorate their absence. As Ziva Amishai-Maisels (2005) explains in *Absence-presence*:

One of the more complex new strategies for remembering the Holocaust is the evocation of “ghosts” to suggest that its victims remain with us, shadowing our existence with their own. Artists first used Holocaust “ghosts” to express a sense of loss: the victim’s disappearance left behind only a spectral image, relics, smoke, or holes in the collective memory. Building on this early approach, contemporary artists attempt instead to represent continuing memory. (p. 123)

What Amishai-Maisels highlights is how the use of spectral images, ghosts, figures, and relics to represent those who were murdered during the Holocaust evokes their absent presence. This is a presence which is no longer visual or tangible (except in material remnants) but can still be felt as it remains in the memory of those who survived (p. 123). In particular, Amishai-Maisels focuses on the use of ghosts, which can be distinctive from silhouettes, not only in their form but also in their role. Ghosts can connote a haunting, or an ever-lingering spirit. They are often times represented as floating, disembodied, and in white or human form (pp. 125–40); the author explains that while silhouettes can evoke a

haunting (p. 131), they do not always do so and are mostly depicted as outlined figures (p. 128–29). I will also add that silhouettes distinctly portray the physical form of the human body and do not necessarily evoke a spiritual presence, but rather the reminder that someone was once there. Moreover, Amishai-Maisels also notes that “[a] different manner of expressing the same type of unreal presence [aside from using ghosts or figures in the human form] while adding to it a heightened sense of loss and absence is to negate the image or call it into question” (p. 128). By “negating the image”, the artists remind the viewers of the irretrievable loss experienced as a result of this atrocity and differentiate in their work the living from the dead (p. 128). For instance, the author describes silhouettes that outline the figure but leave “an inner void” (p. 128) as a method of portraying this aspect. This allows the artist to also represent the loss experienced through the Holocaust with “suggested but not always present images” (p. 150) and commemorate its victims.

As mentioned, we can observe the use of silhouettes and figures to evoke the absent presence of Holocaust victims in concentrationary, post-war, and contemporary representations of Holocaust art, both by Jewish and non-Jewish artists; for example, the works of Polish artist Józef Szajna (1922–2008), who was imprisoned as a member of the Polish resistance in both Auschwitz and Buchenwald, as well as those of the Polish realist painter Jerzy Krawczyk (1921–1969). Numerous of Szajna’s (1970, 1976, 1990, 2006) works depict the victims of the Holocaust through the use of silhouettes as well as material relics.<sup>15</sup> These include, just to name a few: the piece *Wall of Shoes* (1970) (Figure 1), which was an installation for his famous play *Replika* (1973); his 1976 piece *Silhouettes*, featuring outlined figures popping from the cardboard (Figure 2); his 1990 painting *Appeal* (Figure 3), which depicts several rows of people standing side by side—similar to Skąpski’s depiction in *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia*; and his 2006 collage, *Figures*, which combines the abstract shape of the silhouette with photographs of the prisoners of the camps (Figure 4). In addition, Krawczyk’s (1962) *Aufpassen, Mutti!* is particularly striking, as it depicts a black shadowy figure with a yellow star of David painted over several German newspaper clippings (a resemblance to the life-size silhouettes of “El Siluetazo”).<sup>16</sup> Jerzy Skąpski’s (1974) *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* (*Every Day at Auschwitz*), as we will see below, also speaks to this theme.





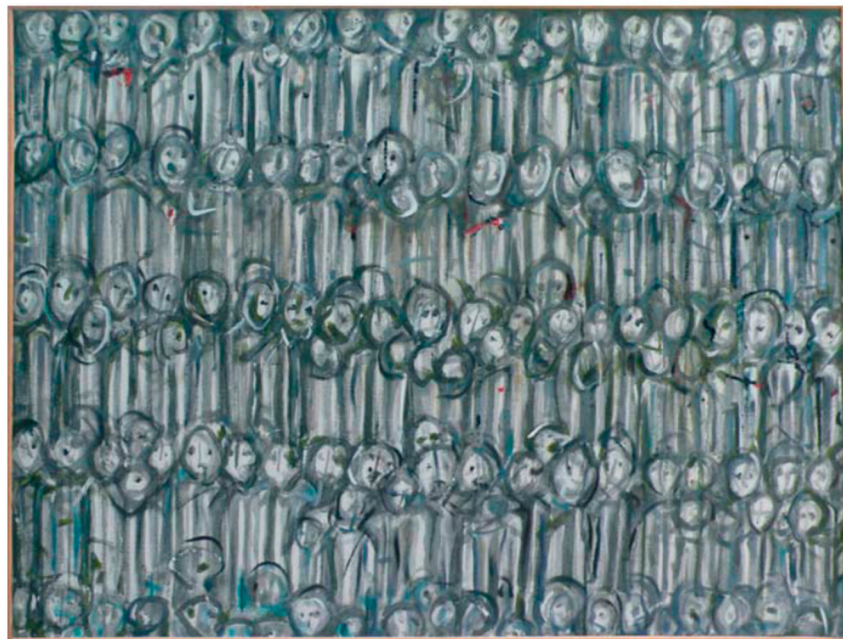
The Wall of Shoes, installation from 1970, a fragment of the Replica, 360x180x300 cm, Zachęta Gallery, Warsaw 1987

**Figure 1.** Józef Szajna's *Wall of Shoes*—Installation fragment from *Replika* 360 × 180 × 300 cm (Szajna 1970). Figure reproduced with the permission of Łukasz Szajna.



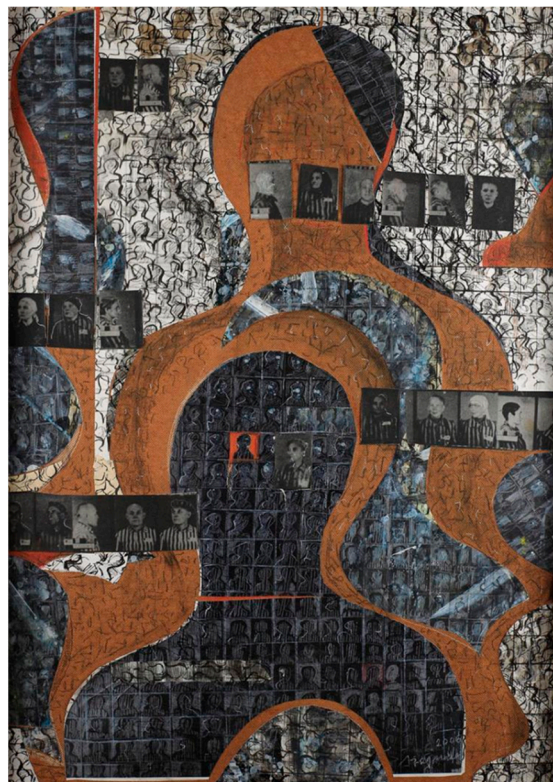
Silhouettes, 1976, relief, carton, 70x100 cm

**Figure 2.** Józef Szajna's *Silhouettes*—relief, carton, 70 × 100 cm (Szajna 1976). Figure reproduced with the permission of Łukasz Szajna.



Appeal, 1990, acrylic on canvas,  
90x100 cm

**Figure 3.** Józef Szajna's *Appeal*—acrylic on canvas, 90 × 100 cm (Szajna 1990). Figure reproduced with the permission of Łukasz Szajna.



**Figure 4.** Józef Szajna's *Figures*—mixed media (Szajna 2006). Figure reproduced with the permission of Łukasz Szajna.

Jerzy Skapski (1933–2020) was born near Kraków, in the village of Hebdów in Southern Poland. He was a renowned painter and stained glass and graphic artist. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków from 1952 to 1958, under the guidance of Emil Krcha, Maciej Makarewicz, and Ludwik Gardowski (Skapski n.d.a). He is best known for his stained glass windows designed for numerous churches in Poland, as well as Sweden, Russia, and France (Laureates n.d.). In total, he created over 800 stained glass windows (Skapski n.d.a). Of particular importance are those he designed for the Roman Catholic Parish of St. Maximilian the Martyr in Oświęcim (Rzymskokatolicka n.d.), whose “[p]resentation of the martyred[sic] in the glory of heaven also has a similar overtone to the poster *[Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia]*” (Agnieszka Skapska, pers. comm., 26 December 2022).<sup>17</sup> He also created the coat of arms for the Archbishop Karol Wojtyła, which became the basis for the coat of arms for Pope John Paul II (Skapski n.d.a). Furthermore, in 2020, he was awarded The Pontifical Council for Culture’s Per Artem ad Deum Medal, honoring his artistic work (Laureates n.d.).

Although Skapski’s stained glass pieces follow Christian themes and aesthetics, the artist has also been influenced by Jewish themes and has commemorated the Holocaust in several of his paintings (pers. comm.), in particular, *Odkrycie rodziny Szulima pod altaną* (*Discovery of Szulim’s Family in the Garden Shed*) (oil on canvas 91 × 91) (Skapski 2010a).<sup>18</sup> The colorful painting with childlike aesthetics portrays twelve blue-eyed faces hiding in the shadows of an enclosure, with a tall and older man at the shed’s entrance speaking with a young boy. The painting’s description on Skapski’s website explains that this is one of the artist’s childhood memories of the Second World War and portrays a young Skapski encountering Szulim Strosberg and his family (acquaintances of the Skapski family) hiding in the garden shed of one of the Hebdów gardens (Skapski n.d.c). The piece represents one encounter with the persecution of Jewish people during the Holocaust years, in this case, the hiding place of a neighbour and his family, and shows the audience the impactful memory this moment left on the Polish Christian artist. As the description recounts:

Eight-year-old Jurek noticed that the latch closing the door to the garden shed was not closed, so he looked inside curiously, and from inside many pairs of eyes looked at the boy with horror. One of the individuals that Jurek recognized was Szulim Strosberg, who approached him and said in a gentle voice: ‘Jureczek, tell daddy that we are here—just don’t say anything to the Germans.’ Jurek complied. Then, Jurek’s father issued an outright ban on going to the attic for the next few months... (Skapski n.d.c; translation by Anna (Ania) Paluch)<sup>19</sup>

As an artist who often times includes himself in his paintings, see for instance *Autoportret Mistyczny Łeb 69* (2003), Skapski’s depiction of this memory of Strosberg shows a vulnerable moment of his childhood, a haunting memory he has returned to in the later years of his life, with a fuller understanding of what happened during the war and to the Strosberg family, in particular.<sup>20</sup>

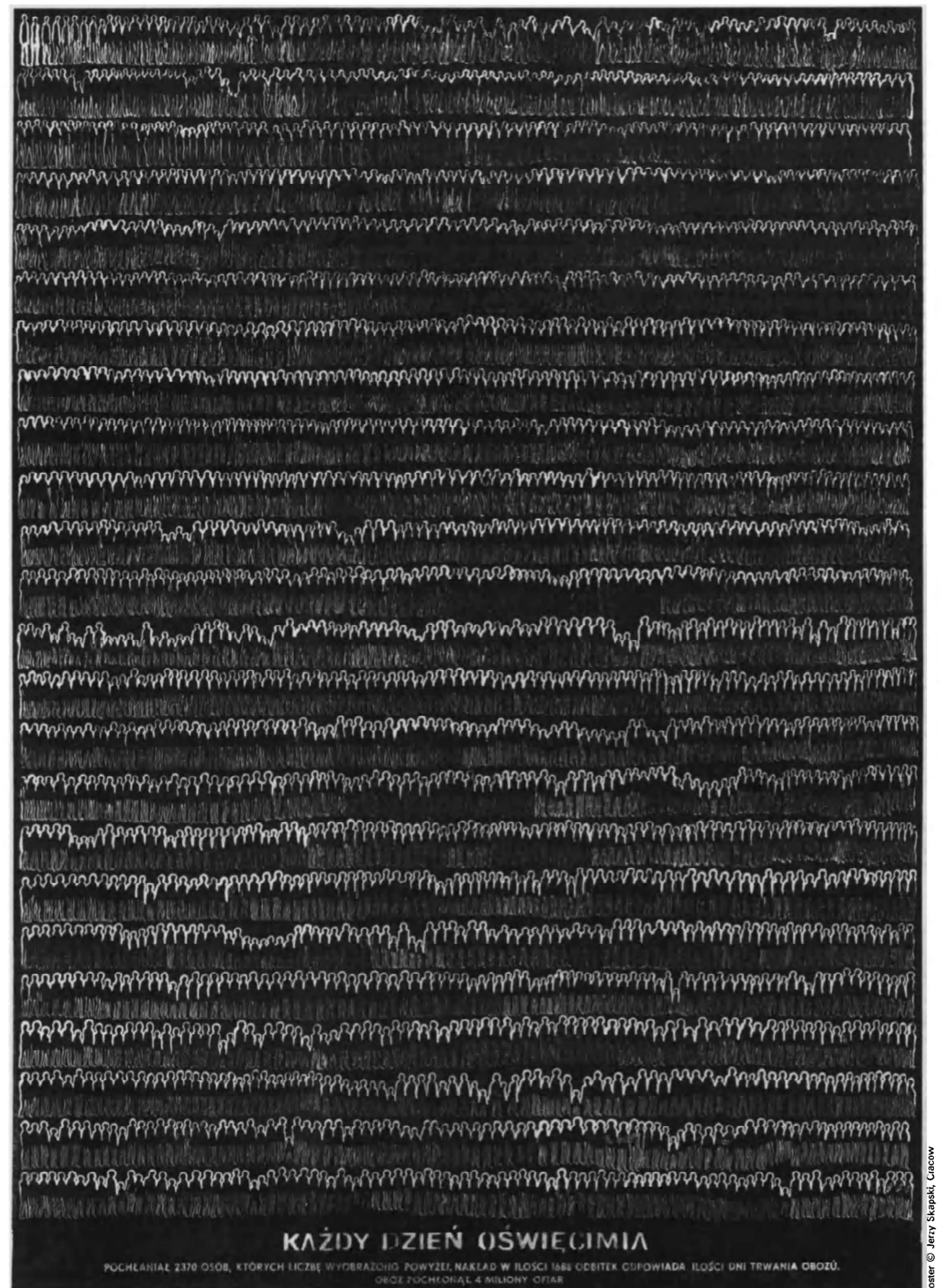
However, his work *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* (*Every Day at Auschwitz*) (1974; 1978) (poster 100 × 70) shows a more abstract aesthetic, as the artist outlines one by one the victims of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp (Figure 5). The poster, created in 1974, was published in the October 1978 issue of *The Unesco Courier*. A copy is also housed at Yad Vashem and the White House in Washington (Skapski n.d.b). As mentioned, the piece depicts the silhouettes of the victims who died at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. It portrays 24 rows of side-profile silhouettes forming a continuous line, with a caption that reads: “‘Every day at Auschwitz brought death to 2370 people, and this is the number of figures represented above. The concentration camp at Auschwitz was in existence for 1688 days and this is the exact number of copies of this poster printed. Altogether some four million people died at the camp’” (Skapski 1978, p. 22). Although the number of victims was revised in 1989 to one million, the poster nevertheless evokes the absent presence of those murdered at the camp by abstractly portraying their figures and magnifying the scale of the atrocity for the viewer. In an email correspondence with



the artist's wife, Agnieszka Skapska, she explains the care Skapski took when painting this poster: "Jerzy mentioned that it was one of the hardest works. As painting the silhouettes he took time to imagine who the person was, what was his/hers/its values and dreams. His aim was to pay tribute to every person martyred in Auschwitz" (Agnieszka Skapska, pers. comm., 26 December 2022). She also recounts the difficulty of finding the materials in the then-communist country:

The poster was created during the communism era in Poland; hyperinflation caused the total breakdown of the economy—it was very hard to get anything from the material goods. Being an artist in such time was challenging. There was no art materials in the shops or it was so expensive that not everyone could afford it. For example when creating the poster Jerzy was lacking the black paper. He painted the paper with a black paint before he started to paint the silhouettes of people with the white paint. (Agnieszka Skapska, pers. comm., 26 December 2022)

As viewers, we can observe these details in the poster as we scan each of the 24 rows, which feature linked white lines forming the shapes of silhouettes against a black background (which we now know was painted black by Skapski). From a distance, these might seem like a heart rhythm line detected by an electrocardiogram (EKG), or "twenty-four rows of seams or scars", as Liam Machado describes it ([Machado 2019](#), p. 48). However, upon closer inspection, the silhouettes become clearly distinct, each not quite the same as the other, and some varying in size in order to resemble the figures of women and children. This is how the poster evokes the absent presence of the victims of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and the Holocaust in general.



The caption to this poster by the Polish artist Jerzy Skapski reads: "Every day at Auschwitz brought death to 2,370 people, and this is the number of figures represented above. The concentration camp at Auschwitz was in existence for 1,688 days and this is the exact number of copies of this poster printed. Altogether some four million people died at the camp." In a letter to the *Unesco Courier*, Jerzy Skapski wrote: "When I had finished painting this poster I was afraid to put my name on it—what meaning have names in comparison with people's lives?"

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**Figure 5.** Jerzy Skapski's (1974) Poster *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* (*Every Day at Auschwitz*) Published in *The Unesco Courier*, "Teaching human rights: education's four 'R'" in October 1978. (Skapski 1974, 1978). Figure reproduced with permission of Agnieszka Skapska.

What makes the piece particularly impactful is how the artist, as a young witness of these atrocities, utilizes the space of the page and the reproducibility of the print medium to

visually depict the victims' death and invoke their lingering presence, felt even after their departure. Similar to Szajna's (1990, 2006) *Appeal* and *Figures*, the use of multiple silhouettes to represent the dead and invoke their presence leaves the viewers with a sense of the scale of the atrocity, while also reminding them of the individual aspect and humanity of the victims; each one of these figures was a person with a name, a history, a family. Skapski's note in the caption of the poster about the letter he wrote to *The Unesco Courier* in relation to his work puts this into perspective. He states: "'When I had finished painting this poster I was afraid to put my name on it—what meaning have names in comparison with people's lives?'" (Skapski 1978, p. 22). We can interpret this in line with Theodore Adorno's ([1981] 2003a) famous statement in "Cultural Criticism and Society" that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (p. 280), or the post-war reluctance to represent the Holocaust in art. How can we understand this traumatic historical period and represent it artistically? What meaning do our lives have in the post-Auschwitz world? As Adorno ([1981] 2003b) would later contend in "Mediation on Metaphysics:" "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage" (p. 286). The artist's attempt to focus on the significance of the silhouettes to represent individual life (including children) in each of the rows speaks to the attempt to at least try to do so. Moreover, as the artist had personal connections to the Jewish community of his village, the words allude to the feeling of mourning the loss of these victims.

Furthermore, the decision to create this aesthetic piece as a poster to be printed and re-printed, as opposed to a painting, also speaks to the intention behind the work, and to the innovation in such a commemorative piece. Walter Benjamin's ([1936] 2008) understanding of mass media, as described in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", clarifies this approach: "It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced" (p. 22). Michael W. Jennings (2008) further reiterates this argument in the preface of the 2008 edition of *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*: "Reproducibility is thus finally a political capacity of the work of art; its very reproducibility shatters its aura and enables a reception of a very different kind in a very different spectatorial space" (p. 15; emphasis in original). By utilizing the print medium to reproduce his artwork 1688 times to match the days the camp was operational, Skapski offers a dynamic commemorative work that utilizes the space of the page and the print medium in a unique manner to represent the victims of the Nazi destruction of European Jewry while paying special attention to how each of the victims was portrayed and commemorated in the piece.

### 3. A Multidirectional and Transcultural Remembrance: *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* and "El Siluetazo"

The spatial representation of absence through silhouettes in *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* is particularly important to keep in mind as we observe a transcultural adoption of Skapski's poster in the Argentinian dictatorial context with "El Siluetazo", an aesthetic/activist action that sought to represent the 30,000 detained-disappeared by means of life-size paper silhouettes that were pasted by the public across the Buenos Aires' city center. The action was also strikingly captured by Argentinian photographer Eduardo Gil, whose images have been circulated globally.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned, the artists of "El Siluetazo", Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel, came across Skapski's work at the time when they were working on visually representing the detained-disappeared in Argentina in the early 1980s. Specifically, they struggled with how to emphasize the number of people who were taken by military forces. Skapski's poster provided inspiration on how this could be done. As Flores states in the "Podcast Arte y Memoria" by Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA (Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020):

We started looking for a way to represent it. And so, we concluded that not only is the sign important, but also the quantity, and the real physical dimension occupied by 30,000 bodies. Searching, trying to build that imaginary, among other things we found, and I brought to one of our meetings, a poster made by the Polish designer Jerzy Skapski, which represented the disappeared in a day in the Auschwitz concentration camp. And the poster said that there was a certain number of copies of that poster that represented the days in which the concentration camp was operational. That showed us the idea of the dimension. That was the temporal dimension, we lacked the physical dimension. And that's where the idea appeared of representing [the detained-disappeared] with bodies, with life-size human silhouettes. This was the key to the idea. (*Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020*, 3:10–4:22; my translation and transcription)<sup>22</sup>

For the artists, Skapski's piece depicted the spatial and temporal dimensions of absence as the silhouettes evoked the absent presence of the victims. As Vincent Druliolle (2009) notes in "Silhouettes of the Disappeared:" "What Aguerreberry, Flores and Kexel learned from this work [Skapski's] is the idea of representing visually and in space the overwhelming scale of the repression" (p. 87). According to Flores, then came the idea to further add the physical dimension by reproducing 30,000 life-size paper silhouettes (*Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020*, 4:10–4:22; my translation and transcription). The question of "¿Cuánto espacio ocupan 30.000 cuerpos humanos?" ("How much space do 30,000 human bodies take up?") thus became the driving principle behind the project (1:22–1:25; my translation and transcription). In responding to this question, the artists realized the spatial dimension of such a project, along with the necessity of carrying out the endeavour. As Flores explains in his chapter for Longoni and Bruzzone's (2008a) edited volume, *El Siluetazo*:

Then we began another reasoning: if an adult person measures on average an area of  $1.75 \times 0.60$  m 30,000 people, what area do they occupy? Positioned one next to the other it would be 18 km (from the National Congress to the city of Ramos Mejía) and positioned lying in a row—head to toe—52.5 km (Congress-Luján). The idea then began to be formalized: we would make all of the disappeared. Conceptually, it would be a *spatial dimensioning* that would help understand the magnitude of the event. (Flores 2008, p. 92; my translation; emphasis in original)<sup>23</sup>

Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel then adopt from Skapski's work the aesthetic of the silhouette to represent each of the victims and magnify it so that the absence of the detained-disappeared is depicted on a 1:1 scale. This allows them and the Argentinian public to emphasize the number of disappearances while also making the absence of those people visually present in the urban landscape of Buenos Aires.

The silhouettes were posted around the Plaza de Mayo, the central square of Buenos Aires, located near various monuments and sites of power—including the Metropolitan Cathedral, City Hall, and the Casa Rosada, the country's House of Government.<sup>24</sup> The Plaza de Mayo is particularly significant, as it is the place where Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo) marched every Thursday to protest the disappearance of their children. As Flores (2008) explains, "the Plaza de Mayo was in those days, and continues to be the space of highest manifestation, where recent history and the origin of our collective identity coexist. It is a place loaded with practical meanings of a vernacular, psychological, social, historical, cultural, ceremonial, economic, political, and historical nature" (p. 93; my translation).<sup>25</sup> With such a central and significant location, the objective of the project was not merely to commemorate the detained-disappeared, but rather was intended as a "performance protest" (Taylor 2003, p. 165), as Diana Taylor defines it.<sup>26</sup> The action sought to bring attention to the state's involvement in the disappearance of 30,000 so-called "subversives" and give voice to the general public's demand to have them return home safely (what the Mothers called "Aparición con vida").<sup>27</sup> This transformed



the visual aesthetic—initially inspired by Skapski’s spatial depiction of the victims of the Holocaust—into a memory-activist performance, as the protestors lay down on roles of paper and used their bodies to create silhouettes, demarcating the absent presence of the detained-disappeared and spatially depicting their absence. People of all ages participated in creating the silhouettes, including the youth and children.<sup>28</sup>

The project’s memory-activist dimension is particularly evident in Flores’s adamant statement that “El Siluetazo” is not a work of art, but a tool to fight (injustice), and the artists’ preference to call the project “La Silueteada” (The Silhouetted) instead of “El Siluetazo” (“The Silhouetazo”).<sup>29</sup> This is significant because the former highlights the action of making the silhouettes through a public performative intervention (i.e., the process) versus the latter, which places emphasis on the silhouette as an object (i.e., the result). As Flores explains:

We say *silueteada* (silhouetted) because we believe that the act of making the silhouette is more important than the silhouette object. Although the object is later installed, at the time we understood that it was to be anonymous, that it was not to be known who had made it. But later to affirm continuity and ensure that it continues to be done in that way in the future, in making the silhouettes, we began to announce, to tell the story behind it and to explain that it was not a work of art, it is a tool to fight. And as such, it was taken in each place, in each country, in each region, on each continent where there are disappeared. This sign and the way of doing it have been taken up again. A partner lays down and occupies the place that a body would occupy and another outlines it. At that time the *silueteada* was an action that tried to draw attention to the one who is not there. ([Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020](#), 6:41–7:45; my translation and transcription)<sup>30</sup>

This already marks a stark difference between the Holocaust memory and commemoration depicted in *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia*, which does not have the same activist component. Although its publication in *The Unesco Courier* makes the art piece publicly accessible, and as Jennings argues, changes the “political capacity” of the work, I contend that Skapski’s poster did not have the same activist intention as “El Siluetazo” did at its conception. As Flores emphasizes in the statement above: “empezamos [ . . . ] a explicar que no era una obra de arte, que es una herramienta de lucha” (we began [ . . . ] to explain that it was not a work of art, that it is a tool to fight”), further adding that “la silueteada era una *acción* que trataba de llamar la atención sobre el que no está” (“the *silueteada* (the silhouetted) was an *action* that tried to draw attention to the one who is not there” ([Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020](#), 7:06–7:15, 7:38–7:45; my translation and transcription; emphasis added). According to Martín Zicari (2018), “El Siluetazo” can be read as a “remediation” of Skapski’s work, as “[f]irst, the object of grievance changed from representing the dead of Auschwitz to the disappeared of Argentina, and second, it evolved from a poster reproduced in a magazine to a graphic action in the street” (p. 4). However, adding to my point above, I argue that this project does not only “remediate” Skapski’s memory form, but most importantly transforms it into an even more powerful visual aesthetic action that has itself become iconic in Latin America. As Ana Longoni (2017) argues in her workshop for MACBA (Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona):

The creative strategies of the human rights movement during the last dictatorships in Argentina (1976–83) and in Chile (1973–90) may be recognised and contrasted by two great matrixes of visual representation of the disappeared: photographs and silhouettes. Both arose (almost) in parallel and have a long history that has turned them into signs referring unequivocally to the disappeared, even outside Latin America. ([Longoni 2017](#))

Today, silhouettes and photographs of missing persons continue to be used in different contexts to fight against forced disappearances and human rights violations across the continent.<sup>31</sup>

The impact of Skapski's *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* on the artists of "El Siluetazo" during the final years of the Argentinian dictatorship also needs to be contextualized in relation to the prevalence of Holocaust memory in Argentina's collective and cultural memory landscapes. The direct connections to the Holocaust and Nazi Germany are rooted in the historical contexts surrounding the Second World War, the Cold War period, and the Holocaust "memory boom" of the 1980s, not only due to the significant Jewish and perpetrator presence in the country after the war, but also because of the considerable role that Holocaust memory had in how the dictatorship was understood on a collective and cultural level during that period.<sup>32</sup> Why is Holocaust memory so significant in the Argentinian context in particular? First, we can consider the significant Jewish presence in Argentina since the early 19th century when the Constitution and Immigration and Colonization Law in 1853 (forty years after Spanish independence) set the way for Jewish settlement in Argentina (Avni 1991, p. 20).<sup>33</sup> We must take into account collective and cultural memories of the Holocaust during the postwar period (Baer and Sznajder 2017, p. 28), the prevalence of anti-Semitism during the military regime of 1976, and the large numbers of Jewish detained-disappeared.<sup>34</sup> Second, we can highlight the presence of Nazi criminals in the country. In the 1940s, there was a significant perpetrator presence as many Nazis fled to Argentina after the end of the Second World War. Although the numbers vary, Raanan Rein (2010) explains in *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines?* that between 19,000–40,000 Germans and Austrians immigrated to the country in the first decade following the war (p. 80). This also included fifty war criminals and one hundred and thirty collaborators of the Nazi regime, most notably "Adolf Eichmann and Josef Mengele, 'the angel of Death of Auschwitz,' who used children, young twins, and dwarfs as guinea pigs for his 'medical' experiments" (p. 81).<sup>35</sup> Third, we can also point to the fascist roots of the Argentinian dictatorship and the role of Nazi Germany as a model for the military Junta. As Federico Finchelstein (2014) explains in *In The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*: "Fascism provided the background for the principles and practices of the violence that the Argentine government unleashed against a group of its citizens in the 1970s" (p. 1).<sup>36</sup> These connections between Argentina, European fascism, Nazi Germany, and Jewish diasporic collective and cultural memories of the Holocaust provided the framework for the Argentinian population to understand the atrocities during the dictatorship of 1976–1983.

As mentioned, Holocaust memory and commemoration in particular became significantly prominent in the cultural landscape of the country and a way for people to make sense of their own experiences of persecution and repression. As Baer and Sznajder (2017) argue:

The number of this regime's victims cannot, of course, compare with its role model, Nazi Germany. But Nazi crimes became an important source of the images, symbols, and representational models that were used to shape and understand state terror in Argentina in the 1970s. Human rights activists, writers, artists, filmmakers, scholars and victims themselves portrayed the crimes of the Juntas as analogous to the crimes committed against the Jews by the Nazis. Similarities and equivalences were drawn between the comparable characteristics of the two historical periods of terror . . . Even the term '*Holocausto*' came to symbolize an Argentine national catastrophe. (Goldberg 2001; Senkman 2011). (p. 28)

The way in which Argentinians looked back to the Holocaust to reflect on their current circumstances, mainly through the use of aesthetics, imagery, and cultural sources, hints at the significant role this historical trauma played for both the Jewish and non-Jewish population of the country. Scholars observe that both in the dictatorial and post-dictatorial periods "the prism of the Shoah brought in by Jewish survivors and writers also conditioned the perspective of non-Jewish survivors and relatives in their retelling and retrospective making sense of the events" (Baer and Sznajder 2017, p. 55). This was the case, for instance, with Jacobo Timerman's ([1981] 2004, [1981] 1982) famous written testimony *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (*Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*). As a well-known

Jewish journalist, Timerman was imprisoned from 1977–1979. His testimony directly compares Nazi Germany with fascist Argentina and had a cultural impact on the national understanding of the dictatorship.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the resonance of Nazi crimes in the Argentinian collective and cultural landscapes highlights another significant aspect to consider when placing in dialogue *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* and “El Siluetazo.” It helps us understand how the creators of “El Siluetazo”, Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel, found inspiration in an artwork such as Jerzy Skapski’s, which depicted the victims of the Holocaust, and why they would adopt the presence of absence trope and the silhouette aesthetic associated with Holocaust commemoration as a conscious choice to protest against the atrocities occurring in their own country.

If we read both *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* and “El Siluetazo” from the perspective of multidirectional memory, this dialogical approach changes our interpretation of both works, as Rothberg (2009) views the potentiality of understanding one historical trauma through the lens of another. In particular, he discusses the role of the Holocaust as a “screen memory” (p. 12). However, this is not in the assumed Freudian sense, in which it “stand[s] in for and distract[s] from something disturbing . . . ” (p. 16), which can displace conversations on other traumas. Rather, Rothberg emphasizes how Holocaust memory can “open up lines of communication” (p.12) and function in ways other than “as a barrier to remembrance” (p.16). We can consider this in relation to “El Siluetazo.” For Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel, *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* did not displace conversations about the detained-disappeared in Argentina, acting as a “screen memory” as mentioned, or a “barrier” to commemorate the detained-disappeared. On the contrary, the poster inspired the Argentinian artists to find their own aesthetic approach to visually and spatially represent the victims of the dictatorship and the magnitude of the atrocities occurring in their country. With “El Siluetazo”, they then added their own interpretation of how the silhouette aesthetic could be used and even transformed the presence-of-absence trope as the project was carried out as an activist intervention in the Argentinian dictatorial context. This gives us a perspective on how Holocaust memory, and in particular Skapski’s spatial representation of the victims of Auschwitz, gave a mode of expression and public presence to the detained-disappeared in Argentina, an aesthetic that has now become iconic as it has engrained itself in the collective and cultural memories of the dictatorship and post-dictatorship periods in Argentina. In my doctoral dissertation, I emphasize the memory-activist dimension of the project and I argue that Skapski’s silhouette aesthetic, as depicted in his poster, had a tremendous effect on Argentinian cultural memory in relation to the detained-disappeared, and in Latin America more widely, as it was transformed with “El Siluetazo”.

Moreover, the time period in which both *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* and “El Siluetazo” were created also influence our multidirectional and travelling memory perspectives. As I mentioned, in the early 1980s, there was a memory boom in which we saw a proliferation of Holocaust memory. In Argentina specifically, Holocaust memory provided the framework from which to understand the dictatorial present. As Kahan and Schenquer (2016b) argue in “The Use of the Past During the Last Military Dictatorship and Post-Dictatorship:” “the resonance of the memory of the Holocaust penetrated the very origins of the most recent military dictatorship. As early as 1976, external voices could be heard around the world denouncing the regime for perpetrating genocide” (p. 132). The Argentinian collective and cultural understandings of the Holocaust in relation to the dictatorship played an important role in why the artists would be inclined to adopt a Holocaust artwork for their own context. In addition, the fact that Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel created the “Siluetazo” during the final years of the dictatorship adds another layer of significance and differentiation, particularly when compared to Skapski’s poster, which was created almost thirty years after the end of the Second World War and the liberation of the concentration camps by Allied forces. Skapski was working with a distant past and personal childhood memories of the war, while the artists of “El Siluetazo” were living in the atrocity they sought to represent and protest. These differences become evident as the Argentinian artists recount, for instance, that maintaining anonymity was a key priority to protect their safety. As Flores

(2008) explains: “Another issue -which was not minor- was that of the authorship of the project, which from the beginning we wanted to be diluted among the militancy, with the double objective of merging ourselves in the activity so that it would belong to everyone and also to preserve our personal safety in order to carry it out” (p. 94; my translation).<sup>38</sup> It was only in the post-dictatorial period that the artists claimed their authorship, as people were misattributing the project to other groups (p. 104–105). The artists also had to deal with the changing political climate and the fear of police retribution during the action. It is for these reasons that the aesthetic aspect took on a central role as well. As Roberto Amigo Cerisola states: “la toma política no se podría haber dado sin la toma estética” (“the political take could not have occurred without the aesthetic take”) (quoted in Flores 2008, p. 99; my translation). It was also through collaboration with the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and the Abuelas y Familiares (Grandmothers and Relatives), as well as the Argentinian public, that the intervention was successful. Through the efforts, for instance, of university students from the fine arts, architecture, ontology, and pharmacy departments who brought rolls of paper (Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020, 6:20–6:30; my translation); and the everyday person that helped. As Guillermo Kexel (2008) notes: “The one who put his vehicle in when necessary, the one who went out to paste silhouettes one night and was arrested, the one who put the last pesos he had in his pocket to buy a paintbrush, the one who ruined the only clothes he had to go to work, full of paint or paste” (p. 112; my translation).<sup>39</sup> These characteristics and contextualizations of both Skapski’s commemorative poster and the Argentinian memory-activist action mark key differentiations in the works and impact our reading of the travelling and multidirectional memory aesthetic they highlight.

We must also recall that Rothberg’s (2009) multidirectional memory emphasizes the dialogic encounters of memory, as it “is not simply a one-way street” (p. 6). How, then, does the organic multidirectional and transcultural connection change our perspectives of Skapski’s poster? How does “El Siluetazo” nuance our understanding of Skapski’s work, or Holocaust memory more broadly? I argue that this Argentinian project allows us to re-interpret *Każdy Dzień Oświęcima* from a decentered/non-Eurocentric lens. Personally, I encountered this piece through the perspective of “El Siluetazo.” For this reason, my view of Skapski’s poster depicting death at Auschwitz has always been infused with the context of the detained-disappeared and the memory-activist dimension inherent in “El Siluetazo’s” enactment during the Marcha de la Resistencia on 21–22 September 1983. The Argentinian iteration has also provided Skapski’s work further visibility across the globe, in Latin America in particular, and encouraged viewers to re-examine the piece and nuance their interpretation of Holocaust memory and aesthetics; especially, as Aguerreberry, Kexel, and Flores have openly spoken about the direct influence of Skapski’s poster when creating “El Siluetazo” (information which is available to the viewers if they watch interviews and/or read articles about the memory-activist action). In addition, Skapski’s choice of the print medium to circulate the commemorative work takes on a different light when we analyze the poster from a memory-activist dimension. Here again, Benjamin’s theorization of art and reproducibility can guide our perspective.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, with these two case studies, we can observe how the spatial representation of absent bodies, in particular the use of silhouettes to evoke the presence-of-absence trope, evolves as it travels from the Eastern European context into the Latin American one during the early 1980s. It has followed a geographical and transcultural journey, commencing with its use in Polish Jewish, non-Jewish, and survivor art (such as with Józef Szajna and Jerzy Krawczyk), and in particular with the publication of Polish Christian artist Jerzy Skapski’s (1974) *Każdy Dzień Oświęcima* in the October 1978 issue of *The Unesco Courier*. In the poster, the artist utilizes the space of the page to evoke the absent presence of the one million people (thought to be 4 million) murdered at Auschwitz, alluding both to the scale of the atrocity and to each individual life through the silhouette aesthetic.



The Argentinian visual artists and creators of “El Siluetazo”, [Aguerreberry et al. \(1983\)](#), then enacted the same travelling memory form in 1983 to denounce the disappearance of 30,000 people during the final year of the country’s fascist dictatorship; in doing so, they transform the silhouette aesthetic and Holocaust memory trope of the presence of absence. A key component of this transformation is the memory-activist layer, which was added as the action was carried out by the public who lent their bodies in order to create life-size depictions of the absent presence of each of the 30,000 disappeared. Although the action was inspired by the silhouette aesthetic depicted in Skapski’s poster, this marks a stark difference between the Polish artist’s work, which only sought to commemorate the Holocaust, and “El Siluetazo”, which was conceived as “a tool to fight” injustice and later became an iconic Latin American visual activist aesthetic.

In reading both works through the lens of multidirectional memory, as well as transcultural and travelling memory, we as Western readers can nuance our interpretation of both Skapski’s poster *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* (*Every Day at Auschwitz*) and “El Siluetazo” in Argentina. By placing in dialogue Holocaust memory artworks and the silhouette aesthetic in particular with this Latin American iteration, we can re-visit Skapski’s impactful piece. The powerful link between memory and activism in the Southern Cone of Latin America fuels such re-interpretations. It encourages us to reflect on the transcultural approaches Holocaust memory can take when examined from a decentered perspective. In this article, I argued that in outlining the figures of the victims of the Holocaust and the detained-disappeared of the Argentinian fascist dictatorship, the two case studies illustrated the multidirectional and two-way transcultural use of spatial representations of absence. In particular, we see how the abstract depictions of figures and absent bodies can evoke the presence of the victims of diverse historical traumas and atrocities. However, it is important to keep in mind that notwithstanding the organic connections that came from the direct inspiration of Skapski’s poster in “El Siluetazo”, when examining very different representations of historical traumas, we must also consider the dangers of appropriations and conflation, as Sanyal warns us. We should continue investigating the particularities of each piece in order to not make inadequate assumptions or generalizations. As more questions emerge in relation to these works, further research will continue to nuance our understanding of them, of Holocaust memory aesthetics, as well as multidirectional and transcultural perspectives on other atrocities, such as the Southern Cone dictatorships of Latin America. For now, these two case studies show us how organic multidirectional connections can emerge as transcultural memory forms travel across time and space and directly or indirectly influence artists in their aesthetics, commemorative projects, and/or memory-activist actions.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> During the 1980s, we see what scholars call a “memory boom” in relation to the Holocaust and the study of memory in western culture. For details see, for example, Jay Winter’s (2001) article “The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies.” In the 1990s, we begin to see the global reaches of Holocaust memory and its reference in relation to other historical traumas and contemporary atrocities throughout the world. See for example, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider’s (2002, 2006) “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory” and *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, as well as Andreas Huyssen’s (2003) *Present Pasts*.
- <sup>2</sup> This article was first presented as a conference paper at the online conference *Space in Holocaust Memory and Representation*, hosted by the Institute of Humanities, Northumbria University, UK, 19–21 November 2021. The presentation was titled “Palimpsests of Memory and the Space of Death: Representing the Holocaust through Jerzy Skapski’s *Every Day at Auschwitz*.” (Marino 2021). This article also forms part of the author’s Chapter 2 of her doctoral dissertation, “Holocaust Memory and the Dictatorships of the Southern Cone of Latin America: Interconnecting Memories and Traumas” (Marino Forthcoming).
- <sup>3</sup> Emilio Crenzel (2011) explains in his introductory chapter of *The Memory of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone*, that “[i]n Argentina, the predominant form [of repression] was that of enforced disappearances, which consisted in the detention or abduction of individuals by military or police officers, who held them secretly captive in illegal detention centers or camps, known as ‘clandestine detention centers,’ torturing and, in most cases killing them. Their bodies were then buried in unmarked graves, incinerated, or thrown into the sea, and their property was looted. As these crimes were being committed, the state simultaneously denied any responsibility” (pp. 1–2). In addition, Ana Ros (2012) notes in *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay* that long-term imprisonment was predominant in Uruguay during the dictatorship, allowing the country of fewer than three million inhabitants (between 1973–1977) to have “‘the highest percentage of political detainees per capita in the world’ (Sondrol, quotes in Lessa 2011, p. 179). This number does not include transitory detentions and supervised release, which means that many more than 6000 men and women were subject to humiliation, torture, and sexual abuse” (p. 161).
- <sup>4</sup> *The Unesco Courier* can be accessed online and in multiple languages through their website: <https://courier.unesco.org/en> (accessed on 15 February 2023). Readers can also explore their archives and view previous issues of the magazine, including the October 1978 edition, which features Jerzy Skapski’s *Każdy Dzień Oświęcimia* on pp. 22. This issue is available online in Spanish, English, and French. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000074795> (accessed on 15 February 2023). (UNESCO 1978a, 1978b).
- <sup>5</sup> 30,000 detained-disappeared is considered the official figure by human rights organizations and has become iconic in Argentinian memory politics, “and questioning the figure is a rarely broken taboo” (Baer and Sznaider 2017, pp. 40–41). Similar to the iconic status of the figure of 6 million in Holocaust discourse, which represents the total number of Jewish victims. For details on the updated number of the detained-disappeared from the Argentinian dictatorship, see Emilio Crenzel’s (2011) Introduction in *The Memory of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone*. For more details on the ‘6 million’ figure, see Chapter 4 of Oren Baruch Stier’s (2015) *Holocaust Icons*.
- <sup>6</sup> We can see the global influence of Holocaust memory, for example, with how the term genocide has also been widely adopted in Argentina to reference the crimes committed by the military Junta. This is a significant word choice as calling these crimes a “genocide” makes the comparison with the Holocaust more convincing. As Baer and Sznaider (2017) contend: “While the most common and accepted term to refer to the crimes of the military Junta is *terrorismo de estado* (‘state terrorism’), Argentina is a country where the term ‘genocide,’ *genocidio*, has been also widely adopted” (p. 41).
- <sup>7</sup> One of the reasons why Skapski’s work resonated in the Argentinian context has to do with the direct connections and comparisons made between this time period and the Holocaust and its commemoration in the country. Holocaust memory also played a significant role in how the dictatorship of 1976–1983 was understood on a collective and cultural level. For more details, see Chapter 2 of Alejandro Baer and Sznaider’s (2017) *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era*.
- <sup>8</sup> Skapski also gifted a copy of this poster to US President Jimmy Carter when the US established the “Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust” in 1979. His wife Agnieszka Skapska recounts in personal correspondence with the author that “he felt the need to give a poster as a thank you” (Agnieszka Skapska, pers. comm., 26 December 2022). Skapski “personally delivered the gift to the members of the Commission [sic]” when they “arrived in Poland (Cracow) around 1979, July 30–August 1” (Agnieszka Skapska, pers. comm., 26 December 2022).
- <sup>9</sup> The artists first conceived this project in 1981 as part of the exhibition “Objetos y Experiencias” (Objects and Experiences) organized by the Esso foundation, which provided an uncensored space to “present installations, drawings, paintings, prints, individually, collectively and on any subject” (*Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020*, 2:58–3:04; my transcription and translation). However, after the invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982 the Esso foundation left, and the artists brought the idea of using silhouettes to represent the detained-disappeared to the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who were organizing the third annual “Marcha de la Resistencia,” (Resistance March) a 24-hour protest march to be held on 21 September 1983. There, there would be a workshop to paint and represent the youth, which is the most common age of the detained-disappeared, the highest average of detained-disappeared (*Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020*, 4:40–5:29). The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo accepted it with a few conditions; mainly that the silhouettes should remain anonymous and only say ‘aparición con vida’ (safe return) (*Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020*, 5:27–5:43; my translation and transcription).

However, as the protestors created the silhouettes, they added the names of their missing loved ones (Longoni and Bruzzone 2008b, p. 30). The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo also wanted the disappeared children and pregnant women to be represented. Julio Flores explains how this was done: “Entonces, Aguerreberry le colocó a Kexel un almohadón en el abdomen y trazó su silueta de perfil. Le agregó detalles como el vestido y el rodete, y así nació el molde para las siluetas embarazadas. La hija mayor de Kexel, de apenas tres años, prestó su cuerpo para la plantilla de la silueta infantil. Los bebés se hicieron a mano alzada” (“Aguerreberry then placed a cushion on Kexel’s abdomen and traced his silhouette in profile. He added details like the dress and the bun, and thus the mold for the pregnant silhouettes was born. Kexel’s eldest daughter, just three years old, lent her body for the template of the child’s silhouette. Babies were drawn by freehand” (Longoni and Bruzzone 2008b, p. 29; my translation).

10 Longoni and Bruzzone (2008b) explain in the introduction to their edited book *El Siluetazo*, that two other iterations of “EL Siluetazo” followed, one in December of 1983 carried out by the organization *Frente por los Derechos Humanos* that connected young activists with the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, and another in March 1984, just as the country transitioned into a democratic government (p. 12).

11 Here I follow Yifat Gutman’s (2017) understanding of memory activism as defined in her book *Memory Activism* and reference Ann Rigney’s (2018) nuancing of this term in “Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic.” Gutman developed this concept in relation to the Israeli-Palestine conflict and defines it as “the strategic commemoration of a contested past outside state channels to influence public debate and policy” (p. 1). Rigney then nuances and expands the terminology by focusing on the interplay between Gutman’s *memory activism*, “the memory of activism (how earlier struggles for a better world are culturally recollected, as described in Katriel and Reading 2015), and *memory in activism* (how the cultural memory of earlier struggles informs new movements in the present, as set out in Eyerman 2016)” (p. 372). I utilize Rigney’s theorization of “memory-activism” as she emphasizes the connection among these three concepts (memory activism, memory of activism, and memory in activism), which helps us better understand how these case studies interact with one another. I expand on this aspect in Chapter 2 of my doctoral dissertation (Marino Forthcoming).

12 The presence of absence trope is also prominent in German and European commemorative projects, as can be seen in countless commemorative sites and memorials. For details, see Jay Winter’s (2010) “Sites of Memory”, and James Young’s (1994) *The Texture of Memory*.

13 For an in-depth analysis of the use of ghosts, relics, figures, disembodied heads, etc., in survivor and postwar art, see Amishai-Maisels’s (2005) Chapter 9: “Haunting the Empty Place” of *Absence-presence*.

14 The use of silhouettes can also be seen in the commemoration of the victims of the Hiroshima atomic bombing. See for example the *Los Angeles Times* (Archives 1985) article “Death Shadows” Mark 40th Anniversary of Hiroshima: Silhouettes of Victims Drawn on Pavements”, which describes the “Death Shadows” that were painted by peace activists in various American cities during the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima.

15 For a detailed catalogue of Szajna’s (n.d.) work, see *The Szajna Collection & Archive*, at <http://www.jozefszajna.eu/> (accessed on 15 February 2023).

16 Krawczyk’s (1962) painting *Aufpassen, Mutti!* can be viewed on the website of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw Palace (Muzeum Niepodległości w Warszawie Pałac) as part of the exhibition article titled “WYSTAWA: Obrazy Jerzego Krawczyka z naszych zbiorów na wystawie ‘Jerzy Krawczyk – Myszy i ludzie’” (“EXHIBITION: Paintings by Jerzy Krawczyk from our collections of the exhibition ‘Jerzy Krawczyk - Mice and People’”) (my translation). (WYSTAWA: Obrazy Jerzego Krawczyka z Naszych Zbiorów Na Wystawie “Jerzy Krawczyk—Myszy i Ludzie” | Muzeum Niepodległości w Warszawie 2022).

17 Skąpski’s stained glass windows for the Parish of St. Maximilian the Martyr can be viewed on the church’s website: [https://maksymilian.oswiecim.pl/images/galerie/kosciol/27\\_kosciol.jpg](https://maksymilian.oswiecim.pl/images/galerie/kosciol/27_kosciol.jpg) (accessed on 15 February 2023) (Rzymskokatolicka n.d.).

18 The painting can be viewed on the artist’s website: <https://jeryzyskapski.pl/portfolio/altana/> (accessed on 15 February 2023) (Skąpski 2010a).

19 “Ośmioletni Jurek zauważył, że skobel zamykający drzwi do altany nie jest zamknięty, więc zaciekawiony zajrzał do środka, a z wnętrza mnóstwo par oczu z przerażeniem spoglądało na chłopca. Jedną z postaci, w której Jurek rozpoznał znajomego Szulima Strosberga podeszła do niego i łagodnym głosem powiedziała „Jureczek, powiedz tatusiowi, że tu jesteśmy—tylko nie mów nic Niemcom”. Jurek wykonał polecenie. Następnie, ojciec Jurka wydał kategoryczny zakaz chodzenia na strych przez kolejne miesiące . . . ” (Skąpski n.d.b).

20 As Skąpski recounts in the article “Rzeczpospolita Proszowska”: “Ojciec doradził, aby ta duża rodzina rozdzieliła się po dwie osoby, bo będzie łatwiej się ukryć tym zwiększą szansę przetrwania...Na pewno przez jakiś czas przechowywali się, może nie wszyscy na naszym strychu bo nie wolno nam było chodzić na strych. Ta liczna rodzina z wyjątkiem jednego z synów przeżyła. Męska część odwiedziła nas w Krakowie już na Kremerowskiej, więc najwcześniej w 1946 r., przed wyjazdem do Jerozolim. Przynieśli torbę pomarańczy” (Skąpski 2010b). “My father advised that this large family should split up into two groups, as it would be easier to hide, thus increasing their chance of survival... They must have been hiding for some time, maybe not all of them in our attic because we were not allowed to go to the attic. This large family, with the exception of one of the sons, survived. The men of the family visited us in Kraków already on Kremerowska, at the beginning of 1946, before leaving for Jerusalem. They brought us a bag of oranges” (translation by Jessica Marino and Anna (Ania) Paluch).

- 21 See for example, the photograph “Siluetas y canas.” El Siluetazo. Buenos Aires 21/22 de setiembre 1983—Fotografía de Eduardo Gil, which depicts the pasted silhouettes as well as the police presence during the Marcha de la Resistencia on 21–22 September 1983 (Gil 1983b). Available online: <https://www.eduardogil.com/siluetazo.html#&gid=1&pid=10> (accessed on 7 February 2023).
- 22 “Empezamos a buscar el modo de representarlo. Y así llegamos a la conclusión que no sólo es importante el signo sino también la cantidad, y la dimensión física, real que ocupan 30.000 cuerpos. Buscando, tratando de construir ese imaginario, entre otras cosas encontramos y lleve a una de nuestras reuniones un afiche realizado por el diseñador polaco Jerzy Skapski que representaba a los desaparecidos de un día en el campo de concentración de Auschwitz. Y el afiche decía que de ese afiche había una cantidad determinada de ejemplares que representaban los días en los cuales estuvo funcionado el campo de concentración. Eso nos mostró la idea de la dimensión. Esa era la dimensión temporal, nos faltaba la dimensión física. Y ahí apareció la idea de representar con cuerpos, con siluetas humanas de tamaño real, y esta era la clave para la idea” (Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020, 3:10–4:22; my transcription).
- 23 “Entonces comenzamos otro razonamiento: si una persona adulta mide en promedio una superficie de  $1,75 \times 0,60$  m 30,000 personas ¿qué superficie ocupan? Puestos uno al lado del otro serían 18 km (desde el Congreso Nacional hasta la ciudad de Ramos Mejía) y puestos acostados en fila—pie con cabeza—52,5 km (Congreso-Luján). La idea entonces comenzó a formalizarse: haríamos a todos los desaparecidos. Conceptualmente, sería un *dimensionamiento espacial* que ayudaría a comprender la magnitud del hecho” (Flores 2008, p. 92; emphasis in original).
- 24 See, for example Gil’s photograph “María Zurita.” El Siluetazo. Buenos Aires, 21/22 de setiembre 1983—Fotografía de Eduardo Gil, which depicts protestors outlining the silhouettes at the third Marcha de la Resistencia, including one with the name María Zurita. 21–22 September 1983 (Gil 1983a). Available online: <https://www.eduardogil.com/siluetazo.html#&gid=1&pid=15> (accessed on 7 February 2023).
- 25 En esos días, como hoy, la Plaza de Mayo era el espacio de manifestación más alto donde conviven la historia reciente y la del origen de nuestra identidad colectiva. Es un lugar cargado de significaciones prácticas de carácter vernáculo, psicológico, social, histórico, cultural, ceremonial, económico, político e histórico” (Flores 2008, p. 93).
- 26 Following Diana Taylor’s (2003) theorization, I categorize “El Siluetazo” as a “performance protest” as the protestors physically embodied the memory of the detained-disappeared by using their bodies to create the silhouettes (p. 173). By doing so, they imprinted in these figures their pain and suffering as well as their strength to oppose the military forces and political repression, making the “absent presence” of 30,000 people as visible as possible, both to the city-dwellers and the dictatorial powers. Taylor classifies the regular protests of the Mothers and Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo, as well as those enacted by the organization H.I.J.O.S (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) as “performance protests” (p. 169).
- 27 I want to point out that a significant number of the detained-disappeared in Argentina were Jewish as anti-Semitism was particularly high during the dictatorship. As Baer and Sznajder (2017) argue: “While Jews represented between 0.8% and 1.2% of the Argentine population (between 230,000 and 29,000 people at that time), Jewish Argentinians make up 5% of the total number of victims of state terror (figures vary between 800 and 1600 people)” (p. 59n4). However, it is important to remember that their persecution was not at the center of the military Junta’s ideology, as it was in Nazi Germany (Tarica 2012, p. 91), as Estelle Tarica (2012) argues in “The Holocaust Again? Dispatches from the Jewish ‘Internal Front’ in Dictatorship Argentina.”
- 28 To understand how the protestors created the silhouettes, see Gil’s photograph “Silueteando I.” El Siluetazo. Buenos Aires, 21/22 de setiembre 1983—Fotografía de Eduardo Gil, which depicts protestors outlining the silhouettes at the third Marcha de la Resistencia at the Plaza de Mayo. 21–22 September 1983 (Gil 1983c). Available online: <https://www.eduardogil.com/siluetazo.html#&gid=1&pid=12> (accessed on 7 February 2023). Also see Gil’s “Silueteando VI.” El Siluetazo. Buenos Aires, 21/22 de setiembre 1983—Fotografía de Eduardo Gil, which shows a small girl painting a silhouette during the third Marcha de la Resistencia. 21–22 September 1983 (Gil 1983d). Available online: <https://www.eduardogil.com/siluetazo.html#&gid=1&pid=19> (accessed on 7 February 2023).
- 29 The English translations for the terms “Siluetazo” and “Silueteada” are not perfect translations. Following Prof. Sonya Lipsett-Rivera’s advice I have translated “Siluetazo” as “Silhouetazo” as “[t]he suffix “azo” often denotes a blow or a something big” and the project was a collective, aesthetic and political action (Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, pers. comm. 2 February 2023). For “Silueteada” I have used “Silhouetted” as it is the most common dictionary translation. It is important to note that the suffix “ada” in this case refers to the silhouettes being an event (Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, pers. comm. 2 February 2023). This is why Aguerreberry, Flores, and Kexel, prefer this term as it references the action taking place (the collective act of making the silhouettes), instead of the result (the silhouettes as objects pasted on walls).
- 30 “Decimos la silueteada porque creemos que el acto de hacer la silueta es más importante que el objeto silueta. Si bien el objeto luego queda instalado, en su momento entendimos que fuera anónimo que no se supiera quiénes lo habían hecho, pero luego para afirmar esta continuidad y hacer que a futuro se continúe haciéndolo de esa manera, en la realización de las siluetas, empezamos a anunciar, a contar, cual fue la historia y explicar que no era una obra de arte, que es una herramienta de lucha. Y como tal fue tomado en cada lugar en que, en cada país, en cada región, en cada continente en que hay desaparecidos, ha sido retomado el signo este y el modo de hacerlo. Un compañero se acuesta y ocupa el lugar que ocuparía un cuerpo y otro lo contornea. En ese momento la silueteada era una acción que trataba llamar la atención sobre el que no está” (Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos: Ex ESMA 2020, 6:41–7:45; my translation and transcription).



- 31 We can see this for example in the Uruguayan post-dictatorial context as the silhouettes became part of the annual “Marcha del Silencio” (March of Silence), organized by *Madres y Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (Mothers and Family Members of the Detained Disappeared) and held on May 20th since 1996. More recently, the Argentinian “Siluetazo” has been adopted in Spain in the action known as “Siluetazo por Ayotzinapa”. This project was created by artists Ana Felker, Arlene Bayliss, Mauricio Patrón Rivera, Sol Prado, and xara sacchi, and conducted at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art on 1 November 2014. Together with the public, these artists protested the forced disappearances by Mexican authorities of forty-three students from the Escuela Normal Raúl Isidro Burgos de Ayotzinapa (Normal Rural School Raúl Isidro Burgos of Ayotzinapa) in the state of Guerrero, Mexico on the night of 26–27 September 2014. For details, see Martín Zícari’s (2018) “Silhouettes: Choreographies of Remembrance Against Enforced Disappearance.” I also mention these iterations in the second chapter of my doctoral dissertation (Marino Forthcoming).
- 32 For details on the impact of Holocaust memory in Argentina during this time period, see Kahan and Schenquer’s (2016a) “Los usos del pasado durante la última dictadura militar. El Holocausto como horizonte de los actores de la comunidad judía en tiempos de régimen militar”, as well as Kahan’s (2022) “Usos y narrativas del Holocausto desde la recuperación democrática en Argentina (1983–2019).
- 33 In *Argentina & the Jews* Haim Avni (1991) explains that Argentina accepted an estimated 13,800–16,600 Jews between 1934 and 1937 (p.141); however, this declined after 1938 when a stricter immigration policy was enacted, which made it more difficult for Jewish refugees to enter the country. After the war, although immigration to Argentina significantly increased in general, Jewish refugees were still being accepted significantly less (pp. 141–146). As he argues: “[i]n the five years between 1947 and 1951, 598,939 immigrants settled permanently in Argentina—compared with 126,925 in the fourteen-year period between 1933 and 1946. The number of Jews, however, was extremely small. In the five years after the Holocaust, 1945–1949, Jewish sources recorded the legal immigration of no more than on thousand to fifteen hundred Jews” (p. 192).
- 34 Finchelstein (2014) further notes that “[a]lthough Jews represented less than 1 percent of the population, they were between 10 and 15 percent of the victims of the military dictatorship” (p. 11). In addition, in *A Lexicon of Terror*, Marguerite Feitlowitz (2011) discusses how anti-Semitism affected Jews in the country. She argues: “The largest Jewry in Latin America, the community has by and large done well. Yet anti-Semitism is entrenched in every major institution, particularly the Church, the military, the government and public schools. Every setback in the economy has engendered scapegoating of the country’s Jews. And every attack on democracy has featured Jew-hating rhetoric. Labor unrest unleashed a full-scale pogrom in 1919. In the ‘30s, inspiration came from the Nazis. After the war Argentina accepted refugees from Hitler’s Holocaust even as it welcomed Martin Bormann, Josef Mengele, and Adolph Eichmann. Ex-Nazis modernized the Argentine secret service” (p. 113).
- 35 For details on German immigration and Nazi refugees in Argentina, see *El Nazismo y los refugiados alemanes en la Argentina 1933–1945* by Carlota Jackisch (1989), and *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines?* by Raanan Rein (2010).
- 36 For details on the fascist roots of the Argentinian dictatorships and the connections to European totalitarian states see *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War* by Federico Finchelstein (2014).
- 37 For more details see Kahan and Schenquer (2016a, 2016b).
- 38 “Otro tema -que no fue menor- era el de la autoría del proyecto, que desde el origen pretendimos que se diluyera entre la militancia, con el doble objeto de fundirnos en la actividad para que ésta naciera como de todos y preservar la seguridad personal para poder llevarlo a cabo” (Flores 2008, p. 94).
- 39 “El que puso su vehículo cuando hizo falta, el que salió a pegar siluetas una noche y fue preso, el que puso los últimos pesos que tenía en el bolsillo para comprar un pincel, el que estropeó la única ropa que tenía para ir al trabajo, llena de pintura o engrudo” (p. 112).

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