

Οι εικαστικές σπουδές στο Τμήμα Αρχιτεκτόνων διαμορφώθηκαν από την αρχή παίρνοντας υπόψη προγραμματικά τη νέα σύγκλιση σύγχρονης τέχνης και αρχιτεκτονικής, μετά τη λεγόμενη «αρχιτεκτονική και κοινωνική στροφή» της σύγχρονης τέχνης. Συνέβαλαν στη διερεύνηση του κοινού πεδίου «χωρικών πρακτικών» στην πόλη και στη δη-

μόσια σφαίρα, αλλά και των τρόπων επαναδιατύπωσης του κοινωνικού από την τέχνη, την εποχή της παγκοσμιοποίησης. Διαμορφώθηκε ένα δυναμικό περιβάλλον μάθησης και έρευνας, με δραστηριότητα που αναπτύχθηκε σε δημόσιους χώρους εκτός του Πανεπιστημίου, εμπλέκοντας σπουδαστές, καλλιτέχνες και το κοινό, στην Πάτρα και σε άλλες

πόλεις στην Ελλάδα και στο εξωτερικό. Το Εργαστήριο Έρευνας της Τέχνης στη Δημόσια Σφαίρα υποστήριξε την κατεύθυνση αυτή από το 2002, ως το μοναδικό στην Ελλάδα πανεπιστημιακό κέντρο για τη δημόσια τέχνη, παράγοντας επιμελητικά και ερευνητικά πρότζεκτ, εργαστήρια και επιστημονικές συνεργασίες με σημαντικούς θεσμούς όπως το

Defending the Dead, Desecrating Monsters: Iconoclastic Class Struggle in so-called Public Space

Gene Ray

Abstract: In public squares and spaces everywhere, we cross the shadows and stroll under the gazes of bronze conquerors and national heroes, sitting horseback or striding boldly, arms in hand. Anchors of ideology, these monuments honor the victors of history, as Walter Benjamin called them – those who step on and over the defeated, in an unbroken chain of domination stretching back into the mists of time. But the politics of remembrance are caught in the force field of violence, and the dead are called to both sides in the class war. The combat of cultures of the dead is integral to the struggles of the living, and therefore “not even the dead will be safe,” as Benjamin put it, “if the enemy wins.” Heroic memorials have become the flash-points of contemporary struggles over the interpretation of history, all

the more so as fascist mass movements establish themselves across Europe and much of the world. This talk looks at three recent episodes in a history of iconoclastic class struggle in so-called public space: an intervention inspired by the Situationist International following May 1968; the symbolic dismemberment of the Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate by anonymous indigenous activists in New Mexico in 1998; and the antifascist mobilization against the 2017 Unite the Right rally at the statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia.

1. Public Sphere, public space, public art: plop art, “community-based” art, “new genre public art”; site-specific, Situationist, “situated”: what remains after all the manifestoes, books, articles, and debates about art launching itself out of the galleries and into everyday life? Very unfashionably, I argue that the *political* dimension of public space is quickly and easily grasped. What artists or anyone can do in it follows on from *what public space is, in political terms.*

Before I turn to some examples of iconoclastic class struggle in public space, I need to spend a little time working up the social and historical context that gives these actions political meaning. We are encouraged to think of public space as common space of civil society – non-privatized or non-commercialized spaces, more or less urban, more or less open to access and use by a general public. But in late capitalist modernity, the social force field saturates and constitutes all public spaces. In fact, any space is public only insofar as it is a place where social forces and powers meet, cross, collide and grind away at each other. In a class society like ours, “social force field” means: the force field of violence. It’s important to remember, and in fact begin with that. Despite the consent and enjoyment machines, the reproduction of capitalist social relations and the defense of the capitalist mode of production require massive enforcement. Most of the violence and terror of the twentieth century – two inter-imperialist world wars, fascism, and the Cold War in all its steps and turns – has to be understood as capitalist

Skulptur Projekte Münster, και η Documenta 12.

Η έκδοση απορρώξ έρχεται σήμερα σε μια περίοδο που είναι αισθητή η αποδυνάμωση της εικαστικής παιδείας, ενώ αναζητούνται τρόποι νέας συγκρότησης της εμπειρίας της μάθησης στη συνθήκη διδασκαλίας από απόσταση που επιβάλλει η υγειονομική κρίση. Παρέχει ένα βήμα έντυπου διαλόγου και ταυτόχρονα ένα ζωντανό αρχείο για δράσεις, πρότζεκτ, κριτικές εργασίες, συνεχίζοντας να ενθαρρύνει

τους σπουδαστές να εμπλέκονται στα ζητήματα της καθημερινής ζωής και της πόλης, όπως και να ενδυναμώνουν τις συνέργειες, ως μέρος της εκπαίδευσής τους.

Η έκδοση απορρώξ παράγεται ως διαδικτυακό αρχείο που διανέμεται και εκτυπώνεται στους οικιακούς εκτυπωτές των αναγνωστών. Μεταφέρει στο σχεδιασμό της μια ιδέα ζωντανής αρχειοθέτησης. Κάθε φύλλο είναι ένα αυτοτελές θεωρητικό αντικείμενο ή πρότζεκτ, που συνδεόμενο

με άλλα, μπορεί να αρχειοθετείται σε διαφορετικά ντοσιέ με διαφορετικές κάθε φορά προθέσεις επιμέλειας, μελέτης, ανάγνωσης. Η ιδέα βασίζεται στην πυκνότητα έκδοσης, στην οικονομική και γρήγορη παραγωγή, στην διασκορπισμένη εκτύπωση και διανομή. Η έναρξη της έκδοσης συνέπεσε με την αρχή της παγκόσμιας πανδημίας και τις πρωτόγνωρες συνέπειές της στη λειτουργία του δημόσιου χώρου και στις διαδικασίες εκπαίδευσης. Μας απασχόλησε ο

enforcement. This recourse to violence and terror has not changed at all in the twenty-first century.

The field of forces, of power relations, shifts like a kaleidoscope around one constant: the antagonism, the irreconcilable conflict of interest between the dominant classes and the dominated, the owners of capital and the exploited sellers of labor power, the victors of history and the rest of us. Everything else follows from this structural given: class antagonism, class enmity, class struggle. Neoliberal institutions, even so-called public ones like this University, are constructed out of these antagonistic relations. This means that public space is not, and is never, neutral or pacified space – no matter how it appears. The history of class domination and violence I just referred to constitutes the very ground of public space. It's always there, always active, even when social peace seems to prevail. The idea that history ended forty years ago, and that capitalism plus democracy ushers in a classless world of consumption and perpetual peace – that idea today is an obscene dead letter of ideology. No one believes the claims of neoliberalism; in fact everyone hates it. If it grinds on, it's only because the dominated still lack the organized power to transform and abolish it.

Class antagonism and conflict has never for a second been absent, although it's true that how we per-

ceive and experience class conflict is bound to context and changes over time. In the confusing wake of capital's defeats of the Left in the twentieth century, we were all trained not to see it, to take part in a kind of performance of blindness and amnesia. Today, it's impossible not to speak of it, as we watch impressive insurrections against austerity and impunity in Chile, Haiti, Ecuador, Lebanon, Iraq, and even France. The global Left, long in disarray, is trying to recompose itself as a political force. Meanwhile, fascist social movements have established themselves all over Europe and other places, and fascist ideology has entered the state in the USA, Brazil, Turkey and Greece, Hungary, India and many other nations. In the last weeks, an imperialist, indeed white supremacist military coup in Bolivia has brought down the first indigenous government in Latin America and its Movement Toward Socialism party. All this is certainly our shared context of class conflict and struggle.

The great Greek communist and intellectual Nico Poulantzas has left us a powerful body of theory analyzing the ways in which class struggle cross through and shape the institutions of the capitalist state. His analysis of Ideological State Apparatuses would certainly be vital to you, in the context of this occupation. Poulantzas tells us to begin by clarifying the class force field. What is the present disposition of class struggle, what he

called, after Althusser, the conjuncture? Today, it is shaped, it seems to me, by two converging crises: First, there's the crisis of neoliberalism, of neoliberal capital – this is a crisis that is economic, political, and ideological (or cultural). With this occupation, you are acknowledging and intervening in this first crisis. Second, there is the truly dire crisis of planetary meltdown – a crisis of society's metabolic interaction with the planet, a crisis of late capitalist modernity's energetics. Capital's adaptation plan to these two crises has emerged pretty clearly now: prepare for war and for civil war, and allow and foster fascist mass movements, in case liberal democracy proves too weak to defend capitalist power and wealth. We've entered the politics of armed lifeboats, climate chaos and desperate geo-engineering. My talk is focused one aspect of the political and ideological crisis: the resurgence of class struggle in the cultural politics of public memory, and in particular the contestation of memorials in public spaces such as city squares, schools and universities. But everything takes place within this larger context of crisis and conflict. The next decades will not be times of peace, and it's important that we understand that and prepare ourselves for it. We are in a phase of rebuilding the collective power to defend ourselves, in a moment of growing danger.

σχεδιασμός του εντύπου στις συνθήκες αυτές απομόνωσης, περιορισμού των πόρων, κυριαρχίας της διαδικτυακής λογικής στην ανάγνωση και στη χρήση του περιεχομένου. Παράγοντας μια σκέψη για το απορρώξ ως ζωντανό αρχείο, προτείνουμε ταυτόχρονα ένα μοντέλο εντύπου που ενισχύει τις ποιότητες που βασίζονται στον αργό χρόνο της υλικότητας του χαρτιού και της ανάγνωσης, στην παραγωγή και διανομή σε οικιακούς εκτυπωτές, στη λογική της συλλογής

και στον ελάχιστο σχεδιασμό.

Το πρώτο φύλλο περιέχει τη διάλεξη του Gene Ray «Υπερασπίζοντας τους νεκρούς, αποϊεροποιώντας τέρατα: Εικονοκλαστική πάλη των τάξεων στον λεγόμενο δημόσιο χώρο». Η διάλεξη δόθηκε στο πλαίσιο του Ειδικού Εργαστηρίου «Χωρίς Μνήμη: Εργασίες Δημόσιας Τέχνης» στις 26 Νοεμβρίου 2019, εμβαθύνοντας στα ζητήματα που σχετίζονται με την ιδεολογική χρήση των μνημείων και την πολιτική της μνήμης. Πραγ-

ματοποιήθηκε σε μια περίοδο παύσης της κανονικής εκπαιδευτικής διαδικασίας, όταν το Τμήμα βρισκόταν σε κατάληψη από τους φοιτητές, σε διαμαρτυρία για τις επικείμενες αλλαγές στην ανώτατη εκπαίδευση. Ο Gene Ray έφερε στο προσκήνιο τον ανταγωνισμό και τη σύγκρουση των τάξεων στην πολιτισμική πολιτική της δημόσιας μνήμης. Είναι ιδιαίτερα επίκαιρη η διάλεξη σήμερα, μετά τις πρόσφατες δράσεις αποκαθής των ανδριάντων σε πολλές

2.

Walk around any city in Europe, or North or South America, and you will find yourself accompanied and under surveillance by a vast host of warmongers, conquistadors, capitalist pirates and empire-builders, cast in bronze, raised on stone plinths and often thrust up even higher on horseback. These statues portray the protagonists of national fictions, imperialist rivalries and capital's myths of progress. They are monuments to imagined community, identity and official social narratives. These static fixities are anchors of that conformity that works ceaselessly, as Walter Benjamin noted, to overwhelm tradition and convert it into a tool of the dominant classes. They celebrate the victors in the long class war, and warn the defeated to shut up and keep to their places. In his celebrated last essay, "On the Concept of History," Benjamin vividly illuminates the violent process of accumulation that is condensed in every official heroic memorial:

With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs, the inheritors, of prior conquerors. Hence, empathizing, or identifying, with the victor in every case benefits the current rulers. The historical materialist knows what this means. Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in

the triumphal procession in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils or trophies are carried in the procession. They are called "cultural treasures," and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For in every case these treasures have a lineage which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period. So there is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism poisons the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.¹

Benjamin is writing here about the masterpieces that fill the museums and mansions. The struggles, organized by Decolonize This Place and allied groups, that have opened up recently around museum collections, boards of direc-

tors and trustees, are struggles to brush history against the grain and bring class antagonism openly into the institutions. These are necessary struggles, worthy of our support and participation. But I want to leave the museums and get out into those spaces where monuments to violent accumulation are planted as triumphal assertions of impunity, and as warnings to would-be insurgents. And where these are concerned, the logic of social antagonism can be formulated very precisely: *the dead, as well as the living, are divided into classes.* They too exist on opposing sides of a class line that is not to be crossed: that is *their politics*. Seen from the point of class antagonism, every living person and every dead one too is either a comrade or a class enemy, but never both. Moreover, great energies are condensed in the relations between the living and the dead, as Benjamin elaborated in the same essay I read from. This is to say that *the dead are called to fight on both sides in the class war.* The combat of cultures of the dead is a vital part of the struggles of the living, and therefore "not even the dead will be safe," as Benjamin put it, "if the enemy wins."²

Nearly all heroic statues today are monuments planted by the victors, by the capitalist class. That wasn't always the case. But monuments to the heroes of the oppressed and exploited have been largely disappeared in the frenzy of de-communization that followed the collapse

πόλεις, με αφορμή τη δολοφονία του George Floyd, από κινήματα κατά της λευκής ανωτερότητας, του εθνικισμού, της πατριαρχίας και της ομοφοβίας. Η διαμάχη των μνημείων και οι σύγχρονοι αγώνες για την ερμηνεία της ιστορίας αναδεικνύουν έναν δημόσιο χώρο που δεν είναι ουδέτερος, αλλά δομείται από ανταγωνισμούς και συγκρού-

σεις, όπως ακριβώς και ο δημόσιος χώρος του Πανεπιστημίου, στον οποίο τίθενται και αντιμάχονται διαφορετικές θέσεις που αφορούν το μέλλον του. Η κατάδειξη αυτού του συμβολικού και ταυτόχρονα ενσώματου πεδίου δυνάμεων εντός των θεσμών μνήμης και εντός του Πανεπιστημίου, και η ανάληψη θέσης σε μια περίοδο πολιτικής και ιδεολογι-

κής κρίσης του νεοφιλελευθερισμού, είναι «ζωτικό μέρος της μάχης των ζωντανών και συνεπώς, ακόμα και οι νεκροί δεν θα είναι ασφαλείς», όπως μας λέει ο Gene Ray παραθέτοντας τον Benjamin, «αν ο εχθρός νικήσει.»

Πάνος Κούρος

of the Soviet bloc and the defeats of the Left in the long neoliberal offensive. That means that class struggle in the politics of remembrance in public spaces tends to take the form of iconoclastic contestation, as I'll show. But there are examples of other strategies, and I will begin with one of these, in order to underscore the point, that the dead fight on both sides in the class war.

On the Place Clichy in Paris, there was a statue of the nineteenth-century visionary socialist Charles Fourier. Fourier's utopian notion of "social enjoyment" was appreciated by Marx and Benjamin, as well as by André Breton and the Surrealists. During the occupation, the Nazis destroyed the statue; they recognized Fourier perfectly well as an enemy to the fascist project, and liquidated his memorial. In exile during the war, Breton penned his antifascist *Ode to Charles Fourier*. More than twenty years later, after the events of May 1968, a group of artist-militants, including a sculpture teacher at the École des Beaux Arts, realized an action in collaboration with members of the Situationist International, a group of mostly ex-artists become revolutionary critical theorists and cultural guerillas. The Situationists described the action in their journal, and I read from their account, entitled "The Return of Charles Fourier":

At 7PM on Monday 10 March 1969, exactly in the moment when a "general strike" – carefully limited to 24 hours by union bureaucrats – was scheduled to

begin, the statue of Charles Fourier in the Place Clichy was returned to its plinth, which had been empty since the Nazis had removed the first version of the statue. An engraved plaque at the base of the statue explained its origin: "In tribute to Charles Fourier, from the barricaders of the rue Gay-Lussac." Never before has the technique of détournement [or re-functioning, repurposing] reached such a domain. The work of putting it in place was accomplished at one of the Place Clichy's busiest times, in front of more than a hundred witnesses, many of whom crowded around it, but of whom none was particularly shocked, even on reading the plaque (in France people who have seen May 1968 don't let themselves be shocked easily). The statue, an exact replica of the original, was made of plaster but finished in bronze. To a first glance, it looked real enough. Even so, it weighed more than a hundred kilos. Soon, the police had learned of its presence and put it under guard through the next day. At dawn the following morning, it was removed by technical services of the Prefecture. A commando of around twenty "unknowns," as Le Monde put it on March 13, had sufficed to pull off the operation, which lasted a quarter of an hour. According to one witness, quoted in France-Soir on the 13th, "eight young people aged

*twenty deposited the statue using wooden beams. A nice performance, if one knows it took no less than 30 guardians of the peace and a crane to leave the plinth empty again."*³

So this constructed situation was a gift to the Parisians who had filled the streets and triggered a near revolution the year before.

According to Andrew Hussey, one of Guy Debord's recent biographers who interviewed all the protagonists still alive in 1999 and 2000, the sculpture teacher fabricated a copy of the original statue, presumably working from photos.⁴ The French state, shaken and nervous after its close call the year before, was unwilling to allow what it rightly interpreted as a provocation – especially not one signed by "the ones who barricaded the rue Gay-Lussac." Just to remind ourselves, the student occupation of the Sorbonne University had rapidly spread out from the Latin Quarter and developed into a wildcat general strike by 9 million workers – a serious threat to any state and social formation. The role of the Situationists and their "Council for the Maintenance of Occupations" is a highly interesting one, but not one I have time to go into here. Images showing the rue Gay-Lussac on the morning of 11 May, after the so-called "night of the barricades," vividly convey the intensity of the revolt and help us to understand why the state's response to the restored statue in the Place Clichy was basically predictable.

And here is the meaning of the action: the French state was easily

provoked into literally repeating an act of political suppression committed by the Nazis – stepping right up, as it were, to the place marked “fascist.” You could hardly ask for a clearer confirmation of everything the Situationists had been saying. It was a good and serious joke, a fine ludic gesture performed before a hundred witnesses and for the larger public of all those who had participated in the recent insurrection. We could say that this intervention is a kind of astonished and admiring echo, a *dénouement* lovingly prolonging these experienced moments of an extraordinary reach beyond domination. The message is unmistakable: take heart, it is possible to play the game in earnest.

3.

Twenty years later, it's a very different conjuncture. The Soviet bloc, outspent and defeated in the Cold War, has collapsed, neoliberal ideology and governance is on the offensive, and the welfare state and workers' rights are under hard attack. 1992 was the 500th anniversary of the alleged “discovery” of the New World by Christopher Columbus. Columbus of course is a celebrated protagonist in capitalist modernity's myth of progress: he asserts the superiority of modern science and technology and the right of Europeans to use those technologies to expropriate freely the wealth of those deemed more backwards. The USA is not alone in celebrating Columbus with an official national holiday and a vast network of local memorials. To the Indigenous peoples across the Atlantic from Europe, however, the captain-navigator symbolizes not progress but the genocidal catastrophe of 500 years of invasion, occupation, enclosure, and extraction. Columbus himself, they remember, installed an atrocious system of forced labor on Hispaniola, and shipped off some 5000 Indigenous to Spain, to be sold as slaves. Estimates of the Indigenous population of Hispaniola on Columbus' arrival range from several hundred thousand to over a million. By 1514, there were just 32,000 Taíno people left alive.⁵ As

the culture industry and branded cities prepared to capitalize on the 500th anniversary celebrations, and as planning for similar celebrations of diverse Spanish conquistadors around the Americas got underway, Indigenous criticism and resistance intensified. The widespread and more or less continuous iconoclastic attacks on settler-colonial memorial statues began in earnest at this time and is captured in a heartwarming selection of desecration and critical defacement accessible online.

I want to relay some attention on one case in particular, as it shows an admirable and exemplary precision. In 1992, the same year as the official Columbus commemorations, an equestrian statue of the conquistador Juan de Oñate y Salazar was erected in Alcade, New Mexico. Oñate founded the first Spanish colony in New Mexico in 1598 and is widely celebrated among settlers as a kind of founding father – not, however, needless to say, by the Indigenous people of the New Mexican Pueblos, whose ancestors temporarily expelled the Spanish in a meticulously planned and executed uprising, the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680. In January 1998, a letter was sent to the *Albuquerque Journal*. It included a polaroid of a bronze foot that was claimed to have been cut off from Oñate's statue. A similar typed letter was sent to the *Journal North*; it claimed that the foot had been removed by an anonymous group “on behalf of our brothers and sisters of Acoma Pueblo.”⁶ In 1599, Oñate had conducted a punitive massacre of the Indigenous residents of Acoma, killing outright between 800-1000 people. He sentenced the 500 or so survivors to 20 years in slavery, and moreover decreed that all men over 25 years of age should have one foot cut off. This criminal history did not at all prevent Oñate from being officially celebrated in towns across New Mexico. The attack on the statue exposed the official amnesia, brought to an end Oñate's impunity, and re-posed the whole problem of settler colonialism, a system of occupation and land grabbing based on the

replacement or extermination of Indigenous people and their customs of land tenure in common. Curator Candice Hopkins, who has researched and lectured on this action, was able to include a clay cast of the stolen foot in the 2018 SITE Santa Fe biennial. As of 2017, filmmaker Chris Eyre was working on a documentary based on the taking of Oñate's foot, reportedly carried out by a still anonymous Indigenous man and one accomplice.⁷



Equestrian statue commemorating the Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate y Salazar in Alcade, New Mexico, before an activist cut off one booted and spurred bronze foot in 1998.

4.

The struggles in the United States against monuments honoring Confederate generals and other figures from the slave-owning classes have developed from a different set of histories and triggering events, but these struggles have taken iconoclastic forms similar to Indigenous contestation of settler-colonial memorials in the 1990s. There are reportedly around 700 monuments honoring the Confederate cause in the US Civil War (1861-1865), mostly concentrated in the southern states.⁸ They depict heroes like Nathan Bedford Forest, a Confederate general who went on to found and lead the Ku Klux Klan in the years after the Civil War. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, when schools, street names and other public symbols are added, there are at least 1747 Confederate symbols in public spaces. Most of these date to the early twentieth century, from roughly 1900 to 1930, and peaking in 1910, the year after the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a leading civil rights organization in the USA.⁹ When you also factor in all the situations in which the Confederate battle flag is officially

displayed or privately carried into public spaces, you can understand how saturated public space is with symbols of white supremacy. Indeed the Confederate flag is such a potent condensation of traumatic historic violence that carrying it into public space is comparable to carrying a Nazi banner. And indeed, these flags are often carried together by fascist and white supremacist groups.

It may be helpful to review some of this history. The slave plantation system was well established by the time the British colonies in North America won independence and reorganized as the United States of America. Slavery was recognized by the US Constitution and other founding documents, and protected by a representational balance between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states - a balance that precariously maintained as the settler-colonial nation-state expanded across North America by grabbing the lands of Indigenous peoples. But by the 1850s the abolitionist movement had become a powerful and international social force. The US Civil War was the result of an attempted exit by the slave-owning southern states, aiming to establish a separate nation based unambiguously on plantation slavery. During the course of the war, in 1863, Lincoln formally abolished slavery by executive order. The South, or Confederacy, was defeated militarily, but retained enough political power and influence to reverse "Reconstruction" policies that aimed to grant freed slaves full civil rights and some redistributed land. As the saying goes, the South "lost the war but won the Reconstruction." How did they win it? Largely by violence and terror, directed at black communities and white reformers. The Ku Klux Klan was formed in 1866, just one year after the Civil War ended. The system of US apartheid and race laws that prevailed across the southern states into the 1960s is generally referred to as Jim Crow. Ideologically, Jim Crow was based in two fantasies: white supremacy and the romanticization of plantation slavery through the myth of the so-

called Lost Cause or Rebel Cause. The films *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) are important cultural markers of the Lost Cause and Jim Crow era. So the monuments that were erected all over during the early twentieth century are evidence both of the continuing demand for racial justice and the continuing refusal to grant it. In other words, this struggle is intersectional class struggle. The meaning of the occupation of public spaces by symbols of the slave owning Confederacy was clearly a symbolic assertion and constant reminder of the real terror and violence of Jim Crow. Between 1877 and 1950, more than 4000 Black people were lynched in the US South.¹⁰ To the extent that law enforcement and the courts were complicit with this system of terror, lynching was arguably a para-state form of repressive state apparatus.

You're all aware, no doubt, that there has been a resurgence of white supremacist groups and discourse in the US since the election of Barack Obama in 2008. This is more than a handful of violent groups and militias; it's a deeply networked mass movement, bankrolled by individual members of the capitalist class. Trump has given it discursive legitimacy and welcomed some its members (Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, among others) into the White House, thereby helping to normalize a growing fascism. Trump consistently holds the approval of 41% of Americans; that is, 41% of Americans are not much bothered by fascist, misogynist discourse and dog whistles.¹¹ Some sizable part of this mass base is actually a fascist social movement, the US part of transnational neo-fascism. It is this fascist social movement in the US that has mobilized to defend the monuments to the Confederacy. So we have reached the moment in this story, when iconoclastic contestation of settler-colonial and white-supremacist symbols and memorial cultures becomes an important form of antifascist class struggle. Since fascism is an exceptional form of the capitalist state that aims to eliminate organized

opposition to capital through forms of violence and terror unavailable to normal liberal democracy, anti-fascism is always a form of class struggle. While there is much more to say about this, the point here is that the struggle over white supremacist statues and monuments now takes the form of a struggle between fascists and antifascists, but this remains fundamentally a class struggle that engages the dead as well as the living.

In June 2015, a twenty-one year old white supremacist named Dylann Roof entered Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and massacred nine Black worshippers. On his website, Roof posted a white supremacist manifesto and photos of himself with the Confederate battle flag. In the context of a growing contestation of police murder and shooting of young Black men organized by Black Lives Matter, and with some lessons learned in course of sustained Indigenous opposition to settler colonial memorial culture, the association of this atrocity with the Confederate flag ignited a public debate about Confederate symbols and monuments. This debate quickly became a battle between opposed interpretations of history, separated by class antagonism - the struggle to grasp the true image of the past, just as Benjamin described it. As a result of the Charleston terror attack and the debate it provoked, the South Carolina legislature voted to remove the Confederate flag from the State Capitol. In some southern cities, notably New Orleans, municipal authorities began to remove monuments to the Confederacy from public spaces. But this movement was strongly opposed: Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina passed state laws prohibiting the removal or alteration of Confederate monuments, and four more states passed laws designed to make removal more difficult.¹²

This is the context in which a statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, became the flashpoint for a major confrontation, one in which the size and violence of the fascist mass movement in the US became

visible. The bronze equestrian statue was commissioned in 1917 and completed and dedicated in 1924, during a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan; this so-called Second Klan aimed to repress new demands for civil rights from Black veterans returning from World War I. The statue was erected in a public park also named after Lee. In March 2016, the Charlottesville City Council was called on to remove the statue and re-name the park.¹³ In June, the statue was spray-painted with graffiti reading “Black Lives Matter.” The City Council appointed a commission to make recommendations regarding the Lee statue and a second one dedicated to Stonewall Jackson, another Confederate general. The final report of the Commission called for the removal of the Lee statue but allowed the Jackson statue to remain in place. In February 2017, the City Council decided to remove the Lee statue and rename the park “Emancipation Park.” Diverse rightwing groups immediately filed lawsuits to halt the removal, and in May 2017, a judge issued a temporary injunction protecting the statue for six months.

Eleven days later, white supremacist and neo-Nazi Richard B. Spencer led a first, but smallish torchlight rally at the site of the statue. They chanted “Jews will not replace us.” On July 8, the Ku Klux Klan held a rally at the Jackson statue. The 50 or so Klansmen were countered by many hundreds of antifascist and antiracist demonstrators. Police dispersed the counter-protestors with tear gas and arrested 23 of them. Overnight, the statue was attacked with red paint. All this set the stage for the so-called Unite the Right rally on August 11 and 12, 2017.

Unite the Right was much bigger and better organized show of force, gathering together hundreds from groups from across the country and across the far-right-to-fascist spectrum, including: League of the South, Identity Dixie, Identity Evropa, Spencer’s National Policy Institute, Daily Stormer, Nationalist Front, Traditionalist Worker Party,

various branches of the Klan, Vanguard America, National Socialist Movement, Anti-Communist Action, at least four armed right-wing militia groups, the fight clubs Proud Boys and Rise Above Movement, and the terrorist group Atomwaffen Division. Demonstrators displayed an abundance of fascist and racist symbols, including Nazi and Confederate flags; most were armed with shields, clubs and street-fighting gear, and semi-automatic pistols and even openly carried assault rifles were also visible.

On Friday night, before the main, permitted demonstration on Saturday, about 250 fascists held an unannounced torchlight march through the campus of the University of Virginia, again chanting “Jews will not replace us” and “White Lives Matter.” At one point a small group of mostly student counter-demonstrators was trapped by this crowd against a memorial statue of Thomas Jefferson, the slave-owning third president of the US, and viciously attacked. Virginia State Police eventually broke up the demonstration.

The rally was scheduled to begin at noon on Saturday, but at 11am, the City of Charlottesville and then the governor of Virginia declared states of emergency. The Virginia State Police changed the status of the permitted demonstration to an “unlawful assembly” and riot police began clearing the streets. But by that time more than 500 fascists had gathered and launched attacks on perhaps 1000 antifascist counter-demonstrators. Melees continued all morning. The antifascists prevented the Unite the Right rally from marching anywhere or achieving anything. The rally was effectively shut down, with only 100 fascists reaching a site two miles away to hear speeches. However, the fascists found various ways to draw blood before dispersing. A twenty-year old Black man, DeAndre Harris, was caught by a mob of fascists in a parking garage and brutally beaten with metal pipes, in an attack that was caught on video and included footage of police watching without intervening. At 1.45pm, white supremacist James

Alex fields Jr. drove his car at speed into a street filled with anti-fascist counter-demonstrators, killing 32-year old Heather Heyer and injuring 19 others.

The murder and violence caused many supporters and sympathizers to distance themselves from the Unite the Right event. But President Trump notoriously defended the rally in numerous tweets and public statements full of dog whistles, mixed messages, and false moral equivalences. He condemned “hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides,” conjured up an “very, very violent alt-left” : “...you had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides.”¹⁴ As for the politics of memorials to the victors of history, Trump mocked the critical contestation of dominant culture: “Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson – who’s next, Washington, Jefferson? So foolish!”¹⁵ And again: “George Washington was a slave owner. So will Washington now lose his statues?” Quite obviously, and this was Trump’s point, this line of questioning would challenge the very foundations of the settler-colonial USA, built on the genocidal land thefts and slave labor. Americans seem to understand, and are split nearly down the middle, not yet along clear class lines, but ideologically, in support of or opposition to openly white supremacist forms of nationalism. The task of brushing history against the grain, and of mobilizing the energies of the dead for a critical, emancipatory, and egalitarian political project, has finally made a beginning in the imperialist USA. But it has far to go. The real tests are still to come.

Ο Gene Ray είναι ο συγγραφέας του βιβλίου *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory* καθώς και πολυάριθμων δοκιμίων στα περιοδικά *Third Text*, *Brumaria*, *South as a State of Mind*, μεταξύ άλλων. Διδάσκει κριτικές σπουδές στο HEAD-School of Art and Design της Γενεύης και είναι διευθυντής του προγράμματος *The Anthropocene Atlas of Geneva* (<https://head.hesge.ch/taag/en/>).

Endnotes

1. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" [1940] in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 391-392.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

3. "Le retour de Charles Fourier," *Internationale Situationniste* 12 (September 1969); in English, trans. Reuben Keehan, online at <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/fourier.html>.

4. Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 252-253.

5. Russel Schimmer, "Hispanola," Yale University Genocide Studies Program, online at <https://gsp.yale.edu/case-studies/colonial-genocides-project/hispaniola>.

6. See "After 20 Years, Has Mystery of Oñate's Foot Been Solved?" *Albuquerque Journal*, October 20, 2017, online at <https://www.abqjournal.com/1080408/after-20-years-has-mystery-of-onildeates-foot-been-solved-excerpt-chris-eyres-movie-will-feature-the-man-who-says-he-cut-it-off.html>; and "Oñate's Foot," podcast by 99% Invisible, December 4, 2018, online at <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/onates-foot/>.

7. *Ibid.*

8. For a detailed mapping, see the 2016 Report by Southern Poverty Law Center, updated in 2019, "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy," online at <https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy>.

9. *Ibid.*

10. See the report of Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror," online at <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.

11. For continuous tracking of this approval rating, see <https://fivethirtyeight.com/>.

12. See Southern Poverty Law Center, "Whose Heritage?"

13. Details about the statue and the violent Unite the Right rally have been widely reported online, but the best accounting and documentation is the 2018 YouTube essay made by Shaun, "The True Alt-Right," online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcoYKuoiUrY>.

14. "Read the Complete Transcript of Trump's Remarks at Trump Tower on Charlottesville," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 2017, online at <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-charlottesville-transcript-20170815-story.html>.

15. Quoted in David Jackson, "Trump Defends Confederate Monuments: 'You Can't Change History,'" *USA Today*, 17 August 2019, online at <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/08/17/trump-attacks-two-republican-senators-criticizing-his-charlottesville-response/575411001/>



"All Monuments Must Fall": protesters throw a statue of Edward Colston, a 17th century slave trader, into a river in Bristol, UK, June, 2020.



"No Justice No Peace": Black Lives Matter protesters gathered at statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia, USA, June, 2020. Projection of George Floyd by Dustin Klein.

απορρώξ

ένα ζωντανό αρχείο για δράσεις, πρότζεκτ, κριτικές εργασίες
επιμέλεια: Πάνος Κούρος, Γιάννης Παπαδόπουλος
σχεδιασμός ΟΜΠΛΟΣ
archivepublic@upatras.gr

Εργαστήριο έρευνας τέχνης στη δημόσια σφαίρα
Τμήμα Αρχιτεκτόνων, Πανεπιστήμιο Πατρών

aporrōx

a living archive for actions, projects, critical works
edited by Panos Kouros and Yiannis Papadopoulos
design by OMBLOS
archivepublic@upatras.gr

Laboratory for Research in Art and the Public Sphere
Department of Architecture, University of Patras