



# How Public Statues Wrong: Affective Artifacts and Affective Injustice

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## Abstract

In what way might public statues wrong people? In recent years, philosophers have drawn on speech act theory to answer this question by arguing that statues constitute harmful or disrespectful forms of speech. My aim in this paper will be add a different theoretical perspective to this discussion. I will argue that while the speech act approach provides a useful starting point for thinking about what is wrong with public statues, we can get a fuller understanding of these wrongs by drawing on resources from recent work in situated affectivity. I will argue that public statues can be understood as affective artifacts and that this can both help us understand both the deep affective wrongs caused by public statues and offer a possible explanation as to why some people are so strongly opposed to their removal.

**Keywords** Commemoration · Statues · Situated affectivity · Affective technology · Public art · Affective injustice · Emotional imperialism · Ethics of statues · Politics of statues · Affective scaffolding

## 1 Introduction

In June 2020, a group of Black Lives Matter Protestors in Bristol, England pulled down a statue of slave trader Edward Colston that had stood in a prominent position in the city center and threw it into the river at Bristol Harbor. This was a striking example of a wider international phenomenon of campaigns to remove memorials promoting a racist world view. For example, in 2015 the Rhodes Must Fall campaign in Cape Town, South Africa, successfully campaigned for the removal of a statue to the British Colonialist Cecil Rhodes which occupied a prominent place at the University of Cape Town. In the United States, over 160 memorials to the Confederate States of America have been taken down by or in response to protesters. Most of these removals have taken place since 2015.

These high-profile public campaigns by anti-racist campaigners to remove statues has provoked significant public debate about the ethics of removing or preserving public statues that honor those who played a key role in oppression.

In relation to Colston's statue, for example, Bristol West MP, Thangam Debbonaire claimed that Bristol "should not be honouring people who benefitted from slavery" (BBC News 2018). In contrast, the UK Prime Minister of the time, Boris Johnson, argued that statues of slave traders should not be taken down as this "would be to lie about our history" (Walker et al. 2020).

Alongside these public debates, there has also been a significant increase in philosophical attention to these issues. On the one hand, several philosophers have argued that at least some such statues should be removed (Burch-Brown 2017; Frowe 2019; Schulz 2019; Timmerman 2020; Archer and Matheson 2021; Abrahams 2022; Fox 2023), while others have argued that vandalizing such monuments is morally permissible and perhaps even morally required (Lai 2020; Lim 2020a, b; Bell 2022). On the other hand, others have argued that many such statues ought to be preserved (Demetriou and Wingo 2018; Demetriou 2020).

My aim in this paper will not be to settle these debates but to add a new theoretical perspective to this discussion which, I will argue, can provide a deeper understanding of both how public statues can wrong and the attachment that many people feel towards them. Until now, most of the philosophical literature focused on understanding the ways public statues can wrong has focused on understanding statues as forms of speech. While this speech act approach provides a useful starting point for thinking about what may be

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wrong with such statues, I will argue that we can get a fuller understanding of these wrongs by drawing on resources from recent work in situated affectivity. I will argue that public statues can be understood as affective artifacts and that this can both help us understand both the deep affective harms that statues can cause and offers a possible explanation as to why some people are so strongly opposed to their removal. While my main focus will be on racist public statues (statues honoring those who have played a key role in racist oppression), my analysis will have broader implications for public statues more generally.

I will begin, in Sect. 2, by outlining existing attempts to understand the wrongs of statues in terms of speech act theory. I will then, in Sect. 3, argue that although this approach provides important insights into the how statues may wrong, it also faces important limitations. In Sect. 4, I will propose an alternative, complementary approach to understanding the harms of statues that draws on recent work in situated affectivity to argue that public statues should be seen as affective technologies. I will then, in Sect. 5, argue that this approach provides important insights into the nature of the wrongs caused by statues by arguing that public statues can constitute a form of affective injustice. Finally, in Sect. 6, I will explore the practical implications of this analysis for what it would take to successfully recontextualize a public statue.

## 2 Statues, Wrongs and Speech Acts

Much of the existing philosophical work on the ethics of public statues has focused on articulating exactly what the moral problem is with such statues (if any) and then using this to draw conclusions about what we should do with such statues. For my purposes here, I am interested in those who have argued that public statues that celebrate those involved in oppression wrong oppressed groups and the explanation these philosophers have given of how statues wrong. There are two broad approaches to understanding the nature of this wrong.<sup>1</sup>

One approach to articulating the wrongs involved in racist statues is to appeal to the *harm* that is caused to oppressed groups. Burch-Brown 2017, for example, argues that two kinds of harm can give us reason to remove racist

statues. First, the harms such statues do to historical victims of white supremacy through failing to tell the truth about their oppression. Second, the harms done to present day people through supporting harmful ideologies and social structures by keeping symbols of white supremacy in prominent positions in public spaces. Similarly, Timmerman (2020) argues that we have a duty to remove Confederate monuments because of the psychological suffering that these monuments cause to groups of people who do not deserve it, particularly those groups have suffered the most from white supremacy. Finally, Archer and Matheson (2021, 40–45) argue that public honors such as public statues can harm those who have been victimized by the person being honored and the victims of similar wrongs, by discouraging them from speaking out against those who have wronged them.

The second broad approach to understanding the wrongs of racist statues is in terms of *disrespect*. Schulz (2019), for example, argues that public statues can violate a duty of recognition respect by expressing support for an ideology linked to the oppression of a group of people. Similarly, Ten-Herng Lai (2020) argues that statues of oppressors express disrespect through a process of what he calls ‘derogatory pedestalling’. The basic idea here is that the placing of oppressors on a pedestal only makes sense if we accept a background view that holds their victims to be inferior beings. Finally, Chong-Ming Lim (2020b, 191–192) argues that such statues are not only disrespectful to those affected by oppression but can also serve as a standing threat to their status as equal members of society. These two groups of views need not be seen as rivals. We could accept that statues are wrong both because they are harmful and because they are disrespectful.

Both these views articulate important objections to public statues that celebrate those involved in oppression, but both face a common question: How do these statues cause these kinds of wrong? Philosophers have responded to this question by drawing on speech act theory and philosophy of language.<sup>2</sup> We can, for example, draw on J. L. Austin’s speech act theory to distinguish different ways in which statues may be seen as “speech-like”. Austin distinguished between three types of speech act. The locutionary act is the basic act of speech which expresses certain representational content. A statue may be seen as a locutionary act as it may represent a particular person as worthy of honor or admiration (Rossi 2020; Archer and Matheson 2021). For example, the written message on the memorial to the Scottish minister and religious reformer John Knox which stands in Glasgow’s Necropolis explicitly states that it is intended to

<sup>1</sup> The two approaches I cover here do not cover all the analyses of the wrongs of public statues found in the philosophical literature. For example, Abrahams (2022) claims that such statues can wrong members of oppressed groups through committing ontic injustice, while Frowe (2019) argues for a duty to remove statues of those who have committed serious rights violations on the basis of a duty to repudiate and condemn wrongdoing. Burch-Brown (2017) also articulates a number of arguments for the removal of statues including but not limited to harm and respect based arguments.

<sup>2</sup> For an extended defence of the claim that visual artworks (such as statues) perform speech acts, see Dixon (2019).

express gratitude and inspire admiration.<sup>3</sup> The illocutionary act is the type of action performed by that utterance. There are various kinds of action that a statue which represents someone as admirable may perform. First, it may not only represent someone as honorable but also involve the act of *commemorating, honoring or glorifying* that person (Dixon 2022, 413; Shahvisi 2021, 459). This act can be further broken down into a *declaration* of the figure's virtues and a *request* that people attend to these virtues (Shahvisi 2021, 460). Statues may also *enact certain permissibility facts* (Friedell and Liao 2022, 449). For instance, a statue honoring a particular figure may prohibit disrespectful acts such as defacing the statue. Finally, the perlocutionary act is the effect that the speech has on the audience. Arianna Shahvisi argues that the perlocutionary effect of racist public statues is “to contribute to the marginalization of particular social groups by ignoring their oppression or relegating it to a mere footnote” (Shahvisi 2021, 461).

### 3 Uses and Limitations of Speech Act Theory

This focus on speech act theory allows us to appreciate that the wrongs involved in public statues are not limited to the representational content of these statues. As well as paying attention to what a statue might express, we should also pay attention to what that statue does and what the effects of that action are. This in turn can encourage a refocusing of our attention from what the statue was originally intended to express to the effects it is having in the present (Friedell and Liao 2022, 449). In addition, it can clarify the value of recontextualizing statues. Doing so may not change what the statue represents but it may change the illocutionary nature of the speech act. In allowing a statue to fall into ruin and disrepair, for example, we may not change what is represented by the statue but we may affect its ability to honor that person (Friedell and Liao 2022, 448).

Understanding statues as speech acts also encourages researchers to draw on other resources from the philosophy of language to understand the ways in which public statues may wrong. One way in which statues often speak indirectly is by appealing to presuppositions or background assumptions (Tsai 2016). This form of speech appeals to ideas that are assumed to already be a part of the commonly accepted common ground that speakers and hearers all accept (Langton and West 1999). These presuppositions can be hard to detect as they are smuggled into the conversation without being stated explicitly. It is, though, possible to challenge

the presuppositions by asking the speaker to explicitly justify it (Langton 2018). Lai (2020) argues that understanding statues as speech acts that work through presupposition allows us to see the importance of challenging these presuppositions and that vandalizing such statues can be an important form of counter-speech against the harmful speech of racist public statues. Similarly, Daisy Dixon argues that both protest and decisions made by curators can bring these presuppositions to the fore and serve to “block” or “reject” them (Dixon 2022, 415–416).

Similarly, Shahvisi (2021) argues that statues can be understood as sharing important features with slurring speech acts. Slurs are speech acts that serve to belittle, demean, humiliate, and express contempt towards their targets. Slurs do so by drawing on existing ideologies which hold certain groups to fitting targets of such attitudes and by doing so degrade their targets and reinforce these ideologies. A noticeable feature of at least some slurs is that they may continue to play this harmful role even when they are mentioned rather than used (Bolinger 2017; Pullum 2018). Even mentioning the ‘n-word’, for example, might be emotionally jarring and offensive. Similarly, contextualizing a statue by adding an explanatory plaque might be seen as similar to mentioning rather than using a slur. While it may diminish the harm or disrespect caused by the statue, it may nevertheless bring up and help to reinforce the same harmful ideologies that the statue appealed to prior to recontextualization.

However, in thinking about how statues wrong we should not limit ourselves to considering statues as objects that can be used to perform speech acts. As those working in the philosophy of technology have long understood, there are many ways in which artifacts can wrong that are unrelated to the wrongs of speech (Winner 1980; Radder 2009; Verbeek 2011). Most relevantly for my purposes, Shen-yi Liao and Bryce Huebner have recently argued that for the existence of “oppressive things” by which they mean “material artifacts and spatial environments that are in congruence with an oppressive system” (Liao and Huebner 2021, 94). The focus of their discussion is not on how artifacts may wrong in similar ways to wrongful speech but on how they may be oppressive in the ways they “shape thought and action” (Liao and Huebner 2021, 101). Drawing on this Ten Hergn Lai has argued that objectionable commemorations like public statues can function as oppressive things by hindering “efforts to establish connections to significant parts of the past” for members of marginalized groups (Lai 2022). In particular, Lai argues that commemorations can play an important role in enabling people to “connect to the past affectively and aesthetically” (Lai 2022, 8). This suggests that we should not limit ourselves to looking to speech act theory when thinking about how statues wrong.

<sup>3</sup> The text begins: “To testify Gratitude for inestimable Services in the Cause of Religion, Education, and Civil Liberty; To awaken Admiration Of that Integrity, Disinterestedness, and Courage, Which stood unshaken in the midst of Trials.”

This is not meant as a criticism of speech act theory in general or even of using it to analyze the wrongs of public statues. Rather it is a reason to not *only* use speech act theory to analyse these wrongs but to also draw on other philosophical resources. Of course, this point is most convincingly made by showing the benefits that arise from drawing on these other resources rather than asserting that such benefits will arise. The remainder of this paper will take on this task.

#### 4 Statues as Affective Artifacts

Situated affectivity is an approach to our affective lives inspired by situated approaches to cognition. Situated cognition is a theoretical approach that holds that cognitive processes take place through deeply entwined interactions between a person and their environment. Rather than simply taking information from the environment as inputs to the cognitive system, people interact with their environments as part of a cognitive process. For example, in the computer game Tetris players must find a place on a grid to fit falling blocks of varying shapes which can be moved and rotated by the player. Rather than mentally rotating these blocks to find the best place for them, players will often physically rotate them on the screen, as this is a more efficient and reliable process for selecting the best strategy (Kirsh and Maglio 1994). This theoretical approach has led to the lively interdisciplinary ‘4E’ research program (Newen et al. 2018). So called because it explores the ways in which cognition is embodied, embedded, extended, and enacted (I explain these terms below).

Similarly, situated affectivity holds that emotions, feelings and other affective responses do not arise simply from mental processes but from complex interactions between agents and their environments (Stephan and Walter 2020; Walter and Stephan 2023). Inspired by situated cognition, this work has also emphasized how our affective lives also fit the 4E approach. First, our affective lives are *embodied*, meaning that affect arises from complex interactions from bodily sensations and actions and the environment and that affective processes do not only take place in the head but also in other parts of our bodies (Fuchs and Koch 2014; Hufendiek 2016; Colombetti and Zavala 2019). Second, our affective lives are *embedded*, meaning that affective experience arises out of an interaction with our social, cultural and physical context which scaffolds certain affective experiences (Griffiths and Scarantino 2009; Wilutzky 2015). Third, our affective lives are *enacted*, meaning that emotions are not simply passive states that represent a pre-given world but rather active processes of sense-making that arise out of dynamic interactions between an organism and its environment (Colombetti 2014; Slaby 2016). Finally, some

claim that these three features of affectivity give us reason to accept that emotions are also *extended*, meaning that affective phenomena are not restricted to the body but can extend to parts of the external world (Colombetti and Roberts 2015; Carter et al. 2016; Krueger and Szanto 2016). For my purposes, I will focus on the embedded nature of affectivity and set aside these other aspects of the 4E approach to affectivity.

An important starting point for thinking about situated affectivity is what Griffiths and Scarantino (2009, 444) refer to as “emotional technologies”. Griffiths and Scarantino give several examples of such technologies. Prozac, for example, is a drug used by people with depression to try to bring about more positive affective states. Think too, of the range of ways in which the right affective states are generated during wedding celebrations (Parkinson et al. 2005). The setting is arranged in ways designed to put people in a celebratory mood, alcoholic drinks may be provided to make people cheerful and sociable, celebratory music is played and various rituals are performed to help ensure that everyone attending the wedding is in the right affective state.

Building on this work, a growing body of research has investigated the ways in which we scaffold our environments to manage our affective lives. Sabrina Coninx and Achim Stephan define scaffolding as “the use or structuring of environmental entities (the scaffold) to enable, support, enhance or regulate a certain activity (the scaffolded)” (Coninx and Stephan 2021, 43). Affective scaffolding refers to the use of environmental entities to scaffold affective experiences (Colombetti and Krueger 2015; Maiese and Hanna 2019; Coninx and Stephan 2021). The material world provides us with various resources we can draw on to help bring about certain affective states. Someone who is stressed before an important job interview, for example, can listen to relaxing music on their smartphone to bring about a feeling of calm. In doing so, they delegate the task of emotion regulation to the music (Krueger 2014). We can also use other people to help us achieve certain affective experiences by, for example, hanging out with a hilarious, fun-loving, party animal friend when we want to have some fun or calling a friend who is sympathetic and a good-listener when we need a shoulder to cry on (Colombetti and Krueger 2015).

While these cases involve the use of other people as affective scaffolds, my interest is in affective artifacts. These are objects that have been created or modified with the aim of scaffolding certain affective experiences (Piredda 2020). For example, someone may use a photograph from their past to foster feelings of happiness or nostalgia, or a wedding ring to scaffold feelings of love for their spouse (Piredda 2020, 551). In these cases, these artifacts are being deliberately used to scaffold certain affective responses.

Affective niche construction refers to the various ways in which people manipulate their environment in order to support and enhance their affective lives, which in turn impact on their own behaviour (Colombetti and Krueger 2015; Saarinen 2020). The term niche construction comes from biology, in which it refers to the ways in which organisms manipulate their environment to support their chances of survival whilst also impacting on their own behaviour and that of their offspring. For example, in constructing dams, beavers shape their environment in ways that have a significant impact on the local ecosystem and that improve their own chances of survival (Odling-Smee et al. 2003). Similarly, affective niche construction is the way in which we manipulate the external world to scaffold our affective lives. For example, someone may lay out their living room in such a way to make them feel at home and to help them feel relaxed, while their workspace is designed in a way to make them feel focused and professional (Krueger 2020). Here, affective niche construction involves manipulating the material environment, but it can also involve manipulating the social environment. Someone who forms friendships in a city they have just moved to, for example, is changing their social environment in ways that will help them to feel at home.

However, the situatedness of our affective lives impacts us in ways that go beyond our use of certain features of the environment to bring about desired affective states for ourselves. Slaby (2016) refers to this as “the user-resource model” of situated affectivity. We also find ourselves embedded in environments that can significantly influence our affective lives in ways that go against our interests and desires, which Slaby (2016) calls “the mind-invasion model”. A key element of this model is the recognition that:

Socially instituted structures of feeling, concretely realized in domain-specific ways in technological infrastructures and affective interaction routines, affective styles and compartments of domain members, exert far-reaching structuring effects upon those that dwell in those domains. (Slaby 2016, 11)

Suppose someone starts working at a major corporation. On their first day they may feel out of place in the way the particular corporate culture of the organization influences the affective lives of those who work there: the way people express emotions, the norms for who is allowed to express what kinds of emotions in what context, the way people are encouraged to emotionally engage with each other and so on. After several years of working there, however, the worker may find that they have fully internalized the affective style of the corporation and that ways of affectively engaging with others that once seemed strange and alienating now come naturally to them. In this case, the corporation has “hacked” the subjectivity of the worker, by altering

their mode of affectively engaging with the world in ways that promote the goals of the company rather than those of the worker (Slaby 2016, 9). In cases of mind invasion, the environment impacts our affectivity in ways that go against our interests. Mind invasion is not limited to contexts like the workplace but also takes place at a wider level through the shaping of our minds by ideologies and social institutions (Maiese and Hanna 2019).

For my purposes, there are four distinct and important questions we might ask in relation to affective artifacts. First, we can ask who is designing or modifying the artifact to bring about the intended affective effects? Second, whose affective life is being scaffolded? Third, whose interests is the scaffolding intended to promote? Fourth, what kind of affective experiences are being scaffolded? In many examples of affective artifacts, the answer to these first three questions will be the same person. For example, someone who takes a photograph of a memorable moment for their own later enjoyment is designing the artifact to scaffold their own affective experiences in ways intended to promote their interests. In other cases, someone may design an artifact to scaffold other people’s affective lives (Coninx and Stephan 2021, 49). Someone who designs a child’s cuddly toy, for example, is designing an artifact aimed to scaffold children’s affective lives. Here, the aim (presumably) is to promote positive affective experiences for the children who are given the toy in ways that promote the children’s interests, while also generating a profit for the designer and manufacturer.

In other cases, affective artifacts might be designed to promote the interests of the designer in ways that are intended or foreseen to have a negative impact on the scaffolded. For example, a Mosquito alarm is a device designed to emit an unpleasant, high-pitched noise that is only audible to young people used to discourage young people from gathering in a particular space. This is a way of generating unpleasant affective responses in young people that is designed to promote the interests of those who have purchased the device rather than the young people whose affective lives will be influenced by it.<sup>4</sup> Here the negative impact on the wellbeing of the scaffolded is brought about by the scaffolding of negative affective experiences. But the interests of the scaffolded could also be undermined through the scaffolding of positive emotional experiences, such as gambling systems designed by Casinos to promote “a state of absorbed engagement” in users to keep them playing as long as possible (Timms and Spurrett 2023, 65). Here the scaffolding promotes the interests of the Casino and is likely to undermine the interests of the user, though it does so by creating positive affective experiences in the user.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of this form of scaffolding see Osler et al. (Forthcoming).



These concepts help us to see how public statues function as affective artifacts that can have very different affective impacts for different groups of people. Statues are artifacts designed to scaffold affective responses. Statues celebrating those involved in racist oppression can scaffold feelings of white pride or belonging for White people. Michelle Maiese, for example, argues that US confederate statues “provide opportunities for white attachment and feelings of pride and belonging” and may also “conjure up feelings of nostalgia for a time when people of color assumed their ‘proper place’” (Maiese 2022, 910). This helps to reinforce what Ahmed (2007, 154) describes as the sense of Whiteness as a “positive residence”, by which she means a sense of being at home and belonging in White spaces. Statues of slave traders and colonialists in public spaces, mark these spaces out as White spaces and scaffold these feelings of belonging for White people in these spaces. These forms of scaffolding form part of a wider project of white supremacist affective niche construction, in which the social and material environment is modified to scaffold feelings of belonging for white people.<sup>5</sup>

To see how this works, it is helpful to consider a concrete example. From the 1930s until the end of their colonial rule in the 1970s, the colonial Portuguese Authorities engaged in an intense period of commemoration in Angola. Key colonial figures were memorialized through statues, such as the statue commemorating Salvador Correia, who re-conquered Angolan for Portugal from the Dutch in 1648. These monuments play several important affective roles for Portuguese settlers.

First, they scaffolded feelings of belonging and security among the settlers, who may feel disorientated when they first arrive in Angola. Seeing statues celebrating Portuguese heroes can help support feelings that Angola was simply an extension of Portugal. Indeed, as the historian Jeremy Ball argues, one of the key aims for these statues was to create a sense among settlers that the Portuguese settlement of Angola was “inevitable and natural” (Ball 2018, 77).

Second, these statues supported feelings of pride that these settlers felt about being Portuguese and about the colonial project. As Ball describes, statues and other forms of commemoration did so by encouraging settlers “to focus on the heroic aspects of Portuguese national identity and the

nation-state’s conquest of foreign lands and peoples, without consideration of costs or victims,” (Ball 2018, 80).

Third, these monuments scaffold a lack of affective engagement with the moral horror of colonial conquest. Through building statues celebrating colonial heroes, the Portuguese colonial authorities could scaffold positive affective experiences for the settlers and help to reduce painful confrontations with the brutal impacts of colonial rule on the indigenous population. In outlining his concept of white ignorance, a pattern of ignorance that arises out of racist social practices, Charles Mills makes clear that *moral ignorance* is an important part of White ignorance (Mills 2007, 22). These monuments help to facilitate this moral ignorance, and so also a sense of innocence, which Wekker (2016) calls ‘white innocence’, by helping settlers to avoid affectively engaging with the horrors of colonial violence. These monuments may also play an important role in maintaining a sense of self. As Piredda argues, affective artifacts can play an important role in scaffolding one’s sense of self and she explicitly mentions how public monuments can be understood as “extended parts of the self” (Piredda 2020, 555). In all these ways, these statues serve to scaffold positive affective experiences for the settlers and form part of a wider project of settler affective niche construction.<sup>6</sup> This may explain why some people are fiercely opposed to the removal of such statues, as they play a key role in the scaffolding their affective lives and in perhaps even in maintaining their sense of self.

However, these statues had a very different impact on the colonized population. As Frantz Fanon explains, statues celebrating colonialists served as a brutal reminder of colonial violence to colonized people: “Every statue, whether of Faidherbe or of Lyautey, of Bugeaud or of Sergeant Blandan—all these conquistadors perched on colonial soil do not cease from proclaiming one and the same thing: ‘We are here by the force of bayonets.’” (Fanon 1963, 84). These statues, then, will likely provoke negative affective responses such as fear and anxiety for those who have been on the receiving end of colonial violence, either through having had that violence inflicted on oneself or one’s friends or family or simply through living one’s life under the fear of such violence.<sup>7</sup>

Importantly, this affective impact may occur even for those who reject the message communicated by such statues, that the colonialists are heroic or admirable. First, these

<sup>5</sup> Maiese uses Schuetze’s term ‘affective milieu’ (Schuetze 2021) to refer to this societal level form of what Slaby et al. refer to as an “affective arrangement” that is the way in which “affect is patterned, channelled, and modulated in recurrent and repeatable ways” (Slaby et al. 2019, 5). For further work examining the ways in affective relations are part of white supremacy see (Fanon 1952; Hook 2005; Zembylas 2018). See also (Yancy 2008; Al-Saji 2014; Sullivan 2015; Ngo 2016) for discussions of the connections between bodily habits and racialized perceptions.

<sup>6</sup> Compare with Coninx and Stephan’s discussion of mind-shaping at the “sociogenetic scale” (Coninx and Stephan 2021, 58).

<sup>7</sup> It is possible that the statues may inspire some feelings of admiration amongst the colonized. This would also function as a form of mind invasion, albeit one that goes through positive rather than negative emotions, as the affective experiences of the colonized are being scaffolded by colonialists in ways that serve the interests of the colonizer.

statues themselves are a statement of force. The fact that these statues have been erected is itself a clear statement that it is the colonizer who gets to impose their will on the public space and that they are able to do so because they are backed by military force. Second, statues of military figures may provoke anxiety and fear amongst those who have been subjected to colonial violence simply in virtue of the fact that they are depicting those responsible for the terror inflicted on local populations. Visual representations do not need to alter people's beliefs to have such impacts, a depiction of a terrifying monster may provoke fear even in those that know that such monsters are imaginary. These representations of the agents of colonial violence, then, may provoke immediate, visceral reactions of fear amongst those who have been subject to this violence, without influencing their beliefs about the legitimacy or the extent of this violence. These feelings of fear advance the interests of the colonizer by promoting obedience and discouraging resistance among the colonized.

These colonial statues, then, may function as a form of mind invasion. The affective experiences of the colonized are hacked by the colonial force to bring about feelings of fear and anxiety in public spaces. This promotes the interests of the colonizer rather than the colonized, as it is likely to make the colonized population easier to command and control. Of course, it is worth noting that this mind invasion will not always be successful, as the statues may instead provoke feelings of anger and hatred which may motivate rebellion. As Fanon (1963, 84) notes, the fact violence that lies behind colonial statues can make it clear to the colonized that the only way to get rid of the colonizer is through violence. When successful, though, these statues will scaffold positive affective experiences for the settlers and negative experiences for the colonized.

The affective impact of racist statues can live on long past their initial construction. As Charles Mills has argued, US Confederate monuments and statues serve to impose a form of collective memory on public space that supports a historical narrative which erases the violence suffered by Native Americans and Black Americans (Mills 2007, 31). This enables White Americans to engage in what James Loewen (Loewen 2008, 131) calls a "feel-good history for whites", in which they can continue to accept the comforting historical narrative of innocent White discovery and settlement, rather than having to confront the painful reality of White brutality and violence. This, in turn, helps White Americans to ignore their own privileged position in the present (Mills 2007, 31). These statues, then, play a role in scaffolding positive affective experiences for White Americans and may be key to maintaining their sense of themselves as innocent.

The same statues scaffold negative affective experiences for Black Americans and so function as a form of mind

invasion. Anthropologist Chelsy Carter describes the way Confederate Statues impact her affective experiences: "As a black woman, every time I pass a Confederate monument I am offended. I am not only reminded of my ancestors who gave their lives fighting for my freedom, but I am insulted by the fact that the city and country that I love continue to honor a violent faction of the country that devalued my life" (Carter 2018, 140). Carter argues that this negative affective impact has negative consequences for her health and, as a result, that "These monuments are part of an urban infrastructure that is violent and deleterious to Black and brown people" (Carter and Mickel 2020).

Public statues, then, are affective artifacts that scaffold affective experiences in public places. This scaffolding will often function differently for different groups of people. For some people, statues may scaffold positive experiences such as belonging and comfort, while for others these statues will provoke fear and anxiety. As such, public statues can be part of how one group of people engage in affective niche construction, whilst also functioning as a form of mind invasion for others.

This approach to analyzing public statues has several advantages over analyses that draw on speech act theory alone. Analyzing public statues as a form of affective technology which scaffolds affective experiences moves our focus beyond thinking about how statues may be used to perform speech acts and pushes us to consider the affective impacts of these statues. This is important, as these statues can have affective impacts on people who reject the message communicated by such statues, as they can provoke bodily responses that may not neatly correspond with people's cognitive judgements. This point can help us to understand both the harms of such statues and their appeal. Statues can harm people by provoking harmful affective responses such as fear and anxiety. These affective responses may be triggered even in those who reject the message communicated by the statue. On the other hand, statues can also trigger positive affective experiences such as feelings of belonging and security. These feelings may explain why some people have a positive feeling of attachment to public statues and hence their opposition to their removal.

Moreover, this analysis may also help us understand the effectiveness of statues as forms of communication. Statues can be a particularly affectively impactful way of performing speech acts that have a visceral impact on people. This can help us understand why statues are a particularly forceful way to perform certain speech acts. Looking beyond speech act theory, then, can also help to improve the speech act analysis of how public statues wrong.

Finally, focusing on the affective impacts that statues have promotes a different way for philosophers to look at debates around controversial statues. A speech act analysis

pushes us to focus on the kind of speech act being performed by the statue and the harmfulness or disrespect of the speech act. In contrast, analyzing statues as forms of affective technology, with different affective impacts on different groups, pushes us to consider whose affective experiences are being prioritized in public space. As I will argue in the next two sections, this has both theoretical implications concerning how to conceptualize the way in which public statues can wrong and practical implications for how we should respond to these wrongs.

## 5 Public Statues and Affective Injustice

In prioritizing one group's affective experiences over another, public statues may engage in a form of affective injustice. The term affective injustice has been coined recently to refer to forms of injustice that people face specifically in their capacity as affective beings (Archer and Mills 2019). This may involve denying uptake to certain people's emotions (Whitney 2018), placing emotional obstacles that certain people must overcome before being listened to (Srinivasan 2018), or the unfair imposition of one group's emotional norms on another (Archer and Matheson 2022).

In the first attempt to provide an overarching theory of affective injustice, Francisco Gallegos argues that an affective injustice is, "a state in which individuals or groups are deprived of "affective goods" which are owed to them" (Gallegos 2021, 186). Gallegos proposes two fundamental forms of affective goods. First, subjective well-being, which can be understood as the extent to which someone experiences positive affective states rather than negative ones and has a positive affective evaluation of oneself and one's life (Gallegos 2021, 190). Second, emotional aptness, which involves one's affective experiences being a fitting and accurate response to how the world (Gallegos 2021, 192).

Bringing together this account with the analysis in the previous section makes clear how the ways in which public statues scaffold affective experience can constitute a form of affective injustice. Racist public statues, such as US Confederate statues or Portuguese Colonial statues in Angola, scaffold positive affective experiences of belonging and security among White Americans and Portuguese settlers and negative affective experiences of fear and anxiety amongst Black Americans and Angolans. If we think that it is unfair to systematically prioritize the affective experiences of one group of citizens over another in public space<sup>8</sup>, then in prioritizing the subjective well-being of one group over another, these statues unfairly deprive the latter group of affective goods which they can legitimately claim to be owed.

Moreover, racist public statues are likely to contribute to what Gallegos (2021, 194) calls "Affect-related testimonial injustice", which is the silencing, smothering or lack of uptake given to someone's affective responses. Given that racist public statues can serve as a way for White Americans to avoid affectively engaging with the history of slavery and the reality of present-day racism, they may also make it harder for those who express their anger about racism in America to be taken seriously. When this happens, this may deprive people of the apt affective engagement to which they are due and so constitute an affective injustice.

Finally, public statues may constitute a form of emotional imperialism. Archer and Matheson use this term to refer to the domination of the emotional lives of one community by another. (Archer and Matheson 2023). Drawing on Michael Thompson's account of domination, Archer and Matheson hold that emotional imperialism can involve both *extractive domination*, where the dominant extract emotional benefits from the dominated, and *constitutive domination*, where the dominant shape the emotional norms, values and practices in ways that legitimate hierarchical relationships (Thompson 2018; Archer and Matheson 2023). The cases of public statues I discussed in the previous section involve both kinds of dominance. Imposing one group's affective norms on another, such as when colonial authorities build statues celebrating colonizers on colonial territory that scaffold certain affective responses is part of a wider process by which colonial powers engage in constitutive dominance by shaping the affective life of the community in ways that legitimate the hierarchical, colonial relationship. This will also constitute extractive dominance, as these statues are intended to extract emotional benefits for the colonizers at the expense of the colonized. The same arguments apply to contemporary examples of racist statues which scaffold positive experiences such as belonging and comfort for white people while scaffolding fear and anxiety in others and in doing so sustains the White ignorance and White innocence that helps to maintain white supremacy. These arguments are also likely to apply to other public statues which scaffold affective experiences in ways that legitimate different forms of societal hierarchy.

Using tools from situated affectivity to analyze public statues, then, allows us to see how public statues may constitute various forms of affective injustice. In doing so, it can provide a fuller theoretical understanding of how public statues may wrong. This provides some guidance for thinking how to ethically assess contested statues. A useful starting point when evaluating a public statue is to return to the questions about scaffolding I outlined in Sect. 4. We can ask who the scaffolders are and whose affective experiences they intend to scaffold? This question points towards who is in a position of control over others' affective experiences.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the right to public space see (Kukla 2021).



We can also ask what kinds of affective experiences are being scaffolded (positive or negative) and whose interests the scaffolding is likely to advance. The answers to these questions will not settle the issue of what should be done about a contested statue but will provide a useful starting point for discussion. Suppose, for example, we discover that a public statue is scaffolding affect in a way that advances one group's interests while undermining another's. A statue to a gay icon, for example, may foster feelings of belonging amongst LGBTQ+ people but lead to feelings of disgust from homophobic people. The fact that this statue advances positive affective experiences for some people and negative experiences for others does not by itself mean that there is an ethical problem with this statue. To settle this issue we would need to know (amongst other things) whether some people's affective experiences are being *unfairly* prioritized over others. To answer this issue it is likely to be important to consider whose affective experiences are generally prioritized in a particular community and whether a particular statue exacerbates or reduces existing inequalities here.

## 6 Recontextualizing Statues

This analysis also has practical implications for how we may respond to the wrongs of public statues. One proposal for responding to these wrongs, that has been advocated both by philosophers (e.g. Demetriou and Wingo 2018) and by the public, is to recontextualize these statues to change what they communicate.<sup>9</sup> One might, for example, add a plaque to a statue commemorating a slave trader that explains the full extent of their involvement in the slave trade and the many lives that were ruined as a result. Alternatively, one might erect a statue commemorating the life of a slave or someone who campaigned against slavery in close vicinity, to change the message of the statue. Beyond these institutional responses, these statues could also be recontextualized through acts of vandalism which may block the speech acts being performed.<sup>10</sup>

While far from settling the ethics of this response, the analysis of statues as affective technologies does point towards what it would take for this response to succeed. For a recontextualizing strategy to successfully address a statue's affective wrongs, the strategy would need to alter the affective impact of the statue. This is important, as some recontextualizing strategies might successfully alter

the literal message being communicated by a statue without altering the affective impact that the statue has on those who see it. For example, a contextualizing plaque that makes clear the many lives ruined by the person depicted in the statue may change how we should interpret the message being communicated by the statue.<sup>11</sup> However, if the statue continues to have the same affective impact on those who perceive it, then the affective wrongs of the statue will not have been addressed. Those seeking to recontextualize statues must consider not only how to change the message being communicated by those statues but also their affective impact.<sup>12</sup> One example of this being done successfully is when Rhodes Must Fall protestors threw faeces at a statue of Rhodes, transforming the statue into a disgusting and repulsive artifact, even for those who had previously found it positive (Knudsen and Andersen 2019). A less extreme example would be placing blood on the hands of a statue celebrating a colonial leader, which may reduce the extent to which the statue scaffolds feelings of White innocence. While there is no guarantee that any such strategy will succeed, attending to the affective impact is an important task for any attempt to recontextualize a contested statue.

## 7 Conclusion

In summary, I have argued that by analyzing public statues as a form of affective technology we can get a fuller understanding of the ways in which public statues can wrong. I started by exploring the various ways in which people have used speech act theory to analyze the wrongs of racist statues. While these approaches provide a useful starting point, I argued that in analyzing how statues wrong we should not limit ourselves to considering statues as objects that can be used to perform speech acts. I then drew on resources from situated affectivity to analyze the function of public statues. I argued that public statues can function as affective artefacts that scaffold affective experiences and play an important role in affective niche construction. Divisive public statues, such as racist statues, may scaffold different affective responses for members of different communities. For instance, while Confederate statues may scaffold positive affective experiences for White Americans, they are likely to provoke negative affective reactions among Black Americans and so function as a hostile form of mind invasion. While my focus so far has been on statues celebrating White supremacists, it is worth noting that this analysis extends

<sup>9</sup> Though it is worth noting that there is some debate in aesthetics concerning whether the meaning of an artwork (such as a statue) can change. For discussion of this issue see (Davies 2006; Levinson 1990; Dixon 2019).

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of how this blocking works and the ethics of vandalizing commemorations see (Dixon 2022; Lai 2020; Lim 2020a, b).

<sup>11</sup> Though we may be sceptical about whether this really does change the message that is communicated.

<sup>12</sup> While they may not put it in exactly these terms, the basic point here has long been appreciated by activists who have found creative ways to undermine the affective impact of statues.

beyond this. We could also apply this analysis to other divisive public statues, such as the public statues that were erected in the Soviet Union.

Analyzing public statues in this way is useful, as it moves our focus beyond the message that such statues communicate and pushes us to consider the affective impacts of these statues. This is theoretically helpful, as it encourages us to approach the ethical issues here from the perspective of whose affective experiences are being prioritized in public space. Thinking about statues in this way allows us to see how public statues may involve various forms of affective injustice. Thinking about the affective impact of statues is also useful for thinking about what is needed to successfully recontextualize a statue. To avoid the affective wrongs associated with statues, recontextualizing must successfully alter the affective impact of statues, not just the communicated message or the kind of speech act being performed.<sup>13</sup>

**Data availability** Not applicable.

## Declarations

**Competing interests** Not applicable.

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