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# In the Shadow of Monumentum...

The War on Statues

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# Abstract

*In the Shadow of Monumentum... the War on Statues* explores the last decade's violent protests on colonisation and institutional racism leading to the vandalism, defacing and in some cases removal or toppling of public monuments. The study explores the chronological events surrounding 4 monuments depicting Edward Colston, Cecil Rhodes and Mary Thomas - "Queen" Mary. Including the persons depicted and the monument's individual history, applying theories of cultural memory, affective economy, object's agency and iconoclasm with the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex nature of decision-making and debate surrounding public monuments today.

**Keywords:** Public Monuments, Affective Economy, Iconoclasm, Cultural Memory, Statue Trashing, Black Life Matter

What has happened that has made images...(...) the focus of so much passion?

To the point that destroying them, erasing them, defacing them,  
has been taken as the ultimate touch-stone to prove the validity of one's faith,  
of one's science, of one's critical acumen, of one's artistic creativity?

To the point where being an iconoclast seems the highest virtue,  
the highest piety, in intellectual circles?

- Bruno Latour<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Latour. B., "What Is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?" Iconoclasm. Ed Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002. 14-37.



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## 1. Introduction

*In the Shadow of Monumentum<sup>2</sup> - the War on Statues* explores the phenomenon of vandalism, removal and demise of public monuments sparked by debates such as Black Life Matters and institutional racism originating from colonialism and a patriarchal memory society.

During the past decade, discourses in our society have ignited heated debates leading the public, especially minorities, to pose questions regarding the mere existence of some monuments in our public domain. In some cases, these discussions have led to frustration, anger and full-blown rage against the inanimate objects placed among us. Sculptures and statues are being vandalised, altered, defaced or re-faced, tumbled, removed by authority and in some places even “drowned“ by angry mobs. Outbursts against dead pieces of stone, bronze or plaster have puzzled me for quite some time now, followed by reflections on why these artworks were placed in various public spaces, to begin with, and why they hold the power to provoke some people to this degree.

One theory, which is not far-fetched based on existing research, is that we humans create monuments in order to remember, a form of memory manifested - built to last forever. “Every period has the impulse to create symbols in the form of monuments, which according to the Latin meaning are ‘things that remind,’ things to be transmitted to later generations.”<sup>3</sup>

The human construction of memories is old, already during the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher argued that some memories are made.<sup>4</sup> There are several examples of ways to build and preserve a memory to manifest and create a sense of belonging to, for example, a nation or a religion. Creating and erecting monuments in public places is one way of achieving this. The question and at times challenge is; Who’s memory is being preserved and for whom do we remember? and additionally, as Judith Butler expresses in a conversation with Athena Athanasiou; “.... a constant contestation regarding what matters as memorable, who owns memory, and who or what is dispossessed of the rights and rites of memorability?”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Monument comes from the Latin monumentum, which variously meant “ a reminder, memorial, record, history. Merriam Webster dictionary.

<<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/monument#word-history>> , Accessed 20 May 2023.

<sup>3</sup> J. E. Young, ‘Memory/ Monument’, *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd ed., p. 234

<sup>4</sup> J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory Ten Studies*, R. Livingstone tr., Stanford press, California, 2006, p.8-9 , p.7

<sup>5</sup> J. Butler, *Dispossession – The performative in the political*, 2013, Polity Press, Cambridge

Neither monuments nor the human construction of memories is new. Neither is our desire to demolish these symbolic manifestations of what once was. Warlords and conquerors have torn down statues depicting former leaders and national symbols for centuries when invading new territories. The newness and difference in the modern context are that nowadays it is rarely powerful white men responsible for the destruction of the statues, instead it is the small voices of our society, the lesser, the “forgotten”, the oppressed rising and forcing their ancestors' oppressors to kneel or lose their head.

### **1.1 Purpose and Research Question**

The broader purpose and motivation of this study is to offer a critical perspective on public monuments - the orderers, the ideal they represent and the idea of their permanent nature.

My thesis is investigating the past decade's (2013 - 2023) outbursts against a few selected monuments in public spaces spanning two continents. I am exploring events surrounding 4 monuments and the regional, national and western discourses leading up to these monuments becoming the centre of violent manifestations against minorities' rights. What happened with each one of them and what, if anything, the vandalism and debates have resulted in from an art historical perspective? I will use the 4 cases and explore their individual political and affective histories with the aim of showing how and why these have become the locus of a, for some people, corrupt cultural memory.

#### **Research question**

1. In which different ways do these specific 4 monumental statues become the manifestation of injustice?
2. How come similar protests against 4 of the monuments led to different outcomes?
3. Is it a war against statues or a war against or between memories?

### **1.2 Case Studies**

The War on Statues investigates 4 cases stretching across two continents and protest movements present over the entire Western world. I am focusing on 3 monuments in Europe, 2 in the United Kingdom of Great Britain (UK) and 1 in Denmark (DK). The reason for choosing these 2 countries is due to these nations' role in the colonisation of Africa. Furthermore, I am researching one case in the continent that was colonised by the 2 other

nations, in South Africa. In the UK I have studied the fallen sculpture of Edward Colston (1636-1721) that was erected in 1895 in the city centre of Bristol and the statue of Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902) mounted at the Oriel College in Oxford in 1911. In South Africa, I have explored a second sculpture of Rhodes erected in 1934, formerly placed at the University of Cape Town. Lastly, I have investigated the recently constructed monument *I am Queen Mary* in Copenhagen commemorating Mary Thomas (1848 - 1905). This monument is a form of counter monument of the three others, the three first monuments hail two white imperialists while the latter honour not only one coloured female but a group of people that fought for injustice. My primary reason for selecting these 4 monuments is their shared colonial history, their vastly different locations and that they have all been subject to protests and debates surrounding their share presence in the public sphere.

### **1.3 Method and Theory**

I have explored and compared the 4 cases stated above through 3 chapters; Time & Space, “New” Voices - “New” Memories and The Void. The phenomena of monument smashing has been heavily monitored by international and local press and these sources are vital to understand and properly explore the events surrounding the cases therefore I will include media in my sources in addition to literature and academic journals. Another aggravating circumstance is that major parts of history have been written by one side and a lot of the documentation regarding the persons depicted on the statues is skewed from a certain angle. I am doing my utmost to tell both sides of the history in my investigation using various historical sources mostly gathered from city and university archives.

In order to explore and explain in what way specific memories and the 4 monuments are intimately connected to each other, society, time and cultural identity I am using Jan Assmann’s concept of cultural and communicative memory. Assmann’s book *Religion and Cultural Memory Ten Studies* deals with how memory transforms into history and how all individuals belong to multiple cultural groups based on families, neighbourhood and professional groups, political parties, associations, etc., up to and including nations and therefore entertains numerous collective self-images and memories.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory Ten Studies*, tr. R. Livingstone, *Religion and Cultural Memory Ten Studies*, Stanford press, California, 2006



Furthermore, Alois Riegl writes about the various values a monument represents in terms of age, historical and deliberate commemorative value in *The Modern Cult of Monuments*.<sup>7</sup> In the same text, Riegl writes about the social aspects of monuments and poses the question of whether monuments are displacing public memory instead of preserving it. This text supports my studies in determining what value each monument represents and sheds some light on the question of why they stir up emotions and where they fit into our society today.

Another concept that supports the question of why emotions are being ventilated on monuments is the agency of objects. To deal with this concept I am using texts by Carl Knappett, Christopher Tilly and Janet Hoskin that intimately discuss the topics of animacy, agency and material culture.<sup>8+9+10</sup> To further explain the purpose of monuments I am pointing to a few of Sert Josep Lluís, Leger Fernand and Sigfried Giedion's statements in their manifesto "Nine Points on Monumentality".<sup>11</sup> Eventhough the manifesto was written in 1943 the nine points still hold validity today, especially in regards to this thesis since 3 of 4 monuments was constructed prior to the manifesto was created.

In the second chapter, I am exploring politics, identity and social attributions linked to each of the case's affective history. The racial and minority aspects of identity are playing a major role in the events surrounding monuments and in order to explain how these aspects I am using cultural theorist Sarah Ahmed's book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.<sup>12</sup> Ahmed's book deals with the economic processes that are driven by emotions and affective relationships; *affective economy*. Ahmed explores how emotions do not only occur from the inside out but also from the outside in, how emotions are not simply individual experiences but are shaped and circulated through social and cultural practices which in turn affect our society. Using the affective economy in my study helps explain how the debate around colonisation, manifesting in movements such as "Black Life Matters", "Rhodes Must Fall" and in counter-movements such as "Generation Identitær" has rapidly grown and spread so fast, inspiring thousands and

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<sup>7</sup> A. Riegl, *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development*, Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conversation of Cultural Heritage, ed. N.S. Price et. al, The Getty Conservation, LA, 1996

<sup>8</sup> C. Knappett, "Animacy, Agency, and Personhood", *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, 2010, University of Pennsylvania Press

<sup>9</sup> C. Tilly, "Ethnography and Material Culture", *Handbook of Ethnography*, 2001, Sage, London, p. 258 -272

<sup>10</sup> J. Hoskins, "Agency, Biography and Objects", p. 75, Jan 2006, (Internet), <DOI:10.4135/9781848607972.n6>, Accessed 14 Feb 2023

<sup>11</sup> S. Lluís, L. Fernand, S. Giedion, 'Nine points on Monumentality', *architecture you and me The diary of a development*, Harvard University Press, 1958, Cambridge, Massachusetts

<sup>12</sup> S. Ahmed, 'Introduction: Feel your way', *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Routledge Francis & Tyler, New York, 2012

thousands of people to support the cause and fight against white supremacy. Furthermore, it supports the phenomena of collective rage and pain binding certain groups together over a shared cause.

The third and final chapter of *In the Shadows of Monumentum* explores the phenomena of the statue “trashing” examining whether these actions are a form of heresy or an iconoclasm...

In Bruno Latour’s paper “What Is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?” the author explains the term iconoclasm as follows;

“Iconoclasm is when there is a clear intent for the destruction or the demise of an image. Iconoclasm is when there is an uncertainty about what is committed when an image –from science, religion or art- is being smashed.”<sup>13</sup>

Latour lists 5 types of people with “iconoclastic” tendencies and analyzes the various reason behind the vandalism of images. I am using this classification as a base to understand why and who is effacing the monuments in each case.

#### **1.4 Research Overview**

The research field of monuments and memorials is monumental in itself, scholars have taken an interest in this content for almost a century from various angles. Many of the books and academic articles within art history investigate the reason we have monuments, their place in history and in our public domain examples of some of these are; Håkan Forsell, “Monumenten i det Europeiska Stadsrummet”, James E. Young, “Memory/Monument, Alois Riegel, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Development”, Katz Thor Rebecka, “Minne och Monument - Förhandlingar om sårbarhet och sörjbarhet i det offentliga rummet” and many, many more. From the field of sociology, anthropology, ethnography, identity and minority studies the political, economic and identity aspects have been studied in terms of public monuments and representation by scholars like Judit Butler, “Dispossession: The Performative in the Political”, Sara Ahmed “Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality” and “The Cultural Politics of Emotion” are just two worth mentioning.

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<sup>13</sup> B. Latour. ‘What Is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?’, *Iconoclasm*. ed. B. Latour and P. Weibel, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002. p. 14.

Assmann is also a scholar who frequently writes about the topic of monuments and memorials however in regards to our cultural memory for example in *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*.

Linking memory and identity to monuments is not adding anything new in this field. However, by studying these four specific cases in chronological order from the reason for their erection, the individual history of the figures depicted, the events leading up to their demise, the in some of the cases violent acts performed on them and the exploration of how governments, cities and states have dealt with the remaining plinth or void after a fallen statue I hope to contribute with a new angle. A new angle on both the democratic processes of decision-making regarding public monuments, the reason for violence against them, their value as agents of various messages and a suggestion on how to manage the cultural memory that “live” among us.

### **1.5 Limitations**

Since this is a study on the visual aspects of the war against monumental statues I will not study the historical or social issues caused by colonialism in depth or in detail, nor will I venture into political questions. I will use the background to support the exploration of each individual case. My aim is to comparatively tell each of the monument's story showing the similarities and differences between the cases to contribute to an understanding of the complexities in the field of public monuments.

When writing about the monument of Colston in Chapter 2, I briefly list three artistic interventions that were made on the monument prior to its toppling. These are all three very intriguing and deserve a mini paper on their individual history, but I have deliberately chosen not to include any detailed exposition due to my focus on the overall comparison between the three other main monuments of my study.

Lastly, I was considering using Judith Butler’s book “Dispossession: The Performative in the Political”, created in collaboration with Athena Athanasiou.<sup>14</sup> The book unfolds a dialogue between the two scholars regarding the act of depriving people and/or communities of their

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<sup>14</sup> J. Butler, A. Athanasiou, “Trans-border affective foreclosures and state”, “Public grievability and the politics of memorialization”, “The political affects of plural performativity”, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, 1st edn, Polity Press, 2013, (Internet), <https://www.perlego.com/book/1535560/dispossession-the-performative-in-the-political-pdf> (Accessed: 12 February 2023).

power and rights and how dispossession can lead to communal and political action. Butler and Athanasiou also discuss the questions of “what matters as memorable, who owns memory, and who or what is dispossessed of the rights and rites of memorability” Given both scholar's backgrounds within gender and minorities on the intersections of gender, race, and social power this could have taken my studies in a different direction and most lightly a direction focusing more on politics and discrimination and identity. Therefore, I deliberately chose not to make use of the book. It is still of interest, especially in the future debate on public monuments.

## **1.6 Disposition**

*In the Shadows of Monumentum... the War on Statues* consists of 3 parts divided into smaller subparts. 1. Time & Space 2. “New” Voices - “New” Memories 3. The Void

Each part is built on two dimensions; the descriptive history of the objects and subjects linked to them intertwined with the theoretical frameworks. My thesis is chronologically describing the history of how the monuments came to exist, the discourses and movements leading up to the vandalism and in some cases removal, the actual violent acts performed against each monument and the monuments' current state and whereabouts. Ending with reflections and a conclusion aiming at answering my research questions.

Time & Space describes the persons commemorated by each monument, how the monuments came to be constructed and erected, the national, regional and institutional cultural memories of each location and the value of the monuments according to Reigl.

“New” Voices - “New” Memories deals with the various movements in which ideologies have contributed to the vandalism of the monuments, the discussion around objects' agency, the actual confrontations directly with the sculptures and statues and the change, if any, the riots have contributed with.

The third chapter, The Void explores what the violent protests, fall and removal of the sculptures have resulted in, what events the vacant spaces left by the former sculptures have welcomed and make an attempt at placing this form for image smashing within Latour's classification of iconoclasts.

Lastly, the chapter Conclusion & Thoughts aims at answering my research questions and discussing the various outcomes in each case. Followed by a short text on my thoughts for future studies in this exciting field.

## 2. Time & Space

“Monuments live solely by the consent of their public.”<sup>15</sup> Who are the monuments public in James E. Young’s text *Memory/Monuments*? Which audience’s consensus is Young referring to? Throughout centuries humans have created monumental statues to commemorate and remember certain events and persons, one aspect that is crucial to review is; Who decides which memories are important to remember? These erections of memory - monuments, are rarely commissioned as a result of a democratic vote among city inhabitants. It is and has been the “winning” party, the people in power that historically have ordered, commissioned and decided where and to place monuments. Each time period and society has had influential people making decisions on what was worth carving out as a part of a city’s, region or national legacy. To understand the history of each individual monument in this thesis one must start from the birth of the memories and myths surrounding the figures that the monuments are depicting. It is not solely the history and actions of the figures commemorated, but also the placement of the monuments and their time in history.

During the 16th century, Great Britain began its exponential growth and continued to expand and colonize territories until the beginning of the 1900s. The slave trade acquired a peculiar importance to Britain’s colonial economy in America, and it became an economic necessity for the Caribbean colonies and for the southern parts of the future United States. Movements for the end of slavery came to fruition in British colonial possessions long before a similar movement in the United States; the trade was abolished in 1807 and slavery itself in Britain’s dominions in 1833. During this large formative era spanning centuries, a large number of British men grew extremely wealthy and powerful.<sup>16</sup> Among these were Edward Colston (1636 - 1721) and Cecil Rhodes (1853 - 1902). Most of the literature available celebrates

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<sup>15</sup> James E.Y., “Memory/Moment”, *Critical Term for Art History*, 2nd ed., Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, the University of Chicago press, Chicago and London, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “British Empire historical state, United Kingdom”, April 2023, (Internet) <<https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire>>, Accessed 20 April, 2023

both men for their generous contributions to the British and South African nations. They are by many historians celebrated as courageous and generous philanthropists who paved the way for the British Empire and donated enormous sums to the educational and welfare systems.

### **Remembering Colston**

The statue of Edward Colston was erected in 1895, more than 150 years after the passing of Colston. Colston has hugely influenced the city of Bristol and the Commonwealth of Great Britain. Kennet Morgan, a professor at Brunel University whose specialisation lies in Bristol's trade and commerce during the eighteenth century, states that;

It is fitting that there should be so many reminders of Colston in modern Bristol, for he was the most famous philanthropist born in the city who contributed to local charities and education.<sup>17</sup>

The text dates back to 1999 prior to movements such as *Black Life Matters* and *Rhodes Must Fall* nevertheless the author fleetingly mentions that Colston's links to the slave trade have become controversial in recent times. Still, Morgan mainly focuses on the positive achievements of Colston, his social and moral reform and the financial contributions he made to the city of Bristol, arguing that most of the slave trade took place in London and not in Bristol. Colston came from a wealthy merchant family dating as far back as 1340 in Bristol and in his early career he seemed to have followed in his father's footsteps. In the 1680's however he became involved with Royal African Company "the leading slave trading company" sailing from Great Britain to the West coast of Africa to America trading beads for buying slaves and providing labour to the British plantations in North America and the Caribbean. During the same period of time, Colston started to take an active interest in his birth city Bristol where his father had moved back to retire. The bachelor merchant got involved in politics as an M.P. for the Torys, he founded several charities and never married. When a friend asked him to take a wife his alleged response was: "Every helpless widow is my wife and her distressed orphans my children."<sup>18</sup> If this statement is valid it does support Colston's reputation as a philanthropist above all else however as Morgan mentions there is very little documentation describing the man's character.

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<sup>17</sup> Morgan K., "Edward Colston and Bristol", Bristol Branch of the Historical Association the university Bristol, 1999

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 4

This might be an explanation as to why Bristol is filled to the brim with symbols commemorating and hailing the man. One of the previously most noticeable symbols of his contribution to the region is the now-fallen bronze sculpture (fig. 1 + 2) created by John Cassidy in 1895.<sup>19</sup> The sculpture was initiated by James Arrowsmith from Anchor Society and commissioned largely by Arrowsmith himself.<sup>20</sup> It rose over 5 meters tall in the middle of Colston Avenue, the gigantic monument consisted of a 300 centimetres tall stone plinth decorated with 3 bronze reliefs, four fish bronze sculptures in each corner and a bronze plaque with the inscription; Erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial to one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city A.D. 1895. Mounted on top of the base was a 250 cm tall bronze sculpture depicting Edward Colston standing leaning over a cane with his troubled or contemplating face resting on his hand. His facial expression is hard to interpret, it as almost as if he is sad, deeply worried or simply stated looking down from his three-meter-tall stone plinth, much similar to a tower, at the citizens who allegedly erected the memorial in his honour. A question that arises here is; which citizens? Morgan ends the text on a note that there are two strands of collective memory about Colston's role in Bristol's history that cannot, according to the professor, be honestly reconciled, one being the image of a slave trader and the other lasting impression of Colston as a philanthropic bachelor. The issue with the monument erected on Colston Avenue (fig. 1) in central Bristol is not a discussion on collective memory, rather it is a discussion in regards to cultural memory and the communicative memories of today.

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<sup>19</sup> C. Hulme, "John Cassidy", (internet) <<http://www.johncassidy.org.uk/works.html>>, January 2010. Updated June 2020, Accessed 30 February 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Three societies in honour of Colston were formed in 1749, 1759 and 1769. In order of founding, they were the Dolphin Society, the Grateful Society and the Anchor Society. The Dolphin Society, named after Colston's crest, functioned as a political society for the Tories but also gave annuities to the aged and deserving poor. p.16



Fig. 1. Statue of Edward Colston, Bristol, UK, image Tripadvisor. Fig. 2. Sculpture of Edward Colston (detail), Bristol, UK, credit John Cassidy webpage.

### **Cultural and Communicative Memory**

In the third decade of this century, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and the art historian Aby Warburg independently developed two theories of a "collective" or "social memory" shifting the discourse concerning collective knowledge out of a biological framework into a cultural one. They stated that memories do not live isolated in a vacuum our memories are not individual, but rather we as a social group construct memories together in a collective context. In the essay, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity* Jan Assmann develop these theories and rename collective memory to the term communicative memory. Assmann position communicative memory as oral history with a horizon of 80 years to a maximum of 100 years. It is personal memory that is relying on actual experience and/or direct communication from others. It is the past that accompanies us because there is a living, communicative need to keep it alive in the present: it sustains and is sustained by us. We remember because we need it, a generational memory that changes as the generations change. Applying Assmann's definition to the case of Colston's role in Bristol's history makes it difficult to frame within collective/communicative memory terms, both the time horizon and that it is not built on personal and/or the memory of others of the man depicted. However, Assmann constructed another theory of memory, that is built on a more political base, cultural memory. According to the professor cultural memory can exist for centuries and have a purely cultural base, it is memories that project the part of our collective identity that wishes to remember and of the individual who wishes to remember in order to belong, examples of this kind of memory are



memorial days, monuments, and rituals. A memory that spans through eras of time. When discussing monuments this is the form of memory that we need to consider. Morgan are mentioning two strands of memory, the Western and the memory of the descendants of the colonized. Here is where it gets a bit complex, applying theories and terms constructed from a purely Western perspective is not really compatible with non-western cultures. Cultural memory is in many non-western cultures built on an oral tradition passing memories down through generations through rituals and oral stories whereas building permanent monuments is a rarity. What if communicative memory is equal to cultural memory in some cases? Arguing against Assmann's statement "We remember because we need it,.." with the difference that the generational, communicative memory does not change as the generation changes because the oral tradition is stronger or perhaps even vital in some cultures that do not cherish the tradition of manifesting memories in stone and bronze sculptures. In the case of Colston the descendants stemming from slaves are projecting their "invisible" cultural memories to the sculpture representing their horror history. Perhaps the very notion that some cultures do not have physical manifestations of events and persons deemed worth remembering contributes to the heated debate. Perhaps there is some truth in Senior Lecturer in History, Dr Kate Donnington's statement "It is not about the statue we do have, it is also about the statues we do not have." when being asked about the events surrounding Colston.<sup>21</sup>

### **The ventures of Rhodes**

In Cape Town, South Africa the majority of visual cultural memory is Western, the monuments are depicting "great" British or Boers white male figures, the street names are named after the former Queen of England, places in The Netherlands or imperialists who made a career for themselves in the country centuries ago.<sup>22</sup> Nowhere are there any physical manifestations of the indigenous heritage. Does this mean that the native people of the land have no memory since Western people can not see it with their eyes? There are no street names, literature, memorials or monuments telling the history of the country and the people who originated here. No visual cultural memory. Perhaps in African culture cultural memory is purely manifested in to the , communicative and cultural memory are one and the same, it seems likely given the fact that the Khoisan people do remember the history of their ancestors several centuries back not through the physical manifestations of monuments, but through oral

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<sup>21</sup> ITV News, ' Why was the statue of Edward Colston so controversial?', ITV News, Youtube, April 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Boer; a member of the Dutch and Huguenot population which settled in southern Africa in the late 17th century. The Boers' present-day descendants are the Afrikaners.

stories and rituals.<sup>23</sup> One man who is part of the visible culture in Cape Town is Cecil John Rhodes (1853 - 1902). Christopher Montague Woodhouse's article on Rhodes for Britannica sheds some light as to why and how the cultural heritage of the West and of Rhodes are still remarkably present.<sup>24</sup> Already when Cecil Rhodes was born in the British countryside in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, he was a child struggling with health problems and by his father deemed too unwell to be shipped off to get a proper education equal to the ones of his brothers'. Instead, he was forced to abandon his ambition of becoming a clerk or a solicitor and was sent to work at a cotton field manned by his brother in South Africa in 1870. Upon Rhodes's arrival, his brother had already left to try his luck in the mining fields. Rhodes followed his brother's quest to find diamonds and both of them left for Kimberly, eight years after he graduated from Oxford splitting his life between the United Kingdom and South Africa where both societies found him eccentric. Perhaps it was Rhode's weak health and exclusion from the high society that made him a bit odd, never the less the man had some strong visions and was determined to make a name for himself. Rhode had developed a strong philosophy of imperialism and was adamant to unite the South of Africa with the North. In addition to lobbying his ambitions to Queen Victoria of England, he founded the mining company De Beers Mining Company making him a very wealthy and influential man. For Rhode it was never about the money, it was about gaining the power to make all of Africa British, his main vision was to build a railway through the entire continent, reconcile the Boers and the British under the British flag, and even recover the American colonies for the British Empire. In 1881 he made his way into politics in Cape Town where he also held the title of Prime Minister for some years. His methods and thoughts were unorthodox and racist. In 1892 he passed a Ballot Act limiting the native vote by financial and educational qualifications. In 1894 Rhode assigned an area for exclusively African development that served to enforce the segregation of native Africans and control their economic options.

He even once defined his policy as "equal rights for every white man south of the Zambezi" and later, under liberal pressure, amended "white" to "civilized." But he probably regarded the possibility of native Africans becoming "civilized" as so remote that the two expressions, in his mind, came to the same thing.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Collectively, the various African Indigenous communities in South Africa are known as Khoisan, comprising the San and the Khoikhoi.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Montague Woodhouse, "Cecil Rhodes prime minister of Cape Colony", Britannica (internet), 2023, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cecil-Rhodes>>, accessed 24 Jan 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. , Political involvement in Africa

Dispossessing Africans of land and voting rights Rhodes laid the ground for Apartheid in South Africa. After Rhodes passing in 1902, he left his entire fortune to scholarships at Oxford for young men from the colonies and the United States and a substantial piece of land dedicated to a national university, today the University of Cape Town (UTC). As a commemoration of the benefactor, a monumental bronze sculpture was commissioned by the Rhodes Memorial Committee and unveiled in 1934. The sculpture of a seated and contemplating Cecil Rhodes measures 200 cm and was sculpted by Marion Walgate in 1933 (fig. 3 + fig. 4). The sculpture is positioned on a high freestanding plinth. Placed on a pedestal detached from the audience below, seated on a bronze chair in a relaxed posture with his hat nonchalantly placed by his feet, leaning his chin on his fist while gazing out over Cape Town with the Devil's Peak towering up in a dramatic background, the sculpture emphasises the man's power and position in society. Rhodes does not even notice the “small” people below his feet.

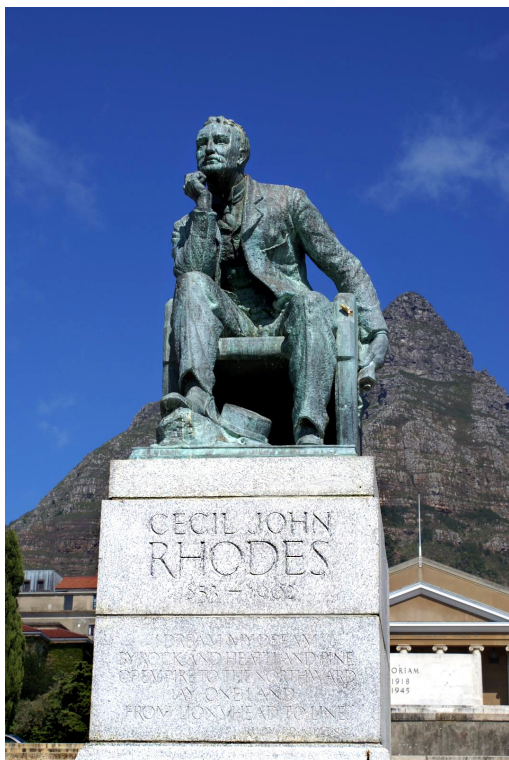


Fig. 3. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, Cape Town, SA. Credit Wikipedia. Fig. 4. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, Cape Town, SA. Credit Iballi Digital Collections UTC.

The second statue of Cecil Rhodes that is subject to this study was sculpted by Henry Alfred Pegram and is placed in Oxford, mounted on the facade of the Oriel College building. The

standing portrait in Portland stone was revealed in 1911 and was designed for and together with the building along with 6 other statues by the same sculptor depicting prominent figures, four former heads of the college, George V and Edward VII. Oxford's official website has published a pretty substantial article on the history of the rather embarrassing conditions in which the building itself came to be.<sup>26</sup> The Oriel building was built on Rhode's bequest, he left money and inscriptions in his will with the actual position of the extension of the college. It was to be built on Oxford Highstreet and 7 townhouses were thorn down forcing several families to relocate with no reimbursement. The statue of Rhodes is placed in the centre at the front of the building's facade. The life-size stone statue is depicting a middle-aged, perhaps slightly younger Rhodes standing between two rather peculiar ionic pilasters, on a stone base with his name inscribed, holding a hat in one hand and pointing down at High Street below him with the other. The statue looks as if it is about to jump off the ledge of the base, Rhodes's posture is leaning forward, looking down at the young students entering and exiting "his" building. Right below the statue is a large relief inscription in Roman letters for 1911 and below this, an inscription for the benefactor of the building, CAECIL RHODES. There can be no doubt when taking even as much as a glance at the front facade that this was a man with power, it seems almost as if Rhodes is guarding the Oriel building.



Fig. 5. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, June 2020, Oxford, UK. Credit Oxford History Fig. 6. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, Oxford, UK, Credit History Reclaimed (internet), 2021.

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/streets/inscriptions/central/rhodes\\_riel.html](http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/streets/inscriptions/central/rhodes_riel.html)

## **The Value of Monuments**

Today it strikes me as odd, cruel and unfair that a memorial sculpture or a life-size statue of a man of Rhodes calibre was erected in one place overlooking the land he stole from the indigenous people and in another location, looking down on the High Street he forever was a part of altering. Monuments have been a part of Western history for centuries filling various functions and carrying different values. In “The Modern Cult of Monuments, its Essence and its Development” Alois Riegl deals with three values of monuments from an art-historical perspective; age, historical, and deliberate commemorative.<sup>27</sup> According to Riegl, “a monument is a work of man erected for a specific purpose of keeping particular human deeds or destinies alive and present in the consciousness of future generations.” The author describes monuments similar to the ones in this particular study as deliberate, monuments created with a certain objective to keep the memories of a person or event alive. A form of manifested fear of *damnatio memoriae* - to be erased from memory. Riegl discuss the difference between historical monuments and artistic monuments and concludes that most historical monuments become artistic monuments over time, they give us art historians a view into our cultural history and aesthetic development. Riegl states that a deliberate monument’s commemorative value is dictated to the viewer by another, the creator/creators while an unintentional monument, merely created with no other purpose than aesthetics, allows the beholder to fill it with value themselves. I would argue that the value a viewer defines any monument be it deliberate or unintentional, changes over time and depending on the viewers' background, education, heritage and position in society. A monument also reflects a socio-historical and aesthetic context, it can assist scholars and the public in telling the story of a city, region or even nation. James E. Young states that the monument in modern days has undergone a transformation and is an intersection between public art and political memory.<sup>28</sup> Writing about the relationship of commemorative value Riegl describes age as one of the easiest and most general values to view with the share eyes. Most people will be equipped to see if a monument is old, and far from all will be able to date it or even place it in the right century, but most can determine by looking at the state of a monument if it has been exposed to years of weather and wind. The age value holds a scientific value in its own right. The historical value is a bit more complex to determine, here it is not the evidence of nature's

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<sup>27</sup> A. Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Developments”, *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conversation of Cultural heritage*, ed. Price S. N, the Getty Conversation Institute, Los Angeles, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Young E. J., “Memory/Moment”, *Criticals Term for Art History*, 2nd ed., Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, the University of Chicago press, Chicago and London, 2003.

disruptive forces that are evaluated but the monument's original form as a work of man. Scholars of Art History have the ability to trace when in history the monument was created and place it in a period this is important for the preservation and our knowledge of our own cultural history, to select a particular moment of the past and place it before our eyes. The third value; Deliberate Commemorative Value is the value most important for the line of thought in this thesis. The purpose of this value according to Alois is to keep a moment from becoming history.<sup>29</sup> In these cases, to keep the achievements of Edward Colston and Cecil Rhodes alive and present in the consciousness of future generations, an eternal present to prevent *damnatio memoriae* - to be erased from memory.<sup>30</sup> Monuments that are forced into our cultural memory, have been placed in the centre of our public sphere with the main purpose of never allowing anyone to forget the great men's contributions to Bristol, Cape Town and Oxford. Claiming immortality with little or no regard or respect for the memory of the people who did not gain a single positive experience, but who lost land, homes and basic rights due to the oppressors.

### **Hail "Queen" Mary**

During recent decades history is being re-written, and whispers of the slave trade and crimes against humanity have grown to retrospectively alter history books and through modern media turned into screams of injustice. Telling the other side of history, the history of the oppressed. Leading to an alternate view of our own history and our role in it. Making space for new persons to enter the stage, one of them being Mary Thomas - Queen Mary, one of the four women who led the revolution, known as the "Fireburn" labour riot against the Danish oppressors in West India in 1878.

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<sup>29</sup> " In its oldest and most original sense, a monument is a work of a man erected for the specific purpose of keeping particular human deeds or destinies (or a complex accumulation hereof) alive and present in the consciousness of future generations. It may be a monument either of art or of writing, depending on whether the event to be eternalized is conveyed to the viewer solely through the expressive means of the fine arts or with the aid of inscription; most often both genres are combined in equal measure. The erection and maintenance of such "deliberate" monuments, which can be traced back to a halt today. When we speak of the modern cult of monuments and historic preservation, we rarely have "deliberate" monuments in mind. Rather, we think of artistic and historical monuments"...p.69

<sup>30</sup> A.Medding 'Damnatio Memoriae: How the Romans Erased People from History', Alexander Madding [website], 2 March 2020, para 3, < <https://alexandermeddings.com/>>, accessed 3 May 2023

There are few records of the life of Mary Thomas, most of the material is found in the Danish prison records of her imprisonment 3 years after the revolt on the island of St.Croix.<sup>31</sup> The riot leader is believed to have been 40 years old when she arrived at the prison of Christianshavn, Copenhagen in 1881. Born in Antigua Thomas allegedly arrived on the island of St. Croix after the abolition of slavery in 1848 along with her 3 children to work as an employee on one of the many sugarcane plantations. On October 1st 1878 Thomas along with three women lead a labour riot called Fireburn which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. Three of the four women who lead the riot later came to be called the fire queens, Mary "Queen Mary" Thomas, "Queen Agnes", and "Queen Mathilda." and are still today commemorated and immortalized in the form of sculptures on St.Croix island.<sup>32</sup> In March 2018 on the 100th anniversary of the sale and transfer of the Danish Indies to the United States, a transnational project was revealed on the waterfront of the former colonial warehouse in Copenhagen. A monumental sculpture *I Am Queen Mary* is commemorating the persons who fought against colonisation and slavery while emphasising Denmark's role in history. The styrofoam sculpture was created by two female, black artists who both share a colonial past, one residing in Denmark Jeannette Ehlers (1973-) and the other in the now US Virgin Islands, La Vaughn Belle (1974-).<sup>33</sup> The monument rises 700 centimetres above ground and consists of a plinth constructed of corals cut out of the ocean by African slaves, the figure in the wicker chair symbolising a throne is a larger-than-life allegorical portrait of Queen Mary. Mary is portrayed seated with her arms leaning on the armrests holding a sugarcane knife in one hand and a torch ready to be ignited in the other, the figure is looking calmly out over the water. Almost like she has risen above the audience 7 meters below her. There is a calmness and an almost celestial aura over the depicted Queen. *I am Queen Mary* (fig.7+8) started as an artist lead art project and was erected without permission from the municipality of Copenhagen. It is creating a lot of discussions and debates not only on a national level but discourse on a Western scale. In 2020 the city of Copenhagen granted permission to permanently install a version in bronze of the sculpture. This project demonstrates how artists can be leaders in igniting conversations on slavery and colonisation on a huge scale.

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<sup>31</sup> 'Mary Thomas prison records', Arbejdmuseet, tr. R.L. Halberg, [website], 2019,<<https://www.arbejdmuseet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/mary-thomas-prison-records.pdf>>, accessed 15 May 2023.

<sup>32</sup> 'Fireburn', Danmarks National Museum [website], <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/historical-themes/danish-colonies/the-danish-west-indies/fireburn/>, accessed 24 April 2023.

<sup>33</sup> J. Ehlers & L.V. Belle., 'I am Queen Mary', I am Queen Mary [website], <https://www.iamqueenmary.com/>, accessed 15 January 2023.



Fig. 7. *I am Queen Mary*, 2018, Copenhagen, DK. Credit I Do Art. Fig. 8. *I am Queen Mary*, 2018, Copenhagen, DK. Credit Iamqueenmary.com

*I am Queen Mary* as a contemporary monument also demonstrates something even rarer. It is a sculpture aiming at starting a conversation and bringing a different side of history into the present time. Whereas many deliberate monuments have been created to permanently commemorate one great man and his achievement, giving the figure depicted eternal life in materials like bronze or stone, this monument is of a much more temporary nature. Created in styrofoam not constructed to withstand wind and weather the age value is extremely low. Of course, any monument needs a human hand to keep its historical aesthetic value and commemorative value since these two values are constantly battling each other. Age value wears off and effaces the signs of the human hand's work and with time erases form, colour and even descriptions on monuments which in turn ceases to become deliberate. Most deliberate monuments are constructed with the purpose of common loci – to forge a common national identity or a common history. For centuries monuments have long sought to provide a naturalizing locus for memory, in which the state's triumphs and martyrs, its ideals and founding myths are cast as being as naturally true as the landscape in which they stand.



sustaining illusions, the principles of its seeming longevity and power. Ehlers and Belle's project serves a different purpose is not to preserve history or glorify and keep one nation or person forever present, *I am Queen Mary* according to Art historian and curator Mathias Danbolt is igniting conversations globally and has a locus of empowerment and mobilisation on racism.<sup>34</sup> It is in contrast to most other public monuments not commissioned by State or municipality, it is not something that the public wanted or asked for. The project keeps being resisted, due to Danish ignorance around colonialism. Danbolt states that the mere presence of *I am Queen Mary* is a demonstration of the possibility of change. I completely agree and his statement underlines this specific monument's or rather art project's rarity. In traditional cases both a monument and its significance are constructed by critics of the monument - neither the monument nor its meaning is really everlasting.<sup>35</sup> *I am Queen Mary* was not constructed and designed to be everlasting as the two other sculptures and the statue, perhaps its purpose is to focus on the importance of our oral tradition, to speak of the parts of history that have not been glorified or memorialised aiming at igniting a new revolt that might hold the power to alter our cultural memory.

### 3. "New" Voices - "New" Memories

Minorities revolting against those that hold the power to write history is far from a new occurrence, the event that led the Western world to know the name of Mary Thomas is only one example of injustice towards a particular group of people leading to a riot.

#### **Fireburn**

October 1st 1887 marked a "shift day" on St. Croix, the so-called shift days were introduced during the abolishment of slavery in the mid-1800s. One day a year all workers had the right to change jobs. The working conditions of the now-free workers were horrible and many felt like they were still slaves, contracts bound them to one plantation for an entire year during which they could not affect their terms. During the enslavement plantation owners were liable to pay for accommodation, healthcare and food however, after the abolishment the free workers became accountable for these expenses. Their salaries were so low that they could barely cover the living costs and definitely not healthcare, due to this dissatisfaction had risen

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<sup>34</sup> Art historian and curator Mathias Danbolt talks about the monument I Am Queen Mary - La Vaughn Belle, 19 May 2021 [website], Youtube, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFfAbnXLDqo>>, accessed 20 Dec. 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Young, op. cit., p. 246

and grown so big that when the workers gathered in Frederiksted on October 1st 1887 the angry mob broke out in protest. After a man named Henry Trotman was injured by local police a rumour quickly spread of police brutality so violent that Trotman died and even though the man was simply driven to the hospital, it was too late. A riot with Queen Mary at the forefront had started and rapidly spread like a fire throughout the island, resulting in most of Frederikstad and over 50 plantations being burnt to the ground giving the riot the name “Fireburn”.

The Copenhagen monument commemorates the act of the women and men standing up for their rights in a very similar invigilating manner, unapologetic without asking for permission the sculpture was placed among the Copenhageners forcing Danes to remember and address their role in a history that is making ripples still today. Even though *I am Queen Mary* had her head blown off by a storm in December 2020 leading local authorities to remove her, the artists behind the monument managed to create a massive discussion throughout the Western Hemisphere. As in most cases of monuments “living” among us, this monument too received critique, some art scholars posed allegations of the sculpture not being a work of art, but merely a statement piece placed to spark a public debate, a sort of social intervention not



worthy of being recognized as fine art. In an interview with the Danish newspaper, Berlingske, Art History Professor Jacob Wamberg states; “I do not know if it should be a statue of any named person. In that case, it would have to be a statue made with our time's sense of ambiguity: if they (the artists) could make a more intelligent grip and really show that they were artists of our time, and not just point fingers at a colonialist patriarchy with same means as this patriarchy.”<sup>36</sup> Wamberg expresses a concern that the rhetoric of the sculpture is totalitarian.

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<sup>36</sup> J. T. Paulsen, 'Professor kritiserer kommende statue ved Amaliehaven – minder om totalitær kunst', Weekendavisen, 15 April 2012, Berlingske [online database], accessed 21 May 2023.

A European movement by the name Generation Identitær (GI) with an independent branch in Denmark has taken the critique way beyond the negative remarks of a few art critics.<sup>37</sup> GI has taken it upon themselves to create a counter-campaign against the ideology of the *I am Queen Mary* monument advocates. When the sculpture was removed by Danish authorities the organisation made a political protest called *No to Danish self loath - We have nothing to be ashamed of* (fig. 9) using the empty plinth of the monument as a base for a large yellow wooden plaque stating “We have nothing to be ashamed of” accompanied by yellow smoke flares, referring to the Danish legacy and role in colonialism and slave trade and how Danes ought to be proud of their history and heritage.



Fig. 9 Image of GI’s protest “No to Danish self loath - We have nothing to be ashamed of”, 2021, credit the organisation's website.

### Collective Affect

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Ahmed focuses on analyzing public texts circulating in the public sphere and how emotions in a group could be reinforced by public debates and media. Ahmed studies words loaded with meaning and the effect they have on us as

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<sup>37</sup> “Generation identitær, Generation Identitær is a patriotic youth movement that works to preserve Danish and European culture in Europe. Through sensational actions and creative communication, we want to create debate about mass immigration and multiculturalism, which today is the biggest threat to European cultures.” ‘Hvem er Generation Identitær?, Identitær [website], accessed 24 February 2023.

individuals and collectively. In my thesis I use Ahmed's studies and apply them to visual objects, sculptures, statues and monuments in the public sphere, working from a theory that these too can create similar reactions as words. Ahmed argues that emotions rise and live within us from texts we have read and stories we have been brought up with and points out that our impressions from others affect our emotions when confronted by an object or subject. She uses an example of a child that encounters a bear and the child's immediate response is to run away due to fear. These emotions stem from parents telling the child that a bear is dangerous and that she should stay away from it. Ahmed argues that we do not love and hate because objects are good or bad, but rather because they seem 'beneficial' or 'harmful' and whether we perceive something as beneficial or harmful depends upon how we are affected by that something. I argue that public deliberate monuments have the same effect, not the share appearance of them but the emotional value they carry and reinforce in people.

### **Who do we remember?**

The cases in this study all have in common that they have been placed in central places in Copenhagen, Bristol, Cape Town and Oxford without the public's wishes or demand. Neither of them has come into being through democratic voting or by popular demand. On quite the contrary the monument's motif and placement have been decided on by a few decision-makers forcing a city's inhabitants to live with them with the intent of the monument being a permanent addition to their designated location. Here it is of course important to remember that the 3 monuments of Colston and Rhodes were erected and approved by publicly elected politicians at a time where Colston and Rhodes were perceived as more or less heroes by the public majority. Whereas "Queen" Mary was the act of two independent artists, rather asking for forgiveness than permission, hence this is the most undemocratic of the 4 monuments. Each monument is a carrier of various "stories" or "myths" that trigger and affect the public differently depending on the individual's background, the text we have read and the stories we have been told and these stories develop and changes over time just the societies they are placed in.

Exploring *I am Queen Mary*, this monument has stirred up feelings with a group of people whose ideology is racist and hails the legacy of colonialism. GI actively works to put an end to immigration and multiculturalism since the group believes this to be the biggest threat against European cultures. For this particular group, the mere presence of the monument is a menace to their ideology and onesided history. For the group of art scholars that is taught that

artistic monuments have one purpose and historical another, the monument in Copenhagen is neither one nor the other making it difficult to judge and value in terms of the limiting frameworks we traditionally determine the value of an artwork by. For the slave descendants of Bristol, carrying the collective memory of oppression and injustice, walking past the immortalized Edward Colston occupying one of the city centre's main promenades as a constant reminder of their dreadful heritage. Or all the people of colour that are forced to walk beneath the feet of a nightmare of their ancestors, while acquiring an education. The "ghost" hovering above them, never deemed the likes of them as fit to realize a university degree. Or the natives of South Africa having to gaze upon a symbol of the figure that deprived them of their own land every single day attending school.

### **The power of monuments**

It might seem irrational that any monument can stir up feelings of resentment or any feelings at all given the fact that a piece of stone or bronze is dead, even hollow. A sculpture, statue or monument does NOT contain life, spirit or even a glimpse of energy, no matter if it is made in stone, bronze or styrofoam. However, the idea of a person or an event or both that the inanimate object symbolises may in some cases FEEL very much alive. This might not come entirely as a surprise since this is the purpose of a monument, should we agree on J.L. Sert, F. Leger, S. Giedion's thoughts on monuments from 1943;

"Monuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute a heritage for future generations. As such, they form a link between the past and the future."<sup>38</sup>

In *Nine Points of Monumentality*, the 3 men refer to monuments as symbols created for men's ideals, aims and actions and how they constitute a heritage for future generations. Any object created as a symbol I argue would possibly have the ability to ignite feelings; be it of hope, happiness, sorrow, frustration or anger. Carl Knappett, however, argues that objects cannot have agency on their own, in his *Animacy, Agency, and Personhood*. "If an artefact holds any kind of psychological presence, it is only a secondary effect of its connection with human protagonists, the 'real' and primary agents."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> J.L. Sert, F. Leger & S. Giedion, op. cit., p.48

<sup>39</sup> C. Knappett, "Animacy, Agency, and Personhood", *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, 2010, University of Pennsylvania Press

Knappet asserts that objects cannot have true agency, because they are not alive, whereas, when imbued by humans with a purpose, an object may act in a manner similar to that of an agent. There are other scholars engaged in the topic of object's agency in our social space who disagrees to a certain extent. Christopher Tilly explains that humans are intentional in their creation of objects, that a person's creation of an object automatically imbues that object with a certain purpose that its creation aims to fulfil. People use the material objects they produce, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to manipulate their worlds.<sup>40</sup> This is often the case with monuments, created to remember a certain person's actions, it might not be the person who created the object, but rather the persons commissioning the monument with a specific agenda as to what the sculpture or statue should convey and make the audience remember. Tilly adds that humans construct objects, from amulets to walls around their cities, to literally and purposefully influence society. People intentionally give these objects an agenda, and, in turn, imbue them with an agency of their own. It is not only the orderers of a monument who imbues it with a purpose, but also the viewers give the dead piece of stone or bronze meaning and agency. In *Ethnography and Material Culture*, Tilly states that the meaning of an object is born when that object is used towards a purpose by a group, I would argue that the group too can infuse the object with a new purpose. An object gains agency, therefore, when it is used for a specific means by a human. In *Agency, Biography and Objects* Janet Hoskin state that objects are made to act upon the world and on other persons; otherwise, they would not be created. Therefore, objects do indeed possess an innate agency given to them by humans that allows them to affect change.<sup>41</sup>

### **Agency's Effect on Change**

Studying the effects of *I Am Queen Mary* it is fair to establish the possibility that objects have some effect on change. Not that the styrofoam sculpture itself jumped down from the coral plinth raising her voice to create a debate on Danish involvement in colonization, but the monument as a symbol of change points to it actually having some agency. I will call this phenomenon, the intended change. The artists behind the construction of the monument intended for her to be an agent of change starting a debate on the dark history of Denmark. Looking at the sculpture of Colston on the other hand, the people behind his monument had a fundamentally different intention when creating and erecting the bronze sculpture in his

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<sup>40</sup> C. Tilly, "Ethnography and Material Culture", *Handbook of Ethnography*, 2001, Sage, London, pp. 258 -272

<sup>41</sup> J. Hoskins, 'Agency, Biography and Objects', Jan 2006, p. 75, Researchgate [online database], <DOI:10.4135/9781848607972.n6>, accessed 14 Feb. 2023.

honour. The intent in this case was that the citizens of Bristol would never forget his contributions to the city. I refuse to believe that anyone back in 1895 was anticipating that three black females, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi creating the Black Life Matter (BLM) movement 118 years after the monument unveiling. BLM is according to the movement's official website “a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.”<sup>42</sup> The organisation was founded in 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. It started with a #blacklifematters on social media and grew into a global movement after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25th 2020. New York Times describes the police brutality that caused Floyd’s life to end.

“Minneapolis police officers arrested George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man after a convenience store employee called 911 and told the police that Mr. Floyd had bought cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. Seventeen minutes after the first squad car arrived at the scene, Mr Floyd was unconscious and pinned beneath three police officers, showing no signs of life.”<sup>43</sup>

This tragic event reminds me of the event that lead to the *Firebun* in St. Croix back in 1878, with the obvious and vital difference that the victim of police violence, Henry Trotman survived. Much like the rumours of Trotman’s demise sparked a burning riot, Floyd’s death echoed over the entire Western world and debates on injustice, white supremacy and abuse of power ignited demonstrations in most major cities spreading from Canada, the US all the way to Europe. After years of debates and several, two government lead and one unsolicited, artistic interventions (fig. 10-12) surrounding the Edward Colstone sculpture, a decision was made to put up a second plaque on the plinth explaining Colston’s dual roles in society.<sup>44</sup> Due to the heated debates following the decision the mounting of a second plaque was never executed.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> 'About', Black Lives Matter [website], <<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>>, accessed 20 May 2023.

<sup>43</sup> E.Hill et. al., ‘How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody’, New York Times [website], published May 31, 2020, updated Jan. 24, 2022, para. 2  
< <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>>, accessed 20 May 2023.

<sup>44</sup> The artistic interventions by Hew Locke, Faith M and Getting Up to Stuff is worthy of receiving their own study therefore I have decided to only briefly mention them here and not describe each intervention in detail.

<sup>45</sup>Anon, “Statue of Edward Colston”, Bristol’s Free Museums and Historic Houses, (internet)  
<<https://museums.bristol.gov.uk/narratives.php?irn=16456>>, Accessed 1 May 2023.



Fig. 10. Hew Locke, 2006



Fig. 11. *Knitted shackles*, Faith M, 2018



Fig. 12. *Here and Now*, Getting Up To Stuff,

2018

On June 7th 2020 the BLM movement reached Bristol and protests grew so strong that hundreds, if not thousands, anti-racist protesters marched in a demonstration to the monument of Edward Colston. The protesters attached ropes around the figure depicting Colston and



toppled the bronze sculpture (fig.13) of its stone plinth.<sup>46</sup> The angry mob sprayed the sculpture with words stating prick and BLM before rolling and dragging the statue through the city of Bristol (fig. 14), down to the waterfront throwing the entire object in the channel. A video (fig.15) posted on Twitter during the day of the demonstration has to date been viewed 8,5 million times. That is more times than the entire population of Denmark.




Fig. 13 The toppling of Edward Colston Statue 2020, Bristol. Credit ICON, the Institute of Conservation

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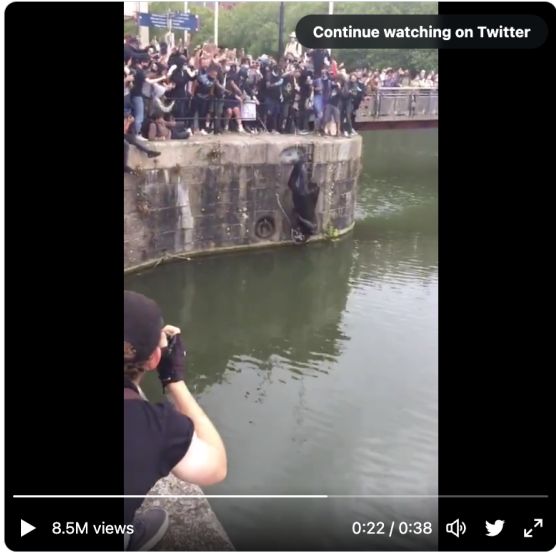
<sup>46</sup> Anon., What Happened To Slave Trader Edward Colston's Statue In Bristol? - March 2022 [video], Youtube 'Statue Wars BBC Select' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6UaVYIZ26M&t=22s>>, accessed 19 December 2023.



Fig. 14. Statue of Edward Colston, June 2020, Bristol, UK, image The Guardian

 **James Felton**  
@JimMFelton · Follow

If you're one of the people who thinks throwing a statue of Edward Colston into the sea is bad, wait until you find out about the 19,000 slaves who died whilst his company transported them to the Caribbean.

 Continue watching on Twitter

8.5M views 0:22 / 0:38

5:47 PM · Jun 7, 2020

96.9K Reply Copy link to Tweet

[Read 1.1K replies](#)

Fig. 15. Video of the Colston statue being thrown into the water, 2020. Credit James Felton, Twitter

The people behind the sculpture, had the intention of memorialising the man depicted and filling the monument with memories glorifying Colston's deeds. Whereas the monument affected an unintentional change with the counter movement caused by the new meaning the viewers attached to it. Unleashing all their combined mutual experiences is "affective economy", a term pointing to that a social group's emotions and affective experiences are produced, circulated and valued within a social context. It is not our individual feelings, but the emotions of a collective group. I might go so far as to resemble it with one strong communicative memory causing a group to feel the same rage and anger powered by media and the BLM movement's ideology creating an affective economy. Affect operates through emotional transfers and attachments between signs and objects, and what is repeated in social life accumulates affective value.<sup>47</sup> Not only do people (orderers, commissioners, artists and viewers) infuse monuments with agency but, the discourse surrounding the monuments as symbols might escalate the transfer of emotions and accumulate feelings of anger and hatred causing them to be vandalised and even discarded in the ocean by their very presence. A vivid example of the emotions towards Colston's sculpture is the poem HOLLOW by Vanessa Kisuule;

...And who carved you? They took such care with that stately pose and propped chin.  
Wise and virtuous the plaque assured us. ...But still you are permanent. You who perfected the ratio.  
Blood to sugar to money to bricks. Each bougie building we flaunt haunted by bones. Children learn  
and titans sing under the stubborn rust of your name. But the air is gently throbbing with newness.  
Can you feel it? Colston, I can't get the sound of you from my head. Countless times I passed that  
plinth its heavy threat of metal and marble. But as you landed a piece of you fell off broke away and  
inside nothing but air. This whole time You were hollow.<sup>48</sup>

The poem shows pure resentment towards not the sculpture alone, but the man depicted and the persons who erected it. It also put words on how the colonisation that started in the 16th hundreds still today, deeply affects society.

Essential issues when discussing colonialism are mobility and space. Not only did colonialism depend on mass-scale movement and migration in its quest to seize territory, but mechanisms

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<sup>47</sup> S. Ahmed, "Affective Economies", *Social Text*, 79, Volume 22, Number 2, 2004, pp. 117-139

<sup>48</sup> V. Kisuule, 'Hollow', *Poetryinternational* [website], 2021, <[https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-30428\\_HOLLOW](https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-30428_HOLLOW)>, accessed 25 April 2023.

for restricting the mobility of colonial subjects became a topic of great interest during colonialism. Nationalism racializes body politics, partly by coupling the notions of unique identity and the right to space through a sovereign history. Whereas Colston has his name all over his birth town Bristol, the music hall, schools, roads and avenues, Cecil Rhodes's name was forever glorified with a monument gazing over the land he stole from Africans and “gave back” to build Cape Town University. Following the BLM movement the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) campaign originated in Cape Town in March 2015 (fig. 16+17), the protesters questioned the legacy and the placement of the monument and demanded it be removed from the campus ground of Cape Town University.<sup>49</sup> Most students protesting were not born during the apartheid the figure depicted on the sculpture started, but state that they still experience racial discrimination. Attending university being greeted by the monument of the racist figure on a campus still dominated by white staff made them feel alienated. During one month several protests took place and the rage was directed straight at the monument of Rhodes, throwing faeces at the plinth of the monument and covering the entire sculpture in black plastic bags. The series of RMF protests forced the university to remove the sculpture in April of the same year.<sup>50</sup> It is remarkably fast. 1 single month from the origin of the protests until the removal of the sculpture (fig.18).



Fig. 16. RMF protests, March 2013, Cape Town

<sup>49</sup> T. Timalina, 'Why Rhodes Must Fall', Harvard Political Review [website], 21 March 2021, <<https://harvardpolitics.com/rhodes-must-fall/>>, accessed 20 March 2023.

<sup>50</sup> D. Bowles, 'Cecil Rhodes monument removal, Cape Town,' World History Commons [website], <<https://worldhistorycommons.org/cecil-rhodes-monument-removal-cape-town-south-africa>>, accessed 22 April 2023.



Fig. 17. RMF protests, March 2013, Cape Town



Fig. 18. Removal of the sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, April 2015, Cape Town, SA. Image New York Times

Following the removal of the Cecil Rhodes monument in Cape Town the RMF protests ensued at Oriel College at the University of Oxford in 2016. Partly due to some donor's threats to end financial support, the university refused the protestors' demands to remove the statue. However, inspired by BLM protests in 2020 the RMF protests were renewed (fig. 19). With the only outcome being that a new plaque (fig. 20) was placed close to the statue, stating; (...Rhodes, a committed British colonialist, obtained his fortune through the exploitation of minerals, land, and people of southern Africa. Some of his activities led to a great loss of life and attracted criticism in his day and ever since...)<sup>51</sup>

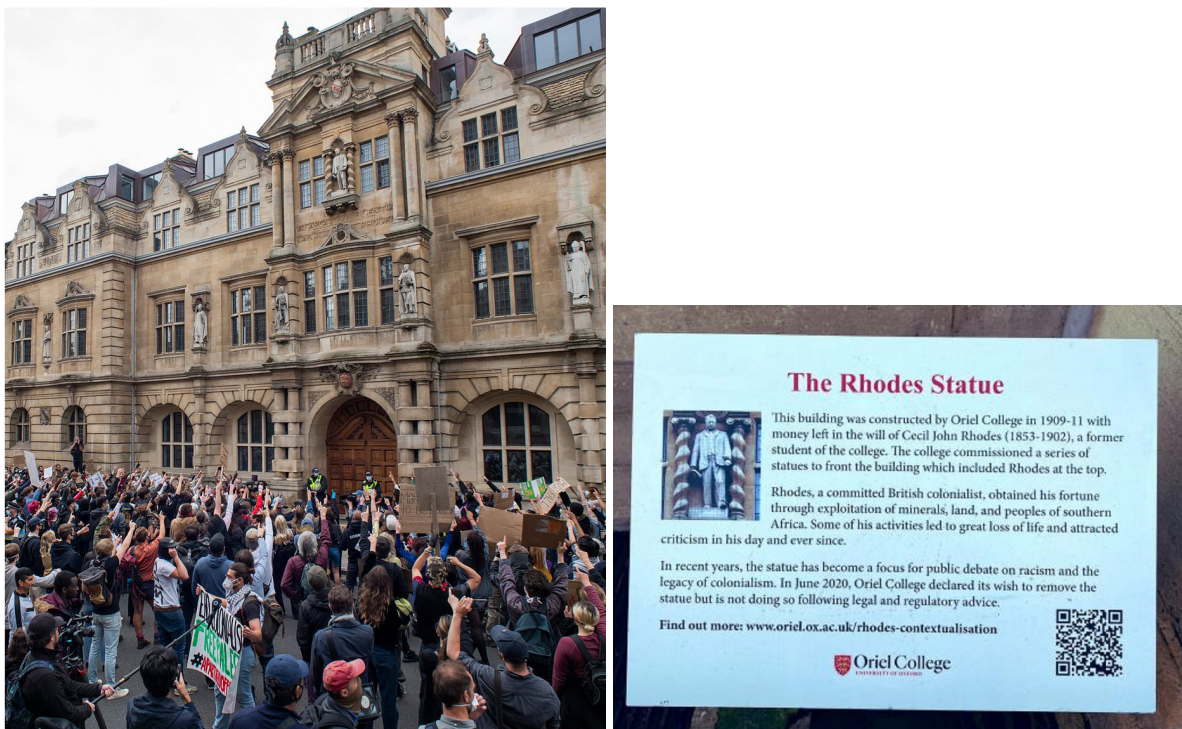


Fig. 19. Protests against the statue of Cecil Rhodes, June 2020, Oxford, UK. Credit Daily Mail. Fig. 20. The new plaque, 2021. Credit Smithsonian.

Protesters are not in any way content or pleased with the outcome and the RFM movement in Oxford is still actively fighting for the removal of the statue one of the main reasons being that Oxford is accepting international students and a racist figure as Rhodes greeting them is alienating and points to institutional racism and cultural hegemony. The statue at Oriel has not

<sup>51</sup> L. Gershon, 'Why a New Plaque Next to Oxford's Cecil Rhodes Statue Is So Controversial', Smithsonian Magazine [website], 13 October 2021, <<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/controversial-plaque-installed-near-cecil-rhodes-statue-180978865/>>, accessed 10 May 2023.

been vandalized as the one in UCT or in Colston in Bristol the explanation for this might be that the stone statue is mounted several meters above ground and rather difficult to reach. The protests in Oxford differ substantially from the original in Cape Town for the logical reason that Rhodes did not cause the same amount of harm in the UK as he did in South Africa.

It is not the monuments alone simply standing in our public sphere that creates strong emotions and reactions it is the history that these monuments projects combined with the stories of media that collective bodies amplify making sculptures and statues become casualties in the protests for justice, attention and equality.

## 4. The Void

According to Bruno Latour events like these - are historical in themselves - it tells us something about how people want to see the world.<sup>52</sup> Or perhaps it tells us more about how people do not want to see the world. Following the protests, demonstrations and removal, defacement, vandalization and overturn of the monuments there is a void, an emptiness. Empty plinths, stone bases with no sculptures, standing naked telling a story of what once was, but not of what's to come. In Copenhagen, *I am Queen Mary* is currently in the care of Statens Museum for Kunst being restored in the cover from wind and weather. The statue is in waiting, waiting for money to be raised so that a permanent sculpture in bronze may take the original's place. The "Queen's" coral throne standing bare, exposed to campaigns such as *We have nothing to be ashamed of*.

### The aftershock

In Bristol, the BLM protesters seized the opportunity of the vacant space on the plinth of Colston as a stage to further spread the BLM ideology by creating a counter-monument. Artist Marc Quinn placed a black styrofoam sculpture depicting the BLM activist Jen Reid (fig. 21) Meanwhile the authorities salvaged the vandalized bronze figure of Colston from the depths and brought it to the storage of M Shed, a part of Bristol Museums.<sup>53</sup> M Shed decided to stabilize the sculpture as it was when dragged up from the water, to freeze it in time allowing

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<sup>52</sup> 50 B. Latour., 'What Is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?', *Iconoclasm*. ed., B. Latour & P. Weibel, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, pp. 14-37.

<sup>53</sup> Bristol's Colston statue on display again a year after being pulled down, May 2022, Channel4 [video], Youtube, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfXUog8Nm78>>, accessed 20 February 2023.

the BLM event to visually be shown as part of the sculpture's history. The city asked the people of Bristol what they wished to happen with the sculpture, and 4 of 5 voted for the memorial to be displayed in a museum. One year after the violent toppling the sculpture of Colstone came on display at the M Shed (fig. 22). Lying down on his back still carrying marks of the red colour sprayed on his face and hands. Almost symbolic as the sculpture has blood on its hands.



fig. 21. BLM protester Jen Reid in front of the sculpture depicting her, Bristol 2020





fig. 22. Sculpture of Colston, M Shed 2021, Credit BBC.

### **Plinths as stages**

In contrast, the sculpture of Rhodes has not been seen since its removal. It remains in storage in a “secret” location on the UTC campus. Much like with the plinths in Copenhagen and Bristol, the void that the Rhodes sculpture left has been filled by protesters. In negotiations to lawfully remove the monument UCT deputy-vice-chancellor Sandra Klopper told the Committee; <sup>54</sup>

“that the space around the plinth had been ‘spontaneously reclaimed’ by the students and that the University remained open to retaining the lower plinth as this decision has been ‘directly influenced by student representation. She further stressed that ‘allowing it to be owned by students was psychologically important.’”

Already prior to the removal of the sculpture, the day before the official removal, an anonymous protester painted the shadow of the sculpture beside the plinth to illustrate that even though the sculpture is gone the shadow of Rhodes will never perish. The colonialist has forever left a mark no matter if he is glorified or remembered by a monument (fig. 23).

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<sup>54</sup> Cecil John Rhodes Statue at UTC, Casestudy #140, Contested histories [website], 2021, <[https://contestedhistories.org/wp-content/uploads/South-Africa\\_-\\_Cecil-John-Rhodes-Statue-at-the-University-of-Cape-Town-in-Cape-Town.pdf](https://contestedhistories.org/wp-content/uploads/South-Africa_-_Cecil-John-Rhodes-Statue-at-the-University-of-Cape-Town-in-Cape-Town.pdf)>, accessed 20 May 2023.



Fig. 23. The empty Rhodes plinth, 2015, Cape Town. Credit ResearchGate

The Cecil Rhodes statue on the Oriel Building still stands on the edge of its stone base overlooking the students entering “his” building. Opposite to the development of the other cases, the protests and demand for removal are strongly objected to in Oxford. So strong that last year in July the first original plaque recognising Rhodes stating “the great services rendered by Cecil Rhodes” was given listed status by the government. Perhaps there is some truth in allegations of white supremacy, institutional racism and cultural hegemony or maybe it comes down to a fear of losing funding.

### **Iconoclash**

Along with the history of humans erecting monuments to remember there is a countermovement of removing the memories or altering the memory and history of a nation, region or city. A traditional way to achieve this is to remove images. Are BLM and RMF the iconoclasts of our time? Or is the destruction, vandalism and removal of these monuments something different altogether? In his text *What is Iconoclash? Or is there a world behind the image wars?* Bruno Latour discusses the difference between iconoclasm and a new term constructed by him iconoclash; “Iconoclasm is when we know what is happening in the act of

breaking and what the motivations for what appears as a clear project of destruction are; iconoclasm, on the other hand, is when one does not know, one hesitates, one is troubled by an action for which there is no way to know, without further enquiry, whether it is destructive or constructive.”<sup>55</sup>

The cases and the events thoroughly accounted for in this thesis are not in any way or form clear projects of destruction. They are actions performed by collective bodies' accumulative rage against not being heard or seen or apologized to. Collective bodies not hurting people, but the visual symbols “living” among them depict the oppressors of their ancestors. Oppressors, whose actions still affect these bodies today.

Latour asks if images can stir up so many emotions why then do we have so many of them? Are they dangerous or innocent this is according to the philosopher an iconoclasm? He mentions Assmann's term “Mosaic distinction” the distinction between the true and false in religion - between the true and only one God and all the other false idolatrous gods. This is a suitable parable for most of the monuments in this thesis if we are to apply it not to religion, but to history - the true and false in history. Here are the two strands or countermovement, on the one hand, the side commemorating the philanthropist's contribution to a city, nation or cause on the other the protesters who see a false “god”, a devil that took more than they contributed. This strand is looking for objectivity and a different truth.

Latour has constructed a rough classification of the people who deliberately destroy images or according to the author “an archaeology of hatred and fanaticism”, he argues that there are various kinds of image destroyers and investigates;

the inner goals of the icon smashers, the roles they give to the destroyed images, the effects this destruction has on those who cherished those images, how this reaction is interpreted by the iconoclasts, and, finally, the effects of destruction on the destroyer's own feelings.

This classification entails five categories as follows: The A People are Against All Images. The B People Are Against Freeze-Frame, not Against Images. The C People are not Against Images, Except those of Their Opponents. The D People are Breaking Images Unwittingly and finally, The E People The »E« People are Simply the People: they Mock Iconoclasts and Iconophiles. As an exercise in my quest trying to answer the question of; Why people are

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.16

destroying and channelling their hate towards the monuments of Colston, Rhodes and Mary Thompson? I will try to place the protesters in Latour's classification.<sup>56</sup>

Starting by annihilating the categories to which these particular image destroyers do not belong. Neither the collective from BLM, RMF nor GI fits with the description of A, if they were against ALL images they would not have created new statues and visual objects replacing the old, it is not a case of iconoclasm. Perhaps all movements could potentially belong in B sympathising with iconophilia, moving from one image to the next. They know "truth is image but there is no image of truth."<sup>57</sup> They all use images and texts to illustrate their ideologies and protests, they use images, not static as the monuments in this study but, many constantly shifting images to get their message across. C, the people who are not against images, EXCEPT those of their opponents, this category seems to be a perfect match for all movements included in this thesis. Since neither of them has anything against images in general: they are only against the image to which their opponents cling most forcefully, the idol smashers. Neither of the groups fits in category D which classifies people who unwittingly break images, my study cases are utmost aware of what images they are removing or adding for that matter. The last group of Latour's classification is the E people, people who vandalize images out of spite, with no clear reason as to why. Neither of the groups seems to be a match for this category.

In the case studies of Colston, Rhodes and Thomas it is not a question of iconoclasm but rather a question of iconoclasm. People taking their anger out on images symbolising decades of unfair and inhuman behaviour. It is especially clear in the case of Rhodes, a sculpture memorialising a man who was the ignitor of apartheid no wonder people are throwing excrement at the feet of his sculpture. A more interesting and pressing matter is the state's abandonment or fear of iconoclasm.

Erecting a monument to something is one societal way of saying: we see what happened, we want others coming generations shall see the same and through this seeing, we remember. A distinctive feature of most monuments in our common public spaces is that they become involved in creating the story of a society's history. Both the context of the monument and the viewer's gaze are important, precisely because the presentation and the meeting take place in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 21-31pp.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 28 p.

public. Building or erecting a monument is thus a way of writing history, of remembering as a verb, as one doing and an active choice.<sup>58</sup>

## 5. Conclusion & Thoughts

### 5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to offer a critical perspective on public monuments - the orderers, the ideal they represent and the idea of their permanent nature. Minorities are forcing their way into our communicative memory by erasing parts of our cultural memory, perhaps even making room for new ones. When toppling monuments, memorials and knocking sculptures of their monumental plinths the contemporary movements like Black Life Matters and Rhodes Must Falls are creating a void, a vacant throne, an opportunity to utilise the empty platforms in our public sphere for change.

Answering the first research question; In which different ways do these specific 4 monuments become the manifestation of injustice? The reason for erecting Colston and Rhodes was to commemorate and remember what the two men gave back to society. In the case of Colston his dedication, time, effort and financial support to the city of Bristol and in Rhodes's case to honour and thank for his financial support in the form of the Oxford scholarships and the land on which the University of Cape Town is built. In all 3 cases, the monuments were erected by publicly elected authorities, back then they were a reflection of their time. With the affective economy of today's minorities that have lived for generations under the shadow of these manifestations of the injustice inflicted on their ancestors, the monuments become "living" symbols of that injustice and through that they become subjects of rage. The sculpture of Thomas was placed in public locations without anyone asking the authorities, citizens or audience of the sculptures for permission or if they even wanted to have it present in their immediate sphere. All 4 monuments are created intended to make people passing them remember, with one big difference when it comes to *I am Queen Mary*, the monument were intended to start a conversation ignited by contemporary movements such as BLM and RMF.

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<sup>58</sup> R.K. Thor, 'Minne och Monument - Förhandlingar om sårbarhet och sörjbarhet i det offentliga rummet', Glänta, vol.4, n.d. 2021, Writings [online database], <[https://www.rebeckakatzthor.com/\\_files/ugd/5818c7\\_1b41295dd87a4c7e98da9474f4698d4c.pdf](https://www.rebeckakatzthor.com/_files/ugd/5818c7_1b41295dd87a4c7e98da9474f4698d4c.pdf)>, accessed 20 March 2023.

Another difference except for the obvious date of construction and the figure representing a “loser”, is that this monument does not have an orderer. It is the artists behind the creation filling the sculpture with ideologies and tension. In the two sculptures and the statue depicting male “conquerors” the artists sculpting them filled them with the meaning and purpose of the orderers. I am not stating that the viewers of the figure of Thomas do not fill that monument with a meaning of their own or that she is a likeable person to her entire audience. She is merely created today in “her time”, a time of movements both challenging what has become our cultural history and some clinging to it as the sole truth. The main reason for her being subject to critique is the way she came about and according to some totalitarian rhetoric the monument projects.

Answering the second research question; How come similar protests against 4 of the monuments led to different outcomes? Having researched all 4 monuments and the events surrounding them one fact becomes utterly clear, even if similar anti-racist movements are spreading across the West, they are received differently depending on which country or even city they explode in. It took one month, ONE single month for the RFM campaign to effectively and legally get the university board to remove the sculpture of the man who gave the university the land it sits on, land that was deprived of the ancestors of today's students. In Oxford, due to politics, power and most likely the fear of losing financial support, the Rhodes statue still stands with 2 plaques, one new and the original with its disrespectful recognition protected by the government. A few miles north the authorities decided to listen to the people of Bristol's demand and even democratised the question of what to do with the toppled sculpture. In Copenhagen something remarkable happened, the authorities granted permanent permission to the vigilant act of placing a monumental black woman in the centre of the city. Perhaps some societies are more open to change and the prospect of making room in the public sphere for a new history and with that new memories.

Lastly answering the final question; Is it a war against statues or a war against or between memories? I argue that perhaps it is a bit of both, having established that no monument, sculpture or statue is a living thing, there still is a possibility that these monuments have agency. They have agency because of what is infused in them by their orderers, makers and audience. A monument can become an agent of memory, of a story and apparently several various histories. It does not speak or move, but it projects and symbolises events and actions carried out by the person it depicts. As a student walking past a 2-meter-tall white man who

laid the ground for apartheid every day on your way into university, it must be difficult not to fantasize about throwing human faeces over “him”. There are very few visual memories making the world remember the cultural heritage of Africans or coloured people, but the cultural memory visually manifested by white people in power is taking up space in every major city from Africa to Great Britain. With the aid of mainstream and social media, strong emotions have circulated between nations and built up a collective anger towards the stone and bronze symbols “living” among us. Resulting in a war between memories, what is deemed worth remembering, that in turn has become a war on those very symbols. In the case of *I Am Queen Mary* the monument is not on the receiving end of the war on the contrary she is being used to ignite a war, a war on memory. Is it possible that “The War” on Statues is not directed towards the lifeless bronze or stone objects placed by someone in power over a hundred years ago, but a war between two strands of memory? One memory that has been sculpted and carved to decorate the spaces of our cities and university campuses forcing a nation to never forget and another memory that has been kept alive through oral traditions and rituals, a communicative memory that has survived its intended timeline? Or perhaps, the colonial sculptures contain more cultural memories than the ones they were originally intended for. Circling back to the statement of Dr Kate Donnington; “It is not about the statue we do have, it is also about the statues we do not have.”<sup>59</sup> I do not believe we need more statues or at least not monuments of a permanent nature, intended to last forever. I argue that we need a more transparent way of deciding on which should go, stay and be erected in order to cater for all cultures living in a society that develops and changes every day.

## 5.2 Thoughts & Future Fields to Study

Is the idea of permanent monuments and statues a thing of the past? Should we aim for an aniconic public sphere?<sup>60</sup> If so, does this mean that we will have no cultural memory? No memory at all perhaps. The only thing that will live on after our brief time on earth is a void, an echo of nothingness. If so, what should be the time limitation for a monument or commemorative statue, 5 years? 10? 20? The same time as a communicative memory - 80 years? Or do we ban them altogether? Should we simply stop the erection of monuments? Recently Rebecka Katz Thor wrote a text on public monuments in Sweden stating that:

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<sup>59</sup>Why was the statue of Edward Colston so controversial?, 8 June 2020, ITV News, [video], Youtube, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\\_NeUhNUDzl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_NeUhNUDzl)>, accessed 10 May 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Without images or idols.

“...erecting a monument to something is one societal way of saying: we see what happened, we want others coming generations shall see the same and through this seeing, we remember. A distinctive feature of most monuments in our common public spaces is that they become involved in creating the story of a society's history. Both the context of the monument and the viewer's gaze is important, precisely because the presentation and the meeting take place in public. Constructing or erecting a monument is thus a way of writing history, of remembering as a verb, as one doing and an active choice.<sup>61</sup>

That is precisely the core of the matter, “A distinctive feature of most monuments in our common public spaces, is that they become involved in creating the story of a society's history.” Monuments do become involved in not only creating the story but telling it over and over again for generations to come right in the centre of their public domain. The most important discussion is not to ban monuments or to only create abstract monuments open to interpretation. It is the question of Who gets to decide? You? Me? Government? Should all of us democratically vote? How and who decides what is worth remembering? And for who do we remember? Butler states the complexity of the matter brilliantly in her conversation with Athanasiou. “... a constant contestation regarding what matters as memorable, who owns memory, and who or what is dispossessed of the rights and rites of memorability”<sup>62</sup>

Monuments are political, they are intentional and they speak to our feelings and emotions. I would very much like to continue the study of public art and explore how the citizen can be part of deciding what monuments, memorials, sculptures and other permanent art we want to share our cities with. Building on the work of Katz and Judith Butler's performative theory.

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<sup>61</sup> Thor, op. cit., p. 5

<sup>62</sup>J. Butler & A. Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, 1st edn, Polity Press, 2013, p. 174.



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## 7. Images

Fig. 1. Statue of Edward Colston, Bristol, UK, image Tripadvisor.

Fig. 2. Sculpture of Edward Colston (detail), Bristol, UK, credit John Cassidy webpage.

Fig. 3. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, Cape Town, SA. Credit Wikipedia.

Fig. 4. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, Cape Town, SA. Credit Ibali Digital Collections UTC.

Fig. 5. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, June 2020, Oxford, UK. Credit Oxford History

Fig. 6. Sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, Oxford, UK, Credit History Reclaimed (internet), 2021

Fig. 7. *I am Queen Mary*, 2018, Copenhagen, DK. Credit I Do Art.

Fig. 8. *I am Queen Mary*, 2018, Copenhagen, DK. Credit iamqueenmary.com

Fig. 9 Image of GI's protest "No to Danish self loath - We have nothing to be ashamed of", 2021, credit the organisation's website.

Fig. 10. Hew Locke, 2006

Fig. 11. *Knitted shackles*, Faith M, 2018 Fig. 12. *Here and Now*, Getting Up To Stuff, 2018 Fig. 13

The toppling of Edward Colston Statue 2020, Bristol. Credit ICON, the Institute of Conservation

Fig. 14. Statue of Edward Colston, June 2020, Bristol, UK, image The Guardian

Fig. 15. Video of the Colston statue being thrown into the water, 2020. Credit James Felton, Twitter

Fig. 16. RMF protests, March 2013, Cape Town

Fig. 17. RMF protests, March 2013, Cape Town

Fig. 18. Removal of the sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, April 2015, Cape Town, SA. Image New York Times

Fig. 19. Protests against the statue of Cecil Rhodes, June 2020, Oxford, UK. Credit Daily Mail.

Fig. 20. The new plaque, 2021. Credit Smithsonian.

Fig. 21. BLM protester Jen Reid in front of the sculpture depicting her, Bristol 2020

Fig. 22. Sculpture of Colston, M Shed 2021, Credit BBC.

Fig. 23. The empty Rhodes plinth, 2015, Cape Town. Credit ResearchGate

HOLLOW - Vanessa Kisuule

You came down easy in the end  
the righteous wrench of two ropes in a  
grand plie  
briefly, you flew  
corkscrewed, then met the ground  
with the clang of toy guns, loose change  
chains  
a rain of cheers.

Standing ovation on the platform of your  
neck  
punk ballet. Act 1.  
there is more to come.

And who carved you?  
They took such care with that stately pose  
and propped chin.  
Wise and virtuous the plaque assured us.  
Victors wish history odourless and static  
but history is a sneaky mistress  
moves like smoke, Colston,  
like saliva in a hungry mouth.

This is your rightful home  
here, in the pit of chaos with the rest of us.  
Take your twisted glory and feed it to the  
tadpoles.  
Kids will write raps to that syncopated  
splash.  
I think of you lying in that harbour  
with the horrors you hosted.  
There is no poem more succinct than that.

But still  
you  
are permanent.  
You who perfected the ratio.  
Blood to sugar to money to bricks.  
Each bougie building we flaunt  
haunted by bones.  
Children learn and titans sing  
under the stubborn rust of your name.  
But the air is gently throbbing with  
newness.  
Can you feel it?

Colston, I can't get the sound of you from  
my head.  
Countless times I passed that plinth  
its heavy threat of metal and marble.  
But as you landed a piece of you fell off  
broke away  
and inside  
nothing but air.  
This whole time  
You were hollow.