



The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg: monuments, documents, meanings

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It is characteristic of the unity of theory and practice in the life work of Rosa Luxemburg that the unity of victory and defeat, individual fate and total process is the main thread running through her theory and her life.

George Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London), 1971, p. 43

[H]istory, in its traditional form, undertook to ‘memorize’ the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments.

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London), 1992, p. 7

R. B. Kitaj’s work *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* (Plate 8) is usually dated to 1960, sometimes to 1960–62, and it has been owned by the Tate Gallery since 1980. It was a work central to his first and widely praised solo exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery in London in 1963.¹ Critically acclaimed works from the beginning of an artist’s career are interesting, not because they serve as mere starting points for a simple developmental narrative that identifies an essence evident in the early stage which is developed through to maturity, but because subsequent readings and interpretations develop into a discourse that is actually not quite so coherent. The texts are organised around and seemingly generated by the mythical figure of the artist but they can also be transformed in this process of organisation. When texts are placed in relation to each other the configuration offered becomes more significant than if they were considered separately as, through an ideological effect, they are seen to be part of a ‘natural’ category of thinking. In this essay I want to consider how this painting has been mobilised at different times in different ways that seem to offer quite disparate, and arguably incompatible, readings. I want to draw attention to the unconscious of this discourse and expose the way in which such conflict is elided. A central question is how far the meanings of a particular work depend upon the artist as

the privileged voice in this discursive process and whether what is offered by critics is actually an index of the changing discourse of the artist 'Kitaj' rather than a 'truer' or 'clearer' understanding of a work.

Described by Kitaj himself in the 1994 retrospective as rather 'graceless', the picture takes as its subject the murder of the revolutionary Marxist Rosa Luxemburg in 1919 in the aftermath of the failed uprising in Berlin by forces of counter-revolution acting in connivance with the Social Democratic government.² It is not just the subject of the painting that is interesting but the various strategies, evident in the picture, involved in the attempt to produce a painting of a political subject which opens up the pictorial space to questions of history and meaning. The painting works to draw attention to the ways in which an event can act as a locus around which revolve a series of accounts and historical narratives. Such narratives and accounts, however, do not necessarily co-exist peacefully but are mobilised to justify the interpretation advocated by any one party within the continuous contest of meaning that is the painting's discourse, which is not to argue for a form of cultural relativism but merely a recognition of the struggle that takes place over interpretation.³ Part of the gracelessness of the picture, perhaps, is the visibility of the processes of construction and containment that for some are meant to remain effaced within an aestheticised realm.

The picture is dark both in visual tone and theme. A series of symbols and figures overlap and intrude on each other to produce a disconcerting feeling in the viewer who is forced to look for clues to establish a meaning. Figures are placed within outlines of other figures with no uniform sense of scale or perspective. A disfigured corpse occupies the central space of the picture, held by a female figure and resting on a bed of sharply pointed striations. An obelisk in a landscape setting also points up to the body and a pyramid monument floats alongside it. A wraith-like figure hovers in the space of the top left hand of the canvas; there is an outline of a vehicle seemingly driven by a male figure; and a statue of a female figure resides within the outline of a helmeted soldier suggested by the khaki and brown hues of clothing and infill. A handwritten note is collaged to the top right hand of the canvas, as is the title of the picture itself on marbled paper at the bottom left-hand, with much of the lower half of the painting left bare. The picture has a rough quality to it, seen in the intemperate brushstrokes and graphic style. Overall the style is suggestive of Abstract Expressionism and even Surrealism. The central figure in the picture is the corpse of Luxemburg. After her murder Luxemburg's body was thrown into the Landwehr Canal in Berlin from where it was not recovered for four months. What is presented, therefore, is not an idealised body, as, perhaps, in a typical homage to a revolutionary martyr, but one that has been distorted by the effects of decomposition and having been abandoned in fetid water. A partly obscured hand holds a phallus/gun with a dotted line tracing a path to the head of Luxemburg which presumably refers to the soldier's execution- shot but can also be read as a comment on aspects of gender and violence.⁴ The outline of the figure in a vehicle and that of a helmeted soldier with a brown

shirt relate to the role of the military, the state organisations of legitimated violence, in this event. The lifeless body of Luxemburg is in stark contrast to the female figure of German national identity as represented by Johannes Schilling for the Niederwald monument, commemorating the establishment of the German Reich in 1871, placed within the outline of the helmeted figure.⁵ This opposition works to highlight the rhetoric of nationalism that operates through its mythologising and its symbols, and its implication in the events surrounding the death of Luxemburg, a dedicated internationalist, executed in the aftermath of the defeat of a revolutionary uprising.

The two other monuments depicted in the picture relate to Kitaj's quotation from an illustrated article in *The Journal of the Warburg Institute* from 1938: 'Monuments to "Genius" in German Classicism' by Alfred Neumeier.⁶ The pyramid is based on the proposed *Monument to Kant*, designed by Janus Ginelli, and the obelisk is derived from the *Monument to Frederick the Great and His Generals*, dated by Neumeier to some time during the French Revolution, but also never built. The use of these more abstracted forms as symbols, designed to be positioned in a picturesque setting, points to the attempt within one aspect of Romantic philosophy to transcend the particulars of an individual and gain access to a realm of pure Nature and Being. Kitaj's use of these second-order representations works to set up a powerful and disturbing contrast between the abstracted and figurative monuments to an imaginary concept of nation and greatness and the darker force of state-organised violence which underpins it, to show how the former degenerates into the latter during the course of the twentieth century.

The montage-like form of the picture with its lack of a single narrative and its interplay of various signs offers a reading of an historic event which, at this point, is not an attempt at defining a single moment of origin but rather a making visible of a point of intersection of multiple discourses both personal and public. The sense is one of fragmentation and decay, marked literally on the body of Luxemburg which also functions metonymically as a sign of the ever present potential for disaster which those symbols of greatness can resolve into. For Luxemburg 'socialism or barbarism' was the stark choice facing the German and European working class, and her death was a forewarning of what would befall them and others. The pessimism inherent in such an account serves as a warning against a complacent notion of history as natural evolutionary progress, as adhered to by the social democrats in Germany at that time with their belief in the inevitability of the decline of capitalism and concomitant, naive faith in parliamentary politics. The problematising of such narratives points to the acknowledgement of the potential disruption, and indeed irruption, posed by the specifics, positive and negative, of the contingencies of what Trotsky called the 'inspired frenzy of history'. What can be seen in the picture, therefore, is a complex array of signs that give some sense of the contradictory impulses of unity and fragmentation that continuously operate within the realm of historical meaning. This is referred to in a review of Kitaj's 1963 show where an enthusiastic critic observed that:

The concept of an immediately graspable formal unity has been abandoned. These [paintings] are the equivalent not of sonnets but of novels or – more nearly – of mediaeval chronicles. Of course there is an underlying unity of theme or inspiration (often deeply suppressed) but the end product has to be pored over, investigated and read like a map with many points of reference.⁷

The setting up in this way of the different monuments which positioned around the body of Luxemburg can be read as a critical commentary on the desire within the, by now dominant, bourgeois order to produce something that can transcend the particular and allow access to the universal, with a corresponding reflection on the terms of such an attempt. As Paul de Man describes it in his essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' the symbol is valorised over allegory because it is founded upon 'an intimate unity between the image that raises up before the senses and the supersensory totality that the image suggests'.⁸ Within the picture, therefore, there is a rejection of the illusion of a single transcendental moment of unity that the symbol is positioned to offer. As John A. Walker observed in a show that featured the Kitaj painting: 'The painting is emphatically two-dimensional; its space, and therefore its time, are not singular and coherent.'⁹

Monuments to nationhood seek to hold in place an essential truth that speaks of the greatness of the culture and its dominant values. The process of historical commemoration, as Irit Rogoff observes in an essay on postwar German monuments, is driven by the attempt to overcome 'the replacement of an absence with a presence', whether that absence be the dead of war or a moment of defining historical identity.¹⁰ But what this effects is an immediate emptying of the very force that originates within lived existence into a form of cultural reification. The utopian impulse, sensed in the blink of a moment of tantalising unity and experienced as a transitory instant of possible redemption, might be an anticipation of the not-yet-existing but it can only take form through that of the mediating material: at the moment it is fixed it ceases to be.¹¹

Kitaj sets up an effective and illuminating tension by the juxtapositioning of the monuments and Luxemburg's body within the picture space. For the socialist tradition the distorting effect of Stalinism can be seen in precisely the discredited practice of erecting hagiographic statues to Marx, Lenin, Dzerzhinsky and others, many of which have since been destroyed by the very people whose being they were meant to express. Monuments in this way offer a particular temporality in that they are an expression of an attempt by the dominant order to suspend history at that moment with attention directed forever back and fixed in a recurring present rather than allowing a sense of a potential future.

To engage further with the question of history and temporality it would be useful at this point to consider the writings of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin, someone whom Kitaj would also later take up as a 'tragic hero', or 'heroic failure' as the artist would call him, addresses many of the questions of culture, memory and meaning that Aby Warburg, whose work was familiar to Kitaj, would seek to

address if in a rather different way with his concern for pictorial rather than literary representations.¹² As Richard Wolin points out, in Benjamin we can see the idea of history not simply as an empty movement from one point of transition to the next but rather as containing those unique moments of 'now-time' charged with emancipatory potential. It is precisely the role of the critic, or the historical materialist as Benjamin would later characterise it, to reclaim such points in history from the homogeneous, 'empty time' of unredeemed historical life.¹³ Benjamin wrote in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940), 'Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes it into a monad.'¹⁴ This reflects his persistent rejection of the myth of automatic historical progress or, conversely, inevitable catastrophe. Susan Buck-Morss makes clear that, for Benjamin, myth and history are incompatible because myth reduces agency to the level of fate, whereas history implies the possibility of action and with it the responsibility of conscious agents to actually shape their own destiny.¹⁵

The elevation of symbols such as the monuments to nation and genius is precisely the emptying of history of that quality of significance which is, instead, filled with myth. Myth, in this way, is mobilised to position such symbols as the end point of a predetermined narrative of events and teleological development. The establishment of such mythic symbols is in part a response to the need for meaning in a realm of potential chaos but it actually works to invert the relationship between human actions and change. As Roland Barthes points out, it is part of an ideological act of draining history of the dialectical processes of human significance to leave behind the simplicity of essences, which at heart is actually an absence.¹⁶

The relationship between representation and experience can be considered in the light of the concept of allegory. Joe Shannon, in the exhibition catalogue for the 1981 retrospective of Kitaj's work at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D. C., refers to the way in which Kitaj can be seen to mobilise imagery in an allegorical way that sets in train a series of readings generated by the culturally significant emblems taken as the subject matter of his pictures.¹⁷ Informed by Craig Owens' essay from the journal *October* in which, via a particular reading of Benjamin, he proposes the allegorical impulse as the defining strategy of postmodern art, Shannon offers an interpretation of a series of works that span the course of Kitaj's career.¹⁸ What allegory offers is a continuous process of reading that on one level is evident in all things but which can also be structurally foregrounded within a text to immediately allow the reader to engage with the semiosis inherent to it; its meaning becomes plural not singular. This manoeuvre brings me to one of the most critically important aspects of the painting, namely, the collaged handwritten text in the top right-hand corner of the canvas.

The full text reads:

... Rosa Luxemburg was led from the Hotel Eden by Lieutenant Vogel. Before the / door a trooper named Runge was waiting with orders from Lieutenant Vogel and Captain Horst von Pflug-Hartung to strike her to the ground with the butt of his / carbine. He smashed her skull with two blows and she was then lifted half-dead / into a waiting car, and accompanied by Lieutenant Vogel and a number of other / officers. One of them struck her on the head with the butt of his revolver, and / Lieutenant Vogel killed her with a shot in the head at point-blank range. The / car stopped at the Liechtenstein bridge over the Landwehr Canal, and her corpse was / then flung from the bridge into the water, from where it was not recovered until / the following May' / (from Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Paul Frölich's 'Rosa Luxemburg' ... Left Book Club Edition, Victor Gollancz, 1940)/

The bust in the car window bears some resemblance to Field-Marshal Count von Moltke / a figure similar to the image at the left of this sheet surmounts the German national / monument, Niederwald, commemorating the foundation of the new German Empire / in 1871.

The Journal of the Warburg Institute, vol. II number 2, contains a paper by Alfred / Neumeier called 'Monuments to "Genius" in German Classicism'. The monu- ment at / the bottom left looks like a monument to Frederick the Great and / his Generals are seen in an aquatint used in illustration to Neumeier's paper.

What this offers is a series of references that give some sense of where Kitaj's influences in the picture come from. His use of quotation brings together both his- tory and art history and, with the appropriated imagery, draws attention to the ways in which our understanding of these events are always mediated through other accounts.¹⁹ Frölich's account itself is based on newspaper reports and details of interviews with the perpetrators of the murder.²⁰ The collaged sheet seems to be pasted over the figure of the murderer who therefore becomes buried under the layers of historical discourse. Kitaj writes in 1992 that this is one of the last pic- tures that included collaged text and the general sense he gives of the work as a whole is more as a 'student' work.²¹ Nevertheless the text is there and the ques- tion is what purpose it serves. On one hand it seems unnecessary as the title of the picture serves to define the event portrayed and is itself actually collaged onto the canvas. This seems to point, therefore, to an anxiety; an anxiety about wanting to pin down the meaning and possible readings of the picture. The account from Frölich serves to further this aim and could be argued to be an attempt to limit the potential semiosis generated by the picture. In terms of the rhetorical organisation of the picture the question is now: what is the relationship between the two ele- ments of image and text? It would seem logical to assume that the image has pri- ority over the textual account given the status of the object as a picture and that therefore the text works merely as a supplement to the images on the canvas. Just such a relationship is, of course, central to a notion of deconstruction, where at some point the attempt to produce a unified and coherent sense actually breaks down under the weight of the very inner logic of the text.²² As Christopher Norris describes it such an approach seeks to identify some crucial opposition within the text, to establish that there is a hierarchy between the terms with one of them

conceived as supplementary to the other but which, in fact, can actually be inverted with the supplement assuming a kind of ‘logical priority’, and that this unstable relationship is evident throughout the work.²³ With respect to the Kitaj picture and the relationship between the two orders of representation, what is offered by the Frölich account is an ‘optional extra’ but one that at the same time is necessary to overcome a perceived lack within the work – the lack being history in a history painting. This can be seen in the view expressed by Michael Podro in 1979 on Kitaj’s attempt in that first show to resist the aestheticisation of his painting:

Painting is unlike literature because language can be part of political action and at the same time saturated with complicated meaning. And the poet or historian can retrace the action through the language. But painting and the historical facts never engage each other so easily. And for Kitaj there was neither a socially or morally charged imagery which he could take for granted and deploy, nor a range of factual reference which he could assume his spectator could take for granted and draw upon.²⁴

What becomes evident, then, is a compulsive return by Kitaj to the picture to attempt to overcome this gap between the different systems of signification.

Kitaj maintains that even when a picture is seemingly completed in the studio it has a life after this and that he wishes to continue to have a ‘dialogue’ with the work and to keep the question of ‘finishing’ a painting open.²⁵ This relationship, however, is one that poses a number of difficulties. It immediately raises the question as to whether it is right to privilege the author’s voice over others once the work has been exhibited and therefore becomes part of a subsequent public discourse. Given Barthes observation that ‘The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author’, it could be argued that the flip side of the liberal urge to explain is an (author)itarian impulse to maintain control of what is fundamentally a public exchange.²⁶ Kitaj positions himself as the cultural mediator in this process of negotiation that seems to extend beyond the boundaries of the canvas. His agenda would appear to be that of the liberal humanist, asserting the values of individualism in the face of late capitalism. This can be seen in the way in which the textual account from Frölich is handwritten, as is the title of the picture on the canvas, which points to the central idea of the autographic trace as revealing the presence of the author.²⁷ Yet, paradoxically, the writing, whether account or signature, marks the empirical absence of the signer and points to the otherness actually within it.²⁸

In the catalogue to the 1963 exhibition, *Pictures with Commentary: Pictures without Commentary*, Kitaj includes an essay by A. R. Orage, ‘Sorel, Marx and the Drama’, and a fairly substantial bibliography. Displayed next to the canvas on the walls of the gallery and in the catalogue are further ‘footnotes’ to the Luxemburg picture:

The prophetic murder of the remarkable woman Harold Laski called one of the greatest Socialist thinkers of our time is described in hand-written notes which occur in the upper right-hand corner of the painting.

The profile in the car window bears some resemblance to Field-Marshal Count von Moltke.

Rosa Luxemburg. Her Life and Work, P. Frölich. London 1940

Rosa Luxemburg, Tony Cliff. London 1959

Letters From Prison. Rosa Luxemburg, London 1946

Monuments to 'genius' in German Classicism. A. Neumeyer, (*Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 11, 2, 1938)

To display an explanatory bibliography consisting of a biography of Luxemburg, a critical introduction to the politics of Luxemburg by a leading member of the Trotskyist Socialist Review Group, Luxemburg's prison letters and the Neumeyer article points towards the framing of the subject by a fundamentally political reading. This can be considered in the light of other strategies Kitaj employs in the show including exhibiting a large photograph of the Spanish anarchist Durruti in the window of the gallery by way of an advertisement for the exhibition, an exhibition actually located in a fashionable and thoroughly bourgeois part of London. However, it is clear that Kitaj never claimed any commitment to organised Left politics and such staging is rather more illustrative of Kitaj's involvement with the generation of young artists connected with the Royal College of Art and the general sentiment of the early 1960s as a period of social turmoil which Pop art responded to.²⁹

By 1982, in a statement provided for the Tate Gallery, Kitaj offers a reading of the picture that is a personal account, one now motivated by a negotiation of his own family history:

The picture arose out of a mediation upon two of my grandmothers ... It is about an historic murder but it is really about murdering Jews, which is what brought my grandmothers to America. One of them, Rose, left Russia because her Ukrainian neighbours regularly liked to kill Jews around the turn of our century. The other grandmother, Helene, left Vienna 40 years later because the Austrians were becoming expert at killing Jews and, in fact, Helene's two sisters (like Kafka's two sisters) were later murdered at Theresienstadt.³⁰

This then explains the two other female figures in the picture, the figure holding the corpse of Luxemburg and the wraith in the top left. Clearly any such revelation adds another layer to the painting and is an entirely legitimate explanation which allows for a further iconographical deciphering of the picture on the part of the viewer. What could effectively be set up is an interesting exploration of the negotiation between public and private meanings that shift and slide across the surface of the picture and echoes the structure of the picture itself with the jump from one association to another. But this is not as straightforward as it might seem given the compulsive attempts by Kitaj to actually block off this process. When in 1994 Kitaj states in the Preface to the picture for the retrospective exhibition and catalogue, 'It is about an historic murder, but it is really about murdering Jews',³¹ I

would argue that Kitaj is not pointing to the instability inherent in meaning and reading as it shifts from one register (public) to another (private) but is wanting to deny one side of this relationship and advance the other; in effect to reverse the hierarchy he worked so hard to establish in 1963.

This latter account does fit with one narrative of artistic development, as Kitaj became concerned throughout the 1970s and 1980s with an explicit exploration of contemporary Jewish identity which Andrew Benjamin, amongst others, has written about.³² However, I want to question whether such an interpretation can be retrospectively applied to the Luxemburg picture as evidence of some unconscious engagement with Jewish identity. What has to be considered as an issue is whether there are limits to this process of reading, which whilst not necessarily singular does not therefore have to be infinite. On one level anything can mean anything but in terms of an historicised social discourse interpretation is implicated in an ideological struggle over meaning and action.³³

Carol Salus offers an interpretation of the picture from the perspective of Kitaj's negotiation of Jewishness and anti-semitism. Salus's starting point mainly that:

The following study of his *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* will demonstrate how Kitaj examined the plight of Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) and cast it in a distinctly anti-Semitic context. The Holocaust, in particular, emerges as a major factor in the formulation of this painting.³⁴

Salus relies on Kitaj's 1982 statement to the Tate Gallery as the basis for her justification of this viewpoint. Pointing to Kitaj's reference to how his use of the pyramid form of the proposed monument in the Luxemburg picture echoes certain 'pyramidal monuments' created in some Jewish cemeteries after the war, Salus states:

Thus, Rosa's death becomes intertwined with victims of anti-Semitism in all ages. Although her death occurred before the rise of Hitler and the erection of the 'grave-stone facades' in Eastern Europe, Kitaj's imaged, collaged and written designations enabled him to regard Rosa as a universal victim of anti-Semitism, even a Holocaust victim, an historical event which occurred after her death.³⁵

I want to consider this for a moment. Firstly, Rosa Luxemburg was Jewish and, no matter how unimportant she might have considered this, for some it would have been enough to condemn her.³⁶ To argue that Luxemburg was regarded by Kitaj as 'a universal victim of anti-Semitism' in the early 1960s, however, seems to me untenable. There is nothing to point to in the picture that is a specific reference to anti-semitism other than the two associative references to his grandmothers who had indeed both escaped the persecution of Jews in Europe. As stated above, Kitaj clearly drew on a wide range of references including his own personal history when making the picture. But, as I have shown, Kitaj was very much concerned to put forward a political reading at this point. Secondly, the description of the picture

as a 'personal metaphor' really only works to elide the complexity of the reading of the picture that can actually allow for a number of metaphoric and metonymic meanings to be developed. What must frame all of these is an attention to history, in the sense of tracking the chains of significations without necessarily closing down those which are no longer convenient. Luxemburg was Jewish; was killed by members of the *Freikorps*, an ultra-nationalist paramilitary organisation from which Hitler would soon recruit his first wave of street thugs; and a degenerate form of German Romanticism was to become increasingly ominous in the 1920s and 1930s. But to argue that the figure of Luxemburg is really a metaphor for the universal suffering of victims of anti-semitism, which transcends the historical coordinates of her time, is a denial of the very quality that Kitaj seemed to work so hard to reinforce. It speaks once again of an attempt to fill an absence but this time from the opposite direction to that proffered earlier.³⁷

To return to the point made earlier about the relationship between image and text on the canvas, what Kitaj now seeks to do is to actually deny the textual account; to close down on what had previously been central. The textual account of Luxemburg's murder on the canvas and the explanatory bibliography intrinsic to the 1963 show now play no part in Kitaj's discourse on the picture. I would argue, however, that the presence of the account on the canvas undermines the attempt to posit some universal and essential notion of identity as the securer of its truth.

Kitaj probably came across Rosa Luxemburg through her prison letters which had been reproduced in the American journal *Partisan Review*, copies of which he picked up in a New York bookshop.³⁸ In 1969 Kitaj reproduced a cover of an issue of *Partisan Review* as part of his screenprint series 'In Our Time: Covers for a Small Library After the Life for the Most Part' (1969). This series consisted of fifty screenprints printed by the Kelpra Studio in London.³⁹ What interests me is the way in which the mythical figure of Rosa Luxemburg emerges once more in a Kitaj work. This series of prints of book jackets, more or less unaltered, points to Kitaj's artistic relationship to European culture, history, and sense of location and temporality. Laid out, these books which have become pictures give a sense of the breadth of cultural influences the artist engages with. Now at a level of icon, the book covers have shifted between orders of meaning; if the monuments described above strive for the status of documents, then, conversely, these documents have been transformed into monuments. Monuments in that they are mute but from which you cannot but hear whispers of memories, and of struggles fought; they become spaces that have to be filled. As a whole the series hints at a conceptual exploration of the relationship between language and aesthetics.

If in the Luxemburg picture Kitaj compulsively tries to fill the absence at the heart of the picture with history in whatever form that may be, in the screenprint the reverse is the case as there has been an emptying out of history. Unable to go beneath the surface of the covers of the books into the realm of deeper meaning, all that can happen is the continuous slide along the series. The series

as a whole gives a structure to what is essentially a collection of fragments devoid of coherence other than that of the space mapped out for the place of the author. The covers have become reified objects that now seem to have a mystical relationship between themselves, produced by a mechanical process that bears no trace of human labour. They are reminiscent of Lukács's description of how, under the dominant relations of capitalist production, 'reality disintegrates into a multitude of irrational facts and over these a network of purely formal laws emptied of content is cast'.⁴⁰ Like the experience of the narrator of Umberto Eco's metaphysical novel *The Name of the Rose*, all that is left for the viewer is a sense of the endless raking over of the remains of a once great library that offers only a kind of 'lesser library ... a library made up of fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books'.⁴¹ Of course Kitaj never actually adopts such a profoundly anti-humanist position because what is presented to anchor the series, once again, is his own individual sensibility and a series of Afterwords he has since written on the prints. Kitaj has subsequently looked unfavourably upon his screenprints precisely, it seems to me, because the processes of production, both collaborative and mechanical, can be seen to undermine the mythical figure the artist has sought to create.

For Kitaj, Rosa Luxemburg is a figure that reappears to continuously problematise his narrative of the artist. Retrospective attempts to silence the troubling nature of such a spectral presence seek to overwhelm it through the sheer weight of a narrative of identity, but such a process can never be complete and, like the body of Luxemburg herself, the questions will always resurface to disturb the closure imposed.