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## lady rosa of luxembourg, or, is the age of female allegory really bygone?

● *The allegories are 'female' because only the images of women - who stay outside (economic and state) competition - were appropriate to embody the imagined community's interests.*

Silke Wenk, "Die steirneren Frauen," 1987.<sup>1</sup>

*What is socially peripheral is often symbolically central, and if we ignore or minimize inversion and other forms of cultural negation, we often fail to understand the dynamics of the symbolic process generally.*

Barbara Babcock cited in Elisabeth Bronfen, "Weiblichkeit und Repräsentation" 1995<sup>2</sup>

The public project by Sanja Iveković, *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg*, was realized in Spring 2001 within the exhibition *Luxembourg et les Luxembourgeois*, organized by Musée d' Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg and Casino Luxembourg - Forum for Contemporary Art. As this exhibition ultimately dealt with national identity and self-representation, Iveković was one of several foreign artists invited to proffer an 'outsider's' view on Luxembourg, its present and its past. She decided to rephrase the local memorial, *Le monument de memoire* (1923), topped with a gilded figure of Nike, female allegory of Victory, known in Luxembourg as the *Gelle Fra* (Golden Woman). Making a replica of the national icon of Luxembourg, Iveković conceived another version of the monument whereby she introduced three crucial interventions: she dedicated her temporary monument to Rosa Luxembourg, turned the figure of *Gelle Fra* into a pregnant woman, and presented a text composed of a number of seemingly unrelated words, running around the monument's socle. All of these three feminist "corrections", but especially the text (to which I will return later on), generated an enormous political scandal in the Luxembourg community and caused violent, even hysterical, 'patriotic' reactions to take place in the public sphere, where the 'inviolability' of collective memory and 'endangered' national identity were discussed not only during the time of the exhibition (31 March till 3 June 2001), but also much later. On the one hand, *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg* created something which contemporary public art sometimes does and this is the phenomenon that could be called

"public as sculpture": a cultural space in which all the 'users' of that space could raise their voice. On the other, with her *Lady Rosa*, Sanja Iveković, a foreigner, triggered in Luxemburg an intense (public, that is, democratic) discourse about nation as 'imagined community', but her project, unveiled as well something else: as often as not, this discourse, may briskly slip into an expression of deep and fanatic (earlier dormant) nationalism.

### THE POLITICAL, THE FEMININE

Sanja Iveković (born in Zagreb 1949) is an artist who emerged after '68 and belonged to the artistic generation raised in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia whose 'post-object' art was usually covered by an umbrella term New Art Practice. Her fellow artists questioned then not only traditional artistic media, figurative art in particular, but also critically referred to modernist art, which used to be official art ideology in Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1991). In contradistinction to her women colleagues who at that time started to make performances and conceptual art, Iveković had already taken a feminist stance in the early 1970s when nobody in her native Croatia (or ex-Yugoslavia) was practising feminist art criticism. Throughout her entire career, she has persistently interrogated the 'politics of femininity' as it was staged in the media, be they 'high' or popular (such as television or print media, for example). In her live and video performances, photographic works and videos produced in the 1970s and 1980s, this critical attitude was directed against the Socialist (Yugoslav) setting in which gender egalitarianism was overlaid with a stable Socialist, or *Sots patriarchy*. After Titoist Yugoslavia started to disintegrate in 1991 through a series of nationalist wars, Sanja Iveković continued to observe 'new' patriarchal models, which conquered the public sphere in Croatia, dominated (not less than other post-Yugoslav milieus) with an aggressive nationalist ideology that only solidified during the war years. In short, she was primarily dealing with the institutions of power, be they communist or nationalist, and their representation of 'femininity'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Iveković was the only woman artist in Croatia of the 1990s to deconstruct nationalism in a critical and 'un-patriotic'

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<sup>1</sup> Silke Wenk, "Die steirneren Frauen" (Petrified Women), in Sigrun Anselm and Barbara Beck (Eds.), *Triumph und Scheitern in der Metropole*, Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1987, 101. (Translation B.P.)

<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, "Weiblichkeit und Repräsentation," (Femininity and Representation) in Hadumod Bussman and Renate Hof (Eds.) *Genus - Zur Geschlechterdifferenz in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1995, 417. (English quoted in original.)

<sup>3</sup> See the catalogue to the Iveković's retrospective exhibition edited by Silvia Eiblmayr, *Personal Cuts*, Innsbruck: Galerie im Taxispalais, 2001.

manner, unmasking the maleness of the (Croatian) nationalist project, focusing on media manipulation of women during the war and later in peacetime, when the image of Mother replaced the Soldier.

When Iveković was selected in 1998 to take part in the international traveling biennial exhibition, *Manifesta 2*, held in Luxembourg, she proposed two projects. In the first one, entitled *Fraenhaus*, she chose to express a social matter that is usually publicly suppressed, neglected and made invisible: domestic violence against women. At that time she was preoccupied with this issue in particular as it resurfaced after the war violence in ex-Yugoslavia ended (violence that also implied ethnical cleansing by the rape of the enemy's women). She did not want it to be viewed as a problem confined to post-Communist and postwar societies, but presented it in a country of 'high capitalism', namely, Luxembourg. This East-West was project, first presented at *Manifesta 2*, was performed in Croatia, where Iveković made a workshop with 7 women hosted in the women's shelter in Zagreb, with whom she cast their own masks, made of gauze and white plaster. Similar proceedings were carried on in the city of Luxemburg, where the housing for victims of domestic violence is called *Fraenhaus* (women's house).<sup>4</sup> In the exhibition area, each of these 'aided' self-portraits of Croatian and Luxembourg battered woman was placed on an individual plinth bearing a label with woman's first name and her 'story' in which she gave the reasons why she ended up in the shelter. In addition, on the museum's façade, Iveković again displayed the names of the women, and each of the names was also printed as a postcard and sold in the museum shop as a 'souvenir'. The other project Sanja Iveković proffered for *Manifesta 2* was then called *Pregnant Memory* (1998), where she planned to intervene on the original monument with the *Gelle Fra*, presented as pregnant. In doing so, she apparently referred to a rather long tradition of nationalism, which has, as Cynthia Enloe argues, "typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope."<sup>5</sup> Since this project could not be realized in 1998, Enrico Longi, director of the Casino Luxembourg, invited her to materialize it in 2001 within the exhibition about Luxembourg, and Iveković now made her *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg*, a statue actual-

ly produced in Zagreb by a male sculptor, and then 'imported' to Luxembourg to be installed in front of the Casino, situated not so far away from the *Gelle Fra*.

Unlike *Fraenhaus* of 1998, an artwork that dealt with domestic violence against *real* Luxembourg women, which to my knowledge did not evoke much public and political reaction in the local community, Iveković's *Lady Rosa* that referred to the nationally praised *idealized* 'femininity', , - did. In other words, *Fraenhaus* that points to the problems of violence and regards the breaking of human and women's rights, that is a burning social problem emerging *here and now*, appears to be less troubling for the given socius than *Lady Rosa*, an artwork that reshaped the female figure originating in the long gone *then*.

Iveković's *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg*, soon to be nicknamed the "Gelle Fra 2", destabilizes in many ways widely accepted art historians' presumption according to which the centrality of female allegorical figures in the public sphere is something that might well belong to the nineteenth century, when such "petrified femininity" saw its first - though not last - glorious days.<sup>6</sup> If the time of female allegory is today *really* passé, how we are to justify more than many literary and artistic works (public ones included) produced over the last decade in which female figures such as the "Mother India"<sup>7</sup> or "Mother Poland" and "Mother Croatia", resurfaced in the post-colonial world and in post-Communist Europe, respectively? Moreover, why did these allegories become recently so central in 'post-nationalist' Western democracies?

To everyone living in a liberal democracy it is clear *why* during the student uprising in Beijing of June 1989 young art students made a gigantic female statue of styrofoam and plaster, named *The Goddess of Democracy*, which they placed opposite to the portrait of Mao in Tiananmen Square, despite the authorities' warning from loudspeakers: "This statue is illegal. It is not approved by the government. Even in the United States statues need permission before they can be put up."<sup>8</sup>

What appears to be less clear to those who (try to) practice democracy, is *why* after the reunification of Germany, *Die Neue Wache* in Berlin, national Memorial to the Unknown Soldier earlier part of East Berlin, was re-designed? During the existence of the GDR, this building (built in

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<sup>4</sup> The third *Women's House* workshop took place in Bangkok (2000) in a shelter that along with victims of home violence hosts also the AIDS patient and drug addicts.

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Enloe, cited in Ann McClintock, op.cit., 150.

<sup>6</sup> See Silke Wenk, *Versteinerte Weiblichkeit - Allegorien in der Skulptur der Moderne*, Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> See Nalini Natarajan, "Woman, Nation, and Narration in *Midnight's Children*," in Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Eds.) *Scattered Hegemonies*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Violence in Public Art," in Mitchell (Ed.) *Art and the Public Sphere*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 29.

1816-1818) was emptied of any figures, and the memorial, watched by solemn guards, was dedicated to victims of fascism and militarism. In 1993, however, due to the interference of the then German Chancellor, Dr Helmut Kohl, a *Pieta* by Käthe Kollwitz, was installed in the memorial. This was not an original, but a copy made by Harald Haacke. Given that Kollwitz, whose son had fallen in the First World War and the grandson in the Second World War, conceived her mother-in-mourning in 1937 as a sculpture having 'intimate' size (ca. 60 cm high), it was necessary to enlarge it to the 'monumental size' appropriate to a memorial of prime state importance. The memorial was rededicated to "all victims of war and dictatorship" and the guards (too reminiscent of the GDR's militarism) disappeared. Despite furious protests against such 'state art' (a reminder of GDR times), voiced by thousands of German intellectuals (feminists included), which occurred in the public sphere of a democratic country, the Chancellor's decision was not revised.<sup>9</sup>

Then, *why* over the memorial service, *The Prayer for America*, held in the Yankee Stadium on 23 September 2001, did the reverend Calvin Butts, President of NYC Council of Churches, refer to a female allegory? He opened his four-minute long speech with these words: "In the harbor of New York there stands a lady. She is the Statue of Liberty. And I thank God today that, while I regret and mourn the loss of lives and the destruction of the World Trade Towers, that those cowards did not come near Lady Liberty."<sup>10</sup> Bearing in mind that several thousands of victims are presumed to have lost their lives in the ruins of the Twin Towers on September 11<sup>th</sup>, one should ask *why* the statue of Miss Liberty was mentioned, and not, for example, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington? Why not an actual man considered the Founder of the Nation, but an allegorical female figure, which embodies abstract ideals?

*Why* did the *Statue of Liberty* reshaped by the art group AES from Moscow, internationally known for some four years, become so popular only after the 11 of September 2001, since when it has started to appear on the covers of art journals and has recently been included in numerous exhibitions dedicated to "Ground Zero" held all over the place? AES started to develop their *Islamic project - Witness of the*

*Future*, in 1997 during the war in Chechnya, which includes both performances and computer-aided photographs in which they redesigned major capital cities of the Christian world (Moscow, Rome, Berlin, Stockholm, and even Belgrade), adding to the cities' vistas elements of Islamic architecture. One image from this series features New York and the *Statue of Liberty*, shown covered with veil and with the book of Koran.

*Why* do people (or rather those who speak in the 'name of the people') need to refer to female allegories whenever the enemy (imagined or real) is near? *Why* still today do female allegorical images reappear, are talked about, or related to *always* when a particular nation or country experiences some great crises? Or, differently phrased, *why* did Iveković's "Gelle Fra 2", induce a crisis in a public sphere of the nation/country where the Luxemburg Minister of Culture, Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, was even asked to resign her position, since she was not ready to prevent Iveković's project. Yes, many patriots in Luxembourg *also* argued that the Americans would never allow their *Liberty* to be 'blasphemed' in this way.

## THE POLITICS IN/OF FEMALE ALLEGORY

The French Revolution brought about a substantial turn in the political/public space and made possible until then unknown visualization of power: "The popular forces acted on the rhetoric of the Revolution, which declared power no longer to resided in the king's body but in the nation."<sup>11</sup> It was a turning moment in history as the figure that used to achieve spatialization of the royal and absolutist 'body politic' now shifted from the male figure to female.

Political portraits of rulers standing for a respective territory or empire have a rather long history, but only in the Middle Ages did political theology clearly formulate the concept of the "king's two bodies", whose contours could already be traced in Roman times.<sup>12</sup> In his thorough analysis of the concept, Ernest Kantorowicz in 1953 examined Western medieval practices, and followed them right back to 1816, when in Plowden's commentaries, he discovered the following definition of kingship: "[T]he King has in him two bodies, viz., a Body Natural, and a Body Politic. His Body nat-

<sup>9</sup> See *Nationaler Totenkult - Die Neue Wache*, Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1995; Stefanie Endlich, "Die Neue Wache 1818-1993, in *Deutsche Nationaldenkmale 1790-1990*, Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1993; also Silke Wenk, "Die 'Mutter mit toten Sohn' in der Mitte Berlins," in *Käthe Kollwitz*, ex.cat., Berlin: Kollwitz Museum, 1995, 84-93

<sup>10</sup> Aired on CNN, September 23, 2001.

Also on [www.cnn.com/2001/us/09/23/vic.yankee.prayer.service](http://www.cnn.com/2001/us/09/23/vic.yankee.prayer.service).

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, 73.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Florence Dupont, "The Emperor-God's Other Body," in Michel Feher et al., (Eds.) *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part Three*, New York: Zone, 1989, 397-419.

ural ... is a Body mortal, subject to Infirmities that come by Nature and Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly free from Infancy, Old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body Natural is subject to... ”<sup>13</sup> According to such a formula, the undying ‘body politic’ or king’s ‘other body’ is conceived as invisible. Starting from this premise, French art historian, Louis Marin (1925 - 1992) developed his own semiological theory, in which he focused on the “figurability” of ‘body power’. He turned to the thinkers around Port Royal, Blaise Pascal in particular, who claimed, “the portrait of Caesar is Caesar.” Marin discussed on several occasions the portrait of Louis XIV, maintaining that a king’s power lies not in his presence but in his representation, he comes to name “the body-of-power”. This body delivered as portrait/figure of the king, which is displayed/installed in every single corner of his empire, *is a king’s real power*. In other words, the King does not exist except *in and through* his pictures.<sup>14</sup> American visual theorist, David Summers (without mentioning Marin though) also holds that spatialization of power enacted by ubiquity of imperial portraits is not simply an ‘illustration’ of power, but rather a visual means through which the given power becomes constituted.<sup>15</sup>

The birth of ‘emancipating’ nationalism, which first appeared as a cultural concept in Romantic literature and painting, and then became political practice in the mid-1800s engendered a radically new approach towards the public space. Given that nation, in Anderson’s understanding, is “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship,”<sup>16</sup> it is interesting to see how the nation or rather a nation state, which relies on “horizontal fraternity,” becomes visualized. It became imagined and imaged via a female body, via an allegorical figure. As soon as the portrait of the male omnipotent ruler, a real, historical person was dismantled and removed from the political/public space, the image of female body commenced to stand for power. Moreover, as Marina Warner in her volume *Monuments*

*and Maidens ~ the Allegory of the Female Form* (1985) remarks, the ‘feminization’ of the public field implied also a shift from personal to universal: “The female form tends to be perceived as generic and universal, with symbolic overtones; the male as individual, even when it is being used to express a generalized idea.”<sup>17</sup>

Allegory, meaning “other speech” (Latin, *alia oratio*; Greek, *allos*, other, and *agoreuein*, to speak openly in the agora), is certainly a literary and visual device well known in Western history. The female statue standing for a natural site (rivers, in particular) or geographical location (like cities, or regions) has been known since the Greek and Roman age, and it further flourished in the Renaissance. But with the female allegories that conquered the public monuments over the period of “democratic statuomanie” following the French Revolution, seen later in historical paintings, and popular print media (like posters, daily press, postcards and comics) particularly after the revolutions of 1948, the female body meant to picture ‘something else’ was staged in the political space and for the sake of that space: this female body now bodied forth the ‘interests of the people.’ Thus, these female allegories must be differentiated from the mythological ones, because, as Silke Wenk has argued, such allegorical figures are not accompanied by narratives inherited from antiquity, but appear together with the naissance of the modern state. The female body became a special *vehicle* for transporting less the ideals shared by a nation as an ‘imaginary community’ of people, and much more the desire to establish a common territory, namely, the nation-state. In this regard, Silke Wenk, German art historian who already in the early 1980s started to inquire into the female allegory in the public setting and who produced valuable studies on ‘allegorical femininity’ (of which, regretfully, very few exist in English translation) contends: “The figure of allegory appears together with the constitution of (nation) states. It works on the basis of ‘moral’ and has a state-building function. The allegory is oriented against inherited myths and is also directed against the heritage of folk culture. Allegorical representations are, therefore, to be differentiated from mythological ones as in the allegorical representations we do not deal with inherited narratives but with collectively accepted

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<sup>13</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, 7.

<sup>14</sup> See Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*, Paris: Minuit, 1981 (English translation of 1988); also, Marin, “The Body-of-Power and Incarnation at Port Royal and in Pascal, or Of the Figurability of the Political Absolute,” in Feher et.al., op cit, 412-447.

<sup>15</sup> See David Summers, “Real Metaphor: Towards a Redefinition of the ‘Conceptual’ Image,” in Norman Bryson et al., (Eds.) *Visual Theory*, New York: Harper Collins, 1991, 231-259. Both Marin and Summers’s views, may be useful for discussing the omnipresence of the figure/portrait of Stalin during his life, and photographic portrait of Tito in SFR Yugoslavia till his death in 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, New York: Verso, 1983. Quoted after Revised edition of 1991, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens ~ the Allegory of the Female Form*, London: Vintage, 1996, 12.

values and required principles according which the world should be arranged and the models through which it should be handled.”<sup>18</sup>

Hence, female allegorical figures such as *La République* or *Marianne* and *La France*) have been substituted for the representation of the monarch, which used to embody absolutist rule. And although Delacroix painted his *La Liberté guidant le peuple* in 1830, and Rude sculpted his *Marseilles* on the Arc de Triomphe in 1833,<sup>19</sup> female allegorical figures, populated memorial landscapes all around Europe by the end of that century and were also ‘exported’, like the *Lady Liberty*, either to the USA or European colonies. These statues came to personify, on the one hand, such universal principles as freedom, equality, but above all (war) victory, and on the other, those ‘site-specific’ ideals shared either by a nation living in a sovereign nation-state (as a rule born of wars with neighboring nation/states) or by a nation, which dreamed of becoming (yet again via combat) an independent nation-state.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, every nation in the world has invented such an allegory. All national fraternities were prompt to commission from their (male) painters and sculptors a figure of the Mother of the Nation, several versions could be produced at different times. The statue of *La République* (Paris, 1883 and 1899) may be seen in the company with female allegories scattered around European monuments and historical paintings, although under different names: *Bavaria, Germania* (1883), *Greece (1858), Hungaria* (1861), *Italy, Finland* (1881), *Denmark* (1897) *Serbia* (1889 and 1901) or *Croatia* (on the Monument to Starcevic, near Zagreb 1905). Such ‘universal’ (known as ‘national’) female statues were usually staged on the socle of the monuments honoring real, historical grandees, generals and rulers shown in bellicose posture.

Marina Warner noted the radical “symbolical inversion” - which, in passing, by now only bothers feminist art historians - implemented in the discrepancy between ‘real life’ and the ‘ideal’ female body shown in national memorials: “Liberty is not represented as a woman, from the colossus in New York to the ubiquitous Marianne, figure of the French Republic, because women were or are free. In the nineteenth century, when so many of these images

were made and widely disseminated, the opposite was conspicuously the case; indeed the French Republic was one of the last European countries to give its female citizens the vote. Often the recognition of a difference between the symbolic order, of judges, statesman, soldiers, philosophers, inventors, depends on the unlikelihood of women practicing the concepts they represent.”<sup>21</sup> One should also add here, that artists, like the French Bartholdi, who designed the *Statue of Liberty*, sometimes associate eternal ideals with actual mortals, so that Liberty’s face is in fact done after Mme Bartholdi, *maman*.<sup>22</sup> In using their own mothers as models for making national allegories, which is often the case, artists stress even more the mixture of blood (family affiliation) and soil (geographic territory inhabited by a nation to which sons belong).

In the nineteenth century, the statues of ‘universal femininity,’ which conquered the squares and façades and popular imagery of the newly born European nations, were shaped according to an equally ‘universal’ academic art that spread all over Europe despite the newly set borders between the nation states. On the eve of the twentieth century, Academicism started to be challenged by other sculptural approaches, which were, in truth, much more influenced by Maillol’s stylizations than by Rodin’s radicalism.

Far from outdated and exhausted, similar envisioning of nation recur in present-day cinematography, inspected by Susan Hayward: “ [The] nation comes to stand for/in for lost issues/concepts/realities of kinship and family obligations ... The nation becomes a collective individual that one dies for (the father- or more particularly and pertinently, the motherland). Or again, the nation is a collective (female) individual that suffers rape at the hands of the enemy. Thus a closed, self-referential, even vicious circle gets established whereby one concept feeds the other: threat to nation leads to (manifestations of) kinship, and kinship leads to nationalist discourses (in the name of the mother nation etc.) ~i.e., a nationalism which in turn engenders the notion of nation. Each concept *masquerades* as a grounded reality, disguising the fact that, as such, these are imagined abstractions.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Silke Wenk, “Die steinernen Frauen”, op. cit., 95. (Translation B.P.)

<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps interesting to remind that L’Arc de Triomphe in Paris, built in 1795, was not originally planned as a military monument, but was to be in memory of the “Heroine of the 6 October 1789”, ~ for those women who, by marching to Versailles in 1789, had forced the King to move into the Tuilleries Palace in Paris. Hans-Christian Harten, “The Monuments of the French Revolution,” in *Daidalos*, No. 49, September 1993, 53.

<sup>20</sup> One recent example confirms this assertion since during the war in Bosnia, a female allegory of *Republika Srpska*, the self-proclaimed state of the Bosnian Serbs in 1992, was also invented in 1995 and appeared in a painting, which general Ratko Mladic gave as present to Sir Michel Rose, who served as Commander of UN peace-keeping troops, now departing from the ‘Balkan quagmire’. See *Der Spiegel*, No. 9, 27 February 1995. I am very grateful to Silke Wenk who made this information available to me.

<sup>21</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, op. cit., XIX.

<sup>22</sup> *The Statue of Liberty*, unveiled in 1886, was the present offered by France to the USA for the centenary of the American Revolution. It took Americans many years to raise the considerable funds needed for the building of the plinth. In contrast to the face, the rest of the statue was not done after Mme Bartholdi, mère: In her book, a fine piece of inspired nationalism, Lillie Patterson, writes: “For the body of the statue, Bartholdi needed a younger and stronger model, one whose body held an implicit vitality and one who could stand day after day with her arm upraised. “ Lillie Patterson, *Meet Miss Liberty*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962, p 47. The artist, of course, married the model ten years later.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Hayward, “Framing National Cinema,” in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (Eds.) *Cinema & Nation*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, 89.

## VICTORY OF MODERNISM AND ALLEGORY OF VICTORY

Le *monument du souvenir* with the *Gelle Fra* in Luxembourg, unveiled in 1923, commemorated the Luxembourg male citizens, who, although their country was neutral, volunteered as soldiers in the Allied armies and were killed in the First World War. This memorial, designed by a local sculptor educated in Germany, Claus Cito (1882-1965), joined thousands of monuments erected all around Europe, which experienced a new statuomanie after the Great War. Regardless of whether the countries left that war as winners or losers, they developed nationalisms that increased in the immediate post-war years, when most of the European countries needed to commemorate the heroes fallen during the “end of humanity” (Karl Kraus) and started to build their national memorials to the Unknown Soldier, an institution established in 1918.<sup>24</sup> Along with countless smaller monuments with male allegories of soldiers, like the French *poilu*, erected in every corner of the countries associated with the Allies, the female allegories of the nations, often shown as mothers-in-mourning, gained a new vitality in public space. For example, *the Memorial to the Unknown Soldier* in Belgrade (1934-1938) presents 8 female allegories standing for the regions that made part of the multi-national Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The female allegory of victory, Nike, once again proved to be the most suitable figure for memorials of the 1920s, irrespective of their location, that is, ‘she’ was equally sculpted in those countries that won and in those that lost the war. By the 1920s, modernist artistic procedures had found their place in public statuary, which eventually became deprived of story-telling details typical of academic realism dominating the previous century, which, alas, has survived in conventional public sculpture until today. This is also evident in *Gelle Fra*, an elegant figure presented with the laurel wreath in a gesture of crowning soldiers fallen in the war (grouped in front of the obelisk), connoting the undying spirit of victory. Very similar statues turned up in post-First World War monuments that blossomed from Germany to Egypt, from France to Serbia. In memorials commemorating the Great War, a winged Nike, like the one in Copenhagen (1923-1928), had become

rather rare by that time, Nike has long lost her wings, an attribute with which she first entered the public sphere back in the late 1800s.

One archeological founding of a winged female statue in 1863 helped the artists’ imagination and established an ‘invented tradition’ soon to be set up in public statuary. Samothrace’s Nike was first exhibited in the Louvre in 1867, and then moved to the central stairway in 1884, where it has remained until today. This figure had an “immeasurable effect on the public iconography of glory,”<sup>25</sup> partly due to the fact that in the ancient Greek mythology Nike (in Roman world known as Victoria) is a “goddess without a story.” In approaching the image of Nike, Warner explains in what ways the pagan mythology and the Christian heritage conflated in this statue as the (male) angel in Christianity borrowed Nike’s features, especially the wings, denoting speed, flight and heavenly immortality. The angel, as in the Annunciation, also retained Nike’s classical function as the bearer of good tidings. Some twelve years after the reappearance of the *Winged Victory*, another wingless goddess of Victory (Nike ‘apteros’) was also found, known as *Nike of Olympia*. From Paris, where so many foreign artists gained their academic art education, the winged Nike moved further on and was installed on the top of national monuments built in Berlin (*Siegeseule*, 1873), New York (*Monument to General Sherman*, 1900) or Krusevac, the earlier medieval capital of Serbia (*Memorial to the Kosovo Battle*, 1889-1904). With modern art and with secularization almost completed, Nike would be staged without wings, but in the memorial erected after the Great War, the figure is as a rule shown with the laurel wreath, and occasionally with a palm (offered to the winner).

Any discourse on (female) allegory involves yet a further aspect implicated in war memorials: this is the relationship of the body to the state, which is not only a highly gendered relation, but also one invested with violence: “Sacralizing military violence and containing questions of the material body by effacing or mystifying it, they produce the national, sovereign subject.”<sup>26</sup> Unlike men, who, in nationalist/patriotic optics are expected to offer (most of the time willingly) their bodies on the “altar of Motherland/Fatherland”,

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<sup>24</sup> Here, Benedict Anderson provides a useful insight: “No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers [...] Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings. (This is why so many different nations have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. What else could they be but Germans, Americans, Argentineans...?) [...] The cultural significance of such monuments becomes even clearer if one tries to imagine, say, a Tomb of the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph for fallen Liberals.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, op. cit., 10)

<sup>25</sup> Marina Werner, op. cit., 140.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Correll, “Rem(a)inders of G(l)ory: Monuments and Bodies in *Glory* and *In the Year of the Pig*,” *Cultural Critique*, No.19, Fall 1991, 142.

and to whom the 'grateful' *patria* will erect memorials (featuring more often than not a Nike), the relation of the woman's body to the state, at least till the Second World War, was construed quite differently. Thus, Moira Gatens argues: "Constructing women as incapable of performing military service and so incapable of defending the political body from attack could serve as an example here. This incapacity, constructed or not, is sufficient to exclude her from active citizenship. At this level the metonymical aspects of the metaphor of the body function to exclude. Those who are capable of the appropriate political forfeit are excluded from political and ethical relations. They are defined by mere nature, mere corporeality and they have no place in the semi-divine political body except to serve it at its most basic and material level."<sup>27</sup>

Before the Second World War, female allegorical statues were crucial for public statuary produced not only in those Western countries molded by totalitarian patterns, such as Germany or Italy, but also in other European states that did not show such inclinations. The 1930s brought about a true revival of the "allegorical speech" accepted the world over. While European nation-states, in which the "horizontal fraternities" did not allow women's suffrage but notwithstanding praised women as Mothers of their Nations, in the Soviet Union, the image of the Soviet couple (petrified by Mukhina in 1937) had to point to the gender egalitarianism set up by the October Revolution. This image that became the icon of Socialist Realism, presents a conventional division of gender roles, since it features the male worker (standing for industry, linked to urban setting and 'culture') and the female peasant (again associated with agriculture, earth and 'nature').

As usual, the end of the Second World War induced a new monument 'boom', experienced again by both the winners and the losers. Briskly after 1945, however, Europe faced the Cold War during which the 'peoples' democracies' would turn to (an imposed) 'Great Realism', and the Western liberal democracies, or the countries that were 'in-between' (like Titoist Yugoslavia, for example, which denied 'Stalin's line' already in Summer 1948), (re)introduced the 'Great Abstraction.' Behind the Berlin Wall, the statue of the Red Army soldier became

installed in every single capital city of the liberated 'East' (Berlin and Vienna included) meant to produce the spatialization of new '-red'- power. Along with this male allegory sculpted by Soviet artists and erected everywhere as early as in 1945, the artists in the 'East' massively turned inventing another tradition: they found in Delacroix's *Liberty*, "the working class goddess," a source of inexhaustible inspiration. Many of her 'sisters' re-emerged as the allegory of (Soviet) *Victory* and in Titoist Yugoslavia, where socialist revolution was carried out parallel to the liberation of the country (1941-1945), as *Revolution*. The figure of Victory topping the memorials in the 'East', lost, of course, its wings as they were too reminiscent of angels, standing for those 'spiritual' and 'backward' values, which societies informed by the Materialist/Leninist worldview had left behind. Thus, an 'atheist' Nike which did not, though, lose its belligerent posture, and the figure of *Liberty* with her dress slipped and one breast nude, landed on war memorials installed from Warsaw (*The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial*, 1948) to Zagreb (*Monument to the Slain*, 1951), from Macedonia to Bratislava to Tbilisi (*Victory Monument*, 1980-85). They were to be seen in Baghdad (*Monument to Peace*, late 1950s), or in Volgograd where a gigantic statue of *Motherland* (1965) borrowed the posture of "femme de peuple" immortalized by Delacroix, who in turn may have been inspired by the antique figure of *Nike apteros*.

Given that abstract art, which conquered public places all around the Western world (and Socialist Yugoslavia) as of the late 1950s, one could easily presume that with this "universal language" (Weltsprache), the glorious days of female allegory were - finally - over. Did female allegories really departed in the public space now informed by High Modernism?

Art historical writings inquiring the female allegory in public space are not numerous, and except for Marina Werner, gender studies of this field in Anglo-American literature are rare. German feminist art historians, on the other hand, have produced valuable contributions on this subject, but nobody has dealt with it so persistently as Silke Wenk. After having examined 'allegorical femininity' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, she turned to post-1945 public sculpture, and

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<sup>27</sup> Moira Gatens, "Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic," in Katie Conboy et al., (Eds.) *Writing on the Body*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, 83.

discussed modernist practices, which - it was long taken for granted - bypassed allegorical meaning. Treating this presumption as one further 'modernist myth', Wenk was able to formulate fully original and unknown reading of non-representational public sculpture. In several 'abstract' and 'content-less' monuments built in West and East Germany after the Second World War, she traced the unassuming vitality and presence of the female allegory of Victory, Nike, although in these high modernist and non-figurative sculptures the body of the goddess has not yet disappeared. She focused on public sculptures with schematized depictions of fire, like Bernd Heiliger's, *The Flame* (Berlin, 1961) or in East Germany, Theo Balden's monument, *Karl Leibknecht - Hart and Flame of the Revolution*, Potsdam, 1983). In her well-grounded arguments, Wenk detected here the form of (Nike's) wings. Furthermore, this shape may be read in twisted, organic-looking shapes, like in Henry Moore's public productions commissioned by the FRG in the 1960s, but it was certainly evident in the abstract public work of Bernd Heiliger entitled *Nike* (Duisburg, 1956).<sup>28</sup> It may be interesting to remind here that these public commissions, took place in Germany just after the country came out of the denazification era, when the ideal of victory sneaked into the public space. Following Silke Wenk's inquiries, I was able to find many similar examples of fire/wings in 'abstract' monuments erected in Socialist Yugoslavia (*Monument to Revolution*, Ljubljana, 1961) and much later in Armenia (design for the monument to Great Patriotic Revolution, Tbilisi, 1985). Parallel to these analyses of sculptures usually described as "organic abstraction," in 1990 Anna Chave inquired into a rather similar "rhetoric of power" in American Minimalism these sculptures, earlier believed to be 'self-referential' and 'un-iconic,' are in fact "cryptically iconic."<sup>29</sup>

#### LADY ROSA OF LUXEMBOURG

In 1985, *Le monument de memoire* in Luxembourg was unveiled for the second time and finally fully restored. The *Gelle Fra*, after having spent 45 years in storage, appeared in full glamour on the top of the memorial. Her first appearance in 1923, also raised a local scandal, so the polemics

over Sanja Iveković's project, were not the first violent dispute over the *Gelle Fra*. Back in the early 1920s, this figure with her dress tightly pressed to the body, was also an object of disagreement. It was then called "indecent" since the local press and the patriotic male audience accused the sculptor of showing the figure "almost nude" in a composition sometimes considered the memorial to the Unknown Soldier. The later destiny of this figure is equally interesting. During the German occupation in 1940 the monument had to be removed, and the *Gelle Fra* was hidden by the workers and secretly kept in a storeroom over the war years. Given that the realization of the Luxemburg nation's desire to reconstruct the central national monument took 'a while' (1945-1985), the names on the monument's pedestal includes today the soldiers who fell in both World Wars.

In the 1980s, however, 'new' public art became not only 'post-figurative' but also 'post-object' and often immaterial, and this may mean that we today enjoy in fact a 'post-allegorical' public sphere(s). This presumption was/is well supported by artists. Reflecting later on her public projects, including *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Washington D.C., 1980-82), Maya Lin mentions the issue of allegory, she found exhausted: "For me, these projects require the kind of art that communicate with you almost immediately and not be referential. The second you start intellectualizing it, it's lost. What I really question is allegory. This represents this because it says so in the guidebook. It's is the difference between telling people what to think and enabling them ~ allowing them ~ to think."<sup>30</sup> However, her highly discussed memorial in Washington, contested while it was not 'patriotic enough' generated a reaction, greatly supported by James Watt, who served as First Secretary of the Interior in the Reagan administration<sup>31</sup>: this was a new monument, this time with male allegories, believed to be able to provide a necessary 'bodily identification' that every national memorial is expected to offer. Frederic Hart sculpted, thus, an additional *Vietnam Veteran Memorial* (1984), showing three figures. Alas, such an allegorical representation was politically correct (two white and one black soldier) only from the men's point of view, as it made invisible the women's endeavors in Vietnam. This occasioned the creation of a third

<sup>28</sup> See Silke Wenk, "Nike in Flammen," in Gudrun Kohn-Waechter (Ed.) *Schrift der Flammen*, Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1991, 193-218; also Wenk, *Henry Moore - Large Two Forms*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," in Holliday T. Day (Ed.) *Power: Its Myths and Mores in American Art 1961-1991*, ex.cat., Indiana Museum of Art and Indiana University Press, 1992, 116-122. Originally in *Arts Magazine*, Vol. 64, No. 5, January 1990

<sup>30</sup> Maya Lin quoted in Daniel Abramson, "Maya Lin and the 1960s: Monuments, Time Lines, and Minimalism," in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 22, Number 4, Summer 1996, 697.

<sup>31</sup> Erica Doos, *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 29.



monument, this time *Vietnam Women's Memorial* (unveiled in 1993) with three nurses and one dying male soldier in which the artist, Glenna Goodacre, cited a 'non-political' scene of the Christian *Pieta*.<sup>32</sup>

With her title, *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg*, Sanja Iveković purposely refers to the same Christian tradition, in which motherhood fuses with virginity ('Notre Dame', Our Lady, the Virgin Mary). In the wake of the secular public sphere during the French Revolution, the statue of the Virgin Mary became at times quickly 'recycled'<sup>33</sup> and used yet in a post-despotic and post-religious context. Overlaying this image/role of women as defined in/by Christianity with the leftist tradition (without forgetting that the *Gelle Fra* was saved from the occupying forces by Luxembourg's working class), Iveković dedicates the memorial to Rosa Luxembourg. With this move, she deliberately points to the monumental statuary, from which real women (be they philosophers, writers, artists or revolutionaries) were historically almost excluded, unless they were royalties.

A question that a feminist art historian may ask (as my German colleague, Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, in fact, did) is whether Iveković with her pregnant *Lady Rosa* continues in fact the patriarchal and nationalist discourse out of which the female allegories of nations and victories were born, instead of deconstructing it? It is a relevant question. Given that earlier statues of Mothers of Nations, Victorias, Liberties, Nikes and Revolutionaries were never shown in this condition, while *Rosa* is, is a poor argument that may appeal only to those still operating with the notion of "artistic originality." Any reading of this statue has to take into account, I think, that Iveković was working here with a *war memorial* and that, as suggested in the initial concept entitled *Pregnant Memory* (1998), women may (as they do) 'remember' wars differently than men. An allusion to women's condition in past and present wars, in each of which (including the recent Yugoslav wars) women of the 'other' side were violated and raped, should not be here overlooked. For, unlike fallen heroes, the raped women are in their own community scarcely honored as 'fallen heroines,' but suspiciously regarded as 'fallen women' bearing 'dirty seed'.

What can be viewed as a deconstructivist (as well as feminist) gesture is not the pregnant figure itself, but the intersection of

the visual (the statue) and the textual (the inscriptions on the socle), of which the latter perhaps more than the former agitated the Luxembourg's public sphere. The texts Iveković presented on her monument are printed as a poster in three languages. They read: in French: *la resistance, la justice, la liberté, l'indépendance*; in German: *Kultur, Kapital, Kunst, Kitsch*; and finally in English: *Whore, Bitch, Madonna, Virgin*. The notions in French and partly German, refer to the ideals and concepts that were historically conceived and practiced as 'masculine' but which became personified by idealized female bodies. "What [female] allegory has to embody, are the principles and determinations that are proclaimed to be 'masculine.' The 'spiritual' was already long in opposition to the 'corporeal', 'culture' opposed to 'nature'. In philosophy, religion, literature, and in the entire Western gender ideology, however, the 'corporeal' and 'nature' are linked to the 'feminine'."<sup>34</sup> The words in English, on the other hand, are down-to-earth expressions or common epithets with which women were - or still are - imagined as and referred to in - real life, a life that happens both at home and in public.

As these unrelated words running around the monument's plinth produced unexpected and provocative junctions, like, "la resistance" - "whore," or "la liberte" - "bitch", for instance, they triggered unprecedented emotional and political reactions. The protest came from the war veterans who fought against fascism (and, at a certain point Enrico Lunghi had to come up with the argument that Sanja Iveković's mother herself was a Croatian anti-fascist who survived after being kept two years in Auschwitz); then the right wing nationalists protested because a foreigner touched upon their memory and claimed that *Lady Rosa* was a "Communist conspiracy" and the graffiti reading "Rosa Go Home" soon appeared; Luxembourg's feminist groups, on the other hand, made their demonstration in favor of "their Rosa." The website created for that occasion was visited by some 20.000 people. In the dailies, the citizens discussed whether the "Gelle Fra 2" should be removed or not; eventually, some 70% voted for keeping it during the time of exhibition; there was the idea that only the text should be removed and sculpture kept but Lunghi refused such a compromise; the artist, now back in

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<sup>32</sup> Originally, the artist conceived this monument with one of the nurses holding a Vietnamese baby, but this was *vetoed* by the board members. As one of their PR staff commented: "The baby represented an accurate portrait of the war: many of the women who served over there took care of orphans. But given the proposed location for the memorial, I think the board members had to be careful not to make any political statements". In Erika Doss, *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> A statue of the Virgin Mary may be "removed from a church, given a fresh coat of paint, and, equipped with a liberty cap, placed on a public square next to liberty tree." Hans-Christian Harten, "The Monuments of the French Revolution," *op. cit.*, 53.

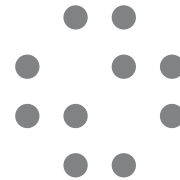
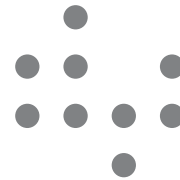
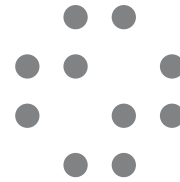
<sup>34</sup> Silke Wenk, "Die steinernen Frauen," *op. cit.*, 100. (Translation B.P.)

Zagreb, has given countless e-mail interviews, etc. The press clipping documentation contains some 700 pages. Briefly put, the scandal aroused over a public artwork in Luxembourg, proved that the public sphere could be practiced as a space pregnant with contradictions. This space is not meant for their suppression, but as Rosalyn Deutsche holds, for their exposition: "Conflict, far from the ruins of democratic public space, is the condition of its existence."<sup>35</sup>

Since these contradictions were called attention to in a democratic public sphere the parliament of Luxembourg decided to pass a new law, a law this state had never had, as it was earlier not needed. The new bill protects the *Gelle Fra* as the national emblem and sanctions any (visual, artistic and otherwise) abuse of this figure! The book with arguments against the *Lady Rosa*, issued either by politicians, war veterans or by the inimical press has already been printed.

During the exhibition *Luxembourg et les Luxembourgeois*, several possibilities for the future of *Lady Rosa* were in play. Initially the Museum of History wanted to acquire the sculpture, but after the show was over, they became resigned. They proposed to keep the figure in storage, until the 'proper moment' for buying it arrives. As she did not want her presentation of *Lady Rosa* to lie hidden like the original *Gelle Fra* was (between 1940 and 1985), Sanja Iveković decided to donate the statue to *Fraenhaus* in Luxembourg, the shelter for the abused women. It was not a gesture of desperation, but conviction. Indeed, Sanja Iveković's entire practice may be observed in an more 'global' manner, best described by Anne McClintock, who once rightly asserted: "There is not only one feminism, nor is there only one patriarchy."<sup>36</sup> ●

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<sup>35</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions - Art and Spatial Politics* (1996), Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998, 30.  
<sup>36</sup> Ann McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Nationalism, Gender, and Race" (1991), in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Eds.) *Becoming National*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 160.