Deconstructing strategies of commemoration:

The Case of the Equestrian Statue of the Duke of Cumberland

Kyung An

Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.[1]

Walter Benjamin, The Task of a Translator (1923)

William Duke of Cumberland, born April 15, 1721; died 31st of October, 1765. This equestrian statue was erected by Lieutenant-general William Strode, in gratitude for his private kindness in honour to his public virtues, Nov. 5, Anno Domini 1770.

Inscribed on the plinth of the equestrian statue of Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, Cavendish Square, London (1770)

The empty plinth in London's Cavendish Square, on which once stood an equestrian statue of Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1721–65), is all that remains of Lon- don's first outdoor statue of a soldier, one of four equestrian works put up during the eighteenth century that the city has lost in subsequent years.[2] The idea of erecting a monument is intricately entwined with the endowment of ownership and the display of power. Changes in political power are often given validation through the removal of monuments dedicated to events once deemed historically significant and by the subsequent building of new ones.

Erected in 1770 shortly after the Duke's death, the equestrian statue presided over Cavendish Square until 1868, when it was removed for ambiguous reasons. The plinth has remained empty ever since with its inscription serving as witness to the memorial tribute that once stood upon it. Written in Soap: A Plinth Project (2012–ongoing), by the Korean artist Meekyoung Shin, revisits this particular episode from British history by recreating the original statue in her chosen medium, soap. Borrowing from Sanford Levinson's study on the tradition of public monument building in changing societies, 'Written in Stone' (1998), Shin's Written in Soap: A Plinth Project is an international public art project that reconsiders the monument as a site of historical and cultural negotiations, and the mutable meanings we attach to them.

The word 'monument' originates from the Latin monumentum, from the verb monere, meaning, 'to advise' or 'to remind'. In this sense, the monument's function extends beyond passive remembrance or accurate relay of historical information to embody a capacity to metamorphose into what Françoise Choay calls 'a living memory'. As Choay further explains, the monument 'addresses a past which is localized and selected to a critical end, to the degree that it is capable of directly contributing to the maintenance and preservation of the identity of an ethnic, religious, national, tribal or familial community'.[3] Such a projection can be found in Vladimir Lenin's 'Plan for Monumental Propaganda' (1918), launched in the year following the Russian October Revolution of 1917, with the intention of creating a historicised and politically-conscious identity for the people.[4] The Plan sought to take down and replace existing monuments with those dedicated to figures who had contributed to the global socialist cause, delineat- ing a historical lineage forged under political belief onto the urban canvas. Such an endeavour depended on the public's recognition of the significance behind the very act of build- ing monuments, which was in many ways a continuation of the tsarist tradition. Fast-forward several decades and this process was repeated, with numerous monuments to Lenin dismantled by the citizens of former Soviet Repub- lics to assert the irrelevance of Communist symbols in the present-day.

Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, the subject of the missing statue in Cavendish Square, occupies a precarious position in British history. The third and favourite son of King George II, the Duke became a war hero at the young age of twenty-five when he prevented

Bonnie Prince Charles's and the Jacobites' attempt to depose the House of Hanover at the historic Battle of Culloden on 16th April 1746. The victory was met with jubilant celebrations in England. To mark the occasion, George Frideric Handel composed the oratorio, Judas Maccabaeus (1746), containing the anthem 'see the conquering hero comes', in honour of the Duke, which was performed at a thanksgiving service in St. Paul's Cathedral shortly after his return.[5] Yet, history remembers not the military hero, but the 'Butcher', an unscrupulous general who enforced orders of executions of wounded rebels in cold blood. The nickname became rife as popular literary and visual depictions illustrating the horrors carried out under the 'Butcher' were propagated. The rumours were most likely made widespread by the Jacobites in an attempt to save face from the defeat. However, it has also been suggested that William's own brother, Frederick, the heir apparent, who shared an uneasy relationship with the King and was thus forbidden from taking military roles on his behalf, encouraged them.

In time, tales of strife and horror became romanticised, providing the backdrop for James Grant's The White Cock- ade; or, Faith and Fortitude (1867), where a legend is toldof 'a spectral army, led by the doomed spirit of the Duke, [that] visits the scene of its atrocities, and marches to and fro amid weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth'.[6]

While attempts have been made to restore a 'true' portrayal of the Duke and his legacy – most notably by William Speck and Rex Whitworth who emphasise that it would be an error to measure Cumberland's historical legacy based on an event that lasted no more than six months of his life – the label 'Butcher' has persisted.[7]

In 2005, BBC History Magazine selected the Duke as the worst Briton of the eighteenth century.[8]

Two monuments were erected in honour of the Duke upon his death in 1765. One, a memorial obelisk to the Duke's military services erected by his father in Windsor Great Park, is still extant. The other, an equestrian statue commis- sioned by Lieutenant-general William Strode

to the work- shop of the Cheere brothers to adorn Cavendish Square, has not survived. A statuette of the lost sculpture by Sir Henry Cheere dating from circa 1746–70 was recently discovered and purchased by the National Army Museum, providing a comparative insight into the original equestrian statue's appearance. In the statuette the Duke is dressed in full military uniform typical of the eighteenth century and sits on a charging horse. In fact, it is said that the lead sculpture was largely ridiculed by its contemporaries for its painstak- ingly faithful rendition of modern costume – including a wig and cocked hat – despite the support shown by some for the decision against classicisation.[9]

Other printed materials circulated at the time – some- times in celebration of his victory at Culloden and at other times with the intention of vilifying his name – also portray the Duke in a similar pose. In particular, the statuette corre- sponds to the view of the lost statue from the west side of the square in an etching by James Peller Malcolm dating from 1808 and another amusing depiction by an unknown artist of the statue shown from the back dating from 1771. The only discrepancy between the statuette and these prints is a pistol held in the outreached arm of the Duke, which is present in these two etchings, but absent on the statuette itself. It is thus probably safe to assume that the pointing finger of the statuette would have held a weapon, memorial- ising the Duke's military prowess and success. In this sense, the statue diverges from the Equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (175) on the Capitoline Hill, Rome, a popular proto- type for equestrian statues throughout eighteenth-century Britain, and from which it is seen to have derived. While the gallant portrayal of the Roman Emperor presiding over his subjects with a gesture of an outstretched arm to signal peaceful governance is similar in pose, the monument of Cumberland is closer to Hubert Le Seuer's Equestrian statue of Charles I (1638) in Charing Cross, London, where the British monarch is seen holding a baton in his right hand.[10]

Philip Ward-Jackson's account of the statue is by far the most comprehensive one available today.[11] Ward-Jackson recounts the story of an application for government funding made in 1868 on behalf of the Management Committee of the Cavendish Square Enclosure for repairs to the work. This was refused on the grounds that it was not a registered public statue. Ward-Jackson assumes that the Committee then took down the statue intending to restore the work.

Others, such as Rupert Gunnis and John Blackwood, provide a more tragic fate for the sculpture, recalling the order by the fifth Duke of Portland in 1868 for it to be removed and melted down.[12] Whatever the reason may be the statue did not reassume its place in the square. The plinth, however, has remained, supporting the speculation that the restored statue would eventually reclaim its place atop the plinth that bore the Duke's name.

The monument translated: London, Seoul, Taipei and beyond

Margaret Garlake's claim that 'memorials to long-dead worthies have little more potency than street furniture' rings true when considering the entire monument to the Duke of Cumberland that was abandoned in a state of rupture and the 'invisibility' of the plinth which had remained unoccupied for 144 years.[13] How are we then to understand the recreation and reinstallation of a monument dedicated to a historical and royal figure, once a hero, now disgraced, originally erected over two hundred years ago as a personal tribute by an individual, brought down a century later, and resurrected as a work of art by an emigrant artist in the twenty-first century?

The literal reinsertion of the statue back into the city of London has courted controversy. When the exhibition was first announced in the summer of 2012, BBC in Scotland and Scotland on Sunday were the first to launch attacks.[14] An independent councillor for Culloden was quoted as describing the work as an 'affront', finding little solace in the fact that the work would eventually be washed away as it is made in soap. He further commented: 'this is not the kind of thing that will improve relations between the High- lands and England'. The antagonism was appeased by the deputy leader of Westminster City Council, who maintained that the work should not be seen as 'reheating ancient historical grievances', and that Scots who see the work would not be offended any more than English visitors by statues of William Wallace or Robert the Bruce.[15]

Yet, what has perhaps gone amiss is Shin's role as an interlocutor, or translator, between cultures and epochs; heritage and remembrance; identification and reclamation. As Walter Benjamin writes:

> Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life. The idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity. [. . .] The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history, is credited with life.[16]

In Shin's work slight modifications to the sculpture and its installation are noticeable, and these are just as much intentional as they are unintentional. For example, in Shin's sculpture the Duke of Cumberland is unarmed and the patterns on his uniform and saddle rug are executed in a more lavish style. The statue also faces in the opposite direction to its original counterpart (towards north as opposed to south). The artist is decidedly apathetic toward delivering a faithful copy of the original statue, a pursuit that is deemed inessential and redundant. The disputes in the Scottish press also bury Shin's obvious disinterest in the notion of preservation as found in Japanese culture, where replicas of original temples are constructed and earlier copies periodically destroyed. This is a position she has maintained throughout her career.

Soap aids in this undertaking. Its ability to convincingly assume appearances of marble, stone, porcelain and glass has often been quoted in the discussion of Shin's career-long Translation series. This ongoing series was developed out of the artist's interest in the jarring or subtle mistransla- tions that occur when an object of cultural and historical specificity is transported and dis/re-located. Written in Soap: A Plinth Project probes the temporal dimension of this phenomenon. As the soap weathers, details are dulled and cracks appear, challenging notions of permanence and definitiveness we confidently attach to such

monuments. Time effectuates mutation; history is revised incessantly, disguised in the name of heritage. Consequently, Shin's resolve to resurrect the equestrian statue of the Duke of Cumberland rather than to create a novel work of art distinguishes it from other public art projects in London, most notably the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square, an annual exhibition that commissions artists to create temporary public sculptures on the empty plinth of the square. Rather, by embracing the historicity of public monuments as her point of engagement, Shin's project is a tacit interjection into the realm of contemporary public art commissions and installations dominated by the ephem- eral and the spectacular.

Despite Written in Soap: A Plinth Project's inception as a rumination on the historical trace borne by the empty plinth, it is not site-specific by nature. In July 2013, a replica (including the plinth) was installed at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, as part of the 2013 Korean Artist Prize and another is due to be erected at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, towards the end of the year. The project's expansion through replication in various locations regardless of, or perhaps in spite of, the differing contexts of reception and perception, rightfully interrogates the translatability of the monument. What does it mean when funerary statues from Ancient Greece of young men or masks used in African ritualistic practice are exhibited in museums in New York and London? Indeed in London, the original equestrian statue of the Duke of Cumberland in eighteenth-century attire was a familiar part of British heritage and a recognisable product of its time and place. Today, it has been recreated in soap and reunited with the forlorn plinth in Cavendish Square, memorialised by a sensational moment of installation watched by the press and the public alike during the London 2012 Olympics. But what becomes of the monument when it is transplanted to a national museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art five thousand miles away, and shown as part of an exhibition recognising artistic achievement?

The expansion by no means ends at every new venue, as the life of each statue is also captured and streamed live through the project's website. Its presence on the Internet will allow the project to be reached by audiences all over the world at any time of the day or night, accessible to a network of wireless communities including those who may come across it by chance and perhaps revisit the page on several staggered occasions. Web presence also facilitates interface

between each leg of the project, as the work is re-casted each time from the first mould used in Cavendish Square. It will also allow the work to penetrate physical spaces, private and public, commercial and non-profit alike, in the form of a video projection. The appropriation of Written in Soap: A Plinth Project by each new territory – on- and offline, present and future – confronts the prevailing assumption that monuments are, by nature, static in both place and time. Shin's deconstruc- tion of the cultural strategies of commemoration is a compelling reminder of the complex sets of codes at work, invariably determined by the traditions and conventions of a given society or culture, upon which our perception and engagement so heavily rely.

[1] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' (1923) in Illuminations, trans. Hannah Arendt (1973; repr., London: Fontana Press, 1992), 74.

[2] John Blackwood, London's Immortals. The Complete Outdoor Commemorative Statues (London: Savoy Press Ltd., 1989), 347.

[3] Françoise Choay, The Invention of the Historic Monument, trans. Lauren M O'Connell (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

[4] Randon Taylor, 'Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda', in Art and literature under the Bolsheviks: The crisis of renewal, 1917-1924, vol.1 (London: Pluto Press, 1991), 56–63.

[5] William Speck, The Butcher: The Duke of Cumberland and the Suppression of the 45 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 140. His unpopularity would have been further affected by his defeats during the Seven Years' War (1754–63). Under pressure by the French, Cumberland agreed to the Convention of Klosterzeven on 8th Sep- tember 1957, leading to the disbandment of his army and much of Hanover. Disgraced, Cumberland resigned all his military and civil office duties. Cumberland did, however, remain a powerful advisor to his nephew, the new king, George III, from George's ascension to the throne in 1760, until Cumberland's death in 1765.

[6] See James Grant, The White Cockade; or, Faith and Fortitude (London and New York: G.Routledge, 1867), 416.

[7] See Bernard W. Kelly, The Conqueror of Culloden (London: R&T Washbourne, 1903), 174; and Jonathan Oates,

Sweet William or the Butcher?: The Duke of Cumberland and the '45 (London: Pen & Sword Military, 2008), 153.

[8] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4561624.stm, accessed 25th September 2013.

[9] The costume has led to a revision of attribution of the lost statue from John Cheere to his brother, Henry, who had

been better known to incorporate modern costume into his work. See Philip Ward-Jackson, Public Sculpture
of Historic Westminster, Vol.1, Public Sculpture of Britain, Vol.14 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), xxii.

[10] This equestrian statue is also seen to have been modelled on the statue of Marcus Aurelius, which held a paradigmatic status for equestrian statues. See Charlotte Chastel-Roussea, ed., Reading the Royal Monument in Eighteenth-century Europe (Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2011), 12; see also Ward-Jackson, op. cit. (note 8), xx.

[11] Initially, the Earl of Oxford had proposed to raise a marble statue of Queen Anne in 1738, but this came to nothing.

[12] Rupert Gunnis, Dictionary of British Sculptors, 1660–1851, rev. ed. (1953; repr., London: The Abbey Library, 1968), 97; Blackwood, op. cit. (note 2), 346.

[13] Margaret Garlake, 'Heroes and kitsch in post-war monuments', in Jeanne-Marie Teutonico and John Fidler, eds., Monuments and the Millennium, Proceedings of a joint conference organised by English Heritage and the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (London: James & James Ltd, 2001), 49.

[14] Stephen McGinty, 'Perfumed effigy of Butcher Duke raises a stink in the highlands', Scotland on Sunday,
8th July 2012, http://www.scotsman.com/scotland-on-sunday/scotland/perfumed-effigy-of-butcher-duke-raises-a-stink-in-the-highlands-1-2399182, accessed on 15th July 2012; see also Teàrlach Quinnell, 'Ìomhaigh Ghlan a' Bhùidseir', BBC, 10th July 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/naidheachdan/18780918, accessed 10th July 2012.

[15] McGinty,op.cit.(note13).

[16] Benjamin,op.cit.(note1),72.