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Political artefacts, aesthetics and heritage: the Valley of the Fallen

When considering the values which define heritage, aesthetic value is usually one of the most important, nearly always linked to the idea of *work of art* and to concepts such as *beauty* or *harmony*. Furthermore, aesthetics and politics tend to be dealt with separately. However, the link between aesthetics and politics is key in order to manage the meaning of those artefacts made with the intention of altering the political environment (*political artefacts*), particularly when they could be (or when they have already become) *heritage*. This paper puts forward the idea that in order to fully comprehend the social effects of political artefacts, their relationship with aesthetics must be understood. The function of aesthetics in modifying the meanings and connotations of heritage, when the latter is considered to be negative from a socio-political point of view, is also examined. In order to exemplify this relationship between aesthetics and politics, the resignification of the Valley of the Fallen (*Valle de los Caídos*), the most iconic and important Francoist memorial in Spain, is discussed.

Keywords: Valley of the Fallen; politics; aesthetics; resignification; Spain

Introduction

In recent years, aesthetics has changed from being an area of study exclusive to philosophy and fine art, to being considered a central element in the fields of social sciences, where previously it was just a marginal subject. Thus, the aesthetic experience is no longer found exclusively in a particular area (and especially in art) but it is

interwoven into people's lives.

On examining the values heritage may have, aesthetic value tends to be closely linked to the work of art and to concepts such as *beauty* or *harmony* (Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre 2000; de la Torre 2002; Labadi 2013). Although the socio-political effects produced by heritage artefacts have already been pointed out (Smith 2006), the importance of aesthetics in achieving these effects is not usually discussed.

The aesthetic characteristics of any artefact influence our way of thinking and acting. In this sense, Larkin's study (2013) is illustrative, dealing with how infrastructures (roads, railways, factories, etc.) can also be understood, beyond their purely technical functioning, as aesthetic experiences, with consequences of a political nature.

Aesthetics tends to be placed in a dimension detached from the social realm and, in particular, from politics. Some researchers consider that these are two spheres which must be kept completely separate (on this controversy, see Jay [1992]). However, this paper's thesis contends that aesthetics and the social are in fact intermingled.

This paper is based, on one hand, on the relationship between aesthetics and politics championed by the philosopher Crispin Sartwell (2010), and, on the other, sociological (DeNora 2000; De La Fuente 2013) and anthropological (Gell 1998; Morphy 2009) theories which situate aesthetics as a central element in the construction of social worlds.[1]

This article's approach comes from beyond the dichotomies of political/aesthetics or art/propaganda and considers that certain artefacts are political because they produce modifications in socio-political dynamics, that these artefacts always have an aesthetic dimension, and that that aesthetic dimension is essential in order to understand their social effects.

The link between aesthetics and politics is also key in order to manage the meaning of artefacts, whenever there is a possibility of turning them into (or when they have already become) *heritage*. A classic solution, *recontextualization*, has been widely used. That is to say, not considering the artefact as the product of a political strategy, but recontextualizing it, often as a *work of art*. The capacity of an artefact to contribute to the generation of certain beliefs is often deliberately ignored, whilst at the same time discarding the existence of conflicts (Smith 2006).

However, serious problems can arise when the artefact is monumental and iconic; when it creates a strong aesthetic impact, but it is impossible to separate the monument from its context of production. That is, when the artefact possesses all the characteristics that could turn it into heritage, but its political intentions remain completely active and are, furthermore, perceived by an important part of the population as being negative (for example, artefacts linked to Communism, Nazism or Francoism).

A heritage object can have both a political dimension *and* an aesthetic one, and each can be analysed separately (this is usually the case when a political artefact is labelled as *a work of art* or *monument*). However, once the relationship between political action and aesthetic action is understood, more resources become available to help deal with the problem of resignification of those political artefacts considered to be *negative heritage*.

In recent years in Spain, a number of intense controversies have arisen concerning the conservation of the material legacy of Francoism and in particular, regarding the Valley of the Fallen (*Valle de los Caídos*). The case of the Valley of the Fallen (Figures 1-2) is particularly significative and complex as it is a monumental work protected by legislation[2]. Furthermore, it possesses a significant historical meaning, it has an obvious iconic dimension, it is an important tourist attraction (receiving hundreds

of thousands of visitors each year[3]) and it is a place where (despite being banned by law) fascist homages are still carried out regularly.

The monument (started in 1941 and finished in 1959) is an exaltation of the national-catholic principles of Francoism, and also a large mausoleum for General Francisco Franco and for the founder of the Falange (the fascist party), José Antonio Primo de Rivera (Olmeda 2010). It is a massive architectural complex which was built as a memorial to the victors of the Spanish Civil War, 'a scenography of victory and power' (Fuentes Vega 2017, 78). Although from the 1950s on, there was a certain transformation of the monument's meaning as it became a heritage site to reconciliation, this was carried out obscuring its political connotations.[4]

The monumental complex, started under the direction of architect Pedro Muguruza (replaced by Diego Méndez from 1950), can be considered a revival of different styles, with special references to the Monastery of El Escorial (16th century), as well as to modernist elements. Part of the Valley of the Fallen's appeal lies in its aesthetic values, directly linked to the monument's colossal dimensions (the enormous cross can be seen from a distance of about 40 kilometres) as well as the relationship between landscape and architecture.

At present, the monument's resignification is being considered, starting with the removal of Francisco Franco's remains, although there does not seem to be a clear strategy concerning any further actions to be carried out beyond that point. Resignification in this case is extremely complex due to many issues such as the participation of thousands of political prisoners in the construction of the monument (González Ruibal 2009), the legal status of the different buildings and, in particular, the ossuary, which holds about 34.000 bodies (although the exact number is not known), transferred from many different places in Spain (in many cases, without their relatives'

knowledge or consent [Ferrándiz 2011]) and which includes the remains of soldiers who fought on opposite sides during the Spanish Civil War.

However, the aim of this paper is not to be another study about the Valley of the Fallen, as an extensive bibliography on the subject already exists (see, for instance, González Ruibal 2009; Olmeda 2010; Comisión 2011; Ferrándiz 2011; Crumbaugh 2011; Fuentes Vega 2017). Instead, this paper deals with the Valley of the Fallen as an example to illustrate the relationship between aesthetics and political artefacts and how perceiving that relationship is essential in order to understand the function artefacts can continue to exert as *political heritage*.

Beyond 'art or propaganda'

Perhaps the simplest way of defining *political artefact* could be: a material object 'that produces certain effects on the social and political environment' (Sferrazza Papa 2018). This concept can be related to that of *actor*, according to the definition by the Actor-Network Theory as '*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference' (Latour 2005, 71).

The most frequent use of the term *political artefact* is regarding something which only exists as a construct in political discourse. However, here it will be used in the sense of a physical object, although obviously an artefact can also function within political discourse. In this paper *political artefact* is used to emphasize the political effects of an object. The term *political* will be used as defined by Mouffe (2005, 9), meaning the 'space of power, conflict and antagonism' which establishes the context where *politics* can develop: 'the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence'.

Political implies confrontations whose aim it is to define the elements which structure social reality. In a general sense, it can also be understood that an artefact may

be considered to be *political* when it is involved in 'the struggle for the real' as defined by Geertz: 'the attempt to impose upon the world a particular conception of how things at bottom are and how men are therefore obliged to act' (1973, 316).

For a political action to be feasible, it is necessary to believe in the power and legitimacy of a political agent and an ideology. The greater part of humanity's creative production has been directed towards stating some kind of political power[5], to making it visible, materializing it. It is not just about creating symbols of power: it is concerned with being able to experience it, by means of artefacts, as a *presence* (Gumbrecht 2004; Nelson 2010).

For example, in the case of portraits, these work as devices of presence, intensification, legitimization and narration; constructing a political subject as the centre of reality (Marin [1980] 2005). Political images (or any other kind of political artefact) are not merely an expression, a representation, a reflection or a symbol: they are a key resource in the configuration of power and the establishment of relationships among political agents (Freedberg 1989; Gell 1998; Mitchell 2005).[6]

One of the most frequent controversies regarding artefacts with an aesthetic dimension and created with a political purpose is whether they should (or can) be classified as *art* or *propaganda*. When studying artefacts of a clear political nature produced by the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, the tension between the concepts of *art* and *propaganda* becomes more than obvious (Ades et al. 1995; Edelman 1995; Clark 1997).

The concept *art* is usually employed to emphasize a creative or aesthetic dimension, whereas *propaganda* tends to highlight the relationship with political discourse and, especially, with manipulation, deceit and persuasive effects. However, one of the problems is that a political artefact can be capable of producing an intense

aesthetic effect, while, at the same time, being loaded with negative connotations from a moral or political point of view. The film *Triumph of the Will* by Leni Riefenstahl, Albert Speer's designs and the Valley of the Fallen itself, would be some good examples.

The construction of political power has always implied the need to generate a continuous flow of artefacts and actions. This matter is brilliantly analysed by Burke in *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (1992). The construction of the king's public image, linked to a sacred dimension, was the result of an unceasing collective production by painters, sculptors, engravers, poets, choreographers, masters of ceremonies, musicians, architects and tailors, among many others (all of them coordinated in a complex system organised by several ministers).[7]

Analysing these creative flows implies understanding the artefacts' function within the construction of a given political order. In this sense, it is perfectly acceptable to use the term *propaganda* for the entire production of political artefacts and, in the same way, it is possible to use the word *art* for those very same products when wishing to emphasize certain aesthetic dimensions (for example, the Palace of Versailles or the portraits of Charles V by Titian).

The Valley of the Fallen has been considered as much a work of art as a propagandistic monument (Fuentes Vega 2017). Bonet Correa (1981, 327) defined it as '*kitsch* art', a pejorative term often used to denote political artefacts. However, what matters, is not so much the use of one label or another, but the relationships among objects, beliefs and people[8], which will determine whether an artefact is political or not in a given context and how it influences that context. In this sense, anthropology and sociology provide some very useful points of view in order to understand the action of political artefacts and, especially, their relationship with aesthetics.

Political artefacts and aesthetics

The area of study concerned with the relationships between aesthetics and politics is plagued with problems and contradictions. The well known denunciation by Walter Benjamin ([1968] 2007) of the relationship between Fascism and aesthetics has created a whole tendency in opinion which suspects of any aestheticization of politics, as analysed by Martin Jay.

> In short, politics has to be saved from its reduction to spellbinding spectacle and phantasmagoric illusion in order to allow a more rational discourse to fill the public space now threatened with extinction by images and simulacra of reality.
> In this cluster of uses, the aesthetic is variously identified with irrationality, illusion, fantasy, myth, sensual seduction, the imposition of will, and inhumane indifference to ethical, religious, or cognitive considerations. (1992, 45)

There is no doubt that Mussolini tried to legitimize his actions through pretensions of artistic creativity (Falasca-Zamponi 1997) while Communism and Nazism employed aesthetic resources on a large scale (Clark 1997). However, the concept *aestheticization of politics* attempts to explain extremely complex social and political events from a reductionist point of view, as the philosopher Crispin Sartwell points out: 'Not all art is political, but all politics is aesthetic; at their heart political ideologies, systems, and constitutions are aesthetic systems, multimedia artistic environments' (2010, 1).[9]

The aim of many political strategies is to try to generate a certain socio-political order (or an illusion of order) by means of all kinds of artefacts and actions which have an aesthetic dimension, are linked together, and whose intention is often easily overlooked (Kapferer 2012). It is, in fact, the creation of what Sartwell (2010) has called an 'aesthetic environment'. As in any other political regime, the creation of an aesthetic environment by means of a flow of political artefacts is also clear in the case

of Franco's dictatorship, through monuments, sculptures, films, posters and a host of other representations, symbols and objects constantly present in daily life (Bonet Correa 1981; Llorente Hernández 1995, 2002).

The social effects of a flow of political artefacts are not merely rhetorical or communicative, they actually 'draw people toward certain beliefs, principles, ideologies, dogmas formulated as statements' (Sartwell 2010, 4). This does not imply there is a deterministic relationship (much less equality) between politics and aesthetics, but it does mean that politics cannot be understood without clearly understanding the aesthetic resources in play: 'The point is precisely to show the concrete nodes at which two distinct discourses coincide or connive, come apart or coalesce' (Sartwell 2010, 14). The following sections show how aesthetics and politics are enmeshed whilst underlining the importance of context in the relationship between aesthetic experiences and political effects. This relationship is a key aspect in order to modify the meaning of the Valley of the Fallen as well as that of other *difficult* (Macdonald 2009) or *negative* (Meskell 2002) monuments.

Aesthetics, experiences and social effects

The importance of aesthetics in generating experiences which can have deep social effects is being brought to the fore by the fields of sociology and anthropology. Sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander (2010, 11) has pointed out the relationship between aesthetic effects and the creation of an experience linked to certain meanings, beyond a purely communicative action: 'Iconic consciousness occurs when an aesthetically shaped materiality signifies social value. Contact with this aesthetic surface, whether by sight, smell, taste, sound or touch, provides a sensual experience that transmits meaning. The iconic is about experience, not communication'.

Alexander emphasizes the importance of aesthetics in materializing, defining and experiencing abstract concepts: 'Everyday experience is iconic, which means that self, reason, morality, and society are continuously defined in aesthetic, deeply experiential ways' (2010, 18). In this sense, formal properties have an essential role in enabling political concepts to be experienced through the aesthetic experience itself.

However, it is from the field of anthropology that perhaps the most thought-provoking idea has developed concerning the ability of aesthetic artefacts to perform beyond a (solely) communicative action. In this sense, Alfred Gell has pointed out that

> I view art as a system of action intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it. The 'action'-centred approach to art […] is preoccupied with the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process, rather than with the interpretation of objects 'as if' they were texts. (1998, 6)

Gell considers that some objects can contribute to 'securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed' (2006, 163). These objects are produced to generate a specific social effect, particularly in relation to the construction of a given order: 'it is a physical entity which mediates between two beings and therefore creates a social relation between them, which in turn provides a channel for further social relations and influences' (Gell 2006, 172-173).

Although Gell's theories may present many debatable or not fully explained aspects (see Layton's [2003] and Morphy's [2009] critiques), there can be no doubt that his approach is, indeed, thought-provoking regarding those artefacts with a significative enough aesthetic dimension to allow them to be experienced as actors in certain socio-political dynamics. At this point, some doubts may arise as Gell defends that *art objects* should not be understood chiefly from an aesthetics point of view when evaluating their social impact, and even that anthropology of art should break away from aesthetics. However, it must be made clear that Gell uses a very restricted concept of aesthetics,

closely linked to Kant's theories. This means that Gell does not reject the idea of aesthetics; he rejects the idea that art objects be treated as objects for mere contemplation. For example, when he refers to Melanesian aesthetics, he points out that it 'is about efficacy, the capacity to accomplish tasks, not 'beauty'' (1998, 94).[10]

Researchers such as Morphy have critiqued Gell's dismissal of the communicative action of aesthetic objects, but maintains the idea that it is, above all, a way of participating in the world, rather than making statements about it. These objects 'are an integral part of the processes that socialize people into ways of seeing things, that inculcate beliefs, create meanings and understandings about the world' (2010, 15). In other texts, Morphy has also emphasized that social effect can be transmitted through aesthetic effects more than through semantic or iconographic meaning, although 'in many cases the semantic component of art can be integral to its being a mode of acting in the world, which may be directed towards change or any other objective that motivates the person who uses it' (2009, 14).

Although there are differences between the theories put forward by Gell and Morphy, both researchers agree that aesthetics is about the capacity to accomplish tasks, to create social relations and, in general, to act in the social world. Therefore, it is not a case of evaluating whether political artefacts (such as those produced by the Francoist regime) possess *artistic quality* or not. It is rather a case of understanding that those artefacts can be capable of (or, at least, contribute to) provoking socio-political effects.

The idea that the interaction with artefacts can be considered as an experience beyond communication has also been developed by the field of heritage studies. Thus, rather than considering heritage to be just a subject for passive contemplation, it should, more accurately, be thought of as a process whereby complex interactions take place

among people through artefacts, with obvious consequences in social dynamics (Smith 2006; Haldrup and Bærenholdt 2015).

Crouch has also underlined the experiential dimension of heritage, emphasizing the 'energies, feelings, affects and emotions wrapped up or available in our encounters with heritage' (2015, 177). This experiential dimension is obvious in the case of the Valley of the Fallen (Hite 2008; Crumbaugh 2011), although it is also clear that the meanings associated with that experience can be diverse and varied, and not always of a political nature. Many visitors who express great aesthetic admiration (using terms like *marvellous* or *spectacular*), do not necessarily link the formal properties of the monument to politics, ideology or a partisan view of history but instead to art, architecture or heritage.[11] As explained below, the political concepts an aesthetic experience may be linked to depend on many factors, such as, for example, visitors' knowledge and beliefs.

A definitional power

Political artefacts are essential in the construction, consolidation and maintenance of meanings and relationships among political agents. In an article about Maori visual arts, Nicholas Thomas points out that although the meaning of artefacts is important, their visual patterns aim to 'disempower some people and empower others' (1995, 101). Some objects 'simultaneously indexed a group's own vitality and ideally or effectively disempowered others' (1995, 103). The aim of creating products which amaze (or, in general, provoke aesthetic effects by means of all sorts of visual resources) is not (just) about communicating a message or symbolising something, but rather about contributing actively to the effectiveness of a given power.

For example, one of the most usual ways of generating the experience of political strength and control is through the monumentality of large buildings, a common resource in political creativity[12].

> The scale of the structure reminds the mass of political spectators that they enter the precincts of power as clients or as supplicants, susceptible to arbitrary rebuffs and favors, and that they are subject to remote authorities they only dimly know or understand. (Edelman 1995, 76)

These approaches highlight one main idea: although an object can be classified as *aesthetic* or *artistic*, this does not imply that its effects within a community are necessarily positive for everyone, as they can contribute to subjugating or weakening people or social groups.[13] It is a question of, to use Thomas' expression, a 'definitional power' (1995, 117). On the whole, a political artefact can contribute to define different aspects of social reality, for example by delineating and enforcing hierarchies. According to Crumbaugh (2011, 420), in the conception and design of the Valley of the Fallen, the 'dead are enshrined so as to overpower the living, rendering observers passive and helpless, forced to experience their own obliteration'.

Monuments like the Valley of the Fallen do have this *definitional* character and clearly manifest the intention to form a certain social order determined by religion and Francoist principles. In addition to the iconographic elements which explicitly support this discourse, the whole architectural complex, its iconic character and its formal properties can stimulate the empowerment of those who identify with neo-fascist ideologies. The Valley of the Fallen was not built with the aim of creating an egalitarian and democratic relationship, but one of subjugation. The promises of peace and reconciliation can only be true for those who unquestioningly submit to the socio-political order represented by the site.[14]

However, the fact that the Valley of the Fallen has definitional *power* does not mean that it can 'influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interests, and values' (Castells 2009,10), but its existence can make a difference (a *significant* one) in some contexts, in certain relationships among people, objects and beliefs.

Aesthetics in context

It must be borne in mind that aesthetic experiences are contextual. That is to say, given the same formal properties, subjects will have one kind of experience or another, and will interpret it differently according to their previous experiences, knowledge, beliefs and expectations. Gell points out in *Art and Agency* (1998, 7) the importance of context, that the nature of the object 'is a function of the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded'. He emphasizes that the effect an object may have is not just 'consequence of the visual effects it produces' (Gell 2006, 166) but also of the beliefs of those who interact with it.

The importance of the relationship between aesthetic experience and the subject's knowledge, values or beliefs has been particularly developed by Morphy.

> The properties of the object […] become aesthetic properties through their incorporation within systems of value and meaning that integrate them within cultural processes. Shininess and symmetry, as aesthetic properties, are interpreted or appreciated on the basis of certain evaluative criteria that, in simple terms, cause them to be viewed positively or negatively, either in themselves or in relation to other properties or combinations of properties. (1992, 10)

The meanings we ascribe to an object have a decisive influence on the aesthetic perception of that object. The materials and techniques used to elaborate an artefact are chosen to achieve a certain effect in relation to a context. As Morphy (1992, 13) points

out: 'an aesthetic system is culturally structured through the consistent association of perceived form with emotional content'.

The greater the belief in a political agent and its ideology, the more intense an experience will be where aesthetic effects are linked to a given political action. This does not imply reducing the aesthetic dimension to context (Morphy 2009), but rather, understanding the relationship between perception of the physical and formal dimensions of artefacts and how that perception is interpreted and entangled with beliefs, ideas, expectations or previous experiences. An architectural construction of great dimensions (such as the Valley of the Fallen's cross) is capable of provoking an aesthetic effect in practically everyone. However, the exact feelings or emotions that effect is linked to (admiration, worship, hostility, rejection, etc.), the effects it may have on certain social groups, and, consequently, the kind of political experience it generates will depend on beliefs and other contextual factors.[15]

Considering aesthetic effects to be contextual is of great importance regarding the problem of Nazi or Francoist artefacts. There has always been a degree of anxiety regarding whether they could in any way, encourage identification with totalitarian political ideologies. Sharon Macdonald has emphasized the importance of Nazi buildings' formal properties on their political effects, particularly in creating a sense of awe, underlining concern about 'how buildings could influence people by their 'impact on the eye'' (2006b, 109). Regarding Speer's buildings which still exist in Nuremberg, Macdonald also explains that

> If the Nazis were successful in their architectural ambitions to the extent that they managed to create buildings that would speak directly to some deep instinctual level in the viewer, bypassing their reasoning faculties, this obviously sets up a dilemma for the future. If the buildings remain intact, there is a risk that they continue to speak the words that Albert Speer intended. (2006a, 16)

However, as Sartwell (2010) points out, the idea that aesthetic objects act by themselves, like some kind of *mind control* system is unacceptable. The capacity of an aesthetic artefact to generate a political experience is produced in a certain context, in an entanglement of people, object and beliefs (among many other elements). In order for artefacts to introduce modifications in people's actions and ways of thinking, they must be combined with many other artefacts (both material and immaterial), within a flow of actions aimed at achieving precisely those socio-political changes. That is to say, political artefacts can have an influence on social processes, but they cannot determine them.

The Valley of the Fallen, or any other building, cannot, by itself, induce, people to believe in a totalitarian ideology, but it can form part of the aesthetic environment and be an actor in actions of a neo-fascist nature. There is no doubt at all that neo-fascist groups find anchorage in these political monuments (Ben-Ghiat 2017). Sites like the Valley of the Fallen can be experienced and interpreted as *proof* of the permanence, holiness, monumentality and order (albeit fictitious) of the Francoist regime. This implies the need to give new meaning to political artefacts so that they cannot (or at least so that it is more difficult for them to) be used to reinforce or legitimize anti-democratic ideologies.

The (aesthetic) resignification of political artefacts

If all heritage is indeed dissonant (Smith 2006), this is especially obvious regarding political artefacts linked to ideologies which are still active. These objects help legitimize and strengthen certain social and political relationships. A political artefact will generate tension among people who hold different beliefs, despite later attempts to hide that dissonance by, for example, modifying the artefact's status to *heritage*, *monument* or *work of art*.

This issue is particularly important with regard to what Meskell has called *negative* heritage, 'a conflictual site that becomes the repository of negative memory' (2002, 556), such as Auschwitz, or Nazi and Soviet statues and architecture. Another researcher who has worked on this matter is Sharon Macdonald, who uses the terms *undesirable* (2006a) and *difficult* heritage (2009): 'This is a case in which the physical remains of the past offer up an identity that many of those in the present wish to distance themselves from, even while, at the same time, recognising it as fully part of their history' (2006a, 11). This generates the dilemma of whether to preserve or destroy a particularly disturbing artefact, and in the case of conserving it, its resignification.

The Valley of the Fallen is a good example of this type of problem as for many it can, undoubtedly, be classified as *negative* or *undesirable* heritage. It is an artefact, and a theatrical experience which empowers Francoism, his identity and his historical legitimacy. Although it can be considered a monumental work with notable aesthetic qualities, or even a work of art[16], this does not imply it can be considered positive for the whole of society (or at least, not in its actual condition and use).

In a modification of the so-called Historical Memory Law (Ley de Memoria Histórica [BOE 2007]) the importance of the Valley of the Fallen's resignification is stressed, to transform it into 'a space for the culture of reconciliation, for the democratic collective memory, and for the dignification and acknowledgement of the victims of the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship'[17] (BOE 2018, III).

A commission of experts (*Comisión de Expertos para el Futuro del Valle de los Caídos*) was created in 2011 which elaborated a report with proposals for the monument's future. Once options like destruction or deconsecration were discarded, the resignification of the whole complex was considered to be essential by means of different actions like, for example, creative/artistic interventions on the front esplanade

and adjacent areas (Figures 3-4), as well as the creation of an Interpretation Centre (Comisión 2011).

Other researchers, like archaeologist Alfredo González Ruibal, have also put forward suggestions for modifying its meaning, considering it fundamental to 'challenge the epic image of the 'crusade' celebrated by Franco's monument' and 'show the sordid and violent side of the conflict. The idea, then, is to remove the Valley from the national heritage list and include it in a topography of terror composed of war and post-war sites in Madrid' (2009, 68).

Except for the recommendation made by the commission of experts regarding the possibility of a 'powerful' creative or artistic action to be carried out on the front esplanade, proposals do not usually include references to any modification of an aesthetic nature. However, the resignification of a political artefact can (and sometimes *must*) be carried out through the aesthetic dimension of an intervention.

A good example of the importance of aesthetic aspects in the process of resignification of those political artefacts considered to be negative heritage, is the Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg (built between 1933 and 1938). It is the largest existing site of Nazi architecture, and includes the Zeppelin Building and the Congress Hall (nowadays site of the Documentation Centre). In much the same way as would happen later with the Valley of the Fallen, the Nazis 'deliberately aimed to create a new heritage site, one that would be looked back on in the future as imposing and significant' (Macdonald 2006a, 14).

There were concerns that conserving this iconic complex would entail a certain continuity and persistence of the collective identity and Nazi discourse. As Macdonald explains, the historian Hermann Glaser suggested the idea of applying a criterion of *trivialisation*, as a way to neutralise the supposed effect of sacrality and even of glorious

heritage. This would mean leaving 'the buildings fall into a state of semi-disrepair but not total ruin. […] They should be allowed to look ugly and uncared-for. And they should be used for banal uses, such as for storage, and leisure activities like tennis and motor-racing' (Macdonald 2006a, 19).

The architectural intervention designed by Gunther Domenig for the Documentation Centre 'also works with metaphors of transparency and profanation' (Macdonald 2006a, 20), inserting a glass and steel stake through the building. In addition, some brickwork has been left visible, and together with the building's somewhat unkempt appearance, has annulled any fascination it could provoke whilst, at the same time, adding new layers of meaning transforming it into a new political artefact, revealing and defying the Nazi discourse.[18]

In the case of the Valley of the Fallen, it is not possible to apply the same criteria as were chosen for the Congress Hall, because the Spanish site is also a place of worship and an important cemetery, so decision-making is much more difficult and *trivialisation* of the monument is not feasible. Nor is it possible to apply just one criterion for the whole site, since the legal status of each of the different buildings is of an extreme complexity (Comisión 2011; Riaño 2019b).

However, what must be emphasized here is that aesthetic aspects, although they may seem secondary, can have the potential to transform the meaning of a political artefact, linking it to a new discourse, even to the exact opposite of its initial discourse, thus altering its *definitional power*.

Conclusions

Political action consists in influencing social dynamics and, in order to do so, it is necessary to elaborate artefacts as part of the political discourse. Political artefacts can contribute to, for example, construct and legitimize political agents, empower or

disempower social groups, create meanings or generate certain behaviour. This means that when the question arises regarding management of a political artefact transformed into a *heritage artefact* (and in particular regarding *negative* or *undesirable* heritage) its socio-political effects must be taken into account.

Furthermore, political artefacts always have an aesthetic dimension and that dimension is key in understanding their socio-political effects. This means that the study of heritage must consider the aesthetic values, linked not only to *beauty* and *harmony*, to the idea of an artefact as a *work of art* to be admired, but to its capacity for generating political effects. On the other hand, it also implies the need to analyse contextual elements which will determine whether an artefact can provoke, in a given situation, political effects and what those effects would be.

Anthropology and sociology are changing our idea of aesthetics, with points of view far from Kant's theories and the field of fine art. If, following Sartwell's theories, we accept the idea that what is *political* is also *aesthetic*, the aesthetic dimension must be considered in a very different way when studying heritage. Furthermore, this relationship between aesthetic effect and political action must be taken into account when dealing with the problem of resignification of negative heritage, such as Nazi or Francoist buildings.

Aesthetic modifications can considerably alter the meaning of a site. Therefore, before carrying out any transformation, it is fundamental to be able to anticipate what a political artefact's effects could be. As the Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg have shown, a creative action is absolutely necessary to define what elements must be introduced, eliminated or modified, in order to achieve the desired socio-political effect. The Nuremberg case is very significative and should be an example to follow in other processes of resignification like the Valley of the Fallen. This does not imply using the

exact same solutions as the Spanish case is much more complex. Criteria like

trivialisation or *profanation* are probably not the most adequate to transform this site,

but some kind of action affecting the aesthetic dimension as a way of altering its

political meaning should be considered.

      Lastly, it must be emphasized that this paper does not defend the idea that an

aesthetic change by itself implies a change in meaning. Just as the commission of

experts created in 2011 suggested when looking for solutions regarding the

resignification of the Valley of the Fallen, it is necessary to act on different levels.

However, it is essential not to underestimate the aesthetic dimension from the point of

view of its political capacity.

Notes

1. In this context, Morphy's definition of *aesthetics* is useful: 'In the case of material culture, 'aesthetics' refers to the effects of properties of objects on the senses, to the qualitative dimension of the perception of objects' (1992, 10).
2. Forms part of the state agency Patrimonio Nacional (National Heritage), which manages a series of historical sites.
3. According to data from Patrimonio Nacional, statistics regarding the number of visitors in recent years are as follows: 254.059 (2015), 262.860 (2016) and 283.277 (2017). In 2018, an increase of 33,5% (378.875) was registered with regard to the previous year (Riaño 2019a), due to the announcement of the removal of Franco's remains.
4. '[...] as the regime sought to repair diplomatic relations with Western democracies […], officials gradually abandoned their overtly fascistic bellicosity in favor of a reconciliatory façade that nonetheless did little to hide its own disingenuousness' (Crumbaugh 2011, 424).
5. See the definition of *power* by Castells (2009).
6. See the work by Llorente Hernández (2002) on the construction of Franco as *Caudillo* through portraits and other visual representations.
7. The relationship between political power and creativity in the royal courts of the Renaissance and Baroque periods has also been studied by other authors such as Strong (1984) or Bouza (1998).

8. In order to better understand these relationships, we recommend consulting other theoretical approaches which analyse entanglements between human and non-human actants such as, for example, the Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005), which will not be dealt with here, as it is beyond the scope of this paper.

9. On the relationship between aesthetics and politics, see also Rancière (2011).

10. The capacity of some aesthetic objects to act socially, to carry out tasks in dynamics which can clearly be called *political* (insofar as they are related to the ways in which society is structured), allows a connection between some points of Gell's theories to the concept of *political artefacts* to be made. Regarding the relationship between art production and political power and rituals, see Gell (2006).

11. This information was obtained from visitors' comments on Google Maps and TripAdvisor.

12. On *creativity* and its relationship with politics, see Schabert (1989).

13. See DeNora (2000) regarding music as a device of social ordering.

14. At no point, in his speech during the inauguration of the Valley of the Fallen (published in *La Vanguardia Española* [April 2, 1959]), does Franco mention the possibility of reconciliation; instead, he insists on the importance of continuing to fight against the 'anti-Spain'.

15. Regarding the importance of context in order to understand the political effects some artefacts can have, see Joerges' (1999) critique of Winner (1980).

16. Regarding its resignification as a masterpiece of Spanish art and the process of heritagisation in the 1960s-1970s, see Fuentes Vega (2017).

17. Translation by author.

18. Butler's thoughts on the resignification of hate speech are very enlightening in order to understand the difficulties faced when attempts are made to change the meaning of negative heritage: 'The resignification of speech requires opening new contexts, speaking in ways that have never yet been legitimated, and hence producing legitimation in new and future forms' (1997, 41).

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Figure captions

Figure 1. Valley of the Fallen: a view from the esplanade (the cross and the entrance to the basilica). Source: author, 2018.

Figure 2. Entrance to the basilica and the Pietà. Source: author, 2018.

Figure 3. Part of the front esplanade. Source: author, 2018.

Figure 4. Front esplanade. Source: author, 2018.