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“It's not Art, It's State': Rethinking the Feminist Interventions into the Mexican Monument of Independence through the Post-Aesthetic Concept of Emptiness and Leerraumkunst”

“No es Arte, es Estado': Análisis de las intervenciones feministas al Monumento a la Independencia a través del concepto post-estético de vacío y el Leerraumkunst”

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“It’s not Art, It’s State”: Rethinking the Feminist Interventions into the Mexican *Monument of Independence* through the Post-Aesthetic Concept of Emptiness and *Leerraumkunst*¹

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Resumen. Después de la intervención feminista sobre el Monumento a la Independencia, aunado a otras acciones históricas en contra de comisiones del Estado, se ha vuelto crítico el cuestionamiento sobre la “profanación” de monumentos identitarios y obras de arte para actualizarlos históricamente a través de un proceso de violencia creativa. Basados en el concepto post-estético de Raum o espacio, expuesto por Heidegger, entendido tanto como presencia, así como el vacío para convenir significado, aunado al nuevo concepto de “arte vacío” (*Leerraumkunst*), esta investigación realiza un estudio filosófico e historiográfico del monumento a la independencia, junto con la intervención feminista sobre el mismo. Teniendo en cuenta el término Heideggariano de “preservación” en el

¹ This research could only be achieved through the invaluable guidance of Professor Diane Bodart, from Columbia University for whose research into the interaction between public monuments and spaces stands as an exemplary work into the projection of power in Imperial Spain and its colonies. Equally indebted is this study to the philosopher and Professor John Rajchman whose philosophical understanding of art strives for the creation of a new understanding of its importance within post-modern thought.

arte, esta investigación vendrá a demostrar cómo actos de intervención en el arte del estado pueden ser equivalentes a tal concepto. Esta discusión nos permitirá cruzar el puente de la singularidad de este evento histórico, a una verdad ontológica que pueda cuestionar la sacralización totalitaria del arte identitario del estado.

Palabras clave: feminismo, Heidegger, Leerraumkunst, Raum, arte, postestética

Abstrac. Leading the feminist intervention on the Mexican *Monument of Independence*, and further historical actions into commissions of the State, question have risen upon the “desecration” of identitarian monuments and artworks as to historically actualize them through a process of creative violence. Grounded upon Heidegger’s post-aesthetic concept of *Raum* or space, understood both as presence and emptiness in which to imprint meaning, along the newfound concept of *Leerraumkunst*, this research conducts a philosophical and historiographical study of the *Monument of Independence*, along with the feminist intervention upon it. Taking into consideration Heidegger’s term of “preservation” within art, this research will come to demonstrate how acts of intervention into the art of the State might become akin to such concept. This discussion will let us cross the bridge from the singularity of this historical event and monument, into an ontological truth that might question the mindless sacralization of the State’s identitarian art.

Keywords: feminism, Heidegger, Leerraumkunst, Raum, art, postaesthetics

“Solo durante el fugaz instante de nuestra participación con lo absoluto podemos afirmar que existimos”.

José Vasconcelos

Sculpture: the embodiment of the truth of Being in its work of instituting places.

-Martin Heidegger, *Die Kunst und der Raum*

After four policemen in Mexico raped a 17-year-old girl a massive feminist protest was convoked on August 16, 2019. As part of the historical strike in Mexico City, the monument commemorating Mexico's Independence was vandalized, or shall we say 'intervened'. The *Angel of Independence*, as it's commonly known, a golden statue of a female allegorical Victory standing in a column with a mausoleum at its base, was set partly on fire and covered in feminist mantras and cries of rebellion at its foundation, such as: “Ni una más” (Not one more), “Amigas, se va a caer” (Friends, it shall fall), “México Feminicida” (Mexico, murderer of women) and the phrases “No es Arte” and “No es Arte; es Estado” (It isn't art, it's the state) surrounding its base.² As the state decided to pardon the women who intervened the monument—along with any vandalization occurred during the protest—questions have risen regarding the validity of acting

² Los Angeles Times (2019) *Vandalizan Ángel De La Independencia Durante Marcha De Mujeres*. [Video].

upon established identitarian monuments and artworks as to re-signify and historically actualize them through a process of creative violence. This research aims to discuss this predicament, along with its occurrence in any future acts of intervention aimed towards the art of the State. Grounded upon Heidegger’s post-aesthetic concept of *Raum* or space, understood both as presence and vacuum, along the newfound concept of *Leerraumkunst*, this research will conduct a philosophical and historiographical study of the *Monument of Independence* itself, along with the feminist intervention upon it. Ultimately, this research pursues the Heideggerian conviction that thinking through art can guide us into the future and can help us demonstrate a genuine understanding of the being, as well as his creations within history.³

Furthermore, as the feminist intervention wasn’t a simple destruction, or iconoclastic action against the monument but they imprinted on its surface mottos and phrases in a rebellious act of “poetic intervention”; a concept underwritten through the covering of the pedestal (and its surrounding statues) with symbols that rephrased and recontextualized the monument as a landmark of resistance along with a memorial to the fallen women, this study, will rather contemplate the post-aesthetic validity of its desecration as an act of reassertion of the self and being—in this case that of Mexican identity—through Heidegger’s own writings. Therefore, this research will not only revisit the history of the memorial itself to understand its contradictory origins and significance, but contrast

³ As Heidegger himself would say in his defense of art as an ontological tool: “The essential nature of art would then be this: the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of beings. Yet until now art has had to do with the beautiful and with beauty—not with truth” (Heidegger, ²⁰⁰²: 16)

it along with post-aesthetic concepts that might lead us to understand how this memorial, along with any art of the State, has become susceptible to be actualized when they turn into a *Leerraumkunst* or empty art; be it through preservation, as Heidegger envisions, but also through intervention—a concept he never considered but will be grounded in his philosophical reflections on creation and preservation, as they both actualize the being across history. In this way we aim to cross the phenomenological bridge that allows us to move from an interpretation of a particular work of art or historical action—the feminist intervention—into an ontological truth that concerns other interventions into the art of the State.

However, this study sets itself aside of the discussion of Heideggerian aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics),⁴ and rather takes on an approach based upon his famous essay *The Origin of the Works of Art*, for which artworks shape and express our historical reality while considering the concept of “preservation” through interaction as a new origin for the artwork.⁵ Only through such a post-aesthetic thinking can we recognize art’s true purpose, helping us understand

⁴ Through his “Afterword” (late 1930’s) and later “Addendum” (1957) to “The Origin of the Work of Art”, Heidegger criticizes the modern aesthetic focus into the beauty of an artwork rather than its potential to create history through the confrontation of beings with ontological truths of themselves and their realities. Therefore, the philosopher called for its surpassing in what has been called by posterior thinkers, such as Lan Thomson, post-aesthetics.

⁵ “The Origin of the Work of Art”, is the essential source to understand the philosophers attempt to overcome aesthetics through an understanding of the work of art in relationship to history. Delivered repeatedly between 1935 and 1936, the essay was held closely by Heidegger himself who added an “Afterword” in the late 30’s and a further “Addendum” in 1957, making us believe in the continued importance of his conclusions through his lifetime. Please refer to, Heidegger, M. (2002). *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In J. Young & K. Haynes, *Heidegger: Off the Beaten Track*. Cambridge University Press.

the inconspicuous way in which its creation and further contact with the work of art—be it as an act of conservation or intervention—unveils the truth of the artwork and actualizes its essence within history. Furthermore, as we concern ourselves with the notion of art, we will inevitably deal with the concept of *Dasein* or being, *Raum* or space (both as presence and absence), and *history*, and thus, his foundational work *Being and Time* would be attentively held in this study, alongside his late-life lecture of *Kunst und Raum* where all the aforementioned concepts will be joined. Finally, while this exercise emphasizes upon the intervention to the *Monument of Independence*, the truth uncovered could apply to any historical art produced by the State. As we will come to see, such works expressly depend on their interaction among beings as to gain meaning, and not through their pristine existence without any connection to its surrounding context.

Emptiness within Presence: Understanding the *Leerraumkunst*

In ages past the vandalization or damage of a monument, especially one pertaining to the image a figure of authority, would have had the perpetrator executed or heavily penalized. As mentioned by Gabriel Paleotti, the statue acted as a replica or extension of the persona, therefore wounding its image was a crime tantamount to hurting the person itself, and so a crime of *lèse-majesté*.⁶ Nevertheless, the *Angel of Independence*, as we will explore in our next section, does not stand in for a figure of authority but as an unclear commemoration of Mexico’s Independence from Spain—while still

⁶ Paleotti, G., McCuaig, W., & Prodi, P. (2012). *Discourse on sacred and profane images* (191-201). Getty Publications.

being constructed by the implementation of iconography from Imperial Rome along with other European models of remembrance. Furthermore, its construction was consistently attempted to glorify and serve authoritarian leaders in Mexican history and not as a genuine celebration of the liberation of European interventionism. Thus, in the contradiction of its own existence in accordance with its ‘intended’ essence other rules might apply to its desecration and the intervention done upon its plastic presence.

Grounded on Heideggerian metaphysics, when monuments and statues become empty of meaning they lend themselves to be rethought. Not as a defect, but rather as an opening; being that truth can only exist within the possibility of an unveiling and meaning can only be obtained where there is an empty space to project it into. As said in *Kunst und Raum*, “Emptiness is not nothing. It is also no deficiency. In sculptural embodiment, emptiness plays in the manner of a seeking-projecting instituting of places” (Heidegger, 1969: 7). This nothing will come to be as the mouth in the Genesis in Judaic thought that suddenly opened, and sound was born; as it is from the silence that everything emerges. Heidegger says, “Does truth arise out of nothing? It does indeed, if by nothing is meant the mere *not* of beings ” (Heidegger, 2002: 44). This sort of reflection is made explicit with his early phenomenological analysis of Van Gogh’s representation of a pair of tough farmer’s shoes, in which he would emphasize the nothingness surrounding it as the space in which meaning is projected. Heidegger says, “There is nothing surrounding this pair of shoes to which and within which they could belong; only an undefined space. [...] A pair of peasant’s shoes and nothing more. And yet. From out of the opening of the well-worn shoes the toil of the worker’s tread stares forth” (Heidegger, 2002: 14). In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the philosopher examines once again the

painting, and delves even further into the nothing that it contains along with the potency that that fact encompasses.⁷ As he says, “The picture really represents nothing [*Das Bild stellt eigentlich nichts dar*]. Yet, what *is* there, with that you are immediately alone, as if on a late autumn evening, when the last potato fires have burned out, you yourself were heading wearily home from the field with your hoe” (Heidegger, 2002: 37-38). For Heidegger, this visible “nothingness” exists as an entity and not merely a *no-thing* or *no-being* at all; after all, the concept of emptiness, by embodying itself through art as a medium, comes to being. For the philosopher, the encounter with the void conditions our experience rendering us able to project our *Da-sein* within the painting and uncover an ontological truth of the self. It is from the experience of nothingness where beings can come to inhabit an artwork, and thus create an act of historical meaning.

Accordingly, with the dilution of significance and within the absence of truth, we might be in need of a new term to describe such state when it comes to inhabit the artworks from within for which *Leerraumkunst*, being ‘art of emptiness’ or ‘empty art’ could be of service. Building upon Heidegger’s concept of *Raum*, the term allows to convey both the temporal displacement suffered by the monument, along with it becoming devoid of meaning while bringing forth an opportunity to be actualized. Furthermore, the term let us rehabilitate Heidegger’s colonial gaze, not as an ‘art of space’ (*Raumkunst*) but rather ‘an art of *emptied* space’ as *Leerraumkunst* exists as literally “vacuum art”.⁸ It is then that when form and con-

⁷ Please refer to Heidegger, M. (2000). *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Yale Nota Bene.

⁸ *Leerraum* also brings forth other sorts of associations such as *Leerraum* a space that has been emptied through an act of aggression, be it genocide or

tent, intent and existence, coming-into-being and actual being occurs in a state of self-contradiction, and the artwork comes close to the nullification of its essence creating a condition of voidness, it becomes subject to being resignified; as the basket that has been cleared in Heideggerian thought, and it is within this emptiness that it holds potency of carrying fruit once again.⁹ Therefore, the *Leer-raumkunst* exists as formed matter whose being has become devoid of meaning and is essentially contested through its own history or conflicting relation to its contemporaneity for which the art of the State, due to the ever-changing waters of time and political power, is more susceptible to fall into. If art is truth made manifest, in the *Leer-raumkunst* the essence of the work will not abide to the occurrence of truth, informed by its political purpose along with its manner of interaction with the people of its contemporaneity. This is why we must emphasize its relationship to this sort of art, and not any simple artistic creation, as it should inherently belong to the people that conform it, along with an understanding that this condition of emptiness tends to occur within this category of art as a more palpable phenomena as it is a *being* existing through time connected to the ever-changing identity of a Nation. After all, art is the “Being of Beings”.¹⁰ Thus, this emptiness should be understood not as a fault, but rather a condition that brings forth an opportunity.

complete nullification.

⁹ “To empty the collected fruit in a basket means: To prepare for them this place.” Heidegger. ¹⁹⁶⁹

¹⁰ Heidegger refers to it as such both in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (p.³⁸), as well as in *The Origin of Art*. A similar discussion of art as an entity is developed in *Die Kunst und der Raum*.

While Meyer Shapiro saw this self-projection into the nothing as a fault of Heidegger’s interpretation—a vision contemporary commentators do not share—when applied to the art of the state, this act of projection of the self becomes essential as to position an artwork within its contemporaneity, and thus, in history.¹¹ Thus, in this developed concept of space, both as presence but also as the emptiness, such as the nothingness surrounding Van Gogh’s painting but that now inhabiting the artwork from within, is what the *Leerraumkunst* conceptualizes. It is through its usage and comprehension that we might come to understand how an act of intervention done into a commission of the State, comes to be an actualizing act upon the essence of the artwork. These new associations will make themselves clearer once we immerse in a brief exercise of historiography using the “Monument of Independence” as our object of study, along with its intervention, as to understand how the memorial since its inception was ultimately created for the glorification of authoritarian figures within the nation, and not for the combatants of Independence or the inhabitants of such state. Thus, its name and identity, along with its chosen iconography and placement—and displacement from “El Zocalo” to the promenade of Reforma—, generated a void in which the women of Mexico could activate the monument, imprinting meaning upon the already existent vacuum.

¹¹ Please refer to Meyer Schapiro, “The Still Life as a Personal Object – A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh (1968),” in Schapiro, M. (1994). *Theory and philosophy of art*. George Braziller. For a critic into his view, please refer to the third chapter in Thomson, I. (2012). *Heidegger, art, and postmodernity*. Cambridge University Press.

A Conflicting History: The Creation of the Vacuum ¹²

Once the fight for sovereignty had been won, the ever-changing governments of the Mexican territory considered building a monument in the Plaza de Armas that would commemorate Mexico's independence from Spain. This strategic location not only represented the heart of the colonial cosmos, but also the center of the Aztec empire, marking itself as a 'lieux de memoire', a place where the society could rally around to assert a common past.¹³ The creation of an identitarian monument following the experience of the war, fell in line with an artistic trend firmly established in Europe;¹⁴ and so, between 1821 and 1843 several competitions were called but the project never came to fruition due to the constant conditions of political instability (Martínez Assad, 2005: 13). However, after the loss of the territory of Texas in 1836, the fraught experience of the first French Intervention in 1839, and the increasing tensions with the American government that anticipated a bigger conflict on the horizon, Mexico finally decided upon the building of a war monument in Mexico's main square that would help serve as a reminder

¹² This historiographical study is made possible due to the extraordinary research of Martínez Assad, C. (2005). *La patria en el Paseo de la Reforma*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

¹³ The term was developed by Nora, Pierre (1997) *Realms Of Memory. Rethinking The French Past*. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press and was found in Rausch, H. (2007). The Nation as a Community Born of War? Symbolic Strategies and Popular Reception of Public Statues in Late Nineteenth-Century Western European Capitals. *European Review Of History: Revue Européenne D'histoire*, 14(1), 73-101.

¹⁴ Please refer to Rausch, Helke (2007) "The Nation As A Community Born Of War? Symbolic Strategies And Popular Reception Of Public Statues In Late Nineteenth-Century Western European Capitals".

of Mexico’s unification within the increasingly unstable geopolitical situation. And thus, this monument could stand as a symbol of a novel republican consensus on political organization as well as a connection to the building of a new state with a self-defined identity apart from Spain; as the Mexican needed not only to project a coherent identity to the nations abroad, but also render it visible to its own citizens who had been continuously hit by foreign entities.

Therefore, by 1843 the Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna—the same man that had signed for Texas’s Independence in 1836 and who had tackled the first French Intervention—convoked an art contest with the support of the former Royal Academy of Arts of San Carlos. Be it as strategy to help consolidate his decaying authoritarian image, or as a message of union in a clearly divided political panorama, he led the efforts for the creation of the artwork.¹⁵ As part of the endeavor, he formulated a series of requirements for the monument, which will impact and remain into the final design of 1910. Conforming to his petitions, an honorary column with a minimum height of 42 m, topped by a statue of Victory, among other requests for the pedestal were established.¹⁶ This structure was meant to act on direct referentiality to the *July Column*,

¹⁵ As part of the design of the column contemplated the inclusion of three scenes that enhanced the persona of Santa Anna in correlation with the creation of the Mexican state: el Grito de Dolores, Mexico’s first call for independence; the triumphant entry of the “Ejército Trigarante” into Mexico City, marking the beginning of Independence; and finally, the battle of Pueblo Viejo, a minor struggle that happened in Tampico for which Santa Anna was responsible for its victory.

¹⁶ At the base of the column the pedestal was meant to be adorned with statues and bas-reliefs, that would be surrounded by a fence and other minor statues that would adorn the square as to create a monument within an artificial public square inside the Plaza the Armas.

a European monument located in Paris commemorating the French Revolution. And while the election of its design might have responded to the overall taste for French culture that existed among the population,¹⁷ as well as the increasing influence of that said culture in Mexico's ruling classes,¹⁸ it was certainly an odd choice considering the Napoleonic intervention that had occurred some years prior, and the supposed intent of the war monument to commemorate its independence from the European forces.¹⁹ By September of 1843, in the frame of national celebrations, the first stone was laid in the Plaza de Armas. However, when roughly a meter and a half of the pedestal, or 'zocalo', had been constructed the project was abandoned for lack of resources aimed toward its erection (Martínez Assad, 2005: 13-23). This 'zocalo', now long lost, ended up granting its nickname to the Plaza de Armas now known as "El Zócalo".²⁰

¹⁷ "Las modas y usos franceses han dado tono a la sociedad mexicana que estaba muy dispuesta a recibirlos, por la conformidad con los que habían cimentado la educación dada por los españoles que en ésta, como en todas materias, reciben cuanto les viene del otro lado de los Pirineos" (Luis Mora [1836] in Flores, Torres, 2003: 111).

¹⁸ About a third of the population in Mexico City, as well as an important majority of the ruling class, was supposed to have been French or Italian speakers at the time. As stated by one of Mexico's first historians José Luis Mora: "La inteligencia y uso de los idiomas cultos de la Europa, lo mismo que el gusto y conocimiento por su literatura clásica, son ya demasiado comunes en México, antes de la Independencia pocos entendían y menos hablaban el francés, en el día es un ramo necesario de educación; y muy pocos o ninguno de los que constituyen la generación que va reemplazando a la actual dejarán de poseer este idioma" (104).

¹⁹ Let us be reminded that the first intent of Independence wasn't even from Spain itself but from the French intervention in the Spanish territories, recognizing Ferdinand VII as the only true monarch of New Spain, and not José Bonaparte who had been appointed by Napoleon to lead Spain.

²⁰ This name has had such an influence in Mexican culture that the word

The second serious attempt in the construction of the monument will fall once again in the hands of authoritarian figures, but now from European origin. On September 16, 1865, during the Second Mexican Empire—a monarchy established by the French, with an Austrian leader, made to restrain the growing power of the United States—the new founding stone laid by Empress Carlota was set. The production of this artwork celebrating Independence, but now being done by an interventionist force, responded to the need of unifying the country’s morale through the appointment of a common enemy for both the French and Mexican culture: the Spanish. However, it will prove to be unsuccessful owing to the fall of the Empire some years later (Martínez Assad, 2005: 23-32). And so, with this second attempt, any actual individual that would have participated in the Independence would have been long deceased before the third and final successful attempt would have been realized.

By the end of the XIX century, a series of real estate developments aimed towards the high class in Mexico City began to develop in the Paseo de la Reforma. These exclusive neighborhoods needed public art that would justify its elevated cost of living, therefore the promenade needed to be beautified by statues of heroes, cobbled sidewalks, groves, and ultimately one of Mexico’s most important public artwork, the long-planned *Monument of Independence* (Martínez Assad, 2005: 33-76). And so, its intended original location in the axis of popular gathering—along with the association that it entailed— was foregone in favor of this great project of re-urbanization. In regard to its design, in 1884, an international contest was convened and the American firm Cluzz and Shultze, based on

has come to signify public square.

Washington D.C., was the winner for the project. But, as it became temporary postponed, the firm sold its rights to the Mexican government (Martínez Assad, 2005: 77-98).

Therefore, in 1910, 100 years after the Independence, the monument was finally inaugurated: miles away from its original location, now with a more urbanistic purpose, and maintaining the European influence on its design that had existed since its inception. However, there weren't any of the associations to the past before colonial rule, other than a small eagle in one of the sides of the pedestal, alongside a snakeskin surrounding the base of the column. Furthermore, more than celebration of Independence from foreign influence the monument served as a testimony of the power of the reigning leader, the general Porfirio Díaz who had been leading the nation for the last 35 years, and who was a known francophile and lover of European culture himself. Attesting to this fact was not only the Winged Victory who was based in the small statue of Victory held by Athena in the Pont Alexandre III in Paris, alongside phrygian caps in the interior of the monument, but the inclusion of other questionable symbols through the bas-relief in its pedestal with figures such as the shield of Medusa, a battle baton with the initials SPQR, along with other Roman imperial motifs that appear everywhere throughout the monument. A plausible artistic liberty taken by the Italian Enrique Alciati, as he was in charge for the sculptures and bas-reliefs of the memorial. Therefore, the monument acted symbolically as a continuation and celebration—as well as a house-warming gift—for the European-descending oligarchy that had come to live and govern in Mexico, along with the commemoration of power being held by Porfirio Díaz, a man with the uncontested authority of an emperor.

Years later, once the Mexican Revolution had been won, but a new authoritarian leader had been established in the period known as Maximato, the monument will be twice intervened by the standing presidents under the orders of the “Jefe Máximo”, or Supreme Leader, Plutarco Elias Calles. The first intervention will occur in 1923, with the creation of three niches to house the remains of the heroes of Independence, further transforming the monument which was now being converted into a mausoleum (Martínez Assad, 2005: 99-115). And, in 1929 the last modification will occur with the addition of a niche to add a votive gas lamp with clear pre-Hispanic style which was meant to be kept always aflame (Martínez Assad, 2005: 115-126). The heavy design of the lamp greatly contrasted with the rest of the monument, making it stand as the only direct allusion to a more “authentic” pre-colonial identity, in a sea of European symbols.

Both of these interventions can be interpreted as an attempt of the current power to appropriate the monument into a symbol of the—short-lived—glory of the Maximato, as well as a venture for a more profound connection with the Mexican identity by sacralizing the space through its usage as a mausoleum, along with the nascent pride of the pre-Hispanic past, palpable within the art of the beginning of the century. Nevertheless, this endeavor will prove unsuccessful with time, as the monument became an urban landmark rather than a space of reverence. Categorically, throughout its history, the monument of Independence has acted as an exercise of self-reassertion of power rather than identity or being, what is left then appears merely as a simulacrum of the truth. At least, until the reactivation of the memorial through the historical feminist inter-

vention.

“It’s not Art, It’s State”: Rethinking the Feminist Intervention

The female motto inscribed upon the pedestal, “It’s not art; It’s state” can speak to us about the desacralization that this monument has suffered throughout the years, as well as its difficulty to install itself as an actual reassertion of Mexican identity. However, the disconnection from the general population has existed prior to the protest, as well as the need to implement meaning upon it through acts of ‘non-apparent’ intervention. It is only natural, as Koselleck mentions in *The Practice of Conceptual History*, numerous memorials have fallen into oblivion, and if they are maintained and visited, it is rarely done to reassert their original political sense (Koselleck, 2011: 324). Attesting to this, nowadays the monument is widely experienced as a desacralized landmark meant for any type of social gathering, ranging from wild football celebrations, *quinceañera* photoshoot locations and even a site for Mexico’s Fashion Week. Following the Heideggerian critique of modern aesthetics, the monument stands only for its ‘beauty’ and not within a real interaction that withholds the meaning of Independence, or at least a memorial to the death that holding within.

As this war monument tried to become an icon that would celebrate the Mexican Independence from foreign European intervention, and that would therefore assert national identity, it did so through the appropriation of European symbols that didn’t necessarily connect with the iconographical language of the Mexican population. Corroborating this fact, the Victory has had the need to be rethought into ideas that pertain to Mexican visual culture, trans-

forming itself from a winged Greco-Roman Victory into a Christian angel to create an actual connection with the core beliefs of the population. Furthermore, the exclusion of the Roman inspired figures in the collective memory existed even before the feminist intervention, as the elimination of these components is so patent in Mexican visual culture that the majority of pictures displaying the monument, as well as the visual propaganda, mostly included the column and the Victory, or just the pagan icon, nullifying the rest of the structure. The monument has even been renamed in the collective memory from “Monumento de la Independencia” to the interpretation of the figure at its top, the “Ángel de la Independencia”, or just “El Ángel”, its most distinguishable figure (if it were an angel). These proceedings could in themselves be interpreted as acts of intervention upon the “pure” identity of the monument, an inevitable phenomenon within this storm of circumvoluted meaning. Ultimately, the monument has been understood and interacted with as if it were empty of meaning and reverence long before the historical feminist intervention, so much so, that most of the structure has had the need to be rethought from a mausoleum to a landmark, and its pagan iconography and name converted into Christianity. Again, not as a fault but simply as the phenomena of the *Leerraumkunst* at work, as the art of the State needs to resonate within the people that it comes to represent, and it is only natural that the being will strive as to implement meaning upon its world.

Most importantly, alongside its resignification, the pagan icon has suffered from the asexualization that comes from the change of identity in the Spanish language, as it has been trans-

formed from the female winged Victory, or “la Victoria alada”, into an asexual or even male angel by naming it “el ángel”. Moreover, even if we didn’t pay any regard into the gender change through language, we can just refer ourselves to its iconology, as Victories tend to be female, while angels are generally asexual or male-presenting. Furthermore, the intervention that occurred in the monument was a dire reminder of the empty symbolism and political implications that any female allegorical statue contains at its core. As mentioned by Warner, while female figures are often used to represent abstract concepts such as liberty, justice, or victory, their gendered form only serves as an aesthetic choice but not one that actually permeates reality, as women will be often disadvantaged in the claims on liberty, victory, or justice (Warner, 1985: 17). Thus, “interventionist” acts upon the identity and into the emptiness carried within the monument had existed prior to the feminist involvement, what is singular about this historic event is that for the first time since its inception the monument actually pertained to a being reminiscent of a contestatory memorial that actually celebrated Mexican identity from an oppressive authority, thus, a *true* Monument of Independence. Most significantly, it will be through the usage of symbols and poetic hymns that actually pertain to national culture.

Attesting to this phenomenon, during the Feminist intervention on the monument, while the pedestal and its Europeanized bas-relief were completely covered and nullified by feminist mottos, the eagle at the entrance of the monument was colored with pink painting, respecting and highlighting the outline and the figure itself in an act of *hergestellt* or setting forth. As Heidegger would say,

“when a work is brought forth, out of this or that work-material—stone, wood, metal, color, language, tone—we say that it is made, set forth [hergestellt] out of it” (Heidegger, 2002: 23). Therefore, the symbol was reappropriated but not negated or nullified as the rest of the monument’s pedestal. It was rather emphasized—a meaningful action that speaks not only to the recognition of a common identity, but to a rejection of the other symbols. In addition, the Europeanized bas-relief acted as an ‘empty’ canvas for poetic intervention, demonstrated through their covering in mottos that nullified and blocked the view of any iconography while stressing the cries for justice and dispute against the State. Through the addition of mottos, alongside the emphasis of the eagle, the work of art started to make itself anew, while underlining the condition of emptiness of representation being held not only throughout the pedestal, but within the walls of the monument itself.

In addition, pictures of the desacralized monument went around social media with a modified stanza of the Mexican anthem: “Y tus templos, palacios y torres se derrumben con horrible estruendo, Y sus ruinas existan diciendo: de mil *heroínas* la patria aquí fue.” Or may your temples, palaces, and towers collapse with horrid clamor, and may their ruins continue on, saying: of one thousand *she-roes*, here the Motherland was. For the first time since its inception the monument was effectively reaffirming the self, through elements of poetry and art pertaining established Mexican identity and framing it through the use of female citizen action; instead of existing as a monument reaffirming authoritarianism or European intervention, with the usage of a language—both visual and written—unrecognizable to the nationals. Therefore, this act of namely

‘creative destruction’ done to the unmistakably Europeanly inspired monument acted then as the reaffirmation of the self. This was both an act of independence and the creation of an artwork. As “when- ever art happens, whenever that is, there is a beginning, a thrust enters history and history either begins or resumes [...] History is the transporting of people into its appointed task (*Aufgegebenes*) as the entry into its endowment (*Mitgegebenes*)” (Heidegger, 2002: 49). Art in itself is origin, as Heidegger discussed, and a distinctive way in which truth manifests itself. The monument covered in mantras, was as much—or even more—than was existent beforehand, or the pristine monument that now stands thereafter. As said by Heidegger, when analyzing Hegel’s conception of time and spirit, the progress of the spirit in history carries within a principle of exclusion, which is meant to surpass the former being (Heidegger, 2021: 467). As the philosopher would later criticize, if works are to be presented and enjoyed merely as ‘art’, that is for their beauty, then, it is not yet established that they actually stand in essence as *real* works of art (Heidegger, 2002: 42).

In this act of seeming violence the setting-into-work of the monument’s intended essence came to be, and thus transformed itself into art through a process of nullification, that existed in simultaneity as an act of creation and restoration of essence (2002: 47). As Heidegger would say, “for a work [of art] actually is a work when we transport ourselves out of the habitual and into what is opened up by the work so as to bring our essence itself to take a stand within the truth of beings” (2002: 47). If it is only through strife that truth might be born, the pink highlighting of the figure manifests that identitarian conflict, along with its resolution and coming-to-being of this renewed graffiti covered monument that

brought itself into a more genuine understanding of contemporaneity. Furthermore, the response of society as to contextualize it within the national hymn, along with evocative photographs of the event, created the Mexican *Gesamkuntswerk* or the total artwork, even if it was short-lived. This temporary work of art, came to be aligned with the intended true essence of the memorial along with the historical reality faced not only by these women, but any other civilian standing within a position of helplessness and anyone who must face a systemically oppressive system; thus, this action constructed a genuine artwork that reflects upon the concept of Independence and contextualized to Mexican motifs, maybe for the first time since its inception. *Desecration* suddenly becomes art creation.

As Thomson compiles in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (2011), art according to the Heidegger should first give to things their look, that is, they help establish an historical community’s implicit sense of what things *are* in essence, but most importantly “they give ‘to humanity their outlook on themselves,’ that is, they also help shape an historical community’s implicit sense of *what truly matters* in life (and so also what does not), which lives are most (or least) worth living, which actions are noble (or base), what in the community’s traditions most deserves to be preserved (or forgotten), and so on.” (Thomsom, 2012: 43). The encounter with the work of art confronts us with the unveiling of a truth for the individual. Art seen through a post-aesthetic’s lens, should convey to the community the necessary truths for a more engaged existence within its contemporaneity, while implicitly understanding himself further through the light of this artwork. As Heidegger would say, “in the [art]work, the happening of truth is at work”

(Heidegger, 2002:19). Art, and *great* art, is capable of setting the wheels of history into motion, transforming the understanding of our world and place within it, “Whenever art happens – that is, when there is a beginning – a push [*Stoß*] enters history, and history either starts up or starts again”(2002: 49) As said by Heidegger, “Art is history in the essential sense: it is the grounding of history” (2002:49).

Finally, as Koselleck mentions, war memorials not only commemorate the dead, but also compensate by rendering survival meaningful (2011: 287). This holds especially true in a country where femicides exist as a looming threat. While the monument as any other combat memorial, stands as a reminder of the maxim *mortui viventes obligant* (the living are obliged to the dead), the feminist intervention is a reminder that the living are *also* obliged to the living. And every woman that conveyed that day, was a survivor of the systemic violence and exists in confrontation to her own plausible death. In regard to the concept being, the *Dasein* is incapable of withstanding the possibility of its death (Heidegger, 2021: 274). The feminist intervention then also acts as an explicit manifestation of the being trying to dodge its own finite existence, as it is intended (2021: 278). The reminder and anguish expressed through the slogans of “Estado feminicida” (Femicide State), set up a theme that was indeed befitting of the mausoleum existent within the monument and gave a more profound reflection on death than the usual gatherings that occur within the memorial since its origin. Through this cumulative set of actions is that the artwork suddenly became anew, actualizing itself within history and bringing forth a more profound understanding of both beings within their contemporaneity.

From Intervention to Restoration: Crossing the Ontological Bridge

This research has throughout referred to the activists’ demonstrations in the monument as interventions, rather than vandalizations. However, we can go even further and understand it as an act parallel to the concept of “preservation” that Heidegger examined and pursued within his post-aesthetics. This discussion will let us cross the bridge from the singularity of this historical event into an ontological truth that might question the mindless sacralization of the art of the State, along with aiding in any future argumentation regarding its intervention. As it has been claimed, the legitimacy and artistic value of an art intervention may vary, depending on the perception and the standpoint of the viewer. The following statement, entitled *Stuckism Handy Guide to the Artworld* (2011), presented in the Tate Museum in London, is an interesting take on this discussion:

An act by an individual which interferes with an existing artwork is termed an “intervention” and the individual termed an “artist” if they are endorsed by a Tate curator or are dead. The same, or similar, act by an individual interfering with the same artwork (or even interfering with the interference to the artwork), if they are alive and are not endorsed by a Tate curator, is termed “vandalism”, and the individual termed a “criminal”.

Aside from our own individual motivations, we need to accept that the interaction with the monument gave it emotional and political value parallel to its intended essence, where before laid mainly its aesthetic worth and a (mostly unknown) contradicting history. As mentioned, while Heidegger didn’t contemplate the con-

cept of intervention, when existent within the *Leerraumkunst* it is tantamount to his idea of preservation, as it creates meaning and historical significance were beforehand the artwork stood as empty.

In no moment preservation, as discussed by Heidegger, resembles its common usage as the maintenance of appearance, but rather focuses on the interaction of beings across time along with a return to their historicity. What the philosopher actually tells us is that the act of preservation is as much of a genesis, as the creation of the artwork itself and dependent of such.²¹ Just as a work cannot exist without being created and creators, “so what has come-to-being cannot also exist without preservers” (Heidegger, 2002: 40). This notion of art preservation might become more complicated within the framework of any art produced to honor the State, as it has a diverse group of owners with an equally shifting set of political ideas. However, if we focus our attention into art’s intended purpose to bring us back to this “engaged level of existence”, and how our experience with it must exist within the un-concealment of truth among beings, when falling into the *Leerraumkunst*, intervention becomes the only action akin to preservation. As said by Heidegger, “Preservation of the work does not individualize human beings down to their experience but rather, brings them into a belonging to the truth that happens in the work. By doing it, it founds their being-with-one-another as the historical standing out of human existence. Beings from out of the relation to the unconcealment [of truth]” (2002: 41). When art exists within a state of disconnection with its contemporaneity it is only through the inte-

²¹ As said by Heidegger, “It is not only the creation of the work that is poetic; equally poetic is the preservation of the work” (2002: 47).

raction of beings that truth can be produced once again. However, who is to decide who is allowed to preserve the monument and its intended manner of preservation? The philosopher establishes that the correct form is set to be decided in accordance with the subjects of its contemporaneity and the artwork in itself; as “the manner of proper preservation of the work is created and prefigured for us only and exclusively by the work itself” (2002: 42). Thus within this set of ideas, is that the notion of intervention can exist as preservation, being that ultimately preservation comes to be defined by its power to become origin, its meant virtue of providing an interaction among beings, and it is permanently open to interpretation as who is to interact with it and its intended manner.

Monuments, as any other creation, are vulnerable to be re-defined. As authorities attempted to build a monument attesting to “Mexican identity” in the *Monumento a la Independencia*, it is within its own desacralization that we have come to find an actual assertion of Mexican identity. It is through the actualization of beings through intervention where the truly poeticizing projection in “the opening up of that in which human existence [Dasein], as historical, is already thrown [geworfen].” Therefore, it will be through these and other interventionist acts where we are able to reconsider the history of our monuments, as well as the inherent state of emptiness in which they exist when they do not interact with contemporaneity in a historical way. Furthermore, it invites us to strive instead in the construction of meaning through active interaction that understands any artwork as a being, susceptible to falling into the voidness of the *Leerraumkunst*; while also, through this condition, opening the possibility of actualizing itself through history. While

the origin of *the Monument of Independence* had always been associated with the reassertion of authoritarian figures of power, by an act of “poetic annulment” and “destructive creation”, the monument then re-emerged and was “preserved” as a work of art, that while being temporary it was no less meaningful in its demonstration of a true essence of Independence, as well as a landmark of resistance within the political panorama.

Heidegger’s postmodern hope is that we come to understand art as a medium to encounter the truths of our own beings, and thus we cannot preconceive and assume any work posing as art as an artwork, and we should rather strive for creations that bring forth the truth of beings. However, when encountered with art that time has been rendered empty, as in the *Leerraumkunst*, interaction through intervention comes to be a possibility that lets us transition from a modern world where meaning-bestowing subjects stand against an objective world, into a world where beings bestow meaning into the world while aiming to generate another being that will return to them and their community a sense of historicity through the unveiling of truth. It is then that intervention can become preservation and a new beginning within history. Never forgetting that meaning is produced through the collaboration of beings, rather than vehement acts of mindless sacralization. Meanwhile, we are convoked to constantly question ourselves of the works that come to inhabit our world as art, especially when pertaining creations assumed to commemorate the State, its inhabitants, and their history. If we are meant to cultivate memory, let it be through a careful observation of the tempests and emptiness that comes to inhabit all beings within the waters of time.

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