

## Letter on statuary and power. Statues as political statements

José Guilherme Abreu

UCP/ CITAR coord. R3iAP, Portugal

*Through this attention to the activity of memorialization, we might also remind that public memory is constructed, that understanding of events depends on memory's construction, and that there are worldly consequences in the kinds of historical understanding generated by monuments.*

James E. Young, *The texture of memory*, p. 15

### Etymological approach

Statuary, statue and statute all derive from the Latin verb *statuere*, meaning “to cause, to stand, to set up”, whose root comes from the nom *status*, meaning “standing, position”.

However, if we decide to look for even older origins, we will find out that all these words derive from the Proto-Indo-European root *stā-*, meaning “to stand, set down, make or be firm.”<sup>1</sup>

So, from an extremely remote past, two main ideas are deeply inscribed in the meaning of these words:

- 1 - The idea of something that is meant to be raised
- 2 - The idea of something that is meant to be established

Of course, both ideas converge in the meaning of something that is presented or shown as a sign or a symbol, for the adoption of some kind of principle or law.

In this sense, one may say that statues always stand for some kind of statement. Through the image of heroes, leaders, rulers, discoverers, philanthropes, scholars, literates, artists, etc., they embody values, and through those values, they proclaim some kind of order, which in the end has necessarily political implications and produce social repercussions.

While statues may be part of monuments, statues and monuments refer to different meanings, fulfill diverse roles and stand for distinct goals, as once again the etymology helps us to understand.

1 - On this matter, vide *Online Etymology Dictionary*: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=statue>

In fact, the word monument derives from Latin nom *monumentum*, meaning “something that reminds”, which derivates from the verb *monere*, meaning “to remind, bring to (one’s) recollection, tell (of).”<sup>2</sup>

Being political statements, statues stand always for some kind of apologetic narrative. Being historical testimonies, monuments are dispositives meant to prevent the obliteration of memory, and appear as some kind of cult, seeking eternity.

On one hand, statues engage and promote coeval political readings, as if their presence could assure that the facts, or narratives, they proclaim remain most effective. On the other, monuments appear as archeological facts, as if their presence would not implicate any statement about the adoption of the principles or the values which were coeval to the time the monument refers to.

In brief, being both statues and monuments symbolic dispositives, statues denote an active role, while monuments denote essentially a passive one.

That is the reason why the tribune of the stadium where Nazi rallies took place still exists, while any statue of Adolph Hitler, nor even in theory, will never stand in any public place, as we may infer by the story of an Adolf Hitler’s head that had been transported to the United States, as it is explained in an American journal:

2 - On this matter, vide *Online Etymology Dictionary*: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=monument>

The story was that she had been contacted by the widow of an American army officer who had served at the Nuremberg trials and who had “borrowed” a bust of Hitler from the courthouse in 1946, taking it back to the USA as a war souvenir. When he died his elderly widow contacted the Nuremberg courthouse museum and asked if they would like it back. The historian was dispatched to New York and returned with the head of the Führer which she had – for obvious reasons – tried to keep hidden in her hand luggage. Carrying it under her coat she tripped and fell on the Führer’s head, bruising several ribs. I asked to see the offending, and offensive, bit of bronze and she took me into a back room where the bust was stuck on a dusty shelf.

“Will you put it on public display?” I wondered. She shook her head. There was no way Hitler’s head would be on public view, even if dressed in the obvious historical context.<sup>3</sup>

### Statuary in ancient literature

Beyond the discrepancies raised by etymology, this case shows us that the opposition between statuary and monumentality is not a single opposition between classificatory categories, but an opposition between dialectical concepts, both appearing imbricated in one another.

Saying this, monumentality smooths statuary, as if statuary evocations would become weaker, faded by the presence of monumental permanency, for monuments are urban permanent artifacts, as Aldo Rossi says.

Monuments are fixed points in the urban dynamic, and as such are stronger than economic laws. (Rossi, 1982: 100)

Similarly, statuary mutes monumentality, as if monuments would become smaller, diminished by the power of statuary, for, the power of statues consists in extending life beyond death, as Michel Serres says:

What is a statue? The mummy first. [...] The statue is a black box: open it and you will see death before you. (Serres, 1987: 328)

Besides that, the dialectical opposition between statuary and monumentality is not only present in modern times. On the contrary, it is indeed a trans-historical matter. In most ancient texts, and specifically in the Epic of Gilgamesh – which is humanity’s oldest written epopee – that opposition is explicitly stated, as in a most recent translation, the mention of the word “statue” appears twice, while the word “monument” appears only once.

It is relevant to notice the contexts in which the word “statue” appears in the narrative:

I will fashion your statue in gold without limit (Tablet VII-80);

He made a statue of his friend (Tablet VIII-70)

The first sentence expresses the high value of the statue that was about to be erected, since it should be cast in gold with no restrictions to the amount of gold to be used.

The second sentence shows that the gold statue that was about to be erected was a commemorative statue (Enkidu’s), and not a votive, apotropaic, allegoric or decorative one.

Similarly, it is also relevant to notice the context in which the rebuilt by Gilgamesh of Uruk city wall (a monumental structure), appears in the narrative:

O Ur-shanabi, climb Uruk’s wall and walk back and forth!

Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork!

Were its bricks not fired in an oven?

Did the Seven Sages not lay its foundations? (Tablet XI-325)

On this matter, Andrew George in his most recent translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh writes:

The poem concludes with Gilgamesh proudly showing his companion the monument for which he became famous. [...] For it was Gilgamesh who in Babylonian tradition rebuilt his city’s wall, and it was the fame won him by this enduring monument that would be his comfort. (George, 1999: xxxiv)

Obviously, here is not the place to discuss the huge problem it is to translate to modern language such an ancient and fragmented document. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged by

3 - On this case, vide <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/opinion/the-statue-debate-what-to-do-about-adolf-hitlers-head/17/06/>

the main Sumerian and Akkadian experts that Gilgamesh Epic is not only one of the oldest literary texts, if not the very oldest one, but also that in opposition of Hesiod's or Homer's poetry Gilgamesh Epic is not a strict mythological recitative, but as William Moran states, it is a "*document of ancient humanism*" (Moran, 1991).

Saying this, I think this narrative allows us to pick up a few relevant assumptions, for in order to clarify the dialectics between statuary and monumentality, it is not enough to inquiry Etymology and History, being of most utility to merge these disciplines with an anthropological and ontological approach.

In order to elucidate the dialectics between statuary and monumentality, I think it would be necessary to see these notions beyond the conceptual and/or typological frames, for statues and monuments, if seen from that perspective, suddenly they appear as archetypes.

That is in fact, the main contribution of the analysis of the Epic of Gilgamesh. After this narrative, one may say that statues appear as "personal doubles", once they act as some kind of clone or substitute of the real person, having the power to incarnate the individual soul and spiritual power, while monuments appear as "heritage remnants", once they do not intent to fix and remind specific personal traces, but instead they intend not to perpetuate the person, but to remind his life work or his most notorious deeds.

When Enkidu died, Gilgamesh ordered to erect a gold statue of his friend, as a symbolic and noble substitute of him. When after the flood, Gilgamesh was told that he would not overcome death and gain immortality, he returned to the city and ordered to rebuild the city walls, becoming this deed, after he died, the testimony of his long lasting grandeur.

### Statuary in History

A similar logic can be found, when talking about the creation of baroque Royal Plazas during the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of 17<sup>th</sup>. That was the case of Plaza Louis le Grand, whose regular rectangular project by architect Jules-Hardouin Mansard (1646-1708) was conceived to receive in its central dominant place François Girardon's (1628-1715) equestrian statue of Louis XIV, set on a socle also designed by Hardouin-Mansart, echoing

roman imperial forum models. (Babelon, 2008: 229-230)

Louis XIV equestrian statue was toppled during the French Revolution, and the plaza became later Place de Vendôme, being erected, in its centre, the *Colonne de Vendôme*, inspired now in the Roman model of Trajan's Column, and displaying in its top a statue of Napoleon. The same statue that would be later also toppled, during Paris Commune.

Because it represented an active statement of Louis XIV power, his equestrian statue was toppled, while Versailles Palace in spite of remaining the most perfect testimony of *Roi-Soleil's* splendor was spared, as its presence and power was less visible.

The same remains valid, if talking about Napoleon. While his commemorative column and statue was, as we have said, spectacularly demolished and his statue crashed on the ground, the *Arc de Triomphe* was spared, as it was also spared the *Temple de la Gloire de la Grande Armée*, in which was transformed the *Église de la Madeleine*, under Napoleon's rule.

Another aspect of the dialectics between statues and monuments, appears: statues generate injury, while monuments generate respect, for as J. E. Young says, there are "*worldly consequences in the kinds of historical understanding generated by monuments*" (Young, 1993: 38)

Many other examples could be shown, but these cases are enough, and they claim for new conceptual and methodological approaches, in order to foster new theoretic assumptions.

The hypothesis I defend is that the power of statuary is based on the very power of images. In fact, during ancient times, sculpture had functions that were abandoned in more recent times.

For instance, during both Sumerian and Assyrian Empires many Lamassu's hybrid statues, formed by the body of a bull or lion and a human head, were usually placed side by side at the entrance of towns, palaces or temples. Lamassus were protective entities, and so they preform apotropaic functions. That same protective functions were assigned to the Sphinx implanted before Cheops pyramid, in Giza, and alongside the access to Karnak Temple.

Formed by hybrid figures, this kind of sculpture had grotesque-like traces, which linked to their sometimes-

colossal size, should provoke an impressive impact in the coeval populations, as if they were powerful idols or monsters.

It is well known how impressive the impact of images may become, and how that impact may become intensified by tridimensional ones.

It is relevant to refer that these aspects remain valid even in modern times, as for instance Diogo de Macedo says, in 1948, in the text he wrote about the function performed by sculpture in Portuguese *Estado Novo*'s exhibition "Fifteen Years of Public Works":

Sculpture is the less appreciated art by the people, maybe because the formal resemblance of the figures with the image of man, disturbs them. (Macedo, 1948:32).

It is true that Diogo de Macedo uses the word "sculpture" instead of "statuary", but that happens because being Portuguese *Estado Novo* a rightwing dictatorship, only statuary was accepted by the official national-historicist sculptural canon, as only statues could serve as propaganda means, so all public sculpture was reduced to statuary. In this sense, talking about sculpture was the same as talking about statuary, and vice-versa.

Diogo de Macedo in this quote says statuary disturbs man, and I think that this effect comes from most ancient reminiscences and fears, that are deeply rooted in the individual and collective unconscious mind.

On this subject, let us return to epistemologist Michel Serres, in order to find out, from the Baal cult, in Cartago, how most ancient sinister and dark rites relate to statues:

His statue exceeded by the shoulders the walls and fortifications; in the countryside, you could see it from a great distance; to get it out of the temple it was necessary to tear down the walls [...] it was first offered to it splendid jewels, gold and diamonds, it was excessively expensive; then a hellfire was lit under the foundations of the colossus with aloe, laurel, cedar and a petroleum flame; and the crowd shouted: homage to space! while the blaze roared, filled the place with swirling smoke that made the giant statue appear in a cloud. The arms of the god, actuated by chains maneuvered behind it, by means of a refined machinery, then fell on an

enclosure where one had previously deposited children, believed to be the firstborn of noble and rich families ; one after another, in the moving hand that straightening up as a lifter, threw them into the empty compartment prepared for them and now close to melting, while the crowd shouted: These are not men, but oxen. Oxen, oxen! The victims disappeared like a drop of water on a red patch, multiplying the plumes of smoke that scattered over the plain and the city towards the stars (Serres, 1987: 14-15)

In this case, one can talk about a transfer from the sacrifice of men or children, to the sacrifice of animals. But could we also make a similar transfer, between ancient theocratic leadership and the erection of statues? Under such conceptions, it is possible to admit that the most prepotent practices and bloody rites of mankind still remain in strait connection to images and figures whose reminiscences are deeply rooted in the collective unconscious mind, necessarily connected to most traumatic memories and fear?

Such an approach cannot be done outside any consistent multidisciplinary methodology, and I cannot say here anything more, than appealing to the need of creating research multidisciplinary teams with the purpose of developing crossed-parallel research programs.

However, following this perspective, I think it may become easier to understand the irrational traces of the "statueclasm"<sup>4</sup> movements that most recently, have been noticed, mainly in the US and UK, but also in Portugal, during the current year of 2020, triggered by the anti-racist international movement "Black Lives Matter".

### Statuary in Present times

Let us begin by collecting the most objective and factual traces of the "statueclasm" actions performed by those movements:

- First of all, they appear and spread as collective movements. It is recurrent that the actions against statues take place in the context of a collective claim against some kind of political or moral blame, concerning specific figures

4 - The use of the neologism "statueclasm" intends to establish a relationship between the iconoclasm movements against religious images, and the movements against historic statues.

related to condemned acts or ideas. Those collective claims invariably generate meetings, demonstrations and marches, and it is normally in those circumstances that the toppling of statues take place.

- Besides being collective, those movements are not clandestine. All the actions against statues happen during daylight and before public assistance, while those actions do not reject, nor even regret, mediatic recording and diffusion.

- Those movements are drastic and severe on their verdicts. Each decision taken about toppling a specific statue is definitive and remain hostile to most appeals. Historical context, or other minimizing circumstances, will not modify nor mitigate any decision. Rooted on a black and white vision of the world, their judgments remain Manichaeian.

- All the actions against any statues are considered legitimate and their actions are executed as highly noble acts, and they are not undertaken in the name of those that achieve them, but in the name of the common good, as some kind of non-institutional and spontaneous form of moral justice or liberation act.

- Saying this, one should realize that the actions performed by “statueclasm” movements are indeed most distinct than those performed by vandalism, for they are not clandestine, hidden or moved by blind rage against the establishment. Indeed, they pretend to appear moral and legitime.

- Finally, contemporary “statueclasm” movements are fostered by the spread of digital social networks that quickly instigate, organize and diffuse actions, amplifying the impact of each act, assuring them mediatic visuality and relevance.

These six points do not pretend to be exhaustive on the matter, and surely other relevant aspects may be added. Nevertheless, they help us to point out some pertinent conclusions about the most recent “statueclasm” phenomenon.

- Nowadays “statueclasm” is moved by collective pulsion and intensified by social networks. “Statueclasm” actions are collective movements. Their actions require the presence and the energy of the crowd, for the legitimacy claimed by their actions have no other fundament than the expressed will of the masses, being their impact fostered by mediatic visuality and social network coordination

- While “heritagecide”, the offenses against heritage or art undertaken by “statueclasm” are not supposed to be seen as crimes against heritage, in the sense of a set of acknowledged and legitimate values. On the contrary, “statueclasm” should be seen as some kind of purge or regeneration of those same values.

- Contemporary “statueclasm” is then a paradoxical phenomenon. While lead by justicialist goals and purposes, their intolerant and radical methods deny all formal and previous assumed rights, encouraging prepotency, sectarianism and force, once all appeasing dialogue is rejected, being their arguments despised and ignored.

- “Statueclasm” nowadays is therefore guided not by the good will and the generosity of highly recommended causes, but instead it is guided by ignorance, revenge and fear.

Now, I am not talking about objective or factual aspects, but after a specific critical and speculative point of view, whose hypothetical basis is obviously fragile, but is anchored in the thesis I presented before of an inscipient plot between ancestral images and fears that appear subliminally expressed by statues.

Under this perspective, the toppling of statues would perform a collective transfer of a pulsion to kill, appearing statues as the substitute of the system that has erected them, in an epoch where revolutions remain closed in its place in History. In this sense, using a Jean Baudrillard’s formula, nowadays the toppling of statues is a simulacre of the Revolution.

While I recognize that we do not have a consistent theory that can explain in a positive way the social and mental aspects involving the acts and the goals of “statueclasm”, I think maybe we can temporary state that “Statueclasm” is not a form of vandalism, for vandalism against public art, public furniture or public space is indeed a quite distinct phenomenon.

Vandalism is not selective nor systematic. Vandalism is indifferently directed against heritage or public goods in general. Vandalism does not vindicate any kind of moral fundament or purpose for its actions. All the actions undertaken are clandestine and do not have, at least they do not declare, any kind of justification.

So, I think we can assert that any theory or critical pronouncement on “statueclasm” based on the concept

or practice of vandalism is erroneous, and therefore inadequate to deal with the phenomenon of “statueclasm”.

### Statueclasm and Iconoclasm

While historically distant, the phenomenon of iconoclasm shares many characteristics with the phenomenon of modern “statueclasm”.

Although iconoclasm is related to the prohibition, extinction and destruction of religious images, while “statueclasm” is related to the prohibition or destruction of specific secular images, mainly historical or political ones, the frontier between those distinct kind of phenomena is not always that clear and simple.

As soon as 1947, British historian Arnold Toynbee defended that the first iconoclast crisis that took place in the Byzantine world after the publication of the decrees of Emperor Leo III against the veneration of images (726-729), had as relevant background the influences of Islamism, while the protestant Reform had the input influence of Judaism:

Though the eighth-century outbreak of Iconoclasm in the Orthodox Christendom and the sixteenth-century outbreak in Western Christendom may have been inspired, at any rate in part, by the examples of Islam in the eighth century and Judaism in the sixteenth, they neither of them attempted to ban the visual arts altogether. They did not carry their offensive into the secular field, and even in the religious field the Orthodox Iconoclasts eventually acquiesced in a curious compromise. Three dimensional representations of objects of religious adoration were to be banned on the tacit understanding that two-dimensional. (Toynbee, 1947: 520)

Indeed, the most curious aspect of that alleged influence lays in the fact that when the Orthodox Church banned the adoration of images, a compromise was established: only three-dimensional images should be banned, while two dimensional ones would be spared.

Studies on Iconoclasm are much more advanced than those on “statueclasm”, for they exceed the descriptive historical facts related to the destruction of statues, images and monuments that took place, for political reasons, during the French Revolution.

As Cyril Mango says on his remarkable book on Byzantine Art, the iconoclast crisis in the Byzantine Empire prompted a huge debate of ideas and controversies on that matter:

... the most interesting contribution of the Iconoclast period lies in the precise formulation of a theory of religious images. [...] the Iconoclasts held the cruder view concerning the nature of figurative art; to them, a true image had to be “consubstantial” with its model. (“prototype”), a kind of magical double. From this, they drew the conclusion that the only genuine image of Christ was the consecrated bread and wine of the eucharist. The Orthodox were clearly on more solid ground when they argued that an image was a symbol (tupos) which, by reason of resemblance, reproduced the “person” (prosôpon), but not the substance (ousia or hupostasis) of the model. (Mango, 1986: 149-150)

In a straight political and secular perspective, which controversies or debates on statuary did, in historical times, take place? Is there any relevant aspects that may help us to identify any relevant criteria useful for the definition of any theory about “statueclasm”?

### Statueclasm during revolutionary periods

Concerning the controversies in historical times, the main cases refer to Revolutionary France, during the I Republic (1792-1804), the same period in which the equestrian statue of Louis XIV was toppled, as we have already seen.

It was not, however, the only statue to fall down. In fact, during that period, as Babelon says, (Babelon, 2008: 229-230) five statues of four kings were toppled in Paris: the equestrian statue of Louis XIII, by Pierre Biard; the equestrian statue of Louis XIV, by François Girardon; the pedestrian statue of Louis XIV, by Martin Desjardins; the equestrian statue of Louis XV, began by Edme Bouchardon and finished by Jean-Baptiste Pigalle; and the equestrian statue of Henri IV, by Giambologna and Pietro Tacca.

And it precisely about this last one, that it is pertinent to take a closer look, because it was toppled after the abolition of monarchy, but during the Restoration it was temporarily replaced by a plaster statue by Henri-Victor Rougier, on the occasion of the royal entry of Louis XVIII, which occurred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1814, later it was switched by a definitive bronze statue by François-Frédéric Lemont, erected in the



Fig. 1- Pierre Brissart, *Equestrian statue of Henri IV*, 1614, Paris. Source BNF <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69452555.item#>

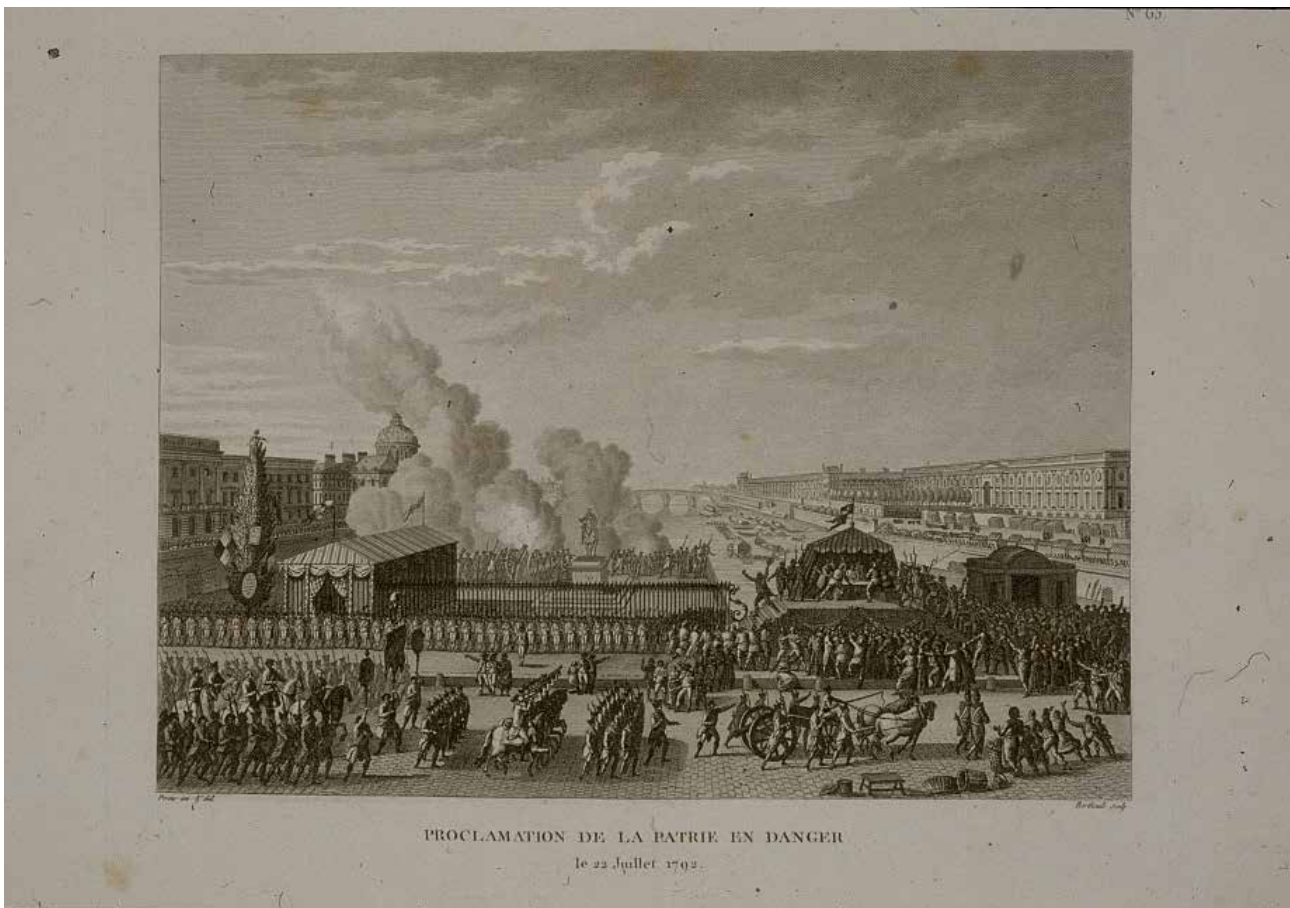


Fig. 2- Louis-François Couché, *Day of July 22, 1792: Parade of municipal officers proclaiming the homeland in danger and enlistment volunteers, in front of the statue of Henri IV on the Pont Neuf*, 1811-1821, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

25<sup>th</sup> August 1818, while most recently, the same statue was fully restored, and classified as historic monument, by the decree of 31<sup>st</sup> May 1992, of the Minister of Culture.

An article by the French historian Jean-Pierre Babelon, published in 2008, gives us detailed and reliable information on this case. In fact, it was a quite popular statue, not only because Henri IV was a benevolent king – *le bon roi Henri* – that finally, after 17 attempts, was murdered, by an intolerant catholic – François Ravallac.

As Babelon says, during Old Regime times the statue “*naturally participates in festive decorations and nautical festivals. The bridge accommodates the crowd of walkers, at the feet of what was known colloquially ‘the bronze horse’, and the crowd continued during the First Revolution, at the time of the États Généraux, of the Droits de l’Homme and of the Nuit du Quatre-Août*” (Babelon, 2008: 220).

A curious engraving displaying the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1892 enrollment of national volunteers, when it was declared *La Patrie en Danger*, shows the statue surrounded by troops, as if its presence did not cause any trouble.

However, two weeks later, after the attack of *Palais des Tuileries* and the abolition of monarchy, everything changed. The decree n° 336 of 14<sup>th</sup> August 1792 of the Legislative Assembly ordered the destruction of all monuments “remnants of feudalism”, as follows:

Art. 1st. All bronze statues, bas-reliefs, inscriptions and other monuments in bronze or any other material, erected in public places, temples, gardens, parks and in the outside of buildings, national houses, even in those which were reserved for the enjoyment of the king, will be removed at the behest of the representatives of the municipalities who will ensure their provisional conservation.

2. The representatives of the commune of Paris will, without delay, convert into guns all the objects listed in article 1, existing within the walls of Paris; under the supervision of the Minister of the Interior, of two members of the arms CRCSS, and two members of the monuments CRCSS.

3. The monuments, remnants of feudalism, of whatever nature, still existing in temples and

other public places, and even in and even outside private houses, shall be destroyed without delay, under the diligence of the communes.

4. The Monuments CRCSS is expressly responsible for ensuring the conservation of objects that may be of primary interest to the arts, and to present the list to the legislative body, to be ruled on what it will belong to.

5. The Arms CRCSS will present a draft decree shortly, to use in a useful way for the defense of each commune in France, the material of the monuments which will be found within their enclosure. (Barrot, 1834: 202)

A new political conjuncture was created, and the citizens of the previous “*Henri IV section*”, now renamed “*Pont-Neuf Section*”, accomplished their duty, not without hesitation, as it is said in the “Address” they sent to the Assembly, which Jean-Pierre Babelon retrieved in *Archives Nationales*:

Legislators, you have ordered the destruction of all the monuments of despotism which, after three years of freedom, still tired the eyes of free men and gave in our public places the most formal and most authentic denial of the revolution. At your voice, the citizens of Henri IV’s section hastened to overturn the statue of the King whose name this section bears. Henry’s virtues, we will admit, made them hesitate for a moment, but they remembered that he was not a constitutional King, they only saw the despot, and suddenly he fell. All the brands, all the names that can recall despotism must have the same fate. The signs of liberty and equality must replace them, and the citizens who have us deputed to you, have instructed us to ask you to erect in the place of this statue two tables on which will be engraved the Rights of Man. Their forgetfulness alone produced despotism, and each citizen would read them while passing on the *Pont Neuf*. They also instructed us to return the founding document of this statue which was found in the sides of the horse, and to tell you that they have changed the name of the section from Henry IV to that of the section of *Pont Neuf*. (Apud, Babelon, 2008: 222-223)

This document gives more information about this case and helps to get a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon of “statueclasm”.

First of all, I think it is relevant to take notice of the terms used in the document to justify the overturn of the monuments of despotism: those monuments, it is said, they “*still tired the eyes of free men*”, as well as they constituted a “*most authentic denial of the revolution*”. As it is said, the effect of the presence of those monuments disturbed and disgusted the freemen and therefor they weakened and undermined the Revolution.

I think it is of major importance to enhance this point, for, as we will see, in any other description, namely in the law, the justification for the decision of banning all the symbols of feudalism and royalty is expressed in such a clear and unequivocal way, and is explained the discomfort and harm these symbols could provoke to the causes of French Revolution.

Besides that, it is also relevant to notice that the decision of toppling the equestrian statue of Henri IV, was not a decision took by the revolutionary crowd of *sans-culottes*, as it was supposed to be. On the contrary, not even the initiative to topple down the statue did not come from any enraged crowd, but also the citizens who finally toppled down the statue, initially preferred to spare it, and they only accomplished the Assembly decision, because they assumed that they were not toppling Henri IV’s statue, but instead the statue of a non-constitutional king, i.e. a symbol of despotism.

In order to achieve an accurate theory about “statueclasm”, I think that aspects like these are key, and should not be ignored. However, before such a theory may be achieved much research on the matter must be undertaken.

Nevertheless, from this case, it is possible to pick up a few pertinent topics about the toppling of statues, during the French Revolution, as follows:

1. The decisions related to the toppling of the monuments of despotism, came from the top of the hierarchy of the political power;
2. In this case, the role of the citizens of Paris was reduced to the function of mere executors.

3. Besides that, there are other details on this case that help us to get a better understanding of the phenomenon, for as it is said the citizens of Parisian’s *Pont Neuf* section, sent back a message to the Assembly, asking for a substitute of the toppled statue: the implantation of “*two plaques on which will be engraved the Rights of Man*”, and they returned to the Assembly the foundation document that was found inside the statue.

While most probably rhetorical, this point is also curious. It shows us that some kind of respect towards the statue remained, in spite of its demolishing. And the most curious about these aspects is that they were not well received by the Assembly, and provoked a reaction from Abbé Grégoire, whose content Babelon summarizes:

He [Henri IV] is “a tyrant too long praised by the French, and whose alleged goodness, compared to that of other despots, lays only in the distance between wickedness and villainy”. The same also adds in a note: “A man whose reign established atrocious penalties against hunting, who after his death left a host of bursal edicts, who enriched his mistresses with the people’s money; a man who almost set France on fire because at the age of 57 he fell in love with Charlotte de Montmorency: here is the tyrant who has long been advocated under the name of the good Henri. (Babelon, 2008: 223-224).

This quote is almost ironic, because the same Abbé Grégoire that had then claimed for the banning of Henri IV statue, and other symbols of royalty and despotism, later on would shout against vandalism that was being committed to historical monuments.

In fact, his harsh criticism appears now as a paradoxical one, for he claimed he was the first to call “vandalism” to the destructive actions against historical monuments, as follows:

We remember that the furious had proposed to burn down public libraries. From all sides, he got hold of books, paintings, monuments which bore the imprint of religion, feudalism, royalty; the loss of religious, scientific and literary objects is incalculable. When I first proposed to stop this devastation, I was once again given the epithet of

fanatic; it was assured that, under the pretext of the love for the arts, I wanted to save the trophies from superstition. However, such were the excesses, that at last I was allowed to speak, the committee was given permission to present to the Convention a report against vandalism, I created the word to kill the thing. (Grégoire, 1837:345-346).

In brief, on this matter, one can say that Abbé Grégoire was one of those who opened the same Pandora box he was now trying to close!

These facts show how problematic it is to create a solid theory on this matter, for it presents itself as a most complex and instable question, as the result of the conjunctural

instability of the revolutionary periods.

### Statueclasm in modern times

On the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1974, matching the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Revolution that had put an end to the 1<sup>st</sup> Portuguese Democratic Republic – and just a few weeks after the Carnation Revolution that in the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974 had restored Democracy in Portugal – an initiative of the artistic collectivity “Democratic Movement of Plastic Artists” (DMPA), performed an “artistic intervention” on the statue of the Portuguese Dictator António de Oliveira Salazar that stood in the garden of Palácio Foz, in Lisbon, which was the siege of *Secretariado Nacional da Informação e Turismo* (SNIT), the governmental institute for the arts.



**Fig. 3-** Mário Novais, 1937, *Salazar's statue at the Portuguese Pavilion in Paris*. Source: FCB- Mário Novais Studio. That statue not only had been created by one of the most remarkable sculptors of the first modern generation, but it also had had a relevant historical background.

The statue that stirred up the focus of that action was the bronze reproduction of the original in plaster that had been commissioned to sculptor Francisco Franco (1885-1955), in order to be displayed at the Portuguese Pavilion, projected by architect Keil do Amaral for the Universal Exhibition of Paris of 1937.

It is necessary to remind that in the following days of the revolution when took place the removal of the photographs of the leaders of *Estado Novo's* regime, the presence of Salazar's statue in SNIT had already been questioned, and then it was asked to art historian José Augusto França what should be destiny of the statue of Oliveira Salazar, he answered saying that that was not a statue of Oliveira Salazar, but a statue of Francisco Franco, thus saving it from destruction.

That most opportune and correct remark saved the statue, for it came from someone who not only had a prestigious and respected career, but also was a well-known opponent of Portuguese Dictatorship, namely of its cultural and artistic policy.

The action that the DMPA performed on the statue was conditioned by José Augusto França previous defense, and it appears now as one of the most interesting actions against political condemned statements supported by statues.

Let us then analyze that action in detail, as it was described by a fully illustrated article published in *Flama Magazine*, whose title was created by artist Marcelino Vespeira (1925-2002) – *A arte fascista faz mal à vista* – and appeared as follows:

“*Ceremonial jacket*” it was how Salazar referred to art (vide António Ferro “Salazar”, 1933). And in the garden of Palácio Foz, “*General Headquarters of colored demagogy*”, how some years before it was nicknamed by the artists, Salazar's statue still perpetuates a past that is wanted to disappear.

The DMPA does not claim for the destruction of works of art, even being condemned symbols, they shall be stored as historical documents of a policy that should not be silenced, so that forgetfulness and repetition should be avoid.

The statue of Salazar by Francisco Franco, while being the symbol of a nefarious dictatorship, cannot remain present in a public building responsible by the democratization of the country. Today, 28<sup>th</sup> May – forty-eight anniversary of the birth of fascism – the central committee of the DMPA a) decided to occult the statue, covering it with a black cloth and tied it with ropes.

The “patron” of the policy of resting “proudly alone” will be protected from the free looks of the Portuguese who openly prefer to be accompanied. At the same time, it is a symbolic destruction and an act of artistic creation, in a gesture of revolutionary freedom.

Fascist art is bad for the vision



Fig. 4- DMPA, Salazar's statue wrapping, 1974, Palácio Foz



Fig. 5- DMPA, Salazar's statue wrapping, 1974, Palácio Foz



Fig. 6- DMPA, Salazar's statue wrapping, 1974, Palácio Foz



Fig. 7- DMPA, Idem



Fig. 8- DMPA, Idem



Fig. 9- DMPA, Idem



Fig. 10- DMPA, Wrapping A Ferro's bust



Fig. 11- DMPA, Salazar's statue wrapping, 1974, Palácio Foz. Source: AR Archive



Fig. 12- DMPA, Idem

a) The Central Committee for the DMPA: Alice Jorge, Ana Vieira, Artur Rosa, Aurélio, Conduto, David Evans, Eduardo Nery, Escada, Fernando Azevedo, Helena Almeida, João Abel Manta, João Moniz Pereira, João Vieira, Jorge Vieira, Lima de Carvalho, Níkias Spakinakis, Nuno San Payo, Pomar, Rogério Ribeiro, Sá Nogueira, Vespeira, Virgílio Domingues. (Flama, 1974, 41)

In a quite detailed manner, the article exhibited a few photos which constitute a precious document about that revolutionary-vanguardist political-artistic action: the wrapping of Salazar's statue with black fabric and ropes, inspired in Man Ray's *Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, 1920, and Christo's large scale wrappings, from 1969 on.

Photo nº 4 shows the statue before the intervention. Photo nº 5 shows the first action that took place: the statue was turned to the building, showing its back to the public. Photos 6, 7 and 8 show different phases of the intervention, carried on by a numerous group of artists and not only.

Besides the statue of Oliveira Salazar, a bust of the first *Director of Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional - Secretariado Nacional da Informação*, António Ferro, that existed inside the building, was also wrapped with black fabric.

The action's ambiance looks both enthusiastic and festive. By the images, one can feel that the predominant emotion is of joy and fun, and not of rage and anger. And in the end, on the faces of those that we can see, an expression of accomplishment and relief prevails.

That same serenity is also present in the text of the handout of the DMPA. In spite of "*being the symbol of a nefarious dictatorship*", it is said there that the DMPA "*does not claim for the destruction of works of art*", and on the contrary that "*they shall be stored as historical documents of a policy that should not be silenced, so that forgetfulness and repetition should be avoided*".

Of course, as the text asserts, the statue would not remain in Palácio Foz. So, one could well ask why if, in the end, the statue had to be removed, which was the reason that lead DMPA to cover the statue? In brief, what was the meaning of that action?

As it is explained in the MDPA text its meaning was a double one. First of all, it was a "*symbolic destruction*". Finally, it was an "*artistic creation*".

But not only, for, as it is well expressed by the photos, it was a joke too! A joke too, as it is well explained in MDPA text, when it ironically says that the covering of the Dictator's statue was also meant to protect it "*from the free looks of the Portuguese*" (!)



**Fig. 13-** Palácio Foz's Gardens with black spot of the implantation of Salazar's statue, Source: Palácio Foz site

The statue was obviously removed<sup>5</sup>, and the place of its implantation became marked in the pavement of *Palácio Foz* gardens, and a decorative like marble statue was placed near-by, filling the emptiness created by the removal of Salazar's statue, and seeking for some kind of a symbiotic integration with the building's color and its 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture.

I think this case is paramount, when talking about the phenomena of the toppling of statuary in Portugal and abroad. Any development on a renewed theory about the toppling of statues should not ignore it, and much discussion is still needed, in order to understand and elucidate all the facts and all the aspects brought by this case.

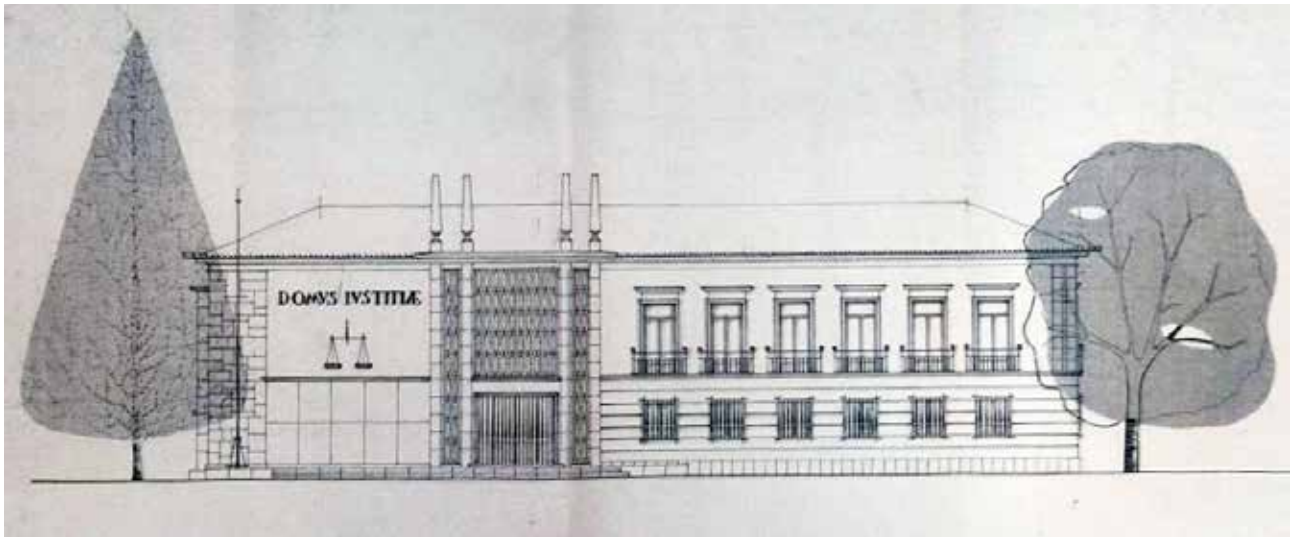
5 - After being removed from Palácio Foz, Salazar's statue was stored in a municipal warehouse (*Mercado Abastecedor de Lisboa*) together with a bust of the Portuguese Dictator which came from Palácio Foz too. Later on as we will see, both sculptures were sent to Santa Comba Dão, in order to be used in a projected museum of the Dictator, whose organization however never really began.

In fact, talking about statuary, what is really the meaning of "symbolic destruction"? Which are the facts and the signs, in a semiotic approach, that allows us to state the a "symbolic destruction" took place? What does it mean when someone says that something was been symbolically destroyed?

Of course, the first aspect is that the thing in question was not literally destroyed: it still exists, but its condition remains not the same, as it was before.

The statue, however, suffered a radical transformation. Its material features remain unchanged, its form is not even a bit modified, but its content – all the statements that were stated by the statue – become neutralized, if not reduced to nothing. In brief, the statue becomes an object: a mere thing.

How does it happen? Are we talking about any magical or shamanic intervention?



**Fig. 14-** Amoroso Lopes, *Tribunal da Comarca de Santa Comba Dão*, 1965, Fonte: Arquivo Municipal de SCD

I think it is not necessary to go that further. Although one can say that some kind of transfiguration took place, the method to perform such an achievement is not at all alchemic (!), for it is, as this case fully demonstrates it, simply an artistic method.

Only art can transform destruction into creation! Or maybe better, only art can achieve destruction through creation. And that was, from the beginning, the intention of the action, as it is stated in DMPA text, when it says that the action was meant both as *“a symbolic destruction and an act of artistic creation, in a gesture of revolutionary freedom”*.

That statement, in spite of its simplicity, clearly expresses the essence of the power of art. Art is the only activity that disregards destruction, for any destructive action carried out by art, is necessarily, simultaneously, at a distinct level, creation.

The lack of that same kind of power is possible to verify in other actions undertaken on statues, not made by artists, nor claiming for any artistic purpose.

That is the case of the actions that took place against another statue of Oliveira Salazar, implanted, in his hometown, Santa Comba Dão (SCD): a seated statue in bronze, molded by one of Estado Novo's most required official sculptors, Leopoldo de Almeida (1898-1975), and implanted before SCD's Tribunal, by initiative of Minister of Justice Antunes Varela (1919-2005). The dedication of the statue matched the inauguration of the Tribunal.



**Fig. 15-** Leopoldo de Almeida, *Moses imposing order over chaos*, 1965; Créditos: autor

Displaying a granite bas-relief also authored by Leopoldo de Almeida, the image produced by the ensemble, marked by Português Suave architectonic style, Biblical themes and strong moral content, was indeed very much in tune with the Regime's aesthetical and ethical credo, appearing the Dictator's statue in this context, as a most adequate and brilliant complement.

Besides the strong unity of the ensemble, it was clear that a semantic relationship marked the nexus among the tribunal, the bas-relief and the statue, for there was clearly a correspondence between the act of *“Moses imposing order over chaos”*, with the action of Salazar, imposing his Government over the Nation, for as the statue *“stated”*, its rule was *“All for the Nation, Nothing against Nation”*, being its instrument the Law, which was present by the Court behind him.



Fig. 16- Dedication of Salazar's statue, 1965, SDC

Besides that, the solemn image of seated Dictator was not the only aspect to describe. In fact, if the serious a compenetrated figure of Salazar constituted already a statement, both statue and pedestal were full of slogans and quotes from his speeches, as follows:

Under the Dictator's right hand: *"All for the Nation. Nothing against the Nation."*

Under the Dictator's left hand: *"It is no use to mourn the dead if the living do not deserve them."*

On the right side of the pedestal: *"Portugal can be, if we want it, a great and prosperous nation."*

On the left side of the pedestal: *"Those who give up fighting are unworthy to live, but that will not be said about us"*



Fig. 17- L Almeida, Oliveira Salazar, 1965, bronze, SCD

Curiously, only the first statement, based on a similar Benito Mussolini's slogan, and pronounced at 30<sup>th</sup> July 1930, during the Dictator's speech to the first congress of the National Union, in Lisbon, was related to the period of the birth and spread of Salazarism, in Portugal. All other quotes, were related to most recent times, namely to the hard times of the rejection of Portuguese colonial policy by several United Nations' General Assembly resolutions, because of the country's disrespect of 1960 General Assembly Resolution 1514, about the right of colonial territories to obtain independence through self-determination.

A news published by *Diário de Lisboa*, on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1975, under the title *"Salazar without head"*, described the action against the Dictator's statue in SCD, as follows:

Let us talk about Salazar. Everyone knows that in SCD, siege of his natal municipality, a bronze statue was dedicated to him (the seated Dictator, with his arms sustained like Abraham Lincoln). Well, now it appeared without head, and the head was taken to an unknown place, by equally unknown hands.

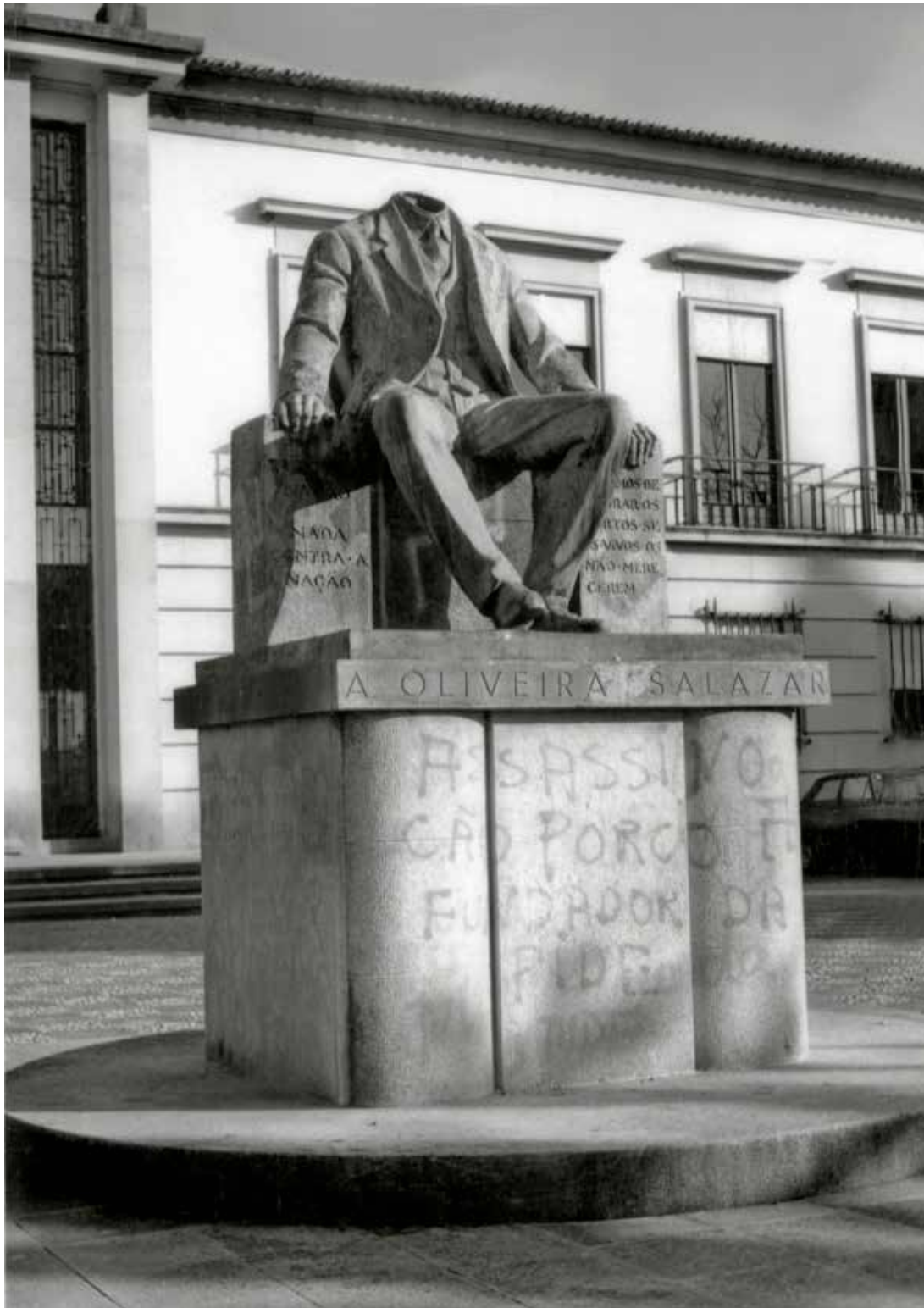


Fig. 18- Beheaded Salazar, 1975, SCD

Authors of the feat? It is said that three men raiding in a car. With other auxiliary means? Maybe an electric saw because the cut, according to testimonies, is “perfect”. Truly, after 25<sup>th</sup> April, already for many times, the work had been object of popular irritation, namely when it appeared painted in red, later in yellow, and even covered with a black cloth. It is hard to be bronze in peace ... (DL, 18/02/1975, p. 2)

Diário de Notícias’ edition, of the same day, added a few more details, stating that the action took place “*near the statue, around 4 o’clock A.M, but the apparently the act was not seen by anyone*” (Diário de Notícias, 18/02/1975). Next to the text, a photograph of the beheaded statue was reproduced, and that photograph later on became most popular.

In spite of the violence of the action against the statue, the fact that the decapitation of Salazar’s figure was the only intervention is a quite important detail, for it appears as a way of once again neutralizing the statue, in this case by promoting its depersonalization.

It is maybe relevant to remind that the decapitation of the statue happened during Leopoldo de Almeida lifetime, for his death occurred in also in 1975, but only on 28<sup>th</sup> April. I ignore if is there any statement by the sculptor about this action, and certainly it would curious to know if there is really any.

While it is clear that we are not dealing with any artistic intervention, it is curious to compare the image of the beheaded statue with the *graffiti* that had been before written on its pedestal, displaying insults like “*assassin*”, “*dog*”, “*founder of the PIDE*”, among other less perceptible.

I think that those insults on the pedestal, now may be seen as a bit more rude, vulgar and aggressive, than the decapitation of the statue, if we see it as a means of depersonalization.



Fig. 19- CRCSS, Poster, 1978, SCD

Although the criticism about Salazar’s regime was then very much spread by the country, in the meantime it was not universal, namely in its hometown. So, the presence of the beheaded statue of Salazar, was not praised by the population of SCD, at least by its most conservative sectors, and so, by the end of 1977, a *Commission for the Restoration and Conservation of Salazar’s Statue* (CRCSS) was formed, with the purpose of restoring the head of the Dictator on his statue, being that restoration conceived and done outside any legal procedures, thus ignoring all the artistic questions and respect by authorship rights, raised by such an intervention.

But those problems had little importance, comparing to the purpose of restoring Salazar’s statue. It was to create much trouble and turmoil because the intended ceremony was not authorized, for its authorization had been not even requested.

However, even canceled and forbidden, the CRCSS program was still ongoing, and their actions announced, generating much tension and even violence, as another news informs:

Tranquility returned, apparently, to SCD, perturbed last Sunday by disturbs when a self-nominated and self-designated CRCSS, disrespecting the Governmental prohibition, tried to restore the sculpture implanted in the garden before the Tribunal, which remained beheaded since February 1975, cut by unknown.

As incidents were expected, in order to fulfill the decision previously diffused by the Ministers of Justice and Intern Administration, declaring illegal the foreseen manifestation and restoration of the statue, National Republican Guard (GNR) moved to SCD a force of about a hundred men, backed up by armored cars type "Shorland". The manifestant's aggressivity would grow up by the end of Sunday afternoon, and GNR replied with gunfire to the air. (DL, 08/02/1978: p. 5)

In fact, the gunfire shot severely in the head a woman who was at the window assisting to the disturbs. She was transported unconscious to the Hospital and died a few days later.

All political parties criticized the events and the manifestants to disobedience to the Governmental prohibition to restore the statue.

The same news, added other relevant information:

The head for the statue of Salazar had been molded by an autodidactic medalist from Santa Comba, David Oliveira, also a collaborator of the regional press: he is author of reactionary texts published in "*Defesa das Beiras*". The mold was then sent to Gulpilhares, while the welding work, to be done in the village, was in charge of another group of a nearby locality. (DL, 08/02/1978: p. 5)

A full coverage of these events by reporters António Macedo and Inácio Ludgero, published on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 1978 edition of the weekly newspaper "*O Jornal*", adds much relevant information. Because of its long extension, we cannot present here a full transcription, but only some of the most important questions and points of view, about the will to restore the statue of the Dictator:

For many, it is simply just one more initiative belonging to a crescent activity by fascist individuals, groups and organizations which want to destabilize Portuguese life, and thanks to the discontent so engendered, intent to trouble the constitutional and democratic system.

However, the elements of the CRCSS, supported by the majority of the population justified that their initiative by questions of "localism" which first left indifferent the inhabitants of SCD, but now, after the violent Sunday intervention of GNR, became a question of honor. (SOJ, 10/02/1978)

Thus, was formulated the first level of understanding of the events in SCD. It was a political act done by reactionary forces, which intended to destabilize the young democratic regime. However, beyond that level, the coverage of the reporters made appear other aspects too:

*"Portuguese authorities after 25<sup>th</sup> April are accomplices of what is going on"* – it is the generalized opinion in SCD. In fact, nothing of the trouble that took place would happen if, as it was the wish of Salazar's family, the statue had been removed from its place, soon after 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974, as it happened naturally with other figures connected to fascism, in different points of the country. A polemic that now, more than ever, looks sterile, about the property of the monument and consequently about who should be responsible for its removal, goes on, since that request entered the Municipality of SCD, still in 1974.

Even after its decapitation, in February 1975, his familiars had proposed to keep the remains of the dictator's record, but did not get any specific answer from the authorities, who at the local level, only recently took a definitive stand about it, when it was already ongoing the public subscription for the fundraising of a new head for the statue.

However, until February 1975, and even after, its removal would surely be done without producing any conflict. In spite of many agree with its removal, now it will be unpleasant. "It is not now, when there are who wish to rebuild the monument that, in Lisbon, they can talk about an outrage to democracy. Outrage to democracy was

not to remove the statue, soon after 25<sup>th</sup> April” – someone said this week in the village centre. (SOJ, 10/02/1978)

This excerpt shows us how the problems related to the removal of statues can be complex. In this case, it seems that the problem that triggered the conflict was not the removal of the statue, but its non-removal. Its removal would be at first consensual and corresponded to the wishes of the dictator's family.

But the most perturbing aspect raised by the reporters of *O Jornal*, was of another quite different nature, as follows:

The CRCSS was created four months ago, and was formed by a civil construction painter, a carpenter (previous emigrant in Venezuela) and the owner of a garage. [...]

The CRCSS, that considered itself the representant of all the inhabitants of SCD, decided to begin by all the country and next to the emigrants, a campaign of fundraising necessary to the production of a new head of Salazar, meant to be placed in the statue during a public ceremony, convoked for last Sunday. (SOJ, 10/02/1978)

This means that the statue was exposed beheaded for two years and eight months (from February 1975 to October 1977), without any unequivocal answer to the dictator's family request, about the removal and delivering of the statue to Salazar's family.

Besides that, another most surprising detail was mentioned in the same coverage, as follows:

As it was noticed in the media, the Ministers of Justice and Intern Administration did not authorize Sunday's manifestation, what in fact signified that the authorities did not allow the reconstruction of the statue, last Sunday, as it was expressed in the official notes.

According to information that the targeted one did not confirm, this interpretation of the official notes would be done by the local GNR commandant, who had assured to the CRCSS for the Restoration and Conservation of the Statue of Salazar, that they could place the head on the statue before Saturday's midnight, while the manifestation marked for the next day was superiorly prohibited. [...]

The truth was that the guarantee the GNR commandant gave to the CRCSS, not only had not be accomplished, but also that the commandant had the initiative of calling for reinforcements, which arrived to Santa Comba from Viseu, Coimbra and Porto, while two local soldiers, removed the head from the statue with great difficulty, because of its weight (45 kilos), and took it to the GNR post. (SOJ, 10/02/1978)

This was really a hard and most unfair coup! One can realize now that it was a tactical move of the GNR commandant that assured an easy apprehension of the statue head, while provoking the indignation of the people of SCD, who reacted as follows:

The people that were guarding the statue and who knew about the agreement between the local GNR commandant and the CRCSS, then tried to mobilize the population, ringing the church bells, and activating the fire siren. About 2 o'clock in the morning, many dozens of people were concentrated in front of the GNR post, demanding the restitution of the head, while began to arrive the requested reinforcements. Testimonies said that the movement of the militarized forces put the population in a war like tension.

The arrival of these reinforcements – four intervention platoons equipped with automatic guns G3, Walter pistols, helmets, shields and bastons, traveling in jeeps and four armored cars – it was seen as a provocation “to the pacific people of Santa Comba, mobilizing much more people than the ringing of the bells and the sound of the sirens. (SOJ, 10/02/1978)

In fact, considering the high level of the confrontation between the opposed fields – GNR forces and CRCSS – a new commission was formed, as follows:

That commission whose dissuasive role by discarding any force measures was enhanced by the Mayor, requests a quick solution for the problem of the statue, and for that gained the support of the Municipal Executive and the Municipal Assembly: or the removal of the statue or its restoration, and the delivering of the statue's head to the City Hall, and its implantation on the statue, to be opportunely executed, with the

presence of a representant of Salazar's family.

For the moment, it was possible, thus, to obtain a certain detent in SCD. But it is a temporary calm [...] when the members of the CRCSS perceive that the agreement between the Municipal Executive and the Municipal Assembly and the Commission that Wants Peace does not include the maintenance of the statue in the place where it was erected. After the radicalization achieved by the population, due to GNR behavior, it is licit to suppose that the simple removal of the statue may cause a strong opposition, now. (OJ, 10/02/1978)

This proved indeed to be right. As a matter of fact, the solution for the problem of Salazar's statue in SCD, could not be but a climbing step further in the logics of force, as it is described in another news, published eleven days after the confrontations in SCD:

An explosion occurred today at 3:15 A.M., destroyed in SCD the beheaded statue of Salazar, which had been in focus since the incidents of Fat Sunday. There is no indications about any presumed authors (said to DL the GNR commandant) nor any arrestments were made (ANOP). Th explosive would be of a median power. (DL, 16/02/1978: p. 5)

On the next day, another news adds some more information about the bomb explosion:

A so-called "*Santa Comba Dão Anti-Fascist Resistance Group*" reclaims the recent bomb explosion of the statue of dictator Salazar. Through a phone call to "*Diário de Lisboa*" around midnight and ten, an unidentified element, claiming to be the spokesman for that group, claimed the action saying that it was justified "*before the fascist maneuvers in the sense of replacing the head of the dictator, and before the complicity of the Government by delaying the statue's removal*". Therefore, the *Antifascist Resistance Group of Santa Comba Dão* decided to "*reduce the statue to dust*". (DL, 17/02/1978: p. 4)

So, eleven days after the attempt to set a new head in Salazar's SCD seated statue, the case was solved by the most radical way. The fragments of the statue were collected, once again like relics, by the elements of the

population, and the City Hall has stored the biggest ones.

This story is really most impressive and tells us about the consequences such confrontations may gain and cause. Here, we can recognize the presence of force and ruse, as methods to deal with such tensions. How distinct and rude are these methods compared to the methods of art! How ineffective and useless is the power of force compared to the power of art!

It was indeed a regrettable way of solving the crisis, for besides being a political problem, it also engaged relevant artist and historic-cultural questions, which demanded for a more inclusive analysis and debate and nothing of that happened, nor even were mentioned in the mediatic and public discussion.

Why were those issues forgotten? In all the research that I have done on this matter, I never saw, any reference to artistic or heritage aspects related to the problem, as taking part of the debate that took place then.

As we have seen, the debate was centered in political, local and corporative aspects. The debate switched between if there was, or there was not, any fascist conspiracy fostering the statue's restoration; or if there was, or there was not, a blessed local pride reaction moving the restoration of the statue; or if there was, or there was not, any complicity between the democratic forces and the local administration, in keeping Salazar's beheaded statue exposed in SCD, while his family did request it for several times; or if there was, or there was not, any Machiavellian coup by the local GNR commandant. In brief, all the debate was centered in political and moral aspects, while the artistic and historic-cultural ones remained absent.

The same absence of criterium in dealing with these matters, is notorious in the solution found for filling the void of the exploded statue. The strategy followed was to erase its harsh memory: no mark of its presence was left on the pavement, nor even in the Tribunal's building, to whom the statue, as we have seen, had been clearly part of.

In this sense, on the place of the polemic statue, the Municipality implanted a decorative piece: a "*Luminous Fountain*", which established a strange, if not absurd, relationship with the Tribunal, and its severe and solemn architecture.

Certainly because of that problematic cohabitation with the Tribunal, the fountain suffered an unexpected metamorphosis, being transformed in *Monument to the Fighters of the Overseas War*, whose project, as the one of the

previous fountain, was designed by the City Hall Planning and Urbanism Department (DPU), as it is shown in the next photos:



Fig. 20- DPU, *Fountain*, c. 1980, Largo Dr. Alves Mateus



Fig. 21- DPU, *Monument to the Fighters of Overseas War*, 2010

As we can see, the pond of the fountain remained unaltered, while seven vertical elements around it allude to the seven colonies under Portuguese rule, until 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974: Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor, and Portuguese India, being the ensemble explained as follows in a military facebook page:

Flanking the central semi-cylindrical, seven vertical elements appear outside the tank, representing the 7 Overseas Provinces. These elements symbolize 7 stylized weapons firing into the sky, as if it were a military salvo. The water that fills the tank, symbolizes the Oceans and intends to remember the discoveries that the Portuguese made 400/500 years ago for the World.<sup>6</sup>

Published in an electronic edition of journal *Destak*, one news refers to the dedication of this monument refers, as follows:

Teresa Silvestre is 51 years old and recalls that she had to *"flee from the police"*, because she was part of a group of young people who did not want to see the statue removed from the square in front of Santa Comba Dão Court. *"In this place should be the statue of Salazar. They should have put this monument elsewhere"*, he defended. Natália Curveira, 79, regrets the lack of a Salazar's statue in the municipality where he was born. *"I worked on his farm, he was an educated person who spoke to everyone, he deserved to be put in a statue, but that will never happen, if not it was a war"*, she claimed. Carlos Rios also admits that he *"would like to see a statue of Salazar in the municipality"*, however, he maintains that this is not the time yet.

*"People still have the negative part of Salazar in mind,"* he argued. Maria Aurora Borges, who lost her brother in the war, stresses that the monument *"could not be better located"*. *"This monument only fails for coming late, but it appears in a quite noble place"*, she said. Opinion shared by the aunt *"of a soldier who fell in Guinea"*. *"The important thing is that this tribute has arisen, regardless of where it is"*, he maintained.

At the inauguration ceremony, the Mayor of Santa Comba Dão, João Lourenço (PSD), stressed that *"there could not have been a better place to do justice to those who died overseas"*. The monument was built in front of Santa Comba Dão Court, framing a fountain that was already there, having been placed seven vertical elements that represent the old provinces.<sup>7</sup>

From these assertions we can see that the memory of Salazar's statue is still present in the imaginary of those who lived during the colonial war, and the very monument still evokes the loss of the "Overseas Provinces", thus reiterating the Salazar's colonialist politics, although the war, whose dead the monument was meant to honor, was precisely the result of that politics, being Salazar its main, if not unique, responsible. And the fact that shows how wrong that war was, is that the much sacrifice and pain it caused, was not only unfair and unnecessary, but also useless.

Finally, it is curious to verify that while the statue of the main responsible for the colonial war could not be tolerated in the public space of SCD, on the contrary, the presence of a monument that reiterates exactly the same politics is officially allowed and even promoted, without any acerbic critic ever take place.

Such contradiction seems to me much meaningful, for the "reason" that what can turn that fact comprehensible and coherent, lies in the circumstance already said that statues and monuments refer each other to different meanings. Statues state and proclaim statements, both from past and present. Monuments recall and remind memories, both pleasant and unpleasant. Statues turn active and alive their statements, because they give them a corps. Monuments turn passive and passed their evocations, because they store them in the invisibility of History.

It turns then clear that the active presence of statues in public spaces, can be neutralized not by their removal or toppling, but by the implantation of monuments nearby them.

6 - FB page Liga dos Combatentes Núcleo de Mêda: <https://www.facebook.com/961263403955903/posts/2799717543443804/>  
28

7 - Jornal Destak: <http://www.destak.pt/artigo/63553>



Fig. 22- R. Kuöhl, Monument to the Dead of Hamburg's Hanseatic Infantry Regiment, 1936, Hamburg

### Memorials and counter-monuments

In his notable work on Holocaust Memorials, James Ernest Young refers a case that must be recalled here: The *Monument to the Dead of Hamburg's Hanseatic Infantry Regiment*. Erected by the Nazis in 1936, it surprisingly survived the massive bombing by the Allies over Hamburg and remained a *Lieu de Memoire* for the soldiers of that regiment till nowadays, in its site in Dammtordamm, nearby Hamburg-Neustadt, Germany.

Carved by German sculptor Richard Kuöhl (1880-1961), the monument displayed a row of soldiers marching below a verse of poet Heinrich Lersch scribed on one side: "*Deutschland muss leben, auch wenn wir sterben müssen*" (Germany must live, even if we have to die)<sup>8</sup>, standing as a belligerent Nazi symbol after, World War II, as James Young says:

8 - As we can see in the picture, part of the verse has been erased, in order to be read as "*Germany must live (...) we have to die*"

As antiwar sentiment rose over the years, Kuohl's monument came under siege by demonstrators, who smeared it with paint and chisel to its stone reliefs. It has incited full-fledged rock-and-bottle riots between skinheads and police, as other police and antiwar marchers battled in the streets nearby. At the same time, veterans of the Second Hanseatic Infantry Regiment number 76 continued to honor their fallen comrades at the monument's base, and the city continued to clean the monument and repair its vandalized façade. At one point, Radio Bremen invited listeners to turn out *en masse* and swaddle the monument in rags, blankets and linen – à la Christo. All the networks covered this live "TV happening" to the great concern of the local Christian-Democratic Union politicians and veteran groups still attempting to protect the monument from its public. (Young, 1993: 38)

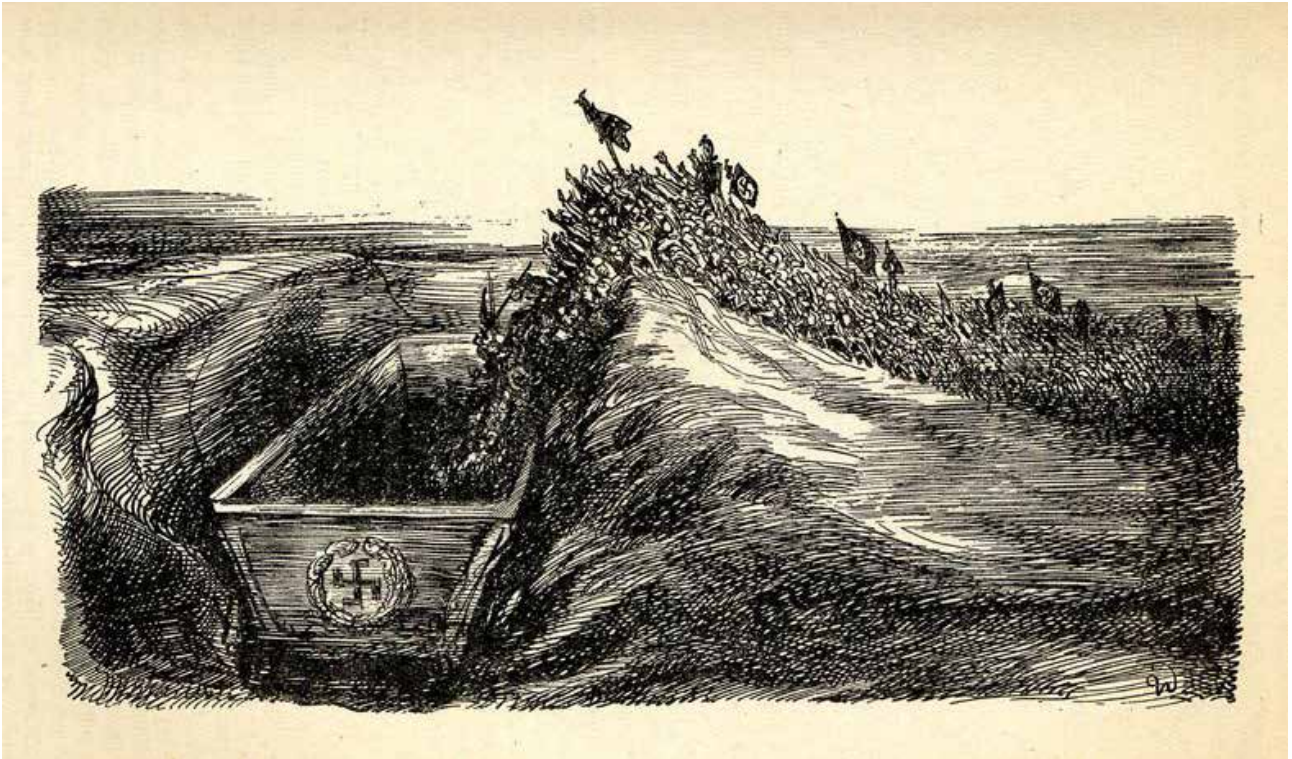


Fig. 23- A. Paul Weber, *German Fate*, 1932, Museum A Weber



Fig. 24- A. Hrdlicka, *F. Engels memorial*, 1981, Wuppertal

These happened during the eighties, and we should inscribe the growing tensions on this matter, in the escalation of the conflicts between pacifist and neo-Nazi groups of that time.

What were the solutions proposed for that conflict by the main protagonists of the time? Once again, James Young tells us:

Move to the Ohlsdorf Cemetery", some have suggested, where there already monuments to the resistance, as well as monuments to the victims of the bombing and camps. The Christian Democrats insisted that the monument stay put, unchanged, and be rededicated to the fallen soldiers of all wars. They then recommended that such a monument could always be balanced with a separate marker to the victims of the Nazis, to be erected at another, undetermined site. After months of debate, city authorities decided on a compromise: they would leave the Nazi monument in place and build a contemporary counter-monument right next to it.

To this end, a jury was appointed, a competition called, and more than one hundred artists, sculptors and architects responded with models and designs. (Young, 1993: 38)

But the winning solution – a reinterpretation-adaptation of a 1934 pacifist cartoon by Andreas Paul Weber, in which a large row of soldiers rowed to the grave – was not convincing, and later on the competition was annulled.

But the counter-monument idea remained, and the local authorities commissioned to Alfred Hrdlicka that was one of the members of the jury the conception of Hamburg's counter-monument. Hrdlicka (1928-2009) was an Austrian expressionist sculptor whose work treated political themes under an unequivocal progressist manner, and had already authored memorials, namely in Germany, like the Friedrich Engels Memorial, erected in 1981 in Wuppertal.

Although progressist, Hrdlicka's art (he was also a painter) remained assumedly tied to figuration, assuring thus a proper, straight and most dramatic narrativity.



Fig. 25- A. Hrdlicka, *Hamburgfirestorm*, 1983-86, Dammtordamm, Hamburg-Neustadt

That is what happened in his Hamburg counter-monument. Although not entirely executed, the *Hamburg Feuersturm* remains a referential mark of a new paradigm for contemporary memorial monumentality.

In the image, we can see Hrdlicka's counter-monument in the first plan, and Richard Kuöhl's in the background. Some years after the dedication of the *Hamburgfirestorm*, was implanted between both a non-figurative counter-monument: the "*Memorial for Deserters and Other Victims of Nazi Military Justice*", by German sculptor Volker Lang (1964-), dedicated, in 2005, to the 227 victims of the Wehrmacht justice system of the Second World War in Hamburg.

This, turns the case of Dammtordamm counter-monuments paramount on this subject. According to my point of view, not only these counter-monuments were able to solve with great correctness a most complex and delicate problem, but also the concept of counter-monument appears as an adequate artistic manner of solving the problem of undesirable statuary, sparing it from destructive toppling or mischaracterizing removal.

And, curiously, the idea of considering counter-monumentality as a means to avoid toppling, begins to be considered and accepted. In a most recent article published in Canadian Broadcast Company – CBC News Network – regarding the toppling statues problem, whose title is "*How 'counter-monuments' can solve the debate over controversial historical statues*", Karen Franck a researcher on counter-monuments, says:

It's remarkable how much it's playing out in the United States as well. I think it's a tremendously useful dialogue and I'm really amazed how the presence of these monuments has sparked this dialogue. So, even though we have very serious, and I would say justifiable, critiques of the monuments. If they weren't there, we wouldn't be discussing these pasts. So, they've sparked a discussion that's very useful. Without the presence of that monument in the City of Victoria there wouldn't be a clearly, and I would say also, eloquent, discussion of this person's weaknesses and strengths. So, I find it just remarkable that monuments that for years we ignored and passed by everyday are now sparking this kind of debate. (Franck,

In this sense, I think it is legitim to say that monuments are means of social participation, as I have already defended. Not only they bring meaning to public space, but also they perform there an active social role.

But, so that they can perform adequately its social role in public places the social functions they should perform, it is crucial that we get a better understanding about their nature, and about the roles that both statues, monuments, memorials and counter-monuments can accomplish in the multidimensional and complex world of public art.

So, let us go on studying, reflecting and discussing this theme together, without prejudices, pre-conceived ideas or dogma.

### Post Scriptum

Presenting no Introduction, my text could not finish with any Conclusion. Conceived as an open letter, it is a personal statement about the problematics of statuary in its relationship with power, from an epistemological, historic and politic point of view. It is the practices of toppling, removing or replacing statues that constitutes the focus of my study, and less the immediate problems related to specific cases, as the statue of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa or the Confederate ones in the US, whose approach by the media have been most noticed. What the present text seeks to reflect and discuss, is how statues' archetypical nature engages effects both on their meanings and in our behavior towards them.

**Bibliography:**

BABELON, Jean-Pierre, 2008, *La statue d'Henri IV sur le Pont-Neuf*. In: *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot*, tome 87, 2008. pp. 217-239.

BARROT, Odilon, (1834), *Bulletin annoté des lois, décrets et ordonnances, depuis le mois de juin 1789 jusqu'au mois d'août 1830*, Paris : Chez Pond Dupont Éditeur.

GEORGE, Andrew, 1999, *The Epic of Gilgamesh. The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*, London: Penguin Books.

GRÉGOIRE, Abbé, 1837, *Mémoires de Grégoire, Ancien Evêque de Blois*, Paris : Ambroise Dupont Éditeurs

MACEDO, Diogo de, 1948, *A Pintura e a Escultura nas Obras Públicas*, In, *15 Anos de Obras Públicas (1932-1947)*. 1º Volume, *Livro de Ouro*, Lisboa: Ministério das Obras Públicas, pp. 31-34.

MANGO, Cyril, 1986, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

MORAN, William, 1991, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: a document of ancient humanism*, In, *Bulletin, Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 22 (Toronto, 1991), pp. 15-22.

ROSSI, Aldo, 1982, *The Architecture of the City*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press

SERRES, Michel, 1987, *Statues: Le Second Livre Des Fondations*. Paris: Flammarion.

TOYNBEE, Arnold, 1947, *A Study of History*, New York and London: Oxford University Press

YOUNG, James E., 1993, *The texture of memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New York: Yale University

**Periodicals:**

D'ANCONA, Matthew, 2016, *Must Rhodes Fall?*, In, *The New York Times*, Jan 28, 2016

FRANCK, Karen, 2018, *How 'counter-monuments' can solve the debate over controversial historical statues*. In, *CBC Radio*, 10 August 2018.

GRACE, Stephanie, 2018, *Removing Confederate monuments in New Orleans the right thing to do*, In, *The Advocate*, 20 Dec 2015.

MACEDO, António e LUGERO, Inácio, 1978, *Estátua de Salazar em Santa Comba Dão: uma questão sem pés nem cabeça*, In, *Semanário O Jornal*, 10 de fevereiro de 1978

MOVIMENTO DEMOCRÁTICO DOS ARTISTAS PLÁSTICOS, 1974, *A Arte Fascista Faz Mal à Vista*, In, *Flama*, nº 1370, 31 de maio 1974.

S/A, 1975, *Salazar sem cabeça*, In, *Diário de Lisboa*, 18 de fevereiro 1975

S/A, 1978, *Santa Comba Ressuscita Salazar*, In, *Diário de Lisboa*, 8 de fevereiro 1978

S/A, 1978, *Salazarismo magro em Domingo Gordo*, In, *Diário de Lisboa*, 16 de fevereiro 1978

S/A, 1978, *Os Incidentes de Santa Comba*, In, *Diário de Lisboa*, 17 de fevereiro 1978

STIEM, Tyler, 2018, *Statue wars: what should we do with troublesome monuments?*, In, *The Guardian*, 26 sep. 2018