



ARTICLE

## Statues, Spatial Syntax and Surrealism: ‘History’ and Heritagescapes in Public Space

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### Abstract

The purpose of statues in public spaces has recently become a matter of controversy. Using a 1937 quotation from the artist Paul Nash and the surrealist leader André Breton, this paper explores the circumstances in which a statue is read as appropriately – ‘in its right mind’ in their terms – situated in public space. In doing so, it draws primarily on examples from Britain, Europe and North America during the rapid expansion in the number of statues in public space from the eighteenth century onwards. The rightmindedness of a statue is shown as primarily determined not by the subject of the statue itself, or by its reception among the public, but by ways in which public authorities and local elites authorise the use of public space. Yet these authorities’ understanding of the fit between a statue and public space can vary over time. Shifts in the political context often prompt changes to where statues are seen as appropriately located. However, picking up on Nash/Breton’s phrase, to place a statue in ‘a state of surrealism’ involves more than mere relocation. This is shown to require additional disruption to a statue’s artistic language and/or spatial syntax.

**Keywords:** Statues; memorialisation; surrealism; public space; heritage; vandalism; Paul Nash

A statue in a street or some place where it would normally be found is just a statue, as it were, in its right mind, but a statue in a ditch or in the middle of a ploughed field is then an object in a state of surrealism.<sup>1</sup>

Exploring this state of surrealism was a major theme in the art of the British landscape painter Paul Nash during the 1930s. It was then that he penned this translation of the words of the French artist André Breton, one of the founding

<sup>1</sup> P. Nash, ‘Swanage or Seaside Surrealism’, in *Writings on Art*, ed. A. Causley (Oxford, 2000), 126.

fathers of surrealism. Jarring juxtapositions intended to subvert normative readings of space and vistas and thereby reveal a deeper reality became a characteristic of much of Nash's work during that challenging decade. They also continued after Nash, who had been a major war artist during the Great War, was again employed in that capacity by the Air Ministry during the Second World War. One of his most celebrated works from that period is *Totes Meer* (1940–1). Its punning title refers with bitter irony to a desolate landscape of warplanes which – having been destroyed – are clearly no longer in their right mind. It thereby sought to ‘convey the feel of the war far more vividly than a photographic record could do’.<sup>2</sup>

Christopher Hussey, the architectural editor of *Country Life*, noted that Nash's contributions to the ensuing War Artists Exhibition ‘are, in their queer way, the only pictures there that represent satisfactorily the fantastic night-mare element in this war’.<sup>3</sup> Jill Craigie's 1944 film *Out of Chaos* shows Nash sketching at the Cowley aircraft dump that inspired his painting. Her voiceover records how ‘he felt that the terrific action taking place should be interpreted in a new way’, capturing the reality of the Battle of Britain through a sombre rendering of ‘This strange almost surreal world of fantastic shapes and twisted metal’.<sup>4</sup> Nash thereby sought to use allegorical and metaphorical artistic language to convey to the public the supervening realities of a battle that otherwise challenged attempts to provide adequate pictorial depiction. He took the savage beauty of the warplanes and showed them eerily relocated amidst the surrealism he readily found in nature.<sup>5</sup>

It is a moot point whether warplanes or statues are ever in their right mind. The notion of a statue's rightmindedness conjures up an image of it proudly shaping the nature of space by its occupation of it and representing and reifying a particular construction of reality as part of the normal and quotidian. Indeed, Nash/Breton imply that a statue is only rendered abnormal when it is not in spaces where it would be expected to be. Its meaning is thereby subverted not by the statue itself but its location. In certain spaces – such as city squares, parks or outside important buildings – statues are normative. Their presence is expected and unconsciously understood as conveying the significance of the site or even that of the town, city or country they thus adorn. The casual visitor assumes that they will see statues in such spaces. Accordingly, Daniel Defoe in 1724, when describing the sights of the City of London, listed various (generally royal) statues that already featured prominently in its streetscapes.<sup>6</sup> Not that these statues were well maintained: thirty years later an early London guidebook complained that ‘All the Statues and Fountains are so much impaired by Time, that they want to be taken down.’<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Sir Kenneth Clark speaking on J. Craigie (dir.), *Out of Chaos* (Two Cities Films, 1944), at 3.36–3.39. See <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-out-of-chaos-1944-online> (accessed 28 June 2023).

<sup>3</sup> C. Hussey to Miss Ramsden, 21 Aug. 1941, Tate Archive (henceforward TGA): Nash 7050, 453.

<sup>4</sup> Craigie (dir.) *Out of Chaos*. The Nash sequence is at 7.30–9.13.

<sup>5</sup> S. Bishop, ‘The Spirit of Place: Paul Nash, a Painter in Wartime Oxford’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 1 (1978), 42.

<sup>6</sup> D. Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (4 vols., 1983 [1724]), II, 106–9.

<sup>7</sup> *London in Miniature* (1755), 205.

Defoe did not find this panoply of royal statues incongruous in public space, though he did consider some inferior in execution. In Robert Musil's celebrated satire, they are so much part of the scene that 'one doesn't notice them. There is nothing in the world so invisible as monuments.'<sup>8</sup> Similarly *The Times* in 1861 described the newly erected statue of General Sir Henry Havelock in London's Trafalgar Square as 'one of those uninteresting statues with which London is crowded, and of which we have nothing to say except that we never look at them twice, never think of them, never care to remember them'.<sup>9</sup> As Jay Winter observed of his Cambridge students' failure to spot the town's war memorial, these monuments simply become for much of the time 'white noise' in stone or bronze.<sup>10</sup> Even something as imposing as the Monument by London Bridge fades into the background for the office workers who daily pass it.<sup>11</sup> Obviously, a statue cannot have a mind, let alone be in its right one: instead, a statue's right to occupy space is conceded by the extent to which they are read and accepted as accustomed elements of the built environment. This does not mean, however much their originators might have hoped that they would invoke memory in public space, that they are necessarily visible, unless they are also controversial.

Although statues are thus everyday if frequently unnoticed features of public space, where they might be expected to be found changes over time and in different cultural settings. For instance, most of the oldest surviving statuary in Britain dates from Roman times and now can only be found in museums, collected in historic houses and gardens or long buried.<sup>12</sup> However, originally these vividly painted figures of emperors, gods and local dignitaries would have appeared in public spaces such as forums, military bases or baths. Following the departure of the legions in the fifth century, most statuary created for public spaces moved to different, interior settings. The vast bulk of it was either on or in public buildings known as churches. Facades of cathedrals were decorated with saints, angels and biblical figures as aids to faith. Inside parish churches there was stone statuary as memento mori to the wealthy benefactors who paid for the effigies placed in sacred space upon their tombs.<sup>13</sup> This type of memorialisation persisted even after the Reformation: most eighteenth-century monuments continued to be funerary.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the creation of statuary

<sup>8</sup> R. Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* (New York, 1987 [1936]), 61.

<sup>9</sup> *The Times* 7 Mar. 1861, cited in D. Cherry, 'Statues in the Square: Hauntings at the Heart of Empire', *Art History*, 29 (2006), 687.

<sup>10</sup> J. Winter, 'Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. A. Erll and A. Nünning (Berlin, 2008), 72–3.

<sup>11</sup> P. Catterall, 'Changing Attitudes to the Past: *Lieux de Mémoire* and Contested Histories', *Political Quarterly*, 88 (2017), 631–2.

<sup>12</sup> M. Polm, 'Museum Representations of Roman Britain and Roman London: A Post-colonial Perspective', *Britannia*, 209 (2016), 209–13; F. Poulsen, *Greek and Roman Portraits in English Country Houses* (Oxford, 1923); D. Kindy, 'Trio of "Astounding" Roman Statues Found beneath Mediaeval Church in England', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 3 Nov. 2021.

<sup>13</sup> See N. Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Joan Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda: Monuments and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (2006), 14.

specifically for sacred spaces continued into the nineteenth century, instanced by the monument to the statesman William Huskisson paid for by public subscription and erected in Chichester Cathedral in 1832.

By then, however, a different type of statuary had begun to emerge. Patrons alluded to their education, aesthetic taste and awareness of classical heritage through the statues they commissioned. Aping what they saw as the tropes of classical civilisation as rediscovered during the Renaissance, they thereby acknowledged a particular reading of how the artistic language of statues should be articulated. Widely influential works such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) elevated the white marble statuary of Roman antiquity as the epitome of beauty.<sup>15</sup> In a period during which Europeans were increasingly encountering and denigrating other peoples, a classical whiteness came to be celebrated as the authentic artistic language of statuary, even though this occluded the rich colour palette actually used in antiquity on statues to represent the varied peoples of the Roman world. Although traces of the original paint were noticed, they were routinely ignored.<sup>16</sup> Colour continued to be used on monuments in ecclesiastic settings in Counter-Reformation Europe. Otherwise, an aestheticised whiteness was emphasised and came to have enduring influence, not least during the statuomania that swept Europe during the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, these artistic tropes were also exported by Europeans around the colonised world during this period. In this process, statues of colonisers served the same purposes of expressing hierarchies of power that had been served by the Roman archetypes these monuments were supposedly modelled on, only with an added racial dimension.<sup>18</sup>

The influence of the Renaissance changed the location as well as the artistic language of European statuary. Classical statues imported from Italy were by the seventeenth century established as centrepieces of formal French gardens,<sup>19</sup> a fashion subsequently adopted across the Channel. James II's much relocated statue, for instance, depicted him in Roman garb and was originally created to adorn the grounds of Whitehall palace in 1686.<sup>20</sup> It was predated by the first Renaissance-inspired equestrian statue in England, an image of his royal master Charles I commissioned for his private garden by Lord High Treasurer Richard Weston in 1633. After the restoration of the monarchy

<sup>15</sup> A. Potts, 'Foreword', in J. Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (Los Angeles, 2006), 27–30.

<sup>16</sup> M. Kotrosits, *The Lives of Objects: Material Culture, Experience, and the Real in the History of Early Christianity* (Chicago, 2020), 146–57; M. Bradley, 'The Importance of Colour on Ancient Marble Sculpture', *Art History*, 32 (2009), 427–57.

<sup>17</sup> This eventually provoked complaints, such as G. Pessard, *Statuomanie parisienne: Étude critique sur l'abus des statues* (Paris, 1911).

<sup>18</sup> See Z. Çelik, 'Colonial Statues and their Afterlives', *Journal of North African Studies*, 25 (2020), 711–26.

<sup>19</sup> C. Mukerji, 'The Political Mobilization of Nature in Seventeenth-Century French Formal Gardens', *Theory and Society*, 23 (1994), 660–70.

<sup>20</sup> Historic England, 'Statue of James II in front of the National Gallery West Wing', grade I monument, list entry 1217629, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1217629?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

this statue was moved into the public realm and its current prominent position on the edge of Whitehall in 1674–5.<sup>21</sup> By then it had been joined by another, purportedly of his son, Charles II. The then lord mayor, Sir Thomas Vyner, imported from Italy a statue originally of the Polish king John Sobieski. With a remodelled head it was erected in 1672 at Stocks Market, London. Defoe tells us that when one of the king's mistresses, the Duchess of Portsmouth, gave birth, the statue was adorned the following morning with a pillow to which was pinned the message 'Gone for a midwife'.<sup>22</sup> Further indignities followed as the statue was successively moved to an inn yard, then the Vyner estates in Lincolnshire and thence to other country locations.<sup>23</sup>

An even worse fate befell that of his nephew, William III, in Dublin. This was installed in 1701 on the eleventh anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne at which William had secured his kingdom, on the politically symbolic site of College Green, just by the Irish parliament. Its depiction of the king in Roman garb, at least among the classically educated elites of the era, established the rightmindedness of his statue both in terms of its setting and its appearance. This rightmindedness was, however, clearly contested from the outset. After various indignities, including being smeared with mud and having his truncheon broken off in 1710, William III's statue was finally removed following a bomb attack in 1928.<sup>24</sup>

By then, however, there were plenty of other examples of statues of William III, if not as widespread as those of his former enemy, Louis XIV, were around France.<sup>25</sup> Dublin's statue was unusual in being erected while the king was still alive, its equestrian referencing of ancient depictions of martial valour proving ironic when in 1702 William III died after falling from his horse. This did not stop the classically informed equestrian style remaining a common means of depicting him, invariably in Roman garb, in the growing number of statues commissioned in the 1730s and 1740s at a time of renewed Jacobite activity. Some, like the one in Bristol, were, as in Dublin, ordered by the city authorities. Others were paid for by private individuals. The one in the small Hampshire town of Petersfield certainly does not go unnoticed in a locale with few such monuments: it was restored by public subscription in 1912 and more recently described in the local press as having 'come to symbolise the town'. This was a new form of memento mori, whereby Sir William Joliffe in death associated himself with the cause of (Protestant) liberty by memorialising the king whose Glorious Revolution in 1688 had supposedly brought such liberty and certainly founded the regime under which these statues

<sup>21</sup> Historic England, 'Statue of Charles I', grade I monument, list entry 1357291, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1357291?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Defoe, *A Tour*, II, 106.

<sup>23</sup> '(lost) Charles II trampling Cromwell', London Remembers, <https://www.londonremembers.com/memorials/charles-ii-trampling-cromwell> (accessed 21 June 2023).

<sup>24</sup> Y. Whelan, 'The Construction and Destruction of a Colonial Landscape: Monuments to British Monarchs in Dublin before and after Independence', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28 (2002), 514–17, 522–23.

<sup>25</sup> Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda*, 8.

appeared.<sup>26</sup> The politicised nature of this memorialisation is made clear by the words on the plinth on William III's statue in Hull. These homages to 'Our Great Deliverer' were not to record history but to impose a particular reading, favourable to the then regime, upon it. Liberty was thus symbolically associated with Protestantism, William III and his successors.<sup>27</sup>

In the later eighteenth century, William III's statues were joined by others in open public space. One such was an equestrian depiction of the Duke of Cumberland in Cavendish Square, funded by General William Strobe in 1769. This statue of the 'Butcher of Culloden' was soon mocked both for its sanguinary associations and on aesthetic grounds. It was quietly removed in 1868 and the statue itself melted down.<sup>28</sup> Worse fates befell contemporary statuary in British North America. George III's statue erected in New York to celebrate the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 was torn down a decade later and used to make bullets to fight the British during the Revolutionary War.<sup>29</sup> It may be that 'Monuments, because they can be so public (in terms of commission, location and iconography) and because they are imbued with the notions of permanence, timelessness and posterity, are a perfect fit for empire,<sup>30</sup> but they clearly only remain rightminded adornments of public space as long as that empire is uncontested.

Sculpture was nonetheless to be widely deployed to assert that empire during its Victorian zenith.<sup>31</sup> This was part of a contemporary statuomania, facilitated by new techniques of manufacture and replication,<sup>32</sup> that served differing purposes across Europe and North America. For instance, the trauma of loss or of defeat provided a context for the thousands of Civil War monuments that appeared in American cities and villages, both North and South, by the 1890s.<sup>33</sup> Increasingly, as the Harvard philosopher William James warned in 1897, these came to reflect not the meaning of that war, but a search for reconciliation across the White population, an occlusion of Black suffering and – in the South – a cathartic celebration of the supposedly noble Christian warriors who had fought in the Lost Cause of the Confederacy.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile,

<sup>26</sup> Historic England, 'Statue of William III', grade I monument, list entry 1093567, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1093567?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023); *Petersfield Post*, 14 Sept. 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Historic England, 'Statue of King William III and Flanking Lamps', grade I monument, list entry 1197697, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1197697?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Survey of London, 'Cavendish Square 5: The Duke of Cumberland's Statue', 19 Aug. 2016, see <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/survey-of-london/2016/08/19/cavendish-square-5-the-duke-of-cumberlands-statue> (accessed 25 June 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> See M. Droth, J. Edwards and M. Hatt (eds.), *Sculpture Victorious: Art in an Age of Invention 1837–1901* (New Haven, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> A. Dunstan, 'Reading Victorian Sculpture', *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 22 (2016), 7–8.

<sup>33</sup> D. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), 339.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 204, 267–71, 341–4. The Robert Gould Shaw memorial in Boston, the unveiling of which was the occasion for James's remarks, was almost unique in providing monumental recognition of the Black contribution to the Union war effort.

following German reunification some 500 statues of the architect of that process, Otto von Bismarck, dotted the country. These were part of the nation-building process that across Europe provided the principal impetus for the statuomania of the time. As Michalski remarks, Bismarck's statues are 'not in reality dedicated to him; they are monuments which the nation erected for herself, and which refer to Bismarck solely as a pretext'.<sup>35</sup> They did not so much memorialise the man himself as mark the territories he had incorporated into the *Kaiserreich*. The trauma of the defeat Bismarck inflicted on France in the process appears to explain the conspicuous absence of military figures from the form statuomania took there. This involved a rejection of the politicised and conservative overtones of such representations. Third Republic statues instead celebrated the genius of France's thinkers, statesmen and manufacturers. It is these statues, often quirkily showing their subjects in settings associated with them (for instance, Marat was depicted in the bathtub in which he was murdered), that Breton had in mind when writing in the 1920s of the rightmindedness of statues.<sup>36</sup>

A century later Tim Edensor suggested that the rightmindedness of many relics of Britain's Victorian statuomania is increasingly questionable. Consider the statuary of public squares across Britain, dominated as they continue to be by nineteenth-century figures. Manchester's Albert Square, for instance, features five Victorian worthies amidst one of the city's principal public spaces. Although some of these figures were nationally prominent, others had a purely local and ephemeral fame. Indeed, Edensor claims the survival into the present of that of James Fraser (Bishop of Manchester 1870–85) is surreal, a jarring reminder of a vanished and more religious era.<sup>37</sup>

During the Victorian statuomania, politicians, royal personages and military figures were joined in public spaces across Britain by reforming campaigners such as Fraser. Whether they continue to command public recognition depends on the cause they were identified with and the narrative purposes the statue served. Thus, monuments to William Wilberforce (erected 1883)<sup>38</sup> and Joseph Sturge (erected 1862)<sup>39</sup> in their respective native cities of Hull and Birmingham could easily be incorporated into a national narrative of defence of liberty amended to incorporate the abolition of slavery that, in the process, conveniently occluded Britain's leading part in the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. They thereby supported a self-congratulatory approach to monumental national mythmaking. The iconography of Sturge's monument, with the supporting allegorical figure of Charity giving succour to an African infant, readily conveys the racialised narrative that freedom

<sup>35</sup> S. Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870–1997* (1998), 66–74.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–47.

<sup>37</sup> T. Edensor, 'The Haunting Presence of Commemorative Statues', *ephemera*, 19 (2019), 55–9.

<sup>38</sup> Historic England, 'Statue of William Wilberforce in garden of Wilberforce House', grade II\* monument, list entry 1197754, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1197754?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023).

<sup>39</sup> Historic England, 'Statue of Joseph Sturge in front of Tube Investment House', grade II monument, list entry 1076324, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1076324?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023).

was gifted by paternalist white figures to the childlike enslaved. A mythic figure is thus used to fix a mythic and whitewashed history.<sup>40</sup> This affirms in public space a reassuring and misleading narration of national virtue.

Those who struggled in causes which did not speak so easily to national myths, or were more contested, were less likely to be memorialised by the Victorians. This was the case even with those causes, like parliamentary reform, which could be related to the post-1688 national narrative of British liberty. Victorian statues of exemplary male statesmen monumentalised Parliament and its role in national life through their commemoration enacted in London's Parliament Square.<sup>41</sup> Yet it was not until Millicent Fawcett in 2018 joined what became during the twentieth century a more heterogeneous celebration of imperial and American great men that any women, or external campaigners for parliamentary reform, entered this throng.<sup>42</sup>

Political figures associated broadly with the Left are not conspicuously commemorated in British public space. It was not until 1964 that Tom Paine was memorialised, when the Thomas Paine Foundation of New York donated a statue of him to his native town of Thetford.<sup>43</sup> The statue of the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor, erected after some controversy in Nottingham in 1859, is a rare example of Victorian memorialisation of campaigners for parliamentary reform. O'Connor's statue was authorised by the local council, who were also persuaded to renovate it in 1880.<sup>44</sup> However, the monument to an earlier campaigner for parliamentary reform, Henry 'Orator' Hunt, erected by Chartists from public subscriptions in 1842, was pulled down because of deteriorating stonework in 1888.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, that to Earl Grey, whose patrician Whig government passed the 1832 Reform Act, still stands impressively on its column in the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne. Campaigners are much less likely than office holders to have statues, but that does not necessarily reflect their relative historical significance. The happenstance of one monument's survival and the other's demise does not testify to history, but to the narrative inequality enacted by those who control power.<sup>46</sup> The prime determinant of the right-mindedness of a statue is thus not the statue itself, nor the attitudes of the public who view it, but the mindset of those authority figures who, since

<sup>40</sup> This is even more the case with the statue to the Earl of Derby erected in 1874; see M. Dresser, 'Set in Stone? Statues and Slavery in London', *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007), 185.

<sup>41</sup> G. Hicks, 'Parliament Square: The Making of a Political Space', *Landscapes*, 16 (2015), 164–70.

<sup>42</sup> M. Terras and E. Crawford, 'Introduction', in *Millicent Garrett Fawcett: Selected Writings*, ed. M. Terras and E. Crawford (2022), 1.

<sup>43</sup> A. McIntosh, 'The Great British Art Tour: Thomas Paine and his Upside-Down Rights of Man', *The Guardian* 26 Jan. 2021.

<sup>44</sup> P. Elliott, 'Nottingham Arboretum's Oldest Figure: The Troublesome Statue of Feargus O'Connor', *NG Spaces*, 20 Apr. 2010, see <http://www.ng-spaces.org.uk/nottingham-arboretums-oldest-figure-the-troublesome-statue-of-feargus-oconnor> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023); Historic England, 'Statue of Feargus O'Connor on South Side of Arboretum', grade II monument, list entry 1255246, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1255246?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 27 June 2023).

<sup>45</sup> *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 7 (7 Dec. 1889), 325–6.

<sup>46</sup> M. Livholts, 'Immaterial Monuments, Narrative Inequality and Glocal Social Work: Towards Critical Participatory Arts-Based Practices', *British Journal of Social Work*, 52 (2021), 777.



Henri Grégoire during the French Revolution, have sought to establish the grounds on which they ought to be preserved.<sup>47</sup>

Statues and memorials do not just appear. Nor are they inert *tabulae rasae* waiting for the public to invest them with meaning and value through interaction with them. They must be conceived, paid for, maintained and, nowadays, win planning permission. Accordingly, the rightmindedness of a statue is generally a matter of official sanction. Statues thus express what the elites of a society choose to remember or occlude in public space. Thus, Victorian male elites celebrated their male heroes and role models. Women, if represented at all, were often anonymised eye candy in supporting roles: for example, draped in semi-naked mourning as the figure ‘Grief over the monument to Sir Arthur Sullivan in Embankment Gardens.’<sup>48</sup> They were used as stereotyped representations of imperial geography or allegorical images of the sciences – such as around the Albert Memorial in Hyde Park – or of virtues, as at the base of the Victoria Memorial outside Buckingham Palace.<sup>49</sup> The queen the latter commemorates is one of the few named women from the era to be memorialised, the rightmindedness of her statues emphasised by their ubiquitous evocation of the age to which she gave its name. It was not until the twenty-first century that she began to be joined by her female contemporaries, an example being Monumental Welsh Women’s current campaign to erect five statues of actual as opposed to allegorical women.<sup>50</sup>

Victoria’s statues were undoubtedly seen as rightminded during the era of statuomania. This rightmindedness can, however, change. When Queen Victoria was empress of India her statue’s pride of place on Delhi’s Chandni Chowk in the heart of what had been the Mughal capital was only to be expected. After independence, its presence became a jarring reminder of former political realities.<sup>51</sup> The statue’s former location reflected the power dynamics of the time. The relocation of the monuments of the British Raj to a retirement home for imperial statues in Delhi’s Coronation Park marks the creation of a new normative site.<sup>52</sup> Their relegation to an imperial garden of remembrance enables the observer to still see them speaking not of present power structures but of a receding though still palpable past.

<sup>47</sup> See J. Sax, ‘Heritage Preservation as a Public Duty: The Abbé Grégoire and the Origins of an Idea’, *Michigan Law Review*, 88 (1990), 1142–69.

<sup>48</sup> Historic England, ‘Sir Arthur Sullivan Memorial’, grade II monument, list entry 1238072, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1238072?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023).

<sup>49</sup> Historic England, ‘Prince Consort National Memorial (Albert Memorial)’, grade I monument, list entry 1217741, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1217741?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023); Historic England, ‘Queen Victoria Memorial’, grade I monument, list entry 1273864, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1273864?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023).

<sup>50</sup> ‘Swashbuckling Poet Cranogwen is Third Woman in Wales to Get Statue’, BBC News, 10 June 2023, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-65867326> (accessed 28 June 2023).

<sup>51</sup> The statue is now in a cobwebbed corner of Delhi College of Art. S. Pisharoty, ‘The Crowned in the Corner’, *The Hindu*, 15 June 2014.

<sup>52</sup> B. Groseclose, ‘Indian Ironies or British Commemorative Sculpture and (Re)Shaped Memory’, in *Memory & Oblivion*, eds. W. Reinink and J. Stumpel (Alphen aan den Rijn, 1999), 588.

Theomorphic statuary of various kinds adorned temples across India from long before the arrival of Europeans,<sup>53</sup> but the British rulers in the late nineteenth century added the symbolic use of statues of eminent men, usually authority figures, simultaneously so widespread in Europe. This practice of commemoration continued after Indian independence in 1947, although the subjects changed, especially with the confluence of Hindu revivalism and nationalism from the 1990s.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, in some areas local individuals and groups began unofficially to erect statues of figures they admired in prominent public locations. An example is the statue of the Dalit leader B. R. Ambedkar that M. Veeraraghavan put up on a village road. Consequent litigation in 2021 led to an order requiring the Tamil Nadu government to remove all such statues of political leaders and personalities in those places ‘affecting or infringing the rights of the common people’, such as roads, and relocate them to a ‘Leaders Park’.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, a statue can only fully be deemed to be in its right mind when its appropriateness in a particular space is acknowledged by the public authorities. Notwithstanding Nash/Breton’s comments, this can be in a ditch, a field or a junkyard.<sup>56</sup> After all, James II’s statue lay on its back amid weeds in the garden of Gwydyr House for a year. However, its re-erection in its (so far) penultimate location outside the New Admiralty building in 1903 renewed official recognition of its right to be in public space.<sup>57</sup>

Processes of political transition have historically been the main drivers of change to the rightmindedness of a statue. Consider the vicissitudes experienced by the statue of the German imperialist Hermann von Wissmann. This was erected in 1911 in the centre of Dar es Salaam, then capital of German East Africa. It was taken down when the British captured the territory during the Great War. As the result of the replacement of one imperial order by another, Wissmann’s statue was no longer in its right mind in Africa. It was donated to Wissmann’s alma mater, the University of Hamburg. Official sanction thus restored rightmindedness to the statue in its new location. Yet not for long. By the time of the student upheavals in Germany in 1968, Wissmann had come to be seen as a racist villain who played his part in his country’s descent into genocidal violence. His statue was first attacked and then removed. It is only occasionally, and historically often through such violent actions, that protesters break into the narrative and alter a statue’s rightmindedness. Wissmann’s statue now lies broken and symbolically daubed with red paint. As such it was displayed in the exhibition on *Deutscher Kolonialismus* in the German Historical Museum in Berlin in 2016. Its rightmindedness has been re-established and metamorphosed in its maimed state now into a symbol of anticolonialism that is only in its right mind in a museum.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> R. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, 1997), 7–13.

<sup>54</sup> See K. Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy* (Durham, NC, 2021).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Madras HC Orders Removal of Political Leaders’ Statues from Public Places’, *Deccan Herald*, 7 Oct. 2021.

<sup>56</sup> See A. Fauve, ‘A Tale of Two Statues in Astana: The Fuzzy Process of Nationalistic City Making’, *Nationalities Papers*, 43 (2015), 383.

<sup>57</sup> E. Gleichen, *London’s Open-Air Statuary* (1928), 47–8.

<sup>58</sup> Catterall, ‘Changing Attitudes to the Past’, 635–6.

Statues are thus far from being neutral interventions in public space. Their rightmindedness generally reflects the exercise of public authority, even when retired to a museum. Their erection and retention enact what Laurajane Smith has called an authorised heritage discourse whereby these authorities establish what should be in the public realm, why it is important, what ought to be preserved and how.<sup>59</sup> Her analysis focuses upon archaeological sites, but it can also be applied to the public space which most statues inhabit. This authorised public space discourse is shaped by public bodies from churches to planning authorities, determining the nature of public space and the features it contains.<sup>60</sup>

Many of these features are legacies, sometimes highly problematic ones, from the Victorian era. As a result, there is in public space always a dialogic relationship between the residues from the past that statues – among other edifices – mark and the contested ways in which a society chooses to remember, memorialise or indeed forget that past.<sup>61</sup> These processes are not neutral, but part of the authorised heritage discourse. Built heritage, such as statues, involves a purposeful process of deeming certain features of the public realm as relevant to public memory.<sup>62</sup> The public's role in this process, except when protesting about what is included in public memory and how it is memorialised, is essentially a passive one. Instead, professional gatekeepers acting on behalf of public authorities determine what constitutes heritage and gets to be preserved. These gatekeepers designate and delineate the articulation of public memory in the public realm by creating what Garden has called 'heritagescapes'.<sup>63</sup> Through constructing these heritagescapes and protecting the elements within them, they play a major role in determining the rightmindedness of a statue. Take Oxford's Rhodes Building, listed in 1972. The right-wing novelist Evelyn Waugh might have felt it ought to be blown up because of its ugliness, yet the grounds on which this designation occurred reflected a statutory framework that continues to privilege supposed architectural merit. Nonetheless, the much-reviled statue of Cecil Rhodes which adorns its facade was included in the citation, because it 'serves as a major monument to Rhodes, a controversial figure, but of immense historical importance and whose legacies had a major impact on the University'.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> See L. Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (2006).

<sup>60</sup> P. Catterall and A. Azzouz, *Queering Public Space: Exploring the Relationship between Queer Communities and Public Spaces* (2021), 13–14.

<sup>61</sup> S. Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*, 2nd edn (Durham, NC, 2018), 191–3.

<sup>62</sup> For instance, British regulations in 2021 require secretary of state approval for the removal of any statues; see K. McClymont, 'The Fall of Statues? Contested Heritage, Public Space and Urban Planning: An Introduction', *Planning Theory and Practice*, 22 (2021), 768.

<sup>63</sup> See M.-C. Garden, 'The Heritagescape: Looking at Landscapes of the Past', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12 (2006), 394–411.

<sup>64</sup> Historic England, 'The Rhodes Building (North Range), Oriol College', grade II\* monument, list entry 1046662, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1046662> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

The Rhodes Building is a monument to the man who paid for it. Similar donations have long been means of establishing a personal legacy to posterity. In medieval times benefactors paid for abbeys and chantries for the good of their souls and, less successfully, their earthly renown.<sup>65</sup> Rhodes was making a more effective and secular payment for the sake of his posthumous reputation. The residue from the past represented by his statue results from his determination to memorialise himself. Rhodes may have been of historical importance, yet so were many people who are not thus memorialised. Furthermore, being of historical importance does not necessarily connote meriting commemoration. After all, there are plenty of figures whose historical importance sees them memorialised only in the distinctive location of chambers of horrors. Historical importance is not what has, until recently, rendered rightminded the occupation of Oxford's public space by Rhodes's statue. That rightmindedness was instead purchased by Rhodes himself and then officially recognised by a listing which inscribed it into the heritagescape of Oxford.

Listing changes the status of such statues. Like Goodhart's Law – that the process of observing a phenomenon changes the nature of what is observed – the decision to list also seems to change public understanding of what has been listed. Listing articulates which residues in the public realm are worth preserving and thereby inserts them into an inherited legacy of the national past. This process is reinforced by narratives such as that provided by Historic England designating 'commemorative monuments' somehow as 'our history made manifest'.<sup>66</sup> Such statements officially encourage a tendency to treat statues as signifiers, embodying the person or the past they reference, and assert the presumed historical value of statues as unproblematic, their rightmindedness obvious and innate.

Yet that rightmindedness is also historically contingent. With regime change, whether imperial or political, rightmindedness can rapidly disappear. Henri Grégoire coined the term vandalism to critique attacks on cultural artefacts as betrayals of revolutionary principles, in his report to the French National Convention in 1794.<sup>67</sup> Such iconoclasm, often officially sanctioned, can be traced back to antiquity.<sup>68</sup> It can also be an outlet for social protest. As Marschall notes of contemporary South Africa, there,

for many, a commemorative monument is not recognized as a dignified public symbol with a specific political "message," but rather as a generic

<sup>65</sup> See M. Richards, 'Chapels and Chantries in Late Mediaeval and Early Modern Besançon: The Record Book of Jean Ferreux, Chaplain', *Journal of Mediaeval History*, 20 (1994), 121–32.

<sup>66</sup> Historic England, press release about 'Commemorative Structures', 4 Dec. 2017, <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-commemorative-structures> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

<sup>67</sup> A. Merrills, 'The Origins of "Vandalism"', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 16 (2009), 155–6.

<sup>68</sup> S. Frank and M. Ristic, 'Urban Fallism: Monuments, Iconoclasm and Activism', *City*, 24 (2020), 554–5; S. Connor, 'Killing or "De-activating" Egyptian Statues: Who Mutilated Them, When and Why?', in *Statues in Context: Production, Meaning and (Re)uses*, ed. A. Masson-Berghoff (Leuven, 2019), 281–302.

and largely meaningless piece of urban infrastructure, erected and maintained by the state at high cost, while the needs of the poor are blatantly ignored.<sup>69</sup>

However, when the targets are seen as symbolising not a political regime but an aspect of the national story, conflicts over the rightmindedness of statues can become embattled in identity politics. This is particularly the case when the authorised discourse is so internalised that challenges to it elicit an angry backlash. Identification with the nation can lead to perceived threats to its emblems being seen as personally threatening as well.<sup>70</sup> In Britain and America in 2020, challenges presented to the rightmindedness of certain statues by Black Lives Matter accordingly prompted a determination to protect what these statues are deemed to embody, particularly on the political Right. For instance, prominent far-right politician Nick Griffin was among the fifty men who turned up in Shrewsbury to ‘defend’ the statue of one of the founders of British India, Robert Clive,<sup>71</sup> after 10,000 had signed a petition for its removal. In claiming that ‘It’s nothing to do with racism, we’re proud of our town and its history and want to stand up for it,’ they rhetorically enlisted history and civic identity as the purportedly acceptable grounds on which to continue to recognise the rightmindedness of Clive’s statue within the town.<sup>72</sup>

Elsewhere some went even further. Consider the bleach thrown in Bristol on the statue of Jamaican actor and playwright Alfred Fagon, a few days after the statue of slave trader Edward Colston was forcibly torn down in the same city. In resorting to the crude racist trope of seeking to bleach Fagon’s blackness, the perpetrator(s) also symbolically rejected the rightmindedness of his memorialisation and the way in which the only statue of a Black person in the city unselfconsciously conveyed in public space a broader narrative of Britain’s imperial past and Bristol’s place in it.<sup>73</sup>

Statues do not represent history or memory, but they do impact upon public understandings of how history and memory are represented. That they are erected, maintained and in some cases listed also provides a statement from public authorities that their subjects are deemed worthy of remembrance.<sup>74</sup> Such a claim might be bolstered by inscriptions lauding their merits and

<sup>69</sup> S. Marschall, ‘Targeting Statues: Monument “Vandalism” as an Expression of Sociopolitical Protest in South Africa’, *African Studies Review*, 60 (2019), 216.

<sup>70</sup> See J. Hearn, ‘National Identity: Banal, Personal and Embedded’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 13 (2007), 657–74.

<sup>71</sup> Historic England, ‘Statue of Lord Clive’, grade II monument, list entry 1254926, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1254926?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 21 June 2023).

<sup>72</sup> C. Bentley, ‘“Statue Defenders” Gather around Robert Clive in Shrewsbury’, *Shropshire Star*, 13 June 2020.

<sup>73</sup> T. Cork, ‘“Bleach Attack” on Bristol Actor’s Statue Shocks Community’, *Bristol Post*, 11 June 2020.

<sup>74</sup> Historic England first listed monuments to Black people in 2016 (Catterall, ‘Changing Attitudes to the Past’, 637). In 2022 Fagon’s statue was added to that list. Historic England, ‘Statue of Alfred Fagon’, grade II monument, list entry 1482464, see <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1482464?section=official-list-entry> (accessed 23 June 2023).

invoking public acclaim,<sup>75</sup> gestures (such as Thomas Guy's hand outstretched to a sick pauper) or allegorical characters.<sup>76</sup> Merely being represented in a statue can indicate that such remembrance is worthy among a public for whom that statue is otherwise most of the time simply Winter's 'white noise' in stone.

The statue, in the process, becomes in the imagination the person they represent and the past they are felt to evoke. Statues become avatars, invested with psychic value. Historically, of course, statues have always served this function: hence the warnings against the resulting idolatry of men or gods contained in the Book of Wisdom and the iconoclasm of medieval Christianity and Islam.<sup>77</sup> Statues may be simply representations, but they are intended to embody otherwise hard-to-grasp abstractions. Surrealists like Breton recognised this quality in the Third Republic statues of interwar Paris, feeling that they imbued the places they inhabited with magical qualities.<sup>78</sup> They did so by conveying abstractions charged with social as well as religious meaning, such as national identity. National identity is not something you can point to or easily define, but – according to Historic England – it can be made manifest in a monument.

An example is the way in which statues of Sir Winston Churchill, particularly the one in London's Parliament Square, are identified with the Second World War. The meaning invested in that statue has steadily morphed. From being an embodiment of national survival in 1940–1, it has become more implausibly a symbol of the supposed national victory achieved (with scant acknowledgement of the contribution of Americans, Russians, the empire and Commonwealth, Poles and many others) in 1945. This misappropriation of history has become powerfully lodged in the national myth. National virtue has become entwined with the personal merit having a statue is deemed to represent. Attacks on the statue – including graffiti drawing attention to Churchill's racism and role in the Bengal famine of 1943 that appeared following the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 – are thus read as impugning the nation itself. Both in these attacks and in the defensive cordon that first volunteers and then the police established around the statue, what was being contested was not history but narratives of the nation.<sup>79</sup> In the process much is occluded, with 1945 transformed from the deliverance from dire peril Churchill then invoked, into a narrative of triumphal white Britishness. For instance, it was found in 2018 that only 22 per cent of the British public were aware of the thousands of Muslims who fought and died for Britain in two world wars, an ignorance reinforced by their absence from the memorialisation of that conflict in public space and exploited by Islamophobic far-right

<sup>75</sup> Cherry, 'Statues in the Square', 686.

<sup>76</sup> Dresser, 'Set in Stone?', 171–3.

<sup>77</sup> See J. Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam* (2013).

<sup>78</sup> Michalski, *Public Monuments*, 47.

<sup>79</sup> J. Peat, 'Protect Churchill at All Costs', *The London Economic*, 14 Mar. 2021: see <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/protect-churchill-at-all-costs-police-surround-statue-as-protesters-march-on-parliament-square-257639> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

groups.<sup>80</sup> Gravesend's statue to Squadron Leader Mahinder Singh Pujji, funded by the local Sikh community and erected in 2014 four years after his death, is a rare and belated example of memorialisation of the overlooked contribution to the war effort of Britain's ethnic and religious minorities. It has since been joined by several other memorials of Sikh contributions to Britain's armed forces. By writing this representation of their community into the heritage-landscape, Sikhs also encoded their place in and contribution to contemporary British society.<sup>81</sup>

As this example shows, the erection of statues of historical figures primarily expresses the associations the groups who caused them to be made seek to draw from history for themselves, often long after their subject's demise. Take two examples from Bristol. The first is the statue of Edmund Burke erected in 1894, nearly a hundred years after his death. This was funded by W. H. Wills, the local tobacco magnate who was elected Liberal MP for Bristol East the following year, and unveiled by his party leader, the then prime minister, Lord Rosebery.<sup>82</sup> The prime motive of the city elites who supported this was to emphasise the importance of their city by adorning it with statues of significant figures associated with Bristol, even though for Burke himself his brief experience as MP for the city in 1774–80 was a far from happy one.

The second example concerns two radically different twentieth-century representations of the fifteenth-century Venetian explorer John Cabot. At least the later one of these, erected in 1985, is close to the site of the docks from whence Cabot sailed across the Atlantic, rather than right outside the City Hall. Yet the prime reason for his representation there is still to claim lustre for the city by association with Cabot's exploits: as the accompanying plaque puts it, 'In May 1497 John Cabot sailed from this harbour in the *Matthew* and discovered North America'. This asserts for Bristol a historical claim to fame, but only from a distorting European perspective. The falseness of this claim is testified by the signs of human activity Cabot brought back with him.<sup>83</sup>

This statue may have been, for Bristol city council, rightmindedly commemorative. Yet this act of commemoration still distorted the past. Clearly, even when not hagiographic, commemoration is not history.<sup>84</sup> Notwithstanding Historic England's views, the most historically aware of commemorative monuments, such as those to the Holocaust, are more concerned with responding to and learning from history, rather than telling or manifesting it.<sup>85</sup> As pieces of

<sup>80</sup> R. Sheikh, 'Forgotten Muslim Soldiers of World War One "Silence" Far Right', BBC News, 9 Nov. 2018; see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46124467> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

<sup>81</sup> A. Banse, 'Sikh Soldiers' Valour and Laurels in the UK', *Sikh Review*, 69/11 (2021), 57–65.

<sup>82</sup> See the description of the unveiling in Roslyn scrapbook, Bristol Archives: 17563/1/369, <https://archives.bristol.gov.uk/records/17563/1/369> (accessed 26 June 2023).

<sup>83</sup> I am grateful to Evan Jones, co-director of the Cabot Project at the University of Bristol (<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/history/research/cabot>), accessed 21 June 2023), for this information.

<sup>84</sup> K. Savage, 'The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Monument', in *Commemoration and the Politics of National Identity*, ed. J. Gillis (1994), 135–6.

<sup>85</sup> See J. Young, 'The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 4 (1989), 63–76.

art, they seek to produce an emotional rather than intellectual response. Most statues should be seen as texts which often tell one-sided stories, hence the addition in 2021 adjacent to the column topped by a statue of Henry Dundas in Edinburgh of interpretative material to draw attention to his deliberate role in delaying the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>86</sup> Statues do not in themselves represent history, or present historical narratives. Indeed, the teaching of history is rarely among their initial purposes. Insofar as they reflect history, it is the history of memorialisation, not of what is memorialised.

Accordingly, it is curious that so much effort has been invested recently in trying to base the rightmindedness of statues on their supposed ability to represent history. After all, many of the most controversial statues were clearly erected with the explicit and politicised intention of misrepresenting history. Consider the Confederate statuary and monuments targeted for protests in recent decades. These articulated in public space the political project of bolstering a Lost Cause ideology and the racialised power relations of the Jim Crow era of the late nineteenth century, long after the Civil War they purportedly memorialised.<sup>87</sup> This project was carried out by appropriating classical motifs and allegorical figures, a process which established their aesthetic rightmindedness within a Western artistic canon by applying a bogus veneer of heroic virtue and refinement. It also drew upon imperial iconography dating back to Rome but mediated through contemporary imperial practice in Europe.<sup>88</sup> In some cases, this reflected a dramatic shift in intentions: for instance, lobbying by various interest groups led to the simple obelisk memorial originally planned as the Confederate Soldiers Memorial at the state capitol in Arkansas being replaced by a more elaborate monument, complete with an angel improbably holding a victory wreath towering over it.<sup>89</sup> Such strategic positioning alongside seats of political power established a visual culture which brooked no dissenting images. Indeed, the statues of Confederate generals that until recently lined Richmond's Monument Avenue intentionally articulated this politicised visual culture.<sup>90</sup>

The decision to erect a statue is certainly a statement by a particular society – or more commonly the authorities therein – of what they consider important to reflect in public space which then, over time, becomes a legacy for

<sup>86</sup> 'Edinburgh's Dundas Statue to Be Dedicated to Slavery Victims', BBC News, 11 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-52997858> (accessed 26 June 2023). A Shropshire county council press release on 19 Nov. 2021 indicated plans for something similar alongside Clive's statue in Shrewsbury (<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2021/11/robert-clive-statue-in-the-square-shrewsbury-an-update>, accessed 21 June 2023). However, such interventions can themselves prove controversial, as pointed out in Levinson, *Written in Stone*, 22–3, 41–2.

<sup>87</sup> Levinson, *Written in Stone*, 174.

<sup>88</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 267–70.

<sup>89</sup> F. Latimer, 'Arkansas Listings in the National Register of Historical Places: The Confederate Soldiers' Monument and the Monument to Confederate Women in Little Rock', *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 60 (2001), 305–8. These monuments were listed in 1996.

<sup>90</sup> See K. Edwards and E. Howard, 'Monument Avenue: The Architecture of Consensus in the New South, 1890–1930', *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, 6 (1997), 92–110. Ironically, the only monument left standing on Monument Avenue now is that of the African American tennis star Arthur Ashe.



succeeding generations. Whether the resulting statues come in any meaningful sense to represent history is another matter. Consider a British equivalent of Wissmann, the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol. The Victorians who erected it in 1895, a year after the statue to Burke was unveiled and 174 years after Colston's death, were supposedly commemorating the latter's philanthropy to the city. Yet there were more important Bristol philanthropists who have no monument, such as Richard Reynolds, perhaps because of his outsider status as a Quaker. Colston was very much an insider, and it was the elites in the web of local charitable societies, Liberal associations and other civic bodies who were the prime movers and funders behind his statue, notwithstanding the misleading claim on its plinth that it was 'Erected by citizens of Bristol'.<sup>91</sup> There was an oblique reference to the source of Colston's philanthropy at the unveiling, but it was not until Carole Drake's 1993 installation *Commemoration Day* that the collective amnesia that his wealth came from slave trading was challenged, as she presented the shadow cast by Colston's statue sucking in 'the histories of thousands of black children, men and women ... to present an uncomplicated, unsullied image of Colston as a benign patriarch'.<sup>92</sup>

When that statue was torn down on 7 June 2020 by protesters for whom its presence in public space was not rightminded but an affront, there was nevertheless much complaint that the past was somehow thereby distorted. Yet, as the historian Joanna Burch-Brown had earlier pointed out, what was at stake was not an unrecoverable past, but the way in which the existing memorialisation of Colston imposed one particular and deeply misleading reading of it.<sup>93</sup> In that sense, John Cassidy's rendering of Colston was a patina, a meta-narrative for public consumption that obscured the monstrous reality of Colston's actions. The statue itself became an absurd distortion of its theme of philanthropy that subverted the meaning of the past far more thoroughly than the violent act of removal to which it was eventually subjected. Recumbent and now stored in a museum,<sup>94</sup> like that of Wissmann, it has arguably recovered a kind of right-mindedness, though one imbued with a very different meaning.

Like Colston's simulacrum, statues often hide in plain sight uncomfortable historical truths. James II's statue might still be accepted as rightminded, but its subject was governor of the Royal African Society through which Colston operated.<sup>95</sup> This grim reality remains disguised by the classical veneer of the statue. Artistically it is thus very different from the efforts of surrealism

<sup>91</sup> R. Ball, 'Myths within Myths ... Edward Colston and that Statue', Bristol Radical History Group, 14 Oct. 2018, <https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/myths-within-myths> (accessed 26 June 2023); S. Jordan, 'The Myth of Edward Colston: Bristol Docks, the Merchant Elite and the Legitimation of Authority 1860–1880', in *A City Built upon Water: Maritime Bristol 1750–1880*, ed. S. Poole (Bristol, 2013), 175–96.

<sup>92</sup> Cited in Bluecoat Library, Liverpool, 'Trophies of Empire', <https://www.thebluecoat.org.uk/library/event/trophies-of-empire> (accessed 26 June 2023).

<sup>93</sup> J. Burch-Brown, 'Defenders of Colston Are The Ones Airbrushing the Past', *Bristol Post*, 30 Apr. 2017.

<sup>94</sup> McClymont, 'The Fall of Statues?', 770.

<sup>95</sup> W. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal Africa Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (Chapel Hill, 2013), 25.

to ‘resolve the heretofore contradictory conditions of dream and of reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality’.<sup>96</sup> Rather than being surreal in an artistic sense, statues like those of Colston or James II might instead be seen as sub-real. They are sub-real because, through flattering its subject to deceive its audience, they hide rather than reveal reality. Many historic statues combine ideational and material facets to the same effect. They often express a meta-narrative both explicitly in the inscription and allegorically in the supporting features. Yet the foregrounding of this unproblematic meta-narrative simply reinforces their one-dimensionality. Meanwhile, the emphases on virtues found on the plinths of Colston and others reduce their subjects to mere, and misleading, exemplars. The humanity – the hopes and dreams Breton aimed to encapsulate – is drained from these superficial representations. Indeed, Taussig suggests that the smug strategic forgetting reflected in these monuments positively cries out to be lampooned or desecrated.<sup>97</sup>

This sub-reality is also expressed in the perennial referencing of classical imagery in conventional statuary. One example of subverting this imagery and its idealised allegorical and objectified representation of the female form is the nude pose struck by the artist Dora Carrington alongside one such statue in Garsington Manor in 1917.<sup>98</sup> This deliberate juxtaposition was not self-consciously surreal, yet Carrington achieved the same objective Nash invoked by imagining a statue in a ploughed field by contrasting the female statue with her own naked body.

A similar, also temporary, intervention was effected by the disabled artist Jason Willsher-Mills placing his 2021 self-portrait *I Am Argonaut* – a rendering of a body very much outside the classical canon Winckelmann featured – in dialogue with Peter Trimming’s conventional 2009 rendering of Folkestone’s most famous son, the seventeenth-century physician William Harvey.<sup>99</sup> Both by changing the artistic language and by invading the spatial syntax Carrington and Willsher-Mills, in their different ways, subverted the normative readings of ornamentation, commemoration and celebration that rightminded statues generally seek to convey.

This raises the question of how far such interventions can be interpreted as taking a rightminded statue and rendering it surreal. Nash’s own work does not give many clues on this. Rather than producing permanent pieces of public statuary, he instead delighted in finding natural ready-mades in the English countryside, such as *Marsh Personage*,<sup>100</sup> exhibited at the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition.<sup>101</sup> Two years later he invoked the super-reality of

<sup>96</sup> G. Hugnet and M. Scolari, ‘In the Light of Surrealism’, *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, 4/2–3 (1936), 20.

<sup>97</sup> M. Taussig, *Defacement, Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, 1999), 20–1.

<sup>98</sup> The photograph adorns the cover of A. Chisholm (ed.), *Carrington’s Letters* (2017).

<sup>99</sup> Creative Folkestone, ‘Jason Willsher-Mills’, see <https://www.creativefolkestone.org.uk/artists/jason-wilsher-mills> (accessed 21 June 2023).

<sup>100</sup> *Marsh Personage* (1934), TGA Nash 7050, 757, see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-7050ph-757/nash-black-and-white-negative-marsh-personage> (accessed 27 June 2023).

<sup>101</sup> I. Cassels, ‘“Surrealism Found Me”: British Surrealism and Encounter’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 50 (2021), 12–14; P. Nash, ‘The Nest of the Wild Stones’, in *The Painter’s Object*, ed. M. Evans (1937), 38–9.

these discoveries in pointing out that they 'belong to the world that lies visibly about us. They are unseen merely because they are not perceived.'<sup>102</sup> The virtuous narratives loudly proclaimed by rightminded statues can be seen as intended to ensure that these underlying realities remain unseen. Nash hints as much in his early surreal work *Token* (1929–30),<sup>103</sup> both through the title and the way in which a classical figure of a mother and child is bisected by an artist's easel, expressing the artificiality of much public statuary. Accordingly, rendering a statue into a state of surrealism does not necessarily require its physical relocation to a ditch. Instead, a statue can be seen as surreal when the disruption of its spatial syntax and/or readings of its artistic language make that which is occluded in conventional renderings perceptible.

One such occluded theme in the Victorian statuary with which London still throngs is the human impact of empire. *Fons Americanus* by the African American artist Kara Walker, installed in the Tate Modern in 2019, was a rare, brief and belated reference to this. Its punning title both reflected its presentation as a giant fountain and the role of Britain as the source of black chattel slavery in North America. This monument provided a depiction of those enslaved people who perished in their thousands on Colston's ships. Its references to Western classicism indicated that it largely worked by disrupting the expected artistic language. This parody of the Victoria Memorial outside Buckingham Palace thus served as a temporary bat-squeak of protest against the chorus of imperial statues permanently proclaiming in London's public spaces a one-sided and white celebration of empire.<sup>104</sup>

Another example of ironic parody is Meekyoung Shin's 2012 version of Cumberland's statue, only this time made of soap, symbolically washing away the bloody deeds of its subject as it gradually eroded in wind and rain. The primary effect of these interventions is to subvert the meaning of the parodied original. They reveal what was originally hidden, in Shin's case figuratively as the armature of the statue became visible as it weathered. In this revived state Cumberland's statue was placed in a state of surrealism that worked more thoroughly because it also returned this parody to Cumberland's original plinth.<sup>105</sup>

Some artists have sought to disrupt artistic language and spatial syntax even when carrying out a commission. As an authorised statue, Charles Robb's 2004 rendering of Charles La Trobe, the first governor of Victoria,<sup>106</sup> could be seen as rightminded. Yet it is also surreal in the various ways it subverts and plays with artistic conventions. Even entitling it *Landmark* evokes a

<sup>102</sup> P. Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', *Country Life*, 73 (1938), 526–7.

<sup>103</sup> *Token* (1929–30), National Galleries of Scotland: GMA 2984, see <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/725> (accessed 27 June 2023).

<sup>104</sup> P. Catterall, 'On Statues and History: The Dialogue between Past and Present in Public Space', LSE British Politics and Policy, 18 June 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/statuses-past-and-present> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

<sup>105</sup> Survey of London, 'Cavendish Square 5'.

<sup>106</sup> Monument Australia, 'Charles Joseph La Trobe', <https://www.monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/people/government---colonial/display/98916-charles-joseph-la-trobe> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

super-reality by referring both to its status as a work of art rather than act of commemoration and to multiple puns about its purpose as a marker of the university that commissioned the statue and bears La Trobe's name, the landing of Australian settlers and the ensuing territorial claims of coloniality. It also literally inverts the classical imagery commonly used to express in stone or bronze encomiums to eminent figures. The statue plays upon the viewer's expectations of this artistic registry by placing upside down, with the plinth at the top, an image which otherwise seems conventional in appearance.<sup>107</sup> This representation calls into question the appropriateness of the coloniality of this art, whilst simultaneously drawing attention to La Trobe's promotion of European culture during what was otherwise widely seen as an ineffective governorship. It also required the artist to eschew the heavy materials commonly used for such statues in favour of fibreglass and polystyrene, in the process also challenging the bombastic claims made by so many of the monuments parodied by *Landmark*. Additionally, it addresses the record of its subject himself, the coloniality of its form and location, and the tensions between the authority such monuments demand and the lack of attention they habitually receive because their rightmindedness makes them unremarkable and unnoticed.

Robb's *Landmark* uses spatial syntax and different materials rather than methods of representation to subvert the artistic language of the conventional Western statue form. Arguably, this is a characteristic approach taken by the most successful attempts to place statues in a state of surrealism. Several of these interventions reflect efforts to come up with an artistic language to express a response to the demise of communism in Eastern Europe. One such is Jerzy Kalina's *Przejście* (*Monument to the Anonymous Passer-by*). First installed temporarily in Warsaw in 1977, it was re-erected in Wrocław in 2005 on the anniversary of the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981. Kalina describes his work as 'ritual actions'. By the time *Przejście* appeared, he had made a name for himself as a Catholic artist opposed to the communist regime.<sup>108</sup> To express this ritual act of opposition, Kalina's work disrupts both the spatial syntax and the artistic language. The first is expressed in two ways. Unusually for such a monument, action is encoded in the work both by its title (the Polish word for passage) and the installation of its fourteen statues either side of a crossing. Furthermore, on one side these figures are disappearing into the ground, whilst on the other side they are re-emerging. There is no inscription or interpretation, leaving the viewers themselves to read the symbolic meaning of the work through the religious and cultural connotations of journeys, oppression and deliverance that it references. This extended spatial syntax is also one of the ways in which the work subverts customary understandings of such monuments and the artistic language in which they

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<sup>107</sup> Robb thus realised a version of what Claes Oldenburg had earlier proposed when suggesting in 1965 the concept of a gigantic inverted and submerged statue of President Kennedy: Michalski, *Public Monuments*, 173.

<sup>108</sup> M. Sitkowska, 'Jerzy Kalina', Culture.pl, June 2002, <https://culture.pl/en/artist/jerzy-kalina> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

are expressed. The other is achieved by the conspicuous anonymity of Kalina's figures, emphasised by the shabby ordinariness of their appearance. That very ordinariness itself subverts viewers' expectations of what a rightminded statue should be, in the process drawing attention to the theme of the monument. In this case it is not the deeds of a famous man, but the shabby deeds of an authoritarian regime.

As with *Landmark*, the entitling of Kalina's monument emphasises that this is consciously a work of art. This inverts the historical occlusion of the artist in the creation of statuary as they are often not even mentioned in the inscriptions. It also stresses the artificiality of statues. They are simulacra, not their subjects themselves. Both Robb and Kalina's work also use their human subjects to critically engage with wider themes. *Landmark's* inversion suggests the impact of unseen external forces, in this case the imperial power of Britain on the other side of the world, just as the semi-buried state of Kalina's figures references the submersion of the human spirit under Poland's communist regime.

This wider context is also central to David Cerny's *Man Hanging Out* (1996). Installed suspended by its hand from a pole above the streets of the Czech town of Olomouc in 1997, it achieves this effect primarily by disrupting the spatial syntax. It is very deliberately not where such a statue would be expected to be found. Nor is it a celebration of its subject, Sigmund Freud, though it arguably references Freud's contribution to the origins of surrealism through his pioneering work on psychology and dreams and Cerny certainly regarded Freud as 'the intellectual face of the 20th century'.<sup>109</sup> Instead, the statue's suspension alludes to the need to suspend belief in the material realities commonly conveyed by statuary and see the hidden meta-narratives. Unlike a rightminded statue to Freud – such as Oscar Nemon's 1971 depiction of him seated near to his final home in Hampstead – the precarious situation of Cerny's figure conveys the thinker's attempts to grasp the working of the mind, the fragility of psychology and the potential isolation of the intellectual at the end of the twentieth century. It also alludes to Freud's own sceptical attitudes towards the consolatory illusions of monuments and their tendency to encourage nostalgia and 'neglect of what is real and immediate'.<sup>110</sup>

Cerny made his name not by creating monuments but by disrupting them. In 1991 he was arrested for what was deemed an act of vandalism, painting pink a Soviet tank in Prague that served as a memorial to liberation by the Red Army during the Second World War.<sup>111</sup> This was also a deliberate subversion of the artistic language and interpretation of a monument, rendering it surreal. This process of modifying a monument that has hitherto been accepted as rightminded is thus a third means – in addition to the examples

<sup>109</sup> Open Concept Gallery, 'Man Hanging Out by David Cerny', <http://www.openconceptgallery.org/portfolio/man-hanging-out-by-david-cerny> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Cherry, 'Statues in the Square', 684.

<sup>111</sup> 'Artist David Cerny: "I Painted Tank Pink to Get a Girl"', Radio Free Europe, 11 Apr. 2010, see [https://www.rferl.org/a/Provocateur\\_Artist\\_David\\_Cerny\\_I\\_Painted\\_Tank\\_Pink\\_To\\_Get\\_A\\_Girl/2008892.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Provocateur_Artist_David_Cerny_I_Painted_Tank_Pink_To_Get_A_Girl/2008892.html) (accessed 26 June 2023).

given above of new works that seek to achieve this either intrinsically or via ironic parody – to place a statue in a state of surrealism. *Pace Nash/Breton*, the spatial syntax of a site does not have to be materially altered to effect this. Modification serves as a clandestine means for protesters to change how a statue is presented and perceived. A notable example is the statue of Gladstone in London’s East End. Local myth maintains that this monument erected to the then prime minister in 1882 at the expense of Theodore H. Bryant, proprietor of the nearby match factory, was smeared with blood by his female workers during the landmark matchgirl strike of 1888. Ever since, Gladstone’s hands have continually been painted red – a symbolic attribution of guilt – as a small act of resistance. This is a monument on a monument whereby a statue established and authorised by the rich and powerful has its meaning subtly altered by an unauthorised and popularly expressed addition.<sup>112</sup>

Another example of the application of paint as means to disrupt a statue’s meaning is the red ball and chain attached to Colston’s statue in an ironic reference to slavery in 2018.<sup>113</sup> Through a simple modification the statue’s one-dimensional veneer of historical occlusion was fundamentally altered, albeit only briefly before this addition was removed by officialdom. Cerny’s efforts demonstrate that monuments to the Red Army in the former Eastern bloc have been prominent targets for this kind of intervention. For example, that erected in the King’s Gardens in Sofia in 1954 has since 2011 been repeatedly painted. These interventions have taken various forms, though the most striking was when its mixture of Soviet soldiers and Bulgarian peasants were reimagined as Captain America, Santa Claus and assorted other icons of Americana. This provided both an ironic reference to the superhero pretensions of so many rightminded statues – not least those expressing the socialist realism of the Soviet era – as well as a commentary on the growing influence in post-cold war Eastern Europe of American culture. It reinterpreted the monument in the contemporary. Such interventions are far closer to the purposes of history – to explicate the past in the present – than most rightminded statues. To underline this point, underneath a graffiti proclaimed ‘In *Pace with the Times*’.<sup>114</sup>

The statues that throng in public spaces are not generally there to explicate the past to the present. Indeed, many of them deliberately occlude that past, instead celebrating what those elites who erected them wished to laud and thereby marking, not the histories of their subjects, but the history of memorialisation. Accordingly, the rightmindedness of a public statue is principally determined by authorised public space discourse which determines what gets represented and preserved in the heritagescape of public space.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>112</sup> ‘Vandalism and the Red Hands of William Gladstone’, *East End Review*, 16 Nov. 2014, <https://www.eastendreview.co.uk/2014/11/16/vandalising-gladstone> (accessed 23 June 2023).

<sup>113</sup> Michael Young, ‘Ball and Chain Attached to Edward Colston’s Statue in Bristol City Centre’, *Bristol Post*, 6 May 2018.

<sup>114</sup> K. Patowary, ‘The Painted Monument to the Soviet Army in Bulgaria’, *Amusing Planet*, 4 Feb. 2015, <https://www.amusingplanet.com/2015/02/the-painted-monument-to-soviet-army-in.html> (accessed 14 Jan. 2023).

<sup>115</sup> Levinson, *Written in Stone*, 54.

Although such public monuments are necessarily freighted with political meanings, inscribing them into public space all too often constitutes an erasure rather than a representation of the past that hides in plain sight problematic histories behind superficial and celebratory aesthetics.<sup>116</sup>

This reflects a tendency to read them as representations of a past that is gone, a reading which fails to recognise the ways in which the legacy of imperial figures like Rhodes or Frederick Roberts shapes the continuing racial stereotyping and inequalities experienced in contemporary Britain. Such a reading, confining imperialism to the past, also occludes the ways in which global power relations, expressed explicitly through Roberts's Victorian deployment of military might, 'have been replaced by new informal empires of economic and political influence' which are much more shadowy, difficult to personalise in a statue and impenetrable in form.<sup>117</sup>

Few indeed are the monuments which have sought to make visible in public space these new imperialistic economic realities. Even the symbolic juxtaposition of Kristen Visbal's *Fearless Girl* (2017) with the celebration of global capitalism captured by Arturo Di Modica's *Charging Bull* (1989) outside the New York stock exchange simply and controversially sought to include women in the visual representation of these power structures.<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless, Di Modica clearly felt challenged by the ways in which this intervention disrupted his monument's spatial syntax, yet his efforts to get *Fearless Girl* moved remain ongoing.

As Nash/Breton suggest, location is thus clearly an important factor in the rightmindedness of a statue. However, the appropriateness of a statue occupying a prime site clearly can change over time. This may be because a space has changed: a statue of medical pioneer Edward Jenner was placed in Trafalgar Square in 1858 but moved four years later as the space became increasingly an imperial celebration of military figures rather than the forum of arts and sciences its creator, John Nash, had originally intended.<sup>119</sup> More frequently, these alterations occur because of shifts in political order or military defeat.<sup>120</sup> This process may also be driven by growing public awareness of the sub-real nature of much public statuary, prompted by protesters pointing out that the virtues they one-dimensionally claim for their subjects are at best problematic and at worst bogus.<sup>121</sup> In such circumstances, the authorities may decide that a statue is no longer rightminded in public space but only in a

<sup>116</sup> See R. Drayton, 'Rhodes Must Not Fall? Statues, Postcolonial "Heritage" and Temporality', *Third Text*, 33 (2019), 651–66.

<sup>117</sup> P. Enslin, 'Monuments after Empire? The Educational Value of Imperial Statues', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 54 (2020), 1343.

<sup>118</sup> G. Bellafante, 'The False Feminism of "Fearless Girl"', *New York Times*, 16 Mar. 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Cherry, 'Statues in the Square', 680.

<sup>120</sup> Levinson, *Written in Stone*, 6–12.

<sup>121</sup> This reaction against the banality of many statues is not necessarily new. *The Times* (7 March 1861) noted of statues like that of Havelock: 'if they excite any positive feelings in our minds, it is a wish that some happy chance may relieve us of the greater part of our street statuary', cited in Cherry, 'Statues in the Square', 687. For William Thackeray's similar comments in 1842 see Whelan, 'Construction and Destruction', 514.

museum. Such statues become repurposed rather than surreal. Notwithstanding Nash/Breton, a statue is not placed in a state of surrealism simply by moving it. A piece of Roman statuary found in a ploughed field is not surreal but, like Shelley's deserted *Ozymandias*,<sup>122</sup> an outdated reflection of long-past power relations. What makes statues surreal are deliberate interventions intended to subvert their artistic language and/or spatial syntax. Thereby the simple narratives of power, public service or virtue usually portrayed by rightminded statues are replaced by more complex readings. In the process those often-unnoticed denizens of our streets, rightminded statues – not to mention the narratives that they hide – can become visible and controversial, thereby actually speaking to the discourse of public space.

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<sup>122</sup> Connor, 'Killing or "De-activating" Egyptian Statues', 295.

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