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Fire and light on monuments: a horizon of burning debates

Edilson Pereira
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro
Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brasil
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8308-661X

Roberto Conduru
Southern Methodist University
Dallas – TX – United States of America
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0197-0300

Thais Waldman
Universidade de São Paulo
São Paulo – SP – Brasil
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1008-4776

Fig. 1: Statue of Borba Gato set on fire by protesters in São Paulo, 2021.

Source: Estadão Conteúdo (photo by Gabriel Schlickmann/Ishoot). Available at: https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2021/07/25/quem-foi-borba-gato-estatua-de-bandeirante-incendiada-em-sp.htm. Accessed: 01-16-2024.

Monuments have received significant attention in recent years. Despite their long history, some dating back millennia, they have gained new prominence in the 21st century. They have become critical objects in cultural disputes surrounding memory, official history, and narratives about the past of national, ethnic-religious and diasporic identities. In recent years, we have witnessed the challenging of countless monuments whose public functions have been reviewed.

In line with this contention, there has been an increase in careful consideration on monuments, examining them in a new critical light, analyzing not only their antiquity, conservation, and cultural persistence but also their controversies and transformations. Burning monuments, removed from their pedestals, toppled,

or, when left standing, defaced and creatively reappropriated by actors interested in making political statements through aesthetic interventions. While cases of iconoclasm increase in several countries, new monuments have been erected, and among the existing ones, either conservative movements are attempting to revive the ideologies that justified their construction, or, conversely, the creation of counter-monuments that question the official history, in favor of anti-racist and decolonial agendas.

Religião & Sociedade journal presents an unprecedented dossier on the topic of religions and (counter)monuments as part of this reflective movement. Despite the growing number of publications dedicated to monuments, we note that the reasoning linking this theme to the field of religions and civil forms of presence and the challenge of the religious in the public space remains scattered, making it difficult for students and non-specialist researchers to engage in such debate. Furthermore, there are still few publications dedicated to the tensions between (counter)monuments and symbols, rituals or religious agents – such as the articles by Abreu (2021), Conduru (2007), Giumbelli (2013, 2020), Goyena (2013), and Pereira (2021a). To foster academic interest in the topic, in this introduction to the dossier Religions and (counter)monuments we present systematized points of connection between the processes of (de)making of monuments, memory, religion, nation, art and the public space.

The words "monument" and "monumental" have been traditionally employed to refer to large or imposing things, which, due to their size, formal singularity and usefulness in narrating the history of certain collectives, would impose themselves on the physical and symbolic landscape of cities. A monument would be "anything built by a community of individuals to remember or make other generations of people remember events, sacrifices, rites or beliefs" (Choay 2006:18). To fulfill their function, as an instrument for collective memory, many monuments are planned and erected in a specific era to provide access to other times, calling upon present or future generations to something. They would carry an imminent sense of an anachronism by acting as an ideal bridge between two or more times, spanning centuries or millennia. They are artifacts of historical significance that project beyond their time, focusing on a past that is "invoked, summoned, somewhat enchanted," which can "contribute to maintaining and preserving the identity of an ethnic or religious community" (Choay 2006:18).

Although common sense tends to define the monumental in terms of its presumably grand physical dimensions, from an analytical perspective, monuments and monumentality evoke a symbolic dimension that is frequently challenged. After all, apart from their material size, human or natural works classified as monumental had their worth recognized by some collective and authority, whether civil or religious, which began to focus on them as works for public contemplation, as seen in sculptures and works of public art built in numerous squares and urban spaces.

Monuments signal the spaces, stories and characters that should be known to people who surround and encounter them. In the Western tradition, *monumentum* evokes a type of exhortation to memory reproduced since antiquity (Le Goff 1990), referring to an event from the past to be remembered, be it a victorious leader or exemplary victim, whose life and/or death is officially *com-memorated*. Therefore, recognizing and classifying something as a monument reflects ideological conceptions, whether latent or overt, which are intertwined with particular versions of the story about the community erecting it. In recent decades, official State monuments have been questioned on various fronts, including by artists, activists, and intellectuals who point out how monumens' canonical forms and uses have placed the memory of those historically defeated, exploited, persecuted, and marginalized under the shadow of oblivion.

Official devices of public memorialization often operate by obliterating some stories to celebrate others. That is why Benjamin (1994:255) stated that "there has never been a monument of culture that was not also a monument of barbarism." It is no coincidence that monuments have become an object of special attention globally. Although there has been a long history of suspicion and interest in them, often becoming targets in different places (Conduru 2021; Nelson & Olin, 2003; Seligmann-Silva 2016), it is noteworthy that, in recent years, anti-racist and decolonial movements of significant international impact have integrated attacks on monuments into their action strategies, both literally and critically (Moraes & Anjos 2020; Napolitano & Kaminski 2022; Ribeiro 2020; Vergès 2020, Pereira 2021b).

In the Brazilian context, how can we forget the immense Borba Gato monument in flames? (fig. 1). Inaugurated in 1963 in a public square in the south zone of the city of São Paulo, shortly before the coup that installed the military dictatorship in Brazil and one of its most brutal arms, Operação Bandeirante (Oban), was launched – a landmark in the political crackdown on the actions of the left and social movements –, the monument was set on fire in July 2021 by a group called Revolução Periférica [Outskirts Revolution]. It is the last significant monument in honor of a bandeirante installed in a public site in São Paulo, near Borba Gato Street and the recently inaugurated Borba Gato station on line 5-Lilac of the São Paulo metro. It is worth noting that this was not the first transfiguration of the Borba Gato monument (Waldman 2018, 2019).

Standing at about thirteen meters tall and with a shotgun in hand, the bandeirante monument has caused a lot of controversy since its inauguration, both for honoring genocidal figures who exterminated indigenous peoples and quilombolas on their expeditions through Brazilian territory and for its aesthetics. Sculpted by Júlio Guerra (1912-2001) from disused tram tracks, the bandeirante remains upright at the border that has become symbolic between São Paulo and the old municipality of Santo Amaro, just like an enormous sentry of his homeland.

At first glance, it might seem that monuments of bandeirantes like Borba Gato

would have no ties with religious realms. After all, the effigies of men celebrated and questioned for their racist, slave-owning and colonial past tend to be kept in a different register from pyramids, portals, cathedrals, temples, mosques, synagogues, sculptures etc., which are easily recognized as religious, and where private rites and celebrations take place. However, monuments seen as religious communicate something about public life not only concerning religious communities. They mark religious presence in the public space and urban landscape in a material and visible way. The monumentality of these artifacts and architectures operates as signs that delineate the contours of sacred space in contrast to the secular surroundings. Just as monuments with more evident religious uses and references can be encompassed in debates that discuss their cultural value beyond religion, symmetrically, non-religious monuments per se can also be entangled in plots that include religious ones, among other agencies and languages.

The case of the burning Borba Gato allows us to verify the validity of this reasoning. After the giant bonfire lit by the Revolução Periférica collective, a group called Juventude Trabalhista Cristã Conservadora (JTCC) [Conservative Christian Labor Youth] volunteered to clean the charred image by wielding cleaning tools alongside replicas of the Brazilian national flag on the very same day as their action for restoration (Unigrejas 2021). Amidst the dense polyphony generated after the controversial performance by the Revolução Periférica collective, religious belonging and the reinforcement of a history that celebrates emblematic figures of the Brazilian colonial process were intertwined.

On that occasion, other actors stated that "Borba Gato is the hidden leader of fundamentalist preachers" and "of the landowners, of the elites who find it convenient to praise henchmen and lackeys fulfilling their duty" (Brazil 2021). In contrast, activist and rap artist Paulo Roberto da Silva Lima, known as Galo de Luta, who was arrested after the collective intervention on the statue, stated in an interview that it would not be possible to dialogue with the communities of the outskirts without taking into account the importance of religion to them. His sensitivity to religious language leads him to define himself as "a Muslim son of Xangô who is waiting for Jesus to return" (Mano a Mano 2023). He is an activist keenly aware of religious language and its prevalence in racial and class consciousness processes.

In addition to such religious references, the spectacular action on the statue of the bandeirante seemed to mimic other practices, not only in politics and arts, but also in rituals that use flames to consecrate a sacrificial victim. Since the early anthropological theories of sacrifice, it has been known that the ritual use of fire is a privileged means of annihilating certain qualities of the victim in the hope of making way for others, antagonistic to the first. The production of a liminal state, of incandescence, emulates or actualizes death to project new life into the sacrificed object/person, who reappears transformed both materially and symbolically. As Mauss & Hubert (2005:32) state, "the fire of sacrifice is nothing other than the deity itself

devouring the victim, or, more precisely, the sign of consecration that inflames it."

Considering theories about modern forms of connection with the sacred, which identify it beyond religious institutions, the iconoclastic act of setting fire to something reveals itself as a potential form of consecration. Transgression mobilizes feelings and thoughts that, in response to the act, make the boundaries that can and cannot be crossed more visible (Taussig 1997). In the Borba Gato incident, the action of the Revolução Periférica collective predicted precisely this. Rather than an unsuccessful intention to destroy the statue, it was expected that, after the fire, the narratives around the exemplary bandeirante would be brought to light and, thus, challenged.

In this strategy, the monument of the historical and ideological enemy becomes a counter-monument. When manipulated, it begins to serve not only the celebration of colonial history but also its criticism in the public arena. For many, it becomes a historical counter-example, a character to be fought against. The incendiary rite serves as a ploy to enter a battle of narratives. Instead of eliminating the monumental image, the collective re-illuminates it. As Michael Taussig (1997:355) argues: "Transgression, we could say, exerts its tremendous and tremendously creative force through its threat rather than its actualization." Attacks and defacement of monuments trigger their powers.

The desire to convert a monument from a negative to a positive classification, or vice versa, can employ pragmatics that have been the subject of long contemplation in religion and sacred studies, including their negative, transgressive facets. Although monuments usually described as civil or religious may be studied separately, depending on the research scope in each case, it is necessary to consider, in every study, how they relate to what is consecrated or contested by the broader society. The analytical gains of symmetrizations between what presents itself as religious or secular reside in shedding light on their continuous redefinitions, intersections and limits. There are articles published in previous editions of *Religião & Sociedade* that explore this dynamic, such as those by Sansi (2005), Giumbelli (2008), Lins, Gomes and Machado (2017), among others, who dealt with monuments or alike. In common, the analyses point out that the public dimension of public space is continually adjusted through disputes and relationships with the field of religion, culture, heritage, etc.

An exciting aspect of the literature explicitly devoted to monuments is that it highlights the inherently contradictory condition of cultural artifacts so categorized. Although made from highly durable materials and in physical shapes designed to draw attention, some monuments end up disappearing in the urban landscape. Some become so integrated into the urban backdrop that they lose their visual relevance and cultural resonance. Even though it may seem ironic to think this way, many authors agree with Robert Musil's jest, who, as early as 1927, stated that "there is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument" (Musil 2006).

But does the potential invisibility of monuments necessarily correspond to the

loss of their power? Do monuments cease to act when not noticed, abandoning their usual function of reminding us and communicating something? We are dealing here with a context of ambivalent possibilities because, while for some monuments the loss of cultural relevance may lead to their urban erasure and literal demolition, for others, their integration into the landscape signals a normalization. Converted into part of our routine, it ceases to surprise because it is established in the status quo. Thus, even if the monument first carries a message that serves a specific era or group, it is perceived as a symbol that would ideally contemplate everyone in a supposedly nondescript way. In short, a public monument, although undeniably private, like Christ the Redeemer, in Rio de Janeiro (Giumbelli 2013).

To be noticed and remain within the scope of attention, monuments need to be culturally activated and observed as prominent elements of the landscape and in public life. Just as works of art and sacred imagery have the power to elicit emotional and intellectual reactions from their observers (Freedberg 1991), we can say that, analytically, monuments are capable of overcoming their inertia, acting in relation to other artifacts and people in activity. Via links to wider networks, monuments are socially activated as landmarks that highlight something worshiped or contested, as symbols that communicate and prompt individual and collective reactions, some of great cultural appeal. These are works that speak volumes despite their silence.

Redefining monuments: national heritage, religion and art

The fascination with the time and narratives evoked by monuments, as well as the fear of their transgression, loss, or disrepair, are principles shared by government policies of different countries concerning their monuments, both ancient and modern. The existence of a rhetoric of loss, material as well as symbolic, in relation to the past of the collectives that the State represents as relevant to national identity, plays a crucial role in public decisions in connection with monuments, in a dynamic that often triggers language and religious symbolism to consecrate the "relics" of the past worthy of preservation as national heritage (Lins, Gomes & Machado 2017; Pereira 2022).

In the French case, for example, the destruction of Catholic churches during the French Revolution was connected to the complementary movement of "invention of the conservation of the historical monument with its legal and technical apparatus" (Choay 2006:95). The instructions and approaches of the 18th century foreshadowed those that would be consolidated, in the following century, with the first Commission des Monuments Historiques in France, which operated from an antiquarian perspective of preserving antiquities.

In the 19th century, there was a notable increase in the fame of archaeologists, art historians, and researchers of ancient monuments. Fascinated by geographic and historical distances, they nurtured an imaginary about ancient civilizations from

various parts of the world. Those connected to the national narrative and colonial interest stood out, including countries such as Egypt and Palestine in the French case. The dissemination of images of ancient architecture and ruins of the Holy Land, like those published by Auguste Salzmann (1824-1872) in the photobook *Jerusalem: Study and photographic reproduction of the monuments of the Holy City from the Judaic period to the present day* (Salzamnn 1858),[1] encouraged the advancement of archaeological study, as well as modern religious pilgrimage. The circulation of such works helped to create a visual cliché of Jerusalem, focusing on it as a city full of monuments related to biblical stories known and valued in France.

It is possible that Brazil's first formal approach to such imagery was through Emperor Dom Pedro II, who traveled to Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, where he visited several cities in the Holy Land, exploring monuments related to passages from the Torah and the Bible. In his diary, he described the excitement caused by encountering a vast number of funerary monuments, religious temples, architectural ruins, sculptures, etc. On September 22, 1876, the emperor commented "Egyptian monuments will be one of the greatest sources of pleasure for thinkers in all centuries" (Museu Imperial, n.d.). Dom Pedro II's intellectual excitement reflected a characteristic taste of the 19th century: travel and research accounts in distant, historically rich locations interested scientists of various fields, archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, and scholars interested in the comparative study of ancient civilizations and their religions.

In that context, accessing the monuments *in situ* or through visual reproductions fostered an imaginary around their peoples, placing them in a classical evolutionary history, focusing on the outstanding achievements that allowed a positive logical sequence. From a monumental perspective, the remembered history leads to a model of an ideal past rather than to the factual truth of events. Such a perspective "will always weaken again the diversity of motives and occasions to present the *effectus monumental* as a model worthy of imitation" (Nietzsche 2003:21-22). They imagined what was great in the past could be great again somewhere in the future.

The antiquarian perspective of history, in turn, encourages a form of veneration of the past, even monumental, taking care of its material records, documents, and monuments, producing a history of these things. This was the dominant perspective in Brazil when pioneering institutions dealing with national monuments emerged, such as the Museu Histórico Nacional (MHN), created in 1922 in Rio de Janeiro. The museum's first actions were marked by the "antiquarian sensitivity" of its director, Gustavo Barroso, who valued artifacts related to the glories of the Brazilian nation (Magalhães 2007:243), including movable (paintings, cannons, etc.) and immovable assets, such as the colonial Baroque architecture of the historic cities of Minas Gerais.

1 Original title: *Jérusalem*, Étude et reproduction photographique des monuments de la ville sainte depuis l'époque judaïque jusqu'à nos jours.

The latter type of valued, immovable heritage included the architecture of Ouro Preto, formerly Vila Rica, which would need protection against the corrosive action of time and oblivion. The rhetoric of Barroso and other intellectuals of his time against the danger of the ruin of the city of Minas Gerais was based on a fundamentally positivist perception of time, where the future advances like an irreversible arrow, moving us ever further away from the past, which would therefore be threatened with disappearance. In response to this danger, he advocated "*the need to make that city a sacred city in Brazil*, defending the pride of its monuments from the insults of time and from the foolishness of men" (Anais 1944:10-13, emphasis in the original).

In 1933, the Brazilian State took unprecedented action, defining by decree that not only individual churches and works of art but the entire historical region of Ouro Preto would be elevated to the status of a National Monument. Ouro Preto was the first city in Brazil to receive this title, granted through a federal decree signed by Getúlio Vargas. In line with this action and with the guidance of the Museu Histórico Nacional, the Inspetoria de Monumentos Nacionais (1934-1937) [National Monuments Inspectorate] was established the following year, with the mission of identifying and cataloging buildings with national historical artistic value. Based on this catalogue, the federal government could determine which buildings would be declared National Monuments, preventing them from being renovated, destroyed, or sold without the intervention of the Inspectorate.

Because of the state classification of Ouro Preto as a monument city, it became an exemplary case for Brazil's history and emerging heritage policies. Founded in 1937, the Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (SPHAN) [National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service] included the Ouro Preto in its first round of listings in 1938. The city's urban and architectural ensemble was inscribed in the Livro de Tombo Belas-Artes [Fine Arts Registry], not in the Historical one. The city's works of art, with particular emphasis on the Catholic colonial religious architecture, positively influenced the – ideal – whole of the town. Ouro Preto began to be portrayed as a monumental work of art (Pereira 2022).

In those years, the notion of a monument was at the center of attention of SPHAN professionals and technicians who were undergoing training in Art History in classes taught by specialists such as Hanna Levy. In her classes, she taught that "there is in every work of art a plurality of 'values' that must be determined and examined precisely" (Levy 1940:187). A painting, for example, could be considered beautiful at one time and yet not cause any evolutionary transformation in art. Only works representing a milestone in transforming a style or artistic era would fit into the monument concept. In summary: "monument, seen from the perspective of Brazilian architectural history, represents a maximum value, which comes as close as possible to the ideal absolute value" (Levy 1940:189). In this sense, the notion of a monument carried only a positive and exceptional value as an art artifact consecrated according

to the canons of European art history and Brazilian colonial narrative.

During the years of the Vargas regime, and even after, state actions related to heritage primarily associated the notion of monuments with works that reinforced the national historical narrative. It is no coincidence that Catholic colonial religious architecture was overvalued both ideologically and numerically when compared to material works linked to other religious traditions in the country. In its early decades, the primary heritage institution of the Brazilian State promoted, through civil means, a "monumentalization of the Catholic faith" linked to the Baroque colonial history (Chuva 2009:218).

The transformation of the conceptual canon of monuments in Brazil would take several decades to occur and affects public policies. In the 1980s, in the context of re-democratization, new fronts for understanding national heritage and monuments gained ground. In the article "Monumentos Negros" [Black Monuments], anthropologist Ordep Serra (2005) narrates a series of actions that culminated in an iconic campaign in favor of the listing, by Instituto do Património Histórico e Artístico Nacional (Iphan), of a "terreiro de Candomblé" in Salvador, Bahia, Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká, Terreiro da Casa Branca do Engenho Velho. In 1981, the Mapeamento de Sítios e Monumentos Religiosos Negros da Bahia (MAMNBA) [Mapping of Black Religious Sites and Monuments of Bahia] project was initiated, aiming to carry out an alternative survey to the existing heritage data, focused on the Catholic legacy. It also sought to identify, through the terreiros affiliated with the Federation Baiana dos Cultos Afro-Brasileiros [Bahian Federation of Afro-Brazilian Cults], the material works that could contest the notion of "monument", due to their cultural, aesthetic and historical value for the terreiro communities. In Terreiro da Casa Branca, itself described as a monument of historical significance, since it dates back to the first half of the 19th century, there would be monumental artifacts characteristic of the religion, such as the OkôIluaiê, the Boat of Oxum.

It is worth noting that the inclusion of anthropologists on Iphan's advisory board in the 1980s contributed to the new possibility of recognizing non-colonial and non-European historical and aesthetic legacies. According to Gilberto Velho (2006), who was the rapporteur on that occasion at Iphan, many advisory board members reacted negatively to the request to list the Terreiro de Candomblé da Casa Branca. Material heritage experts "considered it unreasonable and misguided to list a piece of land devoid of constructions that justified such an initiative due to their monumentality or artistic value" (Velho 2006:237). Furthermore, board members opposed the listing and argued that it was impossible to "list a religion", as it would be alive and would change. Under a climate of tension and uncertainty, the vote to approve the listing of the terreiro took place in 1984, with the experts in favor winning by just one vote. The case, resulting from a multifactorial process, included a critical revision of the notion of monument and monumentality in public policy and Brazilian academia.

Serra (2005) describes how the 1980s were still marked by an uncritical and limited conception of "monument", restricting the notion to something always "sumptuous" that communicated "grandeur", whether through its proportions or its material constitution, serving to celebrate a history of outstanding achievements. The anthropologist argues that this "poor ideology" surrounding monuments resulted in a "symbolic standardization" that would limit their meaning to the expression of "authorized values" – by the State or by another form of established power, such as legitimized religion.

In his critique, Serra considers that the uncritical reproduction of such ideas "about monuments and monumentality leads to dogmatic paralysis […] since it does not take into account the processes of symbolic investment and social institution of monuments, it does not consider the different forms of production of memory" (2005:201, note 52). In contrast, the victory of those who supported the listing of the Terreiro da Casa Branca allowed, in an exemplary and inspiring way for other terreiros, the consolidation of a plural perspective on the history of Brazilian society, recognizing its ethnic-racial and religious diversity as inseparable elements of its cultural composition. Given this pluralist conception, it was no longer possible to support arguments in favor of an absolute and definitive value for monuments and monumentality in general. The heritage dispute demonstrated that these notions must be understood contextually, considering the actors directly related to Afro-Brazilian monuments. It was a critical rupture with epistemological canons of Western art history and its monuments, enabling other ways of thinking about (counter)monumentality.

Another relevant example of the relativization of the monumental canon in the process of public recognition of black heritage involved the listing of Pedra do Sal, in Rio de Janeiro, by the Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Cultural (Inepac) [State Institute of Cultural Heritage] between 1984 (provisional listing) and 1987 (definitive listing). Located in the port region known as Little Africa, an urban area marked by a strong presence of Afro-Brazilian cultural elements in the diaspora, including characteristic festive, culinary, and religious practices, Pedra do Sal was described by actors in favor of its listing as

> "a precious historical monument of black cultural manifestations in the city of Rio de Janeiro" and as an "Afro-Brazilian religious monument" where the Bahian aunts held "Candomblé celebrations, also receiving the carnival groups that came to greet them during Carnival" (Vassalo 2014:5).

The relevance not only of architecture but of culture has mattered in this and other cases since then. However, the visibility of Afro-Brazilian monuments did not occur without opposition, some motivated by religious intolerance. Let us recall the public reactions to the installation of the Orixás monument at Dique do

Tororó, created by the sculptor Tatti Moreno (1944-2022), in Salvador in the late 1990s. The work – consisting of twelve bronze sculptures of the orixás, eight of them seven meters tall and the other four three and a half meters tall – was immediately contested by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God after its installation in a public area. As detailed by Roger Sansi in an article published in *Religião & Sociedade*, church members protested,

> even resorting to physical attacks, under the accusation that [the new monument] would be a set of fetishes and diabolical idols. The episode ended with the personal intervention of the public authorities in Bahia, after which the Universal Church acknowledged "their mistake" of confusing a work of art with a fetish (Sansi 2005:63).

The author concludes that the case illustrates how "different perspectives, gazes, and forms of relationships" were established with the same set of images. This is an excellent example of analysis, which allows us to observe the plurality of framings of the same artifacts – "from the official perspectives, seeing the monument as a work of art and a symbol of Bahian culture, to the more critical perspectives, which see the monument as a tourist commodity, fetishistic idol or fetish of established political power" (Sansi 2005:63).

Art that moves monuments

The plurality of perspectives and the criticism of official monuments have been a constant mark in contemporary art, socially engaged in political and memory issues. There are many and varied initiatives of the so-called "artivism" related to monuments, in actions that combine a variety of processes that have in common a focus on participation and on critical reflection shared between artists and the audience, aiming to rethink and broaden the past debated in public space. Contemporary art's relationship with monuments has become strategic in bringing visibility to defending Afro-diasporic, indigenous, and other minorities' histories, religious practices, and memories.

To mention some recent examples, we can highlight the *Galeria de Racistas* [Racists Gallery] website, which proposes a virtual exhibition on the "art of racism" illustrated by public statues that honor slaveholders in national history.[2] The project, which began in 2020, reads in a counter-monumental way the figures celebrated in the official/State narrative of history. Yhuri Cruz's *Monumento à Voz de Anastácia* [Monument to the Voice of Anastácia] (2019), in turn, takes as its object of intervention the holy image of the Afro-Brazilian saint known as Slave Anastácia,

2 Available at: https://galeriaderacistas.com.br/.

whose "holy cards" circulate in spaces of Catholicism, Umbanda, and Candomblé. The artist intervenes in the iconography known and consecrated by popular devotion by removing from Anastácia's face the diacritical element, the iron mask, which symbolizes her enslavement and silencing. The religious sacredness of (Slave) Anastácia was modified to reconstruct her face without the symbol of oppression. Renamed as Anastácia Livre [Free Anastácia], the new version of the holy card created by the black LGBT artist from Rio de Janeiro has gained widespread media attention in recent years and enabled a non-canonical and non-colonial way of producing monumentality (Pereira 2023).

There are several initiatives in contemporary art that redefine what is understood by monument and monumentality, shifting their intrinsic value and their forms of spatialization: *Monumento Horizontal* (2004), by Coletivo Frente 3 de Fevereiro – F3F, which produces a funerary tombstone in urban space; *Monumento Mínimo* (2005-current), by Nele Azevedo, involving the creation of small ice sculptures in the shape of people that are arranged and dismantled in public areas of the city; *Monumento aos Grandes Vultos*, by Renan Soares (2023); the *Desmonumentos* series (2020), by Evandro Prado; the exhibitions *Monumento Inacabado* (2022), in São Paulo, and *Desmonumento*, by André Parente (2023), censored in Porto Alegre, among others. Instead of grandiosity, perenniality, verticality, exceptionality and authority, counter-memory actions that manipulate and reinvent monuments prefer to follow the path of horizontality of exchanges, ephemerality of activities and artifacts, and polyphony of ways of remembering the past. These days, socially engaged art has been one of the most excellent animators of the life of monuments.

To encourage new research on the topic, we note that some of the recent critical reviews on monuments often echo old but still relevant debates in art. Recalling some reference debates regarding works of art that access and redefine public space, we remember that in the seminal text "Sculpture in the expanded field" Rosalind Krauss argues that "The logic of sculpture (...) is inseparable from the logic of the monument" (1979: 33-34). But she argues that "Late in the nineteenth century we witnessed the fading of the logic of the monument", marking its "negative condition" with two sculptures by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917): *La Porte de l'Enfer* (1880-1890) and *Monument* à *Balzac* (1891-1897). These works display "the marks of their own transitional status" as they were commissioned as monuments but ended up having multiple versions found in various places, not in the sites for which they were intended. Moreover, Rodin gave up the memorial nature of the monument in them. For Krauss, modern sculpture embodies "the negative condition of the monument" by dispensing with a specific site and being able to be nomadic.

Analyzing the terminology of modern architecture, Adrian Forty (2000:112) observes that "'Monumental' was a heavily contested term in the modernist vocabulary." The best example is the famous phrase by Lewis Mumford (1937:264): "The very notion of a modern monument is a contradiction in terms; if it is a

monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument."

Consistently with the modernist debate and her arguments, Krauss (1979:38) excludes the word "monument" from the diagram she composes to schematize the similarities and distinctions in the expanded field of sculptural experimentation from the 1960s onwards, which she structures by opposing the terms "sculpture," "landscape," "architecture," "non-landscape," "non-architecture," "marked sites," "site construction," and "axiomatic structures.".

In an article published a quarter of a century later, "Architecture's expanded field," Anthony Vidler (2004:142) argues that architecture had recently entered a greatly expanded field, and its borderlines remained undefined. Building on Krauss' now classic text, he attempts to "construe a similarly expanded field for architecture in its present exploratory condition." Vidler (2004:142) considers "that both "'landscape' and 'sculpture,' or rather 'not-landscape' and 'not sculpture,' have been emerging as powerful metaphors within a new condition of architecture." Along this path, he understands that the

> "Sculpture" figures as a way of defining a new kind of monumentality—a monumentality of the *informe*, so to speak, which at once challenges the political connotations of the old monument, yet nevertheless preserves a "not-monumental" role for architecture (Vidler 2004:142).

Although, according to Krauss and Vidler, the monument has become the reference against which avant-garde sculpture and architecture have been established for more than a century, territories, landscapes, and cities have continued to be populated by statues, buildings, and spaces with monumental intentions. Indeed, in "The modern cult of monuments: its character and origin" (*Der Moderne Denkmalkultus: sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*), published in 1903, Aloïs Riegl had already indicated that modernity is characterized by changes in how people monumentalize artifacts in the relationships between past, present and future.

In addition to objects conceived as monuments, artifacts adapted as activators of collective memory have proliferated. While, on the one hand, people have continued to build monuments to remember heroes and victories, events, and ideas, as well as to not forget traumatic events, on the other hand, many artists have used the logic of the monument in their creations, often with a meaning contrary to the traditional concept of monumentality. Thus, with Mechtild Widrich (2020), we can consider the monument regarding the "commemoration in the expanded field," outlining a field of possibilities between remembering and forgetting, victories and traumas, celebrations and criticisms, erecting and destroying monuments, traditional monuments, and counter-monuments.

The change in the memorial function of monuments, with interventions for and against individuals, institutions, and power ideologies, has resulted in changes

in monuments' physical-symbolic structure and social life. In the design process, the authority of the usual authors, commissioners and artists, has been questioned in favor of the participation of broader groups of social representatives in the decision-making process, including, at times, very broad communities. Instead of passive spectators, the audience must learn the lesson conveyed by the monumental example; many memorial interventions require active participants, calling them to interact performatively with the works and reflect on the issues they raise.

In addition to being a negative reference for art, the decline of the traditional monument is observed from the object of remembrance to the way of remembering it. While some monuments were erected to celebrate past glories, victories, and heroes, others were built to alleviate trauma, helping people deal with pain, loss, and grief publicly and collectively. Not infrequently, in such cases, the physical structure subverts the traditional logic of the monument, avoiding affirmative and expansive object configurations in favor of conformations of materials, languages and sites that encourage reflection and even doubt.

The onslaught against the monument could be even more radical. Contrariety can manifest itself through temporary interventions, performative acts against current or latent signs of power, and even adopt more drastic measures, leading to its destruction. While performance publicly opposes what the monument celebrates, potentially marking and damaging it, iconoclasm aims at oblivion, eliminating elements that can activate and preserve individual and collective memories. In each case, violent action acts against specific meanings and values disseminated by the monuments it attacks; however, collectively, destructive interventions undermine the logic of power intrinsic to monuments, questioning how they participate in domination processes.

Regarding the multiple meanings of destruction, it is worth mentioning the opposition made by Jason E. Smith (2018:167) between the "recent calls in the US to remove, and in some cases destroy, emblems of the Jim Crow period of the American South" and events such as the demolition of the Buddha statues of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, in 2001, and the occupation of the ruins of ancient Babylon by US troops during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He qualifies these events as "organized attacks on a history shared by humanity as a whole: emblems of the major world religions, relics of the origins of 'civilization' (writing, law, agriculture, the state)" (Smith 2018:167).

This leads us to the relationships between monuments and religion in modernity. Paraphrasing Riegl, one can speak of the modern cult of cult monuments. Modernity has affected the relationships between monuments and forms of worship. Other types of religious monuments have emerged, as well as other ritualistic practices in interaction, whether religious or civil, with monuments.

Thus, it is surprising that there is only one reference to religion in the 175-page dossier on monuments published in the October magazine in 2018, consisting of a brief

presentation by the editors – Leah Dickerman, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Carrie Lambert-Beatty – and 49 responses prepared by 51 authors. The word "religions" appears in the aforementioned analysis by Jason E. Smith (2018:167). Although the dossier focuses on "struggles over monuments and other markers involving histories of racial conflict" (Dickerman et al 2018:3), it is nonetheless surprising that there is only one mention of religion, given the connections between religious practices and processes of racialization, as well as actions against monuments, buildings and other religious artifacts throughout history.

Dossier Religions and (counter)monuments: themes and perspectives

The set of eleven texts that make up the dossier – whose initial idea arose in a Working Group called "Monumentos e espaço público: abordagens antropológicas" [Monuments and public space: anthropological approaches], coordinated by Thais Waldman and Edilson Pereira during the *33ª Reunião Brasileira de Antropologia* [33rd Brazilian Anthropology Meeting], in 2022 – helps to (re)think religions and (counter) monuments based on different objects, temporalities and spaces. From a small metal coin censored in June 2023 when exhibited at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Rio Grande do Sul, for featuring, on one side, former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and, on the other, one of the best-known torturers of the Brazilian military dictatorship, Carlos Brilhante Ustra; to the uses, over the centuries, of the enormous pyramids of the Mateo Salado archaeological complex, in Lima, Peru.

In the visual essay "A arte de profanar monumentos da nação" [The art of desecrating national monuments], Paola Lins de Oliveira analyzes the censorship incident of the work "1 Bolsominion" (2019), a coin with Bolsonaro's face minted, which led to the cancellation of the exhibition Desmonumento, in Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Rio Grande do Sul. The author brings to the forefront the creative act of defacing national symbols carried out by artist André Parente. If money – like public monuments – is a social object that occupies a sacred place in the secular world, its defacement can unleash a socially transgressive force.

In the article "Mãe Preta: uma santa fora da igreja" [Black Mother: a saint outside the church], Alexandre Araujo Bispo traces the journey of a sculpture by Júlio Guerra (the same author of the aforementioned Borba Gato), installed in the 1950s next to the Church of the Rosário dos Homem Pretos, in the center of São Paulo, during the celebrations of the IV Centenary of the city of São Paulo. In the 1980s, the statue of a black mother with a white son required regulation by heritage protection agencies because the offerings placed under the base of the statue were damaging the work. New Afro-centered uses mark this monument, which is increasingly configured as a work that triggers devotion, hope and spiritual belief.

With "O Cais do Valongo como palco religioso: ritual, memória e patrimônio num palimpsesto urbano" [Cais do Valongo as a religious stage: ritual, memory and

heritage in an urban palimpsest], Jérôme Souty presents other (counter)monumental routes linked to African-based religions, transporting us to Rio de Janeiro. The text's focus is the washing ritual of the former slave port, carried out annually since its opening to the public in 2012. Along with other Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, intangible and ephemeral, the washing ritual by priestesses and initiates of the Candomblé contributes to the heritagization process of the Valongo archaeological site, transforming it into a support for "living" memories.

Secular forms of consecration also help to (re)think religions and (counter) monuments. The article "Monumentos improváveis, monumentos decisivos: homenagens mortuárias e justiça memorial em altares urbanos" [Unlikely monuments, decisive monuments: mortuary tributes and memorial justice in urban altars] places us before funeral tributes as means of memory, such as the graffiti honoring Marielle Franco, and the stele and statues erected to remember, respectively, the Jacarezinho and Realengo massacres. Edlaine de Campos Gomes, Julio Bizarria, Juliana Baptista, and Lícia Gomes use the notions of urban altars and implicit religion to reflect on (counter)monuments and their strategic uses in Rio de Janeiro in recent years.

Another unlikely monument is portrayed in the visual essay "Romaria a Brumadinho: contramonumento em memória das vítimas do crime-desastre da mineração" [Pilgrimage to Brumadinho: counter-monument in memory of the victims of the mining crime-disaster", by Leonardo Vilaça Dupin and Marcio Martins. The photographed pilgrimage highlights a counter-monumental action that has been present annually in the public life of the municipality of Brumadinho, Minas Gerais, since January 2020, when the collapse of the Vale S.A. dam complex completed one year. Disputing this memory allows affected communities to fight for social justice. It is a response by local populations to an "official memory" created by the criminal enterprise and the State.

Contrary to this state negligence, also observed in the face of acts that violate Brazil's constitutional right to religious freedom, Clara Habib and Arthur Valle advocate the development of studies that analyze, reveal and denounce religious iconoclasm. The article "*Em nome de Deus*: hipóteses sobre o fenômeno da iconoclastia religiosa no Brasil contemporâneo" [In the name of God: hypotheses about the phenomenon of religious iconoclasm in contemporary Brazil] presents an overview of this phenomenon based on the increasing attacks against symbols of the Catholic faith in the country, as well as the old iconoclastic wave towards monuments, images, and places of Afro-Brazilian worship.

It is worth highlighting that, as we were completing the organization of this dossier, the statue of Mãe Stella de Oxóssi, one of the greatest ialorixás in Brazil, by the sculptor Tatti Moreno (who also sculpted the monument to the Orixás at Dique do Tororó), was reinaugurated in Salvador in August 2023, on an important avenue that bears her name. In 2022, in yet another incident of religious intolerance and racism, the work inaugurated in 2019, measuring around nine meters high, composed

of two sculptures made of polyester resin and fiberglass – one life-size Mother Stella, sitting on a throne, and another 6.5 meters tall statue of Oxóssi, the orixá for whom she was initiated into Candomblé –, had been almost completely destroyed after a fire.

While monuments are being destroyed, others are erected, for different reasons. "Cristo, Bíblia e Iemanjá: monumentos e diversidade religiosa no Brasil" [Christ, Bible, and Iemanjá: monuments and religious diversity in Brazil], by Emerson Giumbelli and Greilson Lima, analyzes three monuments recently built in different Brazilian regions based on religious references: a statue of Christ in Encantado, a small town in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul; the sculpture of a Bible in the municipality of Mesquita, on the outskirts of the Rio de Janeiro metropolis; and an image of Iemanjá in São Luís, the capital of Maranhão. As forms of presence in public space of Catholicism, evangelical churches, and Afro-Brazilian religions, respectively, such objects are taken as monuments in constant (de)construction.

If monuments are not static, the article "A vida, a morte e o pós-vida das materialidades de uma igreja demolida para a construção da Avenida Presidente Vargas, no Rio de Janeiro" [The life, death, and afterlife of the materialities of a church demolished for the construction of Presidente Vargas Avenue, in Rio de Janeiro] reveals the potential of demolitions of (con)sacred things. Marcella Carvalho de Araujo Silva and Rodrigo Toniol revisit this iconoclastic undertaking, marked by disputes between engineers and architects. Listed as a national historical and artistic heritage in 1938, the Church of São Pedro dos Clérigos, in less than six years, was unlisted, demolished, and fragmented in terms of material, aiming for the opening of one of Rio's main public places.

In "Padrões de pedra, contos da memória e silêncio da história: o culto ao marco de fundação da cidade do Rio de Janeiro" [Stone patterns, tales of memory and silence of history: the cult of the founding landmark of the city of Rio de Janeiro], by Francisco Dias de Andrade, we traverse different temporalities by following the multiple social uses and disuses of this artifact before its musealization. It is a stone pattern, supposedly from the 16th century, which refers to the city of Rio de Janeiro as a historical "relic", but also a religious one, as it is linked to the city's patron saint, São Sebastião.

The article "Ela lá está abençoando esta diocese amada que pusemos sob sua guarda: práticas culturais em torno do monumento mariano no Morro da Conceição na cidade do Recife (1904-1953)" [She is there blessing this beloved diocese that we placed under her care: cultural practices around the Marian monument on Morro da Conceição in the city of Recife (1904-1953)] presents us with a monument erected in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the dogma of the Imaculada Conceição, located on one of the highest hills in the capital of Pernambuco. Carlos André Silva de Moura and José Pedro Lopes Neto analyze the design and construction of the work, as well as its role in the sacralization of the site during the first half of the 20th century.

Finally, Pedro Espinoza Pajuelo invites us to explore other realms. In "Reinterpretaciones y multivocalidad a lo largo del tiempo en una zona monumental:

el complejo arqueológico Mateo Salado (Lima, Perú)" [Reinterpretations and multivocality over time in a monumental zone: the Mateo Salado archaeological complex (Lima, Peru)], we are taken to the site, more specifically, to one of its pyramids, the Smallest Funerary Pyramid. In the text, we follow the uses and monumentalizations of this archaeological complex by different groups that coexisted or succeeded each other over time.

This dossier is dedicated to reflecting on the dilemmas of monuments and counter-monuments in intersection with elements of the religious universe, their presence and questioning in public space, their relationships with individuals and groups, as well as the meanings resulting from these interactions. We seek to contribute to the debate by bringing together articles and visual essays dedicated to analyzing the political and social, material and aesthetic uses of monumental artifacts and the processes of (de)monumentalization related to religion.

Presentation of continuous publication articles[3]

In addition to the works that comprise the dossier Religions and (counter) monuments, this issue includes three continuous publication articles and one review. David Lehmann's article, entitled "Ansiedade e reciprocidade: a Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus além das fronteiras" [Anxiety and reciprocity: the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God beyond borders], proposes an analysis of the global Universal Church, based on data collected since 2019 in establishments belonging to the Church in the following cities: London, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Santos, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Oaxaca, Cancún, Tel Aviv, Groningen¸ Amsterdam, Vancouver, Toronto, Brussels, Paris and Brooklyn (New York). Its analytical focus centers on church rituals, and the research interlocutors are Universal Church leaders: pastors and bishops.

The main argument set forth by the author is that the messages of the Universal Church employ the logic of the double bind, involving the framing of aspirations that can never be fully realized. Invitations, proposals, requests and commitments carry in their constitution the need to be met, intertwined with doubt and the conditionalities of their fulfillment. In order to investigate this tense dynamic more deeply, David Lehmann analyzes Universal Church rituals as "disruptive rituals", addresses the topic of healing and debates the idea of "sincerity" within this institutional context. Throughout the article, interested in approaching the Universal Church as a global phenomenon, the author presents similarities and contrasts between local experiences of the church, based on data from his empirical research.

The article "Uma santa budista de cemitério: a construção da devoção a

3 By Carly Machado. Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Graduate Program in Social Sciences, Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. Editor at *Religião & Sociedade*. CNPq researcher. PhD in Social Sciences, PPCIS/UERJ. machado.carly@gmail.com

uma imigrante japonesa (Assaí, 1976-2022)" [A Buddhist saint in a cemetery: the construction of devotion to a Japanese immigrant (Assaí, 1976-2022)], by Richard Gonçalves André, addresses the topic of the cult of saints, in particular the cult of cemetery saints. The relevance of this work stands out considering the treatment given by the author to this phenomenon that is "apart from Catholic institutions", "on the fringes of normative dimensions" and even considered "a deviation" from the religious norm, as he puts it in the article. The specific case addressed by Richard André is that of a deceased Japanese and Buddhist saint, worshiped in a cemetery in Assaí, Paraná, sought out by her devotees beseeching everyday miracles, such as curing illnesses, resolving love issues and professional success.

The analysis of devotion to the Buddhist cemetery saint comes into being through analysis focused on day-to-day practices, with special attention to the appropriations, uses and reconstructions of conceptions employed by devotees. Another central aspect to the methodology that underpins the author's research is the approach to material culture. In particular, the saint's tomb is analyzed as a privileged materiality of the devotional practices aimed towards her.

In "O azorrague de Deus: a reemergência pública da esquerda evangélica entre 2016 e 2018" [The scourge of God: the public resurfacing of the evangelical left between 2016 and 2018], Vítor Gonçalves Queiroz de Medeiros presents an analysis of the public presence of the evangelical left in Brazil in recent years. His argument points to a resurfacing of this branch between 2016 and 2018, indicating that the increase of this activist movement precedes the political rise of Jair Bolsonaro.

The article analyzes the repertoire of one of the main collective actors of this religious left: the Evangelical Front for the Rule of Law. Contextualizing the Front, the author presents a historical background that highlights the existence of long-standing left-wing evangelical activism in Brazil, contributing in a relevant way to this record of the timeline. The thoughts presented portray a panorama full of tensions, pushbacks and disputes, both inside and outside the evangelical field. The analysis developed at the heart of the article's argument emphasizes the various action strategies devised in recent years by evangelical progressive activism, focusing on the actions of the Evangelical Front for the Rule of Law.

Finally, Barbara Jungbeck offers a comprehensive review of Amira Mittermaier's book *Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times*. The review highlights Mittermaier's thorough analysis of the practice of Islamic charity in the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, challenging conventional notions about charity, compassion and poverty. The review underscores the complexity of Islamic giving ethics, illustrated by diverse donor profiles, and highlights the interconnection between this ethics and political discourses, exploring the hurdles facing donors and recipients amid political changes in post-revolution Egypt.

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Edilson Pereira* (edilson.pereira@eco.ufrj.br)

* Professor at the School of Communication, the Graduate Program in Communication and Culture, and the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Editor at *Religião & Sociedade*. Associated researcher, Laboratory of Anthropology of the Ludic and the Sacred (LUDENS-UFRJ), and MARES: Materiality, Art, Religion, Public Space research group (UFRGS).

Roberto Conduru** (rconduru@smu.edu)

** Endowed Distinguished Professor of Art History, Southern Methodist University (SMU). Ph.D. in History, Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF).

Thais Waldman*** (tatawald@gmail.com)

*** Postdoctoral researcher, Museu Paulista, USP, part of the FAPESP Thematic Project "Coletar, identificar, processar, difundir: o ciclo curatorial e a produção do conhecimento". Co-coordinator of the CNPq research group CNPq Coletivo ASA - Artes, Saberes e Antropologia (USP) and member of MARES: Materialidade, Arte, Religião, Espaço Público (UFRGS).