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A Questionnaire on Monuments

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# A Questionnaire on Monuments

From Charlottesville to Cape Town, there have been struggles over monuments and other markers involving histories of racial conflict. How do these charged situations shed light on the ethics of images in civil society today? Speaking generally or with specific examples in mind, please consider any of the following questions: What histories do these public symbols represent, what histories do they obscure, and what models of memory do they imply? How do they do this work, and how might they do it differently? What social and political forces are in play in their erection or dismantling? Should artists, writers, and art historians seek a new intersection of theory and praxis in the social struggles around such monuments and markers? How might these debates relate to the question of who is authorized to work with particular images and archives?

—Leah Dickerman, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Carrie Lambert-Beatty

## LUCIA ALLAIS

Commission after commission has been convened, by institutions and municipalities, to deal with contested monuments on their grounds. One emerging solution that has proved popular is “recontextualization”: A monument can stay, but its original context must be explained on site, thus conveying “historical complexity.” Such will be the fate of Christopher Columbus in New York, Cecil Rhodes in Oxford, Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia, and many more.

I want to point to the tragic inadequacy of this contextualism, as both concept and tool, for the task at hand.

*1. Against Content*

There is a real danger that considering the content of each individual monument, however thoughtfully, avoids taking monumental *collections* for what they have also always been: instruments of territorial management, penetration, and control.

The statues of segregationists that began to occupy town squares across the American South in the late nineteenth century were intended to intimidate the urbanizing waves of former slaves. As time went on this spatial punctuation became more fine-grained. When statues were flanked by public amenities such as drinking fountains, the same social message was delivered by both public systems, even if in the fountain’s case it was the WHITES | COLORED labels that did all the work.

Conversely, waves of monumental empowerment can be discovered in American history. As Southern towns were installing their statues, Italian masons and stoneworkers emigrated to the northeastern United States to apply their trades on the ornate revivalist architecture of the East Coast. These workers used their control of the industry to construct statues, name streets, and invent a cultural heritage in perfect synchrony with their social elevation to positions of civic power.

These monuments were not only historical portraits. They were signposts, markers used to attract and repel certain constituencies, affect housing policies, anchor planning decisions.

And so it is today: White nationalists have reactivated not the symbolic value of Confederate statues themselves but their capacities as a mass media writ far and wide. They do not recuperate specific statues’ identities, but instead leverage their ubiquity and their availability for a range of race-baiting messages across platforms (cue the live, torchlit mob). The fact that the sculptures are largely interchangeable works is key to their potency in reproducing a vague but persistent message of fear.



*Jimmie Durham. Still Life with Spirit and Xitle. 2007.  
Photograph courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture  
Garden, Smithsonian Institution.*

## 2. Against Context

All the talk of recontextualization seems almost comically quaint because it has been four decades already since Rosalind Krauss radically redescribed the relation between sculpture, architecture, and landscape as an “expanded field.” Drawing from the history of the monument, she showed that *all* sculpture was disappearing into the manufacture of context, the congealment of space, and the reconfiguration of land.

This is hardly an obscure reference. Some prominent American artists have already leveraged this congealment to political ends. Kara Walker’s *A Subtlety*, a gigantic sphinx modeled of white sugar, monumentalizes the material output of a sugarcane field—a slave’s territory—in a defensive posture that is also an offensive gesture (crouching, all the better to take it in the rear). Now that Jimmie Durham is the target of identitarian politics, his *Still Life with Spirit and Xitle* stationed in front of the Hirshhorn Museum looks like it was made by hurling a piece of a national monument from the roof of a federal museum, marking the spot of a crime that is equal parts state violence and character assassination.

Such gestures of sculptural affront are not limited to the United States. In central Germany, the Centre for Political Beauty installed a rotated replica of a portion of *Monument to the Murdered Jews* in front of the village home of an anti-immigration politician, redeploing congealment as political aggression against the protection of aristocratic privilege that “locality” provides.

Does anyone really believe that putting a plaque near a sculpture, or even leaving a niche empty, will convey “historical complexity”? More likely, donors and legacies will suffer a little historical ambiguity in return for the benefit of the auratic afterglow of monuments, and the power to distribute people in space in very complex ways.

### 3. *The Territorial Turn*

The real and expanded context is territorial. This recent conflation of race wars and monument wars has thrust the US into a worldwide wave of heritage conflicts—a veritable “territorial turn”—where disputes over monuments inevitably ooze outward to encompass entire parks, city centers, pilgrimage routes, etc., acquiring immense political valence and potentially devolving into revolution. Monuments serve as a dispersed cultural archive; their preservation involves control of nothing less than the national narrative.

The US is uniquely positioned within this territorial turn not only because of its clear history of spatial segregation but also because US national monuments have been territorial all along—parks mostly, and plots of land with only incidental architecture or sculpture. This means the US’s monuments bureaucracy was integrated into land management and social policing from the start. In the early twentieth century, southwestern tribal lands were set aside as national monuments by the federal government in part to preempt more expansive claims of self-determination and delimit Native belonging in space. Federal recreation sites were segregated well into the 1960s. Even today, the fight against environmentalism unfolds over the “right” to throw away a plastic bottle in a national park.

The US is also a nation with a class of cultural experts that is decentralized, multicultural, and not particularly government-inclined. This makes for a possible mobilization that goes far beyond being impaneled about this monument or that.

During World War II, it was refugee American scholars who compiled thousands of pages listing and locating Europe’s monuments, handing them over to Allied commanders for “avoidance.” What they did far exceeded what had been asked of them: They produced a managerial bird’s-eye view of Europe’s entire cultural landscape, a picture that no nation on the continent could muster.

While there is no longer a frightful aerial threat to prompt us to imagine such a project, America’s territory and its civil society are undoubtedly being figured defensively, in part through monumental effects. The Trump administration has announced, with apparent satisfaction, that it has, for the first time in the country’s history, “shrunk a national monument.” The areas of Utah that were just

“given back” will likely soon be re-monumentalized in other ways with rigs and mines—landmarks whose territorial power is as evident as their cultural obsolescence is assured.

The analogy with the 1940s isn’t perfect. The salvage plan America made for Europe was unabashedly white and Eurocentric. But today’s expert field is far less homogeneous. It should not be intimidated by the false equivalence of finding good objects “on both sides,” or kept busy demonstrating—worse, verifying—the spatial inequalities that have been obvious all along. Will any experts rise up to become an organized force, ready with a vision? There is a latent project of systematic selection here.

4.

If we are to move and remove monuments on a large scale, we had better think of a systematic convergence of the territory, the archive, and the citizen. Monuments are the memory-retrieval component of any cultural state apparatus that still seeks to concentrate people’s attention, their bodies, and their national resources in space. When retreating empires are actually ashamed, they burn their archives, as the British did in the 1960s.

LUCIA ALLAIS (Princeton) is the author of *Designs of Destruction: The Making of Monuments in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: 2018).

NOEL W. ANDERSON and ANDREW WEINER

We hold this truth to be self-evident—that the Confederate monument memorializes a white supremacy that was not just Southern but was and remains intrinsically *American*; one whose racism was indissociable from patriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism; one that for centuries has channeled the shame and rage of the exploited, castrated, or dispossessed. It should be self-evident that this ideology enjoys a monstrous immortality, such that a new Jim Crow can arise from the old, such that the voices of Wallace and Connor can echo in the hollow skulls of Trump and Sessions, such that America can be Made Great Again [*sic*]. It should be self-evident and yet of course it isn't. In that sense, we still deserve the monuments, and so maybe they should continue to stand. (If you're asking *who is this "we"*? then we understand, but maybe you're part of our common problem.)

Try and pay attention everybody! The signs are there. The eyes are there. See those eyes? Hear those eyes? Hear Marvin Gaye as he calls out:

*Can I get a . . . witness?*  
*Can I get a . . . wit-ness?*  
 . . . witness . . . whiteness . . . witness . . .

Who am I...are we...are you... are we... to witness this call; to *attend*? How do we respond? Who are we if we don't?

Some signs you don't see: the ones we feel aren't just on our backs but within our joints, articulating and aching. Some signs you don't see: We see no monuments to the Middle Passage or the Tuskegee experiment; there are no genocide memorials on the Mall. We see Martin, but we don't see Malcolm. *Ain't* no Nat Turner, no Kwame Ture. Where are the monuments to systematic dispossession and subjugation, to the extinction of memory? We're taught to remember blackness—a whiter shade of what lies beyond the pale—but never to remember anti-blackness, or to imagine the kind of blackness that exists beyond color, light, positivity. Not the monochrome, but the achromatic; an atonal totality of blackness. Hell, even Malcolm linked black with totality. Darkness is invisible, underrepresented, underutilized, and underground: forever fugitive. The possibility of the (w)hole? How do you witness *that*?

*I said can I get a witness?*

Forget about Robert E. Lee for a second—America's real self is evident in all the other monuments to white supremacy, the ones that can't be shrouded or defaced





or taken off a flagpole. The Constitution, which formalized slave owners' rights and overrepresented slave states. The *White House*, built with slave labor. The National Portrait Gallery, enshrining the likes of Jackson, Monroe, Nixon, Reagan, Andrew Johnson, Lyndon Johnson, and and and... The Lincoln Memorial, which substitutes the heroic myth of the Great Emancipator for the realities of accommodation. Colonel fucking Sanders. The economic, academic, and cultural institutions of contemporary art (including ours), as they instrumentalize "diversity" and deny their own complicity, labeling any criticism of their bias as an attack on artistic freedom. The mechanisms of carceral neoliberalism, which subsidize the private-prison industry through the criminalization of race and poverty. The structural devaluation of black life, as evident in infant-mortality rates and lack of access to health care. The names Trayvon Martin and Sandra Bland and Eric Garner and and and . . .

Maybe *now* I can get a witness—one who can *see* what is veiled by seeing, dissembled in semblance, consigned by the sign. *C'mon!* Maybe *she* can tell us how the institution generates what it claims to represent; maybe *she* can explain how monuments move? How the White House sticks and moves . . . the Great White Hype! Isn't that obvious?

We need our senses to witness what moves beneath, between, beyond. What moves its momentum against monumentality. Black Lives Matter motions toward that horizon, its name at once an appeal and a demand. *Can we get a witness? Can we be that witness?* These claims echo, these motions reverberate into new forms of reflexivity, relationality, and responsibility. When Huey Copeland speaks of *tending-towards-blackness* he guides our attention to the tensilities of blackness: its inclination toward the abyssal or unrecognizable, but also to resemblance, responsibility, and enduring cultivation; a kind of caring that approximates the (w)hole. To tend in the direction of blackness is to riff asymptotically, to identify only in contingency and through improvisation, to find a refuge and a dark refulgence in fugitivity.

*Now can we get a witness?*

To simply remove the monuments allows us to dream that white supremacy can itself be toppled—overnight!—and also that it exists as something alien to us, no matter our color. But whiteness can't be abolished or exorcized, and while it can possibly be disarmed it can never be disowned. Not only does whiteness structure the economies within which we operate, it organizes the scenes within which we are made and unmade and constantly remake ourselves as subjects, as Saidiya Hartman has made all too clear. Whiteness informs *form* itself, along with the sensi-

ble and the intelligible; it determines our senses and thoughts, our expectations, our ability to recognize others, our concepts of space and time and conceptuality itself. Whiteness subtends our very sense of ourselves as sensate beings, since no matter how we might choose to identify, we do so in terms that are already marked by racialized power. In this sense, the most radical question isn't what should be done with the statues, but rather: How do we act in the knowledge that the most enduring monument to white supremacy might well be *us*, whoever we are?

Imagine *blackness-as-us*—the blackness that is our condition of (im)possibility. Sense how the demonstrators move behind these darkened but undead eyes. Their image instructs us by tracing movements that go beyond their own circulation. This prospect structures our imagination of an ongoing transfiguration: of monuments into movements, in which potential exists both in and as the dark; in which we might find holes within wholes, heteronomies within supremacies. Blackness, wholly unexpected—the insight of those sightless eyes. Also, always-already, their oversight—the sight of all those names and all those eyes; the way they bear spectral witness over us, casting us into the shadow of memories that tend towards darkness.

Within this eclipse, Nina Simone sings our chorus:

*In the dark  
Now we will find  
What the rest  
Have left behind*

This is where we find ourselves—in *the dark*, trying to maintain ourselves as some kind of “we,” working to find our way through the refuse and wreckage. Looking for what might burn and become fire music. Obviously entangled, but don't get it twisted. Like those eyes: bearing restless witness from within some contingent, cramped, immanent fugitivity.

*Can we get a witness? (witness . . . ) Just a little bit louder.*

NOEL W. ANDERSON and ANDREW WEINER both teach in the Department of Art and Art Professions at NYU–Steinhardt.

## TANIA BRUGUERA

On December 27, 2016, the Cuban National Assembly signed into law the last wish of Fidel Castro, forbidding institutions, schools, factories, squares, streets, or any other public spaces to be named after him. The law also forbids using his likeness in monuments, busts, statues, or any other form of tribute. Three exceptions were made. The first one pertained to institutions studying Fidel's legacy. The second had to do with photos, which are not considered monuments and can be used and displayed at workplaces, schools, military units, and institutions. The last exception was for artists inspired by Fidel—it is assumed that such an exception was made because the resulting works would be celebratory (a law against disrespect for Fidel remains in place).

One might think that Fidel became aware of the vulnerable fate of a monument during the open season on Lenin, Marx, and anyone else who seemed irrelevant to the post–Cold War world after 1989. During the fall of the socialist governments of Eastern Europe, the pursuit and removal of monuments seemed like a collective act of self-denial, a last surgical gesture. But Fidel always knew that the place for a monument is inside oneself, that the landscape of a hero's remembrance is a series of known-by-heart sentences populating our everyday life as if an uncontrollable stream of consciousness. That is the reason for his endless speeches; he was building his monument word by word inside us, as cultural references, creating a collective ventriloquism. The best monument is the one built with your selective memories. That monument cannot be torn down without resulting in suicide; such a mechanism of political preservation is quite effective.

As that law passed unanimously but without popular consultation, another gesture was in the works: the reproduction and transportation of the monument to José Martí in Central Park in New York City to a Havana park. The people of Cuba were not consulted on this decision either; the monument was brought to Havana as a symbol of solidarity between both countries and dedicated on January 28, 2018, in the presence of around three hundred guests, mostly Americans. Such a preponderance of foreigners indicated for whom the monument was built—not for the Cubans. This initiative, by Havana historian Eusebio Leal, was enabled by several powerful partners in United States who didn't understand the complications of importing such an image of Martí. A monument is generally a gesture that is evaluated by the answers to questions like, By whom is it financed? What does it highlight? Who claims it? And where is it installed? In this case, it was financed, with some very minor exceptions, by American foundations, institutions, and wealthy individuals; it highlights the moment of death of our national hero (imagine a monument to Lincoln showing the moment when he is falling after having been shot); it is enthusiastically celebrated by the Americans (who have no idea that the original was a gift of the artist to Batista and that it was highly contested then by the people of Cuba, who found the monument offensive); it is located





next to the Spanish embassy (Spanish soldiers killed him) and behind the statue of Máximo Gómez (long speculated by historians to be the one who took the missing pages from Martí's military diary that supposedly expressed some criticism of the leaders of the independence war).

Two main controversies arose: the discomfort of its being the only monument on the island that shows Martí's death, making it a reminder of the futility of fighting for your ideal, of the impossibility of changing things, a wound to the future. He was called national hero, martyr, soldier, philosopher, journalist, poet, translator, freedom leader, politician, even apostle, but never a dead man. This monument (rejected by Cuban intellectuals when it was announced in 1958) shows the moment when our national hero dies, and the Americans are financing it. The second controversy was that the \$2.5 million raised did not reach the Cuban people, those who have a bust of Martí on each corner and thought that the opening of relations with the US would bring something more to their daily lives than symbolic gestures, something beyond benefits to and agreements between big business and powerful rich people. Maybe a better monument to the friendship between the two countries would be a transparent process—learning about institutional accountability—and access to resources for education for young Cubans, something aligned with Martí's ideas. How much could have been done with \$2.5 million *for* the Cubans? It was clear that it was not enough money to hire a copy editor, since the Spanish version of the engraved text in the marble has several spelling errors. Both things would have horrified Martí.

Ironically, Fidel divided Cubans when he was alive and united them when he died without a monument, and Martí, who always united all Cubans, became the focus of discord with the distasteful monument to his death. In the meantime, a friend tells me, all Cubans have to dethrone the Fidel they have inside them in order to move on. We walk away, while in the space between Martí and Gómez's monument I'm thinking about the missing pages of Martí's diary and imagine that physical space as a monument to the constant censorship applied to history, as a contemporary Cuban monument to the impossibility of criticizing the country's leaders.

TANIA BRUGUERA researches ways in which art can be applied to everyday political life, focusing on the transformation of social affect into political effectiveness.

## TOM BURR

From November 2016 to November 2017, I was allowed the opportunity to occupy the ground floor of Marcel Breuer's Armstrong Rubber Building (later known as the Pirelli Building) in New Haven, Connecticut, as the site for an art project.

*a building*

The building was built in 1968 and occupied by 1970. It was the result of the combined efforts of Armstrong Rubber Company, Breuer, and the mayor of New Haven at the time, Richard Lee, whose vision for, and implementation of, a program of urban renewal would radically alter the city through sweeping changes in infrastructure meant to revitalize its economic condition and attempt to repair its deep racial and economic disparities. Numerous public-housing complexes, designed for lower-income residents, often specifically communities of color, were erected during the 1960s, simultaneously displacing and fracturing the geographical coherence of communities. Much of the new building was carried out in a modernist vernacular, in a kind of extension of the Yale University campus itself,



*Tom Burr. Tom Burr/New Haven:  
Body/Building. 2017. Exterior view.  
Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.*



which could attract the signature architects of the day: Eero Saarinen, Louis Kahn, Roche and Dinkeloo, Philip Johnson, Paul Rudolph, and Marcel Breuer, among them. Breuer's Armstrong Rubber Building was contemporaneous with this expansive program, and while this was a private-company headquarters, not a publicly funded project, its location, architectural style, and physical presence were calculated to produce a structure that would become an iconic, highly visible entrance marker to the city via the newly constructed Oak Street Connector, bringing Interstate 95 into the heart of New Haven.

*a body*

I was born in New Haven in 1963, five years before the building was constructed. I grew up in New Haven and the surrounding area, my family, like many white families at the time, moving from the downtown of the city to the neighboring suburbs for more room, better-funded public schools, and to avoid racial tensions. I titled my yearlong project at the Armstrong Rubber Building *Body/Building*, attempting to force a relationship between the building and myself, between the building as a sort of fluid, bodily physicality and, conversely, my own body as a *buildup* of socio-spatial conditions. I grew up knowing this building well—one of my teenage jobs being an usher at the Long Wharf Theater, next door to the monumental Breuer form—and the many other Brutalist structures located in the city. I don't have a memory of the building before these architectural and spatial changes. We—these buildings and I—*occurred* at the same time, a temporal and geographic concurrence that led me to the decision to conflate our births, confuse our identities, and consider our parallel developments through a series of temporary gestures inside the building itself.

Like the optimism that fueled the urban-renewal debates of the 1960s (or the utopian ideals that threaded through the Bauhaus, where Breuer would study before embarking on a career in architecture and furniture design), my initial interaction with the building felt rife with seemingly boundless possibilities. Ikea, which now owned the iconic building, and which had been thwarted in its efforts to remove the structure some years before, offered up the space at no cost with the goal of securing a potential new purpose for it, my presence there serving as positive publicity for the future of the building. How could art transform here, contemporary art having made many an abandoned building—as the shells of obsolete economies—“thrive” again under its new economic sway. That expectation of my role was clear. The building had also been the focus of heated debate regarding its fate. The new owner wanted the land beneath the structure for an expansive parking lot, while many in the city, and the wider architecture community, felt the building was an important landmark, a significant architectural monument to the 1960s and to the presence of modernism in the city.

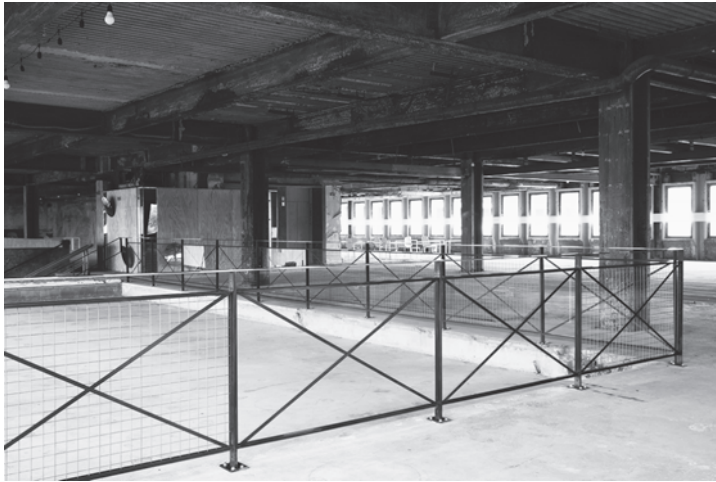
*brutal buildings*

Modernism, and Brutalist architecture in particular (in New Haven and elsewhere), looms large in the struggle around what is to remain and what must be removed to make way for the new. Brutalism, that awkwardly termed style—its name born simply of Le Corbusier's use of concrete (*béton brut*, or raw concrete), then thrust into historical usage by architects Alison and Peter Smithson—has had the added layer of producing psychological effect through the word's English meaning. Added to this is the fact that as a style of building, Brutalism was often employed for state and institutional applications in public projects aimed at solving urban social, economic, and racial problems. When this effort was seen by many to fail, and when the larger psychological/economic paradigm shifted to a resurgence of a kind of material opulence in the 1980s, the very surfaces of Brutalist buildings, their skins, were necessarily rendered as object, as *ugly*.

The ground floor of the building had been almost completely gutted; Ikea had removed a large rear section of the structure. Preservationists prevented further demolition and a compromise was agreed upon among the City of New Haven, the preservationists, and Ikea to leave the front section of the structure intact. If considering the building as a *body*, as I was, which according to my own definition is a *buildup*, or accumulation, of conditions, this act of removing the rear appendage of the building performed a surgical amputation, a trauma to the corpus, followed by the expert and seamless suturing of the structure, using existing sections of the concrete modular walls to close the wound, as if it had never happened.

When I was able to get into the building, city inspectors required a series of alterations and updates to the space in order to allow public access to the structure, something I hadn't anticipated, and months of negotiation, compromise, and expense ensued. I made the decision to consciously fold these requirements into the work itself. I wanted the building, through this project, to look inside itself, into the internal conditions of use, code, and physical access, as well as look outward to the surrounding city. I proposed the structure as a sort of witness to its own origin and life span, and to the temporal and geographical conditions that were in formation—and continue to be so—simultaneously. While allowing the Breuer building to become a material, a frame, and a subject, I then introduced *characters* into the site that fused with the necessary code adjustments: The required railings and partitions became *zones of intensity* within the vast interior space, which had been largely stripped of original detail. These specific zones are where *things took place*.

Several of these areas, which required cordoning off due to the uneven nature of the floor, were in fact the remaining tiled floors of the former restrooms and washrooms. This preexisting condition, this remnant of former use, allowed the public restroom to become an organizing trope, into which my characters could be inserted to create a constellation of relationships and associations: Anni Albers, Jim Morrison, Jean Genet, and J. Edgar Hoover. I wanted to see these figures together, tossed like fragments of content across the ground floor, to see



*Tom Burr. Tom Burr/New Haven: Body/Building. 2017. Installation shot. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.*

what would happen with their proximities and their distances. Each figure had a relationship to the time and to the place—but all were skewed, somewhat indirect, and in my mind *queer*, which is to say not fixed but questioning, fluid, and *other*.

*brutal bodies*

The Black Panther Party (BPP) trials and surrounding protests in May of 1970 were a critical, defining moment in the city of New Haven, and of my own life there. Coincident with the Breuer building, which itself became an event in 1970, the moment was not disconnected from national issues of race, power, and equality, but it did mark this particular place *specifically*. It brought to the forefront issues of racial and economic inequity that had been accumulating and that the rebuilding of the city through programs of urban renewal sought to repair. Those same attempts led to further spatial segregation between whites and communities of color. The relationship of the city to Yale University was also made highly visible through the events of 1970, with the mounting wealth of the university coupled with its political and architectural protectionism—its increasing gates, moats, and security systems—being challenged by the political urgency of the moment. That inscription of these events onto the city was something I wanted to flesh out in a visible, material, and present sense within the walls of the building.

Jean Genet was in New Haven in May 1970. He had been in the country—illegally, having been refused a visa—since March, speaking on behalf of the Black



*Tom Burr. Jean Was Here. 2017.  
Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York.*

Panther Party in numerous other cities. He was speaking specifically to white progressives about the BPP and its goals, a message, as a celebrated white writer and activist, he and the party members felt could be effective coming from him.

One of the areas of the Armstrong Building that required a railing to bring it up to code was a large submerged rectangle at the front of the space that had once housed the computer room. For this area, as well as an adjacent reception area, I designed a continuous railing. Constructed of steel, glass, and mesh, the repeating central “X” formation of this railing was reflective of the iron fences that surround the New Haven Green as well as many of the public common areas both inside and outside the Yale campus. On the top handrail I inscribed a text, the “May Day Speech” that Genet had written to be read on the New Haven Green in May of 1970. The speech was later published with an introduction by Allen Ginsberg and made available to a wider public. The railing and the speech are both components of a place and time that continue into the present. Fusing the two physically into one form made sense.

Genet’s body here, then and now—transhistorically resonant—presents the possibility for me of an unfixed but questioning, fluid *other*. This is the sort of

marker that interests me as a conduit of historical meaning. Perhaps it approaches an anti-monumentality, or maybe more importantly sidesteps the issue entirely. His queerness in this context means everything, as does his foreignness, and his radical formulation combining poetic and political pursuits; his necessity and capacity for change. Angela Davis wrote about Genet: “One last important point: it was Genet who heightened the Black Panther Party awareness to the Homosexual Rights issue. David Hilliard told me that when they were traveling together from state to state, from one university to another, some members of the Party were using very rude and homophobic words to insult Nixon or Mitchell. Genet was hurt by these words and told them they should not use such vocabulary. One night, he even showed up at the hotel—there used to be four or five men per room during these trips—dressed in a sort of pink negligee, and a cigar in his mouth. Well, they all thought Genet was going crazy! He had just wanted to bring about a discussion on the similarities between the struggle against racism and the struggle against homophobia.”<sup>1</sup>

TOM BURR is an artist based in New York City. His work has been exhibited extensively both in the United States and internationally.

1. This quote is taken from a blog called New Day that published excerpts from an unpublished Angela Davis speech at the Odeon seminar in Paris, organized by Albert Dichy for IMEC, May 25–27, 1991. See “Tactfulness of the Heart: Angela Davis on Jean Genet and the Black Panthers,” *New Day*, January 25, 2009, <https://sisterezili.blogspot.com/2009/01/tactfulness-of-heart-angela-davis-on.html>.

MARY ELLEN CARROLL



*Mary Ellen Carroll. General Robert E. Lee statue with "rabbit ears." 2014.*

September 4, 2014

Hi Ms. Carroll:

*The photo showing General Lee with “rabbit ears” has already ignited a whirlwind of negative reaction in our department and as the stewards of the treasured monument, we will not approve of this type of exhibit. This is not an appropriate installation for this iconic historic landmark. The antenna perched on top of the General Lee monument is unacceptable.*

*CBD/Algiers/Jackson Square/Louis Armstrong Park  
City of New Orleans Department of Parks and Parkways*

To respond to the question(s) posed for this issue of *October* regarding monuments and other markers involving histories of racial conflict, it seemed most appropriate to provide a specific example of an actual work that directly addresses the process and the issue. As an artist who has made numerous works on this subject, I knew how to respond. There have been numerous proposals and ideas in circulation, long before the events in Charlottesville, on what the possibilities are in this regard in the social struggles, both in practice and theory. What follows are excerpts from two works that evolved from an ongoing series on refiguring monuments that I started in the early '80s while living in the Philippines. This was during the unraveling of the Marcos regime, and the US was once again one of the staunchest supporters of an ally turned despot, as well as taking the lead as the perpetrator of imperialism. The locus of the protests in Manila in 1986, EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos Avenue) was the stretch of highway in Manila where the protests took place; they ended primarily at Rizal Park, in front of the statue of José Rizal, who was the leader of the Philippine-independence movement in the nineteenth century.

The following is a condensed timeline that is *not* in chronological order. It recounts the process and action that were taken for the realization of the work *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0*, begun on October 24, 2012, and commissioned by Prospect.3 New Orleans. It opened three years later and has continued. It would not have happened if not for my work *prototype 180* that utilizes policy as a material to make architecture perform as a work of art and that was started in 1999. Hence, there is some background provided for context.

October 24, 2012—Franklin Sirmans, who is now the director of the Perez Art Museum in Miami, wrote to me from Los Angeles, where he was then the Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head in Contemporary Art at LACMA, and asked if I was interested in coming down to New Orleans for a site visit for Prospect.3. Sirmans had been named artistic director of the exhibition and was familiar with *prototype 180* from his time at the Menil Collection. Conceptualized in 1999, *prototype 180* utilizes policy, or the lack thereof, as the primary material for the work of art. There is no zoning in Houston, and this is the sole reason the city selected itself as the site. The 180-degree revolution of a single-family home and its surrounding lot acts as the protagonist-cum-monument to the problems of post-WWII housing policy and its

development. It would reveal and provoke questions regarding the discriminatory policy and financing mechanisms that made it impossible for certain populations to become first-time home buyers while showing that it is not the role of the artist to become a real-estate developer—through gentrification—under the guise of art.

November 11, 2010—The 180-degree revolution at *prototype 180* was broadcast globally in the early days of wireless live-streaming. The dissemination of the event was a key component of this work. It necessitated that its reach extend to an international audience, who would witness the real-time severing of the house from its lot—as the monument from its base—as the sculpture from its plinth. With HD cameras mounted on the exterior of the house, the revolution was an ongoing broadcast that was seen from the perspective of the structure, thereby documenting the audience's response as a reaction shot. The revolution was amplified and networked wirelessly over unused radio frequencies.

September 4, 2014—The anticipated email arrived from the City of New Orleans's Department of Parks and Parkways in response to a request that was made to their office to attach "rabbit ears" to the statue of General Robert E. Lee at Lee Circle (originally Tivoli Circle) in New Orleans. The statue at its highest point is eighty-four feet and ten inches in height (including the base of the statue), and it is in proximity to the site where *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0*, the commission for Prospect.3, was to be installed at the American Institute of Architects Center on Lee Circle. It was intended that the lampooning of the monument and its transformation into something of utility would provoke a public discourse that would end up questioning the statue's usefulness *as a monument*. The foundation of *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0* is the design of an open-source, wireless, plug-and-play platform for broadband internet access. This is a system that would be as simple to use as plugging in a television set and watching. Although in this instance the unused spectrum it would have utilized is being used for two-way, wireless communication.





September 5, 2014—A subsequent email was sent to the City of New Orleans's Department of Parks and Parkways, again asking for permission to use the base of General Lee for the antennae. The following is their response.

*September 8, 2014*

*Hi Ms. Carroll,*

*We are firm on our decision. The General Lee Monument is a significant piece of history that we must protect from potential damage.*

*CBD/Algiers/Jackson Square/Louis Armstrong Park  
City of New Orleans Department of Parks and Parkways*

Based on their adamant initial response, it seemed highly unlikely that they would suddenly respond positively in the second round. But both rejoinders are material that can be transmitted and are considered the work of art. The use of the live stream for *prototype 180* was integral to that work and was the appropriate method of dissemination. The method of distribution for the timeline of divisive infrastructure in New Orleans for *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0* revealed itself to be Twitter. (In 2015, it was predicted that Twitter was soon to become an obsolete platform, as its market capitalization declined significantly from December 2014 [\$23.043 million] to December 2015 [\$16.062 million].)

October 20, 2015—The FCC issues an experimental license for *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0* in New Orleans to deploy a software-defined radio for wireless broadband internet access that utilizes the unused spectrum from 500 to 900 MHz for *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0*.

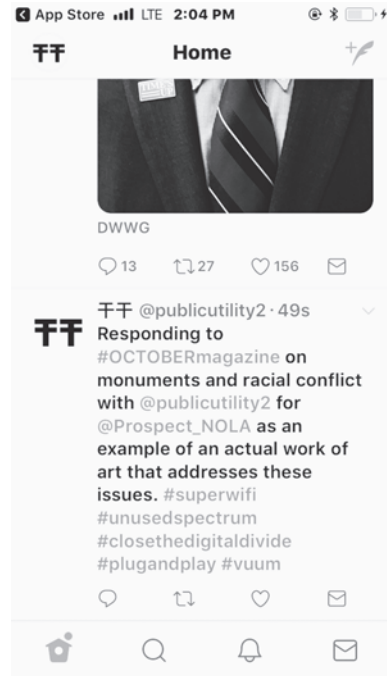
October 24, 2015—Prospect.3 opens. Twitter feeds (@publicutility2) are broadcast daily, every hour on the hour, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., until the closing of the triennial. The Twitter feed @publicutility2 continues to this day. The “rabbit ears” were a necessity in that they would amplify the signal that would be used with the experimental license from the FCC for the software-defined radio that would utilize unused radio frequencies. This spectrum formerly transmitted such groundbreaking programming as *Soul Train* and *A Black's View of the News* over UHF and VHF channels. With the switch from analog to digital in TV, these unused television channels could now be used for wireless broadband access for the underserved. *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0* is a model of how to effectively close the physical and digital divide that was created by another unintended monument, Interstate 10, part of the master plan of none other than the urban destroyer Robert Moses. The overpass cut through the center of New Orleans to divide and disperse the vital and historical African-American communities living in the 7th and 9th Wards. Removing the physical structure of Interstate 10 over Claiborne

Avenue has frequently been proposed to return the overpass to the ground level. It would neither reunite nor would it rebuild those neighborhoods and communities that were destroyed by federal policies. What is possible is the utilization of the public resource of unlicensed spectrum as a public good, as it was intended. Retrofitting those frequencies to construct a space that would privilege the underserved and the accompanying programming is not dissimilar to the original mandate that UHF and VHF channels reflect the needs and wants of local constituents.

May 19, 2017—The statue of Robert E. Lee is removed from its base at Lee Circle in New Orleans. Mayor Mitch Landrieu makes a special address on the “Removal of the Confederate Statues.”

In the seminal work from 1961 *The Shape of Time*, George Kubler wrote, “A work of art is not only the residue of an event but it is its own signal, directly moving other makers to repeat or improve its solution.”

February 1, 2018—The manner in which structural racism and bias have been concealed and overtly displayed as public monuments has finally reached a turning point. We have witnessed various degrees to which this is now occurring in actuality. *PUBLIC UTILITY 2.0* is an example of how to make audible the collective shout to ensure that these acts of bias and hate are heard and thereby made visible. The “improvement” is that they do not vanish from memory but also do not remain as physical markers that commemorate such abominations in the public realm. Therein lies the actual victory in the empty plinth that can provide the possibility for history to be ethically imagined.





*Carroll. The empty plinth following the removal of the General Robert E. Lee statue at Lee Circle in New Orleans. 2017.*

MARY ELLEN CARROLL is an artist who is based in New York and Houston. She is currently living in Stockholm and working on an opera.

## CASSILS

In *Becoming an Image*, Cassils unleashes an attack on a 2,000-pound clay block, delivering a series of kicks and blows in total darkness. The spectacle is illuminated only by the flash of a photographer, which burns the image into the viewer's retina. Cassils initially performed *Becoming an Image* at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at USC, which houses the largest collection of LGBTQ materials in the world. Their performance points to the evidence of queer and trans lives that are often missing from historical representation. The result of this performance is a series of bashed clay sculptures, marked with the imprint of fists, knees, elbows, sweat, and struggle, standing in for the history of silenced violence against trans people.

*Resilience of the 20%* refers to the sickening statistic that in 2012, murders of trans people increased worldwide by twenty percent. Cassils recently cast the bashed clay remnants from a *Becoming an Image* performance into a 1,300-pound bronze sculpture, in order for it to become a public artwork. They imagined a series of such sculptures as monuments to be placed in public spaces to mark sites where acts of violence occurred. But only having funds to make two monuments begged the question: *How to choose a site when there are so many occurrences of violence?*

*And in choosing to commemorate one history, what other histories are you omitting?*

Rather than keeping the sites static, Cassils decided instead to mobilize the monument.



*Cassils. Becoming an Image. 2012.  
Punching and kicking a 2,000-pound clay block in total  
darkness. What is the formal shape of a violent attack?*



*Cassils. Monument Push. 2017.*



*Cassils. Monument Push. 2017. With community members, advocates, and allies, in Omaha, Nebraska, Cassils pushed Resilience of the 20% (2016) to six sites of resistance and violence in downtown Omaha. Each site was chosen by a local collaborator: Dominique Morgan, artist, educator, activist and founding director of Black and Pink; Amy Schindler, lead archivist of the Queer Omaha Archives at University of Nebraska at Omaha; Rev. Debra McKnight, founding pastor of Urban Abbey; Dr. Jenny Heineman, mother, writer, and former sex worker.*

CASSILS has achieved international recognition for a rigorous engagement with the body as a form of social sculpture.

PAUL CHAN

There are many fine qualities to Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*. It is mercifully short. When translated right, it offers good counsel to anyone who feels like they are living under an occupation. It also reflects on the power and limitations of images that outline the underappreciated aesthetic theories within Stoic philosophy.

For a Stoic like Aurelius, an image (*phantasia*) is produced within us by an external object, or more specifically, in the mental arena that guides us (*hēgemonikon*). Now, *phantasia* is Janus-faced. On one side, it is merely an echo of the object from which it is derived: an apparition. On the other side, this apparition is something that already changes us, simply by appearing (*pathos*) from within.

*Phantasia* comes first. But it is what comes after that matters. For it is in the act of reflection (*dianoia*), which expresses what is felt as a result of the *phantasia* and articulated in discourse, that is decisive. The presence of this image within us gives rise to an inner discourse about the quality or value of the origin of the *phantasia* and whether the nature of the object in question is worthy of our further consideration. Or in Stoic parlance, whether we give or withhold our “assent” to the object. What is crucial to this process are *phantasiai*, or the representations we create by combining the *phantasia* with our own affect or sensation (*aisthēsis*). For the Stoics, our capacity to judge what is worth our assent depends upon the conceptual “movement” of an image (*phantasia*) changing and becoming representations (*phantasiai*). In effect, an image isn't even worthy of our attention unless it is always already a *moving image*.

For Aurelius and arguably the entire Stoic tradition, what endures has little to do with how a thing is made, or how it is situated in the world. It is rather how what is made is assented to (*sunkatathesis*), and how this process exemplifies a *spiritualization*, insofar as meaningful and authentic reflection has the capacity to embody the highest realization of incorporeality. Spirit endures. All else is mere technique.

Others outside the Stoic tradition have expressed this counterintuitive notion that what is fleeting (like thoughts) is what truly endures. When the great Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (369?–286? BCE) wrote, “The Perfect Man has no self, the Holy Man has no merit, the Sage has no fame,” he is placing the accent on how letting go of the values in one's life that are supposed to make it last (such as glory or success) actually makes for a better life. Paul Valéry echoes a similar sentiment, but from the vantage point of aesthetics, when he champions fireworks as prototypical of all art worthy of being art: They flash brightly, then fade away, only to endure in the mind as experience, which makes room for reflection that can last longer than anything crafted out of stone or steel.

As a publisher, I have always considered books as monuments for the mind. Books are precarious things. Yet they endure—somehow—as experiences. I just edited and published a book entitled *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts*, and



*Paul Chan. Madonna with Childs. 2017.  
 Photograph by Martha Fleming-Ives.  
 Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali Gallery.*

it's by Aruna D'Souza. She writes about how art institutions grapple with artists protesting those institutions in order to bring about change. Aruna doesn't mention it, but she is essentially dealing with the same philosophical question as the Stoics: What external object (be it an image, a monument, or an institution) can furnish enough space within us that merits the kind of "assent" worthy of an experience and a form of reflection that will last? Perhaps even beyond us.

Those who self-identify as Stoics today are largely devoid of fellow feeling and indifferent to human suffering: a truly miserable lot. But Stoic thinkers such as Aurelius, Epictetus, and Chrysippus have lasted in part because their thinking, as manifested in their translated works, continues to be *moving*.

The fleetingness is what ought to endure. What longs to endure in order to preserve a semblance of the value of its own authority is not worth lasting as an experience. At all. For an image to last, it must move, it must change. These insights are what the Stoics taught. At least me.

So.

Move them.

Change them.

PAUL CHAN is an artist based in New York and publisher of Badlands Unlimited.



ANDREW COLE

The Civil War monuments across the American South are dead monuments. They were once living things, thanks to all who celebrated them. It was impossible to live in the American South in the early twentieth century, let alone the late nineteenth, and not know about the Civil War monument near you. Chances are you've partied right next to one, dressed in your Sunday best, on Confederate Memorial Day in April (which began in my home state of Georgia), singing, dancing, or—on solemn days—praying, gardening, or cleaning the monument. You'd be white in white, fitting garb for the spring season. Or you'd be a descendant of slaves, or a former slave yourself, tending to a white family or working for the mayor on cleanup. Monuments were a thing, you see. And many towns in the South had them. Hundreds, sometimes thousands, would show up to their unveiling and dedication. And everyone would gather to pose for a photo-postcard after the festivities.

But this isn't only about a hypothetical you at a memorial a long time ago. This is also about your relative who sure as day would proudly mail this photo-postcard to the serial newsletter *The Confederate Veteran*, which might as well be called *The Confederate Monument*. From its first issue in 1893, it published information about the construction of monuments across the South and sometimes in such places as Chicago. It enjoyed wide circulation, surprising even its founder, Sumner Archibald Cunningham, who in every issue asked readers like your relative to keep the cards and letters coming about events at monuments or new monuments going up. Print publications like this amplified and embroidered the culture of monument appreciation. This was a culture of celebrating and sanctifying Civil War monuments (plural) but—this is the key part—doing so at a remove, reading about other monuments across the South, donating to their construction, and enjoying the fandom and fanfare of it all. The ritual cultures around Civil War monuments grew from local events to a whole national and nationalist conversation about these structures. And retailers were at the ready to sell and ship monuments to anyone with the funds to purchase them.

Yet, ironically, this is how Civil War monuments died. As soon as they became appreciable at a remove, as soon as they were codified as "art" in collectors' books like Mrs. B. A. C. Emerson's *Historic Southern Monuments: Representative Memorials of the Heroic Dead of the Southern Confederacy* (1910), where you could flip the pages from example to example, style to style, the ritual culture waned and in its place arose an abstraction—Civil War monumentality laying everlasting claim to other abstractions like Southern identity and Confederate causes to which adjectives like "lost" were always attached. As with the newsletter, the Confederate veteran became a monument in a different sense, an idea more than a stone figure whose eyes filled with moss from eventual neglect.

Along with Civil War monumentality, there emerged a culture of violence on a monumental scale happening with such regularity as to be a ritual itself. Take

the monument in downtown Athens, Georgia, where I live. This obelisk was erected in 1871 and unveiled in 1872—just five years before what Rayford Logan famously called “the nadir” of American race relations.<sup>1</sup> The year 1872 is when President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Amnesty Act for Confederate secessionists, making their return to civic life in the Union possible. And it is the year that the torturing, burning, and lynching of African Americans began to markedly increase in reaction to the ratification of the 14th (1868) and 15th (1870) Amendments.

White terrorists lynched 4,084 African Americans between 1877 and 1950, often in front of thousands of people smiling (again) for the camera in hopes of making it on a photo-postcard.<sup>2</sup> Georgia was second only to Mississippi in the number of known lynchings in this period, 589 to 654. A newspaper in Alabama observes that people “meekly hold that it might be good for this whole section of the nation if Georgia would kindly mend its ways and quit spilling human blood on the picturesque theory that ‘it’s no harm to kill a n——.’”<sup>3</sup> Closer to home: Oconee County, Georgia, had eleven documented lynchings. For Athens’s Clarke County, there’s one recorded lynching. Yet we recall that Oconee County is only six miles from City Hall in downtown Athens, and was carved out of Clarke County in 1875 to serve as a white county.<sup>4</sup> The Confederate monument in downtown Athens stood in the midst of this local violence.

To get a feel for that bloody context, we have to perform an uncomfortable thought experiment. We have to imagine that for every lynching, every police shooting and hate crime, every bombing, every Charleston-like massacre, we gladly and ceremoniously add *more* Confederate symbols to our public squares (rather than remove some, as happened after Charleston). This background of violence as monument after monument goes up conveys, by analogy, the lived experience of white Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—those who rejected these monuments on account of what was happening at the edge of town at the old oak tree while hounds barked into the night; and those who embraced them for exactly those reasons. There was no indifference to the matter, no escape from witnessing murder, because the world was too small. No monument in the South, nor any white family, is clean of this history. Everyone knew what the monument was about.

Civil War monuments never “document” any specific violent act against African Americans. What we find instead on monuments are crossed muskets

1. Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877–1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954), p. 52. My former colleague at UGA challenges this thesis for the way it portrays African Americans as only victims. See Caroline Gebhard and Barbara McCaskill, *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877–1919* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 2.

2. <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.

3. *The Literary Digest* 54, no. 1 (January–June 1917), p. 178.

4. *Bulletin of the University of Georgia* 15, no. 3 (March 1915): Phelps-Stokes Fellowship Studies, No. 2. Rural Survey of Clarke County, Georgia, with Special Reference to the Negroes, p. 5.

beneath statues of heroic soldiers looking out at the horizon, or a placard recording a certain battle at a marsh—symbols and signs of violence, sure, but none expressing proudly the founding violence of chattel slavery by which absolutely everything was built. None own it. None can. The very materialization of a Civil War monument is one big indirection about the violence that exceeds it.

But the violence is palpable and the monument is slow to slough it from its surface. That much is clear in the way monuments today are sites of raw violence. We all saw the young men gather round the memorial to Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville in August 2017. They came to psych themselves up for a fight, so much so that one of their fascist ilk mowed down counter-protesters with his car, killing one and injuring nineteen others. That much is clear to every African American visiting the old courthouse in Durham, North Carolina, passing the Confederate monument on their way into the building and feeling a certain violence done to them in the very thought that justice inside won't be blindfolded—this before protesters tore the monument down in response to Charlottesville.

Yes, the monuments must go. They've already been abandoned by their admirers, bereft of ritual apart from straggler celebrations of creative anachronists in the few states that still recognize Confederate Memorial Day. Whoever says the monuments should remain for whatever reason should celebrate them accordingly, and be seen doing so. Otherwise, such advocates disrespect the monuments, which only until recently were abandoned to the task of remembering—as in distorting—history.

Above all, siting Confederate monuments is how we value them. People spoke out over a hundred years ago when sponsors were scouting for locations to install monuments, insisting that they be placed in very prominent places in town and objecting to potential locations like sleepy graveyards. Now people are vocal in saying that these monuments should be removed from our public spaces—because they are no longer at the center of our civic consciousness—and instead retired to cemeteries as artifacts of a dead culture.

ANDREW COLE, professor of English and director of the Gauss Seminars in Criticism at Princeton University, is the author of *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago, 2014).

## MICHAEL DIERS

When I joined the Getty Research Institute last September to do research on the theme of iconoclasm and vandalism in contemporary art, I already knew that the sculpture by Sam Durant titled *Scaffold* (2012), which had been set up in spring 2017 in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden at the Walker Art Center, had been removed after coming under strong criticism. This sculpture reflects on the history of capital punishment in the United States by layering and structurally condensing six different historical forms of gallows, representing seven different executions. One of these wooden, abstracted replicas refers to the hanging of thirty-eight Dakota Indian men on December 26, 1862. The mass execution, presumably the largest in American history, took place in Mankato, Minnesota, and is still a deeply mourned event in the memory of the Dakota Indians. With reference to this horrific episode deeply rooted in their historical consciousness, representatives of the Dakotas and other Native Americans protested vehemently against the sculpture both on site and online. They did not see a work of art but rather a taunting monument. How could one erect such sculpture in a place close to the historical execution site without making an explicit reference to the massacre? How could this work not then be a memorial? How could the artist and the museum deal with their history in this way? Why did they not ask the referenced communities what they thought about it in advance? The fact that *Scaffold* had already been shown at Documenta 13 in Kassel in 2012 and at other European venues, where it did not invite political misunderstanding or cause a stir, did not influence the protesters. Neither did the question about the status of art as a medium of representation, which should not be confused with reality, come up. Nor was the original intention of the artist considered. Durant—as I know from several conversations with him—had prepared *Scaffold* with serious historical and archival research and wanted to make a critical contribution to this often-overlooked aspect of American history: execution by hanging.

In my opinion, the outcome of the conflict is both significant and frightening in its implications for the current debate on identity politics and cultural appropriation. Durant soon realized that there was no way out of the deplorable situation and ultimately donated his work of art to the representatives of the Dakota Indians so that they could proceed with it according to their own wishes. One of the original plans was to burn it; another was to bury it. According to the press, the latter happened in mid-September 2017, but no one knows for sure, not even the artist, as Durant told me. Olga Viso, executive director of the Walker Art Center, who had come under intense political pressure because of the 2014 purchase of the sculpture, stepped down a few months later. It is not clear whether there is a direct link to the *Scaffold* case, but it may well have played an important role.

For myself as an art historian very interested in political iconography, the fundamental question is, What is artistic freedom today? And what is its future?



*Sam Durant. Scaffold. 2012.  
Photograph by Rosa Maria Ruehling.*

How can artists choose controversial topics and put them before the public? And what about the art critic? Why not defend the space of liberty, including for art and historical monuments now in danger of being dismantled in Charlottesville (Confederate monuments) or New York (the Columbus and Theodore Roosevelt statues)? In which century do we live? Is it possible to correct history and art history by making contested works invisible, removing them from view or otherwise disposing of them? And why must art serve as a demonstration-object for what history, politics, and education have failed to address, explain, and clarify? To whom does history belong, and is it divisible into identitarian fragments? It is without question right to have discussions about repressed themes of history, the inequitable treatment of parts of society, and the domination of certain ideologies. But art is exactly the place where this can happen. Indeed, in the *Scaffold* case this is what happened. However, it should not be at the cost of destroying the artwork. To abandon art as a medium of critical representation and reflection means to arrest its history. And the fact that history might be overcome by being forgotten or simply dismissed in the form of monuments is certainly not the appropriate way forward for an enlightened, democratically formed society that is sovereign and critically aware of its history in all its facets.

“The freedom of conversation is being lost,” Walter Benjamin writes in *One-Way Street* (1928). With this remark the philosopher made reference to the dominance of money as a force shaping social life in his time. Today it is the politics of so-called political censorship that threatens freedom. The freedom of the arts is at stake, or, at least, the freedom to talk about art, or, in the worst case, both. Look at the prototypes for the border wall that President Trump ordered to be erected near San Diego. These could be ironically or seriously regarded as a national landmark that could be dialectically understood as a compensation for the virulent iconoclasm of the present day when other monuments have to be taken down in order to erase their history.<sup>1</sup> If in the *Scaffold* case a political debate decided what is or is not art, now politicians like Trump play the role of an artist who longs for a monument that is “big and beautiful” and exists forever.

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1. See the petition of MAGA (“Make Art Great Again”) and the Swiss artist Christoph Büchel, <https://www.borderwallprototypes.org>.

## SAM DURANT

In the United States, most public monuments and memorials are used to forget or cover up our past, not to remember it. They are often used to glorify the conquerors, to forget the conquered, to postpone recognition of genocide, slavery, segregation, sexism, and other atrocities. The recent removals of symbols of the Confederacy, both spontaneous (Bree Newsome's Confederate flag taken down at the South Carolina statehouse, the toppling of the Confederate statue in Durham, North Carolina) and official (the removal of statues in New Orleans and elsewhere, the recommended removals of some public monuments in New York City), show a level of outrage that, while triggered by recent events, has been building for generations. The question today is whether these iconoclasm signal the beginnings of systemic change or if they will act as a safety valve releasing stress while leaving the status quo in place. We will have to do more than destroy symbols. We need to begin a truth-and-reconciliation process with our past, and that will involve a national reckoning with the foundational catastrophes of our history—genocide and slavery.

South Africa, Rwanda, and Germany have attempted to make their histories visible and unavoidable. The past is woven into these societies through ubiquitous memorials, markers, and museums dedicated to remembering genocide through the education system as well as through anti-racist laws and public policy. These examples inspired a civil-rights attorney from Montgomery, Alabama, named Bryan Stevenson to launch two remarkable projects that could be the beginnings of our own truth-and-reconciliation process, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which remembers every single lynching in the US, and the Legacy Museum: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration, which shows how slavery is still with us today. We face unprecedented challenges as a nation, indeed as a species—climate change, wealth inequality, institutional racism, mass incarceration, endless war, nuclear annihilation—and our history continues to divide us, frustrating the joining-together we so desperately need to deal with these existential issues. The National Memorial and the Legacy Museum have the potential to begin healing within the African-American community and within society as a whole. Stevenson's projects offer hope for artists working with social and political issues—with racism, trauma, and injustice. As public consciousness grows around the true nature of our history and its effects, as the process of reconciliation and remedy develops, this sort of material may become more acceptable as subject matter in artwork. At the same time, the identity of artists may become less important than the meaning of their work.

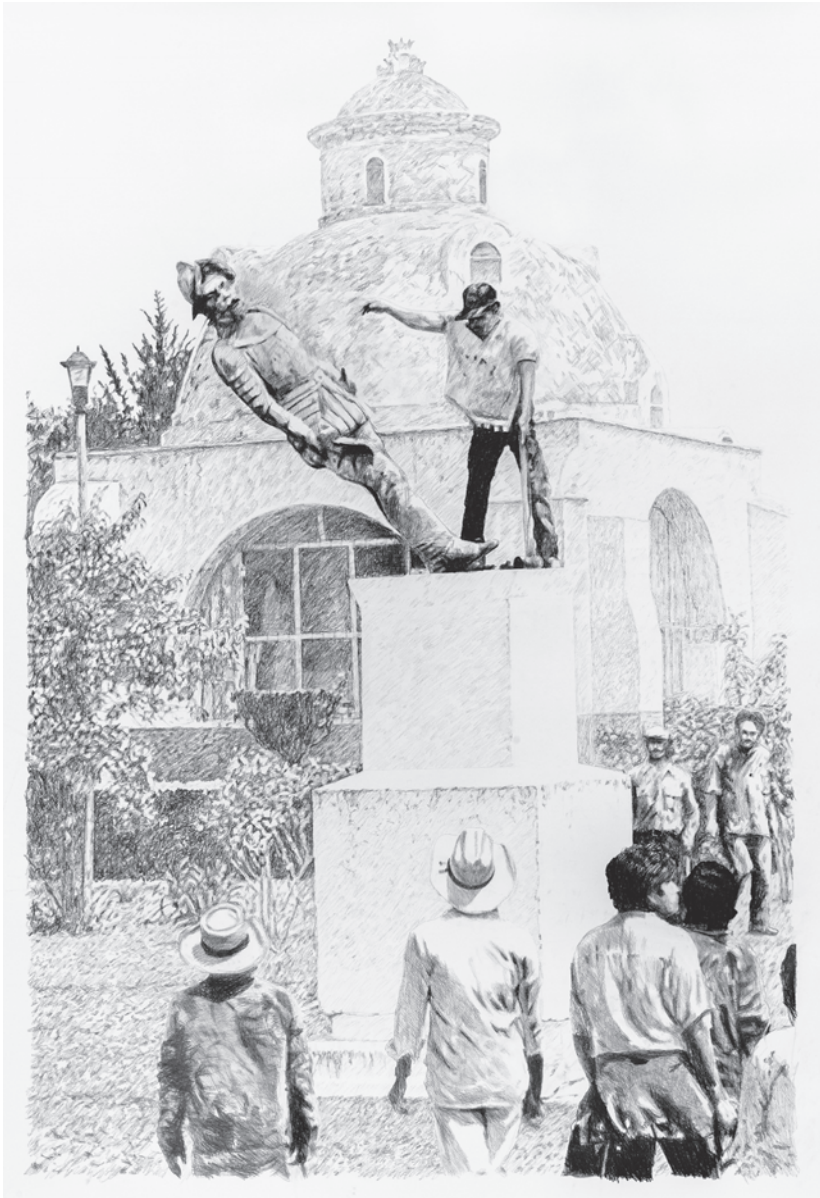


*Sam Durant. Durham, NC 2017. 2018.  
Photographed by Joshua White.  
Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, NY.*





*Durant. Tehran 1979. 2018.  
Photographed by Joshua White.  
Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, NY.*



*Durant. San Cristóbal de las Casas 1992. 2018.  
Photographed by Joshua White.  
Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, NY.*

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## JOANNA FIDUCCIA

On the evening of December 20, 2017, several Confederate monuments were swiftly removed from Memphis following the sale of two city parks to a nonprofit called Memphis Greenspace. The next day, Van Turner, Jr., director and president of Memphis Greenspace as well as Shelby County commissioner, held a press conference in which he delivered the following statement: Memphis Greenspace had “found a solution to remove a barrier to entry to these parks so that activation of the parks could begin. And this is only the beginning. There are other parks that need to be liberated from mediocrity and returned to the people as a unifying asset.”<sup>1</sup> I begin with this statement because I find it formidably strange, its collage of corporate cant, activist watchwords, and urban-planning jargon at once shrewd and unsettling. It suggests that public space must both be free(d) and configured as property, unrestricted and yet binding. And it does so through inexplicit expressions—“barrier to entry,” “liberated from mediocrity,” “unifying asset,” the “activation” of space—that rub orthogonal shoulders in the cramped space of a couple sentences. These are words forged under duress, one name for which might be *monumentality*.

I mean by this that monuments exert a force over signification in public space, legitimizing some representations while driving others underground, where they might show themselves only in the buckling surface of statements like Turner’s. What remains tacit in the press conference is a set of positive terms for communities of color and systems of racial oppression. They’re not too difficult to puzzle out: “barriers to entry,” meaning whiteness, in both its broad and local manifestations; “activation,” meaning blackness; “liberated,” meaning made livable for black people; and “mediocrity,” a superbly cutting description of white supremacy. Even the corporate locution “unifying assets” speaks less to the privatization of public land than to a requisite changing-of-hands. The parks must not just be open to the community but claimed as its property, provided the goal is to undo the spatial and psychic domination of the statues. Their role as both representations of a regional past and representatives of a political present make their occupation of a discrete column of space in the parks but the visible extension of the state’s proprietorship (a state, needless to say, built in part on the institution of

1. With the approval of the City Council, Memphis mayor Jim Strickland sold the parks on December 20, at \$1,000 apiece, to the nonprofit, which swiftly removed the monuments from the land it henceforth legally possessed. The arrangement had been quietly set in motion some months before—a fail-safe in the utterly predictable event that the Tennessee Historical Commission, an agency overseeing the state’s historic preservation, would deny the City Council’s request to remove the statues. Memphis Greenspace filed its incorporation papers in October. Van Turner, Jr., “Press Conference on the Sale of Health Sciences Park and Memphis Park to Memphis Greenspace, Inc.,” December 21, 2017, <http://wreg.com/2017/12/21/memphis-greenspace-addresses-purchase-of-parks/>.

slavery).<sup>2</sup> We can see the occluded meanings in Turner's statement as the upshot of a notion of public space oriented toward the maintenance of institutions rather than their transformation, whether that space be marked by the podium of the press conference or by the statue in the public park.<sup>3</sup> Or, for that matter, by the scholarly framing of this questionnaire. When we mean—or perhaps need—to discuss race in America, we end up discussing monuments instead.

The slippage seems understandable. There has been something exhilarating about the sudden prominence of monuments in national headlines over the past year. With it came a sense that disciplinary expertise might prove clarifying, and even politically powerful. In a number of instances, it has been both. Scholars and art historians firmly related the origins of Confederate monuments in historical waves of white supremacy, and they parsed the rhetoric of the debates from the ideological operations of the statues themselves.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, we art historians have been asked to weigh in on concerns that seem to me not just remote from concrete disputes but tone-deaf. I have trouble fretting over the fate of bronze statues—not least because it has been the destiny of so many of their fore-runners to be gathered up and melted down in times of revolution or war—when the urgent problem is what's happening to black bodies. Against the arresting images of statues dragged down, by force or by legal loophole, anxieties over the abstract loss of a leaf in the historical record look feeble and misplaced. It is hard to take too seriously the concern that the extirpation of these statues may make us forget this country's violent racist foundations, when their legacy is so grievously apparent today. And it is callous to privilege the preservation of these statues or the traces-of-there-having-been-statues, even as object lessons, over the security and sanity of black Americans.

But if the public arena demands reparative actions—among which I would include a broad spectrum of performances and counter-monuments, from William Pope.L's crawls to Nona Faustine's photographs of her immobile naked body at the sites of former slave auctions, to the community concerts that Memphis Greenspace plans for its parks—there are also private zones where other reckonings with monuments might occur. Between 1939 and 1945, as Fascism plunged France and Switzerland into a different crisis of national self-representation, Alberto Giacometti toiled over countless miniature figures, most no taller than a centimeter. He anchored each in its own (comparatively) oversized pedestal, so

2. On the state's "pre-occupation" of public space, by which it grants a platform for free and democratic assembly on the condition of its (potentially violent assertion of) control over that space, see W. J. T. Mitchell, "Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation," in *Occupy: Three Inquiries in Disobedience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 102.

3. I am grateful to Kris Cohen for his clarifying discussion of these concepts with me.

4. For instance, Dell Upton's exemplary response to Charlottesville earlier this fall. Dell Upton, "Confederate Monuments and Civil Values in the Wake of Charlottesville," *Society of Architectural Historians Blog*, September 13, 2017, <http://www.sah.org/publications-and-research/sah-blog/sah-blog/2017/09/13/confederate-monuments-and-civic-values-in-the-wake-of-charlottesville>.

that it resembled a monument viewed at some long distance. The project was melancholy and compulsive, as well as historically and monographically unassimilable. Despite this, it also engaged upheavals of national representation by yielding up the monument as a function of unstable and asymmetrical relations. Giacometti's miniatures mark the dread of the body's disintegrating boundaries in both Fascism and modern sculpture through the third body they mutually, and monumentally, address: the nation. That engagement passed largely unnoticed, however, and illuminating its insights today requires a similar involution of the contemporary stakes around monumentality.

Such work, by the artist as well as the art historian, may well appear like a pale (and politically unsatisfactory) echo of action in the public arena. The counter-monument, like the monument, derives its potency from recognition. For Louis Marin, it was recognition that gave images the power to absorb and replace violent expressions of force; seeing and narrating images as representatives of sovereignty both legitimized the state and constituted those who recognized its symbols as the state's subjects.<sup>5</sup> But it is the nature of anti-monumental sculpture to elude notice, at least for a while. What it does, it does in private, and often inconclusively. Yet long-range problems may demand slow insights as much as swift solutions—both Memphis Greenspace *and* Giacometti, both the action that far outstrips our art-historical questions about statues and the art whose relevance may become clear only when we learn to ask those questions differently.

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5. Louis Marin, "Introduction: L'être de l'image et son efficace," in *Des Pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses* (Paris: Éditions Seuil, 1993), p. 14. See also Roger Chartier, "The Powers and Limits of Representation," in *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language, and Practices*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 94–95.

## NOAH FISCHER

The bronze public monuments built to cut through time as Shackleton's *Endurance* was built to cut through arctic ice are arriving in our present moment as anachronistic vessels. Though they might represent an outdated and even offensive worldview, they are difficult to remove from public space—even in progressive cities. This crusty stubbornness clashes with today's viral consensus production: We like, share, tweet, and post for news, public healing, and entertainment alike. All of these are forms of voting. Embedded in this constant-voting culture is the assumption that all things, people, and phenomena must eventually conform to the law of public opinion with binary options, in this case: Preserve monuments! Tear them down! What about a healing process that moves beyond the binary?

That many of the monuments are problematic is beyond debate: They commonly place racialized colonial triumph at the center of public space. They can embody power and often dominance, through both represented personages and symbols and their spatial manspreading. But when we oversimplify these intricately crafted lumps of bronze as if they were no different from an offensive logo flashing onto a screen whose pixels could simply be turned off, we miss the chance to repurpose their specific histories as artworks. We could be speaking the language of figurative sculpture and molten metal. I will offer a proposal for reshaping a particular monument, the equestrian statue of Theodore Roosevelt outside the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH).

Roosevelt looks virile, his barrel chest puffed out as he leans back atop his horse. He's flanked by stoic and muscled Native American and African standing figures, each of whom touches one of the president's legs in a gesture of steadfast obedience. The grouping lays out a perfectly clear message. Yet as repulsive as its expression of racial hierarchy is, there's more than meets the eye in this 1939 work. Through an attempt to understand this statue and its creator, I've come to see another sculpture trapped inside it.

The statue was created in the Connecticut workshop of James Earl Fraser, a leading American sculptor of his day who was often tapped to design major monuments in the nation's capital. Fraser created two other works that will provide inspiration for our purposes: the slumped form of a defeated Indian riding a sorry-looking horse called *End of the Trail* (1918), which is one of the most iconic and frequently reproduced artworks of the American West, and the Indian-head nickel (also called the Buffalo nickel), which bears a composite portrait of Oglala Lakota chief and celebrity-circus performer Iron Tail and Cheyenne chief Two Moons (who fought at Little Bighorn). There are two important clues for us in the Buffalo nickel.<sup>1</sup> It went out of circulation in 1938, the year before bronze Roosevelt and his companions went up at the AMNH, so we might imagine the monument as a conceptual reincarnation of the coin. And the Indian-head nickel

1. <https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/learn-discover/online-unit-studies/end-of-the-trail-introduction/>.

was often hacked to create the famous Hobo nickel, the hand-carved numismatic folk-art form whereby self-trained artists turned Buffalo nickels into drunken Irishmen, skulls, and other designs. It was an anarchistic collision of art and money, messing with authority by way of laborious craft. What would the bronze Roosevelt look like as a “hobo monument”?



The material we would be working with isn't just bronze. The most important element in both coin and monument is the presence of official US authority. Both coin and monument stand for the full weight of American military force, which is the same force that hunted down and defeated Native Americans. This force was part of Fraser's personal history; his father was a cavalryman active in the aftermath of Little Bighorn. That battle marked the near end of the Native “threat,” and Indian portraits graced American coins only after the US government prevailed in the late nineteenth century and the dignified Indian could be safely trophied. Coin and monument monumentalize the defeated status of a people, literally putting it into common circulation and transporting a power dynamic through time into the present day.

The present moment is marked by an overt racism reaching into the Oval Office, yet the decade prior saw a quietly progressive shift in the US canon of African American and Native American relations. In 2008, the first year of Obama's presidency, the House of Representatives issued a bill called H.R. 194, “Apologizing for the enslavement and racial segregation of African-Americans.”

One year later, Congress tucked an apology to Native Americans into the Defense Appropriations Act of 2010 (H.R. 3326), an apology “on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native peoples by citizens of the United States” (it was signed by the president into law). Even though the apology contains disclaimers against legal damage claims (unlike the Reagan-era apologies to the Japanese interned during World War II), official apologies are more than mere formalities; they are contractual rituals that announce new behaviors from the top down. The official apologies would create a logic whereby eventually reparations could be paid. Official apologies on record cannot be taken back, but many people aren’t aware of them.<sup>2</sup> And to my knowledge, there is no official monument to the 2008–09 apologies. That is why, the more I look at the equestrian statue of Roosevelt, the more I believe that an Apology and Reparations Monument is trapped inside it. How would it look?

Figurative public sculpture tends to communicate through gesture. This is true of Roosevelt leaning back in a tense twist on the horse. This is not the posture of humility that would be appropriate if the statue were to be reconfigured to stand for the official US apologies. Instead we might remember Fraser’s *End of the Trail*. Roosevelt could be placed in a furnace and slumped over into a forward bend with head limp as if enacting a humble bow. The warped and stretched heat-induced intervention would also give the sculpture a contemporary flair. The Indian and African figures to the side could be detached and placed on a separate pedestal directly facing Roosevelt as they symbolically receive the apology. The regrouping intervention should be left in a rough state, the recycling process visible.

When the reparations begin, the figures could be given new life entirely, melted down into commemorative coins in a ceremony to mark the first round of distribution. I imagine the ceremony as a public bronze pour. A furnace would be set up outside the museum. Monument chunks would go in and liquid bronze would melt into a red-hot crucible before being poured into special tree-diagram molds using the same method as ancient Chinese coins. This proposal cannot be realized at the present moment, but one day soon it could. Public space requires vision beyond the binary. Many bronzes embody toxic messages from the past, but they should be reshaped rather than removed so that the lessons of the past—and the artistic possibilities of the future—remain intact.<sup>3</sup>

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2. <http://indianlaw.org/node/529>.

3. This text complies with the stipulations proposed in the artwork *A STRUCTURAL CRISIS IN AN EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE* by Kenneth Pietrobono, according to which authors agree, for compensation, to avoid using the following words: Capitalism, Fascism, Neoliberalism, Populism, Political, Divisive, Establishment, Globalization, Nationalism, Media, Conservative, Liberal, Partisan, Country, Right, Left, Progressive, -phobic, Republican, Democrat, Democracy, Corporate, Racist, Elitism, Sexist, White, Black, Resistance.



## FINBARR BARRY FLOOD

The speed and intensity with which recent controversies have erupted around public monuments from the UK to the US, Australia, and South Africa have taken many by surprise. Baltimore, Charlottesville, Cape Town, Oxford, Melbourne now mark stages in a rapidly unfolding global phenomenon, contagious moments of reckoning with colonial and racist pasts materialized in bronze and stone. Each case exemplifies the intersection between translocal phenomena of agitation and mediatization and what are often quite localized shifts in political circumstances or social consciousness that render fully visible contentious intersections between history, memory, and the *lieu de mémoire*. As has often been noted, in the US many of the offending statues constituted the memory of a memory, erected not at the end of the Civil War but decades later in the era of Jim Crow. As recycled memories mobilized materially to bolster ideologies of segregation they exemplify Pierre Nora's observation that "*lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications."<sup>1</sup>

While the particularities of each contested history need to be acknowledged, a focus (in the US press at least) on the American experience of institutionalized slavery and its legacy in racialized violence has to some extent obscured what are often striking analogies with other historical moments of decolonization. The role of de-monumentalization in the de-Russification/de-Sovietization of the former USSR republics offers just one case in point, as some commentators have noted.<sup>2</sup> In contesting the appropriateness of honorific commemoration, both phenomena reflect a mimetic dimension of public monuments and statues: the idea that they provide appropriate models for the citizen-subject, who may inculcate as habitus the values that they make manifest. This mimetic dimension has been central to historical contestations over public commemorative monuments. Typical in this respect is Gustave Pessard's 1912 tract *Statuomanie Parisienne*, in which the author called for a moratorium on the erection of public statues, complaining that many of those honored by the statues proliferating in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Paris were not worthy of commemoration.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, just a few years later, when the conservative Egyptian jurist Rashid Rida denounced the French statues erected by the khedives of Egypt as part of a modernization program in the 1870s, it was not because of their idolatrous nature so much as their inability to offer appropriate models of citizenship. Writing in 1922, Rida derided the idea that stat-

1. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*," translated by Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), p. 19.

2. James Glaser, "What to Do with Confederate Statues," *The Conversation*, August 10, 2017: <http://theconversation.com/what-to-do-with-confederate-statues-81736>.

3. Gustave Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne: Étude sur l'abus des statues* (Paris: Daragon, 1912), pp. 60–61. See also Maurice Agulhon, "La 'statuomanie' et l'histoire," *Ethnologie Française*, n.s., 8, no. 2/3 (1978), pp. 145–72.

ues of the khedives (seen as colonial stooges) and their European advisers could provide noble models that might be emulated to positive effect by the modern citizenry of Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

While the historical specificities of each of these controversies are clear, what they have in common with the current “statue wars” in the United States is a remarkable, almost ritualized, consistency in the solutions proposed to address the problems posed by recalcitrant memorials: concealment then removal, followed by relocation or destruction. As is also the case recently in the US, these solutions have been pursued both by civic or state authorities and by non-state actors. Although the coincidence went unnoticed, just a few weeks after the Charlottesville City Council voted unanimously to remove the infamously contested statue of Robert E. Lee in September 2017, the funeral was held in Dublin of one Liam Sutcliffe, author of one of the more audacious acts of anti-British spectacle: the dynamiting, on March 8, 1966, of Nelson’s Pillar. Erected under British rule in 1809 to commemorate Horatio Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar five years earlier, this was an iconic monument that stood 134 feet high on Dublin’s main thoroughfare. The monument consisted of a hollow column set on a base engraved with reminders of Nelson’s victories and crowned with a statue of Nelson clutching a sword, a panoptic presence surveying the citizenry of Dublin as they went about their business far below. Visitors could ascend through an internal spiral staircase to share Nelson’s perspective over the city and bay beyond. The pillar was also a favorite meeting place for generations of Dubliners, a role reflected by its appearance in numerous novels and short stories, including James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Nevertheless, despite its centrality to the life of the city, as a remnant of imperial British rule that remained intact long after the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the monument was also the focus of considerable ambivalence. Hence, the response to its destruction in 1966 was generally muted. That the balance of equivocation should shift in spring 1966 was not fortuitous. The pillar was dynamited just one month before the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916, when a band of Republican revolutionaries had challenged the British imperial machine, establishing their headquarters in a building directly opposite the ill-fated monument. In this way, both temporality and topography played their roles in what was to be canonized as an iconic spectacle of anti-colonial iconoclasm. More germane to the contemporary situation in the United States is the fact that this was the moment when, thanks to heightened public consciousness about both history and memory, a long-enduring ambivalence about a highly visible remnant of colonialism could most easily be tipped in favor of removal, even if by unorthodox and unauthorized means.

When it comes to the fate of monuments, timing is everything, as the current debates in the US also suggest. But so is the appropriate gesture. If the fate

4. Henri Laoust, *Le califat dans la doctrine de Rašīd Riḍā* (Beirut: Institut Français de Damas, 1938), p. 140. First published in Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Al-Khilāfa aw al-imāma al-‘uzma* (The caliphate or the great imamate) (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Manar, 1923), p. 84.

of Nelson's Pillar stands at one end of a spectrum of response to problematic monuments, my second example points to potentially more productive possibilities. This little-known monument is a memorial to Italian Fascism erected in 1936 in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa after its capture and occupation by Mussolini's army (1936–1941). It was set in a particularly sensitive location: facing the royal balcony of the palace of the exiled emperor Haile Selassie, transformed by the colonial administration into the headquarters of the Italian governor. The monument originally consisted of a spiral swirl of fourteen concrete steps, each commemorating another year of Fascist power, from the March on



*Transformed monument to Fascist victory, 1936, at the former imperial palace, now Addis Ababa University.*

Rome in 1922 onward. This was, in other words, a monument to Italian victory that evoked in quite literal terms the ascendancy of Fascism and its march toward the future, situated opposite the window of appearances in the palace of the vanquished emperor.



*Transformed monument to Fascist victory. 1936 and later.*

After the liberation of Ethiopia in 1941 and the return of Haile Selassie, it would have been easy to destroy this hated reminder of a brutal and bloody occupation. Instead, a statue representing the Lion of Judah, symbol of the Ethiopian royal house, was placed on the top-most step. In this way, an aniconic memorial to Fascist power was transformed into a prop or support, its original function subordinated to the elevation of the imperial insignia.

The deceptively simple and elegant gesture resonated deeply with the visual rhetoric of occupation and resistance. Not only had the palace lions been shot when the Fascists occupied the palace in 1936, but one of the most iconic monuments of Addis Ababa, the Lion of Judah statue erected to celebrate Haile Selassie's

coronation in 1930, had been among the imperial monuments targeted for destruction or dismantling and shipment to Rome as trophies of empire.<sup>5</sup> In an echo of the solution adopted recently in many US cities and in order to avoid sparking public unrest, the imperial statues were first covered with hoarding and concealed from public view by the Italian occupiers while awaiting an intervention that finally moved them from their pedestals under cover of darkness. On May 8, 1937, the first anniversary of the founding of the Italian empire, the looted Lion of Judah was installed in Rome next to the Obelisk of Dogali, a monument commemorating the defeat of an Italian expeditionary force of five hundred by the Ethiopian army in 1887 erected in the Piazza dei Cinquecento, named after the five hundred fallen Italians. One year later, the Lion of Judah became the focus of an anti-colonial protest in Rome, when a young Ethiopian, Zerai Deress, attacked

5. Others included a statue of the emperor Menelik II, whose army had inflicted a major defeat on an Italian colonial expedition at Adwa in northern Ethiopia in 1896.



*Transformed monument to Fascist victory. 1936 and later.*

Italian officials who attempted to prevent him from praying at the monument.<sup>6</sup>

The strategic placement of a small-scale statue of the imperial lion atop a monument to Fascist triumph by Haile Selassie after his return to Ethiopia in 1941 invoked a series of oppositions, between living lions and sculpture, or figurative imagery and the aniconic abstraction of Fascist modernism. The gesture also epitomized the colonial violence reified in the original monument and its chosen location, underlined by the addition of the small-scale imperial lion in place of the more famous (and monumental) freestanding Lion of Judah sculpture, which remained in Italian captivity until it was returned to Addis Ababa in 1960. However, the addition of the lion also indexed the absorption of these histories into a greater whole: A memorial of colonial oppression was now subordinated to the restoration of the royal house of Ethiopia and the final defeat of an Italian enemy that had menaced Ethiopia persistently since the nineteenth century.

Despite the imperial context, the transformation of a monument to colonial oppression into an iconic memorial of a resurgent Ethiopia might be seen as a classic example of *détournement*, a gesture of remaking that exploited the formal, ontological, and material instability of a problematic monument. In Guy Debord's formulation, *détournement* acts as a corrective not by erasure or occlusion but by means of an intervention that appropriates, incorporates, and transforms. Hence, a *détourned* image "has a peculiar power which obviously stems from the double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within them of their old and new senses."<sup>7</sup> In a well-known passage with uncanny resonances for contemporary debates about the fate of historical monuments, Debord discusses the tension between the historical value and racist content of D. W. Griffith's classic silent movie, *Birth of a Nation* (1915):

We can observe that Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* is one of the most important films in the history of the cinema because of its wealth of new contributions. On the other hand, it is a racist film and therefore absolute-

6. Richard Pankhurst, "Ethiopia and the Loot of the Italian Invasion: 1935–1936," *Présence Africaine*, new series, 72 (1969), pp. 85–95.

7. Situationist International, "Détournement as Negation and Prelude" (1959), <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/315>. Robert Nelson's discussion of Roland Barthes's concept of myth is also relevant. See Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 162–63.

ly does not merit being shown in its present form. But its total prohibition could be seen as regrettable from the point of view of the secondary, but potentially worthier, domain of the cinema. It would be better to détourn it as a whole, without necessarily even altering the montage, by adding a soundtrack that made a powerful denunciation of the horrors of imperialist war and of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which are continuing in the United States even now.<sup>8</sup>

Debord's solution to the problems raised by a cultural artifact that is both a historical document and a pernicious memorial to a problematic past that forever impinges on the present points to the possibility of a middle ground between valorization and destruction. Although apparently untheorized, a similar solution had been anticipated decades earlier in the transformation of Addis Ababa's Fascist memorial into a symbol of Ethiopian resistance and resurgence. Both approaches are worth recalling at a moment when debates about the fates of contentious memorials are consistently polarized between the desire to remove the offending artifact on the one hand and, on the other, accusations that such occlusions attempt to erase, obscure, rewrite, or sanitize uncomfortable historical truths.

In fact, such a solution was reportedly proposed by Charlottesville mayor Mark Signer when he was first petitioned to remove the statue of Robert E. Lee in spring 2016. Signer suggested removing the statue from its pedestal or surrounding it with glass screens inscribed with an eyewitness account of Lee's brutality written by Wesley Norris, one of his former slaves.<sup>9</sup> In the event, the violence of August 12, 2017, made the issue moot, tipping the balance in favor of removal.

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8. Guy Debord and Gil W. Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement," first published in *Les Lèvres Nues*, May 8, 1956, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/usersguide.html>.

9. Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "Battle Scars: How Virginia's Past Spurred a Racial Reckoning," *The New Yorker*, December 4, 2017, p. 33.

## ERIC FONER

With rare exceptions, such as Augustus Saint-Gaudens's Robert Gould Shaw Memorial on Boston Common, historical monuments are not generally evaluated according to aesthetic standards. Rather, they represent markers—perhaps one should say combatants—in ongoing culture wars over how history should be remembered and what historical figures are worthy of veneration. Mostly, they reflect who has had the power to shape public memory.

There is nothing unusual about recent debates in the United States over the fate of such artifacts. Since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the dismantling of public monuments has happened with increasing frequency. Many Americans applauded when Muscovites toppled the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, a founder of the Soviet secret police, Ukrainians took down statues of Lenin and Stalin, and Hungary removed communist-era statues to an open-air museum outside of Budapest. Other examples have nothing to do with the end of the Cold War. The government of Taiwan has been actively removing statues and busts of Chiang Kai-shek, who dominated the island's politics for decades after fleeing the Chinese mainland in 1949 but is now seen as a tyrant. Who can forget the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein by American troops in 2003? Throughout the world, as regimes change, so do monuments. The powerful resistance to removing Confederate statues might make us wonder how far change in our own racial regime has progressed since the civil-rights era—or the Civil War.

Nietzsche once identified three approaches to history: the monumental (history that glorifies the nation-state), the antiquarian (people seeking to reconstruct their family trees), and the critical ("the history that judges and condemns"). It is no doubt asking too much to expect public monuments to be critical in Nietzsche's sense, although in modern-day Germany not only have statues of Hitler and celebrations of the Third Reich been removed, but the public presentation of the past explicitly condemns this part of the country's history rather than attempting to sugarcoat it. (There is a German word for this process—*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—meaning roughly, coming to terms with, or honestly facing, history.) But one can demand basic accuracy, and many of our own public monuments fail this test.

In 1931, W. E. B. Du Bois commented on the proliferation of monuments to Confederate soldiers with inscriptions such as "Died Fighting for Liberty." It would be more honest, he observed, to offer the plain truth—"Sacred to the memory of those who fought to Perpetuate Human Slavery." To be sure, a few monuments did not beat about the bush. One commemorating the Battle of Liberty Place in New Orleans, an attempted coup d'état against the state's biracial Reconstruction government, referred directly to the effort to restore "white

supremacy” and regain control of “our state.” Clearly, “our” history did not include black Louisianans.

Public monuments tell us more about the moment of their creation than about the history they commemorate. Most of those honoring the Confederacy were erected between the 1890s and the 1920s. It is not a coincidence that these were the years when a new system of white supremacy, grounded in segregation, the disfranchisement of black voters, and widespread lynching, took hold in the South. The erasure of slavery from the story of the Civil War and a portrait of Reconstruction as an era of misgovernment caused by granting black men the right to vote were part of the intellectual legitimation of this system. Nostalgia for the Confederacy has always served the needs of the present. The flying of the Confederate flag over public buildings in the South only became widespread in the 1950s, not because of a sudden wave of historical consciousness but as a direct message to the developing civil-rights movement about where power resided in the segregated South. In 1962, the statue of a Confederate soldier on the University of Mississippi campus became a rallying point for those violently opposed to the admission of James Meredith as the school’s first black student. The neo-Nazis and white nationalists who marched in Charlottesville last year to protest the possible removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee had no doubt as to what it symbolized. It was not simply competent generalship.

In my view, there is a line, no doubt difficult to define with precision, that separates monuments so offensive that there should be no place for them in the public square and those that might remain as reminders of history. The Battle of Liberty Place monument (taken down not long ago) and the numerous statues of Nathan Bedford Forrest (a major slave trader, a commander of Confederate troops who massacred black soldiers after they surrendered, and a founder of the Ku Klux Klan) are on the wrong side of the line. But more important is diversifying the public presentation of history. Some progress has been made of late. A statue (admittedly not easy to locate) of Denmark Vesey, who plotted a slave insurrection, was erected in Charleston. The National Park Service has inserted discussions of slavery into its Civil War sites, including Gettysburg, where, for years, visitors could learn the details of the battle but not what the soldiers were fighting about. A memorial to the thousands of Southern lynching victims has recently been unveiled in Alabama. But where are the statues of the black leaders of Reconstruction, the white Southerners who remained loyal to the Union, or anti-lynching crusaders? The problem today is not simply the existence of monuments to slaveholders and Confederate generals, but that the public presentation of history in the South is entirely one-dimensional.

Ironically, the American public seems more comfortable commemorating the civil-rights movement than the struggle to abolish slavery. The movement has been absorbed into a feel-good narrative of our past whereby it represents the



inexorable triumph of the ideals of the American Revolution, rather than, as Martin Luther King Jr. called it, a direct challenge to American values. Civil-rights tourism is big business. Some of these museums and monuments offer a sanitized account of the movement and the white response; others are remarkably candid. Birmingham, Alabama, commissioned a series of sculptures commemorating events in the city in 1963, including a dramatic depiction of snarling dogs, giving the visitor a vivid sense of what the demonstrators faced. It wasn't all Rosa Parks quietly refusing to give up her seat on a bus. Here is a model of sober commemoration, coupled with a sense of how deep was the resistance to change, that might well be emulated elsewhere.

ERIC FONER, a professor emeritus of history at Columbia, is the author of numerous books on American history, especially the era of Civil War and Reconstruction.

## COCO FUSCO

The recent debates about the removal of Confederate monuments have focused on whether these public sculptures legitimate institutionalized racism. To me this debate has little to do with concerns about which individuals or communities possess the “right to represent” history—it is about the implications of the state’s involvement in producing and promoting official historical narratives and whose interests are served by those narratives.

I would like to recast these questions in relation to American imperialism and the Cold War, focusing on US-Cuba relations. Racial theories played a key role in the imperialist ideology that propelled the US’s intervention in Cuba in 1898. Inaccurate taxonomic studies of the Cuban population were incorporated into US-government records, and racist caricatures of Cubans festooned American magazines during this period, suggesting that the US cast itself as the great white savior of the darker, less competent people to justify its assertion of control over Cuba. Monuments from that time also played an important role in enforcing paternalistic views of Cuba. In the postrevolutionary era, the lines of power have been redrawn in the service of anti-imperialist polemics that manifest themselves in skirmishes involving defacement, adaptation, and additive counterpoints.

The US’s intervention in Cuba began with the Spanish-American War, which resulted in its procuring Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines from Spain. By 1922, Cuba had been subjected to three US-military occupations. In theory, the US presence guaranteed Cuban independence from foreign control by others, but in practice it protected US interests on the island. The 1904 Platt Amendment made Cuban sovereignty contingent on US conditions until 1934, and has guaranteed that the US could maintain its naval base at Guantánamo to this day.

The *Monument to the Victims of the USS Maine* that overlooks Havana’s harbor honors the 266 sailors who died when the American battleship exploded there in 1898. The sinking of the ship was used to justify the US’s declaration of war against Spain and its military intervention in Cuba’s struggle for independence. Although the cause of the explosion was unclear, American journalists of the era argued that the Spaniards had planted a mine, whipping up public support for sending American troops to the island. It was not until the 1970s that an investigation determined that the explosion had probably been an accident. Nonetheless, the tale of Spanish aggression and American sacrifice bound Cuba and the US together by means of a shared enemy, deflecting attention from the opportunistic goals of American intervention.

The monument was commissioned by the Cuban president in 1913 and erected in 1925. At the base of the twin columns are two female statues that represent the US as a maternal figure guiding Cuba, a younger woman, to independence. Atop the columns was a large bronze eagle facing north, signifying that the US would fly home once it helped Cuba break away from Spain. While the original

inscription at the base quotes an 1898 US congressional resolution recognizing Cuba's right to be free, the dedication, "To the victims of the Maine. (From) The people of Cuba," tacitly supports the view that Spanish aggression caused the deaths. Not surprisingly, after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, when anti-American sentiment ran high, the monument was attacked by a revolutionary mob. The eagle was confiscated and the new Cuban government added an antagonistic inscription that revised the history of the explosion: *To the victims of the Maine who were sacrificed by imperialist voracity and the desire to gain control of the island of Cuba.*

The eagle's head was delivered to the Swiss embassy, and the body and wings and tail ended up in storage the Museum of the History of Havana. For a while, a rumor circulated that Pablo Picasso was going to send a dove to replace it, but the sculpture never arrived. Between the decapitated monument and the US embassy a stone's throw away, the Cuban government eventually erected its *José Martí Anti-Imperialist Platform* in 2000, used for political rallies. A poet, essayist, and ardent advocate of Cuban independence, Martí is a venerated national hero whose likenesses can be found throughout the island. At the platform he stands holding a child in one arm and pointing with the other at the US embassy. (Critics of the government joke that he is showing Cubans where to go if they want to leave the country.) In 2006, a wall of 138 flags commemorating Cuban victims of terrorism was added to the platform, forming a counterpoint to the monument to the victims of the *Maine* (while also obscuring the view of the US embassy's electronic ticker board that projected pro-democracy phrases between 2006 and 2009). Then, in 2013, on the eve of Obama's historic visit to Cuba, efforts were undertaken to restore the monument, though they fell short of returning the eagle to its original place. Both Cuban and American officials have noted that the eagle resuming its position would symbolize the restoration of amicable relations between the two countries, which won't happen without the termination of the fifty-seven-year-old US trade embargo.

Into this symbolic battlefield stepped the late American museum director Holly Block in 2014, with a plan to send a replica of yet another José Martí statue to Cuba. In this version, Martí is on horseback at the moment of his death in battle in 1895. It was made by the American artist Anna Hyatt Hunting in 1958 and donated to Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista (not to the people of Cuba) on the condition that it remain in New York. Though it is unclear why Hunting wanted to engage with a leader who was rapidly falling out of favor in Washington due to his repressive and autocratic governance, Batista accepted the gift and paid \$100,000 for its pedestal—just months before Fidel Castro and his guerrilla army took over. The US State Department then intervened in New York City's affairs, hiding the Martí statue in a Bronx storage yard to avoid appearing to endorse Castro. Cuban exiles soon began to agitate, arguing that Martí had nothing to do with *fidelismo*. In 1964, a group of exiles secretly produced a plaster replica of the bronze statue and tried to install it on the pedestal. They were unable to mount the six-hundred-

pound figure and decided to compromise by simply leaving Martí's head. It was finally installed in Central Park in 1965.

Block, a longtime supporter of Cuban art from the island, initiated a \$2.5-million fund-raising campaign to create and ship the replica as a gesture supporting Obama's efforts at normalization. Eusebio Leal, historian of the city of Havana and director of the restoration of its historic center, had mentioned on a visit to New York some years before that he would love to see the statue in Havana, and Block took it upon herself to make it happen. (Leal has spearheaded an effort backed by UNESCO and private investors to restore Havana's colonial neighborhoods to their former grandeur, which has helped significantly to attract tourism to the island.)

Block's gesture to the Cuban government sparked a controversy that led to the resignation of several of the board members of the Bronx Museum, where she served as director. The project was clearly a personal one, yet it was widely noted that the budget for the sculpture was nearly as large as the annual operating budget of the Bronx Museum, and many wondered whether staff efforts were being diverted from the needs of the institution and the local community in order to serve Block's agenda in a foreign country. Cuban exiles and Cuban-American artists who had for years complained that Block excluded them from her vision of Cuban art because of her singular focus on work made on the island saw this costly venture as an obsequious embrace of an authoritarian state that looks askance at its diaspora. Artists Tania Bruguera and Geandy Pavon staged a guerrilla intervention in January 2017, projecting text and images on the façade of Sikkema Jenkins Gallery, the gallery that organized the fund-raising campaign. They called on people to donate \$2.5 million to the victims of a hurricane in the remote rural town of Baracoa instead. Block did not respond publicly to the criticisms of her venture.

In Cuba, every state building, every school, and many a street corner, even in the poorest neighborhoods, features a Martí bust or a photograph or a reproduction of a painting of the "apostle of independence." While Block's gesture may delight Cuban officials—even though the local press noted the (now-corrected) spelling errors in the inscription on the granite base—it is unclear how the Cuban people would benefit from having one more Martí to walk past on the way to work. Yet the sculpture was sent to Cuba this past fall, and is now installed in the 13th of March Plaza in front of the Museum of the Revolution. The location of the sculpture is not coincidental. The plaza commemorates an attempted coup in 1957 by young revolutionaries, and some years later it became the site where Fidel Castro declared the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban government orchestrated a positioning of the statue that both supports its historical narrative and attracts tourists. To my mind, that makes Block's gesture a gift to the state and not to the people of Cuba.

COCO FUSCO is an artist and writer. She is the author of *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (2015, Tate Publications).

RENÉE GREEN

Within

Living

Memory

W. E. B. Du Bois

1868-1963



Albert Einstein

1879-1955



Paul Robeson

1898-1976



Muriel Rukeyser

1913-1980



Lou Harrison

1917-2003

RENÉE GREEN is an artist, writer, and filmmaker. She is the author of *Other Planes of There: Selected Writings* (Duke, 2014).

RACHEL HARRISON

**THE  
WAY  
YOU  
MAKE  
ME  
FEEL**







RACHEL HARRISON is an artist who lives in New York.

## SHARON HAYES

Last year I was invited by Ken Lum and Paul Farber to participate in an outdoor exhibition in Philadelphia called *Monument Lab*. I was one of 22 artists asked to respond to the question “What is an appropriate monument for the city of Philadelphia today?” Philadelphia, like many US cities, has a wealth of monuments and public statuary but only two devoted to a real, historic woman. In Philadelphia, these two are Joan of Arc and a Quaker woman named Mary Dyer. Perhaps unsurprisingly, both are white women who did NOT live in Philadelphia and were martyred. This paucity of public acknowledgement of the contributions of women endures in a city in which Marion Anderson grew up; Lucretia Mott and Alice Paul cut their political teeth; Harriet Forten Purvis and her two sisters, Margaretta Forten and Sarah Louise Forten, blazed powerful activism inside and outside of the organization they co-founded, the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society; and Charlene Arcila founded the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference, which has become the largest transgender-specific conference in the United States.

The anecdotal explanation of why there are so few monuments to women in the United States is that women did not, in the past, have political power. That assertion belies the fact that white women were critically important to the proliferation of monuments in the US, particularly those that celebrated the Confederacy. In fact, many white women exerted a great deal of their political power to erect monuments that excluded white women like themselves, women of color, immigrant women, transwomen, people of color in general, queer people, poor people.<sup>1</sup> Clearly these exclusions were normalized by operations of racism and sexism, but to frame the structuring conditions of monuments as simply a consequence of racism and sexism does not explain why such exclusions remain so persistent.

What these exclusions demonstrate, it seems to me, is that the public monument does not simply reflect white-settler patriarchal power; the public monument exists in order to assert, sustain, and maintain that power.<sup>2</sup>

Monuments claim figuration for otherwise imagined positions of nationalist rhetoric: founder, hero, owner, savior, warrior, citizen. They assign a figure, a gender, a race and a class as a political tactic to make claims, to usurp control, to dispossess land, to ward off historical narratives that could, would, and do tell complex stories about how a nation is formed, how a city is founded, how technologies

1. Black women have also played an outsized role in preserving and protecting history, though their contributions are rarely recognized in statues, plaques, historical accounts, or named archives. In contradistinction to the role most often played by white women, the labors of black women to retain African-American history, I would argue, were/are resistant to the foundational genre of monuments, even where the site or object preserved may look like a traditional monument.

2. Here I want to suggest we intentionally widen the distinction between monuments that are purely honorific and monuments that are part of a larger project of historic preservation in which a historic site, home, natural formation is designated as a monument in order to preserve and protect it from subsequent ownership, destruction or development. In this latter category, I am thinking of George Washington Carver National Monument, the newly designated Stonewall National Monument or the Bears Ears National Monument.

are invented. Monuments operate materially, narratively, and iteratively. They are a mechanism inside an ongoing power grab.

Monuments and the power they are rallied to secure are both unreasonable and insecure. Their aspirations and claims have always been the site of intense conflict. Confederate monuments are under attack because there is great, passionate labor being expended to dismantle the material conditions that reproduce white patriarchal heteronormativity. This labor aligns with efforts in the last half-century to remediate the historic exclusions that are constitutive of the genre of monumentality. There has also been an exciting proliferation of resistant monuments, a category into which I would put Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, whose material conditions operate against the aspirations of white supremacy and offer a public reciprocity that allows for fluid negotiations of meaning.

But these objects, as lauded as they might be individually, barely and rarely make it through the intensely conservative and risk-averse mechanisms through which public works are approved, commissioned, and installed. A counter-monument project, no matter how dynamic, will never match the weight and space assumed by those monuments that promulgate the fictions of the white patriarchal nation-state. As part of a field of material support for these fictions, Confederate monuments must be dismantled, removed, and taken out of civic spaces.

In this moment of active and widespread struggle over the place of monuments in our civic lives, the most exuberant praxis for me is that of the active transformation of the monuments, statues, and pedestals that populate our cities and towns. The spray-painted slogans on the Lee-Jackson double equestrian monument pedestal sitting diagonally across from the Baltimore Museum of Art in the Wyman Park Dell,<sup>3</sup> the white KKK hood put over the head of the Edward Douglass White statue in front of the Louisiana Supreme Court building in New Orleans,<sup>4</sup> the bloodstained banner draped over the statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest in Memphis,<sup>5</sup> and the many and multiple protest that performatively recontextualize statues in Kansas City, Missouri; Denton, Texas; Hillsborough County, Florida; Norfolk, Virginia; and dozens of other sites across the US.

In both practice and site, these vocabularies of transformation are the material for a critical reimagining of public material culture and the relationships between language, sculpture and history.

SHARON HAYES is an artist who engages ongoing investigations into specific intersections between history, politics, and speech.

3. Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee Monument funded by J. Henry Ferguson, commissioned by the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore, artist Laura Gardin Fraser, erected in 1948 to criticism as well as fanfare, removed August 16, 2017.

4. Chief Justice Edward Douglass White, erected by the State of Louisiana, artist Bryant Baker, April 8, 1926.

5. Nathan Bedford Forrest Monument funded through a volunteer association of Memphis citizens including an organization called the "Ladies of Memphis," artist Charles H. Niehaus, dedicated May 6, 1905, removed by the City of Memphis, December 20, 2017.

## THOMAS HIRSCHHORN



*Thomas Hirschhorn. Gramsci Monument: Radio Studio, Forest Houses, Bronx, New York. 2013. Courtesy of Dia Art Foundation. Photo: Romain Lopez.*

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN is an artist living in Paris. With each exhibition, he asserts his commitment toward a non-exclusive public.

## ANDREAS HUYSEN

Except for the statue in the opera that came alive and started to sing, monuments in real life are usually considered to be mute and static. This view seriously underestimates their mobility. I'm thinking here not of the toppling of monuments such as the Vendôme Column in Paris in 1871 or the demolition of monuments to Lenin when the Soviet Union collapsed. I'm thinking rather of the vanishing and reappearances of monuments subject to political debates in the course of time. A peculiar case of the seesaw fate of a monument is the equestrian statue of Frederick the Great in Berlin. Designed in 1839 by Christian Daniel Rauch half a century after the monarch's death and unveiled in 1851 on Unter den Linden near the Hohenzollern castle, it was encased in concrete during World War II to protect it from the bombings, removed from Unter den Linden by the communists after the war as a representative of Prussian militarism and a favorite of Nazi mythmaking, hidden for decades from public urban space in Sanssouci's palace park in Potsdam, only to be returned to Unter den Linden in 1980 when official GDR memory politics took a radical turn to embrace the Prussian heritage. An early marker of the coming reunification, you might say! Today the Hohenzollern Palace is being rebuilt and Frederick rides eastward again, right in the vicinity of a counter-monument by Israeli artist Micha Ullman to the book burnings of 1933 on Bebelplatz, an underground library with empty white shelves covered by a glass plate and visible only from aboveground.

Counter-monuments were the rage in Germany in the 1980s and '90s. Based on a fundamental critique of Nazi monumentalism and a rejection of the tradition of privileging figures on horseback with erect postures and triumphal gestures, the counter-monument promised to empower memory of the Holocaust and the Third Reich. Famous memorials of this kind were Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's *Monument Against Fascism* (1986–93) in Hamburg-Harburg, a lead-clad column offering a surface for graffiti and inscriptions that in the course of seven years was lowered step by step into the ground. All that remains is a plaque with an inscription and a book publication documenting many of the graffiti. If self-denial of the monument as monument was one strategy, spatial reversal was another. Horst Hoheisel's *Aschrott Fountain* (1985) in Kassel turned the structure of the original fountain, donated to the city by a Jewish industrialist in 1908 and destroyed by the Nazis in 1939, simply upside down, thus creating a negative form going as deep into the ground as it once had risen above it. But could the counter-monument avoid becoming a monument itself, even if it disappeared from view? Did it really challenge the monumental claim of lasting through the ages by simply negating key features of its predecessors? Or do these counter-monuments ultimately share in the fate of all monuments as defined by Robert Musil when he said that there is nothing as invisible in urban space as a monument?

Clearly, there are times when monuments or counter-monuments fallen into obscurity become visible again, not out of some antiquarian interest but because

of political passions and crises in the present. At a time when white supremacists are rallying across the nation to glorify the Confederacy and have more than just the ear of the current US president, monuments to the Confederacy in New Orleans, Memphis, Charlottesville, and elsewhere have become embroiled in attempts to remove or even destroy them. Some have been successful, some not. Public debate has drawn attention to the fact that they were all erected decades after the Civil War in order to support segregation and political nostalgia. They created a belated, heroic image of a lost cause that was anything but heroic and always an offense to the African-American population in the South and indeed to principles of democracy and human rights. Memphis monuments to Nathan Bedford Forrest, founder of the Ku Klux Klan, or Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, must have been painful reminders of slavery to those to whom they had not become simply invisible. But that such feelings have exploded on a broad scale in the current moment is not at all surprising. It is the political rise of white supremacists (I shun the normalizing term “alt-right”) and the Black Lives Matter movement today that have galvanized the demand to dismantle such monuments.

Even New York, a city without Confederate monuments, joined the debate when Mayor de Blasio created a commission to make recommendations about monuments in the city, none related to the Civil War, but all offensive to parts of the public. Central and controversial has been a demand to dismantle the Teddy Roosevelt statue in front of the American Museum of Natural History and the Columbus monument on Columbus Circle. The need for a reckoning with American history embodied in these monuments has been publicly acknowledged, and the commission has presented its findings and recommendations.

I agree with those who doubt that dismantling should be a general solution for monuments of a past considered to be offensive not only to present-day sensibilities and politics but to any democratic polity based on Enlightenment principles. Different histories must be recognized, even if their lingering manifestations in the present are odious. And remember: All sides of the political spectrum will have both the desire and the means to destroy monuments. The recent case of neo-Nazi destruction of many of the famous *Stolpersteine* in German cities, small brass plaques marking sidewalks in front of buildings where Jews lived before being deported and killed, is a good example.

Assuming that monuments do have some power to keep historical memory alive, every destroyed or removed monument adds to an erasure of history from public space. But what is the benefit of expanding the historical amnesia already so widespread in current digital culture? What benefit is there to people’s everyday lives if monuments are destroyed or removed to some safe site with trigger warnings?

I would opt for another strategy. Instead of dismantling the Columbus or Roosevelt monuments in New York City, as has been suggested by some, we should supplement them in situ with aesthetically and politically persuasive counter-monuments that can provide a *Lehrstück*, a learning lesson in a Brechtian sense, about Columbus’s or Roosevelt’s effects on racial politics and history up to this day.

Removing them to a museum or merely adding a plaque or other explanatory markers is not enough. Enliven the extant monument through public debate, organize a competition for design proposals, and create a temporary or permanent counter-monument that enters into active dialogue with the extant structure and speaks to diverse audiences. It must be attractive enough to draw attention and, in conjunction with other public interventions, continue to provide a teaching moment until such teaching may no longer be necessary. At this point, however, we need teaching that testifies to the inherent mobility and liveliness of the monument, that most static and immobile marker in the flow of history.

ANDREAS HUYSEN, professor emeritus at Columbia, is the author, most recently, of *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film* (Harvard, 2015).

SILVIA KOLBOWSKI

Mainstream US debates about contentious monuments tend to focus on issues of removal or non-removal, destruction or contextualization. Often absent are debates about the politics of form, about what might constitute a monument of the future (as proximate as tomorrow). The one condition considered inherent to monuments—untimeliness—remains largely unexamined.

In 2015, I presented my video *A Few Howls Again (AFHA)* at Carnegie Mellon University. *AFHA* “awakens” the 1960s German militant Ulrike Meinhof from her death photo. After the presentation, a young professor of philosophy approached me to say she hoped I wouldn’t be insulted, but she thought my video constituted a “contemporary monument.” Only by reading the video’s script, below, can one understand the radicality of her interpretation. Three years prior to that, I was approached by Francisco Alí-Brouchoud, an artist and the producer of *Visión Siete Internacional*, a public-television news show in Buenos Aires that is viewed internationally over the internet. He wanted to broadcast *AFHA* during the presentation of their nightly political programming, introduced by their news anchor. It was a brave request that involved much persuasion of his anchors. (Imagine a video on a notorious 1960s militant being presented by Judy Woodruff on PBS *NewsHour*.) Surprisingly, the broadcast produced positive viewer feedback. Years after the comment by the philosophy professor, I realized that Alí-Brouchoud had created a platform for a “contemporary monument,” and an opportunity to open the question of temporality in regards to monuments in general.

*A Few Howls Again, 2010, video script*

Police truncheons, hasty arrests, and administrative measures provide a foretaste of what will be legalized by the Emergency Laws. The students’ Vietnam demonstrations have allowed them to sound out democracy. It is hollow. This revelation is a public service.—Ulrike Meinhof, *Napalm and Pudding*, 1967

If the system is under a taboo and not being discussed, then the order of things is in order, and only the devil knows who dehumanized the police.—Ulrike Meinhof, *Water Cannons: Against Women, Too*, 1968

Those who hold positions of power and condemn stone-throwing and arson but say nothing about the bombs in Vietnam, or the terror in Persia, or the torture in South Africa, are hypocritical proponents of nonviolence.”—Ulrike Meinhof, *From Protest to Resistance*, 1968



They declared war on me to avoid their own conflict.



*Silvia Kolbowski. A Few Howls Again. 2010.*

They want politics as destiny, masses of disenfranchised people, a help-  
less passive opposition, democratic sandbox games, and when things  
get serious, they want a state of emergency.”—Ulrike Meinhof, *From  
Protest to Resistance*, 1968

“People are no longer just playing the roles of adversaries in order to  
be nice to each other again afterward. People are no longer concealing  
their annoyances, or sweeping conflicts under the rug, or explaining  
nausea as a consequence of a pill, or fighting melancholy with coffee,  
or stomach aches with mint tea, or depression with champagne, or  
vapid sobriety with schnapps.”—Ulrike Meinhof, *Water Cannons: Against  
Women, Too*, 1968

“Student actions rather than workers’ struggles have set off this new  
irritation. They have brought the contradictions of this society to the  
surface. Malaparte’s image of dogs with slashed bellies who don’t howl  
because their vocal cords have also been cut is no longer totally apt. We  
are hearing a few howls again—at least a few.”—Ulrike Meinhof, *Water  
Cannons: Against Women, Too*, 1968

“. . . now that the shackles of common decency have been broken, we  
can and must discuss violence and counter-violence anew . . .”—Ulrike  
Meinhof, *From Protest to Resistance*, 1968

My name was Meinhof; first name, Ulrike.  
I was 42 when I was found dead, in 1976,  
dead, in my cell at Stammheim prison, Germany.  
Mention of my name is always accompanied by the word “terrorist.”  
In the police photo you can see I died by hanging.  
The prison called it a suicide.  
Some insist I was murdered.  
Others insist I committed suicide.  
I died.  
Since my death, I haven’t been allowed to rest either.  
I’ve been resurrected through books, films, paintings . . .  
. . . videos, articles, arguments.

She was a brilliant but frustrated journalist.  
She gave up her voice in favor of the gun.  
She was fervent but otherwise directionless.  
She fell in with the wrong people.  
She suffered under the injustice of the world because she was depressive.  
She was a cold-blooded sociopath.



*Kolowski. A Few Howls Again. 2010.*

She couldn't see reality clearly.  
 She wasn't subtle.  
 She is militant due to her inability to find satisfaction in being a mother.  
 She created a police state through her own actions.  
 She was irrational to think that in Germany the masses would overthrow the capitalist system.  
 She became violent because she had an unfulfilled need for love.  
 She was unrealistic in the face of police brutality.  
 She wasn't strong enough to bear the escalation of war.  
 She became violent because she was hyper-moral.  
 She was masochistic.

For eight months, between 1972 and 1973,  
 I was the only prisoner in an empty jail building.  
 The room was painted completely white.  
 The furnishings were white.  
 Neon lightning was left on day and night.  
 I was woken repeatedly.  
 I was in physical and acoustic isolation.  
 I had the feeling that my head was exploding.  
 I had the feeling that the top of my skull would split and come off.  
 I had the feeling of my spinal cord being pressed into my brain.  
 I had the feeling that the cell was moving.  
 I had the feeling I was growing mute.  
 I could no longer identify what words meant.  
 I felt I was burning out inside.  
 I was freezing. I felt I was disintegrating, being dissolved in acid.  
 No one exists outside of oneself in these circumstances.  
 Four years later, I was found dead.

Have you noticed that some kinds of violence make people feel secure?  
 My kind of violence made people nervous.  
 It rattled frameworks and foundations.  
 It raised the specter of justice and equity achieved through violence.  
 They declared war on me to avoid their own conflict.  
 They turned me into an alien.  
 Even after my death, they declared war on me.  
 [*Loops.*]

SILVIA KOLBOWSKI is an artist currently working on an allegorical video about the rage-filled subjects that capitalism creates.

## BENJAMIN KUNKEL

Campaigns over recent years to raze the statues of figures such as Teddy Roosevelt and Cecil Rhodes make it clear the English language could use a word like the Spanish *demonumentar* or French *desmonumenter*, meaning simply to take down, out of political motives, monuments to this kind of ex-hero of the nation (and presumably extendable to stripping kindred names, like John C. Calhoun or Woodrow Wilson, from buildings on college campuses). If the foreign verbs—for which an ungainly English equivalent might be *to demonumentalize*—are hardly everyday sights in their own idioms, that they were first coined elsewhere nevertheless reveals us, in the Anglosphere, as relative latecomers to some process of public reckoning with a heritage of racist subjugation common, in spite of all grisly local color, to every imperialist and/or settler-colonialist nation-state since capitalism began. How far can we want and hope this reckoning to go?

I first encountered the word *demonumentar* half a dozen years ago, while living in Buenos Aires, in the context of agitation against statues of President Julio Roca, who in the late 1870s led the so-called Conquest of the Desert, a genocidal clearing of the Argentine Patagonia of its indigenous inhabitants. Far more discontinuous than that of the US or UK, Argentina's political history, with its alternating bouts of military diktat and popular democracy and its frequent economic crises, has over recent generations furnished several occasions to imagine a country founded on a new basis. And, ultimately, this would be the profoundest rationale for hauling down old statues and giving buildings, and indeed whole countries, new names: not the mere repudiation of a bad and racist past but the refoundation of the polity as a good collective future. Any such program of political refoundation remains far off. For now—or so prevailing dispositions to public monuments suggest—most ordinary center-left or -right citizens as well as most leftists are alike in our relationship to history: We know how to condemn and how to mourn but can hardly conceive of how to desire and propose, much less to plan and build.

Consider, schematically, two kinds of public monument, received lately in two opposite ways. The first kind—"Romantic military sculpture," as Robert Lowell called it in his poem "Buenos Aires"—has already been evoked. Typically, the subject is a military hero and/or statesman, white and male of course, often aristocratic, standing erect or else seated on horseback; the figuration is representational and realistic, if ennobling; the mood is triumphant (even in defeat: e.g., the Confederate general on the Southern courthouse lawn); the medium is bronze (with marble or granite plinth); and the point is to celebrate the inauguration or consolidation or defense of some national community (the Union, the Confederacy, the Empire, etc.). Precisely because the national hero so depicted was only too often an avowed white supremacist and the national community, as he conceived of and symbolized it, a cruel schedule of racial castes, it's statues of this kind that contemporary activists—some mere liberals, and others

leftists—have targeted for demonumentalization. And many of these campaigns have prevailed, with municipalities removing statues and universities renaming buildings, for the simple and excellent reason that today nearly everyone claims to oppose racism. (Actually intending and effecting racial equality is obviously another matter.) Not that other contemporary values don't inform the movement against the statues, in a lesser and no doubt frequently unconscious way: Isn't heroic statuary, as an artistic form, at odds with our perception that the tidal struggles of whole populations and classes shape history more than the feats of rare individuals? And don't we know enough of great men's biographies by now to doubt whether even our own heroes deserve a statue? Karl Marx didn't kill anyone, but he does seem to have impregnated his housekeeper or, in other words, to have exploited the sexual vulnerability of a female employee.

Over recent decades, a second kind of public monument has come to prominence, very different in form and effect from heroic statuary. If the latter as a rule boasts of national triumph through the figuration of some "great man," this other and newer genre of monument—Maya Lin's 1982 Vietnam Veterans Memorial in D.C. is perhaps its original and still its most eloquent instance—does something else. Here is an abstract shape (a 250-foot chevron in black marble) rather than a realistic figuration, and a wall engraved with an exhaustive alphabetical list of the obscure dead rather than a plinth, beneath gleaming bronze, touting a single immortal name. Here are countless victims, not singular heroes, to be recalled in a mood in a universal lamentation, not national triumph: Everyone who fell is equal and alike in the absolute democracy of death. And the monument is set into the ground, below grade, not raised above it: Death in war abases, it does not exalt.

Lin's leveling gesture, notably reproduced in the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin (2005) and the National September 11 Memorial in New York City (2011), was more radical and controversial than its successor monuments, since it proposed the American war dead as undifferentiated mortals rather than noble warriors. Military valor sorts and ranks people; mere death homogenizes them. For this reason, the public has found the same monumental approach—sorrowing abstraction honoring masses of the unranked and even unnamed dead—far easier to accept in cases of sheer passive victimhood. Jewish victims of the Nazis or American workers in the Twin Towers on 9/11 were not prosecuting an imperial war that many judged scandalous and obscene; they were simply innocents pursuing the miscellaneous ends of civic life.

Both the outrage over statues to bigoted eminences and the respect shown monuments to utter victimhood convey unimpeachable values of a negative kind: Racism is to be rejected, and the murder of innocents deplored. In many cases, these are even one and the same value. But can the Left conceive of having any positive value to propose? Or—a related question—of wielding sufficient political power to refound a polity, and therefore to remonumentalize, as it were, as well as demonumentalize? The poet Pablo Neruda lamented in a letter that in Santiago there was not a single statue to the Araucanian *toqui* Lautaro, who spearheaded

indigenous resistance to Spanish conquest and “deserves to be the symbol of Chile,” while in the capital there stood “dozens memorializing the invaders.” But of course any such remonumentalization—Lautaro replacing the conquistadors—would have been merely cosmetic unless it accompanied or anticipated a corresponding social revolution, as Neruda, a member of the Chilean Communist Party, well understood. And even then, in the future the Left still seeks to establish, the time for statues of individuals may be over, as another Chilean poet, the late Nicanor Parra, suggested:

si realmente fueran socialistas  
un monumento para cada mortal  
o ningún monumento para nadie carajo!

Roughly: If you were really socialists / a monument for every mortal / or no monument for anyone for fuck’s sake!

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## HARI KUNZRU

In 2004 the Mexican artist Damián Ortega made *Obelisco Transportable*, a shiny, twenty-foot needle standing on a little patch of grass, the whole thing mounted on wheels. It was a calculated insult to the twin monumental ambitions of permanence and significance—it could be rolled anywhere, to commemorate anything. A simple vertical that organizes space around itself, the obelisk *makes* a classical gesture towards the “on high” that lies at the origin of the traditional public function of statuary to indicate, organize, and dominate, as soldiers, administrators, monarchs, and religious figures occupy the traffic island and the public square, a metonymic reminder of the power in the land. Ortega’s obelisk is politely subversive, suggesting that the viewer could be free to alter this topography. Moved ad hoc, symbols of power become mere decoration.

In the 1930s the sculptor Charles Sergeant Jagger, known for his First World War memorials, was commissioned to make a massive statue of King George V to stand under a sandstone cupola near India Gate, at the head of the Rajpath or “Kingsway,” the ceremonial parade at the center of Sir Edwin Lutyens’s imperial master plan for New Delhi. The king was to look through the war-memorial arch toward the viceroy’s house, one of the largest residences for a head of state anywhere in the world. At the durbar of 1911, George had presided as emperor of India, and Jagger portrayed him wearing the imperial state crown and carrying an orb and a scepter, in robes that draped down over a high plinth. Jagger died before completing the commission, which was finished by another artist. The statue was installed in 1936. Eleven years later, the British were gone, and the question of what to do with the marble king became moot.<sup>1</sup>

Plans were proposed to replace King George with Gandhi, but there was no immediate action. In 1965, two days before Independence Day, activists of the Samyukta Socialist Party poured tar over the statue and chipped away at the face and crown, leaving behind a photo of the nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose. There was much hand-wringing in the British press, and it finally prompted the Indian government to act. The statue was moved, along with those of various viceroys and Victorian administrators, to Coronation Park, a large open space in North Delhi. It was a relegation, but a perfectly respectable place for such statues, having been the site of the durbars of 1877, 1903, and 1911. Now King George stares at an obelisk marking the spot where he once laid the foundation stone for New Delhi, before surveyors decided that the land was too marshy and moved the development elsewhere.

The park is run-down and redevelopment has stalled, partly due to a general lack of enthusiasm for celebrating the relics of empire, but as the trauma of decolonization fades into history and North Delhi real estate becomes more

1. <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/an-unfinished-symphony-in-stone>.



desirable, it is possible that this will change. The cupola at India Gate has now stood empty for a generation, and the absence of a figure inside it has induced a sort of psycho-geographical short circuit. There is no consensus about who or what could stand there, commanding that vista. Gandhi's legacy is increasingly contested, and his values are out of step with those of the "New India." Ortega's lesson, that monuments change meaning with a change in setting, is evident in the old king's loss of force, and also in the empty cupola, which has acquired its own monumental weight, as a frame for a national project that is still evolving.

HARI KUNZRU is the author of five novels, including *White Tears* (Knopf, 2017) and *Gods Without Men* (Vintage, 2013). He lives in New York City.

RACHEL KUSHNER (with JAMES BENNING)

A friend who is a public defender had advised me that I might learn all I'd need from the preliminary hearing of the murder case I was following. This was in 2015. My lawyer friend said "preliminary" was a slightly misleading term, as the prosecutors would bring out every bit of evidence they had, and defense attorneys would reveal whatever strategies they planned to use. And so it was, and more—a lot more than I was equipped to handle, to process, already by the lunch break of the first day of the preliminary hearing of a case involving two minors and two "adults" (one age eighteen, one age nineteen), all four Latino youths from South Los Angeles who were being charged in a special-circumstances murder that could result in penalties, for all four, of LWOP: life without parole.

The *Los Angeles Times* journalist assigned to report on the case was sobbing audibly, on the courtroom bench across from me, as prosecutors presented the details of the murder. Emotions are real, and they are to be mistrusted. Court adjourned for lunch. I exited Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center and crossed Temple Street walking north and took the 101 overpass along Hill Street, toward a restaurant I know called Colima. I live in this area, and I know these streets, but that day, walking along Hill toward Cesar Chavez and thinking about time, what it means to serve time, to go to prison for life, asking rudimentary questions about who commits crimes, who doesn't, and why, I looked up to my left and realized I was standing before a massive scene of a giant horse and eleven cavalry soldiers and a rippling flag—a sculpted scene eighty feet tall, which merged into my reality in bas-relief. I was only a few blocks from home but I had never before noticed this huge monument, dedicated to the Mormon soldiers who built a fort on the site, apparently won Los Angeles in the Mexican-American War, and planted a flag of independence at that location on July 4, 1847.

TO THE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WHO WITH TRUST IN GOD FACED PRIVATION AND DEATH IN EXTENDING THE FRONTIERS OF OUR COUNTRY TO INCLUDE THIS LAND OF PROMISE, the towering concrete flag pylon announces. The monument has a non-functioning water feature on the right—an expanse of mosaic-tiled wall two hundred feet wide, where a fountain was designed to tumble. WATER AND POWER HAVE MADE OUR ARID LAND FLOURISH, says an inscription among smaller bas-relief scenes celebrating ranching and pioneers.

The Fort Moore Memorial was built more than a century after the events it commemorates, in 1957. It is the largest bas-relief military monument in the United States, its main figures constructed of terra-cotta and designed by New Deal artist Henry Kreis, who also designed bas-relief sculptures for the Bronx Post Office and the state supreme court in Brooklyn. The overall design of the memorial was the work of modernist architects Dike Nagano and Kazumi Adachi. The flag pylon, designed by Albert Stewart, features a sixteen-foot-tall eagle hovering above the message about extending frontiers and this land of promise.



*James Benning. Manifest Destiny. 2018.*

I would have guessed that the monument's construction could be pegged to a specific postwar political, economic, and social history that might explain why, in 1957, it became expedient to assert, or reassert, this vision of Mormon soldiers planting an American flag on a hill overlooking downtown and the old pueblo of Olvera Street, where the *Californios*—vanquished in their attempt to retake Los Angeles—once thrived.

Among the players involved in funding the monument—the city school board, the Department of Water and Power, two influential women who were historians of Mormon pioneer history, and the Church of Latter Day Saints—it's not clear who was really behind the idea of memorializing the site, or even what, precisely, the message of the Fort Moore memorial was, or is.

The monument and fountain are now undergoing a six-million-dollar restoration. The fountain, which features a sixty-four-thousand-gallon reflecting pool, has been shut off since 1977, when the state suffered a catastrophic drought that resulted in the decommissioning of industrial farmland up and down the Central Valley, creating a rural land surplus that played a direct and major role in California's prison-expansion project, which began in the late 1970s.

Every year, Mormons reenact, with pioneer costumes and bugles, the planting of the Independence Day flag. Now, the Church of Latter Day Saints leaders seem to have played a role in getting the monument restored, but it also seems to be part of a development project, which I only learned of when I tried to go back to Colima, the restaurant I was walking to when I noticed this monument for the first time. I tried to eat at Colima, but Colima was gone. The building it was housed in was also gone, demolished along with every building on that block and the adjacent one, to make way for a 400,000-square-foot retail-and-housing development that will be anchored by the Fort Moore Memorial, newly restored, and commemorating I'm not sure exactly what: It is a celebration of water and power, by the Department of Water and Power; a celebration of expansionist Mormon settlers, by elders in the Mormon church; a salute to the victory of California, by California governance. The bas-relief horse, many times larger than a real horse, looks out over the 101 freeway, where sheriff's buses shuttle chained men and women, all day and all night, from the courts to the jail and back again. Horse, soldiers, flag, plaques, water, court, and jail, all undergirded by the whoosh of the Hollywood freeway. For some, the monument might register as akin to the WPA art to be found on civic facades all across the country. To the Mormons, it seems to preserve some kind of history, a set of myths, about pioneering and the West, and maybe something deeper. God, after all, set foot, by Mormon doctrine, on American soil.

While I read each plaque, the day I first noticed the monument, pedestrians passed me, dwarfed by its bas-relief sculptures. Every single one of these people on foot was headed into the criminal-courts building on Temple Street. While I'd like to say the irony was not lost on me that this paean, above me, to the victory of California in the Mexican-American War was being traversed by people of Mexican descent who were headed into court to have their lives illuminated by power, in a Foucauldian sense, and ruined, in a practical sense, I don't know what the true meaning of this monument is, and of its placement, and the court's placement, nor the truth of the lives of the people streaming past it. I only know that no one else noticed it. No one looked up.

—Rachel Kushner

JAMES BENNING has been making art since 1970. He began in the Midwest and now lives in Val Verde, California.

RACHEL KUSHNER's new novel, *The Mars Room*, was published in May by Scribner. She lives in Los Angeles.

JOHN LANSDOWNE

Dismantling the Confederate statues is the correct moral solution. It is essential, however, that some fractured remnant of these monuments be left in place—precisely as a means to commemorate their dismantling.<sup>1</sup>

This proposal is not an attempt to find a center between opposing views. Rather, amid the rush to remove these monuments in the wake of Charlottesville, it aims to ensure that the force of the critique of the monuments lasts. The ideal monument bears witness to its conflicting histories. To confess to their origins but also make known the abrupt shift in their public reception, all forsaken Confederate sites should retain some visual citation of the discourse surrounding their removal.

The monuments cannot be left undisturbed. To do so is to condone the agenda they were built to advance. Those who have expressed concern over the preservation of local or national heritage should be content to find the deposed statues, steles, and plaques reinstalled in civic museums. There, educators, informed by local communities, can provide these artifacts of institutionalized racial violence and oppression with the historical context and critical interpretation they require.

On the other hand, total removal of the monuments sends but a fleeting statement. Its effect can only be sustained so long as the memory of what was erased and why endures.<sup>2</sup>

The objective is not to wipe the monuments from the historical record. Rather, it is to demonstrate, through overt actions, a collective condemnation of what they stand for. This is to say that the more powerful statement lies not in the aftermath of a monument's destruction but in the act of destroying it. This act merits its own memorialization, and in conspicuous terms.

Art history offers many diverse examples in which an object or image was intentionally preserved in pieces so as to call attention to the fact that it had been broken.

During the Middle Ages in Europe and the Mediterranean basin, iconoclastic factions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were known to sometimes leave visible traces of the very images they abolished on display in their own places of worship. The public censure of formerly acceptable images is showcased in the mosaic floors of several Late Antique synagogues located today in the West Bank. At Na'aran, near Jericho, all depictions of humans, animals, and zodiacal symbols have been cut away in conspicuous fashion, leaving the blank silhouettes of

1. Much of my thinking on this topic was prompted by the classic essay on monuments by Alois Riegl, originally published as *Moderne Denkmalkultur: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (Wien: K. K. Zentral-Kommission für Kunst- und Historische Denkmale; Braumüller, 1903); and translated by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo as "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origins," *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982), pp. 21–51. I am grateful to Charles Barber, Hal Foster, and Bryony Roberts for reading previous drafts of this essay.

2. On this point, see the essay titled "Monuments" in *Robert Musil, Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, trans. Peter Wortsman (Hygiene, CO: Eriadnos Press, 1988), pp. 61–64.



*Excised image of Leo. Na'aran,  
West Bank. Circa fifth century CE.*

the excised figures, together with their identifying inscriptions, on view.<sup>3</sup> For example, in the representation of Leo, the body of the figure was removed, while its paws, tail, and inscription were consciously retained.<sup>4</sup> Although spontaneous image-breaking did occur, iconoclasm was most often a deliberate process of removal prompted by larger political or cultural shifts. To those adhering literally to scriptural or Quranic prohibitions on idolatry, figural representation was considered an ethical problem that required lasting rebuke. I point to the medieval iconoclasts so as to draw attention to the strategy of monumentalizing the displacement of images in admonition of the images themselves.

Religious iconoclasts borrowed from the concepts and methods of *damnatio memoriae*, the catchall modern term for the ancient Roman political practice of cen-

3. Early-twentieth-century photograph courtesy of the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem.

4. On the Jewish iconoclasm at Na'aran, see Charles Barber, "The Truth in Painting: Iconoclasm and Identity in Early-Medieval Art," *Speculum* 72, no. 4 (1997), pp. 1019–36.

suring the names and images of persons deemed enemies of the state.<sup>5</sup> Translating literally to “condemnation of the memory,” *damnatio memoriae* aimed to posthumously negate its targets’ existences. Yet rather than wholesale destruction of the objects bearing a disgraced individual’s name or likeness, in many instances the Romans opted instead to surgically strike out the offending factors alone. Thus, the Senate might chisel away a specific name while leaving most of the inscription intact. Coins issued under deposed emperors might remain in circulation so long as the emperor’s face was crossed out or over-struck.<sup>6</sup> In effect, *damnatio memoriae* replaced the image of the malefactor with an image of his or her obliteration.

As institutions nationwide move toward dismantling their Confederate monuments, they might stop and consider the potency of putting fracture on public display. Take down the statues. Strip away all the dedicatory plaques. But keep some fragment on view and in situ to make the force of their removal present and perpetual. To remove the monuments outright risks eliminating the source of controversy without bringing forth any meaningful change. It gives institutions license to whitewash their histories by taking the evidence out of sight and out of mind.<sup>7</sup>

One solution is to leave behind the plinths, the architectonic platforms upon which the statues or sculpted pedestals rest. The sight of these cumbersome structures standing statueless in New Orleans, Baltimore, and elsewhere today is profound. Their vacancy makes a powerful statement, particularly when situated in prominent settings within their respective cities.

The bronze dedications should be removed along with the statues. The names of figures, however, might remain. A plinth with an inscription reading ROBERT EDWARD LEE, juxtaposed with Lee’s missing effigy, further underscores the Confederate general’s fallen stature. Many of these dismembered monuments will be eyesores—this is an advantage. While they may not be popular stops on guided city walks or campus tours, the empty plinths will make a strong visual statement about the decision, made by later generations, to stamp the original messages of these monuments out.

By preserving the Confederate monuments in a fractured, statueless state, we testify to their conflicting histories using the fabric of the monuments themselves. Relieved of their original, often vicious, commemorative intentions, they become new monuments, imbued with a new purpose, aligned with contemporary values. In such a way, removing the statues is not just a destructive act but a creative one.

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5. For an overview, see especially Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), chapter 1.

6. Ibid, p. 51.

7. For one recent example, see “Vanderbilt Pays \$1.2M to Remove ‘Confederate’ from Dorm Name,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2016.

THOMAS J. LAX

What would a monument to ending sexual assault look like? How do histories of sexual violence (sidebar: Is there a kind of violence that isn't sexual?) already live in public memorials everywhere around us? How do artists reroute and reassign value to these signposts of death and terror in order to create a visual language and material culture adapted to the demands of mourning and grief by cannibalizing the effects of loss lived every day?

When choreographer, artist, and amateur ethnographer Ralph Lemon was traveling across the American South visiting sites of mass protest and of unmarked lynchings for his work *Come Home Charley Patton* (2004), he created miniature vignettes that he left behind in his motel rooms—captured in photographs and published in his book of the same name. In one, a mass-produced white debutante figurine in a gown whose head has been removed or decapitated sits beside a stuffed duck or goose on a rock; both are placed on a carpet of Cocoa Puffs. In another, a green toy soldier lays head down beside a mound of Froot Loops. Lemon describes these as “counter-memorials”—scenes whose relationship to



*Ralph Lemon. Untitled. 2001.*





Geo Wyeth. *Quartered*. 2014.

American history is at once literal and meaningless, irreverent and carefully staged. Sitting without a plaque, caption, or audience, except maybe for the motel cleaning people who might stumble upon it, these unseen still lifes are the inversion of the spectacular scenes of historical trauma and violence the artist also visited. The ineffable murmurs in what is withheld in these two counter-memorials mirror the excesses of the overstated expectations of, for example, the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, 1965. Both refuse to fully picture a referent: They obscure the knowability of trauma. And in doing so, they mark an absence, a hollow space, a hole that the audience experiences as a feeling of nothingness, a loss that is everywhere present in the ground of American history.

Geo Wyeth's 2014 *Quartered* is an approximately thirty-minute video that brings together experimental approaches to documentary film with 1970s black feminist Southern literature and musical theater.<sup>1</sup> The video is the result of two research trips Wyeth took to Heath Springs, South Carolina, where he was drawn toward what local residents call "sensitivities" or "witches."<sup>2</sup> There, the artist investigated the legacy of his great-great-great-grandfather: James Marion Sims, a nineteenth-century gynecologist noted for gruesome surgical experimentations on enslaved African-American women. Trained as a musician and songwriter, Wyeth researched his ancestral origins in a purposefully thwarted attempt to reconcile his experience as a biracial, transgender man who is—according to him—often mistaken as white. The video presents the artist as both the omniscient, Robert Stack-

1. This description follows my essay on monumentality in public art, "From New York, Southward: A Counter-Memorial," in *Mousse* 44 (Summer 2014).

2. Geo Wyeth, artist statement.

like narrator as well as the Shard of Light, a mythological figure who uses the pronoun she/her and wears a gold lamé skirt, a black wig, and a gold Eye of Providence. The Shard travels between various times and places and has suffered an unknown trauma at the hands of Sims, who is both her father and lover. As she inhabits the landscape where Sims lived and worked, she meanders through the rural town and builds bombs. As she meets with seers who recount past traumas through a lo-fi vocoder—"a very heavy presence," "a horrible scent in the building," "the impression of a hanging"—the video culminates with the Shard performing a wordless song in a parking lot at an electric piano that names the trauma only through the melodic calls the artist makes for a resolution that will not come. At once a memorial to the victims of Sims's experiments and a riposte to Sims himself, Wyeth's video and performance limn what Jamillah James has called "the personal and mythological; the everyday and the uncanny; queer optimism, futurity and the historic; and self-determination and the biological, even when visiting those spaces reveals embedded trauma or violence."<sup>3</sup>

Lemon's counter-memorials and Wyeth's sensitivities or witches suggest that despite the totalizing force of the genre, monuments—or rather acts of memorialization—can nevertheless hold out the possibility of recurrence necessary for meaningful redress. These forms of history-making already exist in our ordinary intimate lives, they point out. While distinct from a statist public culture that attempts to guarantee the safeguarding of official history—a plaque to Bloody Sunday, or James Marion Sims's statue in Central Park, for example—these seemingly small and ephemeral acts of custodianship are social, shared acts of remembrance and recollection that burrow through lore, hearsay, and vernacular culture. What these two artists share is an Afro-futurist (another sidebar: The term is redundant, but worth each inflection, much like a double negative) form of monumentalization. This cosmic invocation isn't simply a nod to Lemon costuming his performers in space suits or Wyeth dressing himself in gold lamé. Each has made a speculative monument—a spectral monument to a historic wrong that is imagined for a future made available and manifest in the here and now. As a result, the forms of public embodiment typically assumed to inhere within the genre of the monument—the nation-state, a heroic individual—are diffused across a messy assemblage of entangled people living their lives through routine, sometimes indecipherable gestures.

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3. Jamillah James, "Geo Wyeth," in Thomas J. Lax, *When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination and the American South* (New York: the Studio Museum in Harlem), p. 103.

AN-MYLÊ



*An-My Lê*. Monument: General P.G.T. Beauregard,  
New Orleans, Louisiana. 2016.



*Lê*. Monument: General  
P.G.T. Beauregard and  
General Robert E. Lee, New  
Orleans, Louisiana. 2017.

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SARAH LEWIS\*

Standing next to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial facing the Jefferson Memorial is a span of meters that allows the mind to consider the conditional tense, specifically the future-real conditional. It inspires a consideration of what will, and even must, have had to happen here, on this soil, in this country, for these two monuments to be set in relationship to one another. Tina Campt reminds us that in the context of race, possibility comes from an examination of not just the future tense—*what will be*—or even the future-perfect tense—*that which will have happened*—but the future-real conditional, or *that which will have had to happen*. It is, as she argues, an orientation toward what “should be true . . . it involves living the future now—as an imperative rather than subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.”<sup>1</sup> The future-real conditional is a tense we don’t use often in conversation, but we do use it conceptually as we think about race and possibility. It is a tense that can arise, for example, when we pass (or when, generations from now, pedestrians pass), say, the Harvard Law School monument on the plaza dedicated to honor the role that slav-



*Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial  
facing the Jefferson Memorial.*

\* Adapted from remarks delivered on the occasion of the “On Monuments” symposium, Harvard University, February 27, 2018, in honor of President Drew Faust.

1. Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 17.



*Harvard Law School monument.  
Photograph by Jon Chase.*

ery played in the creation of the institution and ask what must have had to happen here for this to exist? A monument often forces this question out of its audience.

The topic of race and monuments in the American context requires such interrogatives born of the conditional tense if we are to understand the futurity of the practice in the United States. Now, you could imagine that by this question of tense, we could address the historical stratification of monuments—the material foundations. In the context of New York City, my hometown, I could talk about this in terms of Central Park and its foundations built on Seneca Village, destroyed in 1857, or Wall Street, built on the African Burial Ground. But those examples are not precisely what I'm after. Instead, I want to excavate the often hidden social, racial, and systemic conditions and strata that prevent figurative entrance into the category of American monuments for some and permit it for others. That is to say, I'm interested in how monuments are predetermined by a notion of belonging that is inscribed into aesthetic conventions.

To address this claim, I'd like to focus on narrative refusals, moments when a proposed monument could not be realized because of the tension between race, aesthetics, and form brought on by our failure to consider this conditional tense. Understanding why this is so requires revisiting the foundations born out of the Civil War, when civic society struggled to handle the new associations between freedom and race in the very composition and materiality of monuments.

*Bree Newsome takes down the Confederate flag from a pole at the statehouse in Columbia, South Carolina, June 27, 2015. Photograph by REUTERS/Adam Anderson.*



Let's consider the South Carolina statehouse as a case study in the conditional tense, the building often compositionally set behind the news of filmmaker, musician, and activist Brittany "Bree" Newsome scaling a thirty-foot flagpole in Columbia, South Carolina, in the dawn hours to take down the Confederate flag in 2015. I confess that I am struck by something seemingly unremarkable in the image—the blank pediment. Like many of us, I was also focused on the surrounding politics and tragedy. The day before, President Barack Obama had eulogized South Carolina state senator Rev. Clementa Pinckney, one of the nine churchgoers murdered at Emmanuel Baptist Church during evening Bible study in Charleston. During that funeral, the American flag was flying at half-mast, as was the South Carolina state flag. Yet the Confederate flag, raised in 1961 as a counterstatement to the civil-rights movement, was still flying high. Obama called for the removal of that flag from the South Carolina statehouse. The NAACP had been calling for its removal for at least fifteen years.

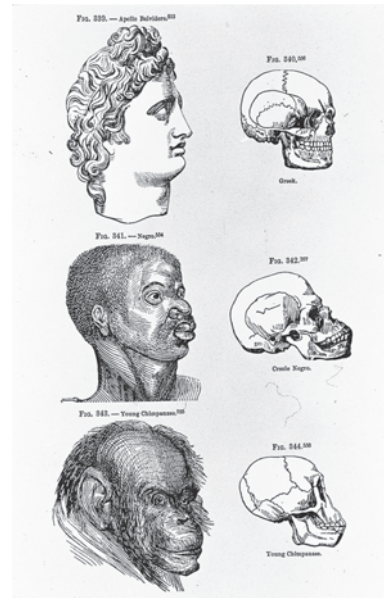
Yet as I looked at the picture, I was largely focused on the blank pediment and the impossibly perfect diptych that her body created with it—her figure seemed to fit precisely in the apex of the tympanum. Bree Newsome, herself the daughter of Howard University's Divinity School dean Clarence G. Newsome, had worked in concert with ten other activists, including a Greenpeace activist who knew what it meant to scale trees. She also deliberately chose to scale the fence with a white man, activist James Ian Tyson, to signify that their group was working across racial and gender lines. The team decided that the symbol of a black figurative form was necessary for the act, a figure that would be shown at that pediment's height. There, her body seemed to stand in for the figurative elements I imagined, or rather wondered about, being emblazoned on that statehouse pediment. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?" Newsome said as she lowered herself down, released herself to the authorities, and was arrested.

From Kirk Savage's scholarship we know that the pediment was never meant to be left bare. The Civil War interrupted the project then underway that would have made it the grandest pediment outside of the capital, requiring half of the South Carolina state budget over several years. The Northern abolitionist sculptor Henry Kirke Brown received the commission. He had proposed pediment models before, including one in 1855 for the US Capitol in Washington that included enslaved figures, and was rejected. In 1859, when Brown was asked to work to create portrait medallions of two pro-slavery advocates, which went against his own politics, he was also asked to create a facade for the ninety-foot-long South Carolina statehouse pediment to sweeten the offer, one that again included enslaved figures.

The Civil War intervened. The project was halted. Brown moved back North. The pediment is still blank to this day.

South Carolina's long-unrealized pediment project emblemizes our work and the need to acknowledge the constantly forestalled futurity of the project to effect a relationship between race, figuration, and monuments. Part of the reason for this forestalled condition is that we have yet to interrogate how sculpture has been marshalled to delimit racial categories. The form, the material, the very concept of a monument is part of the way in which culture has served to delineate social strata, to literalize our visual sense of who counts in society.

Frederick Douglass knew it, lecturing as he did in 1854 about this marriage between racial science, aesthetics, and monuments years before his now better-known speeches about the importance of pictures and photographs for America's self-comprehension. For all of the focus on photography, we may forget that Douglass was also attuned to the use of sculpture in the American School of Ethnology's argument for polygenesis. In his library he had the then widely circulated anthropological racial treatise by George Gliddon and Josiah Nott, *Types of Mankind*, which used the head of the Apollo Belvedere, the highly celebrated work from classical antiquity championed as the Greek aesthetic ideal, as a representation of whiteness. As Savage reminds us, "Classical sculpture served as the benchmark of whiteness and, indeed, served that function over and over again in the writings of the racial taxonomists. The importance of the aesthetic dimension of racial theory cannot be overemphasized, and sculpture served as the aesthetic standard."<sup>2</sup> So,



J. C. Nott and George Gliddon.  
*Types of Mankind (detail)*. 1856.

2. Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 11.





John Quincy Adams Ward.  
The Freedman. 1863.

through the landmark work of Henry Kirke Brown's pupil John Quincy Adams Ward—*The Freedman*. This is the first bronze statuette of an African-American in the United States. It is small, just two feet tall. It appeared in New York at the National Academy of Design's spring exhibition months after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

Ward's *Freedman* represents a narrative, conceptual impossibility. Some critics began to suggest that it should become a public monument, even one that would be placed in the Capitol. Ward then had the plaster work produced in bronze and sold to subscribers. If realized, this would have been the first monument to an African-American man in the United States.

The monument never happened.

Emancipation had to enter sculpture through alternate means, through the body of Abraham Lincoln. Ward never again sculpted a black male form. His sculpture embodied uncertainties about post-emancipation life. The figure's nudity in the eyes of critics was now not a sign of heroism but of vulnerability. The figure does still bear the marks of subjugation: the broken shackle on his left wrist. Public monuments were meant to historicize, but emancipation asked citizens to consider futurity. This enterprise challenged sculptors, which we see translated

parenthetically, I should say that works such as these that we celebrate as sculptures, often neutralized from their contextual usage, could in fact be considered racial monuments, so large do they loom in the civic realm of the nineteenth century to solidify and shore up a definitive conclusion in the literature and theories about racial superiority. Yet my main point here is that monuments are predetermined by conditions, a hardened notion of belonging inscribed into aesthetic conventions with which we have not yet contended as a field.

So deeply is the conditional tense embedded into the material limits of monument-making that it has led to narrative refusals, moments when a proposed monument could not be realized because of the tension between race, form, and futurity. A final way to consider this comes to us

*Harvard President Drew Faust, left, and Congressman John Lewis unveil a plaque at Harvard's Wadsworth House honoring four slaves who had been owned by and worked for Harvard's past presidents, April 6, 2016. Photograph by Keith Bedford / Boston Globe via AP.*



through the indeterminate action of *The Freedman*. One is not sure if he is kneeling or about to rise.

There is a tense to monuments set within America's structurally racialized landscape. Ward's *Freedman* monument could have existed, but there was a conceptual limit: That which would have had to have happened had not yet occurred.

How do we account for the conditions that make monuments possible? Addressing this question represents our unfinished project. It is also work we have begun. This conditional tense is, I believe, what has created such anticipation around the 2018 Equal Justice Initiative Memorial to Peace and Justice. Taking conditionality quite seriously is what has inspired initiatives like the Black Monuments Project. It is what can let us start to reframe works—such as the Wadsworth plaque at Harvard University, dedicated by John Lewis and Drew Gilpin Faust, honoring the enslaved men and women who served two Harvard presidents—as in fact if not a monument, mark-making that is monumental. Here you're seeing how it invites the kind of immersive concentration that, as Jennifer Roberts has so eloquently described, can occur when engaging with a work of art and that you see occurring here as John Lewis turns to meditate on the power of that moment. The relationship between race and monuments reminds us that we live in a very specific tense, and not addressing it has led to tension and violence. Without this conditional tense, monuments can seem inert, as emblemized by Elihu Vedder's painting *The Questioner of the Sphinx* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, created during the Civil War.

If we are to understand which narratives about race and citizenship are created by monuments, we need to focus on considering their temporality anew. Do they historicize events or do they signal a narrative of futurity, an order, a narrative that will define a path of civic life? In the context of race, do American monuments truly offer a sense of fixity or do they mainly express a desire for it?

Even the composition of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial reminds us of

the need to grapple with this question. King's figure is set apart as a separate block of granite, as if having been cut from the rock behind it and placed in front. Yet, no matter the vantage point you take on the King memorial, neither the eye nor the camera can resolve a perspective such that it fits back into the rough-hewn stone. The linearity is broken. This perspectival riddle is fitting. Monuments shift our sense of the linear flow of tense—what was and what will be—to this conditional imperative, a futurity that alters our sense of what the relationship between race and history should be and will have to be to permit new possibilities.



*Elihu Vedder. The Questioner of the Sphinx. 1863.*

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ALEX LICHTENSTEIN and ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN

Ascertaining meaning in a conflict-ridden and violent past—and giving it corporeal form as a monument, a statue, a state marker, a historical designation, a museum—is always fraught with power and beset by contending pressures from the state, civic groups, commercial interests, and individuals with a stake in local historical interpretations and in the consecration of memory. Those who complain that the removal of statues or monuments, the renaming of buildings or streets, or the reinterpretation of historical sites discards “history” fail to acknowledge that these are always representations and interpretations of the past, not the past itself. Nevertheless, the desire for physical proximity to the geography of the past—and the frequent claim to authenticity embodied in those physical spaces—underlies the ongoing mania for “heritage,” preservation, memorialization, and reenactment that constitutes much contemporary public engagement with history.

For seven years, my brother Andrew has journeyed throughout the United States, using his camera to document infamous historical sites. His photographs of the confluence of landscape, event, and memory are no simple doorway into an unmediated past. Andrew’s documentation of “sites of memory,” as French historian Pierre Nora famously called them, explores the interstices between public remembering and public forgetting at locations of violent racial trauma in American history. While Andrew has traveled with his camera, I have spent my career digging in historical archives, unearthing past struggles for racial justice in both the United States and South Africa. Yet I remain disquieted by the sense that the academic accounts such research produces have little impact. As a result, I have increasingly been drawn to visual modes of historical narrative.

These intersecting sensibilities led us to our collaborative project, *Marked, Unmarked, Remembered: A Geography of American Memory*, which brings into a single frame visual and textual representations of the remnants of a past too many Americans would prefer to forget. Some of the sites we document and discuss are boldly marked, given an imprimatur as part of a “national heritage” by federal, state, and local authorities. Others remain largely forgotten—or at least unmarked, and thus not immediately visible to the casual observer. Finally, whether marked or unmarked, remembered or forgotten, many of the sites Andrew visited serve as the meeting point for active rituals of organized memory, attempts to resist the national bad habit of amnesia when it comes to some of the more unsavory aspects of the settler colonialism and racial trauma so central to the history of colonial America and the United States.

Above all, monuments—whether marked or unmarked, whether celebrated or forgotten—remain mute until imbued with meaning by human actors, as many of the photographs in our book attest. Places resonant with historical meaning only acquire significance when people organize their public, commemorative face, although not always with the official stamp of state authorities. Indeed, it would be a mistake to conclude that “unmarked” sites of memory have simply been forgot-

ten. In the absence of official recognition, these sites remain a singular part of a local “social memory” for particular communities, sometimes surreptitiously so. If the spot at which a black person was lynched has been “forgotten” by local whites—indeed, if the public memory of the event, as dictated by whites, has been expunged—you can be sure that the local black community remembers. When racist graffiti appears in the same spot a century after a notorious lynching, is this a sign of deep social amnesia or, more sinisterly, covert memory passed down from the original perpetrators?

### *Ghosts*



### East Money, Mississippi

It is true that the store where fourteen-year-old Emmett Till allegedly whistled at a white woman is officially recognized by the state of Mississippi. But nothing marks this nearby derelict church where Till’s great-uncle, sharecropper and lay preacher Mose Wright, worshipped and preached. After Till was murdered by whites for his supposed offense, Wright identified his two killers in open court; his courageous act could be considered the birth of the modern civil-rights movement. After his testimony, Wright immediately fled to Chicago, knowing that retaliation in Money, Mississippi, would be swift and brutal.

*Mimesis*

## Charleston, South Carolina

Memorialization is often about claiming a physical space and investing it with historical meaning—sometimes with divergent intentions. Andrew traveled to Charleston to photograph the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the key site of African-American life in Charleston at the time of the 1822 slave revolt. Led by Denmark Vesey, a highly religious man and class leader at the AME church, the rebellion came after authorities fearful of African gathering places harassed Vesey's church and its members. Three years after this photograph was taken, white supremacist Dylann Roof made a murderous pilgrimage to the same spot for a very different purpose. But his actions drew on a deep well of American memories of racial violence and hatred.

*Sacrilege*

## Okemah, Oklahoma

In May 1911, a mob removed Laura and L. D. Nelson from the Okemah jail before they could come to trial. The next morning, their bodies were found hanging from a railroad bridge over the Canadian River, six miles outside of town. As was usually the case with such lynchings of blacks by white vigilante mobs, no one was ever brought to justice for this crime. Like thousands of other lynchings, no public acknowledgment of this atrocity marks this location.

Though the Nelson lynching is largely forgotten now, the atrocity was widely known at the time. A photograph of the Nelsons' hanged bodies subsequently circulated as a grisly "souvenir" postcard. There is no way to know if the perpetrators of the Nazi and Klan graffiti now defacing the concrete bridge support near where Laura and L. D. Nelson's bodies dangled are aware of this brutal history.

*Reappropriation*

## Montgomery, Alabama

Confederate Civil War reenactors joined in the commemorative events in Montgomery in 2011 on the 150th anniversary of Jefferson Davis's inauguration in that city, the first capital of the newly created Confederate States of America. Perhaps by coincidence, these three women in Confederate garb waiting for the rally to begin sit on the very bench where civil-rights activist Rosa Parks boarded the city bus she was arrested on in 1955. The arrest of Ms. Parks touched off the yearlong Montgomery Bus Boycott, resulting in the desegregation of the city's buses. Such reappropriation can be almost comical in its disingenuousness. Yet our laughter might be tempered by the amnesiac power of competing forms of commemoration.



*Ritual*



Memphis, Tennessee

Other memory-sites are quite well known, indeed iconic. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated by white supremacist James Earl Ray while standing on the balcony outside of his room at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. The motel has been preserved, and is now the National Civil Rights Museum. But even these sites depend on human intervention to constantly renew their meaning. A testimony to the civil-rights struggle, but also a cenotaph to King's martyrdom, the Lorraine Motel serves as a site of annual remembrance.

King had come to Memphis to support striking black sanitation workers. Every year on the anniversary of King's murder, a memorial ceremony is held at the museum, and every year the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who was with King the day he died, attends the event. In this photograph, Jackson embraces Elmore Nickleberry, one of the original striking sanitation workers, after attending the brief ceremony in King's memory.

*Contestation*

## Charles Town, West Virginia

We associate memorial culture with particular physical sites, but sometimes these can obscure as much as they reveal. Harper's Ferry, for example, where in October 1859 abolitionist John Brown led a band of twenty-one of his followers on a raid of the federal arsenal in Western Virginia, is a National Historic Park. To be sure, John Brown and his fellow radical abolitionists get their due as antislavery warriors. Yet an older marker remains, installed by the Daughters of the Confederacy in the 1920s, in memory of an "industrious and respected colored freeman" who died in the raid and exemplified the "faithfulness" of those "negroes" who did not take up arms against their masters. Here, too, memory is contested. In fact, Brown's short-lived rebellion became a potent symbol of the African-American struggle for liberty. On the 150th anniversary of the Harper's Ferry raid, the local NAACP honored the memory of John Brown and the descendants of his fellow abolitionists in a procession from the jailhouse to the site of the gallows where he was hung for treason, in Charles Town, seven miles down the road from Harper's Ferry.

*Redemption*



Waco, Texas

In 1916, a black teenager, Jesse Washington, was accused of murdering a local white farmer's wife. A mob broke into the McLennan County courthouse at the conclusion of his trial—he was found guilty—and marched him to Waco's central square in front of City Hall. There, a crowd of fifteen thousand citizens, including city officials and children, tortured him to death. No members of the mob were charged with a crime. Washington's murder remains one of the more infamous spectacle lynchings in America; a local professional photographer documented the entire event from the balcony of the mayor's office and sold the images as "souvenir" postcards.

Exactly one hundred years later, the mayor of Waco officially apologized to some of Washington's descendants at a ceremony held at a community center. After the ceremony, the family came to visit the scene of the crime. The local NAACP then filed with the state of Texas to erect a historical marker on the site.

*Now*



### Ferguson, Missouri

How will our own present be commemorated when it becomes the past? How will future generations honor the memory of today's victims of police violence and brutality? This impromptu, vernacular memorial to Michael Brown, thrown up like a revolutionary barricade in the street in Ferguson, near where he was shot to death by a white policeman and his body lay on the bloodstained pavement, is but a temporary marker. Yet it is a powerful testimony to the undying human need to give physical space mnemonic meaning.

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## GREIL MARCUS

It's been said that if we take down statues of Robert E. Lee and even Nathan Bedford Forrest, we need to take down statues of Washington and Jefferson. The meaning of this argument is simple: Shut up. The counter-argument is equally simple: Lee, Forrest, and every other Confederate general or political leader were traitors. Washington and Jefferson created the nation they tried to destroy. There's no comparison and no commonality.

That's true, but it's not the whole truth, and the truth isn't simple. In Washington and Jefferson's time what we call white supremacy was accepted by almost all white people everywhere. New York only banned slavery in the 1820s. There were slaves held in New Jersey throughout the Civil War. Black people were not permitted on New York streetcars until a woman broke the color line in the 1850s, and not in Philadelphia until the same thing happened early in the twentieth century. Schools were segregated in parts of New Jersey into the 1950s. Black people were routinely refused entry to hotels, restaurants, and movie theaters in the north into the 1960s. For Washington or Jefferson to have taken abolitionist stances would have been not merely unusual but considered insane.

Both Washington and Jefferson had to hold together an extremely fragile coalition of states that many considered an experiment, and an experiment likely to fail. After Jefferson's election, there was a serious threat of secession by New England Federalists, and the more dubious Burr conspiracy to establish a separate nation in the Midwest. The principle of federalism—that federal laws are the law of the land—wasn't in any way fixed until the early nineteenth century, leading directly to the Interposition and Nullification movements in the 1830s, their revival in the 1960s, and the resistance to federalism that continues today in the West and the South. The Bill of Rights was in the main not applied to state and local governments until a series of twentieth-century Supreme Court decisions, the legitimacy of which is still denied by any number of federal judges, including Justice Clarence Thomas.

Throughout Lincoln's speeches, from the 1838 Address to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, Illinois, to the Gettysburg Address and after, there is a continual and passionate awareness of this fragility, this sense of experiment: In the Gettysburg Address the subject is jeopardy as an unavoidable, and in that sense essential, component of democratic, as opposed to despotic, government. And there is a great irony. Without the Louisiana Purchase by the Jefferson administration in 1803, the Civil War, if confined to something like the original states, would likely have turned out differently. By expanding the nation, *de jure*, to include Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Colorado, Wyoming, and so on, even though the flash point for the Civil War was the debate over the expansion of slavery into Kansas and Nebraska, Jefferson in effect made the United States too big to fail.

It's easy enough, from perspectives that don't accept the white-nationalist, KKK, and Nazi discourse that has been adopted by the current president of the United States, to refute his argument that if we pull down Forrest we have to blow up Jefferson. But the nation should go further and acknowledge the fullness of who Washington, Jefferson, and so many other founders actually were. Statues of Washington and Jefferson ought to list "slaveholder" along with their other accomplishments, and let people think that through. It won't happen. But it would take away from them what was, in history as it can be understood now, never theirs, and, as a nation, never ours.

GREIL MARCUS is the author of *Lipstick Traces* (Harvard, 1990), recently reissued in Paris by Editions Allia in an updated and redesigned edition. He lives in Oakland.

ACHILLE MBEMBE and SARAH NUTTALL

*Sarah Nuttall:* It is now clear that we need to think about monuments differently from the way we have in the past. And to think about the taking down of monuments in registers other than those that have generally repeated themselves for a long time. Monuments are founded on a notion of political time, but seldom do they themselves take political time seriously: that is, the notion that time is political, when it comes to memorialization, and that it is never immemorial; it changes as society changes. I remember the moment the news arrived one evening at our house in Johannesburg, about the assault on the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, and the call for it to fall. I knew immediately that it was the right time, the time for the cut, the mark of an end, latent in the culture, of a political time. It was immediately generative of thought, politics, imagination, history. It set my South African mind alight.

I think that monuments ought to be built now with an inbuilt understanding that they are interventions of sorts, temporary exhibits of a kind, that stand or fall on what they have to communicate and that must face the possibility of their demise, replaced by a better set of occasions for public thought. Part of the power to grace a public space and speak for the past in the present is the graciousness to move on or be removed. But nevertheless remembered. In the form of a permanent exhibit in a cool and dry place where people can go to consult you for what you had to say at the time, in that manner, where you have the potential to shock, produce reflection, or be resuscitated from oblivion in the form of writing, perhaps, or curatorial projects which offer you other contexts from which to stand your ground. Monuments should be archived; it is only archives to which we accord monumental time, the power to preside over the past. Or is this the worst possible version of growing old?

Who decides when a monument ought to be replaced, excised, critiqued, or even destroyed? One could say that it should be decided at the intersection between ongoing processes of political contestation and the gathering or assembling of public opinion. At an unpredictable moment of ignition via a consolidated act or expression; an intensification we recognize through its power to speak to the changing of time. Coupled with the emergence into twenty-first-century life of an anti-monumentality which understands a contemporary monument to be an intervention into the power of place, in the name of time and subject to the force of change. I see that such a view is susceptible to capture by the Right, so to be rigorously contested by the Left. What do you think?

*Achille Mbembe:* I used to think that there is only one legitimate place where monuments belong—a museum-like enclosure where these material artifacts

would be curated and properly contextualized. But of late and in relation to monumentality, I have become rather an anarchist.

By definition, monuments mean nothing a priori. In the first instance, a monument is nothing but a bundle of matter designed by humans and made public by virtue of occupying a space of visibility. It might be that what any monument means in the first instance is but the matter of which it is made: iron, stone, metal, gold, silver, or copper. In this sense, monuments gesture toward the mineral and geological, that which is called upon to last as long as possible.

Eventually monuments also speak to the human figures in the image of whom they are created. For instance, in the city of Brussels, the monumental statue of King Leopold II, the predator of the Congo, is supposed to evoke the story of this sovereign filibuster—who he was, what he accomplished during his lifetime that should never be forgotten, that should permanently remain in the public mind, since it is assumed that monuments should never be destroyed. Because they are the expression of humans' longing for eternity or immortality envy, in principle they defeat and transcend time as such. Through them we delegate to the inert, the geological, the mineral, and the indestructible that which otherwise might be but ephemeral, in this case life itself.

What strikes me these days is the sheer vanity and stupidity of almost every single public monument, as well as the vacuity of the concept and practice of monumentality. Indeed, there is nothing, no material artifact on this Earth, that cannot be defeated by time. In relation to time, there is no immunity. Time alone is timeless. Everything else, humans and nonhumans included, is doomed to destruction. There is nothing that has no end. Everything will end.

To assuage our fear of extinction might well be the ultimate function of monuments. In this they hardly succeed. In an age without heroes, they will succeed even less. So to a large extent I am in agreement with you. Let me add but one thing. Memory does not entirely depend on monuments to be kept alive. Not all monuments represent past human figures. There is no memory which fully escapes the corrosive effect of time. This is the reason why to forget is an ordinary act and not simply the failure of our faculties. We have to learn to remember in the absence of monuments and of traces. With the urge to destroy that is engulfing our world, many of us will be more and more forced to remember in the absence of any trace because all traces will have either disappeared or will have been erased. Our monuments will have been turned into piles of rubble, unrecyclable waste, or dust.



*Nuttall:* It is interesting to me that while the statue of Rhodes was being forcibly removed from its lofty plinth, backed up by a majestic mountain, it became newly apparent that Wits University, where we work, has no statues. Being freshly aware of their absence, I didn't miss them. I have also been thinking about Mikhael Subotzky, one of South Africa's most talented photographers, and his recent exit from photography. First he made an elegant allegorical study of his own eyes in a series called *Retinal Shift*, dramatizing what he couldn't see when his retinas were filmed close up, implicitly what he couldn't see as a white South African. Then he smashed these photographs and exhibited them. Now, in a recent interview, he says he has come out from the project of photography altogether, finding it too fraught a practice for him to sustain any longer. For him, then, an art of the empty wall. Might there be a place for an art of the empty wall, a statue-less university? After students burned works of art that day at UCT, I began to notice with renewed clarity how all kinds of seminar rooms appeared to somewhat randomly hang art, or satirical cartoons, or objects, around the place. It suddenly begun to appear at least at times as a parade of oddities not receptive as such to histories of racialization.

Most people think that the best thing to do when monuments die is to make them live again, to defy political time. So when it came to the question of the statue of Rhodes at Oriel College Oxford, it was suggested, by Matthew Parris, that another statue, of Lobengula, the king of the Matabele people whom Rhodes subjugated, should be erected in his line of sight. Rhodes would not be removed, but confronted. Seen from the volatility of South Africa, that suggestion still seems, despite its good intentions, somewhat pious. Perhaps different places, though, need different statues, including, at times, none at all.

*Mbembe:* I have hardly ever been moved by a monument, especially those monuments meant to commemorate so-called heroes who, too often, also happen to be bandits and murderers. The only thing closer to a monument that has ever moved me is a grave, the zero world of the grave, that ordinary scene of radical equality. The grave, in its simplest manifestation, is the only monument humans should be allowed to offer to themselves. Everything else is superfluous. Everything else is but a testimony to our reluctance to go. What we need to capture or to chase is the spirit. And yet, the spirit can never be fully captured or chased by the matter, or by the matter alone.

*Nuttall:* I was in discussion the other evening with Jay Pather, who heads the committee to review, or rather to reinvent, the University of Cape Town's

monuments, statues, and art collections. He told me that in total the collection numbered about 1,800 objects, 3,000 if one included items loaned from other collections, which is vast. He and his committee are now redesigning—re-curating, I guess—the entire campus as a public aesthetic space, and in some instances replacing paintings and statues with other kinds of “live art,” including video installations and performance pieces. It must be an exciting job to have. It draws closer to an idea of a university that is most alive when it speaks to—not for—its younger generation. Still, this radical act of curation will have to find ways not to lose the chance to see and know and listen to the passing of time, a call to time passing, which is in itself such a powerful way of learning about the world and the self. Ways to chase the spirit, as you say.

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## NAEEM MOHAIEMEN

The man wakes up in an unfamiliar city. Bicycle bells, footsteps, and strange sounds seep in. It is hot, sweaty, and only seven in the morning. The guide arrives, it is time. The man is blindfolded, and the two set out in a car. Not a hostage exactly, but his host wants him to have full sensory deprivation before the reveal. This is the story I heard later, who knows if it is apocryphal.

Soon they are on the grand lawn. Wet dew seeps through his sneakers. The guide, an older architect, takes the blindfold off. Blinking into the sunlight, the visitor stares at a building, rising out of a moat of perpendicular canals. He stares for a long moment. Quietly, he begins to cry.

The visitor is Nathaniel Kahn, and the building is the Sangsad Bhaban—centerpiece of Louis Kahn’s National Capital Complex in Dhaka. The film *My Architect* (2003) was the claiming of Louis Kahn by his unclaimed, unofficial son. Nathaniel found his patrimony in the sunlight streaming through the Kimbell Museum roof, the geometry of Exeter’s library, unfinished designs for a Holocaust memorial, and the dewy mornings surrounding the Sangshad Bhaban.

“I knew that when I was in Dhaka, the film was over.”

Kahn’s was an unfinished life. His career was interrupted (he was laid off while completing drawings for the Washington, D.C., Justice Department building), late blooming (his first commission was for Yale University Art Gallery in his fifties), and truncated (his 1974 death in Penn Station left a firm in debt). Fund shortfalls, changed priorities, project overload, and sudden death left several ambitious projects incomplete. The Vladimir Ilyich Lenin Memorial in the Soviet Union (1932), the US consulate in Luanda (1959), and the Memorial to Six Million Jewish Martyrs in New York (1968) were drawings that stayed on paper. New York’s Four Freedoms Park was designed in 1974 and completed in 2012 after Nathaniel’s film generated fund-raising interest. As for the Sangsad Bhaban in Bangladesh (started in 1961, completed in 1982), national politics intervened forcefully to almost kill the building.

In the 1960s, tensions between the two wings of Pakistan—East Pakistan (today’s Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (today’s Pakistan)—were at boiling point. Anxious to preserve national unity, military dictator Ayub Khan designated Dhaka in East Pakistan as a “second capital,” with Islamabad in West Pakistan retaining primacy as “first capital.” A second capital needed a grand administrative complex, and so the Sangsad Bhaban was commissioned. Kahn was invited by his former Yale student Muzharul Islam to work on the project, and construction began in 1961. Ironically, the breakdown of negotiations between the two wings of Pakistan in 1971, which led to the Bangladesh War, was partially around the demand that this symbolic “second capital” become the actual capital of all Pakistan. When the two Pakistans went to war, Kahn insisted on continuing until a collapsing security infrastructure halted construction.

Nathaniel said, “Everybody has a story about meeting a friend on the plaza, playing a game, being a child on the lawn, walking around the Crescent Lake,





*Zaid Islam. Post-Fence Sangsad Bhaban. 2018.*

exploring the areas where the streets go past the hostels.” But he was extraordinarily lucky with the timing of his visit. A few years later and he would have filmed his finale in a lonely fortress, empty of people, life, and energy. His last low-angle shot would have taken in a fence, past the legs of guns, police, and paramilitary forces. Security barriers would be everywhere. There would be no civilians within a frame of that film, certainly not the exuberant “Dhaka Morning Walkers’ Club” (one of whom mistakes Louis Kahn for Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam). Since 2006, the building has been dying, fatally surrounded by fences. The cage of national security.

Recently, a group of German architects came to visit Dhaka. Armed with university letters, ministry permissions, and VIP phone calls, they were allowed access to the inside grounds. A Bangladeshi friend wanted to join, as he had never been inside the Sangsad Bhaban. *How is that possible?* I asked, and he replied that there are no local tours of it anymore. “Remember,” he said, “you are older.”

It’s true—the tour I received was in the 1980s. Thousands of people thronging the Sangsad Bhaban grounds. Those who have not seen it will not be able to imagine that open city. Before the new normal took over.

I called up the leader of the German team and asked if my friend could join. She said that copies of passports had to be submitted to the authorities two weeks earlier. Slow time as a way of demonstrating *We are serious*. We stayed behind. Later they met us for dinner. My friend, who could only imagine the interior, had to depend on secondhand recollections. Wide-eyed stories of soaring beauty; sadness at a crumbling interior, absence of light, eerie stillness, sleeping cleaners. The only way he can enter the national parliament is with “foreigners.” The rest of you, go home. Wanting to take a morning walk, do adda with old friends, eat chinabadam, hold hands with your partner, take in the fresh air, gaze into the open space, the vision of stone—not now, not here.

In 2016, a fresh controversy about a high wall being erected that would mar Kahn’s original design. “NO wall ON Kahn” went the slogan, and a group of architects assembled for silent protest on Manik Mia Avenue. A few months later, the protests were exhausted, legal challenges defeated. The construction continued, the wall went up. Look at images taken by international visitors and you’ll note there are none at a wide angle of the whole complex. Everyone cooperates with the embarrassment of the wall.

Architect Dorothee Riedle wrote: “It is very hard to understand why anyone would want to keep people from enjoying their nationality around their parliament building in this desperately needed green and open space. Writing all this I started to wonder whether it would be easy to get access to the German Reichstag.”

In *My Architect*, a young boy stares up at the Sangsad Bhaban, and is reflected on the water. The boy channels Nathaniel’s sense of wonder at journey’s end.

Someone has drained the joy from that scene, sealing off a cenotaph.

NAEEM MOHAIEMEN combines films, installations, and essays to research former Left utopias.

MTL+

*Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart with the removal of our beautiful statues and monuments. . . . Robert E Lee, Stonewall Jackson—who's next, Washington, Jefferson?*

—Donald Trump, August 2017

The following dossier contains a series of short documents from a multifaceted initiative to remove several public monuments in New York, especially the bronze equestrian monument to Theodore Roosevelt that guards the entrance to the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Executed in a style of authoritarian kitsch by anti-modernist sculptor James Earl Fraser, that monument, erected in 1939, features the former army general, police commissioner, governor, and president swaggering atop a warhorse while accompanied subserviently on foot below by the stereotypical figures of a half-clothed black man and a supposed Native American chief. The removal of the sculpture is a goal that has been embedded within long-term processes of movement-building in New York City that extend far beyond any one monument or museum.

The earliest document included in this dossier precedes the election of Donald Trump by one month. This point should be stressed given that the struggles around white-supremacist monuments that came to a head in Charlottesville during the first year of the current administration far precede Trumpism per se, and indeed point to deeply rooted dynamics dating to the very origins of the United States itself as a settler-colony founded on genocide and slavery. The first document presented here is from a pamphlet pertaining to an action at the AMNH in October 2016 by a coalition of groups organized under the banner of Decolonize This Place, an ongoing artistico-political formation discussed in depth elsewhere in this issue of *October*. The second is an elaboration of the demands of the original action a year later by a coalition including New York Stands with Standing Rock, Decolonize This Place, Black Youth Project 100, South Asia Solidarity Initiative, and Eagle and Condor House, among others. Next is a manifesto issued by a group called the Monument Removal Brigade in October 2017 in tandem with a mediagenic “action painting” deployed against the sculpture. The final document is an open letter initiated by a group of activist academics and signed by hundreds of scholars in the week prior to the issuing of the official recommendation by the New York City Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers in November 2017, which was formed to review the fate of the city’s public “symbols of hate” in the aftermath of the events in Charlottesville.

The items collected here are presented as a curated archive of the different styles, tones, and tactics of action deployed in the monument-removal effort, as well as an evolving sequence of imagined and real alterations to which the monu-

# INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY, 2016 DECLARATION

We are gathered here at the American Museum of Natural History to issue three demands.

**RESPECT** – New York's premier scientific museum continues to honor the bogus racial classification that assigned colonized peoples to the domain of Nature here, and Europeans to the realm of Culture, across the park in the Met. We demand that the museum's display arrangements and classifications be reconceived by curatorial representatives of the "exhibited" populations, and that human remains, sacred things, and objects of power stolen from Indigenous peoples should be returned.

**REMOVE** – The equestrian status of Theodore Roosevelt outside the American Museum of Natural History is a stark embodiment of the white supremacy that Roosevelt espoused and promoted. It is an affront to all who pass it on entering the museum, but especially to African and Native Americans. A monument that appears to glorify racial hierarchies should be retired from public view. We demand that City Council members vote to remove this monument to racial conquest.

**RENAME** – It's time for the Mayor and City Council to rename Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day. New York City sits on the territory of the Lenape, and over one hundred thousand Indigenous people live on this territory today. We demand that this holiday be relaunched as an occasion to dignify our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and it should no longer commemorate a figure widely associated with exploitation and enslavement.

**DECOLONIZE THIS MUSEUM | DECOLONIZE THIS STATUE | DECOLONIZE THIS DAY**

## #decolonizethisplace

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*Kyle Goen/MTL+. Front and back of pamphlet for Anti-Columbus Day Tour at the American Museum of Natural History, October 10, 2016.*



**ANTI-COLUMBUS DAY TOUR**

**DECOLONIZE  
THIS MUSEUM**



*rename the day  
remove the statue  
respect the ancestors  
we heal*

"Public Enemy" Series

ment itself has been subjected. Insisting on the inherent connection between the Roosevelt monument and the museum for which it stands guard, these documents suggest the ways in which cultural institutions can be variously activated, targeted, and leveraged in the service of justice by artists, educators, and social movements, holding them accountable for neglecting, perpetuating, or normalizing deeply rooted systems of oppression.<sup>1</sup> Pointing beyond the artistic tradition of "institutional critique" and exceeding a single-issue or single-site activist campaign, the documents below crystallize a politics of decolonial solidarity between and across movements.

The Roosevelt monument has long been an object of popular grievance and disgust. It was defaced by Native American activists in 1971 as an expression of solidarity with the occupation of Alcatraz Island by the American Indian Movement, and its stark embodiment of white supremacy was highlighted by David Hammons in his 1991 MoMA installation *Public Enemy*. Produced in the shadow of Donald Trump's vindictive, race-baiting campaign against the Central Park Five, the police brutalization of Rodney King, and the resurgence of black militancy in hip-hop culture, *Public Enemy* involved a three-dimensional photo-mural of the sculpture that was surrounded by sandbags and NYPD barricades, as if the monument itself were under attack and in need of defense by the forces of the state.

The interpretive framework for the documents collected here had its genesis in a three-month "movement undercommons" set up in a 2016 residency at Artists Space by the MTL+ collective under the banner of Decolonize This Place (DTP). DTP is devoted to weaving solidarity from multiple strands of decolonial struggle in New York City and beyond, including black liberation, Indigenous struggle, Puerto



*Monument Removal Brigade action  
at the American Museum of  
Natural History, October 26, 2017.  
Photograph by Eric McGregor.*

1. See Andrew Ross, ed. *The Gulf: High Culture, Hard Labor* (New York: O/R Books, 2015); Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (New York: Verso, 2016); Kareem Estefan, Carin Kuoni, and Laura Raicovich, eds., *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production* (New York: O/R Books, 2017).



*David Hammons. Public Enemy. 1991.  
Photograph by Mali Olatunji.*

Rican decolonization, de-gentrification, the Palestinian BDS movement, and the struggles of workers and debtors within and beyond the cultural economy. During this period, Artists Space was converted into a round-the-clock organizing hub, fabrication zone, and performance platform for groups like NYC Stands with Standing Rock, Mahina Movement, United Melanin Society, Take Back the Bronx, Chinatown Art Brigade, Comité Boricua en la Diáspora, El Salón, Insurgent Poets Society, Society for Unpopular Culture, and Direct Action Front for Palestine. The gallery walls were festooned with an ever-rotating arsenal of massive banners, photo-murals, and video screens. These materials moved in a feedback loop from gallery to street to media networks and back again as they were utilized over the course of a series of direct actions launched throughout the city.

The largest of the DTP actions occurred on Columbus Day—or what many US cities have renamed as Indigenous Peoples' Day—at the AMNH. With the museum's iconic *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton looming overhead and the patriotic



*Decolonize This Place. Artists Space.  
November 2016.*

exhortations of Theodore Roosevelt—to MANHOOD, YOUTH, NATURE, and THE STATE—inscribed on the walls, at four o’clock sharp, a silent signal rippled among the hundreds of people milling about as usual in the atrium. Clusters of participants surged into the museum galleries, where they assembled en masse around a taxidermied herd of elephants in the Akeley Hall of African Mammals. With the darkened gallery and mummified creatures lending a surreal atmospheric quality, the congregants were called to attention by a “counter-tour” guide using the vocal technology of the “people’s microphone” and officially welcomed to the first Anti-Columbus Day Tour.

Following the example of a similar action at the museum undertaken by the Black Youth Project in 2015, an alternating team of guides led the crowd through the morbid displays of the ethnographic halls and dioramas, populated by faceless mannequins of non-European peoples frozen in premodern time not unlike the stuffed animals in the neighboring galleries. At each stop, the guides highlighted the colonialist logic of the framing and the coercive circumstances under which the objects and specimens had been acquired. When the groups reconvened in Roosevelt Hall, a banner declaring *DECOLONIZE THIS MUSEUM* was unfurled at the base of the dinosaur skeleton, along with a scroll of the three demands, accompanied by mic-checked statements. The first was “Respect the Ancestors,” calling on the museum to participate in the formation of a “decolonization commission,” comprising Indigenous curators, scholars, and community stakeholders, to initiate the overhauling of the museum’s displays. The second was “Rename the Day,” calling for the AMNH to lend its voice in support of the New York City campaign to rename Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples’ Day. The third was “Remove the Statue,” referring to the offending monument out front.

As the crowd moved onto the museum steps, a specially trained direct-action team scaled the Roosevelt monument, covering it with a burial shroud, while several battle standards and slogan-bearing banners were erected around its perimeter.



*Decolonize This Place action,  
American Museum of Natural  
History, October 10, 2016.*

As a squad of NYPD officers struggled to tear down the shroud, organizers from NYC Stands with Standing Rock mounted the pedestal of the monument and led a powerful speak-out assembly, joined in turn by artists and organizers from the participating groups. Each expressed solidarity with the three demands, explaining how their specific grievances were intertwined with the Roosevelt monument's expression of white supremacy, settler-colonialism, and patriarchy.

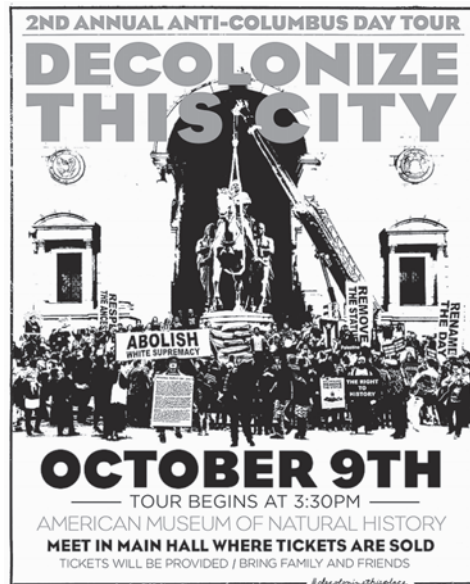
In the following weeks, representatives from DTP and NYC Stands with Standing Rock began to meet with museum officials to urge decolonization measures within the AMNH. Many museums around the world have undertaken these revisions, but the AMNH, among the largest of these institutions, has long been resistant, acquiring the unhappy reputation of a museum frozen in time—frozen, that is, in the early twentieth century, when it served as a clearinghouse for the eugenics movement, with the blessing of Roosevelt and others in his conservationist circle. While officials have been sympathetic to, but not particularly proactive about, the three demands of Respect, Reclaim, Remove, they took the opportunity, in the lead-up to the first anniversary of the tour, to announce the revamping of the Northwest Coast Hall, the museum's oldest gallery. Notably, the new staff hired as part of that undertaking did not include any Indigenous curators. As for the Roosevelt monument, the museum chose to withhold its institutional voice on the grounds that the statue sits on city-owned land, an excuse based on a technicality given that much of the display infrastructure of the AMNH is itself a memorial tribute to Roosevelt.

Public scrutiny of the monument's eligibility as a "symbol of hate" intensified in the wake of the events in Charlottesville in August 2017 and the subsequent establishment of the mayor's commission. In October, DTP staged the Second Annual Anti-Columbus Tour, multiplying the number of participants from the previous year from 300 to 1,000 and recruiting new movement allies to work on the public-education materials and calls for action. The post-tour assembly on the

steps of the museum met with no resistance from the authorities. Yet the NYPD erected a multilayered metal barricade around the monument along with dozens of police officers, bringing to mind Hammons's image of the sculpture being placed under violent state protection in *Public Enemy* (an image subtly cited in the promotional materials for the two counter-tours by the artist Kyle Goen, reproduced in these pages).

In subsequent statements to the media, museum officials went on record stating that the statue was “problematic” and that its future should indeed be decided by the Mayoral Advisory Commission. Two weeks before the commission's public-hearings process was due to commence, a new entity arrived on the scene, calling itself the Monument Removal Brigade (MRB). Taking its cue from a practice initiated by the defacing of colonial and apartheid-era monuments in South Africa, the group splattered the base of the monument with dozens of gallons of stage blood. The popular media coverage of this action was largely negative—framing it as an act of illegitimate vandalism—but the commentary brought to the surface the full cultural scope of the campaign for decolonization. In an outraged editorial, the *New York Daily News* touched on the essence: “If the brigade is true to its words, it must now waste no time in targeting the statue of white supremacist Abraham Lincoln . . . and George Washington . . . and then get enough of that blood-red liquid to turn the Hudson River red.”

Building on the momentum of the two DTP counter-tours as well as the MRB media action, a group including Nicholas Mirzoeff and Conor Tomás Reed drafted an open letter, signed by hundreds of leading scholars in the humanities and arts, calling for the removal of several monuments under review in addition to Roosevelt and Columbus: the J. Marion Sims statue in Central Park (memorializing a surgeon who performed experimental surgery on enslaved African-Americans) and the commemorative plaques for the Nazi collaborators Philippe Pétain and Pierre Laval in Lower Manhattan. The commission recommended that the Sims statue be relocated but that both the Columbus and Roosevelt statues were too “historically and artistically significant” to suffer the same fate. Instead, the panel advocated an “additive” approach that would call upon all the resources and tactics of “social practice art,”



*Kyle Goen/MTL+. Flyer for  
Second Annual Anti-Columbus  
Day Tour, October 9, 2017.*

around which co-chair Tom Finkelpearl had built his curatorial career: alternative signage, ephemeral performances, public discussions, and participatory urban research. In some respects, these were state-sanctioned versions of what DTP had already done in drumming up the public demand to remove the monuments. But electoral politics seem to have been a decisive factor in Bill de Blasio's subsequent adoption of the panel's recommendations. Powerful voices from the city's Italian-American communities had let it be known that there would be blowback if Columbus was toppled from his perch, and a mayor with presidential ambitions was unlikely to order the unseating of a New Yorker president.

The opportunity to publicly repudiate the toxic legacies symbolized by Roosevelt was passed over for short-term political gain, but the impact of the challenges mounted by the monument-removal initiative has been considerable, and has hardly run its course. Just as important, organizers from the various groups involved in these efforts demonstrated a diversity of confrontational direct action, alternative education, agitprop art-making, grassroots organizing, the leveraging of academic capital, and forceful yet sincere invitations to institutional dialogue, the ramifications of which extend into the future beyond any one site, institution, or monument.

*1. Open Letter to Mayor de Blasio, New York City Council, and the Trustees of the American Museum of Natural History (October 9, 2017)*

*Decolonize This Day*

Many U.S. cities have chosen to do what is just and renamed Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day. Why is New York not among them? There is no reason for holding out any longer. It's time for the Mayor and City Council to stand on the right side of history. New York City sits on the territory of the Lenape, and over one hundred thousand Indigenous people live on this territory today—more than any other city in the United States! Let's honor the persistent presence of Indigenous Americans, despite attempts toward their elimination, and reject the celebration of imperial conquest. This public holiday must be relaunched as an occasion to respect our Indigenous brothers and sisters and no longer commemorate a figure widely associated with exploitation and enslavement. American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) officials have told us that they will neither advocate for nor enter the public conversation about renaming Columbus Day. Their position of non-advocacy functions as an action against Indigenous peoples. Now is the time to reconsider and rename.

*Decolonize This Statue*

The equestrian statue of Theodore Roosevelt on Central Park West outside the AMNH has often been cited as the most hated monument in New York City. It's easy to see why. Flanked by figures that appear to be Native and African stereotypes in a position of subservience, the statue is a stark embodiment of the white

patrician supremacy that Roosevelt himself espoused and promoted and is an affront to all who enter the museum. Statuary is not forever and a monument that glorifies racial and gender hierarchies should be retired from public view. The movement that began in the South with the removal of Confederate flags and generals from public display has come to New York. The statue is city-owned and sits on land managed by the Parks Department. The Mayor's commission to review "symbols of hate" should prioritize its removal and City Council members should all agree—it's time to take it down.

*Decolonize This Museum*

Why do Indigenous, Asian, Latin American, and African cultural artifacts reside in the AMNH, while their Greek and Roman counterparts are housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art across the park? Because New York's premier scientific museum continues to honor the bogus racial classification that relegates colonized peoples to the domain of Nature and the colonizers to the realm of Culture and Science. It's time to accept that the Hall of African Peoples does not belong in the same exhibition framework as the Akeley Hall of African Mammals, and that Indigenous or Asian peoples cannot be represented in ways that are akin to the display of fossils and meteorites. These arrangements should be reviewed and reconceived by representatives of the "exhibited" populations. Human remains, sacred things, and objects of power stolen from Indigenous peoples should be placed under the authority of their descendants. The museum, which receives \$17 million of public funding annually (a sum greater than that allotted to the entire borough of Queens), has long been an embarrassment to New Yorkers and tourists. It needs a serious renovation, to be undertaken by a diverse range of curators drawn from the populations featured in the museum.

Recently, the museum leadership announced plans to renovate the Northwest Coast Hall, its first cultural gallery, largely untouched since it was built at the turn of the twentieth century. While we welcome this long overdue initiative, the false and degrading representations in the rest of the culture halls remain as a present reminder of inaction and colonial violence. AMNH must immediately begin a formal institution-wide decolonization process that addresses the saturated colonial infrastructure of the museum as a whole. An independent Decolonization Commission must be established to assess the colonial mentality, past and present, that presides over the institution. A full-time Decolonization Officer must be appointed, an internal decolonizing working group must be established, and town hall meetings must be scheduled to allow those affected by the racisms perpetuated in the culture halls to speak publicly.

Moreover, the educational guides provided to teachers and docents fail to properly acknowledge present-day peoples. They perpetuate racist stereotypes and demeaning representations, which inevitably reflect back on the exhibits themselves. It is shocking that, in 2017, school children are still subjected to this level of institutional violence in the name of education. This kind of violence should no



longer be tolerated. With more than 2 million children visiting the museum annually, the NYC Department of Education should initiate its own independent assessment of the AMNH. This review should evaluate how the museum is addressing, and trying to rectify, the harmful effects of misrepresentation, incorrect information, and structural racism upon New York's diverse school populations. As a publicly subsidized educational institution, the AMNH must be required to uphold the dignity of all peoples in this city.

—NYC Stands with Standing Rock  
Decolonize This Place  
Black Youth Project 100  
South Asian Solidarity Initiative  
Eagle and Condor Community Center

## 2. *Prelude to the Removal of a Monument (October 26, 2017)*<sup>2</sup>

*Now the statue is bleeding. We did not make it bleed. It is bloody at its very foundation.*

*This is not an act of vandalism. It is a work of public art and an act of applied art criticism.*

*We have no intent to damage a mere statue.*

*The true damage lies with patriarchy, white supremacy, and settler-colonialism embodied by the statue.*

*It is these forms of oppression that must be damaged again and again . . . until they are damaged out of existence.*

This work of public art is in solidarity with the Second Annual Anti-Columbus Tour that took place on October 9th. Without any disrespect for those organizers, our tactics must be different.

A thousand people assembled at the museum on that day, and amplified the following demands, originally issued at the first Anti-Columbus Day Tour the year before. 1) The museum should rethink its cultural halls regarding the colonial mentality behind them. 2) The City Council should follow the lead of cities around the country and replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day (a related petition has garnered 18,000 signatures since October 9, 2017). 3) Finally, we call upon the city to remove the monument to Theodore Roosevelt that frames the entrance to the Museum.

In that monument, Roosevelt is pictured on horseback, reaching for his pistol as he gazes on the horizon. He is flanked subserviently by a shirtless Black

2. This text was released at [monumentremovalbrigade.tumblr.com](https://monumentremovalbrigade.tumblr.com) and first covered in Claire Voon, "Activists Splatter Red Paint on Roosevelt Monument," *Hyperallergic*, October 27, 2017.

man and an “Indian chief.” They are both holding rifles, willing foot soldiers in the expansion of American Empire. A former NYC Police Commissioner and proud descendent of Dutch settler-colonists who first expropriated Manhattan from the Lenape, Roosevelt rose to fame for his role in the Spanish American War, which involved the colonization of Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, and Cuba. Roosevelt was also a staunch endorser of eugenics, the pseudo-scientific movement whose calls for sterilization, population control, and racial purification would directly inspire the Nazis. Roosevelt was an open white supremacist and imperialist who is still lionized by the museum and the city plaza standing in front of it.

In statements to the media, the museum has claimed that the statue is the city’s problem, since legally it sits on public land (which is also to say, stolen Lenape land, like the rest of the city). To separate the statue and the museum is a technicality. The museum itself is an expanded monument to Roosevelt’s worldview, and the statue is what visitors first see upon approaching the institution. Millions of schoolchildren pass under this oppressive image every year as they visit the museum, where they are in turn exposed to grotesque, dehumanizing displays.

This damage is being done as we speak. In response, we choose to act immediately with the means at our disposal: artistic expression. Against an artwork that does real damage we offer a counter-monumental gesture that does symbolic damage to the values it represents: genocide, dispossession, displacement, enslavement, and state terror.

The monument embodies not only the violent historical foundation of the United States but also the underlying dynamics of oppression in our contemporary world. In highlighting the bloody foundations of the monument, we salute those movements struggling against the values epitomized by Roosevelt, past, present, and future: from the uprisings of Ferguson and Standing Rock, to popular self-defense at the frontiers of gentrification in the Bronx, in the ground zero of climate crisis in Puerto Rico, or in the crosshairs of ICE raids terrorizing immigrant communities. We also salute the history of artistic actions undertaken against the monument, especially the six Indigenous activists who temporarily marked it 1971 in solidarity with the occupation of Alcatraz Island by The American Indian Movement (AIM). On the base of the monument they inscribed “Return Alcatraz” and “Fascist Killer.” Decolonization and Anti-Fascism remain the horizons of our time.

After Charlottesville, Trump tweeted: “Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart with the removal of our beautiful statues and monuments . . . Robert E Lee, Stonewall Jackson—who’s next, Washington, Jefferson?”

A venerated U.S. president on the chopping block? Trump was on to something. The onus of decolonial and anti-fascist action falls to New York City, from whence the current president hails. Mayor Bill De Blasio has set up an advisory commission to investigate “hate symbols” across the city, but it will have no bind-

ing authority. The commission will at some point seek public input to identify eligible monuments and statues. We take matters into our own hands now to kick-start the removal process.

With this public artwork we are sparing the museum. We hope the museum will recognize the liability that the statue represents for its stated claims to be moving in the right direction, and use the leverage that it undoubtedly has with the City.

At this year's Anti-Columbus Day Tour, the NYPD made a massive show of force to defend the monument, with barricades, handcuffs, cops of every rank deployed—including two officers of color ordered to stand on the base of the statue itself just under the Black and Indian foot soldiers flanking Roosevelt himself.

We imagine a day when the monument—and the museum standing behind it—will not have to be barricaded and protected by force of arms. We imagine Roosevelt instead moldering away as a ruin in the trash-heap of history alongside his brothers-in-arms, towering figures like Lee and Columbus, lesser-known monsters like J. Marion Sims and Henry Osborn, and so many others. The empty pedestals left behind at places like the museum would in turn clear space for new visions of reparation, freedom, and justice. In the meantime, while the Mayor's Commission trudges forward, the Monument Removal Brigade hereby announces itself. Our membership is already legion, from Charlottesville to Durham to New York and beyond.

—Monument Removal Brigade

### 3. *To the Mayor's Commission on Monuments (December 1, 2017)*<sup>3</sup>

As scholars of American art, cultural history and social analysis, we are writing to urge that the Commission recommend the removal of several monuments from public view in New York City. They have long been highlighted as objects of popular resentment among communities of color and anti-racist scholars, artists, and movements. It is thus no surprise that these monuments have risen to the top of the list of the “symbols of hate,” to quote Mayor de Blasio, singled out during the Commission's recent public hearings. For too long, they have generated harm and offense as expressions of white supremacy. These monuments are an affront in a city whose elected officials preach tolerance and equity.

In this letter, we add our voice to the widespread sentiment calling for their removal. We understand this call for removal as an historic moral opportunity for creatively reckoning with the past and opening space for a more just future. We encourage the Commission to seize this opportunity to make a brave,

3. This text was first covered by Benjamin Sutton, “Over 120 Prominent Artists and Scholars Call on NYC to Take Down Racist Monuments” (*Hyperallergic*, December 1, 2017), with the full list of signatories available at [nycmonumentsletter.info](http://nycmonumentsletter.info).

even monumental, gesture that will resonate for generations to come, rather than a politically expedient fix that will be easily absorbed—and quickly forgotten—by the status quo.

The monuments in question are as follows:

1. The Dr. J. Marion Sims statue in Central Park, commemorating a doctor who performed surgical experiments on enslaved African American women, including children, without anesthesia or consent. Momentum for its removal has spurred a remarkably broad coalition in support of the long-standing demand from Black and Latinx Harlemites that this affront be removed.

2. Historic markers of Vichy France's Nazi collaborators, Philippe Pétain and Pierre Laval, are located in the Canyon of Heroes. Lest anyone need reminding, Vichy organized its own deportation to Auschwitz of over 70,000 Jewish French citizens.

3. The Equestrian Monument to Theodore Roosevelt in front of the American Museum of Natural History. It depicts Roosevelt on horseback, accompanied by half-naked African and American Indian figures on foot, carrying his rifles.

4. The Christopher Columbus statue overlooking Manhattan's Columbus Circle.

We believe the case for removing the first two is largely beyond debate. There are no defenders of these monuments, and they have no place on City property.

The third monument is not simply a free-standing statue of the 26th President, but rather a grouping of figures: Roosevelt on horseback, flanked by subordinate figures on foot, one Black (African by appearance) and the other Indigenous (in a stereotypical Native American cast but with an especially inappropriate mix of headdress and clothing). As an imperialist, and frank advocate of eugenics, Roosevelt's views on racial hierarchy are well-known to historians. The Museum (center of the American eugenics movement in the early years of the twentieth century) now pays tribute to his conservationist efforts, without acknowledging the link to those racist beliefs. The dedication of the Museum's memorial in 1936 and of the adjoining equestrian monument in 1939 was celebrated by its officials as a consummation of the theories of Henry Fairfield Osborn, who had presided over the institution's early growth at the same time as he championed eugenics within and without. Even casual visitors who may not possess this knowledge regard the monument as a stark embodiment of white supremacy, and it is an especial source of hurt to Black and Indigenous people among them. The removal of this monument will be a bold statement on behalf of all New Yorkers that this unsavory moment in American history no longer deserves to be commemorated. Indeed, this past October, more than one thousand people gathered at the Museum at the invitation of groups including Black Youth Project 100, Decolonize This Place, and NYC Stands with Standing Rock to demand the removal of the statue.

By far the most controversial of the monuments is that to Christopher Columbus, who served the Spanish crown, and spoke and wrote only in Catalan. Because he was born in Genoa in 1451—a city that did not become “Italy” until the unification of the country in 1861—he was adopted as a patriotic symbol by Italian immigrants in the nineteenth century. But the public claim of “ownership” of Columbus by Italian-Americans cannot be allowed to override his key role in the historical genocide of Indigenous peoples of the Americas. By 1600, at least 50 million Indigenous people died in this hemisphere as a result of the Columbian encounter with Europeans, whether from war, disease or enslavement. It takes only a little understanding to see why their descendants do not regard anything associated with 1492 as an object of veneration. Many U.S. cities have chosen to do what is just and renamed Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples’ Day. There is now a national movement to remove statues of Columbus parallel to the movement to remove Confederate monuments in the South. The recent events in Charlottesville prompted Mayor de Blasio to establish the Commission, and so it is incumbent upon us to look to the example of that city in boldly opting to remove the offending monuments.

In calling upon the Commission to recommend the removal of the aforementioned monuments, we also endorse any forward-looking post-removal initiative to advance understanding of these histories and make creative use of the vacated city property. These statues could be placed in dedicated museum spaces or memorial gardens, as has happened in Germany, India, South Africa, and across Eastern Europe. The Roosevelt monument by James Earle Fraser could be profitably displayed alongside Fraser’s *The End of the Trail* in the Metropolitan Museum, for example, so that viewers could explore how race and eugenics were visualized in the period. The empty sites could be used as the subject for artistic competitions, as with London’s Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. In short, we see the outcome of the Commission not as destroying heritage, let alone the purported erasure of history, but as the beginning of an exciting new set of possibilities for public art and museums in New York City, one finally devoted to an inclusive and reparative vision of the difficult histories of settler colonialism and the Indigenous peoples of this land.

MTL+ is a collective of artists, writers, and organizers—including Lorena Ambrosio, Nitasha Dhillon, Crystal Hans, Amin Husain, Kyle Goen, Yates McKee, Vaimoana Numeitolu, Aiko Roudette, Andrew Ross, Marz Saffore, and Amy Weng—that has facilitated the work of Decolonize This Place since 2016.

MAYA NADKARNI

Images of toppled monuments and headless statues of Lenin dominate Western representations of the end of state socialism in the former Soviet bloc. But in Hungary, where the demise of state socialist rule was bloodless and bureaucratic, the country's communist statues and monuments emerged from the political transition mostly unscathed. This lack of revolutionary iconoclasm presented a challenge for Hungary's politicians, local authorities, and art historians in the early years of post-socialism. In the absence of popular rebellion against the statues, what would best represent the will of a newly democratic public: to banish the statues on political grounds or to retain them in a grudging acknowledgment of their artistic or historical value?

In Budapest, municipal authorities ultimately decided to remove these remnants of the past regime to a "statue park museum," which opened in 1993, twenty minutes by car from the center of the city. The park was designed by its young architect, Ákos Eleőd, to serve as an "anti-propaganda" space that would subvert traditional expectations of monumentality. The statues are positioned closely together according to common themes, and many are mounted low to the ground, inviting physical as well as visual engagement. Flowering red stars decorate a path in the shape of figure eights, guiding the visitor on an "infinite" journey alongside communism's heroes, martyrs, and key events that ultimately leads nowhere. Instead, with the redbrick walls of the park silhouetted against a prosaic suburban backdrop of power lines, billboards, and a nearby water tower, both the statues and the totalizing aspirations of the regime that erected them appear merely pathetic or absurd.

Many local and international observers have hailed the Statue Park Museum as a "civilized" solution to the problem of how to handle the ideological remnants of a "barbaric" political past. By celebrating an ethos of historical preservation, the park maintains the peacefulness of the democratic transition, which stands in stark contrast to the violence of the previous political upheavals in Hungary's turbulent twentieth century.

But such efforts to cleanse public space of the historical politics of past regimes have their own afterlives, and it is important to be alert to the stories that they tell—and those they forget—about their own making. At the time of the park's creation, supporters argued that it would provide a solution to both the problem of the statues' discredited ideology and the danger that they might inspire violent protest and vandalism. What this rhetoric concealed, however, was that by the end of state socialism, many Hungarians paid little attention to many of these monuments. Some were unaware of the statues' specific ideological content, and for others such knowledge was overwritten by everyday familiarity. While most people agreed that statues and busts of Lenin had to go, there was less urgency about removing others, such as one commemorating Soviet envoy Ilya Afanasievich Ostapenko, who was killed on December 29, 1944, while delivering



*Memento Park. Statues and memorial plaques commemorating, from left to right, Ilya Afanasievich Ostapenko, Captain Nyikolaj Szytepanovics Steinmetz, the Republic of Councils Pioneers, the 1919 Hungarian Republic of Councils, and Róbert Kreutz.*

an ultimatum to the German forces that encircled Budapest. Originally standing on one of Budapest's main highways at the city's border, the Ostapenko statue portrays him with one arm upstretched and the other waving a flag, a gesture that appeared to greet or bid farewell to city residents on their trips in and out of the city. Over the years, the statue became a popular hitchhiking stop, and many people viewed it with great affection.

The decision to remove Ostapenko and similar statues enabled politicians and city officials to redefine such domesticated landmarks of everyday urban life into traumatic remainders of Soviet rule—and to transform former socialist subjects into an outraged democratic citizenry who demanded the statues' removal. The Statue Park Museum thus decontextualizes what it preserves in order to re-narrate not only the history of the monuments themselves but the very story of what propelled the park's creation. Perhaps as a result, it has failed to meet either Eleőd's artistic ambitions or its manager's economic projections in the twenty-five years since its opening. Those who grew up with the statues tell me that they already know what each one looks like, whereas the schoolchildren who encounter the park on class field trips regard the monuments as simple remnants of a distant and finished past.

These days, the Statue Park Museum (later renamed "Memento Park") primarily caters to foreign visitors eager to satisfy their curiosity about an era now reduced to oppressive Soviet relics, Trabant automobiles, and Young Pioneer songs. By marketing history as kitsch (such as a gift shop that sells red-star T-shirts and tins containing "The Last Breath of Communism"), the park limits the mnemonic possibilities of Eleőd's open-ended anti-monumental architectural strategy to distanced pity or mocking laughter. This irreverent commodification also enables the park's tourists to fulfill their own fantasies about the triumph of Western capitalism, in which even communist icons can be repurposed to make a profit. If the park was created to disavow Hungarians' ambivalent experience of late socialism, the redemption of its relics as post-Cold War nostalgia thus covers up such institutionalized amnesia through the appearance of remembrance. This unexpected afterlife of the park suggests that the problem of unpalatable monuments (whether in the former Soviet bloc or elsewhere) is not simply a matter of answering the question of "what is to be done." It also demands that we remain attentive to the unanticipated consequences of those decisions.





*Memento Park. An East German Trabant 601 is permanently parked just inside the museum's gates, next to the gift shop.*

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## STEVEN NELSON

Monuments, in their capacity to consolidate, articulate, and visualize cultural values, public memory, and political ideology, are potent sites for the projection of our relationship to civic life. In addition, monuments can also inform our private sense of self. They generally express the values of those in power, often effacing the histories of everyone else.

Yet monuments' meanings are never totalizing. The values that they espouse are often not fixed. In Charlottesville and Cape Town, for example, monuments have become embroiled in clashes of opposing ideas around race and questions of full equality, citizenship, and belonging in the nation. Removing Confederate monuments across the Southern United States and the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town as well as renaming Yale's Calhoun College register as explicit expressions of altered ideologies and changed standards of acceptable discourse. These racialized contestations counteract the attempted exclusions of black and brown people from the official histories and public memories held dear by a hegemonic body politic.

The fervor surrounding these ongoing clashes attests to the visceral power of images. However, such clashes are not new, and they have not always centered on statues and buildings memorializing racist men. On December 8, 1922, Senator John Williams, a Democrat from Mississippi, introduced bill S. 4119, which authorized the erection of a monument "in memory of the faithful colored mammies of the South," in Washington, D.C. The proposed monument, a gift from the Jefferson Davis Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy to the American people, would, according to the *Washington Star*, recall the mutual affection between white children and their black caregivers, and would remind the nation of the lifelong interest mammies held in the lives of those they had so dutifully and lovingly raised. The bill passed the Senate on March 6, 1923. By June, images of the proposed monument appeared in the press. By the end of the year, a plot of land by the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Q Street had been identified as the site where the Mammy Monument, as it came to be called, would be erected.

There was strong backing for the statue from Southern whites. Numerous supporters noted that the Mammy Monument would arouse the warm feelings so many Southern whites felt in the arms of the black slaves who raised them. Others felt that the image of the mammy visualized the strides that African Americans had made since slavery as well as the white benevolence that, in supporters' minds, made such progress possible.

In stark contrast, black Americans were resolute in their opposition. Many found the very idea of such a memorial to black servitude to be an insult and a national disgrace. Black people understood the monument as celebrating white supremacy. Thousands of African-American women protested in Washington. Halle Brown, president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs,



"A Colored Artist's Suggestion,"  
 Literary Digest, April 23, 1923.  
 Originally published in the Baltimore  
 Afro-American, March 30, 1923, p. 9.

issued on behalf of 500,000 "intelligent, educated colored women" a statement decrying the proposed monument. Others saw the Mammy Monument as a slam to black people along the same lines as the Senate's refusal to approve the nominations of African-Americans to prominent government positions and the government's failure to outlaw lynching. A writer for the *Chicago Tribune* complained that this was another example of Washington Republicans' bending to the wishes of Southern Democrats. A *Washington Eagle* journalist suggested planting a bomb under the completed monument. The protests were successful. The Senate bill was killed in the House of Representatives.

The Mammy Monument ignited a battle over representation. It made its supporters and detractors ask which Americans were full, deserving citizens. It forced a national conversation about African-American self-esteem, particularly in the face of white supremacy and white fantasies of continued black deference and subservience. The same questions have come to the fore in the increasing skirmishes over monuments seen as participating in the marginalization of black and brown Americans.

The failed Mammy Monument shows the capacity of the image and its elevation to memorial to elicit powerful responses on multiple levels. While we're accustomed to showing, on the one hand, how images and monuments function in political and ideological realms and, on the other, how they operate on psychological

and emotional levels, we're less capable of understanding and articulating how they connect these registers.

Monuments bring out the image's ability to bring to the surface the indelible connection between our political lives and our private self-conceptions. Be it through Mammy, Rhodes, or Robert E. Lee, the quest for equality, justice, and fairness is always political and personal. For African-Americans, by the beginning of the twentieth century the image of the mammy, personified by Aunt Jemima, was a humiliating and derogatory sign that reopened the wounds of physical and psychological brutality whites had wrought onto blacks under slavery. In opposing the mammy statue, African-Americans transformed emotional trauma into political action. Despite such a link, despite the lack of a boundary between the personal and political, when we analyze images, when we interpret them, we still have a stubborn tendency to cordon off the private and emotional states they engender.

With this in mind, it seems to me that our charge, indeed our ethical duty, is to find languages to acknowledge and better understand the play of images in such a complex, even messy terrain. In achieving such a feat, in better exploring the meeting place of both our understanding of images' "official" nature and the "unofficial" work they always do, we can more fully engage their transformative potential.

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## TAVIA NYONG'O

The retrograde role that historicism played in the recent public controversies over monuments dedicated to the Southern Confederacy (and other icons of patriarchal white supremacy) is certainly cause for pause.<sup>1</sup> In both public settings and behind closed doors in the corridors of power, art history (if we can understand, for argument's sake, art history solely in relation to its function *for the state*, that is to say, as an ideological state apparatus, rather than to the breadth and diversity of opinion within the field and among art historians) has not been able to relinquish an unconscionable attachment to a doctrine that was soundly mocked by Walter Benjamin in his 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History."<sup>2</sup> The historical doctrine that Benjamin mocked, and that the field-imaginary of art history upheld in relation to controversial statues of white men on pedestals, is one that seeks to know the past "how it really was."<sup>3</sup> This dedication to the "truth" of the past, and its zealous defense against "revisionists," Benjamin criticized as betraying both a spiritual malaise and a corrupting identification with history's victors. "Those who currently rule," he wrote, "are however the heirs of all those who have ever been victorious."<sup>4</sup> We see this even in the case of debates over monuments that were erected in the US to commemorate the side that ostensibly *lost* the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that the white-supremacist Confederate monuments were all erected as public claims on the meaning of the Civil War *after the fact*, the historicist approach has tended to treat these monuments as themselves of intrinsic historical value, the worth of which would be somehow lost if they were now removed from public view and/or destroyed, as many now call for.

In other words, the victory of white supremacy memorialized in these statues occurs not once but twice. First, when they helped seed a now hegemonic and tententious distortion of the war as a noble "lost cause" fought over "states' rights" (today, according to one poll, forty-one percent of Americans believe schools should *not* teach that slavery was the cause of the Civil War).<sup>6</sup> Second, when those who reject

1. See, for instance, "New York City Decides Not to Remove Controversial Monuments," *Artforum.com*, January 12, 2018.

2. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Selected Writings, Vol. 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

3. For instance, New York City's decision not to remove but rather to add additional "markers with historical context" to statues of Theodore Roosevelt, Christopher Columbus, and Philippe Pétain in the news story cited above. Another instance was Yale University's decision (later reversed) to keep the name of Calhoun College and instead recommend more "historical study" of the context behind its namesake buildings. See Noah Remnick, "Yale Defies Calls to Rename Calhoun College," *New York Times*, April 27, 2016. After further protest, this plan was scrapped, the college was indeed renamed, and problematic stained-glass windows were redesigned by noted black feminist artist Faith Ringgold.

4. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," thesis 7.

5. David Blight has influentially argued that, although the South lost the war, they won the battle over how it would be remembered. See David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). See also Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

6. Emma Brown and Scott Clement, "Poll: Americans Divided over Whether Slavery Was the Civil War's Main Cause," *Washington Post*, August 6, 2015.

this distortion of history, and who seek a new vision of the past more befitting our modern non-racialist democracy, are the ones accused of iconoclasm and historical distortion. What would seem apparent to any neutral observer—that both sides in the #MonumentsMustFall debate care passionately about the same history, and aim to give it a true and comprehensive public airing—is lost in the unfortunate division between those who get to stand “for” history (in the guise of these grotesque and offensive objects) and those who would seem to wish to deny or erase the past.

At my own institution, Yale University, a tortuous and drawn-out process was required to accomplish the long-fought-for renaming of buildings dedicated to icons of white supremacy. Other institutions, such as Princeton, punted their chance to give offenders like Woodrow T. Wilson the boot from their awnings.<sup>7</sup> In vain have its defenders sought to fudge the message that this ongoing practice of bestowing honorifics sends. That message is indeed more about the future of our democracy, about who we desire to be from here on out, than about the past. After all, who could miss the deliberately offensive gesture of Donald Trump when he placed a portrait of Indian-killer and slaveholder Andrew Jackson in the Oval Office upon replacing our first black president?<sup>8</sup> Or his Treasury secretary’s apparent conniving to keep Harriet Tubman off US currency?<sup>9</sup>

In the face of this open and public battle over memory, the side of the angels ought to be clear. Art history still has a chance to be on it. Who really wants to keep company, on grounds of scholarly probity and the preservationist spirit, with the neo-Nazis and neo-Confederates who flock to the defense of monuments to racism in Charleston, New Orleans, and beyond? Rather than defend the historic value of these blights on the landscape, would it not be better to recall the more active sense of historical materialism championed by Benjamin, who reminded us that “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘emergency situation’ in which we live is the rule.”<sup>10</sup> Monuments to the Confederacy, to slaveholding and white-supremacist presidents, to great colonialists like Cecil Rhodes, are hated by the oppressed for the same reason they are loved by their rulers. Taking them down is an act of historical justice; it is not the erasure of a shameful past but quite the reverse: the reopening of a dark record that the nation has never adequately confronted on a humane and mature level (in the way that, by comparison, Germany at least *attempted* in the wake of the Holocaust to do a public and thorough reconstruction of public memory).

That said, I don’t know that I share the conviction of some others that taking down monuments achieves anything but a small symbolic victory in relation to the present crisis. At its worst, it can seem like a feel-good distraction at a moment when so much urgently needed political action is blocked by an ascendant right-wing oli-

7. Alexandra Markovich, “Princeton Board Votes to Keep Woodrow Wilson’s Name on Campus Buildings,” *New York Times*, April 4, 2016.

8. Eli Rosenberg, “Andrew Jackson was called ‘Indian Killer.’ Trump honored Navajos in front of his portrait,” *Washington Post*, November 28, 2017.

9. Donna Borak, “Mnuchin Still Won’t Commit to Putting Harriet Tubman on the \$20 Bill,” *CNN Money*, January 12, 2018.

10. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” thesis 8.

garchy, a moment when the Left engages a demoralized, distracted polity that has apparently grown exhausted from the laborious exercise of citizenship and has to be “nudged” to do the right thing.<sup>11</sup> Far more inspiring to me, then, than all the proposals to take down or relocate mossed-over statues is the innovative recent action taken by Chicago-based artist Theaster Gates to relocate the gazebo near which the young black male Tamir Rice was assassinated by trigger-happy cops in 2014.<sup>12</sup> In cooperation with Rice’s mother, Gates aims to re-erect this anonymous gazebo in Chicago, as part of a planned “peace park” where he envisions members of the public can gather to mourn and organize in relation to the epidemic of gun violence in America. In this gesture of taking an anonymous playground structure, now forever stripped of its innocence by tragic associations, and reassembling it as a focal point for public and performative memory, Gates works in the best tradition of the historical materialism Benjamin called for when he defined the historical monument we need as one that invites us “to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.”<sup>13</sup> In proposing something like a counter-monument, Gates invites us to move towards a method of black social practice that is not content with reactive and rearguard actions against the memory of a failed and defeated political form (the Southern Confederacy and its battle flag), but instead seeks to work out a memory-in-the-present adequate to the historical task we are summoned to.

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11. Cass R. Sunstein, *Why Nudge?: The Politics of Libertarian Paternalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
12. Henri Neuendorf, “Theaster Gates Secures Loan for the Gazebo Where Tamir Rice Was Shot” *ArtNet News*, September 20, 2016.
13. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” thesis 6.



*The gazebo where Tamir Rice was murdered, currently disassembled.  
Part of a planned future peace park in Chicago.  
Courtesy of Theaster Gates Studio.*

## RUTH B. PHILLIPS

In the twenty-first century, monument wars, like infections, are jumping across borders and finding receptive hosts in new countries. The attacks on Canada's commemorative landscape that took place in the summer of 2017 are both illustrative and instructive. Following the well-publicized attacks on Civil War monuments in the United States, protesters across Canada rallied to demand the removal of statues and the renaming of schools that honor politicians and colonial officials who oppressed Indigenous peoples.<sup>1</sup> The Canadian protests were not simply copycat events, for the foundations on which these monuments stand had already been weakened by decades of decolonial Indigenous activism. The subsequent debates have revealed the intersections, congruencies, and conflicts that inform Indigenous and settler investments in the dynamics of memory and forgetting—and, of course, the diverse positions taken within each of these “communities.” Thus far, we have been left with more questions than solutions, many raised by Indigenous artists who have been in the vanguard of critical discourse since the 1980s. I want here to review this tangle of interests and needs and to highlight the critical role of “aesthetic action” in the ongoing monument wars as an effective means of maintaining productive tensions rather than seeking their resolution.



*The Sir John A. Macdonald monument at Place du Canada, Montreal, on November 12, 2016, after the statue and base had been defaced with red paint. Photograph by Simon Nakonechny/CBC.*

The primary target of the Canadian-monument wars has been Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister and the initiator of the infamous system of residential schools to which 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed between 1886 and the late twentieth century. In 2009, after years of negotiation, the federal government

1. For some examples, see Katie Dangerfield, “Statues and Streets Named After Controversial Figures in Canada,” <https://globalnews.ca/news/3674023/controversial-signs-and-statues-across-canada/>.



offered a formal apology and financial compensation to survivors of the schools. It also commissioned a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools that traveled across the country to hear and record survivors' testimony. Its 2015 report broke the long silence that had shrouded the history of these schools and suppressed public memorialization. It revealed the sufferings of Indigenous parents and children who, from ages as young as five, were harshly disciplined, punished for speaking their languages, malnourished, given substandard educations, and forcibly converted to Christianity. Both physical and sexual abuse were common, and the intergenerational consequences of survivor trauma continue to afflict Indigenous families across the country. The chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada named the residential school system a form of cultural genocide, and it has quickly come to be accepted as Canada's greatest national shame. Understandably, then, the sparks provided by the monument protests south of the border immediately caught fire.

Both Canada and the United States are settler societies where protesters are targeting the outer signs of difficult histories. A gesture commemorating a Confederate or colonial proponent of racial oppression is the visible tip of an iceberg whose deep origins and *longue durée* defy comprehensive protest action. It represents historical processes that predate the advent of modern settler nations but whose pervasive legacies inform their citizens' contemporary lives. All Americans are on some level the beneficiaries of the slave economy, and both Americans and Canadians live on lands more or less forcibly wrested from their Indigenous occupants. Decolonial activism can attack these histories only through a strategic focus on the narrow target and the selective preservation of sites of memory. A troubling asymmetry is also revealed by a comparison between the United States, where the primary locus of collective guilt is the enslavement of African-Americans, and Canada, where it is the oppression of Indigenous peoples. The difficult histories of Native Americans have had a much lower profile in the US, while in Canada the history of slavery and anti-black racism is barely acknowledged. National economies of memory and forgetting, it would seem, can make room for only one significant other.

In Canada's confrontation with its history of residential schools, debates have unfolded around the destruction or preservation of two kinds of monuments. One set, celebrating heroes of the settler narrative, is being reread as evidence of colonial oppression. These statues remain, as noted, in limbo—splattered with red paint, defaced, but most still standing.<sup>2</sup> The second set is made up of residential-school buildings and their grounds, where thousands of children who died of diseases lie in unmarked graves. Most of the buildings are now gone and, since 2015, have been commemorated—if an individual community so desires—by a bronze marker funded by the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and

2. On January 31, 2018, the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, removed to storage the 1931 bronze statue commemorating Lieutenant General Edward Cornwallis, who founded the city in 1749. His efforts to overcome Mi'kmaq resistance included putting a bounty on Mi'kmaq prisoners or scalps. <https://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/cornwallis-statue-is-history/Content?oid=12360151>.



*The Aboriginal Residential School Commemorative Marker produced to mark the sites of officially recognized schools. Photograph by Graham Iddon.*

designed in the shape of the shared symbol of a drum.<sup>3</sup> The leveling of the buildings is the result both of the lack of funds to maintain them and a widespread desire to obliterate painful reminders of past suffering. One notorious site of sexual abuse at the Alberni Residential School in British Columbia was ritually destroyed in 2009 when the Tseshahst First Nation invited survivors to demolish the high-school student dormitory “using traditional and cultural

methods to take the power away from the school once and for all.”<sup>4</sup> A reverse strategy has been adopted by the Hodenosaunee (Iroquois) of the Six Nations of the Grand River in Brantford, Ontario, who have organized a successful “Save the Evidence” campaign to preserve the Mohawk Institute, partially repurposed since the 1970s to house the offices of their cultural center. The building is preserved as a site of memory where survivors and family members give somber tours to schoolchildren and other visitors.

Efforts to remove the statues of Sir John A. Macdonald have produced parallel debates, for his is a mixed legacy. Macdonald has long been acknowledged as the founding father of the modern nation of Canada. He was instrumental in forging the 1867 confederation of separate British colonies, suppressed the threat posed by the Northwest Resistance led by Métis leader Louis Riel, and built the transcontinental railroad to unite the former colonies and enable Canada’s extension to the Pacific. Yet to clear the land for this ambitious project, Macdonald starved Indian nations in its path and forced them to accept removal to reserves; he hanged Riel and other Indigenous allies. Rather than “pampering and coaxing

3. Five artists came together to create the design: Ursula Johnson, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Marianne Nicolson, Mathew Nuqingaq, and France Trépanier. Their statement and a description of the project appear in *The Aboriginal Residential School Commemorative Marker*, a brochure issued in 2014 by the Assembly of First Nations. I am grateful to the manager of the project, Trina Cooper Bolam, for her help. See her article “On the Call for a Residential Schools National Monument,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 52:1, Winter 2018.

4. Debora Steele, “Tseshahst Hosts Survivors for Demolition of Peake Hall,” February 12, 2009, *Ha-Shilth-Sa*, <https://www.hashilthsa.com/archive/news/2012-11-13/tseshahst-hosts-survivors-demolition-peake-hall>; and see “Alberni Indian Residential School,” on the United Church Archives’ “The Children Remembered” site, <http://thechildrenremembered.ca/school-locations/alberni/>.

the Indians,” Macdonald told Parliament, “we must vindicate the position of the white man, we must teach the Indians what law is.”<sup>5</sup> Is it possible or desirable to erase such a man or his name from public view? How can children entering schools named after him best develop critical skills that acknowledge the mixed legacies to which we are heir—the unjust and uneven ways in which different segments of society have had to bear the costs of present well-being and the responsibility we share to do better in the present? Métis artist and scholar David Garneau’s critique of the closure implied by current discourses of “reconciliation” is compelling: “Colonialism is not a singular historical event but an ongoing legacy—the colonizer has not left. The sin cannot be expiated. . . . An apology and cash payments will not absolve the stain. The government’s frantic race to a post-historical space of reconciliation, rather than submission to a permanent state of negotiation, of treaty, is shortsighted.”<sup>6</sup>

I agree with Garneau that maintaining this “permanent state of negotiation” is the best answer we have at present. Rather than removing statues, we need to foster interventions, alterations, and counter-monuments. To realize fully the “aesthetic action” championed by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, we need to move the critiques artists have been offering inside the art gallery into broadly accessible public spaces.<sup>7</sup> And we need to develop strategies that point to the vast iceberg on which we all reside so that we can take the small steps that are possible toward decolonization and restitution on multiple levels, from land rights and treaty abrogation to the provision of clean water and the restoration of mental and physical health.

The bronze drum that marks the sites of residential schools was designed to act as a kind of receptacle for electronically accessible content provided by each community—commemorations of individuals, articulations of memory and history that may differ in their assessments of harm and, sometimes, benefits. As yet, inadequate funding has prevented the realization of this potential, but it remains available for the future realization of more nuanced, textured, and—yes—contradictory accounts. I would also prefer that names be added to school buildings rather than subtracted. Why not call the local elementary school the Sir John A. Macdonald and Chief Poundmaker School, provoking children to ask not only who Sir John A. was but also to learn about an Indigenous leader who courageously negotiated on behalf of his people?

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5. Sir John A. Macdonald, speech before the House of Commons, July 6, 1885, reproduced at <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/primeministers/h4-4090-e.html>.

6. David Garneau, “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2016), p. 37.

7. “Introduction: ‘The Body Is a Resonant Chamber,’” in Robinson and Martin, eds., *Arts of Engagement*, pp. 8–11.

## POSTCOMMODITY

The meanings of words shift in complex ways across time, space, languages, and bodies. One of the reasons for this dynamism is that all words signify politically contested meanings. The emergent nature of languages sometimes causes reactions that are defensive, such as when a public feels that linguistic changes threaten the values and norms of its institutions. Considering this fear, it should come as no surprise that schools in the United States discipline students to believe in a thing called “standard English,” as if presupposing language to be set in stone or cast in bronze.

US public schools help project the social structuring power of government by enforcing policies that monopolize language. In schools, language standards are deployed to serve some at the expense of most. Schooling, despite the good intentions of the best teachers in the US, remains a zero-sum game of winners and losers. This system largely facilitates, by suppressing language dialects, inequitable systems of contest based on race, class, and creed. Despite efforts in the democratic United States to establish “standard language,” it is important to note that ruptures recur, and that not even totalitarian regimes have been successful at rendering inert the diverse forces of linguistic expression to communicate knowledge, ideas, aesthetics, values, and beliefs.

it is not possible  
to separate  
land from  
social experience

or separate  
culture and  
community  
from land

this is  
a physical  
reality  
confirmed  
by indians  
and scientists  
alike

it's as close  
to non-culturally

chauvinistic truth  
as there will  
ever be

You might be asking, What does linguistics have to do with monuments? One answer is that monuments are used to establish place, and theories of place represent a great deal of research in the fields of language. Monuments are a lot like words. No matter how permanent one tries to make the meanings of words and monuments, their inherent and systematic nature is to change.

ask any  
rohingya  
or lenape

genocide  
is an interventionist  
mechanism

upon these  
realities  
and modes  
of knowing

but it  
doesn't  
change  
anything

acts of death  
remain acts of death

even the graveyards  
are embedded  
within land

Although change is a basic fact of life, there are various beliefs and approaches to "maintaining control." So within the exercise of power to prevent change, it may be healthy for publics to constantly question things that are politically enforced or standardized. In the spirit of inquiry, one might ask what are the purposes of monuments, and whom are they intended to benefit. The discourse of stone and bronze provides us with a clue that, at a fundamental level, monuments are built to archive, inscribe, and maintain stories that someone benefits from. In

their hubris, publics in the US often assume monuments are for maintaining specific meanings forever. Despite the aspiration and belief that many of us hold concerning “forever,” the analogy of monuments to words does not bode well for perpetuity, and suggests that the social-political expectations of monuments as permanent are irrational at best.

yet closer  
still  
to all  
of us

a multinational  
operating  
down the street

there is  
a familiar  
incentive  
calling out  
for us  
to look  
at the land  
without  
acknowledging  
the location  
of our own  
children’s  
feet

these  
are who  
the monuments  
are for

they are ours

Perhaps in Washington, D.C., no commissioned artist understands the dynamic nature of words and monuments better than Nora Naranjo-Morse. In her work titled *Always Becoming*, Naranjo-Morse stewards the emergent relationship between monuments, her collaborators, and meanings by replacing the discourse of stone and bronze with a medium perhaps more reflective of changes found in life, language, relationships, land, and memory. Her work, commissioned by the National Museum of the American Indian, is inspired by North American indigenous tradi-



*Nora Naranjo-Morse. Always Becoming. 2007.  
Photograph by Bill Steen.*

tions of construction. By using materials such as those found in adobe, her work demonstrates changes sympathetic with the elements of nature. On the national mall, Naranjo-Morse's sculptures shift the discourse of monuments as rhetorics of permanence and stasis to those of "always becoming." This stance demonstrates a worldview that the past is emergent in the present, and that monuments are about stewarding life with the transformative power of generative relationships across difference. To affirm this stance, we must learn to set language free.

and now  
the materials  
of their construction  
still speak to us  
maybe they mumble

maybe they speak  
like a rhetorician

but all of the  
material comes  
from somewhere

and regardless  
of design  
or intention  
it all erodes  
before our eyes  
with the same velocity  
we have ever known

like clay  
beneath  
male and female  
rain

Despite the deceptive discourse of stone and metal that certain place-making traditions would have publics believe, history demonstrates to us that monuments have life cycles articulated by emergent meanings. In their lifetimes they are commissioned, erected, vandalized, maintained, decommissioned, destroyed, and removed. Or they are eventually reclaimed by the land and forgotten. Idealistically, monuments are for inspiring, commemorating, honoring, loving, and remembering. But people are noisy and complex, and so is diversity and history. A monument that represents an ideal for some is violent, hateful, and painful for others. As propaganda, monuments are for indoctrinating, disciplining, controlling, and subjugating. As democracy, monuments are for dramatizing, organizing, and debate. As humor, monuments are for bird shit! The complex life cycle of monuments is inevitable—they are born, emerge, and eventually die. Rain erodes bricks, borders synchronize themselves to new latitudes, humans make mixtures called babies, and monuments often ignore the long view of time, its nature of eventual forgiveness, and its pardoning of us growing beings.

POSTCOMMODITY is an artist collective comprising Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist. Postcommodity's art functions as a shared lens to connect indigenous narratives of self-determination with the broader public sphere.



## CHRIS REITZ

For the better part of a year I have been participating on city commissions tasked with making recommendations concerning Louisville, Kentucky's most divisive statues, and rereading Alois Riegl's guidance on monuments ("The Modern Cult of Monuments," 1903) alongside public comments. Riegl's text was written to frame conservation policy, and his preliminary distinction between the "intentional" and "unintentional" values of monuments still offers a productive framework for thinking about what to preserve and how to do it. In Riegl's formulation, intentional monuments are objects or texts produced in order to commemorate a person or event and preserve history for the future. Unintentional monuments are human-made artifacts that preserve the past as well, but as historical or artistic reflections of their time, not as commemorations of an earlier one.

Riegl notes that intentional monuments are often unintentional ones too. A statue erected to commemorate a long-deceased soldier, for example, is also a product of its time and place. In Louisville, the fact that these objects have significance beyond their commemorative value is often invoked in arguments both for and against their removal. But these arguments have not been uniformly applied to contested monuments in the city. Rather, the most fervent and divergent claims about the unintentional values of statues have been made about objects with the most recalcitrant, local, intentional value. Indeed, it often seems that the former is dependent on the latter. This poses a particular challenge to historians grappling with monuments that intentionally commemorated figures who supported or advocated racial conflict: Can such monuments have preservation-worthy unintentional value today despite their problematic intentional value?

Two case studies demonstrate the point. As of this writing, all of the city's objects—more than 400—are under review. So far only one, a generic Confederate monument formerly sited near the University of Louisville, has been relocated. The statue was erected in 1895 by the Kentucky Women's Confederate Monument Association, a group supported by the state. Their original plan was to select the design blindly through an open call for proposals. However, when it was announced that the association had chosen a woman named Enid Yandell for the design, various Louisville men of means stepped forward to terminate the program. In the end, a local monument company was hired to construct a stone base for generic bronze soldiers, which were ordered from the German artist Ferdinand von Miller.

In this case, relatively few arguments were made about the unintentional historical or artistic value of the object. It is certainly of its moment, commissioned by one of the many women's Confederate groups erecting such statues at the tail end of the nineteenth century, and in that regard has unintentional historical value. But in its original location the statue was relatively devoid of connections to its place and community, and thus most of its support came from state and national

Confederate associations. This made the decision to relocate it relatively easy (relatively because the statue remained in place for over a century despite decades of protest and failed attempts at relocation).

While the Confederate monument was moved last year, another contested statue remains in place, that of John B. Castleman. One of the infamous Morgan's Raiders, a group of Confederate cavalymen who terrorized Indiana and Ohio through arson, looting, and extortion, Castleman was also the founder of the American Saddlebred Horse Association and an instrumental figure in the development of Louisville's Olmsted parks. Public comments regarding the Castleman monument came overwhelmingly from Louisvillians, and many are limited to questions about intentional value. Castleman's contributions were significant, and quite a few were positive. But these comments just as often take up the monument's unintentional value. Some note the artistic merit of the statue or its lack thereof. Others argue that the statue has become a recognizable city landmark and is therefore now a positive, iconic neighborhood emblem. Still others argue that the statue was installed to stand sentry at a historically segregated park and its adjoining neighborhood, and that it must fall if we are truly committed to integrating communities. Some argue the opposite, that the object now serves as an artifact of this racist time and must be preserved as a barrier to forgetting.

These arguments aim to obscure the intentional value of the monument with its unintentional value. Yet those unintentional qualities are a direct consequence of the intentional design. Monuments to Confederate soldiers were installed at entrances to segregated neighborhoods precisely because of the legacy of slavery that they invoke. Likewise, such neighborhoods were articulated according to the same logic that established Jim Crow and, later, redlining policies, and thus these objects are well positioned to serve as emblems of neighborhood character in what remain segregated communities. The more persistent and multifaceted the significance of the figure intentionally memorialized is, the greater the monument's capacity for unintentional value. For example, Castleman was an advocate for the park adjoining the Cherokee Triangle neighborhood where his statue is located, but he also helped to segregate the park's facilities. Today his monument serves both as a logo for a historical neighborhood association (it is on T-shirts and newsletters) and as a target of activist, anti-racist vandalism.

For many historians there is great appeal in elevating the unintentional value of monuments above their intentional value. As Riegl notes, monument makers determine intentional value, but unintentional value is determined through subjective interpretation. Thus if we base preservation decisions on unintentional value—on interpretation—we reassign who is empowered to shape public space, whether or not monuments are removed. But we must be careful to consider how the persistent intentional values of these monuments shape and even determine their unintentional value, especially when those unintentional values motivate

decisions to relocate or recontextualize them. If intentional value determines unintentional value, then reinterpretations and recontextualizations that seek to emphasize unintentional value (for example, changing a monument's plaque) may only serve to reinscribe the original, intentional aims of the work. Conversely, decisions that seek to undo or reduce the persistence of local, intentional value while keeping other values intact (for example, relocating an object) may inevitably undo the foundation supporting the values they aim to preserve. In either case, I wonder if it makes sense to ask intentional monuments to bear our historical values. We have plenty of other things better equipped to do so—historic homes, bridges, city squares. These public artifacts are activated and made meaningful through interpretation and contextualization. Monuments, on the contrary, are designed to indelibly preserve the meaning bestowed by their makers—and they seem to do it quite well.

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## CAMERON ROWLAND

Public monuments and memorials to the Confederate States of America occupy government land and facilities in the United States. In Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, the permanent removal of these monuments is prohibited by state law.<sup>8</sup> Although the Confederacy was predicated on secession from the US, the maintenance of the Confederate legacy relies on current US governments. The majority of Confederate monuments were constructed during Jim Crow.<sup>9</sup> These monuments function as indices of the Confederate legacy, its historiography during Jim Crow, and its continued protection.<sup>10</sup> Under the aegis of formal equality, the “public” served by these governments remains conditional.<sup>11</sup> This is articulated by governmental commitments to preserve and promote a variety of types of monuments to the Confederacy. Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia announce their governmental operations as coextensive with the legacy of the Confederate Constitution through their continued use of Confederate flags as their contemporary, official state flags. The Confederate Constitution stipulated the maintenance of “the institution of negro slavery,” “the right of property in said slaves,” and the quantification of each slave as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of taxation and congressional representation.<sup>12</sup>

8. Ga. Code Ann. § 50-3-1 (2010); Miss. Code Ann. § 55-15-81 (2013); N.C. Gen. Stat. § 100-2.1 (2015); SC Code § 10-1-163 (2012); Va. Code Ann. § 15.2-1812 (2006).

9. Southern Poverty Law Center, *Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy*, April 2016, [https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com\\_whose\\_heritage.pdf](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com_whose_heritage.pdf).

10. Many of these monuments were privately funded by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, founded in 1894. “United Daughters of the Confederacy Historical Markers,” Historical Marker Database, <https://www.hmdb.org/results.asp?SeriesID=259>. “Monuments were central to the UDC’s campaign to vindicate Confederate men, just as they were part of an overall effort to preserve the values still revered by white southerners.” Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), p. 49.

11. “As a consequence of emancipation, blacks were incorporated into the narrative of the rights of man and citizen; by virtue of the gift of freedom and wage labor, the formerly enslaved were granted entry into the hallowed halls of humanity, and, at the same time, the unyielding and implacable fabrication of blackness as subordination continued under the aegis of formal equality.” Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 119.

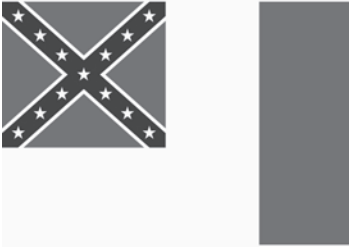
12. James D. Richardson with the permission of Congress, “Permanent Constitution,” in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy Including the Diplomatic Correspondence 1861–1865*, (Nashville: United States Publishing Company, 1905), pp. 51, 50, 37.



First Confederate National Flag (1861 - 1863)



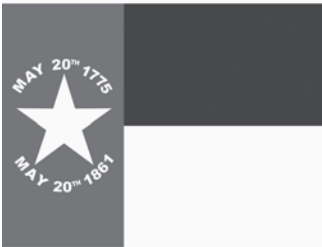
Georgia State Flag (2003 - present)



Third Confederate National Flag (1865)



Mississippi State Flag (1894 - present)



North Carolina Confederate State Flag (1861 - 1865)



North Carolina State Flag (1885 - present)



South Carolina Confederate State Flag (1861 - 1865)



South Carolina State Flag (1865 - present)



Virginia Confederate State Flag (1861 - 1865)



Virginia Confederate State Flag (1861 - 1865)

CAMERON ROWLAND is an artist based in New York.

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## KIRK SAVAGE

For good reason, Cecil Rhodes and Robert E. Lee and their like have sucked up most of the oxygen in the recent disputes over public monuments. While we need to continue the conversations about them, they are merely symptoms of an even bigger, more structural problem in the memorial landscape. Across almost every continent, that landscape is littered with fossils of colonialism and white supremacy.

This is no accident. Before Nietzsche conceptualized “monumental history,” it was a thriving practice on the ground in emerging modern nation-states and their colonial possessions. The monumental assemblages that ultimately took form, even in planned landscapes such as the National Mall in Washington, D.C., often appeared haphazard, but they still clung to a strict logic of racialized domination.

As art historians, we are familiar with this logic in our own canons. Even though we may declare that we trashed the idea of the canon years ago, it survives in the museum and the classroom, just as monuments to dead white men survive on the ground no matter how much the profession of history thinks it has bypassed them. The “corrections” to these canonical landscapes are usually incremental and piecemeal: Remove a white man or two, add a woman or person of color. The demographics change slowly, but the underlying value systems still privilege deeply entrenched—and racialized—notions of quality, influence, and achievement.

So it is with the universe of monuments: They privilege the names and bodies of those who have had the freedom and scope of action to make a decisive mark on history. Colonialism and racism are enterprises that seek to curtail freedom and agency and distribute them inequitably, for obvious reasons. Only a select few are even eligible to become honorees; they in turn confirm the honor of the enterprise in a closed feedback loop. It should come as no surprise that white supremacy has invaded every corner of the memorial landscape, and whole populations have fallen into invisibility. Reshuffling the cast of characters cannot change things significantly if the deck is still stacked this way.

To think about this problem, I keep returning to a cautionary tale that I witnessed in Indianapolis a few years ago. Artist Fred Wilson had a commission to install a permanent public artwork along a newly designed “cultural trail.” He was given the artistic latitude to develop his own idea. He decided to appropriate a little-noticed element in the city’s own huge Civil War monument—the sole African-American figure, an emancipated slave reclining at the feet of a standing allegory of America. He proposed to reproduce it at scale and install it alone on a tilted pedestal with an African-diaspora flag in its outstretched hand. Wilson cleverly titled this act of extraction *E Pluribus Unum*. As a critical intervention, it had two main goals. First, it would draw attention to the exclusionary character of the war

memorial and the local memorial landscape, which ignored, among other things, the “colored troops” from Indiana who had enlisted in the Union cause. Second, it would give new agency to a figure who had been conceived only as a recipient of the dominant history, not a maker of his own.

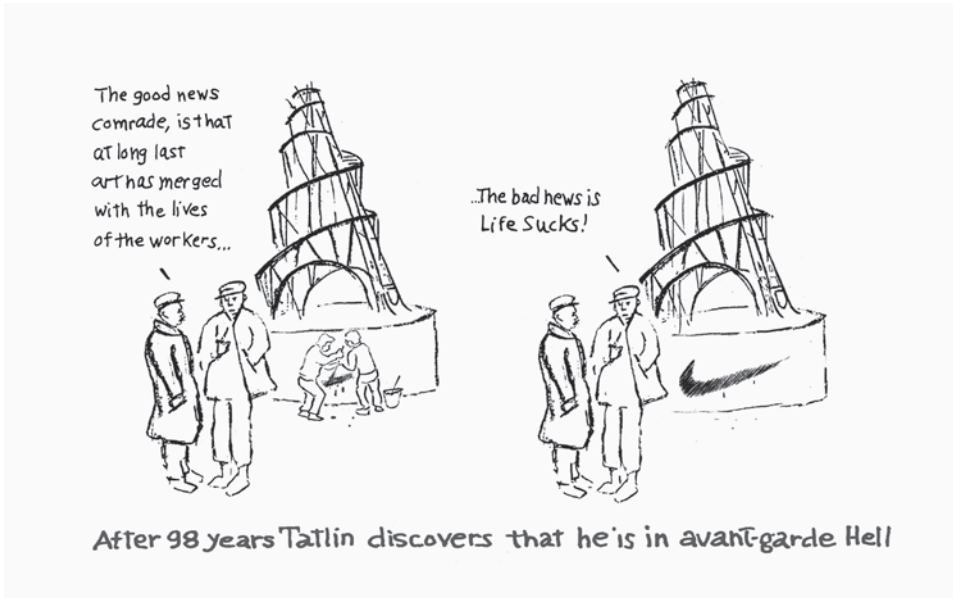
A long controversy ensued. For many reasons, the local African-American community did not welcome the project, even though most liked and respected the artist. By almost all measures Wilson had the credentials and the authority to work with the community; certainly the commissioning body thought he did. But his idea originated in a curatorial model and was largely “baked” before the public got involved. Designed as a work of contemporary art, the project unexpectedly entered the territory of monumental history by virtue of its planned permanence: A meta-monument became a monument. While Wilson’s intention was to empower by shining a spotlight and sparking discussion, many in the community wanted real input into the subject matter and the design. Commemoration is ultimately about who and what gets the privilege of representation, and they wanted a seat on the board that decides. The process had the effect of depriving the community of agency—exactly the opposite of *E Pluribus Unum*’s artistic gesture—and echoed structural inequities that have had a long painful history in Indianapolis and elsewhere. Ultimately, the process and the artwork became inseparable. As many people told me, they fully understood what Wilson was trying to do; they just didn’t want another slave on a pedestal, not in their town.

In the midst of the conflict I was asked by a local group, unconnected to academia, city government, or the public-art world, to come and offer some historical perspective. I had the luxury of not having to advocate. I’m certain I learned more from them than they did from me. I heard about “sundown towns” (where blacks who had jobs had to leave by sundown), urban renewal, segregation, political exclusion. At every turn, I was forced to confront the disconnect between their experience and the history told in the local memorial landscape.

If artists, critics, and art historians are to engage with the problem of monuments, as Wilson tried to do, that engagement will have to give a real voice to those who have been systematically excluded from monumental history for so long. It is hard to see how theory and practice can intersect productively unless professionals have the opportunity to consult and collaborate with these communities in new kinds of commemorative processes. The projects that enter this collaborative territory are often precarious and underfunded and impermanent. But even if they end inconclusively or in outright failure, they still represent perhaps the only way out of the cul-de-sac of monumental history. In that sense, Wilson’s project was a step in the right direction. Since there is no road map, the destination is unknown.

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GREGORY SHOLETTE



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## ROBERT SLIFKIN

One of the fundamental characteristics of the monument is its Janus-faced temporality, the way that it simultaneously looks backwards to an event or figure from the past and imagines its material preservation into an unspecified future. One might say that monuments, through their characteristically commanding physical presence and occupation of space, aim to continuously transmit a message into an unknown and ever-expanding future. In this regard, monuments, at least as they have been traditionally understood, are fundamentally conservative objects, seeking to shape the future, not through revolutionary action, but aspiring to the more moderate promise of constancy, both material and mnemonic, within the inevitable flux of time.

Consequently, a modern monument is, as Lewis Mumford suggested, something of a contradiction, and even the most ostensibly contemporary monument risks possible obsolescence, irrelevance, and unintelligibility as it perseveres in an environment that is bound to change both materially and ideologically.<sup>1</sup> Robert Musil would acknowledge this nonsynchronous dynamic between the avowedly timeless monument and the rapid pace of modern life in a short, witty essay on the subject from 1927 in which he provocatively claims that there are few better ways to render a figure or event obscure than to erect a monument in its honor.<sup>2</sup> Musil's canny recognition of the monument's dialectical affinity with oblivion—the very thing it is built to defy—in many ways set the terms for a counter-tradition of monumentalism—or anti-monumentalism—that has emphasized ephemerality, contingency, and critique over such conventional values as permanence, universality, and celebratory heroism.

This postmodern and post-medium renewal of sculptural monumentalism emerged in the mid-1960s (the moment when, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, the tenets of modernist autonomy gave way to an array of practices that engaged with the contingencies of site) in the work of artists like Dan Flavin, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Smithson, who produced nominal, if fundamentally ironic, versions of the form. Unlike traditional monuments that sought to preserve the memory of historical events or actors into the future through their material permanence and imposing scale, these new monuments, to borrow Smithson's designation, seemed to compromise their commemorative function by disavowing a commitment to perpetuity. Whether because of their colossal size, which made them impossible to build (Oldenburg), or their ultimate fate to become obsolete because of technological development (Flavin) or disappear due to geological phenomena (Smithson), the new monumentalism registered a temporal paradox: "Instead of

1. Lewis Mumford, "The Death of the Monument," in *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*, ed. J. L. Martin, Ben Nicholson, N. Gabo (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 264.

2. Robert Musil, "Monuments," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Burton Pike (New York: Continuum, 1986), pp. 320–23.

causing us to remember the past like the old monuments,” Smithson wrote, “the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future.”<sup>3</sup>

Smithson would align this paradoxical future-orientated oblivion conveyed by these new monuments with the concept of entropy, arguing that the typically bland, geometric forms associated with the new sculpture served as material auguries of an all-encompassing sameness that would, according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, ultimately inflect the entire universe. (A drive down any suburban highway indicates the prophetic force of Smithson’s assessment, delineating a fateful trajectory that leads from a minimalist box to a chain box store, both of which, according to the artist’s theory, foretell a forgettable future of cultural monotony and cosmic extinction.) Replacing the quasi-universal laws of metaphysics with the physical laws of the universe, Smithson established a materialist teleology that, much like conventional examples of monumentality, provided a means to synchronize a contemporary audience’s experience of space and time onto a much broader historical continuum.<sup>4</sup>

If Smithson’s conception of the inevitable entropic oblivion that awaits all forms of monumentality—and human endeavor more generally—might appear nihilistic or unexpectedly romantic (however valid or even visionary it may seem in the face of the existential implications of climate change), it also presents a paradigm for a monumentality that is able to register the contingencies of experience and the discontinuities and multiplicities of history and, perhaps most importantly, repudiate the promise of permanence and possessiveness that has made the monument so ideologically problematic for a radical, let alone progressive, politics. Recent intimations of this sort of entropic monumentality can be discerned in Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci Monument* (2013) and Kara Walker’s *A Subtlety* (2014), in which the dynamics of commemoration and ruination operate in tandem, so that multiple publics are assembled and various meanings are generated without recourse to a rhetoric of universalism or timelessness. Amidst the current debates concerning which existing monuments should remain standing and which should be sent off to oblivion (or at least rendered less ideologically potent through their archivization in museums), works like these posit an alternate vision of the form, one in which acts of remembrance exist alongside opportunities for contestation. By proposing the necessity of an expiration date for all examples of the category, these works propose an ethics to the monument’s characteristic temporal expansiveness, one whose ultimate message is not so much *remember this* as *keep going*.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Robert Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments” (1966), in *Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 11.

4. Mark Wigley, “The Architectural Cult of Synchronization,” *October* 94 (Autumn 2004), pp. 31–61.

5. The mantra “keep going” comes from Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), p. 91.

IRENE V. SMALL

On April 9, 2015, as a statue of Cecil John Rhodes was removed from its plinth at the University of Cape Town, the artist Sthembile Msezane raised her arms to embody the mythical stone Bateleur eagle—the *chapungu*—from the ancient ruins of Great Zimbabwe that Rhodes had once appropriated as his possession and personal emblem.<sup>1</sup> The statue was the target of the #RhodesMustFall movement that had ignited on campus a month before and quickly spread to other universities in South Africa. It also caught on at Oxford, host of the prestigious Rhodes scholarship, an honor conceived specifically as the pedagogic instrument of empire. In a widely reproduced photograph of Msezane's performance, she stands above the crowd, her back to the sculpture and a beaded veil shielding her face, one of her outstretched wings extending to the arm of the crane as if to dismantle the monument with the sheer force of her gesture.

Msezane's critique extends to the masculinist and territorial logic of monumental statuary at large. Nevertheless, this image orchestrates a certain temporal collapse that posits her action as the phoenix-like triumph of a restituted monumentalism, one that delivers justice and reparation in turn. It is deeply satisfying,

1. See the artist's account in "Sthembile Msezane performs the fall at the Cecil Rhodes statue, April 9, 2015," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/15/sethembile-msezane-cecil-rhodes-statue-cape-town-south-africa>.



*Sthembile Msezane. Chapungu, The Day Rhodes Fell. 2015. Courtesy of the artist.*

for instance, that her fierce wingspan and defiant female body echo and overturn that of Rhodes in the famous print of him stretching a telegraph line across Africa, one arrogant boot planted in Cape Town, the other in Cairo, envisioning the unbroken path of British empire. Yet such temporal collapses also oil the mechanisms of power and political stasis in post-apartheid South Africa, where the proferring and consumption of symbols often trump systemic transformation.

In her work on queer temporalities, Elizabeth Freeman defines “chrononormativity” as “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity.”<sup>2</sup> And while we might think immediately of the disciplinary effects of linear, teleological, or positivist modalities, the temporal rhetoric of emancipation has also been harnessed to corral and control: “Democracy has arrived! (Resist no more).” This is why the most significant outcome of #RhodesMustFall was not the removal of the statue but the #FeesMustFall movement later that year that demanded the economic and intellectual decolonization of the university at large, spawning internal defiance by queer, feminist, and other dissidents in turn. The lingering question, of course, is what epistemologies of change will endure.

By what came to be known as the #Fallism of 2015, the Johannesburg-based Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR), a shifting group of artists and collaborators, had already died by its own design. But one can glimpse in its residues and spectral hauntings another non-normative temporality, one that in radically rejecting monumentality coaxed into being new articulations of the experiential presence(s) of South African history. Indeed, the collective’s inaugurating event concerned nothing less than the ontology of passage as comprehended in its multiple historical and existential iterations: from the notorious passbooks by which the apartheid regime regulated the movements and recognizability of bodies to the associated passing of persons from one race to another (acts of biopolitical mimesis and bureaucratic sabotage but also alienation, desire, and despair); from the cataclysmic event of death and the lurching time of grieving to the often indiscernible passing of one generation into another.

CHR’s *PASS-AGES: References and Footnotes* was staged in the basement of the former passbook office in Johannesburg, now a women’s shelter, and one of its many references is to Coco Fusco’s *Rights of Passage*, a performance at the second and last Johannesburg Biennale of 1997.<sup>3</sup> Held three years after South Africa’s first democratic elections, that exhibition had come to be a “phantom limb,” as CHR co-founder Gabi Ngcobo put it, deprived of any actual functioning but haunting the contemporary with urgent questions that remain unresolved, if transmuted in form.<sup>4</sup> To this

2. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 3.

3. See *PASS-AGES: References and Footnotes: A Curatorial Project by the Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR) in Collaboration with the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism (JWTC)* (2010), pp. 1–12. Available at: <http://historicalreenactments.org/images/projects/Passages/15-1.pdf>.

4. See Gabi Ngcobo, “Endnotes: Was It a Question of Power?” (2013), <https://www.newmuseum.org/blog/view/museum-as-hub-endnotes-was-it-a-question-of-power>, and Khwezi Gule, “Center for Historical Reenactments: Is the Tale Chasing Its Own Tale?,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 39 (Summer 2015), pp. 88–100.

end, the CHR has pursued *reenactment* not in terms of a repetition of the historical archive so much as a contemporary investigation of its undead.<sup>5</sup> For if the archive, in a Foucauldian sense, is the manifestation of power concretized as statements, only an oblique touch can yield its unwitting ghosts and possible lines of flight.<sup>6</sup>

During its properly institutional life from 2010 to 2012, CHR's activities included *Xenoglossia*, A Research Project, which explored the tensions and incommensurabilities of language, Fr(agile), a curating and caring-for of documentary photographer Alf Kumalo's archive, and *They Will Never Kill Us All*, an embroidered banner that rematerializes a sign documented by Kumalo that was carried during a 25th-anniversary commemoration of the 1960 Sharpeville protest and massacre. CHR's banner was in turn mobilized in ongoing contestations of violence, including protests against the homophobic murder of Disebo Gift Makeu in 2014. In these and other interventions, CHR core members Ngcobo, Kemang Wa Lehulere, and Donna Kukama collaborated with a host of other artists, researchers, and collectives, among them Sohrab Mohebbi, Jabu Pereira, Khwezi Gule, Kader Attia, Ruth Sacks, Sanele Manqele, Mbali Khoza, Gugulective, and Made You Look. Elements of the projects bleed into one another, and several, such as *Na Ku Randza* and *Does This Window Have a Memory?*, excavate and circulate informal histories proximate to the CHR's site in downtown Johannesburg.

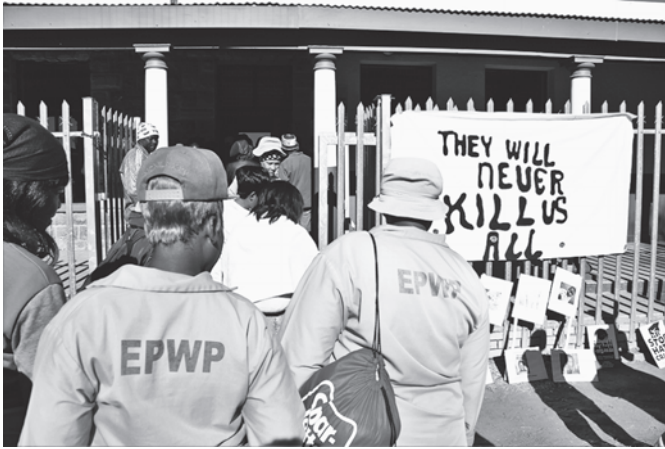
After two years, however, CHR found that its motivating "phantom" had transformed into "a sculpture that dropped a pin over our roof."<sup>7</sup> And so to hold off the ossification of a single recognizable configuration, the collective staged an "institutional suicide" on December 12, 2012. But as Gule has eloquently written, "the shadow of death runs deep through the work of CHR," and this constitutive spectrality has allowed various returns.<sup>8</sup> These include *After-after Tears*, a 2013 exhibition that references the "after-tears" parties (also known as *Wie sien ons?* or "Who sees us?") held in South African townships after funerals; *The Second Coming*, which marked the one-year anniversary of the CHR's institutional death on Friday, December 13, 2013 (improbably, but definitively, also the day before Nelson Mandela's funeral); and *Digging Our Own Graves 101*, a 2014 publication that considers what the philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe has termed the "Nongqawuse Syndrome," a symptomatic form of "political disorder and cultural dislocation . . . which advocates, uses, and legitimizes self-destruction, or national

5. On some of the problematic aspects of repetition within reenactment practices, see, for example, Paige Sarlin, "New Left-Wing Melancholy: Mark Tribe's 'The Port Huron Project' and the Politics of Reenactment," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 50, no 1/2 (Spring/Fall 2009), pp. 139–57; and Hal Foster, "In Praise of Actuality," in *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (New York: Verso, 2015), pp. 127–40.

6. Michel Foucault, "Part III: The Statement and the Archive," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pp. 79–134.

7. Center for Historical Reenactments, "We Are Absolutely Ending This" (December 12, 2012), <http://historicalreenactments.org/endingthis.html>.

8. Gule, "Center for Historical Reenactments," p. 97. Gule's article remains the most extensive discussion of the extent and significance of CHR's activities.



*Center for Historical Reenactments.*  
 Untitled (banner).  
 2012. Photograph by  
 Gugu Mandla.  
 Courtesy of Iranti-org.

suicide, as a means of salvation.”<sup>9</sup> Is the CHR’s necromantic orientation a form of such fatalism or, worse, cynical prophecy? Or could its fugitivity unsettle the chrononormative mandates of a political culture that aggressively commemorates but can barely come to terms with the ongoing fact of death at every turn?

In *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Jacques Derrida reminds us that ghosts must be named (he himself dedicated the 1994 text to the recently assassinated anti-apartheid activist and South African Communist Party leader Chris Hani).<sup>10</sup> If CHR transforms the iconographic logic of the monument and the image into something more akin to the rumor or legend, it also moves from an archival impulse to a citational praxis, one that resists a centripetal imperative to consolidate or collect in favor of a centrifugal movement that disperses towards the periphery.<sup>11</sup> It is here—in footnotes, appendices, afterthoughts, and errata—that ghosts are named and find themselves in altered constellations. Perhaps it amounts to an instituting in reverse, a monumentalism etherized but not forgotten.

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9. Achille Mbembe, “South Africa’s Second Coming: The Nongqawuse Syndrome,” *Open Democracy*, June 14, 2006, [https://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa\\_democracy/southafrica\\_succession\\_3649.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa_democracy/southafrica_succession_3649.jsp). Nongqawuse was a sixteen-year-old Xhosa girl who had a vision that if the Xhosa people killed their cattle, their ancestors would return and the whites would disappear into the sea. Belief in her prophecy resulted in a massive slaughter of cattle between 1856 and 1887 and a large-scale famine. See also *Digging Our Own Graves 101* (Johannesburg and Berlin: Center for Historical Reenactments and the 8th Berlin Biennale, 2014).

10. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

11. See Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 3–22, as well as Dieter Roelstraete, “The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art,” *e-flux journal* 4 (March 2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/04/68582/the-way-of-the-shovel-on-the-archeological-imaginary-in-art/>.

JASON E. SMITH

In early 2006, an archaeologist from the British Museum published a report on the condition of ancient Babylon's ruins. The document revealed that shortly after the invasion of Iraq in late March 2003, a command post had been established by the US Army over a designated heritage site among the ruins. The army, with the assistance of a subsidiary of the oil-field-services company Halliburton, fortified its position by digging trenches and pits throughout the area. In addition to scraping and leveling areas for parking lots and helicopter landing pads, it built earthen barriers around the base perimeter, in the process "pulverizing ancient pottery and bricks that were engraved with cuneiform characters." It was even said that contractors and troops, endeavoring to "protect" the site, filled thousands of sandbags with soil from the trenches and pits, filler rich with material fragments of a city founded some two and a half millennia ago.

Such contempt for these vulnerable sites is of a piece with US policy and practice throughout the Iraq War, whose opening days witnessed large-scale looting of antiquities originating in ancient Mesopotamia under the permissive watch ("stuff happens") of the invading forces: The National Iraq Museum is said to have been stripped of as many as 15,000 artifacts. The practices of the US interlopers were later to be taken up by the vicious, ragtag army this incursion gave rise to. In the late stages of the war, with a civil war raging in Syria next door, the group variously called ISIS, ISIL, the Islamic State, or Daesh carried out a systematic ransacking and defacement of ancient sites—pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—throughout the region: Mosul, Palmyra, Nimrud, Nineveh. This formation, composed of ex-Baathists, Wahhabite extremists, local Sunni *guerrilleros*, and no small number (as many as 10,000 all told) of European youth can be seen as a particularly contemporary phenomenon, though one inseparable from a long-unfolding decomposition of the imperial Sykes-Picot arrangement. But it was arguably the Taliban of Afghanistan that set the initial bar high, with the demolition of the towering Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001, though not without some setbacks: When artillery rounds did not do the job, well-placed dynamite was required to lay waste to them. This attack, carried out just months before the US and its host of opportunistic fellow travelers set upon the country, might be characterized, like the others enumerated above, as *a crime against humanity*.<sup>1</sup> The destruction of these symbols and sites, which do not represent local, agonizing episodes in the history of this or that society or region, were organized attacks on a history shared by humanity as a whole: emblems of the major world religions, relics of the origins of "civilization" (writing, law, agriculture, the state).

I invoke these recent events to provide a clear and hopefully instructive contrast with recent calls in the US to remove, and in some cases destroy, emblems of the Jim Crow period of the American South. These statues, whether they

1. On my cautious use of the much-abused notion of "crime against humanity," see Jean-Luc Nancy's response to the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan: "L'idolâtrie des taliban," *Libération*, March 21, 2001.

portray Lee, Jackson, Davis, or some unknown soldier sacrificed to the so-called Lost Cause, were placed in public spaces throughout the South some thirty years after the defeat of the Confederate army, and decades after the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877. Many were raised around the turn of the century, not long before the publication of Thomas W. Dixon's *The Clansman* and the cinematic adaptation of his novel by D. W. Griffith a decade later. Some monuments were hastily hoisted up as late as the 1950s. As C. Vann Woodward's 1955 *The Strange Case of Jim Crow*, written in the midst of what Woodward then called the "Second Reconstruction," spells out clearly, the imposition of Jim Crow in the Southern states was anything but inevitable: It was a deliberate campaign undertaken at the tail end of the nineteenth century, formalized juridically and enforced by terror. The erection of these statues was hardly meant to celebrate the Lost Cause: They hung, and still hang, in public squares like a noose, an active, abiding, and present threat, rather than the commemoration of a fictionalized past. These monuments enforce a state of historical blackout, stupor, or repression, rather than articulating a shared historical—violent, conflictual—experience or tending to a still open historical wound. Not a single one should be left standing. And no one should wait for the deliberation of a *bien-pensant* civic body—city councils, landmarks commissions—to decide to remove them under the cover of night. The recent toppling of the Confederate-soldier statue in Durham, North Carolina (dedicated in 1924), offers precious guidance in these matters.



*Gustave Courbet and Communards on the Place Vendôme, 1871.*



One can be excused under the circumstances for being reminded of a letter sent in 1927 by a group of Surrealists to the elders of Charleville, who proposed to erect a statue in honor of the hometown poet, Arthur Rimbaud: “The statue,” our Surrealists gleefully suggest, “will perhaps suffer the same fate as the one it replaces, which the Germans pulled down and used for the fabrication of shells, as Rimbaud waited with great pleasure for one of them to lay waste to your city center” (“Permettez!”). The use of the future rubble of the Confederate statues remains open. Rimbaud seems to have left Charleville for Paris shortly after the Commune was declared, spending a month in the city during the insurrectionary days of 1871. But he missed, regrettably, the toppling of the Colonne Vendôme, a feat organized in part by Gustave Courbet, and before whose debris the artist was proudly photographed: a decision arguably as aesthetically significant as the grand *Burial*, the magnificent *Stonebreakers*.<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, the Lettrist publication *Potlatch* printed a short text in 1955 outlining a set of “Rational Beautification [*embellissement*] Projects for the city of Paris,” which included a spirited debate among members of the Internationale Lettriste as to the coming fate of Christian churches: among the proposals, their complete eradication, on the one hand, their transformation into haunted houses, on the other. The ineluctable removal of those Confederate statues still standing in the US South will furnish ample fodder for artists and militants in the years to come. The public squares, in the South and everywhere, await not only their occupation but their embellishment.

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2. In 2006, as the British archaeologist was making his disastrous reckoning, T. J. Clark published an important book devoted largely to looking at two paintings by Poussin. The book is structured in part around an episode from the past, in which he recounts being on the fringes of a large London demonstration—the details suggest it is the notorious antiwar demonstration of March 1968—with a comrade, on the steps of the National Gallery. Clark claims that, at the time, he pledged to destroy a painting housed there should a “revolutionary situation” present itself (such were the conversations in the first half of 1968). The painting in question was, for the young Clark, the “epitome of painting for me, summing up the utmost that visual imagery could do in a certain vein”: Poussin’s *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*. See T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death* (Yale: New Haven, 2006), p. 114.

## MARTINO STIERLI

Under the rubric of *spomenik* (“monument” in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian), the monuments of the former Yugoslavia have received a great deal of attention over the past few years. They have usually been presented on social media and in lifestyle magazines as otherworldly curiosities and formalist extravaganzas in concrete and steel: This media hype has almost completely ignored the original meaning and context for which these structures were once conceived. Yugoslavia suffered among the highest number of casualties in World War II in all of Europe. Many of the memorials commemorated the anti-Fascist liberation war of the partisans, the sites of concentration camps, and the victims of Fascist occupation as well as countless atrocities committed during the war. While many of the thousands of monuments across Yugoslavia were impromptu installations by survivors in mourning, others served an organized politics of commemoration that helped to define the anti-Fascist struggle as a foundational myth of a multiethnic socialist society. These monuments thus looked back to the past, while at the same time symbolizing a promised, better future. The need for the construction of a hybrid national identity produced a large number of state-organized competitions of monuments and memorial centers sponsored by all levels of government—particularly throughout the 1960s and ’70s. What ensued was a complex landscape of commemoration that was openly advertised in the form of brochures and tourist maps. The pilgrimage to these sites created a fledgling leisure economy while constructing and stabilizing a complex and conflicting national identity founded on a shared, traumatic experience.

In a way that is indicative of Yugoslavia’s expulsion from the Soviet bloc in 1948, Yugoslav memorial culture differed significantly from that of other Eastern European socialist countries in that, a few exceptions in the late 1940s notwithstanding, it refrained from the pompous figuration of Socialist Realism and instead consistently featured a broad range of stylistic approaches, from geometric abstraction to organic forms. Exceptional too is the fact that many of the state-sponsored competitions did not solely ask for individual sculptural objects but encouraged cross-disciplinary collaborations between artists and architects. The underlying logic of embedding sculptural monuments in larger memorial complexes generated an arsenal of innovative typologies. Like many of his other projects, Bogdan Bogdanović’s highly recognizable Jasenovac Memorial Site (1959–66) on the location of the eponymous concentration camp constitutes an entire park-like landscape defined by winding paths and monumental sculpture that allows for a contemplative visitor experience in the act of absorbing space. Conversely, the Memorial Center in Kolašin (1969–75), by architect Marko Mušič, or the Monument to the Uprising of the People of Kordun and Banija in Petrova Gora (1979–81), a collaboration by architect Berislav Šerberić and sculptor Vojin Bakić,

*Berislav Šerbetić, Zoran Bakić, and Vojin Bakić.  
Monument to the Uprising  
of the People of Kordun  
and Banija, Petrova Gora,  
Croatia. 1979–1981.*



are fully accessible buildings with expressive sculptural forms that include a number of facilities such as meeting rooms, museums, and, in the case of Kolašin, even a community center and town hall.

After the violent end of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, many Yugoslav monuments have been decried as “communist” and as representatives of an obsolete oppressive regime, and have in consequence fallen prey to either neglect or active vandalization. The tragic loss of memory that ensues is addressed in the work of contemporary artists such as David Maljković, whose experimental video work *Scenes for a New Heritage* (2004) performs a vision of an alternative future against the omen of collective amnesia.

MARTINO STIERLI’s exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia* is currently on view at MoMA, where he is the chief curator of architecture and design.

## DELL UPTON

Civic monuments need to be seen from the broadest possible standpoint. The meaning of a sculpture resides not only in its formal qualities and its inscription but in its siting and in the circumstances that led to its creation. Debates over the fate of monuments in recent years have, instead, taken a narrow view, focusing on the works and their subjects alone. For monuments in the United States, the first step is to understand the peculiar nature of American civic space as it took shape during the early years of the republic. Civic (as opposed to more broadly public) space was conceived on the one hand as a common, not to be appropriated for the benefit of any individual or small group (as, for example, by intruding on it for commercial purposes), and as a space of consensus. Fictively, at least, civic space represents the values of the entire community. A monument located in civic space should, by this view, express generally held, or at least very widely held, values.

The Confederate monuments that have been the focus of recent controversies were erected during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when white supremacy was reasserted in the South. As an “old colored man” said at the dedication ceremonies for Richmond’s Robert E. Lee Monument, “The Southern white folks is on top—the white folks is on top!”<sup>1</sup> These monuments were erected to celebrate a racial polity in which African Americans could have no role. They oppose the inclusive democratic ideals that the American state and most American citizens now profess. There is little question that they should all be removed. Arguments that they should be left in place and “contextualized” overlook their location in civic space, which is the most meaningful context of all. This is not to say that all should be destroyed; some do have aesthetic value and belong in settings such as art museums with aesthetically pleasing images of Medicis, Borgias, Napoleons, and other kindred spirits.

However, this is the easiest part of the monument problem to solve. Monuments are often the visual keys to entire landscapes. In the Southern case, the Confederate monuments annotate a modernizing New South whose leaders sought to urbanize and industrialize the region within the context of an imperial, racial state. African Americans, while nominally free, would reprise their pre-Civil War roles as a socially separate, politically and economically powerless labor force.

Charlottesville is an excellent example of the role of monuments in the New South. The Confederate monuments in that city were key elements of an effort to redefine its urban form at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Aaron Wunsch has shown, Charlottesville native Paul Goodloe McIntire made a fortune in Chicago, where he lived at the time the famous Burnham-Bennett *Plan of Chicago* was published in 1909. The plan was never implemented in Chicago and was impractical in Charlottesville, but McIntire brought elements of it to the city. Between 1918 and 1941, using his own funds, he created Lee and Jackson parks, as well as McIntire Park,

1. Quoted in Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 151.

a large landscaped park for whites, and Booker T. Washington Park, a much smaller park in a low-lying valley adjacent to the black section of town.<sup>2</sup> McIntire paid for a new public library, endowed the history and art/art-history departments at the University of Virginia, where they are still named for him. And he paid for four monuments, for which he chose the sculptors and the subjects. They honored Robert E. Lee, the subject of this summer's conflicts; Stonewall Jackson; Lewis and Clark, which features a crouching Sacajawea behind the two men; and George Rogers Clark, "Conqueror of the North West." Together, the monuments described a vision of an expansive white nation centered on Charlottesville. McIntire's interventions embellished and concretized a segregated urban geography that coalesced in the years after the Civil War. Tellingly, a block of black-occupied houses adjacent to the county courthouse was demolished to provide a site for the Jackson statue.<sup>3</sup>

At varying scales, similar programs of simultaneous modernization, urban beautification, and (white) Southernization transformed the South. In Memphis, Confederate Park was built on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River adjacent to the US courthouse and the city hall, and Forrest Park, further inland, housed a statue of slave trader, Confederate general, and Klansman Nathan Bedford Forrest and contained his ashes, until recently. Birmingham used parks and monuments to separate the white and black sections of the city, particularly after the Supreme Court outlawed specifically racial zoning. In tiny Fort Mill, South Carolina, a local mill owner donated land for Confederate Park and paid for monuments to Confederate soldiers, and others for women, Native Americans, and African Americans who ostensibly supported the cause. The grounds of state capitols and county courthouses across the region became Confederate and white-supremacist sculpture parks. These are the most frequent foci of contemporary controversies.

If these monuments are merely the finials of an entire white-supremacist structure, then the question of what to do becomes much more difficult to answer. The modernized early twentieth century landscape of the New South forms the context of the Confederate monuments and each illuminates the other's meaning. The New South city was, appropriately, the landscape in which the iconic events of the civil-rights demonstrations of the 1950s and 1960s took place. The familiar photographs of Birmingham in 1963, for example, are framed by the surrounding Kelly Ingram Park, a whites-only park built in the early twentieth century that separated the white and black downtowns. That landscape was almost entirely erased by urban renewal. This absence hinders understanding of the civil-rights memorials that stand there as much as a failure to understand the New South's urban landscape impedes a clear vision of the Confederate monuments.

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2. Aaron Wunsch, "From Private Privilege to Public Place: A Brief History of Parks and Public Planning in Charlottesville," *Magazine of Albemarle County History* 56 (1998), pp. 77–90.

3. Daniel Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (New York: Norton, 2011), pp. 223–25.

## MABEL O. WILSON

TJ IS RACIST AND RAPIST read the sign three protesters propped up against the shrouded statue of Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia (UVA) in Charlottesville. On September 13, 2017, dozens of protesters—a group that included students, faculty, and residents—engaged in an act of civil disobedience by wrapping the figure of Jefferson in black plastic and draping a BLACK LIVES MATTER/FUCK WHITE SUPREMACY banner at the statue’s marble base. What the protesters demanded was for the university’s administration to renounce the institution’s historical connections with racist individuals and groups by, for example, removing two Confederate memorial plaques affixed to the rotunda’s south entrance—this was a “March to Reclaim Our Grounds.”

The demonstration proclaimed solidarity with local residents in response to the violent and deadly white-nationalist march that took place one month earlier and left one anti-racist counter-protester, Heather Heyer, dead. Members of white-nationalist groups had descended on Charlottesville to protest the city government’s proposed removal of monuments to generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. On the first night of their rampage, a group of one hundred mostly white men led a torchlit parade through the university’s historic grounds—an ominous reenactment of Ku Klux Klan night marches. While alternating cries of “You will not replace us!,” “Jews will not replace us!,” and “White lives matter!,” the throngs of white nationalists encircled a smaller group of anti-racist protesters at the base of the Jefferson statue. Jefferson, who in his lifetime had been a vociferous champion of freedom for white Euro-Americans but also had lacked the political and personal will to end chattel slavery, which would have freed thousands of enslaved blacks, including hundreds of his own slaves, became a flash point for both the condemnation and exaltation of the white-nationalist ideals constitutive to the nation’s founding and prosperity. The blueprint for the biopolitics of the US social order has always meant that white bodies, idealized in the bronze figure of Jefferson’s robust physique, have thrived at the expense of the lives and labor of black and brown bodies, what Michel Foucault formulated as the modern racial state’s power dynamic of “to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die.”<sup>1</sup>

A statesman and slaveowner, Jefferson founded the public university near his home Monticello in 1817 to promote education as the foundation for the preservation of freedom in the US. Cast in bronze in an ornamental beaux-arts style and installed in 1911, the life-size statue of Jefferson by sculptor Moses Ezekiel portrays him at age thirty-three with his hands unrolling the text of the Declaration of Independence. The likeness of the Founding Father stands firmly atop a replica of the Liberty Bell encrusted with the muses of liberty, equality, justice, and the

1. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 247.

brotherhood of man.<sup>2</sup> It stands as a symbol of civic virtue within the plaza on the north facade of Jefferson's neoclassical rotunda. The statue captures Jefferson's character as boldly defiant of the British crown's tyranny and steadfastly upholding the Enlightenment precept of man's right to freedom. By shrouding the monument, what the protesters aimed to redefine was the historical narrative of a founder of the university and the nation as a defender of liberty by pointing to Jefferson's tacit acceptance and practice of dehumanizing bondage.

Jefferson, like many other slaveowners, was wholly dependent upon his investment in an enslaved labor force—in their distribution to work his vast plantation holdings and in the intimate domestic routines performed to sustain his and his family's life. The “unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty,” rationalized Jefferson in his 1785 text *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.”<sup>3</sup> Jefferson's ruminations on the moral and physical inferiority of the enslaved were also critical for how he elevated and rationalized white superiority and mastery. In the words of scholar Saidiya Hartman, “the long-standing and intimate affiliation of liberty and bondage made it impossible to envision freedom independent of constraint or personhood and autonomy separate from the sanctity of property and proprietorial notions of the self. Moreover, since the dominion and domination of slavery were fundamentally defined by black subjection, race appositely framed questions of sovereignty, right, and power.”<sup>4</sup>

That double bind of “intimate affiliation of liberty and bondage” was central to Jefferson's neoclassical designs for UVA: ten pavilions to house faculty and family, rooms to board 125 male students, the verdant swath of the terraced lawn, and the rotunda, the centerpiece of the ensemble housing the library. In his plans for the “academical village,” Jefferson brought together an exclusive community in an environment conducive “to health, to study, to manners, morals and order.”<sup>5</sup> But what until recently remained silent in official historical narratives about the university's antebellum period from 1817 to 1865 was mention of the village's dependency on an equal number of enslaved men, women, and children who built the university and who lived and worked there.

Thus, while in Jefferson's educational Eden its white residents embarked on a daily journey of personal enlightenment and communal engagement while their

2. Erected in 1911, the beaux-arts monument of Jefferson was part of an effort to aesthetically unify the grounds of UVA under the tenets of the City Beautiful movement. Between 1919 and 1924, Charlottesville also embarked upon a plan funded by a private benefactor to erect four monuments to war heroes and explorers in public parks, including the Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. At the 1924 unveiling of the Lee monument, for example, the Klu Klux Klan marched in full regalia in the city's celebratory parade.

3. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787), p. 240.

4. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Slavery, Terror and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 115.

5. M. Andrew Holowchak, *Dutiful Correspondent: Philosophical Essays on Thomas Jefferson* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), p. 264.

material needs were satisfied by the labor of slaves, for the enslaved their daily routine unfolded under the regulatory authority of slave codes that severely curtailed mobility and rights. In his designs, Jefferson carefully calibrated vistas throughout the UVA grounds to strategically hide from view the spaces where slaves labored. Slaves worked in poorly illuminated kitchens and lived in quarters below the pavilions. Behind each pavilion, they worked inside serpentine walls where the washhouse and smokehouse and other dependencies could be found. The enslaved lived under the constant threat of violence—at any time, from any white person, on or off the grounds—that ensured unyielding obedience. In 1856, for example, one white male student, Nathan Noland, brutally beat a ten-year-old enslaved girl until she fell unconscious and bloody because she had challenged his authority to whip her since he did not own her. Disciplined by university authorities, Noland was eventually required to apologize to the child's owner, but not the girl, whose name remains absent from university records.<sup>6</sup>

While we can know that on the morning of Monday, July 31, 1809, at Monticello, Jefferson feasted on a breakfast of “tea, coffee, excellent muffins, hot wheat and corn bread, cold ham & butter,” giving him the robust constitution that allowed him to live until the age of eighty-three, to be immortalized in hundreds of statues around the world, we know almost nothing about the slaves who built and lived at his university. It was, after all, mostly enslaved workers who did the backbreaking labor of digging the clay, filling the molds, and firing the bricks for the estimated 1.2 million bricks for the rotunda. Indeed, on a few of the original bricks, now on view in a vitrine in an exhibition in the basement galleries of the rotunda, careful viewers can find the thumbprints of an enslaved worker. Unlike the detailed statue of Jefferson, the prints leave a very different symbolic register of the over 5,000 men, women, and children who labored and lived in the academic village. These slight indentations, accidental traces of a life enslaved, have become an improbable memorial.

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6. Maurie McInnis, “Violence,” *Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's University*, Maurie McInnis and Louis P. Nelson, eds. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019.



JESSICA WINEGAR

How to honor the deaths of social-justice activists when the struggle for which they died is far from over? For Egyptian revolutionaries in the wake of their mammoth 2011 uprising that ousted longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak, the answer was to destroy a memorial to their dead compatriots.

In November 2013, the prime minister, the governor of Cairo, and other state dignitaries, accompanied by a military brass band, presided over the laying of foundation stones for a “memorial to the martyrs” of the revolution. The circular stone base was located in the center of the center of the nationwide 2011 uprising: the grassy circle in the middle of Tahrir Square that protesters had occupied under the revolutionary slogan “bread, freedom, and social justice.” The monument was to bear the names of those killed during the prior two years of clashes with Mubarak-regime forces, or with supporters of the democratically elected but recently ousted Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated president, Muhammad Morsy. Mere hours later, with shouts and chants of defiance against the government, activists hammered the stone foundation into rubble and spray-painted graffiti on it that denounced both Morsy and the military general Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who had launched the coup against Morsy and essentially ran the government. THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES, one graffito read. A mock coffin with an Egyptian flag over it was set in the middle.

In destroying the monument and replacing it with more transient memorial messages, the activists were refusing to allow the very state apparatus that had killed friends and family members to take credit for their memory. They were also refusing to let the state, in effect, terminate the revolutionary process by erecting an immovable stone monument at the epicenter of national protest. Such a monument would *monumentalize*, and thereby render static, a space whose fluid potential as a site of revolutionary practice was still needed. Furthermore, by etching the names of the martyrs in stone, the regime would be foreclosing the possibility that any future activists it killed could be honored as martyred; any future dead would be framed as traitors to the state. The destruction was thus an act of protest against the regime’s attempt to co-opt a radical history into the closure of official narrative. It was also an insistence on an open future for memory, space, bodies, and protest.

Security forces ended up arresting a few individuals and putting them on trial for vandalism and “thuggery.” Arguments about the destruction ensued between the revolutionaries, increasingly small in number, and the abundant supporters of Sisi who came to see him as a savior from the Muslim Brotherhood. Since that event, the regime has doubled down on torture, extrajudicial arrests and imprisonment, killings, and forced disappearances. As of this writing, the core 2011 revolutionaries remember their dead in depressed conversations about whether it was all worth it.

But to this day, there is no monument to the martyrs in Tahrir Square. The absence indicates a politically potent presence and potential, fueled by the memory of what was once possible.

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