WHAT IS TO BE DONE[1]

Mark Lewis

> The monuments and memorials with which large cities are adorned are... mnemic symbols...Not far from London Bridge you will find a towering and more modern column, which is simply known as 'The Monument'. It was designed as a memorial of the Great Fire, which broke out in that neighborhood in 1666 and destroyed a large part of the city ... [W]hat should we think of a Londoner who shed tears before the Monument that commemorates the reduction of his beloved metropolis to ashes although it has long since risen again in far greater brilliance? ... Yet every single hysteric and neurotic behaves like [this] unpractical Londoner. Not only do they remember painful experiences of the remote past, but they still cling to them emotionally; they cannot get free of the past and for its sake they neglect what is real and immediate.
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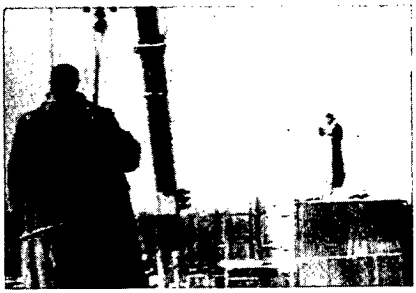
> Sigmund Freud
> *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*

Cleric holding up cross, Bucharest, Romania, 1990



Cleric holding up cross to Lenin, Bucharest, Romania, 1990

Iconoclasm

It is a familiar image: The man of God raises his arms and in a series of highly symbolic gestures summons up the force and truth of The Father. It is a summoning up which will aid in the reparation or atonement of a public for its earthly sins and, more specifically, the sacrileges which, in moments of madness and hallucinatory blindness, that public has inflicted on the very image of God. Here, then, is just such a moment.

He lifts his hand, and, in a gesture somewhat denuded of seriousness by its appropriation within the Dracula film genre, holds up a cross, a defiant and defensive gesture against something which offends. But this gesture... against what? ... Against whom? The frame widens, revealing that the danger to which all these visual histrionics are addressed is, in fact, a work of art, a bronze metal statue that, until recently, occupied Piatia Scinteli in the center of Bucharest, Romania. It appears that our man of God is gesturing atop the giant granite plinth which only moments before, had been the base upon which Vladimir Ilich Lenin (an Antichrist as it turns out) had stood. Looking out and down upon the 'publics' of Bucharest, Lenin's monumentality was a sign of the very power of inscription, of the power of the symbolic in the production of political economies. I have spoken of Lenin's removal, but it is more properly, perhaps, *a certain image* that is being removed, an image in the name of which the cleric has been battling, drawing upon his own substantial register of theological iconic inscriptions. And in the context of thinking about the nature of "the public", it is worth repeating that what the cleric wishes us to avert our gaze from is a work of art, a work of art made from a certain metal—bronze—and one that figuratively depicts and represents in rather complex configurations, a man, a political leader, an ideology, a liberation, a tyranny and, very significantly, an absence.

This image of the unceremonious removal of a statue that depicts Lenin is a familiar one. All over Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union today, publics, either spontaneously or under orders, are removing images of Lenin from public view.[2] They are smashing and melting down his figure or simply taking it to a place where it may not be seen, except by appointment. In Bucharest an appointment can be made by those with an intention to purchase the said statue of Lenin: twelve tons of Bronze that the mayor, Dan Predescu, hopes will find a home in the 'West', and bring desperately needed hard currency to his city's treasury.[3] If I have taken up that suggestion, made such an appointment with Mayor Predescu, it is not simply to find an ironic humor in the idea that we might place Lenin upright again, here in the West. Rather it is to take advantage of a very particular situation, one which repeats a tradition that goes back at least as far as the French Revolution, and which allows us to think a little about the status and changing meanings of so called public works of art. These are works which, as I have argued elsewhere, inevitably perform the function of simultaneously marking out and policing the public shere.[4]

By placing the statue of Lenin in Oxford (see footnote #1), not only am I responding directly to Mayor Predescu's suggestion but, in the spirit of estrangement that his cunning proposal would seem to include, I am also asking that we consider the general authoritative presence of public monuments and official public art—consider, that is, questions of permanence, commemoration and visibility.

The move is simple but also a little noisy. The statue that in one sense, communicates the presence of an 'alien' (a Russian) and an alien idea (Communism), looks authoritative in an absurd sort of way. It is perhaps in the disturbing space that the statue's displacement opens up, that we might begin to see—as if for the first time and in the absence of any indigenous revolution—works that

have performed similar contradictory projects here in England, here in what Dan Predescu calls the West.

I have mentioned revolution, or at least the absence of one in England. I have done so because as a motif it is crucial to my discussion of public art, specifically with regard to the latter's removal, destruction and displacement. Revolutions, rebellions, uprisings, even terrorisms: each gives to public works a particular *visibility,* one that as Robert Musil has noted, is often denied them at other times.

> The most striking feature of monuments is that you do not notice them. There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments. Like a drop of water on an oil-skin, attention runs down them without stopping for a moment...We cannot say that we do not notice them; we should say that they de-notice us, they withdraw from our senses. [5]

If Musil is certain that to produce a public monument of a 'great person' is to consign that person to oblivion, he perhaps under-estimates the continued efficacy of the monument in its ability to be *always more and less* than the figure which it ostensibly represents. The monument's invisibility is a sign of a silent interpellation, of a subtle but nevertheless pervasive marking-out of the public realm according to the logic of certain statist concerns. After all, is it not always the state which installs or permits the installation of 'public' works of art? If monuments remain silent, they only "de-notice us" insofar as they become part of the architectonic and semantic landscape. As Freud points out in his *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, such a landscape will continue to be a determinant producer of identification and memory. [6]

When there is a crisis in the realm of the social–a revolution or political uprising–then the symbolic realm, of which public art is part becomes the subject of a certain re-evaluation. While we might indeed hesitate before concluding that the removal and destruction of 'hated' monuments is the only possible critical re-evaluation of the semiotics of public statuary, we need to acknowledge that the *visibility* which inaugurates such an attack is a prerequisite for any attempt to re-interpret and intervene within this area of the symbolic realm. Clearly, the impulse to attack and destroy public works is part of a general attack on the continued presence of the signs of an *ancien regime*. It is confirmation also that in moments of 'madness', publics will treat monuments and public works of art as if they were the actual leaders themselves, as if bronze effigies were literal extensions of Kings' bodies. In a report from 1871 on the destruction of the Vendome Column, for instance, *The London Illustrated News* gave this account of what happened after the column was felled:

> Three orators of the commune stood at different points in the ruin and made speeches. They treated the statue [of Napoleon] as the Emperor itself, spitting on his face, while members of the national guard hit his nose with rifles. [7] (My emphasis)

The Hungarian crowds in Budapest in 1956, may have felt that they were literally attacking Stalin himself as they smashed a statue of him, each crack of the hammer on metal and stone at once producing a delicious and murderous

vicarious pleasure. Without wishing to subtract from what was the eruption of a popular will by some publics, I would like to remark that at some level, such a theological belief in *the image*, in its divinity, confirms the ideology of the "King's Two Bodies."[8] This ideology has enabled despots to represent themselves as being at one with their image, an image that marks the King's history as at once secular and spiritual, of the earth and of the eternal. For the King or Emperor, his image is not so much a representation, but constitutes his very public embodiment. *The image is his power.* To deface his image is to deface him; a knock with a hammer is in some sense part of the same economy which incites the believer who would rather genuflect. Up to a point perhaps. This anyway is the paradoxical trap which the Romanian cleric unwittingly finds himself in: He holds up his cross, not to Lenin himself, but to an image which threatens to seriously undermine his own relationship to "the image", a relationship that pivots around the cleric's right to *interpret* images and to judge their authenticity (according to the laws of God). Ultimately we might conclude that what offends the cleric in Bucharest, is not so much that the statue of Lenin represents an anti-Christian current that threatens the church's survival (which, of course, in some sense it does), but rather that Lenin, like any "two bodied" ruler or King who has become synonymous with his own image, threatens to disrupt the very economy of the image which guides the church's theological belief in authenticity. For if Lenin *is* his image, then this can only de-value the equivalence which God himself is supposed to enjoy with *His image.*

This may seem a rather peripheral point, insofar as it is not necessarily clerics who are overseeing the removal of works of public art today, but rather angry and rebellious publics who quite rightly desire to have a say (albeit sometimes through simple acts of negation) in the semiotics of "their" public space. In so far as they are acting on that desire, we could tentatively say that the attempts to remove and smash certain works of art, are as much a part of the project of a public art as the discrete objects themselves. Although we may question the necessity, or progressiveness of a 'vandalism' which destroys works that during moments of social and political crisis may already be in the process of having their meanings transformed, these destructive acts are inscribed within the works as a potential from the moment that they are commissioned and publicly installed. The works' installation and destruction share the same economy. What falls outside that economy and disrupts it, are unforeseen appropriations of public art works immediately following the demise of the very power that these works were meant to re-present. Stalin's boots, remained as the container for the Hungarian flag in 1956; In Leningrad in 1918, the inscriptions on many statues were altered to reflect the revolutionary moment. That such appropriations and semiotic disruptions can occur, suggests that there is more than one possible future for the public work of art "after the fall" of the *ancien regime.*

The reason for my questioning the status of a gesture of pure negation of the image, is simply to try and understand the extent to which such an iconoclasm can unwittingly, and against its own best intentions, display an immense respect for the image. And further, how through an act of destruction, the power of the image, the power of public statuary to control and define the public realm may

paradoxically be confirmed. Two forms of negation need to be distinguished, two different orchestrations, if you like, of a mass iconoclasm with respect to the revolutionary and post-revolutionary moment. On the one hand, are seemingly spontaneous actions of various publics as they vent their anger and frustration on the visible signs of power of an *ancien regime*. Stalin's desecration in Budapest can be understood in this context, as can the defacement of the statue of Dzhirzhinsky by students in Warsaw.[9] On the other hand, are the planned removals of the art and images of the old political regime, where "revolutionary" governments order their destruction. In Poland today, the Solidarity government has been overseeing such a program of removal and destruction The Lenin statue in Romania was also removed by state order.

We can speculate that the iconoclasm of art's orderly removal embodies more of a respect for the image than does a public's spontaneous destruction. An inevitable consequence of such a respect might be the erection of yet more permanent statues and monuments, their 'contents' differing perhaps, but their formal precision remaining much the same. And is not the fate of such careful and 'thoughtless' formal precision, precisely the continuity of public art's terror, its "Architecture of Fear"? This may be a little pessimistic, perhaps, but let us watch the re-organization of Poland, for instance, to see if in fact today's leaders in the fight against Communism do not eventually rest their bulks, bronze cast on granite.

The question of respect (for the image) and how it is invested very differently in the two forms of removal (as well as destruction/modification) that I have proposed, leads very directly to a critical consideration of the various arguments that are often made for the retention and conservation of public monuments and other works of art. These are arguments that are predicated on an assumption that a work's meaning can change—that the semantic charge of a work from the past will be different once it has been re-appraised and displaced within the symbolic organization of the post-revolutionary state. But how is that re-appraisal and displacement accomplished? It is, as I suggested above, primarily because that possibility is already contained within the work from the start, because the work will never be the simple representation of its subject, no matter how important or trivial the latter may be.

The axis of visibility-invisibility is the determinant field across which the public work of art exacts its different meanings. In this respect, it is extremely similar to the process Freud described and named fetishism. Like the fetish, the public work of art serves (at least) two ends, the one ultimately undermining the other. The monument covers up crimes against the public in so far as it is able to temporary 'smother' the possibility of remembering specific histories in terms of the violence that engendered them; it instead commemorates a history or event in terms of a pernicious heroism or nationalism. But at the same time, the monument exists as a perpetual marker, a reminder of those very crimes. It waves a red flag, so to speak, on the site of its repressions. And when the symbolic order is thrown into crisis—revolution or terrorism—the public monument's semantic charge shifts and the work becomes less heroic in form but rather begins to take on the characteristics of a scar—literally a *permanent monument* to the original

crime(s). This may be as good a reason as any for the retention of at least some works—perhaps worked on, perhaps displaced somewhat after the demise of the regimes responsible for their erection. That is the argument, for instance, of Samir Al-Khalil, in his discussion of the possible future of the *Victory Monument* in Baghdad after Saddam Hussein is overthrown or dies.[10]

Georges Bataille had much to say about this idea of the repression of social life by monuments. He wrote more specifically about architecture, but in the following quote, we can also detect the figure of the stone or bronze statue: standing upright and phallic, pretending to guard the public space when it in actual fact, it both constitutes that space and simultaneously demands that we forget by what means the latter's publicity is obtained.

> The ideal soul of society, that which has the authority to command and prohibit, is expressed in architectural compositions properly speaking. Great monuments are erected like dikes, opposing the logic and majesty of authority against all disturbing elements...It is obvious in fact, that social monuments inspire social prudence and even real fear. The taking of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of things: it is hard to explain this crowd movement other than by the animosity of the people against the monuments that are their real masters. [11]

A public monument which like architecture is to some extent the image of the social order, guarantees, even imposes that very order. Far from expressing the soul of society, monuments then, to paraphrase Denis Hollier, smother society, stop it from breathing.

Revolution

'Revolutionary' and immediately 'post-revolutionary' societies have been forced to deal with the representations of its pre-revolutionary history articulated through public art. In France, there were fierce debates over what was to happen to the public works of the Royalist regime following the revolution of 1789. Attempts were made to determine to what extent particular monuments *represented* the ideology of the past, and to therefore apportion a punishment commensurate with the degree of a work's culpability. Works of art were forced to stand trial. As was the case with all other mock trials in post-revolutionary France during the period of 'the terror', the works were often executed, destroyed before they had a chance to account for themselves.

Some revolutionaries argued that the old monuments and other works of art should be used as the building materials for new 'revolutionary' works. And this indeed was the idea that originally motivated the looting and destruction of the Royal Tombs at St. Denis when it was agreed that all the works contained there should be used in the construction of a symbolic mountain in honor of Marat and Le Peletier. Other projects of this nature involved saving some works, or at least parts of them, so that their recognizable form could be reintegrated within new allegorical projects. J.P.B. Le Brun, for instance, argued that Angier's statues of Louis III, his wife and son, should be saved so that they could be overturned at

the feet of David's project for *The Colossus of the People Sovereign*. He also suggested that the left foot of the statue of Louis IV from the place Vendome be saved in order to "Conserve the proportions of these monuments, which, when placed beside the French People, will show the smallness of the monuments to those that they regarded as the greatest."[12]

Others, arguing against the continued existence in any form, of any traces of the old art and public monuments and participated in an orgy of destruction, knocking down and breaking every work that offended their revolutionary sensibilities. In this rampage, they were supported by successive legislatures and officials. A Parisian police officer of the time noted that he had heard: "Complaints on all sides that the eyes of patriots were offended by the different monuments built by despotism in the time of slavery, monuments that should certainly not exist under the reign of liberty and equality."[13]

When it was detailed in the legislative assembly that the people were destroying bronze statues of Henry IV, Louis XII, Louis XIV and Louis XV, the assembly simply encouraged these actions by declaring that "It is the manifest will of the people that no monument continue to exist that recalls the reign of tyranny...the statues in public squares in Paris will be taken away and statues in honor of liberty will replace them".[14]

Into this mire of debate and unpredictable action stepped the Abbe Gregoire. Anthony Vidler has presented Gregoire's project of redeeming and saving works. In the brief summary that follows I have borrowed from Vidler's published texts on this subject.

Gregoire was a supporter of the revolution but one who argued for the conservation of old works of art and public monuments, on the grounds that they were: "transforming the symbols of oppression into permanent reminders of tyranny, forcing them to become a kind of permanent pillory".[15] By using a rhetoric that he knew would be warmly received by the revolutionary assembly, Gregoire began to formulate a notion of what he called "cultural vandalism", a kind of thoughtless and destructive behavior that was to be understood as distinct from, even contrary to correct or corrective revolutionary behavior. As Vidler points out, it is certainly a paradox that the cultural vandalism of the revolution's early years was also accompanied by an emerging sensibility towards a national patrimony embodied in historical and artistic monuments. Indeed, many have noted that for the museum to really begin to exist, it *needed* 'vandalism': the museum fed off the fragments left behind by, and saved from, cultural vandalism.

If Gregoire was opening up an entirely new discourse (on cultural vandalism and on the necessity of museums to protect against the former), his contribution to the discussion concerning the necessity of conserving works of the *ancien regime* was also part of his attempt to evince a recognition of the possible separation of the symbolic and political realms. If he argued that the old statues, for instance, could be used pedagogically—albeit by negative example—he did so primarily in order to save the objects themselves, objects that he might have believed could eventually be turned away from their tyrannical histories. That is to say, he believed that once these objects were recognized as no longer marking

out, no longer smothering a public history, they might then take their place in a museum of art and antiquity. Such a museum could serve, simultaneously, the nation's need for nationalism, didacticism and moral improvement. Gregoire was beginning to articulate a sense of the discontinuity which overdetermines the symbolic realm and how that discontinuity would always already be part of any monument's history. It is a discontinuity that ultimately inscribes within the work an built-in obsolescence; and it is this built-in obsolescence which will finally allow the work to be rescued by a museum where it will take its place in the national history of a country, its patrimony of permanence.

I have strayed a long way from Lenin in order to articulate some of the contradictory investments in the historical idea of public art, of an art that is apparently more democratic, more of the people than any other. But as should be clear by now, I am suggesting that not only is this very far from the truth[16]—that public art often imposes, subjects, terrorizes—but that a sense of public art's 'opposite' —the 'private' works of the gallery, etc.—emerges in part through attempts to save public works from the anger of revolutionary publics. All of this to say that we need to be very cautious before we assign to a type of work a positive or negative epithet, simply on the grounds of its actual geographical emplacement. Indeed, some works, once 'publicly' located and then placed within the contextual confines of a museum might find themselves, in their latter history, to be less like, recalling Bataille, "dikes, opposing the logic and majesty of authority against all disturbing elements," and more truly public (in the literal sense of the word) than before. Notwithstanding this problem of posing the question of a so-called progressive public art, I think that it is possible to suggest other paradigms, other ways of conceptualizing public art And I can propose one of these now, through a return to my initial discussion of Lenin himself.

V.I. Lenin

All over Eastern Europe, every day for some months, cities have been overseeing the removal of busts, statues, bas reliefs and pictures of Lenin. These are images that are hated by many, hated because they are understood and perceived as synecdoches for equally despised communist regimes. But, of course, Lenin was always much more than this simple representation. And there is indeed some sense of the idea of Leninism which survives today, survives despite the wholesale removal of his public effigies, survives the very fact that these monuments were ever built in the first place. Perhaps the removal of these massive monuments is not totally incommensurate with some of the original ideas of Lenin, particularly those ideas he had about a revolutionary public art. This is not to say that I think that the monuments should necessarily be removed, destroyed or displaced (on this matter I can confess only to the most profound ambivalence), but what I want to recognize is that the Lenin of 1917-1918, the Lenin of "On the Monuments of the Republic"[17] might never have approved of the original erection of the bronze statues, in Bucharest or elsewhere. Insofar as this idea(lism) of Lenin can be said to be remembered today, I want to briefly examine

Lenin's relationship to the question of public art as it emerged during the immediate months after the October Revolution.

By the time of the 1917 revolution, Lenin had already insisted that art under socialism should no longer serve the elite of society, "those 10,000 suffering from boredom and obesity; it will rather serve the 10's of millions of labouring people, the flower of the country, its future".[18] In order to further this aim, Lenin proposed what he called a *Monumental Propaganda*. This was to be a so-called "people's" art, one that would become part of everyday life, assisting in the ideological shaping of a new revolutionary mass consciousness. Lenin argued that this Monumental Propaganda should be produced through the posing and installation of slogans and other "quickly executed forms." Even more important to Lenin were "the statues–be they bust or bas reliefs of figures and groups."[19] The statues were *not* to be made of marble, bronze or granite, but on the contrary, were to be extremely modest in their production, and should take advantage of cheap and readily available materials such as plaster. Lenin felt that these works should react to the moment, that their objective was always to instruct within the context of particular celebrations. Above all, wrote Lenin, "Let everything be temporary"[20]. And with these words addressed to Lunacharsky, Lenin announced the beginning of a massive project (much of it centered around May Day celebrations) to install dozens of plaster statues and busts, each one celebrating a revolutionary figure or event. Very few of these works survived more than a few months, and almost none remain in any form today, as Lenin and the artists involved must have anticipated. Some of the works were crudely executed, others crudely conceptualized, while others were extremely radical insofar as they challenged the whole notion of *permanence* with regards to public monuments and statuary. Particularly interesting is Nikolai Kolli's *The Red Wedge Cleaving the White Block* (1918). In this work Kolli seems to parody and question the whole historical project of the permanent public monument, a monument that relies on the height and unassailability of a stone plinth from which it towers over the publics that move within its domain. The plinth is also the site of the official inscription, of the command to respect of King's and Dictators. In plaster form, what Kolli is splitting open, is the very support system of all monuments. It seems to suggest the absurdity, within the revolutionary context, of erecting yet another bronze statue on the physical supports of historically inscribed tyranny–the plinths that have born the weight of cold terror.

This work by Kolli was produced within the context of other works by artists which consisted in temporary modifications and additions to existing statues and monuments. And if the revolution did produce its fair share of "cultural vandalism," it is also the case that many at the time thought that this exercise of destruction was not only unnecessary, but actually counter-revolutionary.[21] As the artist Alexander Blok put it at the time: "Even while destroying we are still the slaves of our former world: the violation of tradition itself is part of the same tradition."[22]

Not quite the Abbe Gregoire, and perhaps not sharing his archivist's imperative for conservation, but nevertheless, Blok's demand, his perception is part and

parcel of a more complex and interesting approach to the art of the past. Moreover, it is an approach which I believe is not at all contrary to Lenin's own desire that contemporary public works be temporary.

Military Metal

Many of our monuments and public works of art are made from metal. Metal is cold to touch. This is a metaphor that on closer inspection constantly envelops the description of leaders, now bronze cast or engraved in metal, unimpeachable in their authority. It is a metaphor that quite literally formalizes the close association of metal figures with the cold terror they can always summon up. The text of terror, its cold economy is embodied, figured in the surplus of the king's image. Which is to say, we do not need to see it in order to see it. Metal will always remind us of this absence. Here is Pascal:

> The custom of seeing kings accompanied by guards, drums, officers and all those things that bend the machine toward respect and terror causes their face to imprint on their subjects respect and terror, even when they appear by themselves, because one does not separate in thought the persons from their retinues with which they are ordinarily seen.[23]

Not only does metal statuary have metaphoric resonances with terror which allow us to recall unwittingly the invisible retinues of power, but in the very production of bronze figures—their forging and moulding—there is an inextricable link with the very economy of the military machine. Traditionally, bronze is the material of guns and canons, and we should not be the least bit surprised that the latter have often been made by melting down up-rooted and destroyed public statues.[24] Guns can be made from melted statuary, but, equally public statuary can be produced from melted guns. The Vendome Column, erected by Napoleon to commemorate the French victory at Austerlitz[25], was covered with 425 bronze plaques moulded in bas-relief which displayed some of the incidents of the Austrian campaign. The bronze, which weighed close to two million pounds, was obtained by melting down 1200 captured Austrian canons. In 1871 the column was destroyed in an uprising, and while the masonry was quickly broken up and taken away by onlookers as souvenirs, the national guard kept a protective eye on the bronze plaques—plaques which, of course, would be extremely valuable if and when they were returned to their military form.

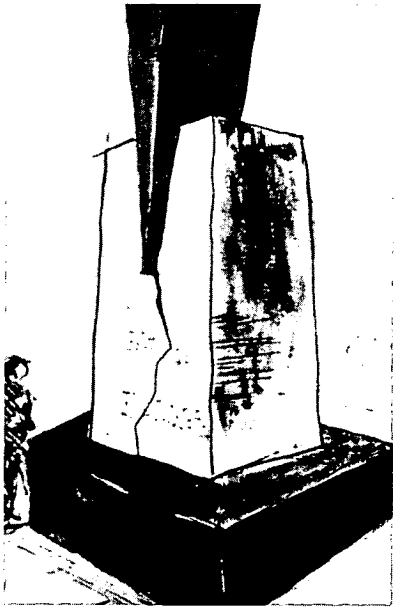
I would like to think of Lenin's demand for temporariness, his proscription on the use of bronze, as in some sense, an intervention within this economy of military terror. Plaster will only crumble and therefore prove useless in the manufacture of instruments of war (a crucial exigency, one imagines, for a country surrounded by hostile forces just ready to turn any existing metal against the revolution, and in this context, Kolli's work would seem to have a particularly materialist resonance). Its use in the public sphere recalls the military economy of statuary at the same time as it disrupts it. It asks us to think less about the permanence of the structure—its apparent right to exist forever—and rather more

about any particular work's contingent meaning, how for instance that work imposes itself in a very contradictory way. After all, as I suggested earlier, permanent monuments are often born of terror and force–they are literally imposed, and occupy spaces like an invading army–and it is not the least bit surprising, therefore, that their eventual demise should reduplicate that terror, both in the act of destruction itself and in the re-cycling of the works into yet further instruments for subjection.

There are many other examples of plaster monuments being used to address the question of military terror. Perhaps the most famous one in recent years was the Liberty Statue erected in Tianenmin Square in China. Students created not only a symbol that in its temporariness called attention to the very spontaneous and changing nature of their revolution, but they also made an ironic and critical commentary on the tradition of the public monument itself. It was, recalling Lenin, 'modest' and 'quickly executed', and importantly it also appeared to be from the wrong tradition–'statues of liberty' being so closely associated with a hostile power. Indeed, when the army stormed the square, one of the first things it did was to smash the statue. But, as it turns out the statue's reference was not so 'alien' after all. Ironically, the Red Guards had some twenty years earlier done precisely the same thing when a group of them attacked the Yellow Flower Cemetery in Canton. In the Cemetery were the tombs of the 72 martyrs of the Republic of China who were killed in the overthrow of the Ching dynasty in 1911. A large monument there had inscribed the words "liberty, equality and universal love." Nearby, there was also a statue of the Goddess of Liberty. Both the statue and the monument were violently destroyed by the guards who could not understand that liberty was not a concept born of capitalism.[26] Perhaps the plaster recall at Tienenmin Square of that earlier moment of destruction was unintentional, even largely unnoticed. However, contextualising it historically might help undermine any easy appropriation of the students' statue by the forces on the right, who are equally unable to understand that liberty is not a concept born of capitalism.[27]

Impermanence

I have strayed a long way from Bucharest, and I have done so in order to contextualise the problem of public art which is foregrounded with the removal of the statue of Lenin. I have only been able to very schematically outline some of the more obvious semantic and ideological investments in the art of public monuments, but it is these investments which I believe public art today must both examine and problematise. Perhaps a truly public art would be one that allowed different publics to make their (temporary) marks on what Bataille has called the fascist organization of public life. These works might then attempt to give air to what the statist installations have worked so hard and effectively to smother. The paradox is that as soon as these works become permanent, they tend to become the very objects which they were intended to intervene against. This is perhaps why we need to re-invent each work, each public, in order to



Nikolai Kolli: The Red Wedge Cleaving the White Block (1918)

make the art answerable to successive publics. This re-invention though, would ask of us something both more ambitious and subtle than the simple negation that destruction implies.

The statues and other public monuments which until very recently had occupied the streets and civic squares of Eastern Europe, were the remainders of a project which had defied Lenin's own understanding of public art. "Let everything be temporary," he demanded. Yet it took the citizens of Bucharest some thirty years before they had the right to remove the clumsy bronze statue of Lenin which had imposed itself upon the city and its publics.[28]

Against this motif of permanence and metal, of coldness and terror, I would argue that it might be more useful, at least for the moment, to take up Lenin's demand for temporariness. While I recognize that this might seem to consign contemporary radical work to oblivion (as 'historical' public works continued to exist under the guise of invisibility), I do not believe that this is necessarily cause for concern. On the one hand, questions of permanence and durability can never really be part of a radical project. For an ambition of permanency would always fail to recognize the very mutability and entirely arbitrary constitution of art's publics. Public art is literally an art creating a public, an art creating society – one that may or may not be commensurate with any real body of people in a real time or place. On the other hand, the work of research, historiography and connoisseurship will continue nevertheless: there are records, photographs, texts, witness accounts, sometimes even the actual objects. As the early street art of the Russian Revolution demonstrates: permanent bronze works they may not be but the record of their interventions, what Gregoire might have called their inevitable didactic presence, lives on.

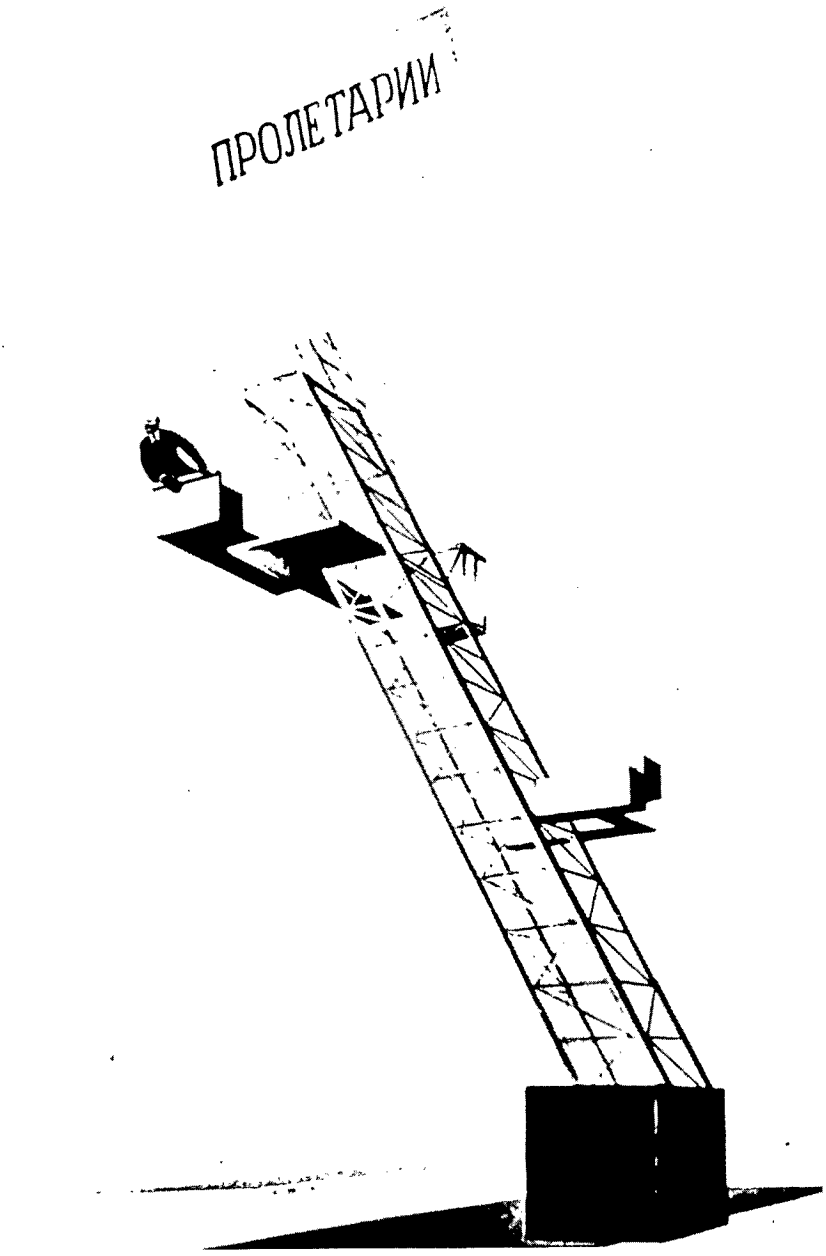
In the spirit of this observation I want to take one last look at this picture of Lenin being removed, an image which stands, I suppose, as a record of a public art project that has now entered a different (perhaps terminal?) stage in its history. When I first saw this image, I was struck with a certain sadness, for it seemed to say something about the impossibility of alternative forms of organization, the impossibility of finding a way to think of the importance of both Lenin and how some of his ideas might have been represented differently. For after all, much was made of the statue's removal in the West, and the event was used to dramatic effect as a *denouement* to the history of Communism.[29] There was, however, something about this picture which made me recall another image. The effigy of Lenin being removed by a crane bore a strong formal resemblance to the drawing by El Lissitzky entitled *A Design for a Rostrum for Lenin* (1920-24). Lissitzky's image would seem to be a reminder of the original radical impulses that motivated a certain idea of public art, an idea which I have tried to associate with the name of Lenin, but it could also stand as a kind of portention of the inevitable metal work to come.

Coda

There are two important areas which are integral to any discussion on the idea of public art and which I have hardly even touched upon in this paper. Firstly, there is, of course, the question of difference as it is obtained through the performative function of the works themselves. Literally, there are the typical divisions of labour which organize the contents of works and their locations. Sexuality and race are crucial to an understanding of these ideological divisions of labour. For instance, whether a statue is of a man or a woman, whether that sexed figure bears a name and a history or whether it is simply 'generic' are considerations of some importance. Similarly, a colonial history of Europe, for instance, could be traced simply through a mapping of where public monuments were placed and how and when they were removed. In this paper I have been unable to include any detailed discussion of these crucial differences simply because of what I felt to be the necessity to respond directly to a particular historical and political event. I do examine the question of sexual and colonial difference with respect to public art and public monuments in a forthcoming paper entitled *Public Dreams and Public Wounds*

The second area that needs to be dealt with is the question of the representation of the public work and its allegorical future. For if in this paper I have argued that works of art have become the subjects of a deep rage and anger and have therefore been attacked and often destroyed, it is also the case that these attacks have become the subjects of works of art themselves. Not only are there real events depicted (such as the felling of the Vendome Column), but there is a whole genre of works which have either anticipated, incited or simply provided the allegorical background for this type of semiotic disturbance of the public space.

Statue of Lenin being removed from Bucharest (1990)
Photo: Mark Lewis



El Lissitzky: A Design for a Rostrum for Lenin (1920-24)
Photo: Mark Lewis

Notes

1. This paper is based on a talk given for the symposium *Art Creating Society* organized by Stephen Willats at The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford England in June 1990. For the exhibition that accompanied this symposium, I installed in the streets of Oxford a 1/3 scale plaster model of the statue of Lenin that was recently removed from Bucharest, Romania. Thanks to Jeff Brandt for research and building assistance. A statue of Lenin was also installed near the parliament buildings in Quebec City in November 1990. Similar statues will be installed publicly in Montreal and Toronto in 1991.

2. Other countries are also taking part in this re-organization of their public art. For instance, South Yemen which recently merged with North Yemen, has undertaken to remove all its Lenins by the end of the year.

3. This information was ascertained during a phone call to the Mayor's office in May of this year.

4. See my "Technologies of Public Art," *Vanguard* Volume 16, No. 5 (Vancouver, November 1987). Also "The Public Imaginary," by Mark Lewis, Janine Marchessault and Andrew Payne, *Parachute* 48 (Montreal, October 1987) and my "Photography, Democracy and the Public Body," *Parachute* 55 (Montreal, August 1989).

5. Robert Musil, as quoted by Marina Warner in her book *Monuments and Maidens* (London: Picador, 1987).

6. Sigmund Freud, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, New York: W.W. Norton.

7. *The Illustrated London News* (May 27, 1871).

8. E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). Also for an interesting critique as well as complementary text see Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988).

9. Dzhirzhinsky, a Polish citizen who was the founder of the Soviet secret police, was monumentalised in metal in what used to be called Dzhirzhinsky Square (Now called Bank Square). In a celebrated incident, students climbed up the statue and painted its hands red. The Government later ordered the removal of the statue.

10. The Victory Monument in Baghdad consists of a pair of sixty foot arms which hold two swords that cross over Victory Square some 140 feet in the air. The arms are bronze cast. from the actual arms of President Saddam Hussein. Hussein's fists emerge from two heaps of helmets, each helmet from a dead Iranian soldier, with bullet holes that are stained with the blood of exploding heads. Samir al-Khalil has suggested that the monument be retained so that it can stand as a reminder of the fear and tyranny brought on by the megalomania of Hussein. al-Khalil reminds us that the West were far too hasty in their destruction of fascist public art after the fall of the 3rd Reich. See Samir Al Khalil's *Rear Window: The Architecture of Fear*, a documentary for Channel 4 Television (England); produced by Tariq Ali for Bandung Productions Ltd.

11. Georges Bataille, "Architecture," *Documents*, no.2, May 1929 (OC 1:171). As quoted in Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture; The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) After quoting this passage from Bataille, Hollier suggests that we only have to look at contemporary 'government ideas' on monumentality to realize that Bataille was not 'jumping to conclusions.' Hollier finds this example in Le Monde in May 1973 from the then Minister of Cultural Affairs, Maurice Druon:

    I am convinced that one of the reasons for what we certainly must call urban decadence results from the absence in our cities of temples, palaces, statues, or anything that represents the superior facilities of human beings: faith, thought and will. An urban

civilization's vitality is measured perhaps by the prestigious monuments it is capable of erecting.

12. See Claudette Houlde (editor), *Images of the French Revolution*, (Quebec: Musee Du Quebec, 1989).

13. Daniel Hermant, "Destructions et vandalisme pendant la Revolution francaise," *Annales E.S.C.*, 33 (1978), Quoted in Anthony Vidler, "Monuments Parlants", *Art and Text* 33 (Melbourne, Winter 1989).

14. *Images of the French Revolution* (ibid)

15. See Anthony Vidler, "Monuments Parlants: Gregoire, Lenoire and the Signs of History", *Art and Text* 33 (Melbourne, Winter 1989). And also Anthony Vidler, *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1987).

16. The 'idea' of public art is currently enjoying a lot of attention by art curators and museums. Usually, their idea of being public means literally placing the work 'out on the street.' Not only is this a very narrow understanding of what forms publicity can take, but by circumventing any critical discussion of the role of art in creating a public and its historical projects in this regard, such a move often unwittingly re-duplicates the very divisions of labour and systems of control, etc., that it ostensibly sets out to challenge and undermine. For more discussion on this matter see my "The Technologies of Public Art" (ibid).

17. V.I. Lenin, "On the Monuments of the Republic" (April 12, 1918), *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967)

18. V.I. Lenin, *Complete Collected Works*, V.12

19. A.V. Lunacharsky, "Lenin o Monumentalanoi propogande", *Lenin i izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo* (Moscow: 1977), quoted in Vladimir Tolstoy, "Art Born of the October Revolution", *Street Art of the Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990)

20. A.V. Lunacharsky (ibid)

21. In the essay "On the Monuments of the Republic", Lenin does in fact 'order' that those "monuments erected in honor of tsars and their minions and which have no historical or artistic value are to be removed from the squares and streets and stored up or used for utilitarian purposes." He did however order that such a program of adjudication and removal should be done under the auspices of a special commission made up of the People's Commissars for Education and Property of the Republic and the chief of the Fine Arts department of the Commissariat for Education. together they were to work with the Art Collegium of Moscow and Petrograd. This does suggest that Lenin was sympathetic to the idea that politicians alone would be unable to decide which works were of `merit', etc., and that he felt it necessary for 'experts' to be consulted. Despite, for example, the fact that many hundreds of religious icons were destroyed, it is still the case that Lenin's approach to the art of the past was significantly more sophisticated than either the legislators of the French Revolution and many of the current 'post-communist' governments in eastern Europe. An exception would seem to be the Czech government of Havel, who recently suggested that many of the socialist realist monuments should be placed, undamaged in a forest so that 'nature' would grow around and over them.

22. Block's sensibility has, by and large, been lacking in present day Eastern Europe. However, there have been exceptions. For instance, there is a group in eastern Germany called "The Monuments of the DDR Committee" who have been arguing that none of the old public works should be torn down or destroyed precipitously. They have insisted that there be generous public consultation and that the artists of the works (if still alive)

should be included in any discussion concerning the future fate of the works.

23. Blaise Pascal, "Les Provinciales" in *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950). Quoted in Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988).

24. Invading armies as well as revolutionary armies have historically used the metal from statuary to help in the production of weapons. When the Germans were invading the Soviet Union, they actually melted down statues of the 'Czar and his minions' that still remained in order to help in the manufacture of guns for the campaign.

25. Interestingly enough, the Column at Vendome was built on the spot where a statue to Louis the IV had been destroyed by the revolutionaries in 1792. The original statue of Napoleon was placed on top of the column in 1810. In 1814, the Bourbons were restored and the statue was taken down. Twenty or thirty years later, under King Louis Phillipe, another statue of Napoleon was placed there, this time representing the Emperor standing on a heap of cannon balls. Napoleon III had this statue removed and instead replaced it with a reproduction of the original statue of Napoleon in Roman costume and crowned with a laurel wreath.

26. As reported in the *South China Morning Post* (August 31, 1966).

27. As many have pointed out, but seldom reported in the Western Media, as the tanks entered the square, the students stood in front of their 'statue' and sang the Socialist International. For a brief moment, then the Statue of Liberty became something else, its meaning in the context of socialist students who had built a replica of it, was transformed. You might say that its meaning was rescued from its perversion within the American market phenomenon. As Lou Reed has aptly put it, the inscription on the *Statue of Liberty* should read "Give me your tired, your hungry, your poor, and I'll piss on them." (Lou Reed, "Dirty Boulevard" on the LP *New York*, Sire Records, 1989)

28. The statue was built by the Romanian artist Boris Caragea in 1960. Caragea's design was selected after a national competition. But as anyone familiar with statues of Lenin in the Soviet Union knows, his design was simply a replica of one of the standard poses used to depict Lenin.

29. Coverage of the removal of Caragea's statue in Bucharest was given prominence on all four American networks for over three days. Images of the statue being ripped from its pedestal were overlaid with predictable and cheap dialogue about the 'end of communism'. The fact that Eastern European cranes were not up to the job and that an American crane had to be borrowed was given particular emphasis!