

Interrupting Memory: Anti-monuments and the Transformation of Commemoration in Mexico City

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Abstract: *This article explores the emergence of anti-monuments (antimonumentos) in Mexico City as a new form of memorials, installed by victims' families and activists in response to systemic violence and state impunity. Unlike traditional state-sanctioned monuments, anti-monuments reclaim public space and serve not only as sites of mourning but as performative acts of resistance and collective memory. Drawing on memory studies, ritual theory, and non-participant observation, I analyse their characteristics, symbolism, and practices through examples such as Antimonumento +43 and Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan. This study offers a conceptual foundation for future ethnographic research on the ritual dimensions of anti-monuments in Mexico.*

Keywords: *anti-monuments; rituals; Mexico City; memory; protest*

Introduction

On the night of September 26, 2014, about one hundred students from the rural teachers' training college in the city of Ayotzinapa in Guerrero state were traveling by bus to a protest in Mexico City. They were allegedly detained in the evening in the city of Iguala by local police, and the buses were shot at, during which six people – including civilians and one student – were killed.¹ Forty-

¹ According to Hernández, a total of five armed attacks were carried out, four of them on five buses with students that were in two different locations and a fifth on the bus transporting

three students then forcibly disappeared and so far, the case remains unresolved. From September to December, massive demonstrations took place demanding the return of the students alive. This event exposed deep ties between organized crime, police forces and the state. In the aftermath, families of the missing students and civil society mobilized not only through protests, but also through the symbolic occupation of urban space. One of their responses to this event was the creation of the first anti-monument in Mexico City, *Antimonumento +43* on one of the main avenues, *Paseo de La Reforma*. When I returned to Mexico City in September 2016 to continue my ethnographic research on the Day of the Dead, it was impossible to miss the striking red installation of *Antimonumento +43* on *Paseo de la Reforma*. Towering at the intersection of two major avenues, *Paseo de La Reforma* and *Avenida Bucareli*, the monument demanded attention. I asked my key-informant about it. He replied: “*They put it up, I think, about a year ago. Because the case isn’t solved-and never will be.*” When I asked how he could be so sure, he simply said: “*Because it’s Mexico. Many cases like this are never solved.*” He was right. Nearly ten years later, the case remains unresolved.

Since the installation of the first Mexican anti-monument, public spaces in Mexico City – previously reserved mainly for state-installed monuments - have begun to be appropriated by groups of citizens and activists to highlight injustice and other unresolved cases of violence by creating anti-monuments (*antimonumentos*). These anti-monuments mark a shift in how memory and justice are publicly claimed: not through state-sanctioned memorials, but through citizen-led interventions in the city’s spatial and symbolic landscape.

The topic of anti-monuments has, to date, received relatively limited scholarly attention – particularly from an anthropological perspective. As a relatively recent phenomenon, anti-monuments in Mexico, especially in Mexico City, have been examined primarily through sociological, urban, or political lenses. These studies often focus on their spatial implications or their role in public protest and memorialization. Existing literature on memory tends to address broader memorial practices, especially in the context of protest (De Vecchi Gerli 2018; Hernández and Adalid 2024; Délano Alonso et al. 2023), feminism (Borzacchiello 2024; Stengel Peña 2023) or the spatial and urban significance of anti-monuments (Díaz Tovar and Ovalle 2018; Gutierrez 2024; Perez-Manjarrez 2025). Anthropological research-particularly ethnographic work-on anti-monuments in Mexico is still a growing field. Studies exploring their lived experience, ritual use and cultural meaning are still scarce, highlighting a significant gap in the literature.

amateur players from the *Avispones Negros*, who were traveling to Chilpancingo (Hernández, 2016).

The term *anti-monument* (*antimonumento*), used to describe an unauthorized installation that serves as an active reminder of a painful or even traumatic past or present, first emerged in Mexico City with the installation of *Antimonumento +43* in 2015, which introduced the concept into both popular and media discourse. *Antimonumento* differs from the concept of the “anti-monument”, which has its roots in contemporary art and critical memory practices in Europe, especially in relation to counter-monuments in 1980s and 1990s.

In this article, I present the relatively new phenomenon of anti-monuments in Mexico City within the broader context of alternative forms of memorialization. However, I distinguish them from counter-monuments, as defined by J. E. Young (1992). Using the example of eleven anti-monuments currently installed in Mexico City, I outline their basic characteristics as defined by Perez-Manjarrez (2025). While the present article draws primarily on secondary data and visual observation, this framework provides a conceptual starting point for future ethnographic work. Building on Taylor’s performative memory, Turner’s ritual liminality, and Young’s counter-monumentality, I aim to investigate how these spaces (or installation) function as embodied practices of memory-making and resistance in lived contexts.

The fieldwork was conducted through short-term non-participant observation during two periods: March 2023 and January–February 2025. The aim was to map existing anti-monuments, photograph them, and observe activities in their surroundings, including the appearance of missing persons’ photos and the reactions of passersby. No rituals related to the anti-monuments were observed during these periods, as none took place while I was in Mexico City; information about such rituals is drawn from secondary sources. Ethnographic interviews were conducted only with personal informants from Mexico City, who commented on the anti-monuments in a neutral manner. Interviews with activists and creators of anti-monuments are planned for a later stage. Some of the photographs included in this article were taken by my key informant, as part of our ongoing ethnographic engagement. These photos are used with their permission, identifying details have been changed. A methodological limitation of this study concerns the availability and character of data on commemorative or ritualized practices around the anti-monuments. During the period of fieldwork, no continuous, recurring, or directly observable ritual activities were taking place at the sites. Many of the practices that have been associated with the anti-monuments in the past were interventions documented only through mediated sources such as news reports, activist statements, photographs, and posts on social media. For this reason, the ethnographic material derived from direct observation is necessarily limited. In the manuscript, I therefore draw on these mediated traces as secondary evidence.

Memory, monumentality, and alternative commemoration in Mexico

The discussion over memory in contemporary Mexico is entwined with the ways public space is used to construct historical narratives (Ruiz Lagier 2023). State-sanctioned monuments in Mexico, particularly those lining the iconic *Paseo de la Reforma*² and historic center of Mexico City, have long reflected a hegemonic view of history. These sites – dedicated to figures such as Benito Juárez, national hero and first indigenous president of Mexico, or *Niños Héroes*, a group of six Mexican military cadets who died defending Chapultepec Castle during the final stages of the U.S.-Mexico War in 1847- present an official account centred on unity, nationalism, and heroism. Such monuments function as what Pierre Nora (1996) calls *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory): fixed, tangible markers of a past that seeks to stabilise collective identity. These sites also function as containers of collective memory and historical experience of a community or nation (Nora 1996). Yet, as Maurice Halbwachs (2009) emphasised, memory is not a static or individual process, but is socially constructed, shaped by present-day needs, power structures, and cultural contexts. In this sense, collective memory is not neutral or unified; it is selective and contested.

In urban Mexico, this contestation has become visible through the emergence of anti-monuments (*antimonumentos*). Rather than reinforcing state narratives, anti-monuments reject the permanence and closure of traditional monumentality. These are what James E. Young (1992) termed counter-monuments, the concept he developed in the context of post-Holocaust Germany. Young defines counter-monument as a form of critical memory that rejects traditional conventions of monumentality – such as permanence, grandiloquence and the unidirectionality of the message, to favour interactive, ephemeral, or disruptive interventions that actively question official narratives (Young 1992). Rather than offering resolution, counter-monuments aim to provoke reflection, discomfort, and ongoing dialogue. According to Young (1992), counter-monuments challenge dominant narratives by deliberately refusing closure about historical events and invite ongoing reflection. The most famous example of counter-monument is Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's Monument Against Fascism (1986) in Harburg, Hamburg, Germany. This counter-monument was designed to disappear over

² Along *Paseo de la Reforma*, the avenue built by Emperor Maximilian according to the model of European boulevards, successive rulers, including dictator Porfirio Díaz, placed the statues that were supposed to remind of the ancient beauty and celebration of the Mexican nation. For a long time, the avenue represented a nationalized space where protests were held.

time. It was a 12-meter-tall column where people were invited to inscribe their names or messages against fascism. The column was gradually lowered into the ground until it fully disappeared in 1993. This work initiated a whole movement of counter-monuments and anti-monuments that critique traditional memorial culture. Mexico's anti-monuments, however, differ from counter-monuments in that they are grassroots initiatives, emerging from victims' families and activist collectives, not institutional artists or governments. This distinction is essential. While counter-monuments often emerge from within artistic or institutional spaces, Mexican anti-monuments are acts of urgency and resistance, frequently installed without permission. They are deeply political and direct responses to structural violence, enforced disappearance, and impunity. In this sense, they reflect what Patrick Drinot (2009) described as a broader global trend since the Second World War toward using public monuments to commemorate trauma, but with a crucial local difference: these interventions arise *exclusively from below*. They are not commemorations sanctioned by the state, but insurgent forms of memory activism.

In this way, anti-monuments reflect what Michel Foucault (1977) calls counter memory: a disruptive, oppositional form of remembering that contests dominant histories. Unlike official monuments which often promote forgetting through grand narrative, Mexico's anti-monuments keep painful memory alive. Their visibility and specificity remind passersby that injustice is ongoing.

Anti-monuments also transform public space through performative and ritual acts. Diana Taylor (2003) contrasts the archive (texts, monuments, official history) with the repertoire (embodied memory, performance, action). Anti-monuments belong to the repertoire. They are activated by gatherings, chants, altars, offerings, and protests. Each visit, each candle or flower places, reinscribes the memory through performance. Victor Turner's (2004) concept of ritual as a liminal process is also helpful here. Installations of anti-monuments, and the commemorative acts surrounding them, can be seen as rites of passage where private grief becomes public resistance. These liminal moments temporarily disrupt the everyday flow of the city, creating spaces of collective mourning, solidarity, and transformation. Thus, I perceive anti-monuments in Mexico as more than protest objects. They are performative, literally living and political acts of memory that challenge not only *what* is remembered, but also *how* is remembered and by *whom*.

In the following lines, I will present the thematic analyses of anti-monuments in Mexico City, which I have classified into a total of six patterns, following the patterns of Perez-Manjarrez (2025). These patterns include: (a) characteristics of the anti-monuments; (b) design and implementation of the anti-monuments, including installation processes; (c) agency, which includes authors of the anti-monuments,

their motives and objectives; (d) spatiality, which is related to the spatial logic by which the authors of anti-monuments have been occupying the space in the city; (e) temporality, which refers to the historical events that anti-monuments have described (Perez-Manjarrez 2025: 133-134). Following Perez-Manjarrez, I include another aspect, which is the incorporation of anti-monuments into rituals, i.e. (f) the ritual aspect of anti-monuments (more below).

Anti-monuments in Mexico City

To understand the rise of anti-monuments in Mexico, it is necessary to consider the broader socio-political landscape marked by violence, impunity, and institutional mistrust. Mexico has long been marked by deep structural problems, including systemic impunity, widespread violence, and persistent human rights violations. These conditions form the critical backdrop for the emergence of anti-monuments in urban public spaces. According to national statistics, approximately 90% of reported crimes remain unpunished and unresolved, reflecting a justice system that is both overburdened and deeply mistrusted.³ This pervasive impunity fosters a climate where violence is normalized and accountability rare. There is the alarming number of disappearances. Since 2006, when the government launched its so-called war on drugs, more than 110,000 people have been officially reported missing (as of May 2024).⁴ This figure continues to rise each year by several thousand. The disappeared include activists, journalists, students, and ordinary civilians, many of whom are presumed to be victims of enforced disappearances involving state actors or criminal organizations.

Another critical dimension of this crisis is gender-based violence. In 2024 alone,⁵ 797 women were victims of femicide in Mexico, according to Statista.⁶ It is important to note that this is a lower number than the actual number, as some murders of women remain unsolved and are not classified as femicide, even though they are femicide. These killings are often accompanied by impunity, inadequate investigations, and a lack of institutional response.

This dismal situation, which is being highlighted by many Mexican and foreign

³ *National Report on Missing Persons México 2024*. Online. Red Lupa. 2024. Available from: https://imdh.org/redlupa/informes-y-analisis/informes-nacionales/national-report-2024/?utm_source=chatgpt.com. [cit. 2025-05-02].

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ From January to December 2024.

⁶ *Number of femicide victims in Mexico from 2015 to 2024*. Online. Statista. 2025. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/827142/number-femicide-victims-mexico/>. [cit. 2025-07-22].

NGOs, is understandably worrying, especially for the survivors and relatives of the missing. The anti-memorials that have been emerging in Mexico in recent years are one of the responses to this situation. The growth of anti-monuments in Latin America and Mexico can be viewed within the framework of the discussion of monumentality (Drinot 2009), however with local specifics and with the fundamental difference that anti-monuments in the Latin American arise exclusively from below, often as a form of resistance during demonstrations.

Characteristics of anti-monuments in Mexico City

The birth of anti-monuments in Mexico was sparked by a tragic event that occurred on September 26th, 2014, when forty-three students from Ayotzinapa in Iguala were kidnapped. Their kidnapping was followed by massive demonstrations held for three months in 2014. The Mexican government's reaction to the whole case was somewhat surprising – the government was slow to comment, and from the outset authorities were evasive, seeking to close the case as quickly as possible. On January 27th, 2015, the government presented the official version “the historical truth” of the Ayotzinapa Case, in which it blamed local criminal groups for the disappearance and murder of the students thereby attempting to close the investigation (Perez-Manjarrez 2025).

According to the authors of *Antimonumentos: Memoria, Verdad y Justicia*, during those days the families and companions of Ayotzinapa's students received a proposal from anonymous person, who approached them with the idea of creating something like a monument that was not a monument. He had this idea after the brutal repression of November 20th, 2014, during the march in the Zócalo.

On April 26, 2015, exactly seven months after the forced disappearance of 43 students, the *Antimonumento +43* was installed on historically and culturally significant avenue - *Paseo de la Reforma*. This anti-monument consists of a large red number 43 made from metal and three meters high. It is accompanied with the sign “*Porque vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos!*” (Figure 1)⁷

Rather than commemorating a resolved event, *Antimonumento +43* calls attention to the unresolved case of the students, government impunity, and systemic violence. The “+” symbol signifies that 43 students are not the isolated victims but part of a broader pattern of forced disappearances in Mexico.⁸

⁷ “*Because they took them alive, we want them back alive!*”

⁸ According to the *Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes* (GIEI; Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts), no fewer than 180 direct victims can be identified because of these attacks, including not only students, but also other civilians, such as a woman who was driving by in a taxi.



Figure 1: *Antimonumento +43*, Mexico City, September 2016 (photo by the author)

Antimonumento +43 was installed illegally but in daylight by a collective of artists, activists, and family members under the name *Comisión de Antimonumentos*. They designed it as a counter-narrative to state-sanctioned monuments, using the public space to demand justice rather than glorify power (Foundation Heinrich Böll 2020). The circumstances surrounding the design and preparations for the *Antimonumento +43*, like most other anti-monuments, are recorded in publication *Antimonumentos: Memoria, verdad y justicia*. Survivors of the bus attacks in Iguala are also quoted in this publication. Since its installation, *Antimonumento +43* has become a site of ongoing protest and ritual. This anti-monument inspired a wave of anti-monuments across Mexico and beyond.

Over the last decade (2015–2025) seventeen anti-monuments have been constructed in five cities in Mexico, eleven of which are in Mexico City.⁹ An

⁹ It is unclear why Perez-Manjarrez (2025) and Samadi Bustos in her online article (<https://www.somoselmedio.com/antimonumentos-gritan-ni-perdon-ni-olvido/>) refer only ten anti-monuments in Mexico City, when there are in fact eleven. However, I also include the



Figure 2: *Antimonumento a Samir Flores*, Mexico City, July 2025 (photo by key-informant, used with their permission)

anti-monument is a relatively simple structure that commemorates a tragic or traumatic event in Mexican (often recent) history. They are often represented by a number, which represents number of victims (e.g. *Antimonumento +43*, *Antimonumento +65*, *Antimonumento +72*) following the example of *Antimonumento +43*, always supplemented with a plus sign, which indicates that there are far more victims of the system than this specific number; by the date of the event (e.g. *Antimonumento 2 de Octubre*), or by a simple symbol – either the outline of a figure (e.g. *Glorieta de Las Mujeres que Luchan*, *Antimonumento David y Miguel*) or an interculturally known symbol (e.g. a Venus symbol in case of *La Antimonumenta* or a cross in case of *Cruz de Vida*). In case of *Antimonumento a Samir Flores*, the anti-monument is a bust.¹⁰ This anti-monu-

anti-monument *Cruz de Vida* in my count. Beyond Mexico City, anti-monuments have also been installed in other cities such as Guadalajara, Pachuca, Hermosillo, and Morelos (Pérez-Manjarrez 2025).

¹⁰ Samir Flores Soberanes (1982-2019) was environmental defender, activist, and community



Figure 3: *Antimonumento +72*, Mexico City, July 2025
(photo by key-informant, used with their permission)

ment is also probably the least known and very atypical, because it is not a visible colored structure, but a bust that fits into the environment of the historic center and the Zócalo square and because of this is easily overlooked.

Besides the *Antimonumento a Samir Flores*, anti-monuments' installations are usually minimalistic, yet powerful in their visual impact – often relying on bold colors, urgent slogans and symbols of collective grief and protest. Their ephemeral or fragmentary character contrasts with the durability of state monuments; many

radio host of Nahua origin from state of Morelos. He campaigned for the rights of his community, focusing on Indigenous autonomy, land conservation, and environmental justice, especially regarding Proyecto Integral Morelos (PIM), federal infrastructure project including thermoelectric plants and a gas pipeline crossing Tlaxcala, Puebla, and Morelos. On February 20th, 2019, he was shot dead outside his home in Amilcingo by unknown assailants, one day before a scheduler community referendum on the PIM. Authorities attributed the killing to organized crime, and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Mexico's president at the time, condemned the killing but allowed the referendum to proceed as planned. As of now, the case remains officially unsolved. After one year, the bust was created and installed collectively by activists and Indigenous community organizations in alliance with locals and Samir's family.



Figure 4:
Antimonumento 49
 ABC, Mexico City,
 February 2025
 (photo by the author)

are created overnight, painted on asphalt, or symbolically inserted into existing symbolic structures. The period when anti-monuments are installed often falls on the period when a given event is commemorated – e.g. *Antimonumento +43* was installed on the day exactly seven months after the disappearance of the 43 students, the anti-monument *Rescatemos David y Miguel* was installed on January 5th, 2018, the same date that David and Miguel were kidnapped 6 years earlier (Perez-Manjarrez 2025: 136).

Anti-monuments are not created by a single group or artist, though many of them were created by *Comisión de Antimonumentos*, which is not an official or established entity, but rather a term that refers to groups of individuals or collectives responsible for the installation, maintenance, and dissemination of anti-monuments. The other actors are victims' relatives, activist collectives, artists, and sometimes broader social movements. However, the installation of



Figure 5: *Antimonumento 2 de Octubre*, Mexico City, December 2022 (photo by the author)

anti-monuments itself requires considerable preparation – design of the anti-monument, its production, its transportation, and installation on site, as well as good communication with the families of the victims and missing people. The installations of anti-monuments are not merely commemorative, but acts of resistance, rejecting both state violence and the institutionalization of memory itself. Thus, the process of installation of anti-monuments is for some academics first and foremost a protest action (Ruiz Lagier 2022). However, the installation itself and the organization of the installation represent a significant element of sharing for the families and survivors and have a ritual aspect and those who participated in installation, report strong impressions. For example, Carmelo Ramírez, survivor of Ayotzinapa and contributor of the anti-monument installation, commented on the installation of the anti-monument as follows:

“I remembered when we were looking at the place where we were going to install it, moving clandestinely so the security cameras wouldn’t watch us, looking at photos to see how it would look. It was great, right? Although, to be honest, I thought we weren’t going to make it. It was a tremendous feeling. We achieved our purpose, our objective, and it was something that, even as



Figure 6: *Antimonumento Halconazo*, Mexico City, December 2022
(photo by the author)

the years go by, I'll always remember. I also contributed to the organization to have that anti-monument installed there.” (*Antimonumentos: Memoria, verdad y justicia*, 2020: 35)

As other participants in the organization and installation of anti-monuments, especially survivors, state, the installation of altars also has a meaning for them in terms of community and sharing. Thus, the act of installing anti-monuments in Mexico City functions not only as a political resistance but as a ritual of collective mourning and symbolic reparation. Drawing from Victor Turner's concept of ritual as a liminal process, the creation of anti-monuments can be understood as a threshold moment – a symbolic rupture in the urban landscape that transforms ordinary public space into a sacralized terrain of memory and protest. For families of the disappeared, feminists, and activists, the physical act of placing the structure – often accompanied by speeches, chants, tears – constitutes a ritualized enactment of memory. As Diana Taylor (2003) suggests in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, such performative acts operate as a repertoire of embodied memory that resists institutional erasure. The installation becomes



Figure 7: *Antimonumento a David y Miguel*, Mexico City, July 2025 (photo by key-informant, used with their permission)

a public testimony, a counter-ritual to the silence or neglect of state narratives. The significance of the installation of the *Antimonumento 49 ABC* is described by Julia Escalante, the mother of the child who became a victim of tragic fire at the Guardería ABC (ABC Daycare Center) in Hermosillo on June 5th, 2009:

“I felt supported by so many people, I felt listened to, I felt presence of my daughter and her 48 little friends.” (*Antimonumentos: Memoria, verdad y justicia*, 2020: 50)

Regarding spatial logic within which the anti-monuments are installed, anti-monuments in Mexico City are strategically placed in high-visibility locations like *Paseo de la Reforma*, Zócalo Square and near government institutions. For example, *Antimonumento +43* is placed at the intersection of *Paseo de la Reforma* and *Avenida Bucareli*, where the headquarters of *El Universal* and *Excelsior* – two of Mexico’s oldest and most influential newspapers (Perez-Manjarrez 2025: 137). In some cases, they have even replaced the original traditional monuments (such as the statue of Christopher Columbus, see below *Glorieta de Las*



Figure 8:
Antimonumento +65,
 Mexico City,
 March 2023
 (photo by the author)

Mujeres que Luchan). Two anti-monuments – *Antimonumento a Samir Flores* and *Antimonumento 2 de Octubre* are in the main square in Mexico City – *Plaza de La Constitución* (Zócalo for short).¹¹

The authors of the publication *Antimonumentos: Memoria, verdad y justicia* and the organizers of the installation of the anti-monuments state several times that they selected places for the *Antimonumento +43* and other anti-monuments so that anti-monuments would be mainly visible (2020: 17). In *Table 1* you can see a summary of the locations of all anti-monuments in Mexico City. These are

¹¹ During one discussion about anti-monuments, my friend from Mexico City noted that soon, due to the atrocities happening in Mexico, there will be no place for anti-monuments in Zocalo. He wanted to express the seriousness of the situation in Mexico, since the Plaza de la Constitución is one of the largest squares in the world.

always exposed places. As I mentioned above, *Paseo de la Reforma* and the historic center of the city are the places where most of the monuments, but currently also anti-monuments, are located. Visitor of Mexico City who walks through the historic center from the main square to the statue of Angel of Independence (probably the most famous statue in Mexico City), is bound to come across almost all anti-monuments.

The anti-monuments thus create (or are part of) the so-called *ruta la memoria* (memory route), also “Antimonumento Memory Route”, which is well described in the article from Délano Alonso et al. (2023). Authors describe the anti-monuments that visitors of Mexico City will encounter if they head from the historic center towards *Paseo de la Reforma*. It is important to emphasize that the route was not created as a planned project – instead, it emerged organically through installing anti-monuments. However, this route is becoming part of public discourse and is possible to find a website with the exact route at geoactivismo.org.

Table 1: List of anti-monuments in Mexico City (July 2025)

Name	Place	Year of installation	Purpose of installation
Antimonumento +43	Intersection of Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida Bucareli	2015	1 st anniversary of the kidnapping of 43 students in Iguala, Guerrero.
Antimonumento 49 ABC	Paseo de la Reforma, opposite the headquarters of the Mexican Social Security Institute	2017	8 th Anniversary of the ABC daycare fire in Hermosillo, Sonora, where 49 children lost their lives due to negligence
Antimonumento +65	Paseo de la Reforma, in front of the Mexican Stock Exchange at the <i>Glorieta del Ahuehuete</i> roundabout ¹²	2018	12 th Anniversary of the Pasta de Conchos mine disaster, in which 65 miners died trapped underground in a Coahuila in 2006.

¹² *Glorieta del Ahuehuete*, formerly *Glorieta de la Palma*, is the only roundabout on Paseo de la Reforma that did not have a monument in history. Until June 2022, there was a palm tree here, after which the roundabout was named. However, it died due to pathogens and an ahuehuete tree (also known as Montezuma cypress) was planted in its place in June 2022. This tree had to be replaced in May 2023 because the previous one was damaged in a traffic accident. In February 2025, while riding the metrobus, I also noticed the renaming of a metrobus stop, which was originally called La Palma, and is now called *El Ahuehuete*.

Name	Place	Year of installation	Purpose of installation
Rescatemos David y Miguel	Paseo de la Reforma, across from the Torre del Caballito, opposite the <i>Antimonumento +43</i>	2018	6 th anniversary of the kidnapping of two young men David Ramírez and Miguel Ángel Rivera in January 2012 in the state of Guerrero.
Antimonumento 2 de Octubre	Entrance of the Plaza de la Constitución (Zócalo), main Mexico's City square, in front of Palacio Nacional	2018	50 th Anniversary of the Tlatelolco Massacre.
La Antimonumenta	Avenida Juárez, historical center of Mexico City	2019	Protest and symbolic memorial to femicide in Mexico.
Cruz de Vida	Intersection of Paseo de la Reforma and Avenida de los Insurgentes	2019	Dedicated to women who have been murdered or subjected to violence in Mexico.
Antimonumento +72	Paseo de la Reforma, in front of the U.S. embassy	2020	10 th Anniversary of Massacre of 72 immigrants from Central America.
Antimonumento Samir Flores	Plaza de la Constitución (Zócalo), main Mexico's City square	2020	Bust erected to honor environmental activist and journalist Samir Flores Soberanes who was assassinated in February 2019.
Antimonumento Halconazo (10 de Junio)	Intersection of Avenida Juárez and Calle Humboldt, historic center of Mexico City	2021	50 th anniversary of the Corpus Christi massacre ("El Halconazo") when paramilitary group Los Halcones attacked student demonstrators in 1971.
Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan	Paseo de la Reforma, the roundabout, formerly Glorieta de Colón, where the statue of Christopher Columbus stood until October 2020.	2021	Symbolic act of feminist resistance and direct response to state inaction and systemic violence against women in Mexico.

Feminist anti-monuments

A specific type of anti-monuments are the feminist anti-monuments. There are currently three feminist anti-monuments in Mexico City¹³ – the *Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan*, *La Antimonumenta*, and *Cruz de Vida*.

The *Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan*¹⁴ (from now on referred as *Glorieta*) is probably the most famous feminist anti-monument in Mexico. Installed on 25th September 2021, it is in Stengel’s words, “a symbol of feminist demands and urgent need for authorities to implement relevant changes” (Stengel Peña 2023: 94). The anti-monument was created and installed without state permission by a coalition of feminist collectives, many of which included families of victims. It was conceived as an act of civil disobedience and drew inspiration from previous anti-monuments in Mexico City such as *Antimonumento +43*. Its installation coincided with period of heightened feminist mobilization across Latin America (Stengel Peña 2023).

Glorieta occupies the space formerly known as the *Glorieta de Colón* (Columbus Roundabout, see *Figure 9*). In 2020, amid global re-evaluations of colonial symbols, the statue of Christopher Columbus was removed by city authorities for “restoration”. Feminist activists seized this moment of symbolic vacancy and redefined the space – renaming it *Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan* and erecting their own anti-monument in its place.¹⁵ According to Stengel, *Glorieta* carries a transfeminist and decolonial statement which goes beyond replacing a statue of a colonizer, but it also challenges popular representations of women, challenges the government, and rejects patriarchy (Stengel Peña 2023: 101).

Glorieta consists of three parts: (1) a large, purple-painted metal sculpture of a woman standing with her hand raised in a fist as a symbol of resistance and empowerment. Purple, historically associated with the feminist movement, reinforces the installation’s connection to transnational struggles for gender violence; (2) a garden with the names of the victims of femicide and enforced disappearance, called *Jardín Somos Memoria* (Garden We are memory), where mothers and other relatives can write names of victims. This garden is also a grieving site where survivors gather to mourn; (3) clothesline where women can report acts of violence. Stengel points out that *Glorieta* differs from other anti-monuments in its complexity and the fact that the entire installation exhibits the above-mentioned elements, but also because it is an anti-monument which is the most contested. Nowadays, *Glorieta* is also an important meeting point during feminist demonstrations.

¹³ Number known to me as of July 2025 from available sources.

¹⁴ The Roundabout of the Women who fight.

¹⁵ A detailed description of the entire history of *Glorieta* is provided for example by Natalia Stengel Peña (2023) in the context of feminist movements in Mexico and Latin America.



Figure 9: *Glorieta de Colón*, Mexico City, 2016 (photo by the author)



Figure 10: *Glorieta de Las Mujeres que Luchan*, Mexico City, 2022 (photo by the author)



Figure 11: *La Antimonumenta*, Mexico City, 2019
(photo by key-informant, used with their permission)

La Antimonumenta (Figure 11) was the first feminist anti-monument installed in Mexico City. It is placed in historic center of Mexico City on *Avenida Juarez*. It was installed by mothers and relatives of victims of femicide as a protest gender-based violence and femicide on March 8th, 2019 – International Women’s Day. It features the feminist symbol – a raised fist inside the Venus symbol and is painted in purple, color associated with the feminist movement. Below, the message reads: “*En memoria de todas las mujeres asesinadas por razones de género. Ni una más.*”¹⁶ Similarly, the third feminist anti-monument, *Cruz de Vida* (Cross of Life, *Figure 12*), honors women victims of disappearance and femicide in Mexico. While it carries broader symbolism, it was installed by relatives of missing and murdered women and its focus is the gender-based violence crisis in the country.

¹⁶ “*In memory of all the women murdered because of their gender. Not one more.*”



Figure 12:
*Antimonumento
 Cruz de Vida,*
 Mexico City,
 February 2025
 (photo by the author)

Ritual aspect of anti-monuments

Drawing on the theoretical perspectives outlined above, but also highlighting the unique socio-political conditions of Mexico, this section explores how anti-monuments function not just as commemorative installations, but as ritualized spaces of political resistance and collective mourning. In the framework of Diana Taylor (2003), these sites belong to the repertoire of cultural memory, which means, that their meaning is continuously enacted through embodied, performative acts.

Anti-monuments are activated through repeated rituals – monthly gatherings, annual anniversaries, and spontaneous visits – that can be analytically situated within Victor Turner’s framework of liminality (2004). Following van Gennep, Turner conceptualises liminality as a transitional, indeterminate phase in which actors are symbolically separated from the structures of ordinary

social life and temporarily enter a threshold condition characterised by ambiguity, suspension, and potentiality. In the case of anti-monuments, liminality is enacted both spatially and performatively: urban space, conventionally organised around commerce and state authority, is periodically reconstituted as a ritualised area oriented toward mourning, political denunciation, and public memory. At *Antimonumento +43*, for example, the regular anniversary meetings on the 26th of the month interrupt the quotidian routines of the city and instantiate a liminal timespace in which the boundary between private grief and public protest becomes permeable. We often see grief and grieving as a private act, but in this case, grief is not privatizing (Butler 2020). Sites around the anti-monuments serve as altars for offerings, including the Day of the Dead offerings, which reinforces the ritual hybridity, blending institutionalized commemorative traditions with political protest. Participants often transform the anti-monument into a living altar by leaving flowers, candles, and banners, and in some cases writing the names of the murdered women directly on its structure. Many mothers have already expressed in interviews that rituals, such as lighting candles, chanting names, placing offerings are meaningful for them and they offer sense of belonging and shared purpose in the face of loss¹⁷ and how these collective rituals around anti-monuments produce a sense of solidarity and belonging by reinforcing shared values and identity (Durkheim 1995 [1912]; Butler 2020). Through these recurring actions – writing names, lighting candles, painting slogans, the *Glorieta* is ritually redefined as a feminist sanctuary, a sacred site of memory that challenges state neglect. The repetition and embodiment of grief here constitute what Judith Butler (2020) might call public assemblies of vulnerability, where the act of gathering and grieving together itself becomes a ritual of resistance. Moreover, the symbolic elements—candles, flowers, banners, and photos—recreate traditional forms of Mexican mourning, especially those related to the Day of the Dead. These acts blur the lines between political protest and cultural tradition, reinforcing the hybrid nature of anti-monuments as both civic and sacred. Taylor’s distinction between the archive and the repertoire is evident here: while the state builds archives of official history in stone and bronze, collectives inscribe memory in bodily gestures. Each repetition inscribes the memory anew (Taylor 2003).

Feminist anti-monuments such as *La Antimonumenta* or the *Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan* function both as memorials and as altars. They incorporate gardens of names, ritual performances, and spaces for collective storytelling. The repeated acts of inscribing names or lighting candles at these sites becomes

¹⁷ Interviews with mothers of victims are published in the book *Antimonumentos: Memoria, Verdad y Justicia* (2020).

what Butler might describe as a public assembly of vulnerability, where collective presence defies institutional silence. The *Glorieta* also serves as a meeting point for feminist demonstrations. It is also a regular gathering place for marches and commemorations – particularly on March 8th (International Women’s Day and November 25th (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women). In this sense, anti-monuments embody what Taylor (2003) describes as a “repertoire of resistance,” sustained through embodied actions that defy forgetting. They not only commemorate the dead or disappeared but also affirm the presence, persistence, and dignity of the living who remember them. These ritualized enactments also generate what Turner terms *communitas*: a transient, affective mode of sociality that emerges within liminal contexts through the temporary attenuation of established hierarchies and social distinctions. At anti-monuments, *communitas* manifest not only as emotional solidarity among relatives and activists, but also as a shared epistemic stance that challenges dominant narratives about violence and accountability. Moreover, the anti-monumental rituals correspond to Turner’s later notion of the *liminoid* (Turner 2004): voluntary, recurrent, and emergent practices characteristic of complex, plural urban societies. As such, anti-monuments function as contemporary liminal sites in which ritual action reconfigures public space into a sacralised and politically charged domain of memory and collective presence.

Conclusions

This article has examined the emergence and significance of anti-monuments in Mexico City as a grassroots response to state violence, impunity, and systemic forgetting. Anti-monuments operate as liminal sites (Turner 2004), where ritualized practices—such as vigils, offerings, chants, and commemorative gatherings—temporarily suspend ordinary social hierarchies and urban routines, transforming public space into a domain of collective mourning, memory, and political engagement. Through these embodied and performative acts, anti-monuments generate *communitas*, fostering emotional and political solidarity among participants and affirming shared values of justice, resistance, and dignity. By disrupting conventional monumentality and state-sanctioned narratives, anti-monuments constitute a living form of memory from below, where grief and trauma are continually voiced rather than resolved, and where public space becomes both a stage for remembrance and a site of civic contestation. These practices also highlight the ways in which cultural tradition and political resistance intertwine, producing a language of collective presence that transforms grief into visibility and collective action.

Taken together, anti-monuments exemplify how contemporary urban interventions can mediate memory, resistance, and public discourse. In future work, I will further develop this line of inquiry by conducting extended ethnographic research on the experiential and affective dimensions of the anti-monuments in Mexico City, examining how participation in anti-monument rituals shapes collective identities, solidarities, and forms of civic engagement.

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