

## RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS AS A NEW TYPE OF OBJECT: GENEALOGY AND ACTUALITY OF A FORM OF CATHOLIC PRESENCE IN PUBLIC SPACES

DOI

[dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.2525-3123.gis.2020.165595](https://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.2525-3123.gis.2020.165595)

ORCID

[orcid.org/0000-0002-6980-5494](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6980-5494)

**EMERSON ALESSANDRO GIUMBELLI<sup>1</sup>**

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil, 91509-900 – atendimento-ppgifch@ufrgs.br

### ABSTRACT

Based on an ethnographic scenario involving the recent construction of a statue of large proportions representing a catholic saint, this paper attempts to answer the following question: What constitutes a monument? This study articulates inspirations to guide the anthropology of objects with references that build a material approach of religion. The original role of Christ the Redeemer is taken into account as a prototype for a new kind of religious object. The presence of such objects denoting realist and colossal representations of religious figures is persistent given the crisis affecting monumental paradigms until the beginning of the twentieth century. The results imply these recent religious monuments of the sort function less as a memorial and more as a means to establish certain forms of catholic presence in public space.

### KEYWORDS

Monuments;  
Catholicism; Memory;  
Anthropology of  
Objects; Materiality.

1. This text divulges the result of the project “*Arquiteturas Monumentais: religião e espaço público*” (Monumental Architectures: Religion and Public Spaces), financed by *Bolsa de Produtividade* (Productivity Grant) from CNPq. A first version was presented at Reunião Brasileira de Antropologia (Brazilian Anthropology Meeting) in 2018, to a round table (“Arts, religion and memory: exploring the transversalities”) as proposed by MARES (Religion, Art, Materialities and Public Spaces: Anthropological group). This version was further discussed in a session of the *Núcleo de Religiões no Mundo Contemporâneo* (Nucleus of World Religions in the Contemporary World) (CEBRAP) in 2019, coordinated by Paula Montero. I would like to thank all those who made comments on these occasions, as well as the reviewers from GIS.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2017, construction began on a monument in a city in the south of Brazil, in the State of Santa Catarina. The monument, with its works currently suspended, is intended to portray Saint Paulina, canonized by the Catholic Church in 2002, whose sanctuary is located in another city within the same state<sup>2</sup>. Designed to be almost 50 meters tall, the statue, if concluded, will crown the top of a 300 meter high hill, having a significant impact over the surrounding local landscape. Several conversations I have had, since 2015, with Camilo Damázio – one of the instigators and greatest enthusiasts for the monument – have made it possible to understand the constellation of elements that surround it. Devotee of Saint Paulina, he led a group of pilgrim walkers. For him, the sheer monumental size of the statue was not disconnected to two other points; firstly, the presence within the monument of the very attributes necessary for its representation, having as its model the previous image of the saint - this was a point of negotiation with the author of the project, who opted to portray the Saint in a stylized form; secondly, the inclusion of the image in the circuit of pilgrimages, to which the group led by Camilo dedicated themselves. Such usage dovetailed perfectly with the plans of the Local Council, the financiers of the project, which presented it as an endeavor of “Religious Tourism” with much wider feelings and benefits than those associated with a strictly Catholic image. (Figures 1 and 2).



FIGURE 1  
Billboard divulging  
the construction  
of the statue of  
Santa Paulina,  
Imbituba, 2015  
(photo by the  
author).

2. Paulina is the religious name for Amábile Lucia Visintainer (1865-1942). Born in Italy, she spent the greater part of her life in Brazil, where she founded the congregation that would later strive for her canonization, which took place in 2002. The sanctuary is located in Nova Trento (SC), where Amábile began her religious life. The place for the statue, in homage to her, is Imbituba (SC); the city where what would have been the first miracle attributed to Paulina took place.

FIGURE 2  
Camilo Damázio  
next to moulds  
for the statue of  
Santa Paulina,  
Imbituba, 2015  
(photo by the  
author).



Few people perhaps know, but the monument to Saint Paulina is far from being an isolated case of such articulations between religious devotion, artistic project and touristic endeavor. Based upon a study which is far from being exhaustive, adopting the year 2000 as a marker, I counted 11 Brazilian statues portraying Christian characters, measuring more than 30 meters in height.<sup>3</sup> These monuments were constructed in cities from distinct regions of the country, with several of them being sited on top of hills, which provide them with an even greater and special visibility. I found much more news about projects for monuments with similar characteristics. Some of these monuments are copies or variations of “*Cristo Redentor*” (*Christ the Redeemer*), the statue that was erected in 1931 on top of Corcovado (Hunchback mountain), in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the then Federal Capital. Even though, as is the case of Saint Pauline, *Christ the Redeemer* does not serve as a model, the famous image has established one specific parameter, in that being “taller” than the *Christ the Redeemer* is always something that is highlighted in the projects, constructions, or repercussions of these more recent statues.

3. The tallest of these statues is a representation of Santa Rita de Cássia, in city of Santa Cruz (RN), with a height of 56m, inaugurated in 2010.

I will take this specific condition of the *Christ the Redeemer* as a prototype for religious monuments that are multiplying throughout Brazil (and even further)<sup>4</sup> in order to argue that their appearance has constituted a new object. In other words, the incorporation of the monumental form by Catholicism is not in line with other devotional images, but rather engenders objects that acquire a distinct nature, which I shall characterize by means of their trump card: visibility. As a second step, I shall take advantage of the fact that the composition between model and copies, parameter and variations, makes it possible to shed light upon two historical situations. The moment of the conception of the *Christ the Redeemer* corresponds to the peak of a certain type of monument, such that the most recent images belong to an age in which we have felt the effects of the crisis of that previous paradigm of monumental representation. One of the paths for us to perceive and pose this question is the matter of memory. I shall argue that, if the *Christ the Redeemer* lends itself to demonstrating the constitution of a new object, the more recent monuments that take it as a prototype serve for us to ponder the persistence of a certain form of representation and its relationship with memory. The most recent situation further allows us to raise points regarding the modes of the public presence of Catholicism in contrast to those of Evangelicals, focusing on debates dedicated to the understanding of recent religious dynamics in Brazil (Almeida 2010).

Methodologically speaking, this paper is based upon incursions stimulated by the effort to follow the endeavor related to Santa Paulina.<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that there is currently little chance of the Santa Catarina monument being concluded, the characteristics of the work boost the reflection that I judge to be pertinent and worth sharing. Indeed, the Saint Paulina monument leads me to pick up on previous studies, focused precisely on the statue of *Christ the Redeemer* (the results of which were collected together in Giumbelli 2014). The story of its conception and construction receive a new perspective, in this essay, with counterpoints brought from other equally iconic monuments – The *Eiffel Tower* and The *Statue of Liberty*– and by monuments inspired by distinct conceptions – to such point where they might even be called counter-monuments – from those which guided the *Christ the Redeemer*. What is also new is the general framework which I place on the discussion, with references that refer back to recent discussions in anthropology about images and objects, their forms of representation and their agency. These references articulate some more widely shared inspirations

---

4. One example is the *Christ the Redeemer* known as “Cristo do Pacífico” (The Christ of the Pacific), located in the Peruvian Capital, and inaugurated in 2011.

5. I made four visits between 2015 and 2018, the latter being the year in which the works were interrupted. In these visits, apart from observations, I conversed with Camilo and other pilgrims, with the local parson, journalists and the civil authorities. I further followed the media controversy regarding the statue of Saint Paulina and the construction of a further monument, in Imbituba, in homage to the Bible.

(Appadurai 2009, Gonçalves 2005, Henare et al 2007) with others that are more specifically aligned to the field of religious studies (especially, Meyer 2019). For the reasons presented, this essay brings together information regarding a wide set of realities, but does so based upon the questions that arose from ethnographic encounters surrounding the construction of the Saint Paulina monument– to which I shall return at the end of this essay.

It is important to make it quite clear right from the start that the focus of this essay is not the Saint Paulina monument per se, or even the monument's project as such. For its proposition, several articulations took place between agents of different natures (religious representatives, Catholic laypersons, and civil authorities, in particular). The idea of the construction was surrounded in controversy on certain questions such as the secularism of the State, the use of public money and State treatment towards different religions. The very configuration of the image and the place of its setting were also a question of debate, as was the positioning of the monument within "religious tourism". On these aspects, I have dedicated other texts (Giumbelli 2018a, 2018b, 2019). However, in this essay, my aim is to reflect upon religious objects and their transformations, taking the Saint Paulina monument as a starting point and further taking it as a representative of a certain type of object. It is this understanding, of what this object modality is, with which I shall drive the analysis for other monuments, which, in turn, will enact the function of memory. In any case, thinking about religion implies, within the perspective that I assume, posing the question regarding its relationship with the non-religious.

There is a specific bibliography about monuments, produced above all in the field of History (Levinson 1998; Nelson e Olin 2003). Although there is an intersection of the discussion which I propose here with the questions raised by this bibliography, what interests me here, and it is worth underlining, is to consider certain monumental expressions, considering them as objects, in the sense incorporated by the proposal of an anthropology of the objects and/or of things. In function with this, I find myself in the same arena of debate in which, for example, the essays of Novaes (2016) are circling - regarding objects in indigenous funeral rituals - and of Pinheiro (2016), regarding discursive representations of Iracema (an Amerindian woman) as an iconic figure. In my analysis, the images play a fundamental role, given that the monuments are objects that inspire and engender symbolic and material representations. With these frameworks in mind, what I seek to do is to introduce the monuments, above all some of those that relate to religious references, as part of the discussion around objects and their representation and agency. As we shall see, the resource of a bibliography that proposes a material approach from religion can produce this effect, drawing the analysis of religious monuments closer to debates with an interest in the anthropology of objects. Indeed, the fundamental

questions in this *démarche* are: What do these objects do (or try to do)? On what material and symbolic forces do they support themselves?

### THE GENEALOGY OF A NEW OBJECT

The *Christ the Redeemer* that we can visit at Corcovado is the result of an elaboration over a long period of time, and in which factors, such as the conventions of representation, choice of materials, and the relationship to the landscape all come into play (Giumbelli 2014). The final form that the statue acquired presents significant differences from the initial project (Figure 3). This project was announced as the winner in a competition carried out in 1921 in Rio de Janeiro. Regarding this, it is worth highlighting two points. The first point is in regards to the treatment of the “redeemer” – the risen Christ destined to save the world – with his attributes (the cross and the orb) guided by a realist aesthetic. Such aesthetic does not clash with that of the religious images that can be found in Catholic places of worship from the same period, and, as we shall see in the following, it is reminiscent of the predominant paradigm of contemporary monuments. The second point is that the project for the *Christ the Redeemer* was conceived by taking into consideration certain other monuments. In a list found in a text which presents the aforementioned project, which was published in the journal *O Paiz* in September, 1923, those with great stature are highlighted. There are several ancient monuments; however, among those that come after the Renaissance, three are mentioned, all European and all religious. The one exception is the *Statue of Liberty*. Based on this list, and regarding the image of Christ, the text declares: “it shall be, not only the largest statue in the world, but very probably the largest of any that have ever been raised”.

We shall explore each of these points. Salgueiro (2008) compiled an extensive bibliography to state that the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe – above all in France and in England – constituted the peak of endeavors that erected statues in public spaces, referring to a “real monument fever”. This is associated with a series of factors, such as nationalistic symbology and the consolidation of liberal or post-monarchy values. From then on, there was a proliferation of images and marks, to remember deeds and pay homage to people (from the political universe, and from science and culture). From the aesthetic point of view, it is worth mentioning the synthesis of Salgueiro (2008, 56): “When it comes to the formula for the architectonic composition of the commemorative monument of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it could be said that, essentially, what occurred is yet another diversity of combinations of traditional elements (statue, pedestal, corner figures and figures in the ornamentation), in which the realistic treatment of the statue predominates, whether it be allegorical or a rendering portrait, rather than really any revolution in the manner of materially remembering and commemorating”.



FIGURE 3  
Model based upon  
the original project  
for the monument  
of the *Christ the  
Redeemer*. Source:  
Figueiredo et  
al (1981).

The original project for the *Christ the Redeemer* applies the proposal and predominant aesthetic in the monuments of the 19th century to the religious figure. It is basically composed of a pedestal and a full figure. In the pedestal, foreseen as being built in reinforced concrete covered in stonework or marble and bronze - again, according to the newspaper piece from 1923, "the exterior decoration is of Syrian style, in order to characterize Judaism, the ancient religion, the Old Testament, upon which The New Testament is supported in the figure of Jesus". Portrayed in line with western representations, Christ widely appears as looking upwards, his hands holding the orb and the cross. His clothing is

formed by what appears to be a tunic and cloak, with volumes and folds as realistic as the features of his face. The pedestal should be of 12 meters; the body, a further 35 meters. Thus, it is possible to state that the *Christ the Redeemer* was presented as an amplified version of devotional images, a plan made viable through an aesthetic convergence between civil monuments and the religious statuary – both in discord with the artistic vanguard, which appeared in successive waves ever since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The *Statue of Liberty* is cited several times in the text of 1923 as a model to be followed, because of its plans to use the same material and techniques – “hammered copper plates” – to create the external form of the image. Although Salgueiro (2008) does not mention the proposed statue in France in 1865, later inaugurated in 1886 in Nova York, its aesthetic and its purpose do not clash with the preeminent standards in the “modern worship of monuments”. Using motifs from the ancient classics, much used in public sculpture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the statue is an allegorical representation of freedom (Khan 2010). Apart from the techniques and materials, there are other similarities with the plans for the *Christ the Redeemer*: the format and ornamentation of the pedestal, the relationship between the trunk, head and limbs, the draping of the robes; especially, the realism applied to the figure. Apart from that, one can assert that the *Christ the Redeemer* receives the legacy of the *Statue of Liberty* by means of its dimensions: as such, the monuments assume a completely different scale, reaching previously unseen enlargements. Including its pedestal, the *Statue of Liberty* reaches a height of 93 meters. Inspired by European models, monuments in the Americas gained the possibility of exploring new senses and grandeur in their very idea of monumentality.

In fact, in terms of scale, there was precedence from the exact same place from where the *Statue of Liberty* originated: the *Eiffel Tower*, almost 300 meters in height, concluded in Paris in 1889. There is a thought-provoking essay from Roland Barthes (1979) regarding the Parisian symbol that allows us the opportunity of continuing the commentary about modern monuments. In it we find clues in order for us to make a counterpoint between the *Eiffel Tower* and the *Statue of Liberty*, based upon the opposition of form and symbol. For Barthes, one of the reasons that explains the fascination caused by the iron structure situated on the banks of the River Seine is its condition of being “a pure significance, in other words, a form to which one can incessantly attribute sense (Barthes 1979, 2). Its “simple and primary shape”, explains the semiologist, “confers upon it the vocation of an infinite cipher: in turn and according to the appeals of our imagination, the symbol of Paris, of modernity, of communication, of science or of the nineteenth century, rocket, stem,



derrick, phallus, lightning rod or insect (...)” (Barthes 1979, 1). This is in contrast with the *Statue of Liberty* and its allegorical human form. Although both monuments are penetrable, the spaces of the *Eiffel Tower* continue to counterpose the solidity of “Liberty”; and when you enter the tower, you find shops and a restaurant, whereas the Statue offers only an observation point beneath its crown. Indeed, the tower makes it clearer that the verticality of “Liberty” is reminiscent of a beacon, an idea that the held-high torch merely reiterates and reinforces.

From this counterpoint, it is possible to present the *Christ the Redeemer* as a kind of synthesis between the characteristics developed by the *Eiffel Tower* and those of the *Statue of Liberty*. I refer now not to the original project, but rather to the modified version that points to the features that the monument started acquiring, until attaining its final format, of 30 meters above an 8 meter pedestal. To the material attributes of the redeemer, a symbolic solution was conferred: the cross merged with the very body of the image and, in turn, the orb was converted into the figurative pedestal of the statue. There were further important changes in the lines and features of the image, which adopted a simplification and stylization that permits a certain association of the monument to *Art Déco*. Finally, the material was also substituted: instead of metal, reinforced concrete covered with a mosaic of soapstone.<sup>6</sup> In a text from 1931, on the occasion of the inauguration of the monument, its engineer had the opportunity of making reference once more to the *Statue of Liberty*, this time as more of a counterpoint: the *Christ the Redeemer* benefits not only from more convenient materials, but also from a location that accentuates its visibility (Costa 1931).

Barthes considers the *Eiffel Tower* as a unique monument, because, wrought into it, are things that normally remain separate: a place that is seen and from whence one sees. Well, the *Christ the Redeemer* has the very same characteristics. Although it is not penetrable as with the *Statue of Liberty*, its location transforms it into a viewing point for all the surrounding landscape. Equally, the ability for it to be seen from many places was an essential condition for its construction. The illumination of the monument was also part of its characteristics, right from the outset, which conferred upon it the possibility of being described as a beacon in the port city. Added to this, the constructive technique draws it closer to the contemporary sky-scrapers. As Koolhaas (2008) suggests, one of the components of the sky-scrapers is the assimilation of a tower, something that the *Christ the Redeemer* fulfills when seen as the extension of Corcovado. Finally, without sacrificing a figurative aesthetic, the final version of the monument consecrates such a simple

---

6. For details about these changes, I refer to chapters 2 and 3 in Giumbelli (2014).

but primary form as that of the *Eiffel Tower*. With this form and the simplified features of the image, the *Christ the Redeemer* opened itself up to many significations, the majority of which cannot simply be embraced by purely religious connotations.

I believe, then, that with all this said, we have a better framework with which to comprehend in what way the *Christ the Redeemer* may be characterized as a new object. Let us remember that the intention of its creators – authorities and laypersons linked to Catholicism – was to produce a colossal religious image. One should note, within this, that the reference to “redeemer” mixes itself with others, especially that of the “Sacred Heart of Jesus” (*Sagrado Coração de Jesus*) and of “Christ the King” (*Cristo Rei*). It is possible to argue, along this line, how the statue of *Christ the Redeemer* in Rio de Janeiro belongs to a lineage of images, which correspond to the transformations through which certain devotions pass in their material expression. In the case of the devotion to the *Sagrado Coração de Jesus*, this becomes more evident. Born in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, such devotion was originally taken up by an expiatory sense, with an imagery linked to suffering. In its expansion it acquired political and triumphalistic overtones – of which the main example is the famous Basilica in the Parisian neighborhood of Montmartre (Jonas 2000). But it is in the Americas, specifically in Brazil, that these political and triumphalistic overtones gain monumental expression, in *duple-entendre*: both as monument and colossal in dimension.

Nevertheless, on gaining scale, the image transforms its very devotion. A way for us to capture this is through the reference to the concept of “gaze” proposed by David Morgan (2012). Morgan is an important reference from *religious studies* and one of his contributions has to do with the notion of visual culture, which imposes attention not only upon the images and objects that make up devotions, but further upon the very conception of visibility. In this case, we can approximate Morgan’s elaboration to the concept, put forth by Rancière (2005), of the politics of aesthetics. We have valuable references here, which over recent years have served towards “the materializing of religion” (Meyer 2015). My interest in integrating myself into such a perspective is related to the possibility of expanding it, or rather, stop applying it to religion as a previously demarcated territory, but rather employing it in order to perceive the historical situations in which religion itself gained a determined definition through social and cultural processes. To understand them materially is the advantage of using certain concepts such as “gaze” and “visual regime”.

The reference to the work of Morgan is further an opportune one, because he himself was dedicated to studying the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Morgan 1999). Turning his attention to the popularization of images of the Sacred Heart in the United States, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Morgan notes a kind of personalization of the relationship between devotees and images. The Sacred Heart found its way into American homes in the form of drawings. Placed in and amongst personal or family objects, these drawings allowed and provided incentives for what Morgan calls the “reciprocal gaze”: at the same moment in which it is seen, the image itself sees; the image reveals itself as one devotes attention to its semblance (2012, 73). To the Catholic sensibility, this translates into the touch that brings both statue and devotee closer together: just as Christ points with his hands to his wounds or his heart, the person uses touch to establish the relationship with the image. It is this economy of imagery and its corresponding visual regime that is going to be displaced with a monument such as that of the *Christ the Redeemer*.

Indeed, the configuration of *a place to look at - place to look out from* that is established in a location such as the top of Corcovado is quite different from the “reciprocal gaze” described by Morgan. The statue’s gaze and the devotee’s gaze no longer meet. On the one hand, the look from the image may assume, from its monumental vantage point on high, panoptical tones, or, in the opposite situation, suffer from incurable blindness.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, it is as a spectacle that the statue shows itself to the onlooker (visitor), or even of people that glimpse the monument from afar. The impossibility of being able to touch translates this new regime, becoming a corresponding triumph for vision. It is in this sense that the *Christ the Redeemer*, seeking to extend a religious image, constitutes a new object, to which new senses are linked. As we well know, objects are always subjects. In such a configuration, the agency contained in the image-monument is no less powerful. Yet its power derives precisely from this “non-meeting” with the devotee and starts to serve for other things. We shall see which things a little later, but before we get there, it is interesting to shift some focus towards the relationship between religious representations and other forms of artistic elaborations.

### THE CRISES OF THE MONUMENTS

The mismatch between the aesthetic of commemorative monuments and the artistic vanguards of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century anticipate the critique that will target the dominant representational conventions in the case of the former. Yet figurative and realist sculptures would still find

---

7. It is worth noting that the eyes of the *Christ the Redeemer* do not have pupils.

sufficient output within the Fascist period in Italy, in the Nazi regime of Germany and in the Soviet Socialist experience. It is easy, in this sense, to perceive the affinity between the aesthetic of the *Christ the Redeemer* and the architecture of the Estado Novo, commanded by Vargas (1930-1945). Ironically, the updating produced by the features of the image in its definitive version converses with the solidity of modernist forms adopted by regimes of exception in the 1930s. It is only after WWII that the model of the monument, consecrated over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, falls into discredit, undermined, in the words of Huyssen (2000: 50), by suspicion based on political, social and ethical reasons. It is possible to indicate certain factors that contributed to this crisis.

On the representational plain, it is the human figure that undergoes a revision (Moraes 2010). The very history of monuments points to this transformation. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century draws near, the number of sculptures of men of science and culture multiplies, to which the conventions of grand pedestals and equestrian statues are applied less and less (Salgueiro 2008). For these figures, other configurations construct a greater proximity with the pedestrian. Around them is where the “modern worship” takes place, aimed at new heroes and values, often in a more-or-less planned substitution of religious references. In this sense, the monuments seem more appropriate to civil devotions rather than religious ones. In any case, the criticism of representation also comes back to the selfsame idea of the human figure. If, up until then, allegories had tended to receive an anthropomorphic representation, with the new aesthetic currents, there arose the possibility of imagining the human with other appearances; or, indeed, even of abandoning the human as model. The result gave rise to experimentation with new forms for the construction of monuments.

There was further the arrival of new materials, which added options to the stone and traditional metals. Concrete, glass and steel started to be considered in architectonic solutions that would further have an impact on the life of monuments. (Salgueiro 2008). The preference for copper and bronze in the erection of many monuments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century proved ironic during the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The original reason for such choice was to do with their resistance and durability. Nevertheless, copper and bronze proved themselves useful in the production of artifacts of war; the result being that many statues, conceived to endure for much time, were melted down to serve, for example, as the raw material in the production of ammunition for weapons. The text from 1931, regarding the *Christ the Redeemer*, cites this motive as one of the factors that determined the choice of other materials for the erection of the image.

It is further necessary to consider the framework into which monuments produced throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century insert themselves. Constructed in order to be appreciated by pedestrians, many of them failed in their mission. Their relocation and the lack of care and attention ended up, not infrequently, affecting them. Suffering from urban transformations, some of them were uprooted and replanted in new locations, losing their relationship with their original surroundings. Others were simply abandoned, or started to suffer from a lack of comprehension, either lacking the same appeal they once had, or due to a veritable evaporation of the key references needed to read their original intentions. Others, it seems, became the object of a paradox, alluded to by Robert Musil (1987, 61 apud Taussig 1999, 51 e 52): “The most striking feature of monuments is that you do not notice them. There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments. Doubtless they have been erected to be seen – even to attract attention; yet at the same time something has impregnated them against attention”.

In the light of all this, turning once more to the list of religious monuments with which this essay began, the question cannot be any other than: how is it that realist and figurative images insist on occupying public spaces? – My hypothesis is that, by reflecting upon the subject of memory, we may be able to risk an answer to this question. Yet before doing so, I shall briefly mention two further examples of religious works that assimilate the critique of the representation directed to traditional monuments, in order to make it quite clear that there is no reason for us to suppose any essential incompatibility between religious images and the non-traditional artistic languages. Both are presented by Cottin (2007, 200 e 211) in his discussion about the mutations of relationships between art and Christianity over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first, entitled *Cross of Hope*, occupies the altar of a church in France: it does not exist as an object, rather it is merely suggested through the architecture of the temple (Figure 4). The other is a work by Anish Kapoor, who was part of an exhibition on the margins of a Swiss lake, accompanied by other works with religious themes. Baptized as *Beyond*, the piece is a metallic mirror – circular and convex in shape – which shows a deconstructed and inverted image of the very visitor-viewer (Figure 5). The two works invite the spectator to participate in the formation of the images; but what happens when these images insist upon coming not only ready-made, but in colossal proportions?

FIGURE 4  
Nicolas Alquin,  
Croix d'espérance,  
2002 (Source:  
Cottin 2007,  
2000).



FIGURE 5  
Anish Kapoor,  
Au-delà, 2002  
(Source: Cottin  
2007, 211).



### **OBJECTS THAT SERVE NOT TO REMEMBER, BUT RATHER TO GO BEYOND THE RELIGIOUS**

It is unlikely that any essay on monuments would not indeed relate itself to the subject of memory. One of the first reflections about these works– the book by an Austrian art historian, published in 1903– defined them by their purpose: “always keep the deeds or individual destinies (or a mix of them) alive and present in the minds of generations to come” (Riegl 1999, 23 *apud* Salgueiro 2008, 11). Salgueiro follows the tradition of references that proposes considering monuments as part

of a complex of situations that Pierre Nora calls “places of memory”, emphasizing the processes and political choices involved in their erection. “[a] Monument is, thus, as much a place of memory as it is of forgetting – the forgetting of the other, of the diverse point of view, of the contrary interest” (Salgueiro 2008, 20). The happenings in 2018 in the United States proved this all too well. The contesting of images related to confederate symbols and heroes seems to want to undo all that the monument was made for: to eternalise its memory.<sup>8</sup>

The protest against monuments in the United States – which in 2018 even affected a statue of Christopher Columbus in the center of Los Angeles – can be included in a lineage of attacks against realist representations in moments of political transformation. That is what happened to the statues of Lenin in the former Soviet Union, or what we watched, on television, happening to the statue of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Thus, it is exactly the realism of these representations, originally presumed adequate as to their memorial function, which turns them into special targets for politically motivated and iconoclastic attacks. Nevertheless, this iconoclast exists alongside another recent trend; that of the proliferation of monuments. Such a trend is associated, as noted by Salgueiro (2008, 12), with the extension of the concept of the monument; which is now apt to be applied to entire cities and even landscapes. I prefer, nevertheless, to highlight another possibility exactly because it paradoxically highlights the role of memory: the constitution of monuments as anti-monuments, or counter-monuments.

No other place carries out this idea of the anti-monument better than Germany, from the 1980’s. The endeavor of national reconstruction came alongside an effort to reflect upon the Nazi period. Such reflection is forced to deal with many paradoxes, as synthesized in the formulation from Huyssen: “unimaginable, unspeakable and unactable terror” (2000, 85). Instead of commemoration and celebration, artist and architects were invited to find material forms capable of evoking the absence of millions of victims, and of remembering what should not have happened– the atrocities of a genocide regime. The memory, therefore, is urged to work not in the key of contemplation of objects they themselves are charged with remembering, but rather in the logic of interaction, given that the observers are an active part of these new monuments. For this reason, it seems to me that Huysen’s comment is misguided in terms of the memorialist outbreak in Germany and in its main city: “Taking up once more the observation of Robert Musil in which there is nothing as invisible as a monument, Berlin (...) is opting for invisibility. The greater the number of monuments, the more the

---

8. And we are seeing this more and more in 2020, especially with monuments of people connected to slavery and protestors from Black Lives Matter.

past becomes invisible, and the easier it becomes to forget: redemption, therefore, through forgetfulness” (2000, 45).

If we take three examples, commented upon by Young (1992), we find elements with which to contest Huysen’s suggestion. The professor of Jewish Studies emphasizes that the three cases of counter-monuments— as proposed by German artists in the 1980’s – serve to maintain a “debate surrounding what types of memory to preserve, how to do it, in name of whom, and to what end” (Young 1992, 52). In one of the examples, a fountain, destroyed by the Nazis – due to its association with the Jews, has been recreated; however, in its reverse (negative) form: as a well. The observers are obliged to bend over the well for them to reencounter what had been destroyed. In the second example, a memorial project in Berlin, nothing will be built. The passerby will activate the projection of a text that will make them remember what that place was during the war; a factory that relied upon forced labor in its production. Once again, it asks the observers to actively participate, with their bodies.

The third example, in Hamburg, deserves a more detailed presentation. A kind of totem was installed in order to receive inscriptions from the public, who could thereby add their names to those of people killed by Nazism; after the lower part of the totem has been filled, a mechanism allows that part to be submerged, leaving more free space for further inscriptions and subsequent submerging; and so on, until such point where the column completely disappears under the floor, leaving just a mark and a plaque presenting the project. Young notes that the monument was situated within the dependencies of a shopping center to provide greater visibility. At the same time, its counter-monumentality is expressed exactly in its dynamic of dematerialization, which plays with one of the typical forms of traditional monumentality, the column. Making the column disappear through the participation of the pedestrian is a way in which the project instigates the memory of Nazism— or at least maintains the debate active in regards to its history and agency.

Before returning to my main focus of religious monuments, I should like to mention yet another case, precisely because it places a myriad of objects and structures, distributed across a large area, back into the scene. In other words, an alternative to minimalism has arisen and to the (de)materialism of the German examples. Apart from this, it takes us beyond Europe and involves certain religious elements. I am talking about Freedom Park, on the outskirts of Pretoria, the capital of South Africa – as presented by Jethro (2013), who analyzes it as a “colossal heritage project”. The author goes on: “the site was purposefully built to reframe South African history for the purpose of calling into being a post-apartheid national subjectivity using an indigenous southern



African cultural and religious idiom.” (Jethro 2013, 374). One can note, then, how the park puts into play the reconstruction of a nation seeking to articulate its rupture with apartheid and the recourse to a Pan-Africanism. Jethro highlights the three main components of the project: the production of a center of nationality, the composition of which received the support and participation of religious leaderships; the presentation of a mural of names as heroes of a post-apartheid nation and as transcendent ancestors; the museum, which reconstructs the national cosmogony, juxta positioning natural and cultural dimensions based on references to and ways of African storytelling. Under a very distinct material form from that of the German cases, it is also the memory which is challenged to work in an endeavor that simultaneously seeks to both engage and break with the past.

Indeed, it is this work, with memory, that seems exactly not to be part of the configurations that define the religious monuments that take the *Christ the Redeemer* as a prototype. Once again, the *Statue of Liberty* and the *Eiffel Tower* present interesting clues for us to apprehend such configurations. Regarding the first, Khan (2010, 118) states: “Rather than dwell on the burden of past oppression the statue points to the new life of the nation”. This is reflected in certain elements of its composition, for example, the absence of the shield and sword and the preference for the torch and the “tablet” of the Constitution. More than just breaking from or returning to the past, it is about marking a new beginning. In another way, Barthes (1979) further emphasizes the “originality” of the *Eiffel Tower*. Expressing the idea that the tower is an empty and open form, there is no museum that can be visited in its interior. More radically, the tower presents itself both as a spectacle and as a viewing point, negating itself from being apprehended as a place of memory in itself: “To visit the Tower, then, is to enter into contact not with a historical Sacred, as is the case for the majority of monuments, but rather with a new nature, that of human space.” (Barthes 1979, 5).

The *Christ the Redeemer* can be characterized in a similar key. Not that the ideas that erected it disregarded the past. Indeed, that was an important element, as the monument sought to connect itself with the endeavor of colonization and the reason for the inauguration occurring on the 12th of October – the date attributed to the discovery of America. Another factor is the relationship with the monument of the notion of “Christendom”, something which referred to the past in which the State and the Catholic Church were united both in the Portuguese colony and the new nation. Yet it is possible to affirm that the most important aspect of the story surrounding the *Christ the Redeemer* lies in its bet for the future. Its aesthetic and materials give it the credentials to represent Catholicism in a dispute for the narrative of a nation. In a country that

has experienced other possibilities – for example, those brought by the modernists of 1922 –, the *Christ the Redeemer* did not exactly encapsulate a place of memory, rather, and primarily, as a project of *becoming*. The absence of a museum alongside the monument is also significant. This could be related to the plans for the place to be an open sanctuary for pilgrimages. With the failure of such a plan, the connection to a specifically religious past started to reveal its fragility.<sup>9</sup>

My hypothesis may be formulated in counterpoint to the way in which two authors define religion. For Danièle Hervieu-Léger, French sociologist with important contributions on the subject since the 1990's, "religion is defined by means of the transmission and perpetuation of the memory of an original founding event by means of a 'religious lineage' or 'line of belief'" (Camurça 2003, 251). In 2002, Bruno Latour published a book dedicated to religion which also mobilizes the subject of memory. As I previously presented it in another text (Giumbelli 2011, 332), "Latour proposes that we should call religion a certain mode of enunciation, with its corresponding requirements for the production of truth. As such, the information, in the referential sense, is already given and does not constitute the focus of religious communication; what is necessary is to update it, make it relevant to the present-day context, through such an inventive yet faithful translation of a message so known and revealed". For the philosopher, the images develop an important role in this mode of enunciation, given that it is exactly up to them to make such a clearly revealed message relevant today, submitting it to the different languages of understanding and expression.

Considering what these two authors state, it seems to me that the dominant features of the *Christ the Redeemer* indicate other possibilities. The monument lends itself badly as a harbinger of an authorized memory, in the terms of Hervieu-Léger. On producing a colossal image, the Catholic Church intended to construct an ally in its missionary project. Yet, ironically, the object became too big to be controlled, thus losing for its religious institution the monopoly – and even the hegemony – over its very representation.<sup>10</sup> This defeat has been compensated somewhat by a parallel aspect, which the formulations of Latour allow us to apprehend; and not just because the image is particularly an appropriate one to modernize such a message – as was, once again, the proposal of the

9. The decision to consider the *Christ the Redeemer* as a sanctuary was taken up recently, with a decree from the Archdiocese of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 2006 (Giumbelli 2014, 59). Even so, it is not about a sanctuary in the traditional sense; a site of miracles that become the very reason for the pilgrimages. This was never a characteristic of the *Christ the Redeemer*.

10. The Archdiocese of the city of Rio de Janeiro claimed the intellectual property rights to the monument. Nonetheless, the claim in itself, ever subject to contestations and very often denied by the various appropriations of the image of the *Christ the Redeemer*, is the demonstration why we are seeing such disputes. On this point, see chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 from Giumbelli (2014).

Catholic Church on patronizing the monument – but to the contrary, for having been capable, instead, of assimilating new significations; for example, when the *Christ the Redeemer* is the spirit of Rio de Janeiro or even Brazil – in the sense that it is enabled to represent them. And thus, the statue remains in place, in the terms of Latour, ever modernizing itself; exactly because it managed to go beyond its religious attributes.

It remains to be seen whether the more recent monuments that are proliferating within Brazil will maintain the characteristics of their prototype. In the case of the project of Saint Paulina, there is an attempt at composition. It is likely that its existence would serve to boost the devotion that pays homage to her, serving as a cog for her memory. In the same vein, it is worth noting that the project includes a kind of memorial: on entering into the base of the statue, the visitor will come face to face with panels that narrate the biography of the Saint, including her miracles, one of which has a relationship with the city that houses her monument. However, other characteristics of the monument remove it from the memorial function. As an endeavor of “religious tourism”, it is aimed at attracting visitors who are not necessarily devotees. In line with that, it is proclaimed as an “ecological complex” and as a viewing point over an amazing landscape. In short, its viability, paid for with public funds, depends on the articulation of the religion with other aspects and dimensions. This seems to be the price to be paid – and the profits to be earned – in order for it to be maintained as a religious monument.

The question is not – as the references to the works of Hervieu-Léger and Latour might suggest – whether the monuments that portray catholic figures are religious or not. Once they evolve religious elements, references and agents, what enters into play are the forms through which the religion undergoes transformations as it continues to operate. In other terms, the question is one of religious politics. In this sense, a counterpoint with the Evangelicals might be productive. Indeed, in Brazil, the Evangelicals in their more dynamic and influential facets confer little importance to either past or memory (Mafra 2011), which puts them on a similar plan to that which the monuments focused upon here operate. In the case of Evangelicals, however, the monumentality appears in their temples– and it is by no means unusual to find denominations following the example of the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) in constructing buildings with the capacity of uniting thousands of people.<sup>11</sup> Thus, competing projects of monumentalization are being established.

However, if monumentality is present in both catholic and evangelical universes, its expression and implications are quite different. For the

11. Regarding the project of the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* being aimed at the construction of “cathedrals”, see Gomes (2011).

Evangelicals, monumentality is expressed in spaces directed specifically at the religious practice; fueling the suspicion that we are dealing with “oversized” churches – and producing the impression of a “out-of-place” religion. For the Catholics, monumentality expresses itself in huge object images, placed in public spaces, to which, nevertheless, they need to admit or understand that it represents something “more than religious”. It is here that the relationship with “religious tourism” gains plausibility and strength. As such, it is important not to take “religious tourism” as a recent expression that would serve to name more ancient phenomena. This expression innovatively claims non-religious (i.e., “economical” or “cultural”) meanings or gains to be associated with “religious attractions”. It is not by chance that “religious tourism” relates to a type of object, the monument, which itself provokes a shift in its relationship to other types of religious objects.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Returning to the argument developed in this essay, it could be summarized in the following order. In the first historical situation covered, religion is seen as part of the wave of monuments that are developed from certain motifs and of a certain aesthetic, since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the erection of religious monuments goes beyond the mere enlargement of previously existing images. It is a new object that is being created, one that has more to do with monumentalization than with religion (such as it existed prior to the monuments). It is precisely this which I intended to show on suggesting that the *Christ the Redeemer* be understood as a synthesis of the characteristics of paradigms represented by the *Statue of Liberty* and by the *Eiffel Tower*. The focus on the *Christ the Redeemer* further served to indicate the prototype of more recent monuments, which together configure a second historical situation which serves as a reference for analysis. The subject of memory arose as a relevant way of tracing certain transformations. Experiments with the memory led to the production of a new type of monument—the anti or counter-monument. The persistence of realist and figurative aesthetics in the scope of more recent religious monuments can be apprehended as a bet in the opposite direction, which points less to the past and to memory, and more to the future and the imagination, which includes new forms of public religion.

To conclude this essay, I would like to return to the case with which I started and with the help of two further comments. The first resorts to Lévi-Strauss (1983), who in the first chapter of *The Savage Mind* evokes the “religious monuments”. Although he is not being specific, the mention serves to demonstrate the general argument that the small-scale model constitutes “the universal type of the work of art” (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 44). Therefore, even something monumental for its scale doesn’t stop being a miniature of something even bigger— such as the frescos of the Sistine Chapel that depict, according to Lévi-Strauss, the theme of the “End of Time”. The essay

goes on to show how the construction of small-scale models manages to produce an intellectual apprehension of what is represented. From this passage, which deserves many other observations, it reminded me of the conversations with Camilo, of how he had visualized the image of Saint Paulina on top of the hill even before its construction had begun. For him, in an analogous fashion to the photographic tricks that miniaturize objects of grand proportion, the monument would certainly be an expression and part of the ties that linked him to Saint Paulina. Thus, for however monumental something might seem, this object, when placed closer to its devotees, can always be inserted into even larger frames.

The second comment equally helps us to investigate the relativity of the monumentality that characterizes these colossal objects. The fabulous essay by North (1992) explores the idea of the public being part of the sculpture, based upon aesthetic experiments which, as with the (counter) monuments created in Germany, depend upon the participation of their observers. The author resorts to many references to demonstrate that this idea presents developments in opposite directions: the world as a collective construction or as totalitarian domination. One example of the first type is the recreation, in Austria, of a Nazi monument as a kind of social provocation to raise the debate and reactivate memories. One example of the second type would be the very Nazi rituals, whose scenarios were large spaces built to receive crowds. In short, the essay makes us consider monuments within necessary relationships with different publics. For Camilo, the colossal image of Saint Paulina would be part of a devotion that articulated other people and other objects. Yet what is to guarantee that she might not also be the pivotal point of an experiment that perpetuates the material presence of an image?

We must wait for new studies that are capable of indicating the clues in order to respond to these and other questions. What is important to highlight, however, is that the questions raised by this essay depend on one perspective that is interested in the objects and their own forms of agency. No less important is to remember that one investigation into forms of agency is not disconnected from the attention to representations and to people, in other words, on the one side, the conceptions and symbolic operations that accompany the things in their production; and on the other side, the rest of the agents that are related to the objects, in their personal and institutional formation. The references, however brief, to my conversations with Camilo serve to reinforce these points. They further serve to indicate the necessity for us to understand the production of objects as much from their projects, as from considering their effective use. It is along such lines that a further inspiring essay is developed (Gieryn 2002), who follows the conception and utilization of a university building, with laboratories, classrooms, offices, etc. Its title evokes the same question that has guided this article: what do buildings – or monuments – do?

**TRANSLATION**  
Chris Tunwell

## REFERENCES

- Almeida, Ronaldo. 2010. Religião em transição. In *Antropologia*, coord. Carlos Benedito Martins e Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte, 367-406 São Paulo: Anpocs.
- Appadurai, A. 2009. *A Vida social das coisas: as mercadorias sob uma perspectiva cultural*. Niterói: Eduff.
- Barthes, Roland. 1979. The Eiffel Tower. In *The Eiffel Tower and other mythologies*, Roland Barthes, 3-18. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Camurça, Marcelo Ayres. 2003. A sociologia da religião de Danièle Hervieu-Léger: entre a memória e a emoção. In *Sociologia da religião: enfoques teóricos*, org. Faustino Teixeira, 249-270. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Costa, Heitor da Silva. 1931. A concepção. *O Cruzeiro*, n. 49 (20), 10/10/1931: 14-17.
- Cottin, Jérôme. 2007. *La mystique de l'art: art et Christianisme de 1900 à nos jours*. Paris: Cerf.
- Gieryn, Thomas. F. 2002. What buildings do. *Theory and Society*, vol. 31, no. 1: 35-74.
- Giumbelli, Emerson. 2011. A noção de crença e suas implicações para a modernidade: um diálogo imaginado entre Bruno Latour e Talal Asad. *Horizontes Antropológicos*, vol. 35: 327-356.
- Giumbelli, Emerson. 2014. *Símbolos religiosos em controvérsias*. São Paulo: Terceiro Nome.
- Giumbelli, Emerson. 2018a. Public spaces and religion: an idea to debate, a monument to analyze. *Horizontes Antropológicos*, vol. 24: 279-309.
- Giumbelli, Emerson. 2018b. Religious tourism. *Religion and Society: advances in research*, vol. 9: 24-38.
- Giumbelli, Emerson. 2019. Religious tourism and religious monuments: the politics of religious diversity in Brazil. *International Journal of Latin American Religions*, vol. 3: 1-14.
- Gomes, Edlaine C. 2011. *A era das catedrais: a autenticidade em exibição (uma etnografia)*. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, Faperj.
- Gonçalves, José Reginaldo Santos. 2005. *Antropologia dos objetos: coleções, museus e patrimônio*. Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Museus e Centro Culturais.
- Henare, Aimiria, Holbraad, Martin e Sari Wastell. 2007. *Thinking through things: theorising artefacts ethnographically*. Londres: Routledge.
- Huyssen, Andreas. 2000. *Seduzidos pela memória: arquitetura, monumentos, mídia*. Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano.
- Jethro, Duane. 2013. An African story of creation: heritage formation at Freedom Park, South Africa. *Material Religion*, vol. 9, no. 3: 370-393.
- Jonas, Raymond. 2000. *France and the cult of the Sacred Heart: an epic tale for modern times*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Khan, Yasmin Sabina. 2010. *Enlightening the world: the creation of the Statue of Liberty*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Koolhaas, Rem. 2008. A dupla vida da utopia: o arranha-céu. In *Nova York delirante*, Rem Koolhaas, 106-157. São Paulo: Cosac Naify.
- Levinson, Sanford. 1998. *Written in stone: public monuments in changing society*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1983. A ciência do concreto. In *O Pensamento selvagem*, Claude Lévi-Strauss, 15-50. Campinas: Papirus.

- Mafra, Clara. 2011. A "arma da cultura" e os "universalismos parciais". *Mana*, vol. 17, no. 3: 607-624.
- Meyer, Birgit. 2015. Picturing the invisible. Visual culture and the study of religion. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 27, no. 4-5: 333-360.
- Meyer, Birgit. 2019. *Como as coisas importam: uma abordagem material da religião*. Porto Alegre: UFRGS.
- Moraes, Eliane Robert. 2010. *O corpo impossível*. São Paulo: Iluminuras.
- Morgan, David. 1999. *Visual piety: a history and theory of popular religious images*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Morgan, David. 2012. *The embodied eye: religious visual culture and the social life of feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Motta-Roteiro, Edson e Guilherme Figueiredo. 1981. *O Cristo do Corcovado*. Rio de Janeiro: Léo Christiano Editorial.
- Musil, Robert. 1987. Monuments. In *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, Musil, 61-64. Hygiene, Colorado: Heridanos.
- Nelson, Robert e Margaret Olin, org. 2003. *Monuments and memory, made and unmade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- North, Michael. 1992. The public as sculpture: from heavenly city to mass ornament. In *Art and the public sphere*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 9-28. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Novaes, Sylvia Caiuby. 2016. Iconografia e oralidade: sobre objetos e pessoa entre os Bororo. *GIS*, vol. 1, no. 1: 89-114.
- O Paiz. 1923. O Monumento a Cristo Redentor, 02/09/1923, edição 14196: 1.
- Pinheiro, Joceny. 2016. Iracema, a virgem dos lábios de mel: negação e afirmação da indianidade no Ceará contemporâneo. *GIS*, vol. 1, no. 1: 135-158.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2005. *A partilha do sensível: estética e política*. São Paulo: EXO Experimental, Editora 34.
- Riegl, Alois. 1999. *El culto moderno a los monumentos: caracteres y origen*. Madri: Visor.
- Salgueiro, Valéria. 2008. *De pedra e bronze: um estudo sobre monumentos: o monumento a Benjamin Constant*. Niterói: Universidade Federal Fluminense.
- Taussig, Michael. 1999. *Defacement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Young, James Edward. 1992. The counter-monument: memory against itself in Germany today. In *Art and the public sphere*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 49-78. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**EMERSON GIUMBELLI** is a full professor in the Postgraduate Program of Social Anthropology, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. He received a PhD in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in 2000.

**Use license.** This article is licensed under the Creative Commons CC-BY License. With this license you can share, adapt, create for any purpose as long as you assign the work.

Received: 01/10/2020

Resubmitted: 05/13/2020

Accepted: 06/12/2020