

Why (and how) statues matter

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Abstract

In this paper, I consider the import of the metaphysics of statues to the decolonizing statues debate. On the one hand, this may seem an odd starting point: after all, the issues surrounding decolonizing statues are political, moral and, perhaps, aesthetic. I agree; however, presuppositions about the nature of statues may well be shaping the political imaginary about decolonizing statues. Indeed, when expressing political and moral claims such as ‘decolonizing statues erases history’, or that ‘decolonizing statues destroys objects that help us to remember a (bygone) past’, I suggest that, from a metaphysical point of view, this relies on a notion of statues as singular objects. Drawing upon material constitution debates in metaphysics, I suggest that thinking about statues as multiple, co-locating objects, might deepen our theoretical understanding of decolonial activism because it allows us to think about the relationship of statues to history and culture in a much more critical way. As such, my analysis is intended to extend our metaphysical understanding of decolonial activism. Furthermore, it stands as a challenge to anyone who thinks that certain effects to history and culture follow, metaphysically speaking, from decolonial activism.

Keywords

post-colonial theory, decolonial activism, statues, decolonizing statues, metaphysics, social ontology, critical ontology

‘The past didn’t go anywhere’. Utah Phillips

The Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) campaign and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements have galvanized decolonial activism concerning statues. This activism has been met with varying degrees and forms of resistance: from the desire to protect statues due to explicitly pro-colonial attitudes, through to liberal concerns that statues are either

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low-priority or serve as useful reminders of a problematic past. Such resistance has resulted in the theoretical contestation of statues in both popular and academic outlets. It is unsurprising that these various contestations are more or less political and/or ethical in approach.¹ After all, the problems of coloniality and its effects are first and foremost political and moral. Without disputing that decolonial activism is irreducibly political, I want to explore how metaphysical commitments about the nature of statues are involved in shaping the contours of the debate. Crucially these commitments are tacit and unacknowledged. As such, their discursive and dialectical effects are going unnoticed. In this paper, I want to make these metaphysical commitments explicit in order that they can be critically assessed for their political consequences. Specifically, I want to show how these commitments can serve to truncate the horizon of political possibility vis-à-vis decolonial activism.

When these commitments in the popular anti-decolonial debate are made explicit, what emerges is a stolid, disenchanted metaphysics of statues. The anti-decolonial view assumes that statues are (merely) aesthetic and symbolic objects, enduring as discrete hunks of matter apart from other objects, cut adrift from their own historical context. This solipsistic metaphysics, both social and historical, underwritten by their being essentially just bits of material, contributes to conservative approaches to statues. On the one hand, as hunks of matter, *and nothing more*, statues are themselves materially innocent of the histories that decolonial activists attach to them. Precisely because of this innocence, they must be allowed to endure as items of aesthetic and heritage value. Of course it should be noted that heritage itself has a history which is linked to the ideological development of the European nation (Smith 2006: 17-18). It is also a practice in which conservatism and elitism can camouflage itself (Ibid: 17). As such, arguably, heritage is not innocent of colonialism. There are also liberal conceptions, which at least take more seriously the colonial import of statues. Nevertheless, they see statues as (merely) symbolic proxies or mementos of a problematic past – a past of which they are still innocent. Again, this is at least in part due to a metaphysics of statues as just discrete hunks of matter, in no way metaphysically bound to an ongoing post-colonial reality. The aim of this paper is to show that, at a metaphysical level, these approaches to statues are potentially misguided, because there are other potential positions to be had about the metaphysics. This potential returns as decolonial possibility.

Indeed, contrary to this metaphysics, I want to present a metaphysics of statues that helps make sense of why statues might be such a crucial site of contestation for decolonial activists.² As Rahul Rao argues, far from this disenchanted model, statues are plenipotentiaries of hegemonic psychical and libidinal energy: phallic protuberances which emerge out of the fabric of social space and which are purposefully deployed to demarcate and coordinate the structure of hegemonic ‘public space’. Precisely because of their representational relationship to colonial figures, statues persist as totems or fetishes, of colonial power for decolonial, liberal and pro-colonial actors alike. In this picture, rather than being mere object desiderata of a bygone past, deadened as the material out of which they are constituted, statues are dynamic, protean manifestations of enduring post-colonial socio-political configurations.³ I think Rao is right; this paper is an attempt to provide an analytical metaphysics that speaks directly to this vision of statues and to the

decolonial activism mobilized by this vision. Indeed, I want to speak to Doreen Massey's vision of (public) space as irreducibly dynamic and relational, functional of the social practices:

[I]nsofar as they 'work' at all places are still not-inconsiderable collective achievements. They are formed through a myriad of practices of quotidian negotiation and contestation; practices, moreover, through which the constituent 'identities' are also themselves continually moulded. Place, in other words does – as many argue – change us, not through some visceral belonging (some barely changing rootedness, as so many would have it) but through the practising of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us. (2005: 306)

Echoing this, I will argue that the being of statues is deeply enmeshed in the material formulation of society as such. Indeed, far from being 'proxies' or figurative expressions (metonyms/synecdoches) of colonial power, they are materially manifest, nodal points in the latticework of ongoing (post-)colonial power relations. Indeed, it is *through* the material congealments of hegemony in objecthood that this relationality obtains.⁴ Statues are figurehead objects which map the vectors along which hegemonic power operates and through which public spaces maintain their colonial imprint.

These ideas may be grounded theoretically, I argue, in an analytic metaphysics of objects. The rhetorical value of this is not merely a kind of clarity, but to show that decolonial activism and theory, which tends not to delve into analytic metaphysics, may garner support in this area too. To this end, I mobilize John Heil's analysis of the 'material constitution' debate concerning the metaphysics of statues. He argues that the seeming singularity of a material object – that is, the idea that the statue of Colston, toppled in Bristol, is just *one* object – is something of a phenomenological illusion to be dispelled by metaphysics. Careful analysis of the statue requires us to think that a statue is, in fact, *multiple objects*.⁵ Furthermore, to make sense of this multiplicity, Heil contends that other objects' material reality, *beyond that which makes up the statue*, is involved in *constituting* the material reality of the statue. As such, *the relations between statues and their object environment are co-constituting*. The first section of this paper aims to make sense of this metaphysics of objects.

In the second part of the paper, the co-location view is applied to theorize the identity conditions of a 'colonial object'. This ontology helps explain why decolonial activists consider statues so important for decolonization. Although decolonial activism is, of course, a political activity and can derive sufficient justification in that domain, the metaphysics offered here extends our theoretical understanding of statues, further challenging anti-decolonial views. If statues are seen as singular entities fully constituted by their material, they may be considered politically innocent and 'merely symbolic' of their colonial history.⁶ However, the view of the 'colonial object' rejects such innocence, emphasizing that statues are vanguard entities in the material configuration of the (post-) colonial present.

I Statues: A paradoxical entity

In Adorno's thought, where the aesthetic and political domains are dialectically entwined, the idea that (political) reality might be contradictory, or paradoxical, stands as starting point. Moreover, such paradoxes are not to be analysed away, but grasped as something complex about the way that (political) reality is in manifest material tension with itself. For Adorno, artworks are 'non-identical' to themselves [Adorno \(1997: 158\)](#): 'Artworks are self-likeness freed from the compulsion of identity' (*Ibid*: 166). This is a contradiction. After all, how can an object not be the same as itself? This is not a paper on Adorno's aesthetics, but the shape of his response is instructive for the discussion here. An example of how artworks are non-identical emerges in their relationship to commodification.⁷ On the one hand, artworks are perfect commodities: without their value being determined by use, or exchangeability on a like-for-like basis, they exist as pure cyphers of capital flow in the art market. And yet, on the other hand, they are one of the only moments of resistance left in late-Western capitalism precisely because their unique inscrutability resists the kind of instrumental rationality upon which capitalist exchange is predicated. After all, any particular artwork is not identical to anything else of its own kind, even other artworks. Hence, artworks, for Adorno at least, are dialectically contradictory: they are perfect commodities; they are perfectly imperfect commodities. This contradiction is not a trivial contradiction, but something complex to be understood about the nature of the being of artworks.

Analytic philosophy, by contrast, rarely perceives contradictions in the world and entertains them just to the extent that they can be explained away. After all, contradictions, aside from having devastating consequences in classical logic, tend to not be very common sensical, and analytic philosophy generally appreciates common sense in its analyses and explanations. Despite this, whilst analytic metaphysicians have not engaged with the contradictoriness of artworks more generally, they have noticed that the metaphysics of statues seems contradictory. Moreover, this is not seen as an aesthetic or political contradiction, but a fundamental metaphysical contradiction in the nature of the being of an object. Indeed, the very fact that even analytic philosophers can be spooked, as it were, by statues, tells us that there is something unusual about statues. On the one hand, theoretically speaking, statues are like any other object, and the metaphysical analysis that follows can be rolled out as such. In this regard, statues are exactly not special; they are mere gateways to a set of general metaphysical issues about objects. However, I think it is no accident that it is statues which have provoked metaphysicians to analysis precisely because *statues are weird*.

Most functional objects disappear into the background noise of everyday life: tables, chairs, cars, etc. These are common objects, seemingly exhausted by function and utility; metaphysicians are often happy to offer materially reductive analyses of such objects – if they bother with them at all.⁸ Conversely, other kinds of objects such as musical works are notoriously tricky and tend to be cordoned off as special interest cases within an already specialist domain of philosophy, namely aesthetics. Statues stand somewhere in between these extremes. They are part of everyday life in a way that other art objects tend not to be. They are also as seemingly simple as any other material object like a chair or a table –

unlike musical works, say. Despite this, there is something manifestly different about a statue to the functional objects they resemble in their brute materiality. On the one hand they are often familiar to the point of invisibility; they are often passed by without notice. In fact, they are less present than the buildings, roads and cobble-ways with which they are surrounded because they are, functionally speaking, *useless*! In their uselessness, if they catch our attention at all, they appear as ghosts of bygone eras, entombed in a slower time about which the kinetic energy of modern life swirls. And yet, a moment's reflection reveals an object exploding with excess meaning and history: an imposing manifestation of hegemony, marshalling and coordinating the life which flows about it. Whilst metaphysicians might not catch the weirdness in these terms, I think they intuit it in the clear tension between a statue's material simplicity and a manifest sense of its complexity.

Indeed, it is in the basic tension between simplicity and complexity that metaphysicians mobilize their enquiry. When considering the statue, there is clearly just *one thing*: a lump of bronze. Indeed, we may refer to the thing as a 'lump'. The term 'lump', in analytic jargon, is a 'sortal': it is a word that enables us to pick out and count objects.⁹ To use sortal terms communicatively, there must be application conditions based on the identity conditions of the objects in question. In other words, if I am to talk about the number of lumps of bronze in a park, the logic of the term needs to be such that it can be consistently applied to some set of objects and not others; lumps must be ontologically amenable to being counted. What exactly is a 'lump' such that it can be identified and counted?

Lumps are just objects whose identity depends on the mass of matter of which they consist. So, I can smelt down a lump of bronze from a cuboid shape to puddle shape, and it is still the same lump. Indeed, *it is* the very mass that a lump consists in that makes it the lump that it is. On the other hand, I can take a cuboid lump of bronze, divide it and make two lumps. The first lump is now annihilated, and I have two new lumps with their own masses in its place. Moreover, if I divide the cuboid lump into two smaller cuboids, I do not have the same lump despite being the same shape. Metaphysically speaking, the identity of some particular lump depends on that mass out of which it is materially constituted and not the shape.

Yet it is also said that the thing is a 'statue'. Thinking in terms of application and identity conditions, what is the *prima facie* metaphysical analysis of statues? In order that some statue be that very statue, it had better look just as it does. If the statue is smelted down, it could no longer be said that this smelted object is still the statue – yet it would still be the same lump. Statues, in order that I can talk about them, identify and count them, require their shape. It is in virtue of this straightforward, relatively uncontroversial metaphysical analysis that there is a seeming paradox. There are *two* identified objects, a 'statue' and a 'lump' with different persistence conditions, yet they are made of the *same* material; hence, there is just *one* object. Statues are weird because *they are two things and one thing* at the same time (Rea 1997: xxv). Moreover, that tension is clear in the case of statues in a way that it is perhaps not with other objects; hence, it is the subject of their analysis.

This metaphysical discrepancy needs some explaining; there are competing explanations.¹⁰ One set of explanations is going to take this paradoxicality, this weirdness, and

try to explain it away through metaphysical theory. The result will be a metaphysics in which common sense prevails: the single entity I see before me, *the* statue, is really just *one* object. After all, I do not see two objects; I see one. I suggest that this is the metaphysics of statues with which conservative and liberal thinkers are operating. In due course, I will consider an alternative analytic theory which, somewhat atypically, holds onto the weirdness of statues: they are irreducibly complex in such a way that their reality needs a kind of ‘decoding’. Statues are not simply as they appear; there is truly more than meets the eye to the statue. Moreover, that this complexity is functional of the materiality of their socio-cultural and historical context.

II ‘Singularity’ and ‘Dependency’: metaphysics, politics and history

In this section, I consider two answers to the paradoxicality of statues which, in effect, seek to explain away the strangeness – and by extension any similar strangeness accruing to other objects. I will label them both ‘singular’ views. That is ‘statues’ and ‘lumps’, in some way or other, are really just *one thing*. As suggested, this view is pre-theoretically intuitive because it’s hard to see how *an* object, such as ‘a statue’, can be *two* things. Whether or not this is the right metaphysical approach is not the concern here. Rather, insofar as this is the most intuitive approach, it is likely to be operative in the decolonizing statues debate, precisely because that is a popular political and/or moral debate, not a technical metaphysical debate. I then show that thinking about the metaphysics of statues as singular entities shapes our thinking about how statues and history relate metaphysically. I will argue that thinking about statues as ‘*singular*’ entities, results in a view of history ‘*depending*’ on statues. Crucially, thinking about history *depending* on statues will stand as reasons for arguing against decolonizing statues – whether you are sympathetic to decolonial activism or not. In other words, unspoken metaphysical commitments are guiding the contours of the political debate.

The most obvious way to explain away the paradoxical nature of statues is to conflate the two objects: the statue is strictly identical to the lump.¹¹ This is the quickest way to a ‘singular’ analysis of statues: statues and lumps are one and the same thing. As much as this might appear intuitive there are immediate metaphysical worries. Statues and lumps have different persistence conditions as discussed in section 1. It is on that basis that they may be identified, counted and tracked. This idea is codified in an important metaphysical principle: the indiscernability of identicals which says that if two objects are identical then any property of one is a property of the other. Therefore, by logical contraposition, if objects have different properties, then they are not identical. This foundational principle of metaphysical identity requires that we distinguish statues and lumps because they persist differently.

To maintain singularity, another option is to distinguish statues from lumps, but assign them different levels of reality. Lumps are real, but statues are not. Statues are merely mental constructs, and when we point to a statue, we are *really* pointing at a lump of matter. This reveals to us the ontological priority of the lump over the statue because the lump constitutes the statue. Moreover, the lump is an empirically respectable entity. If I

say that the statue is both distinct from the lump, and real, what reality does it have beyond its material basis in the lump? Empirically, none!¹² Although we can conceptually distinguish statues from lumps, the statue has no material existence beyond the lump. To claim otherwise would require additional material being that does not exist. Therefore, the lump is real, but the statue is not. To argue that both are real is to mistakenly ‘double-count’ the only real object: the lump.¹³ If this is right, common sense has prevailed: statues are singular entities.

Beyond the analytical technicality, what we have arrived at is the disenchanted metaphysics of statues mentioned before: trenchantly empirical; hostile to complexity; exhaustively scientific and committed to a somewhat sterile, lifeless metaphysics of quantification, that is, countability (and exchange). Moreover, the specific response to the seeming weirdness of statues becomes a general lesson about objects as such. Statues/objects are discrete, simple islands of matter, enduring through time and space, and in isolation of each other. Ultimately statues/objects exist as mere ‘furniture’, populating our environment just as it suits and pleases us (note that in the public sphere it is the uses and pleasures of people with public power that pick out the furniture). Of course, this is an entirely rhetorical rendering of the metaphysics; the metaphysics is not thereby wrong.¹⁴ However, I do think the rhetoric captures something true *about* the metaphysics and is very important to the statues debate.

The critical point is that the way that we do metaphysics expresses something existential about how we find the world and ourselves meaningful. In other words, the kind of metaphysics we attach to is not just the result of argument, although it is amenable to some degree of argument. Rather, the metaphysics that attracts us is, ultimately, I think what speaks to us existentially. This is provocative for metaphysicians who tend to see this as a purely rational inquiry. Nevertheless, the rhetoric above is an attempt to capture an existential relationship to objects hardcoded into metaphysical commitments about them. Indeed, it is a rhetoric that reflects the cultural disposition to objects found in secular, late-Western capitalist cultures, governed as they still are by populist scientism, consumerism, domination of nature and atomistic individualism. The point is that people think about statues as they do, not because of metaphysics, but because of cultural rhetoric and logic of objects. What I am doing is making explicit how the metaphysics works for such a view.

Indeed, what is important is not whether the metaphysics is right, but rather how this common sense metaphysics is plausibly operative in contemporary political contestations over statues, precisely because it fits the cultural common sense and rhetoric of objects in general. In ‘singular’ positions statues are *simple* objects. There is one object: a lump of material. Crucially, I now want to show that this singularity configures the relationship between history and statues such that *history ‘depends’ on statues*.¹⁵ It is at this point that we shift from the metaphysics as such to the political import of those metaphysics for the statues debate. To appreciate this move from pure metaphysics to the political, we need to see how this singular metaphysics of objects underwrites *value judgements*. Hence, I now want to consider how we might evaluate statues aesthetically, artistically, politically and historically in the context of a metaphysics of objects committed to singularity. What becomes clear is that, if statues are just lumps, that is, singular entities, they cannot help

but have a *very limited role in historical truths*. In turn, this has effects for the importance of statues when thinking about decolonizing.

When evaluating an object, we might ask ‘in virtue of what?’ is some judgement true.¹⁶ This approach to evaluation focuses our attention on ontology, ontological commitments and how things are such that some evaluative claim is true. This approach is going to be useful as it directs our attention to how statues (as lumps) participate, or not, in the truth of historical claims made about them, claims which are at the heart of the statues controversy. Consider the following judgements concerning statues: empirical judgements such as ‘This statue is one metre tall’; artistic judgements such as: ‘This is a significant example of neo-classical sculpture’; historical judgements such as: ‘*The Death of Cleopatra*’ (1876) was sculpted by Edmonia Lewis and socio-political judgements in which statues have played an important role: ‘*Augusta Savage’s Lift Every Voice and Sing* (1939) is important because it is one of the few sculptures by an African-American woman commissioned for the 1939 World Fair’. Now, assuming metaphysics of singularity about statues, what might make these claims true?

The case is relatively simple for an empirical claim about the lump. That a statue is *materially extended* in the way that it is makes true that it is ‘x cm tall’. But pursuing this kind of strategy, things are immediately more complicated when considering *historical claims*. As Mark Sagoff (1978) argues when considering issues of statue restoration, the lump, to the extent that it persists, might bear the historical property ‘having been fashioned by Edmonia Lewis’. But as he notes, *this is already precarious*. What happens if Cleopatra’s arm is broken off and is integrally restored to its original appearance *by someone other than Lewis*? The lump is now an amalgam; it is no longer uniformly the work of Edmonia Lewis. It is no longer true that ‘this statue is Lewis’ work’. This is a *historical* property, and damage, then restoration, to the statue has destroyed this property.

If we care about Lewis’ art, we lose something important when a statue is integrally restored with non-original materials and labour. Indeed, Sagoff argues that integral restoration *erases the history* precisely because the statue’s historical properties *depend* on its remaining in its ‘original’ state. Such a view of statues seems to underwrite an especially precarious account of art’s relationship to history. Sagoff is basically committed to the singularity thesis: statues are *just lumps of material*, and all that a lump, by itself, may materially secure about a statue are its empirical properties. Historical properties, imbued by work on the lump, cling, as it were, to it as the statue is projected forward in time. Over time, Lewis herself disappears into history, and the only thing maintaining that history is the fact that no tolerable change happens to the lump – such as a scratch...or some graffiti. The point is that our hold on history, and our contact with it, is precarious: it all depends *solely* on the statue’s materiality, *being as it is just a lump*.

While we may still remember an artist’s work, the loss of historical properties of cultural artefacts is a real concern. Our relationship with history also suffers as our sensuous link to the past, by way of historical artefacts, is also eroded. When looking at a statue, we see something the artist made in the past, and it affords us a transitive link to the artist and their historical circumstances. But this link is fragile, and integral restoration practices can jeopardize it. This is at the heart of Sagoff’s concern about preservation and restoration practices.

What about a claim concerning the political and historical importance of Augusta Savage's statue? This is clearly even more precarious given the singularity and dependency view above. On this metaphysical view, all we have left, materially speaking, of Savage is her work. Moreover, if this work is really *just a hunk of material*, then *it* can only directly make true claims that depend on that materiality. Claims that concern the social history *about* itself are simply not made true by the lump itself. Clearly then, the 'dependency of history' on the statue is, metaphysically speaking, a very weak form of dependence – whilst the history is nevertheless very important to us culturally. Indeed, the point is that it is not, as it were, metaphysically robust, precisely because we stand as intermediaries between the past and the statue, linking the two. If the statue disappears, or we stop making that link, the past is lost. The objects which make true claims concerning the political importance of Savage's work are lost to history precisely because they are *historical states of affairs*. Crucially then, on this view, in the material absence of history, the statue operates as a kind of proxy. In this way, our lost histories endure only indirectly, by way of this proxy. What emerges here is a view of the lump/(statue) as an avatar of the past, dressed up in an epiphenomenal cloak of historical properties, all of which may be lost with even the slightest carelessness – let alone decolonial activity such as graffiti, dissemblance and revisionary restoration.

The idea of statues as *just singular lumps* of material upon which history 'depends' in the manner discussed has two conflicting aspects. On the one hand, statues are extremely important as they are avatars of history precisely because the historical circumstances out of which they are produced have disappeared to time. And yet, even as they bear the weight of a history lost to time, they are also innocent of that history precisely because they are 'just lumps of matter'. So, in another sense, they are not so important. If one is disposed to worrying about colonialism and its enduring legacies, perhaps one thinks that we must hold onto statues precisely because they serve as reminders of a dangerous past whilst not actually *being* that dangerous past – after all, that past is 'long gone'. Or even: surely there are more important things to worry about vis-à-vis colonialism than hunks of metal in a park.

This, then, is 'the dependency view', bolstered by a pre-theoretical consistency with a singular metaphysics of statues. It is easy to see how these positions might shape the political imaginary about statues and decolonial activism. Exactly resembling Sagoff's injunction against integrally restoring statues – because it erases its important historical properties, confusing our relationship to the past – decolonial activism is said to willfully erase historical properties; it severs our precarious relationship to the past.¹⁷ From the liberal political position, decolonizing statues destroys these avatars of a (racist) past that we should do well to remember. At this point, it is worth noting that this idea is somewhat glib on its own terms. As Zeynep Çelik's careful analysis of particular interventions into specific colonial statues demonstrate, a colonial statue might survive in public memory through its absence: 'The physical absence of Duc d'Orléans thus did not delete colonial memory in Algiers but continued to trigger it in unpredictable ways in Algeria and France alike' Çelik (2020: 716). Indeed, intervention is itself a complex event, the results of which cannot be determined by any particular party in advance (Ibid: 723). Nevertheless, the popular narrative persists that the optics of a racist history, which depends on statues

for its continued presence, is thereby reconfigured as less racist, when statues are removed, dissembled or destroyed. It is, as Mary Beard complains, a ‘photoshopping’ of history. However, as has been pointed out, even on its own terms, it is not obvious who is photoshopping what: plenty of Rhodes’ contemporaries, including Oxford scholars, contested his great reputation (Drayton 2019: 664-5). It is obvious why people who treat colonial histories as triumphant episodes in a country’s history are against decolonizing statues. However, I think the singular/dependency configuration also speaks to the political position of anyone who has the thought ‘leave statues alone’: statues are *just lumps of matter*; what, after all, did they do wrong?¹⁸ Each of these political positions, in their different ways think that history is precarious and statues, as lumps of matter, are relevantly, that is, materially, innocent of that history.

If this were the only way to think about statues, perhaps we just shrug: this is their relationship to history; the metaphysics is thereby moot, and all relevant contestation takes place in the political and ethical domains. It is not, however, the only way to think about the metaphysics of statues and thinking otherwise allows us to think about the involvement of statues with politics and history in a very different way.

III ‘Co-location’, ‘multiplicity’ and ‘mediation’

There is another way to think about the paradoxical status of statues as ‘co-locating/coincident objects’.¹⁹ Under this view, statues are entities consisting in *multiple*, rather than singular objects. Crucially, as we will see, thinking about statues as multiple objects allows us to think about their relationship to history differently, as ‘mediated’ rather than ‘dependent’, and in a way that helps make sense of decolonizing activism over statues. Indeed, if we were to provide a rhetoric of objects under the rubric of co-location, statues/objects are still material entities, of course; nevertheless, they are the sites through which the relational dynamics of socio-cultural, political and historical states of affairs converge. In this way, objects are complex, jostling hives of political energy, microcosms of social tension and contradiction. Far from the lifeless, inanimacy of disenchanted matter, objects are the lightning rods through which social energy is manifest, managed and invigorated. Indeed, this social energy does not merely rove the surface of objects, as in the singular dependence view; it is constitutive of the object as such. The tension between lifeless materiality and explosive social complexity is so apparent, so immanent to the being of statues. Statues are special for decolonial activists because their political activity is a direct harnessing of this tense complexity; activists interrupt and intervene on the flow of hegemonic power as it manifests and articulates itself through the latticework of statues.

To underwrite this rhetoric with a metaphysical picture, I introduce a third object (in addition to the ‘statue’ and the ‘lump’) to the analysis: ‘the colonial object’.²⁰ It turns out that on the co-location view history does not merely *depend* on the statue as above. Rather, it ‘mediates’ the materiality of the statue.²¹ What exactly that means will become apparent in due course. The upshot, however, will be that history may be more materially robust in certain respects than the singular views provide for; moreover, the statue as a material entity is far from innocent of that history. It also means that whilst statues are avatars of hegemonic colonial power, they are simultaneously focal points of vulnerability: attack a

statue, and one attacks the power network of social arrangements of which it is a functional expression. As such, this metaphysics may be mobilized to help underwrite the theoretical basis of contemporary anti-racist and decolonial contestations of statues, like Colston in Bristol, Rhodes in Oxford or Churchill in London.

To make the metaphysical case, I return to analysis. Consider again the paradoxical nature of statues. Leibniz' law demands that we distinguish statues from lumps. As John Heil puts it, if we say that objects are entities that bear properties (2003: 172), then, insofar as statues and lumps have different modal and historical properties, they are distinct objects (ibid: 181–192).²² That the material constitutes both the lump and the statue does not by itself mean that they are thereby identical objects, or that I must favour the reality of one over the other. The outstanding issue for either the identity theorist or the anti-realist about statues will doubtless concern the issue of double-counting. Here Heil has an elegant solution that enables me to theorize the reality of 'the colonial object'.

The main concern is that there isn't anything – technically, *no addition of being* – that makes a statue more real than a lump of clay. Heil has two arguments that address this concern, which I use to introduce the 'colonial object'.²³ In *From An Ontological Point of View*, Heil attacks what he calls 'picture theorizing' (Ibid: 5–7). The main idea is that much of analytic philosophy (and, I think, cultural logic more generally) is implicitly or explicitly committed to the idea that realism involves some kind of isomorphic correspondence relationship between language terms and what they represent.²⁴ For example, I may be realist about some property-talk iff there corresponds to that property-talk some property. If there is no such correspondence then there follows some form of eliminativism or anti-realism. This tacit assumption revolves around the idea that to the extent that I can talk in realist terms, there needs to be a picturing relationship between language and world: a discrete entity (object or property) for any realist commitment. This idea drives the singular positions canvassed above. Heil argues that there is no reason why we ought to hold this view, not least because there are other choices available (Ibid: 9).

His second argument builds on this idea. Jettisoning picture theory commitments, there is a way to solve the double-counting problem: there is a way in which there *is* more to the statue than the lump, materially speaking, that is, there is an addition of being which stands as a difference that makes a difference. Heil puts the point modally. Anne Witney's *Charles Sumner* statue currently sits in General MacArthur Square. Now imagine a nomologically well-formed possible world in which the statue is the *only thing* that exists. Heil argues that in such a world the 'statue' has *really* disappeared. Crucially, however, it has done so without any material change to the lump. It is easy to misunderstand the point here: of course, if you take the beings out of the world on whose mindedness the statue depends, then the statue disappears. This seems like the anti-realist position again.

But Heil's point is not that: crucial to the argument is a view of language and truth beyond analytic correspondence, that is, beyond picture theorizing. The addition of material being that constitutes the reality of the statue consists in the *materiality* of socio-cultural and historical reality as well as the materiality of the lump (Ibid: 189). And it is on *these material bases* that I may distinguish *the reality of the statue from the lump*. Heil's view is a *non-analytic* truthmaker theory: we are entitled to realism about anything involved in a true claim. However, what is true need not be so only in virtue of some

discrete, corresponding state of affairs. Truths about statues involve lumps and the material configurations of socio-cultural and historical states of affairs. When I point at what makes true the claim ‘this is a statue of Charles Sumner’, I cannot just point at the lump, I must point at the lump, at ourselves (as material beings grounding normative states of affairs), and, as it were, the vast swathes of material reality which nest the discrete materiality of the lump. This does not make the statue any less real, it simply makes the material conditions upon which its reality depends vastly more complex.

I think it worth noting that this is a remarkable thing for an analytic metaphysician to do. Heil stays with and understands the complexity, rather than explaining it away. And this understanding involves a kind of realism about social contradiction manifesting in the complex being of statues: they are one thing; they are many things. Moreover, the many things that ‘statues’ are results in entities that are in tension with each other. Statues and lumps are different kinds of entities and they do not persist, live even, in the same way despite co-inhabiting the same material space. These co-locating objects obtain to the extent that they are *mediated* by different material configurations of socio-cultural and historical states of affairs. ‘Mediation’ being a way of conceptualizing how socio-cultural, political power relations are grounded in objects. Finally, whilst the metaphysics of singularity attempts to exhaust our understanding of statues by bleeding them dry of their life, this metaphysics galvanizes statues, demonstrating that understanding statues requires socio-cultural and historical engagement and critique.

This discussion provides an outline of how we can understand the ontology of statues. This argument applies to objects in general, not just statues. Crucially, however, if the reality of an object turns out to depend on extant material arrangements of socio-cultural states of affairs, and those states of affairs are (post-)colonial, then it follows that there are realist grounds for thinking there may be at least a further kind of object, distinguishable from both the lump, and the statue, but which is functional of those colonial states of affairs. This, I suggest, is ‘the colonial object’.

IV The colonial object

In the co-location view, there are multiple objects co-locating, but what makes it true that there really exists a statue in addition to the lump? The answer is that there are also material configurations of socio-cultural and historical states of affairs that, together with the lump, allow for truths concerning ‘statues’. However, not just any socio-cultural states of affairs will do. It requires a specific material context in which those lumps can be called ‘statues’, which includes the material reality of things like museums, galleries, art collecting practices and public and private commissions. These social practices treat the lump in normatively distinctive and distinguishable ways, so that it can be called ‘a statue’. This doesn’t mean that statues are just made up, or ghostly epiphenomena, but rather that we need to think about the reality of objects differently. When we talk about ‘statues’, we must consider Heil’s idea that object-talk need not correspond only to the discrete portion of matter to which we refer when talking about a particular object-kind. When we are considering ‘Western’ statues, we must also consider the material reality of

the 'Western European' art-world. Therefore, *statues* are complex mediations of socio-cultural material that exist just as much as the 'lump' of matter.²⁵

To understand what a 'colonial object' is, we need to consider the concept of objecthood presented earlier. Essentially, it is the same physical matter that we refer to when we talk about 'lumps' or 'statues', but it also invokes a specific socio-cultural and historical context that is different from the art-world context that licences truths about statues in general. These different contexts mediate the material of the statue and give rise to different conditions, which in turn licence further truths about colonial objects. The contexts are by no means obvious and are enormously complex. Hence, the metaphysics invites us to understand object phenomena through bespoke, particular analyses. For a colonial object to exist and persist, be destroyed or altered, two material domains are required. First, there must be a state of affairs in which coloniality persists as a context within which the 'statue' is nested. Additionally, the colonial object must possess modal and historical properties that allow it to be distinguished as a distinct object from both the statue and the lump with which it co-locates. We will now consider both of these domains in turn.

Objects and the post-colonial context

The ongoing reality of colonial states of affairs in the post-colonial world is perhaps the most crucial aspect of the ontology of a 'colonial object'. Aside from those who wish to dispute the moral evil, say, of colonialism, there are those who think that it is the kind of state of affairs 'to be remembered' with caution. Perhaps they believe that whatever colonialism is, and however bad it may have been, it is 'long gone'. If this were so, there would be no colonial objects on the metaphysical story offered so far. For example, whilst the memory of Roman imperialism persists in its artefacts and inherited technologies, it is not present with us in the sense relevant here; it is not an active political force directly responsible for shaping and organizing contemporary socio-cultural states of affairs.²⁶ The Roman Empire no longer directly mediates the material reality of artifacts such as the Colosseum. Whilst the colosseum was once an 'imperial object', nowadays it is not. Nowadays, I merely remember the Roman Empire by way of its artefacts; perhaps this points towards the ontology of a *relic*.

Again, perhaps some feel that the colonial campaigns of the European Enlightenment are history in a manner relevantly similar to the Roman Empire. It may be the case that the European colonizing nations have relinquished some of their legal entitlement to their empires under international law; it does not follow that the socio-economic, political and cultural structures that both underwrote and emerged out of colonialism have thereby been relinquished or have dissipated. Here is not the place to argue the post-colonial case: this work has been done and continues to be done elsewhere by experts in that field. Nevertheless, if post-colonial theorists are right about the ongoing reality of colonial effects which organize the contemporary world, and the metaphysics offered in the previous section is right, then it follows that there are 'colonial objects'.

Identifying a statue as a colonial object requires further analysis of ongoing colonial material reality as it persists through other objects, such as roads, buildings, town squares,

administration buildings and shipping lines. These, of course, are objects too and can in turn also be considered ‘colonial objects’. As I have been emphasizing throughout, Heil’s metaphysics of co-location allows for a view of social reality as a latticework of mutually mediating (colonial) objects. However, not all objects are equally important in this structure. Whilst the post-colonial landscape is a public space of political relations physically manifested, managed and psychically coordinated through the arrays of objects which materially constitute the environment, statues obtrude as visible talismans of coloniality. Unlike a civic administrative building managing a colonized outpost, or a road functional of a colonial trade route, or even the quintessentially ‘British’ cup of tea, all of which are colonial objects, the colonial statue parades itself, in pride of public space, as exactly that: an avatar of the colonial. Whilst the colonial origin of the cup of tea is sublimated in the ahistorical dream of an always already Britishness, the colonial statue performs exactly that of which it is an image: colonialism. Yet it is in its slippery material contradictions that the statue attempts to sublimate that very coloniality under its demure claim to ‘just being a statue’. This is a metaphysical sleight of hand that perhaps no other colonial object can perform. Of the many things that colonial activism about statues does, it says: I see you for what you are.

Distinguishing properties of the colonial object

If this is how the colonial object obtains by way of mediation, there is still the issue of how it might be decoded. That is, what properties might differentiate it from the buzzing multiplicity of objects with which it shares its material basis? Or, what are the forensic lines along which the colonial object might be exposed from its doppelgangers? According to the co-location view, statues and lumps can be distinguished by their different properties, both modal and historical, which allow us to identify them uniquely using Leibniz’s law. In Heil’s analysis of this view, the statue has those properties in virtue of the socio-cultural and historical context which contributes truthmakers for statue-talk – see above. What are these properties, then? If statues require their shape and are on that basis modally distinguishable from lumps, what does the colonial object require? Moreover, just as the precarity of statues is indexed to their requisite properties, colonial objects will also be precarious in unique ways indexed to their properties. Understanding these properties can guide us in exploring the metaphysical dimensions of decolonization efforts.

The properties that are relevant to the identification and intervention into the persistence of colonial objects are difficult to answer. Although it is a metaphysical issue as to how to theorize a category of properties and identity, the particularity of these properties are functional of the manifest reality of colonialism and its enduring presence in the socio-cultural configurations of the contemporary world. As such activists and academics working on colonialism will be best placed to determine the particular properties in question, and how they obtain in particular cases. However, some properties are clearly relevant to the identification and intervention into the persistence of colonial objects, such as shape and appearance.

Statues that concern decolonial activists tend to bear a mimetic or representational relationship to coloniality, for example, the statues of Rhodes and Colston. Moreover, given the normativity of art-world practices, their shape is crucial to their being a statue. However, being a representation of coloniality, that is, being a sculpture of a slave trader, is accidental to its *being a statue*: it could have been some other shape, completely unrelated to coloniality, and still be a statue. It would be a different statue, of course, but it would still be a statue. The accidental nature of this property, *qua statue*, has some explanatory power for understanding conservative positions in the decolonization debate. These positions emphasize that statues *in general* are *innocent* of the import of their *particular* shapes: to be a statue is just to be shaped in some particular way, but *it could have been any shape* the sculptor intends and still be a statue. Furthermore, if we take a singular metaphysics discussed in section two, and the statue/lump is relevantly ‘all there is’, the statue as such is moot in the conversation: its offending property (looking like a slave trader) is *merely accidental*; the colonial appearance is a problem of coloniality, and not the statue...so leave the statue alone! Indeed, it is easy to see why someone sympathetic to the decolonial cause might hesitate to intervene on statues. The relevant properties are accidental, and properties that are necessary for the statue, such as shapes, are precarious and likely to be destroyed in decolonial dealings with the statue. Why attack the statue for its accidental properties when the only significant metaphysical effect will be the destruction of empirical and aesthetic properties crucial to its being a statue.

However, the co-location view discussed in section 3, augmented with a theory of the ‘colonial object’, indicates that the above property analysis is too quick. The particular shape of the statue/lump is *necessary* to its status *as a colonial object*. While we may forgive the statue for its shape, we cannot do the same for the colonial object. This is especially significant given the discussions in sections 3 and 4.1. The existence of colonial objects, and thereby also their appearances, is a reflection of ongoing socio-cultural configurations that are themselves colonial. In other words, the conditions for the existence of a colonial object are provided by *extant socio-cultural reality*. If decolonial theorists and activists are correct in their claim that colonialism continues to configure the contemporary material world, and a co-location view is adopted in a metaphysics of the colonial object, then it follows that the being of the colonial object is an integral part of the contemporary configuration of the post-colonial world.

The analysis highlights the importance of a critical social ontology of statues as colonial objects. What matters about the colonial object from a material standpoint is not solely its shape/appearance – such as that of a slavetrader – but rather that it exists as a colonial object in the first place. This serves as a shorthand for the ongoing existence of coloniality and the overwhelming influence it has on the objective configurations of socio-cultural reality. However, this does not mean that the shape of the statue is irrelevant. In fact, allowing the colonial object to persist is a clear, *visible manifestation* of the ongoing reality of colonialism in socio-cultural appearances.

It follows then that doing something to the statue, *qua* colonial object, is to do something to the material configuration of coloniality. Specifically, in the context of properties concerning appearance, there is something we can do to the appearance of the colonial object which does nothing to the appearance of the statue by itself – precisely

because appearance is not entirely reducible to shape. The differential effects of intervention arise as a possibility precisely because the properties of appearance operate differently between the two kinds of co-locating objects – despite them being *empirically* indiscernible in appearance. Indeed, if statues really are innocent of their particular appearance, then the particular appearances of other statues must not matter either. In other words, for a statue to persist as a statue, it does not matter what shape it and other statues possess. Yet we can see this is clearly not the case when considering colonial statues: put some statues of Mickey Mouse around the statue of a slavetrader, and ask if the appearance of ‘the statue’ seems altered? I believe it must. This example cannot be written off as something like incompetent curation either. It is one thing if a painting is put in a position in which I cannot see it because of the light, or that there is no unobstructed view of a statue in a gallery. In galleries, our favourite pieces are surrounded by pieces we do not like, but we are able to attend to them regardless. I believe it is impossible to ignore the *Mickey Mouse* statues surrounding a *slavetrader* because their appearances are a direct, semiotic attack on the appearance of the colonial object. Indeed, in Rao’s formulation of the statue as phallic representation of colonial power, a Mickey Mouse statue would mock the slave trader with its own impotence. This is, as it were, a metaphysical attack on the reality of the colonial object. It speaks to a crucial dimension of the appearances of colonial objects (and not statues): that the stability of the appearance is directly functional of ongoing colonial power, and its expression in persistent social norms, norms to the effect that colonial objects must be free from ridicule.

The example also highlights the vulnerability of statues as colonial objects, which is a significant issue for the material configurations of coloniality. In some sense, colonial statues are literally a material part of contemporary post-colonial socio-cultural configurations. They are literally and figuratively its face. However, when colonialism gets egg on its face, it is indicative of an already weakening colonial context which has, in the past, been able to demand and secure the continued respect of those objects. Mocking, rehousing, removing, augmenting and let alone destroying the colonial object send a reverberation through the rest of the material structure of colonialism upon which the colonial object depends for its reality. Colonial objects, in the form of statues, flip from being material vanguards of colonialism to an Achilles heel.

Indeed, there are many ways in which colonial objects have properties that make them uniquely vulnerable when compared to statues. Locational properties are also necessary of colonial objects, but not of statues necessarily. Colonial objects, including statues, but also state administrative buildings and housing, all map the material configurations of colonial power both within colonial powers’ borders and within former territories. In this function, statues are visible symbols of coloniality, but they are much more. That statues occupy specific locations amongst the material configurations of colonial powers’ territories is a crucial function of its being a colonial object. Again, echoing Massey’s analysis of public space as a dynamic relational space through which the political takes material form, colonial statues were placed as a physical encoding of colonial power and are a visible, material part of colonial territory (Massey 2005: 328). That is, if we think of the colonial territory as a materially extended, whole object, constituted by different kinds of material entities which together manifest the colonial territory, the colonial statue contributes to

that extension and provides a representational focal point about which the material super-structure of coloniality might revolve.

Thinking in such mereological terms is useful but fails to do justice to the complexity of the metaphysics of location in coloniality. Crucially, the colonial power's resistance to moving a colonial statue is both an implicit acknowledgement of the statue as a colonial object and an attempt to maintain the status quo of post-colonial power. Of course, one could point to the statue and appeal to cultural heritage, but precisely because some particular location is not necessary the maintenance of *the statue*, such appeals would be straightforwardly disingenuous. The only object affected by the change in location from a town square to a memorial or museum, say, is the colonial object. This is because its being depends upon the uncontested colonial power of which its erection was an original expression and of which its continued presence is a testament. Modally speaking, the colonial object can only withstand pressure for its moving/removal to the extent that there is colonial power holding it in place. Hence, the very possibility of its being moved at all is already an expression of the contestation of colonial power. Indeed, as David Olusoga writes of the Colston toppling,

‘The supporters of Colston’s strategy of heel-dragging and obfuscation were based on one fundamental assumption: that the toppling would never happen. They were confident that black people and brown people who call Bristol their home would forever tolerate living under the shadow of a man who traded in human flesh, that the power to decide whether Colston stood or fell lay in their hands. They were wrong on every level. Whatever is said over the next few days, this was not an attack on history. This is history’ (Olusoga, 2020).

Nevertheless, as Katharyne Mitchell argues, ‘Resisting and/or transforming dominant forms of memory production in the landscape is somewhat easier when the city in which these forms are located is in a state of upheaval and flux’ (Mitchell, 2003: 453). It is in this context that the urgency of conservative reaction is intelligible: it is arguably a function of protecting the state and its parts from moving into a position of flux or upheaval. This is, after all, the political *raison-d’être* of conservatism.

What I am arguing is that decolonial activism is at least about destroying colonial objects; weakening the material expression and structures of colonial power in the post-colonial world. This might be in addition to other dimensions of the protest such as a moral intervention, say, into the commemoration of a slave trader. The physical attack is itself not political *actes gratuits*: a futile, misguided attack on some lump of material/statue. When protestors threw Colston into Bristol Harbour, they did something to it that destroyed the colonial object. This is so even if the appearance had not been damaged. I do not say this as an argument that decolonial action should not be allowed to affect the statue, but rather to reiterate how the pluralist metaphysics of co-location allows us to think about the differential realities of co-locating objects and their differing vulnerabilities. Indeed, a heritage-based claim that the toppling of Colston is nothing other than an act of vandalism *to a statue*, is, at best, a blindness to the material realities of ongoing colonialism. It is also to miss that Colston is not just a statue; it is also a colonial object. As Lara Choksey says, the attack on Colston was an intervention into the ‘psychogeography

of the everyday' Choksey (2021: 79). I do not think that we can make complete theoretical sense of this claim without the metaphysical account presented above. Indeed, without it, operating instead with a singular account of *statues*, it is very easy to see why statues are innocent, besides the point, or mere props for memory.

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Notes

1. For public debate, see Murphy (2017). For more academic analyses, see: Newson (2020), Abrahams (2020). Of course, there are analytic arguments which favour, more or less, decolonizing statues: Frowe (2019), Timmerman (forthcoming), Schulz (2019). There are also measured particularist analyses, see: Burch-Brown (2017, 2020). And more broadly: Archer and Matheson (2019), Cunningham (2016), Nguyen (2019). As my argumentative strategy is not ethics as such, I will not be pursuing these arguments or their strategies, leaving open possible consistencies between my position and theirs.
2. In this regard, I see this paper as contributing to critical social ontology. See, for example, Thompson, 2021: 15–45; Harris 2021: 1–20; Átsa 2018.
3. Rao develops these ideas in his lecture the *Libidinal Lives of Statues*. These ideas will presumably be developed in more detail on his forthcoming book on statues. See: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/institute-of-advanced-studies/events/2024/may/libidinal-lives-statues> [last accessed: 20/08/24].
4. In this regard, I do differ from Massey's pure ontology of relations. I hold that relations are internal to objects, as objects must be the relata of relations in order to maintain a coherent ontological grammar of relations. An ontology of relations in which relations are the relata of relations results, results, I think, in Bradley-style regresses, and radical ontological under-determination (Heil 2021a, 2021b: 10.2). Nonetheless, Massey is absolutely right to read social objects, and space, in the normative terms of meaningful arrangements of object relata.

5. Some form of this claim has been made by other metaphysicians. See, for example: [Wiggins \(1997\)](#), [Lowe \(2003\)](#), [Koslicki \(2008\)](#). There may be other theoretical routes to the points levied here. However, Heil's explicit account of *non*-analytic truthmaking (to be discussed later in the paper) seems to make his metaphysics particularly germane to my purposes here.
6. See Judith [Butler's \(1998\)](#) 'Merely Cultural' for a critique of the way in which certain kinds of injustices, in being relegated to the 'cultural' or 'symbolic' domain, are deemed as less important than say, issues of economic redistribution, which are perceived to sit squarely in a 'material' (rather than symbolic) domain. The view defended here makes this point in the register of metaphysics.
7. There is a great deal of work analysing these ideas both in Adorno and in many commentators. See for example, [Zuidervaat, 1991](#): 91; [Jarvis, 1998](#): 114 - 7; [Hammer, 2006](#); 80 - 1; [Paddison, 1997](#): 98. [Hohendahl, 2010](#): §13.
8. See Heil on Eddington's tables for a critique of such reductive analyses, and how the sort of analysis of statues canvased here might result in a far more complex, critical understanding of objecthood (2003).
9. See [Lowe \(2009\)](#) for a discussion of sortals.
10. For further discussion see: [Lewis \(1986\)](#), [Wiggins \(2001\)](#).
11. For a complex analysis along these lines, see [Gibbard \(1997\)](#).
12. For analyses of such ontological reduction, see Heil's discussion of 'Eddington's Tables' (2003).
13. There is a third set of positions, which require more technical detail than I can offer here. If one wishes to hold onto the reality of statues, but also admit that they are constituted by their material, one could think that statues *supervene* in some way or other on their material. Much has been written on metaphysical supervenience generally ([Kim, 1984, 1990](#)), and in aesthetic contexts ([Hick, 2012](#)). The details are not relevant to the discussion here – although following Heil, I am sceptical of supervenience [Heil \(1988\)](#). What is interesting about supervenience and various non-reductive strategies is that statues start to look like somewhat ghostly entities. Statues on this view have the air, as [Rao \(2016\)](#) puts it, of the 'epiphenomenal'.
14. For transparency's sake, I do think it is a deeply misguided view of objects, but I cannot justify that here.
15. See [Abrahams \(2022: 749–753\)](#) for an extended, critical discussion of the 'erasing history' claim.
16. Here I am employing the approach of truthmaker theory. I will not be arguing about truthbearers as the argument does not rest of differences between such candidates. For transparency, I am operating with something like Heil's view of truthmaking [Heil \(2003, 2012\)](#). Nevertheless, it should be noted that truthmaking is a complex trajectory in contemporary metaphysical thinking. See [Bigelow \(2009\)](#) for a useful overview.
17. What I have in mind here, are views such as Beard's accusations that the Rhodes Must Fall Campaign 'photoshops' history [Beard \(2015\)](#), or Newson's worry that decolonizing statues might simply serve to assuage white guilt [Newson \(2017, 2020\)](#). Although this tends to be the case in debates around statues of slave traders and imperialists, it is also worth noting that the very same people who insist on 'preserving' statues of racist figures tend to applaud the taking down of statues that they don't like: see for example this article on the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue in Iraq ([Maass, 2011](#)).

18. See this kind of response from volunteers washing graffiti off a statue of Winston Churchill (LBC News, 2020).
19. I am well aware that the metaphysical intelligibility of co-location views are contested: see, for example: Burke (1994), Rea (2000). But then this is just simply to say that the debate is still live.
20. By suggesting there is a third object, I am not thereby suggesting that there is *only* one further object. For our purposes, here I will remain agnostic about whether or not there is just this third object or ‘bazillions’ (Bennett, 2004). That said, the truthmaker strategy discussed below, adopted from Heil, does suggest that any excess of objecthood engendered by the co-location strategy is limited by mediations, functional of real arrangements of socio-cultural states of affairs.
21. See Murris’ (2016) posthuman analysis for a competing metaphysical analysis of mediation to that which follows here.
22. Note as well, to the extent that other cultural phenomena such as buildings, books and roads are also *objects*, I expect the argumentative moves presented here to extend to other objects of decolonial interest.
23. See also Dyke (2007) for a similar stance to Heil; and, Eklund for criticisms Eklund (2009) of these positions.
24. Interestingly, I think that Heil is getting at something very similar with picture theorizing to what Adorno speaks of with identity-thinking Adorno (2004: 5). Here is not the place to argue that point. However, I do think that this is a meta-philosophical point of convergence at which analytic metaphysics and critical theory meet.
25. For further discussion of the modal important of co-location concerning statues, see Stopford (2016).
26. See Jane Webster’s analysis of the difference between modern imperialism and Roman imperialism. Webster (1996: 1–18).

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