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Sanja Iveković, *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg*

Within the exhibition *Luxembourg, Les Luxembourgeois* that intends to define and question the issue of national identity of Luxembourg, *Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain* had produced the public art project by Croatian artist Sanja Iveković, entitled *Rosa de Luxembourg*. The project has been realised as the copy of the Luxembourg monument *Gëlle Fra* (Golden Lady), the strong national symbol of Luxembourg's independence and resistance, erected in commemoration of the victims of World War I. The original monument, dating from 1920's, represents an elegant female figure standing at the high obelisk, draped in clothes through which outlines of her body are clearly visible. As such, it belongs to the corpus of monuments developed during the period in which French Revolution had become representative for forms of political constitution and political iconography, characterised by allegorised femininity that signifies freedom, the Republic, as well as the nation or that upon which a nation's self-understanding can be grounded, that is, arts and sciences.

The replica had been staged not far from the original monument, from which it differs not only in material used (golden polyester for the figure and wood and iron for the obelisk and base), but in a few important details as well. The female figure is clearly pregnant, the original captions at the monument's base are replaced by words in French (le résistance, la justice, la liberté, la indépendance), German (Kitch, Kultur, Kapital, Kunst) and English (whore, bitch, Madonna, virgin), and the Golden Lady is subtly renamed to Rosa Luxemburg and thus moved from abstract allegorical context into concrete historical circumstances.

Lady Rosa of Luxembourg had been staged on March 31 2001, and since then it had triggered violent polemics in Luxembourg's media. At certain moment even the question of resignation of Luxembourg's Minister of Culture, who had been against the calls to demolish the monument, had been raised, and in less than two months, the press clippings had filled several hundreds pages. The polemic started when anti-fascists veterans and liberal-national politicians and men of prominence proclaimed the newly erected, temporary monument to be blasphemy that makes mockery out of Luxembourg's resistance and its victims in both world wars. Strangely enough, it seems that the most violent attacks were not provoked by the figure of pregnant woman, but by the text in three languages, which supports Lucy Lippard's thesis about the combination of words and images being the most effective form of contemporary political art. At the beginning, most photos in the press had shown only the monument's base with the text, while the figure of pregnant woman at the top of the obelisk had often not been represented at all. What is it about the text by Sanja Iveković that provoked such strong reactions? Or maybe the text had served just as an excuse for aggression whose real object is the golden woman whose blatant pregnancy insults not only sophisticated aesthetic feelings, but also national values represented by the allegorical feminine?

The text at the monument's base alludes to the complex and problematic issue of language as the ground for national identity of Luxembourg, but it also points towards entanglement of the modern construction of the ostensibly natural two sexes and the construction of the modern nation-state. The transitions between culture and politics and political representations are fluid, and the political is always-already determined by that which it is supposed to have nothing to do, and the text quite clearly exposes the problematic naturalness of the national monument.

The English text locates stereotypes about women (Madonna, whore, bitch, virgin), the French words (*la resistance, la justice, la liberte, la independence*) point towards the realm of political values that the feminine figure allegorically represents while in reality women had been excluded from them, while the German text (*Kitsch, Kultur, Kapital, Kunst*) comments the cultural production and the production of culture that lies at the very base of such constellation. *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg* provoked reactions because it really is a provocation, a socially and aesthetically aware provocation that is effective, that truly mobilises new ways of seeing and thinking about things around us, which art is actually supposed to do.

Sanja Iveković is an artist who does not see political aims and aesthetic considerations as mutually exclusive and basically incompatible actions. By naming her sculpture Rosa Luxemburg, the artist unmasks not only the fact that women are symbolically constructed as the symbolic bearers of national history (but at the same time they are denied any direct relation to national agency), but also affirms the revolutionary politics of Rosa Luxemburg and questions the very notion of national identity. Rosa Luxemburg, a 'left terrorist', as she was proclaimed in one of the angry letters in Luxembourg's daily press, deeply annoys the myth of capitalist ways of production, and capitalism as social order supposedly being capable to reproduce itself without non-economical oppression. As the pregnant woman, she threatens to affect the framework of the collective memory that consists of things which are "always-already" understandable and reproducible, without having to be made explicit or explained in words. Her words *Today we can seriously set about destroying capitalism once and for all* are exactly those that are not to be heard in today's Luxembourg, the embodiment of smooth economical functioning and order, just as they were not to be heard in Europe of 1919. Judging by the reactions, to erect the public monument is an act just as serious as it was at the time when the original monument had been erected. It is an act by which the nation and its highest values had been represented by a pregnant revolutionary woman, an act performed by an artist who is also an Other – woman, artist, feminist, coming from Balkan, the symptom of Europe that embodies all that is wrong in the light of the utopian notion of the European Community itself, from a country of doubtful democratic traditions – an act that seriously challenges aseptic (multi)cultural consensus at the heart of Europe.