Kristina Norman

AFTER-WAR

Estonia at the 53rd International Art Exhibition–La Biennale di Venezia
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AFTER-WAR
by KRISTINA NORMAN

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In the current essay I reveal the background to my *After-War* project and shed light on several events in the near history of our homeland that are important to me. I will also explain how I personally experienced them. This is a personal attempt in the field of historical writing (mémoires) and also in creating some sort of mythology to frame my artistic practice and to give sense to my artistic stance. I have been dealing with the topic explored in the *After-War* project for several years. I've created a number of audiovisual works and carried out some experiments in the public space as well. The criticism that my most recent work attracted demonstrates the division that is so symptomatic of the society of our small country.

A culture of opposition exists in Estonia, which historically has deep roots and in recent years has turned into a war of memories and a war of monuments that perpetuates the memories for the different groups. By a "culture of opposition" I mean that Estonian society is a classical example of a cultural entity that defines itself through opposition with The Other. Estonians commonly think of and refer to themselves as highly individualistic people who stand by each-other only when threatened by a common enemy – foreign master, regime of force, economic crisis *etc*. The current generation remembers only two occasions when the Estonian nation stood together shoulder to shoulder: the Baltic Way[1] and the Singing Revolution[2]. The Soviet period is generally associated with a

1 Baltic Way (also Baltic Chain, in Estonian Balti kett) is the event which occurred on August 23, 1989 when approximately two million people joined hands to form a human chain that was over 600 kilometres long across the three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – in order to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

2 The Singing Revolution is a commonly used name for events between 1987 and 1990 that led to the restoration of the independence of Estonia. The term was coined in 1988 after

social model that threatened the national identity and language of a small occupied country due to a Soviet policy known as Russification. The period of national re-awakening that started in the 1980s is usually characterized as patriotic and positively nationalistic. At that time, the blue, black and white tricolours flew in the wind and the chords of Alo Mattiisen's patriotic song "It's a proud and good thing to be an Estonian" (*Eestlane olla on uhke ja hää*) echoed in the air as Estonians became "a free nation in a free land".

Many Russian-speaking locals understood and shared the Estonian desire for independence, and they supported it in the referendum by voting in favour of independence. Their disappointment was great, when it turned out that not all people living here would become citizens of the re-independent Estonia, and that this privilege would need several more tests of loyalty. Ethnic Estonians wanted to fully enjoy their re-found statehood, and those who had previously enjoyed more rights, but who no longer belonged to the entitled nation, rapidly lost their trust in the new state.[3] The small republic regained its independence on 20 August 1991,[4] and only 69% of its inhabitants were ethnically Estonian.

Now that 18 years have passed, it's clear that the patriotism of a small nation that used to be so marginal while incorporated within a huge federal state has metamorphosed into the classical nationalism so common among nation states. The current political power constructs and redefines their historical, foreign and internal enemies for populist reasons. At the same time, they are carrying out a policy of the intensification of national identity, and in this process monuments have become vital visual instruments.

spontaneous mass night-singing demonstrations at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds.

3 It is impossible to ignore the fact that many Russian-speaking locals were categorically against Estonian independence from the start. During the Soviet regime and the "privileged nation" days ethnical Russians formed this counter-balance to Estonian patriotism. The loss of their position seemed too tragic and traumatic to them even before it happened, so to balance the National Front movement they created Intermovement (Интердвижение) in 1988, declaring that they were against breaking apart from the Soviet Union.

4 The First Estonian Republic existed between 1920-1940.

The political leaders that came to power have started to reorganize the landscape of memory – for example, at the beginning of the 1990's most of the monuments erected in the Soviet years were removed. However, the monument to the liberators of Tallinn, *alias* the Bronze Soldier, remained in the centre of the city of Tallinn. [5]

The Bronze Soldier was only removed from the centre of the city in the early morning hours of 27 April 2007. By then it had already been the cause of conflict[6] between Estonian ultra-nationalists and Russian-speaking defenders of the Bronze Soldier for two years. In 2006 a group known as *Ночной Дозор* or the Night Watch[7] was established. The politicians in power (and those wishing to enter politics) constantly used the Bronze Soldier conflict in their election campaigns. For example, the elections held in March 2007 brought to power a populist rightist party named *Reformierakond*[8], and its leader Andrus Ansip, is still the ruling Prime Minister of Estonia in 2009.[9] *Reformierakond* won largely due to a campaign that was clearly against

5 In the 1940's still young Soviet power destroyed most of the monuments erected in Estonia during the first Estonian Republic.

6 The monument had repeatedly been tainted – for example, painted in red or in Estonian flag colours, etc.

7 Ночной Дозор got its name from a book (1998) by Russian sci-fi writer Sergei Lukyanenko, because in it good forces are battling the bad ones under the cover of night. The book has also inspired a blockbuster movie, produced in Russia in 2004 and directed by Timur Bekmambetov.

8 Reformierakond or the The Estonian Reform Party states that its main aim is to develop a welfare society in Estonia by implementing the free creative powers of the people. Reformierakond is exerting the convictions and traditions of European liberal democracy.

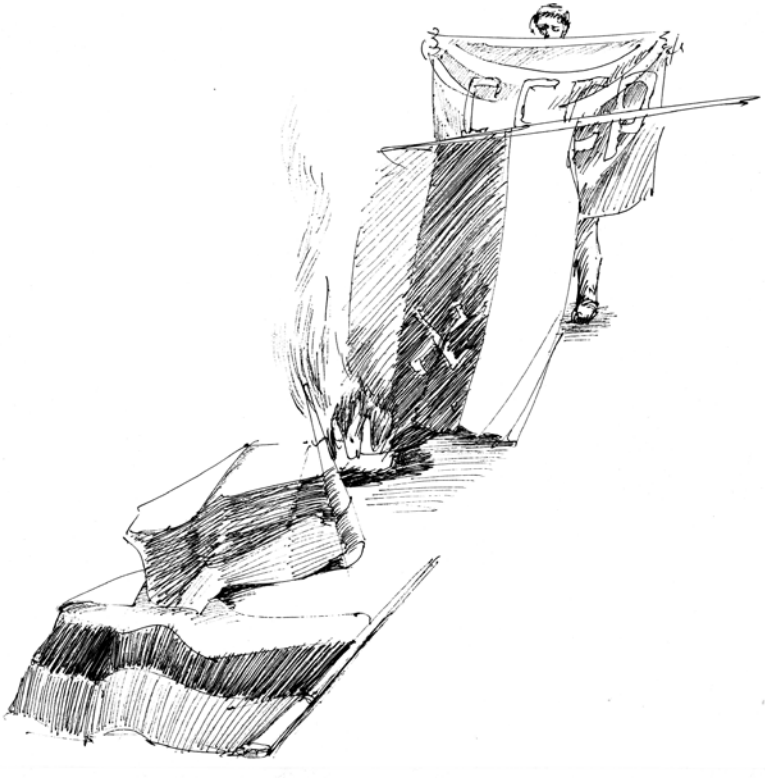
9 Estonia is a parliamentary republic and the prime minister is its political leader. Andrus Ansip has been the Prime Minister since 2005.

The Bronze Soldier was a cause of conflict between Estonian ultra-nationalists and Russian-speaking defenders of the Bronze Soldier for two years.

the Bronze Soldier, even though Ansip's promise to make Estonia one of the five richest countries in Europe within five years in light of rapid economic growth also played its part. In January 2007, the Estonian Parliament started to work on the law concerning the removal of illegal structures, which, if approved, would have provided a legal basis for removing the Bronze Soldier. The tensions between communities grew and international relations worsened. In Russia, the embassy of the Republic of Estonia had been in trouble for several months with meetings and pickets being organised outsides its doors by a Kremlin-supported youth organization, the Nashi[10]. After the Bronze Soldier was moved, though

10 Nashi's longer name is Молодежное демократическое антифашистское движение "Наши" (Youth Democratic Anti-Fascist Movement "Ours!"). It is a government-funded youth movement in Russia that positions itself as a democratic anti-fascist movement. Its creation was encouraged by senior figures in the Russian Presidential administration, and by late 2007, it had grown in size to some 120,000 members aged between 17 and 25.

actually also before this event, the meetings in Moscow almost got out of hand – the participants climbed repeatedly over the high fence marking the territory of the embassy, and in addition to this they tore the flag from the embassy once. Protesters even attacked the car of a Swedish diplomat visiting the Estonian ambassador and they also tore the Swedish flag off the car. Countries exchanged diplomatic notes as the Russian side violated several international contracts. Russia increased its political pressure on Estonia, even threatening to cut diplomatic relations altogether. Estonia was, and is still, accused of violating the human rights of ethnic minorities



The meetings in Moscow almost got out of hand.

and of attempting to rewrite history. Several Russian politicians demanded that the government of Estonia resign. The members of *Ночной Дозор* co-operated voluntarily and closely with Russian TV channels and among other things they organized special protest meetings where they staged exaggerated descriptions of the state of ethnic minorities in Estonia. Poll results in Russia at that time showed that Russians considered Estonia to be their top enemy (while Georgia was number two).

On the 26 April 2007, the Bronze Soldier monument area was surrounded with fences in order to delimit it for the archaeological excavation of the grave where Red Army soldiers had been buried in 1946. The procedure was allegedly started in order to finally shed light on the identities of the people actually buried there,[11] and the remains of the people buried there were intended to be re-buried in a more appropriate place afterwards (*e.g.* in some cemetery).[12] The Bronze Soldier as a grave marker was also to be moved to a cemetery along with the remains.

Prime Minister Ansip started claiming in May 2006 that people want a solution to this endless conflict, which is why the monument should be removed from Tõnismäe. Everybody knew that pitch. The older generations of the Russian community in Estonia had even accepted the inevitability of this event. Yet, on 26 April 2007, immediately before the Victory Day

11 Different communities support and spread different versions of history. The community of Russian-speaking people who moved to Estonia during the Soviet regime believes that the remains belong to the Red Army heroes who died while liberating Tallinn from fascists. Estonians, on the other hand, who survived the Soviet regime believe that these couldn't be the liberators of Tallinn, because by the time the Red Army reached Tallinn in September 1944, the German forces had already left town, and there was no battle activity. At the open house day at the parliament on 23 April 2007, the Prime Minister called the people buried on Tõnismäe marauders.

12 Before the excavations and dislocation of the monument, Andrus Ansip publicly supported the view that it is insulting and inappropriate for Estonian people, when those who still support and spread values rooted in the Soviet period, follow their unchristian and uncivilised traditions (dancing and drinking vodka on gravesites) – and furthermore do it in the heart of the capital. Also, the location of the graves was emphatically inappropriate, as it was right next to a trolleybus stop.

Tõnismäe was surrounded by fences and the whole square in front of the monument was covered by a huge white tent.

celebrations on the 9 May[13], when some Russians traditionally gather at the monument to celebrate victory in the Great Patriotic War – a strong basis for their Russian identity – the Estonian government made the place inaccessible to them by commencing archaeological excavations. Tõnismäe was surrounded by fences and the whole square in front of the monument was covered by a huge white tent.

Most people took this as a provocation and they gathered around the fences in the evening to protest against the excavations and also against the removal of the monument. Ansip was named the Anti-Christ and a

13 9th of May is known in Russia as День Победы, Victory Day, celebrating the end of the Great Patriotic War (World War II). In European tradition, the end of World War II is marked by Victory Day on May 8, a day earlier.

blasphemous gravedigger. A confrontation on Tõnismäe between civilians and special-forces units lasted for hours and when the protesters were finally forced to leave the area with the help of teargas and dummy cartridges, they headed off to sack the old town and city centre that the police had left unguarded.[14]

Rioting lasted for two days, but by the second day the city had been filled with policemen from other towns as well as volunteers or assistant policemen. Due to this, both sides embarked on a campaign of physical violence. Quite a few people who accidentally got in the way of the police were beaten with truncheons and thereafter taken to D terminal in the harbour where they were held in custody. Later, there were stories that the conditions of this detention were inhuman and that the police had beaten everybody. The police still deny any use of excessive violence, and nobody who wasn't there in person knows for sure what really happened at the terminal. Both sides naturally bent the truth to support their own claims. [15] As most people had already chosen which side they supported, they either believe that they were "innocent victims" or that "law and order" prevailed.

14 There were Estonian-speaking citizens among the looters too – along with the Russian-speaking majority they also used the chance to loot the expensive stores and to fill their big bags with different products. Hugo Boss, Armani, Marlboro Classics and Diesel clothing and accessories were the most "popular" brands to go. Alcohol stolen from stores gave the pilferers even more courage. The police statistics showed that at the same time no crimes were committed in the suburbs of Tallinn, where criminal activity is usually higher than in the centre, or so the official rhetoric went.

15 There were no media cameras there and security camera videos haven't been leaked to the media either. The only visual material I have personally seen of the events in the terminal are a few short clips filmed with mobiles. One can see from there that most of the arrested people are standing or crouching on the floor and that most of them have their hands tied behind their backs. The background noise consists of mainly whistling and cursing directed towards policemen. See, for example: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQo6VcFQShU&feature=related

"An unknown Russian hoodlum" and a police state

"An unknown Russian hoodlum".

For the largest part of the Russian-speaking community, the main object of hate is the Estonian Republic as such (along with its government), and after the events of April 2007, the police became the next in line as an executive power. This hatred was especially strong during the culmination of the conflict. The stereotype dating from the Soviet period, describing Estonians as fascists from a hostile bourgeois country, who went to fight the Russians in German uniforms in World War II, was resurrected in the shouts and slogans that looting Russian youths chanted on the streets. They screamed: "Fascists!" and alternated this with the name of their ethnic home country: "Russia!". They carried posters with "AnSSip the gravedigger" and "CCCP 4ever!". Right after the riots and police violence, one of the largest national newspapers, Postimees,[16] published an editorial entitled "The unknown Russian hoodlum"[17] beside a photo of a looter symbolizing the Russian community in Estonia as a whole. Some other media channels also ridiculed those who protested against the dislocation of the monument. No difference

16 It's one of the two most important daily newspapers of Estonia and is mainly considered to be of liberal views.

17 As the editorial wasn't signed, it meant that the article expressed the views and ideas of all the whole newsroom. See: Nädala nägu: Tundmatu vene pätt. – Postimees 28. IV 2007 (http://www.postimees.ee/280407/esileht/arvamus/257707.php)

They carried posters with "AnSSip the gravedigger" and "CCCP 4ever!".

was made between hooligans, marauders and peaceful protesters – not to mention anybody else who dared to manifest their non-Estonian identity. In 2009, it will be the second anniversary of those events, but so far there have been no articles in the papers apologizing to the Russian community for creating such a public image of them. The strong polarization of society between "Estonians" and "Russians" didn't actually follow ethnic lines, but crossed those borders. Every "ethnic" Estonian who dared to criticize the position of the Estonian government was momentarily tagged "pro-Russian" and "anti-Estonian". A well-known Estonian sociologist Juhan Kivirähk wrote a critical article immediately after the riots, where he stated that in his opinion the midwife of such criminal activity was the Estonian government and especially Prime Minister Andrus Ansip. Kivirähk said that Ansip should resign because he had destroyed society's internal balance and damaged Estonia's international reputation. "The government won its ridiculous battle with one monument, but in the meantime it lost

something much more important and worthy – the trust of its people and society's feeling of security".[18]

Yet the majority of citizens understood the situation differently. Public opinion poll results showed that after the "successful police operation" support for the police and the government grew remarkably,[19] and most of the people answering the poll were also satisfied with the fact that the monument had finally been relocated. Though some citizens started to gather signatures against the "Police state", and amendments to the law increased the authority of the police a great deal.

Public opinion poll results showed that after the "successful police operation" support for the police and the government grew remarkably

18 J. Kivirähk, Uue kolmikliidu verine algus.– Eesti Päevaleht 30. IV 2007. (http://www.epl.ee/artikkel/383936)

19 In the beginning of May 2007 the newspaper Postimees ordered a poll from research company TNS Emor and its results show that almost half of the questioned people were ready to vote for Reformierakond. In April, i.e. during the election period, the support to the Prime Minister's party had been only 34%. See: http://www.postimees.ee/150507/esileht/siseuudised/260667.php

Where to belong?

People have asked me whether I am a patriot of Estonia or not. My answer to that question is yes – and no. I am definitely not a hoorah-patriot, so I am critical of this phenomenon in general. Since my early childhood I've associated with both Estonians and Russians – both sides understand history and their national identities very clearly –, but I've always been able to understand emotionally the driving forces of both of those communities of memory. I've understood that history is a verbal fiction and that it's as much invented as it is discovered.[20] We have all heard our parents' and grandparents' stories of "how the things really were", how they understood the ongoing events, how they participated in them and experienced them. During the Soviet occupation every Estonian knew what was wrong with the history textbooks published in the Soviet Union, and nowadays every student in a Russian-speaking Estonian school also knows very well what is different in the textbooks from what he or she has heard at home. In that sense – when it comes to method and purpose, the curricula of history in Estonian schools today doesn't differ much from that used in the Soviet times. The authors of the history books were educated during the Soviet occupation and whereas then they were the supporters of a different "historical truth" and their point of view was generally considered dissident, now they've become living proof of the effectiveness of the Soviet methods of education.

Today our politicians also recreate the government models and methods of the previous era. Back then the education system was supposed to make "Soviet people" out of youngsters, today the aim instead is to produce an "Estonian-mindedness". I don't support this one-sided "Estonian-mindedness" that is expected from all Estonian citizens, and that is synonymous with hoorah-patriotism in my opinion. I am not "Estonian-

20 H. White, The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact. – Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism. Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 82.

minded", nor "Russian-minded". I am a patriot of my country because I desire to see social change here, and I also want to contribute to it. I want to live in a better society because I was born here and I feel that I belong to this society.

In 1997, I graduated from one of the Russian-speaking high schools in Tallinn, and just recently I happened to discuss the events of the so-called Bronze Night and the amount of Russian schoolchildren rioting on the streets of Tallinn, chanting "Russia, Russia!", with my high school history teacher Yevgeny Samohvalov. He thought that the young Russian-speaking generation living in Estonia today is going through a deep crisis of values. Work at school has made him realize that today the schools no longer teach history as a scientific discipline. The sole purpose of a teacher has become checking whether the children know the dates and events documented in the history books. The teachers are no longer expected to teach children to form their own opinions and make judgments based on facts. However, it is understandable that the only knowledge and value judgements that really matter are those that a person has formed by him- or herself. Due to all of this, Yevgeny decided to give up his job.

In my family we speak both Estonian and Russian – and none of us knows exactly what our nationality is. As a child I was sent to Russian school, because both of my parents had graduated from a Russian school and they never even considered sending their daughter to an Estonian educational facility. On the other hand, I remember vividly how my parents so emotionally supported the Popular Front of Estonia (*Rahvarinne*)[21] during the transgression period of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and that my mother used to have heated discussions in the evenings with our Russian neighbour who was a member of Intermovement (*Интердвижение*). I remember how we participated in the referendum with all our family in

21 The Popular Front of Estonia was a political movement born from public initiative, officially it was called the Popular Front for the Support of Perestroika (Rahvarinne Perestroika Toetuseks).

March 1991 and we all voted for the restoration of the independence of Estonia. In the same year my sister Arina, five years younger than me, went to first grade. One could feel the Estonian spirit gain more and more power every day. Our family too agreed to "eat potato peels" [22] as long as we get our own state.

Since then, I have wondered what kind of person I would be, if I had graduated from an Estonian school. Maybe I'd have received Estonian citizenship more easily and I'd never have seen the "alien's" passport. Maybe I'd have become a "real" Estonian and I'd never have had to take the language exam. But in the newly independent Estonia one had to prove one's "Estonian-ness" with necessary documents[23] or by taking a language exam and by testing one's knowledge of the constitution of the republic. My papers are not much to be desired, because I had graduated from a Russian school. It was an unforgettable experience: to sit this exam along with crying and desperate Russian babushkas, for whom the hope of passing the exam was clearly unreal – it was not an easy task for an elderly person to learn a language with 14 cases by force.

Yet I didn't become a "real" Russian either in the Russian school because when people went to take flowers to the Bronze Soldier on the 9 May, I always stayed at home or went for a walk in the city. The monument square and its associations remained a stranger for me. I didn't consider it important

22 "Eating potato peels" was a phrase often used at the time, implicating people's heartfelt desire for independence and demonstrating their readiness to go through hard times, if only they could live in an independent state. In the late 1980s, the economy of the Soviet Union totally collapsed and the Estonian wish to become independent was to a great extent spurred by the desire to control economy in the republic.

23 These documents included an application written in Estonian; identification documents and papers proving the person's citizenship; a document proving that the person is residing in Estonia under the circumstances stipulated in the abovementioned law; curriculum vitae written in your own hand in Estonian; those people who were born in Estonia also had to provide data on when his or her parents moved to Estonia and under what circumstances; documents attesting education and career; attestation of constant legal income; a certificate from the Estonian language exam and a certificate also to prove that the exam on the constitution and Citizenship Act has been passed. See: Estonian Citizenship Act, approved in 19. I 1995 (http://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=961169).

The monument square and its associations remained a stranger for me.

to take flowers to the mass grave of unknown people because my grandfather, who had fought in the Red Army, has a grave in the cemetery and every year we'd go to light candles there on All Saints' Day.

I've never been totally accepted – neither in the Russian high school nor in the school of art where I went with Estonian kids. For Russians, I was an Estonian, and for Estonians I was a Russian. It is still like that.

This is my artistic stance

Years after my graduation from high school, I turned back to my childhood experiences, and memories became an object of research for me. The video installation *Contact* (*Kontakt*, 2005) deals with the phenomenon of the alien's passports valid in Estonia, as well as with the people who own them. The name of the project implies similar titles used for sci-fi films and so on. However, it is ironic that this sci-fi word "alien" describes rather well the status of those people in the country and society in which they live. The main character of the video is a young man, about my age, who has a Russian background, but who was born in Estonia; he studied English linguistics at the university, but he never learnt Estonian. He works as a customer care assistant in a wholesale warehouse, where the owner and most of the clients are also Russian. He doesn't need Estonian at work and he manages really well without speaking the official language of the state. As far as Estonian society is concerned, he lives in a parallel reality.

In the video *Contact* this so-called alien is reading the Estonian Aliens Act out aloud – a document that regulates his status, obligations and rights. The video is equipped with Estonian subtitles because for this young man reading and pronouncing words in a foreign language is incomprehensibly difficult.

In the documentary *The Pribalts* (*Прибалты*, 2006), I explore via my former schoolmates – whom I last met almost ten years ago because since being accepted into the Estonian Academy of Arts I have mainly communicated with Estonians – how a "real" Russian lives in contemporary Estonia and whether this "real" Russian even exists. I also asked my old classmate Sergey these questions. Sergey went to study in Russia right after graduating from high school, and has become a young star actor at

The video installation Contact (Kontakt, 2005) deals with the phenomenon of the alien's passports.

the Mayakovsky theatre in Moscow. As he was an "alien" by passport in Estonia, he decided to go to his ethnic home country only to discover that he is an alien there as well. In Moscow, Sergey has obtained Russian citizenship and he communicates with people in his mother tongue, but he hasn't fitted in completely. Sergey says that his dream is to become famous in Moscow and then to return to Tallinn and ameliorate the state of Russian culture in the city where he was born.

The experimental film, *Monolith* (Monoliit, 2007), was originally supposed to be a documentary that would give equal liberty of speech to both sides participating in the Bronze Soldier conflict, and would reveal the emotional, historical and political meaning of the monument for both communities living side by side in Estonia. I started shooting the film in autumn 2006, when the monument drama was just beginning. However, as the conflict escalated I understood that a situation where the "event" is being constructed and where it is getting too big to grasp should be approached from "outside" not "inside". Otherwise there's some threat that I will simply start defending one of those putative truths and choose a side in this invented conflict. The absurd has to be approached in an absurd key. *Monolith* was born as a paraphrase of Stanley Kubrick's famous film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In my film, the Bronze Soldier is a monolith that comes from outer space and lands on Earth, more specifically Tallinn, and the society here is now forced to relate to this new alien object. Some people decide to worship this object with its cosmic origins; others choose to fight it. This process would lead to a conflict that cannot have a positive solution. In the film, indomitable natural forces solve the situation because human beings would continue to argue about the "truth" until the end of their existence.

Even though people in artistic circles were familiar with my interest in identity creation thanks to my earlier project, *Monolith* earned me mostly criticism. I was told that I hadn't chosen an artistic stance and

Monolith was born as a paraphrase of Stanley Kubrick's famous film 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968).

that the film doesn't explain whose side I am on in this conflict. [24] It appears that not choosing a side is not a stand!

I got the idea for the *After-War* project for the 53rd International Art Exhibition in Venice from an experiment I organized in Tallinn on the 9 May 2008. As I was intrigued by the question of the sacral and the profane in the context of the Bronze Soldier, I carried out an experiment as an artist. I made a small number of miniature plaster cast copies of the Bronze Soldier and took them to the Defence Forces Cemetery in central Tallinn. This is the new location of the monument, and where the members of Russian-speaking community had again gathered together to celebrate Victory Day. The purpose of this action was to find out whether small copies of the Bronze Soldier could have some new extra meanings that differ from those of the real one? I wanted to know how much the semantic field of the souvenir format of these figurines would or could match that of the real monument itself? And whether people would agree to exchange money for a miniature representation of the Bronze Soldier?

It was a very interesting experience to talk to the people gathered at the statue in the cemetery. Some of them were positively surprised at seeing me with those figurines. One older man advised me to make more, but a little smaller, so that I would become "really rich" by selling them cheaply. It was evident that my artefacts delighted many people and they were ready to obtain them – some for money, some with wit and some by evoking pity. Others, however, recognized in me "the notorious agent-provoker from the newspaper Postimees" who came to the holy territory on a holy day to use unethical and staged journalistic methods in order to create a negative public image of the local Russians for the Estonian people. [25]

As an artist I carried out a symbolical act: I took the representation of the monument from the sacred sphere that the community had created around it, and positioned it in the daily, profane sphere. A paradox is written inside

24 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXqk0gqG11c
25 See the headlines of the newspaper Postimees mentioned above (28. IV 2007).

I made a small number of miniature plaster cast copies of the Bronze Soldier and took them to the Defence Forces Cemetery in central Tallinn.

all of this – it is like selling cheap copies of icon masterpieces in ersatz frames. Small copies of icons have a certain function in daily life, or the profane sphere – with their help people create an environment where they can carry out religious acts daily without having to go to church.

It turned out that one of the miniatures I had handed out in the cemetery was taken to Tõnismäe, to the previous location of the monument. The evening news on the national television network showed how somebody had lit a candle in front of the small Bronze Soldier, symbolizing the eternal flame,[26] and how people were bringing flowers to this installation.[27]

26 In the Soviet years, the eternal flame burnt in front of the monument on Tõnismäe.

27 TV news of Estonian Public Broadcasting (Eesti Rahvusringhääling), 9. V 2008 at 18.00 and 21.00 (http://uudised.err.ee/index.php?06119703).

As an artist, I had all of a sudden given the community an impulse that gave its members an idea for how to re-sacralize the place that had been claimed profane by the government a year earlier. The meaningful void of the monument's previous location was filled by the miniature copy of the symbol that had previously been standing there.

The action on the 9 May 2009 – artist's suggestion for a new cultural practice – is a sort of mimetic gesture documented and shown at the exhibition in Venice. I am reflecting the reaction of the community to my impulse of the previous year. I am now suggesting a new physical expression for the community, with their clear desire to bring together the previous and current locations of the monument. I prepare a full-scale golden copy of the Bronze Soldier and make it go through a symbolic route of passion, repeating its journey from its previous location to the new one. I am accentuating and poetizing the invisible, I am making it visible by giving the empty square as well as its new place in the military cemetery a semantic meaning. Here I am stressing that the behaviour of the artist and the community are tautologically different. This shift not only takes place due to the visual transmutation of the "hijacked" model of actions (the community takes a small replica of the monument to Tõnismäe, but the artist does it with full-scale copy, *etc*), but also thanks to the different positions from which these actions are fulfilled.

For the Russian community, taking a small replica of the monument to its previous location was kind of an attempt to return "confiscated instruments" to their comrades, so that they could, in a dignified manner, celebrate the *victory* of the Great Patriotic War. I am demonstrating that the community needs such instruments in order to practise their communal and national identity rituals of intensification. As an artist, I am deliberately intervening in reality and distorting it. I am not only acting inside the existing reality, and I am also not involved in recreating it. I am trying to provoke and evoke the emergence of different points of view. By creating a golden full-scale copy of the Bronze Soldier and carrying out a ritual known from church

practices, I am highlighting the religious substance of the rituals practiced by the Russian community in Estonia. With my action I am not only targeting the Russian community, who practices those rituals, but also this Other, who has, via technocratic means and methods, violently intruded into something that they really don't have a clue about.[28] The traditions of the people who always gathered at the Tõnismäe monument have always been described with scorn in Estonian media, because the "dancing on graves" [29] and "eating and vodka drinking" have always caused disdain among Estonians – representatives of a different culture. The sacredness of these rituals[30] performed by Russians was not understood in Estonia, and nobody even wanted to begin to understand them. There was no code to help decipher the information obtained by the simple visual observation of the other community. There still isn't. The purpose of my artistic practice is to take over the code-generating machines and program mistakes in them, so that none of the existing ciphers could be mechanically used to read the cultural texts.

28 I consider the government as an intruder.

29 Soldiers were buried under the square in front of the monument.

30 Semiotic and culturologist Mikhail Lotman, a son of the renowned Yuri Lotman, claims that "drinking vodka and eating in the burial sites is connected to pagan rituals and funerals is one of its manifestation. Eastern Slavs named this pagan ritual "dedy" (деды) – "grandfathers", hence the reasoning that the monument supporters and the Night Watch used – they're protecting the graves of their grandfathers. See: M. Lotman, Märulisemiootika Eesti pealinnas. – Postimees 2. V 2007 (http://www.postimees.ee/020507/esileht/arvamus/258198.php).

Kristina Norman's *After-War*

by Marco Laimre

Sound

Sound installation for the exhibition.

On 26 April at 9:05 pm I entered a well-known Tallinn nightclub, the Von Krahl Theatre Bar, to go to a tribute concert dedicated to the famous post-punk band, The Cure. Despite the small audience, the event wasn't cancelled. The bands performed their interpretations and covers from the The Cure's repertoire – some more successfully than others. Sometime around 2 pm my friend Raul, a sound artist (and also the designer of this book), arrived at the party in an agitated state of mind. He had been recording sounds of events in the city for his installation for the group exhibition *New Wave*[1], which was to open the following day. According to him things in the city were getting out of hand. He had seen with his own eyes how a man with

1 New Wave – Estonian Artists of the 21st Century was a group exhibition curated by Anders Härm and Hanno Soans at the Tallinn Art Hall (28. IV 2007–28. V 2007). It was the first big survey exhibition of Estonian artists who had entered the art scene in the 2000s (See also: 22+ Young Estonian Artists, a collection of interviews compiled by Karin Laansoo in 2005. – Ed.). Because the events outside were more interesting, the opening of the exhibition was not met with the attention it deserved – the guests at the opening preferred to lean out the windows to watch the riot.

dreadlocks had tried to set a newspaper kiosk on fire; he'd seen cars that had been overturned and a massive ongoing fight between the police and mostly young Russian-speaking Estonians. The last performer of the night was Estonia's legendary anarchist and punk poet Villu Tamme and his band J.M.K.E. They played their song and started to pack up. I asked them to play one more, in Russian – well… in solidarity with the Russian youths fighting the police on the streets. But after a brief discussion J.M.K.E. refused, saying they couldn't "remember" a single song in Russian.[2] And this was at the end of the 20th year of their performing career! Around 3 am, now 27th April, stepping out of the nightclub and heading home I saw that the windows of a hat shop had been smashed. The streets were empty, but from somewhere further away I could hear a particular noise. We are all familiar with the uneasy sound of low-flying helicopters, the combined *sound* of police sirens and vague rhythmic thumps – the latter no doubt being produced by some "thumpers".[3] What was taking place was the riots, which later became known as the Bronze Night.

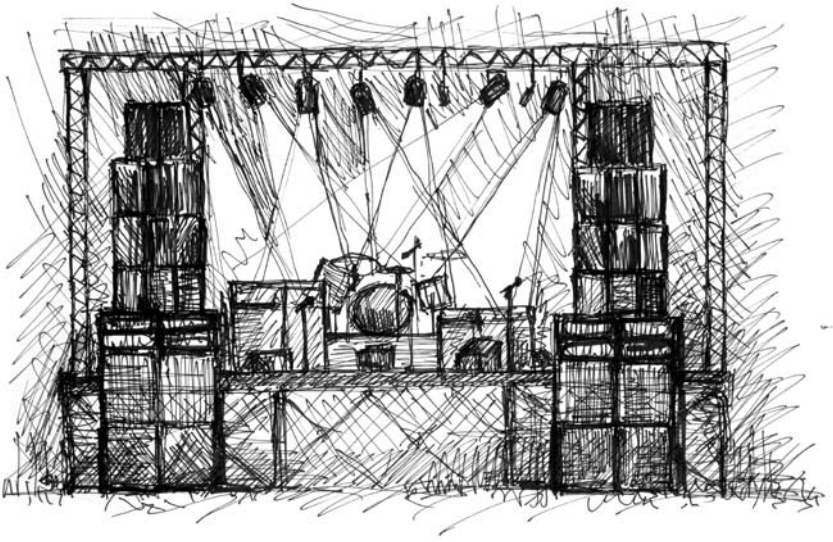
In 2003, a good friend of mine described his arrival at a summer event held by The Estonian Reform Party (*Reformierakond*, a neo-liberal right wing party currently in power, led by Andrus Ansip who has been the Prime Minister of Estonia since 2005), which took place somewhere deep in the forest.[4] Approaching the campsite and not yet seeing what was going on, he heard a *sound* through the trees not unlike Metallica and thought that someone was doing a good imitation. On arrival at the event he discovered

2 During the writing of this piece it was possible to watch a J.M.K.E. music video on the subject of monuments from 1987 also on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZiZYGuty1Y

3 Here I am thinking of the uneasy relationship between sound and picture that has been consolidated by the Hollywood film industry.

4 These "summer days" are a strange communal picnic-drinking party type event lasting a couple of days that the larger political parties, institutions and companies organise for their members and employees. They usually take place in an out-of-the-way place in the forest. The idea seems to be for the ordinary members or employees to demonstrate their loyalty while the leaders demonstrate their solidarity towards their subordinates.

that there was no band to be seen anywhere. The stage was empty and to my friend it seemed that the music was emanating from some unseen source. But people were enthusiastically leaping and jumping about to the music. My friend had arrived in time for the after-party. His earlier mental picture turned out to be wrong.



The stage was empty.

At this point I would like to make reference to the idea of the proximity of symbols to power, as a moral order; to the traditional relationship of the stage to the audience, the speaker to the people, government to the voters, leadership to the party, sovereignty to subject *etc*; and to the comparison of the close symbolisation of "party" as a construction of "after-party".

I suspect that the centre of power is empty, or at the very least it is surprisingly thin. It seems to be constantly decontextualising itself. In his description of how community identities are formed in the modern world via the crossing of contradictory contextualising and decontextualising logics, Ernesto Laciau states that thin morality is not a core to be isolated

analytically, but the result of a historical construction. Of course, this means that the content of thin morality is not permanent, and there is constant debate about this.[5]

Kristina Norman

About two years ago – February 2007 – Kristina Norman and I were discussing the options for dealing with the case of the Bronze Soldier. Norman had actually already started collecting material a year ago, and the question was how to put it all together. She suggested a distanced view from a UFO. I immediately found various aspects and important discourses visually systematising that any artist who wants to work with this kind of material must be able to place themselves in a very special position because the full entirety of the events is very complicated. They must be able to place themselves between the two communities and relate to the various active affiliations and political discourses that surround the thematics of the Bronze Soldier. This means that the contents of their "tool box" must be derived from Nicholas Bourriaud's concept of "relational aesthetics"[6], and the primary method for research should be documentary discourse.

Despite the fact that the case of the Bronze Soldier seems to revolve around the monument, for Norman the monument is a kind of Hitchcockian "McGuffin"[7] that provides an opportunity to address the re-codifying and symbolisation of existing cultural practices.

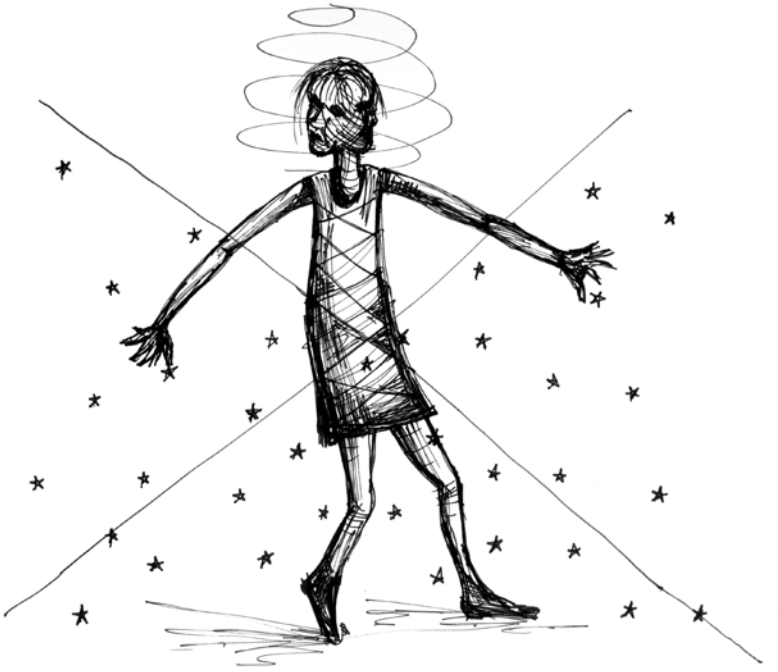
As a result of this, Kristina Norman's position as an artist is, on the one hand, the position of a documentary maker, taking the meaning

5 E. Laclau, The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology. – Journal of Political Ideologies 1996, vol. 1, pp. 201–220.

6 As we all know, relational aesthetics is connected with an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space. See: N. Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics (English edition), France: les presse du réel, 2002.

7 S. Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology. London: Verso, 1989, p. 163.

of "documentary" to follow John Grierson's definition from sometime in the 1930s as "the creative use of actuality" or Dziga Vertov's definition at roughly the same time, where he referred to "life as it is" and "life caught unawares".[8]



The artist must place herself between the two communities.

On the other hand, Norman takes the position of a provocateur and offers new options. During the year that the fate of the monument was being discussed, many suggestions were made regarding how to proceed; for example, how the significance of the monument could be extended

8 See, for more detail: John Grierson, First Principles of Documentary. – F. Hardy (ed.), Grierson on Documentary. London: Faber and Faber, 1966, pp. 199–211; D. Vertov, We. A Version of a Manifesto (1922). – I. Christie, R. Taylor (eds.), The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939. London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 138–142

to make it acceptable to everyone. Most of the discussion took place in newspaper forums and opinion columns.

This same approach had been attempted in 1995 in the form of a competition, which was won by the most economical design and resulted in the footpath passing the monument at an angle causing it to become marginal in relation to the passing pedestrian traffic. But because of the defining strength of the dominant dichotomy of the "liberator versus occupier", this third option, that sought to reach a compromise by "Estonianising" the Soviet monument, ran aground.

The original greenery was changed and the concrete pedestal and depression for the gas flame were removed. In 1993, the original memorial plaques and the words "Eternal honour to the fallen heroes who died for the liberation and independence of our country" were removed from the monument. Two years later plaques in Estonian and Russian with the words "To those who fell in World War II" were added to the monument with the aim of changing the monument to a memorial in honour of all the casualties of World War II. Despite many positive suggestions to find alternative solutions this third option was not pursued any further.

One can claim that something from the Bronze Soldier incident has remained unfinished. It makes sense to address Norman's installation *After-War* as part of the third option, as a suggestion from the position of an artist to cut through the finality of the process of marginalisation.

Kristina Norman says herself: "My art practice is interwoven with documentary, and for me the video camera is an indispensable tool. While making documentary films, I am collecting information and material for my art projects and visa versa. In a way, *After-War* is socio-cultural research, and an experiment during the course of which I am mapping and dissecting the "monument incident". I am fascinated by the theme of how values are formed and the problematics of the sacred and the profane. I am also interested in the relationship between memory and history in the construction of national and state identity."

At the same time, it is also possible to think that Norman's installation *After-War* is a monument to a monument, where this new monument carries the trauma of the dislocation of the previous one because the original monument – the Bronze Soldier of Tõnismäe – is dead.

In any case, Norman proposes her own sequel to the democratisation of the Bronze Soldier memorial and of memory, and creates new practices by layering the previous levels of meaning and symbols.

The work in Venice is an attempt to "stitch together" the edges of the event in a way that maintains the many layers of meaning and guarantees the presence of escape routes, and which in turn helps to generate dialogue and a new understanding about integration. Because "if we understand integration as a movement towards the ability and desire for dialogue, then what Estonia lacks most is semiotic regulators, which appreciate the value of many voices and encourage dialogue as well as cultivate social creativity and flexibility".[9]

The incident of the Tõnismäe war memorial in Tallinn is an excuse for Norman to overturn and transform the supposed message. It is also an issue of identity and the reactivation of the traumatised core of a marginalized community.

Riots known as the Bronze Night

The timing of Kristina Norman's installation *After-War* as the Estonian exhibition at the 53rd la Biennale di Venezia keys into a context where the chain of events dealing with the issue have in the "official version" come to an end. But of course the alternative after-party continues.

The issues surrounding the relocation of the Bronze Soldier (*i.e.* the specific event) must be regarded as the most traumatic event in Estonian

9 M. Raudsepp, Vimma ja lepituse hääled Pronkssõduri ümber: internetifoorumite analüüs. – P. Petersoo, M. Tamm (eds.), Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008, p. 169.

society since the restoration of independence in 1991, and one which aroused the most public discussion.

The conflict that flared up in April 2007 between Estonia's two largest communities – the Estonians on the one side and the Russian-speaking citizens and non-citizens (who hold the country's "grey" alien passports) on the other – highlighted the failure of state integration policies, the lack of dialogue between these two communities and the socio-political inequality between them.

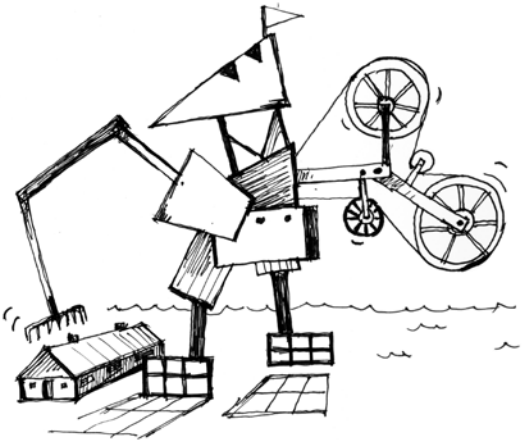
Even though "it can be said that the inept removal of the Bronze Soldier by the centre-right government as a representation of national history was a cowardly demonstration of state power, it is also a part of the civilising process where the mindless violence of one group of people against another is presented aesthetically in such a way that future generations can do likewise and will consider it reasonable".[10]

To illustrate how emotionally loaded the events were, here is an example from the Estonian television journalist Vadim Belobrovtsev's emotional feeling of emptiness following a press conference after the so-called Bronze

The Prime Minister's empty, transparent eyes.

10 S. Kattago, Sõjamälestusmärgid ja tsiviliseerimisprotsess. – P. Petersoo, M. Tamm (eds.), Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008, p. 66.

Night. "First there was indignation, insult, even rage. At a special press conference the Prime Minister announced that the memorial had been dismantled and removed from Tõnismäe. Later when the first emotions had subsided, I looked at the Prime Minister's empty, transparent eyes and immediately understood that this person had not a scrap of regret about the riots, the devastated streets of a Tallinn that was unfamiliar to him, the injured citizens and police, Dimitri, the man who had been killed and whose name was as yet unknown (the only person killed in the riots. – *M.L.*), and even less about how, after these events, Estonians and Russians would continue to live side-by-side in this country. Prime Minister Andrus Ansip was indifferent to all of this – he had had his victory – but the consequences, which turned this into a Pyrrhic victory for the nation, he either hadn't thought about or they just didn't affect him."[11]



Potential political problems can be seen simply as technical problems.

Aleksander Astrov, in his analysis of the events, is without doubt correct when he calls the Prime Minister Andrus Ansip a sovereign for whom all potential political problems must be solved either as issues of state security or simply as technical problems. It is also clear that the intensity with which local Russians identify with the monument can best be explained via the structural similarity of their situation and the special role of the monu-

11 V. Belobrovtsev, Kuidas me kaotasime integratsiooni. – Vikerkaar 2008, No. 4-5, p. 121.

ment – simultaneously within and outside the ruling order, being included by being excluded – this means they are survivors in an unusual situation that has now become the norm.[12]

Geopolitical cake

"Two main factors caused the combined effect of the Bronze Soldier crisis: the internal power struggle between Estonian political parties and the influence of Russia on Estonian internal policy", argues Raivo Vetik. "In response to the growing influence of America in the current monopolar international system, Russia defined the enlarging of its zone of influence in the countries situated in the territory of the former Soviet Union as being of national interest. (For example, Vladimir Putin, then the president of Russia, stated in his traditional annual speech in 2005, that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". – *M. L.*) This is not only about Russia's economic and foreign policy, but increasing its influence is seen as an important tool for rekindling the Russian national consciousness that had been weakened after the collapse of the Soviet Union. One possible course of action for Russia to take in order to enlarge its zone of influence in neighbouring countries is by supporting developments that create instability, all the while claiming to be the protector of the interests of Russian-speaking populations."[13]

This geopolitical behaviour by Russia becomes more meaningful when viewed in parallel with an event from World War II. In 1942, Adolf Hitler celebrated his 53rd birthday with a cream cake representing the region around the Caspian Sea, of which he had served the Absheron Peninsula piece for himself with big chocolate letters on it that read: B-A-K-U. This

12 А. Астров, Самочинное сообщество: политика меньшинств или малая политика? Таллинн: Издательство Таллинского университета / Авенариус, 2007, p. 72.

13 R. Vetik, Etniline domineerimine Eestis. – P. Petersoo, M. Tamm (eds.), Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008, p. 117.

Adolf Hitler celebrated his 53rd birthday with a cream cake representing the region around the Caspian Sea.

event has been quite well documented,[14] and after this somewhat sweet mouthful, Hitler is said to have commented: "We'll lose the war unless we can get the petroleum from Baku." The conquest of the Caucasus was code-named "Edelweiss" after the beautiful alpine flower (*Leontopodium alpinum*). However, German armoured cars and tanks had to stop before reaching their main target – they simply ran out of gas about 400 kilometres from Baku. Another operation with a more symbolic meaning was more successful – on 21 August, a swastika was placed on the summit

14 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGzEs3K66hA

of the Elbrus.[15] It is generally thought that if Germans had obtained the petroleum from Baku, the events of the Second World War would have taken a somewhat different turn. In light of this, the ritual cake eating seems even more important. And, of course, that strange flag hoisting on the bleak summit of Mount Everest. Of course, we can only speculate about what kind of cake Hitler would have eaten, and how much of it, if operation "Edelweiss" had proven to be a military success.[16]

In this context the piece of cake is starting to take the form of a synthesis of symptom and fantasy – Lacan's *sinthome*. A symptom as a *sinthome* is a signifying formation imbued with pleasure – a signifier that conceals *jouissance* – enjoyment within the meaning. A symptom as a *sinthome* is actually our only substance – it is the only positive support of our being and the only thing that gives unity to the subject. In other words – symptom is our (the subject's) way of avoiding insanity; the way we "choose something (symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, destruction of a symbolic universe)", by tying enjoyment to a certain symbolic signifier that guarantees the unity of our existence in the world.[17] The Bronze Soldier is also such a symptom.

At this point it is necessary to dodge into the earlier history of the Bronze Soldier – namely to 1946, when there was a temporary veneer symbol preceding the ultimate memorial to the liberators of Tallinn. On 8 May 1946, two Tallinn schoolgirls blew it up, but the next day, 9 May, the wooden mortuary monument stood silently there again as if nothing had happened.

15 See, for more detail: И. Тюленев, Крах операции "Эдельвейс". Крым: Орджоникидзе, 1975; Gerhard Weinberg, World at Arms: A Global History of World War II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

16 It is the "one last wafer-thin mint", that the French waiter (John Cleese) in Monty Python's film The Meaning of Life (1983) persuades the impossibly fat man, Mr. Creosote (Terry Jones) to eat, that proves to be fatal. Mr. Creosote explodes showering human entrails over the other restaurant guests who find this so repulsive that most of them begin vomiting.

17 S. Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, p. 75.

This is reminiscent of the well-known statement that Slavoj Žižek made concerning the cartoon characters Tom and Jerry – how they always return unscathed, as if nothing had happened. Both get into big trouble: the cat gets stabbed, dynamite explodes in his pocket, he gets run over by a steamroller and his body is pressed into a thin pancake and so on, but in the next scene he reappears in his usual shape and the game starts all over again, as if he had another, indestructible body.[18]

Tom and Jerry

Žižek's "indestructible body" seemed to be the main object of concern for the members of the Russian State Duma, who were specifically sent to Tallinn in May 2007 to check the condition of the Bronze Soldier at its new location, and to demand the resignation of the Government of the Republic of Estonia.

And what about the government? "The Estonian government ordered that the previous location of the monument at Tõnismäe should be quickly planted with flowers. Though the media made numerous offers about whose new statue could be erected on the site, the government decided to plant flowerbeds in a newly designed park without any reference to historical symbols or monuments. Apparently, the government wishes to erase all memory of what used to stand there – but this might in fact make the former location of the Bronze Soldier a *lieu de memoire*, representing the lost battle in support of the monument."[19]

18 S. Žižek, Laugh Yourself to Death: the New Wave of Holocaust Comedies! Paper presented at Lunds Universitet. December 15, 1999. http://www.lacan.com/zizekholocaust.htm

19 K. Brüggemann, A. Kasekamp, Ajaloopoliitika ja "monumentide sõda" Eestis. – P. Petersoo, M. Tamm (eds.), Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008, p. 85.

Exhibition

Kristina Norman's installation *After-War* as the Estonian exhibition at the 53rd international art exhibition La Biennale di Venezia can be regarded as a sort of articulation of collective speech. While dealing with collective memory it is therefore crucial to notice how these memories are handed over and preserved, and also what channels mediate and thereby also shape the community's historic memory.

According to Peter Burke, it is possible to distinguish five different mediatory channels of collective memory. Firstly, there are oral channels, meaning the direct transmittance of historical memory and orally communicated traditions that are forwarded mostly over 3–4 generations. Secondly, there are written channels – memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, history books and other written records that store and mediate a certain experience or vision of the past. The third category is visual channels – all kinds of visual representations of the past (souvenirs, paintings, photographs, films *etc*) that create a visual connection with the past. Fourthly, there are action channels – several more or less ritual activities (parades, processions, rallies *etc*) that regularly immortalize certain events from the past. The fifth and the last category involves spatial channels that represent the topographical part of the memory associated with landscapes, streets, squares, houses, monuments and other such details.[20]

Norman's *After-War* is built up on the basis of those five communication channels – five spatial elements of the installation. As the Estonian exhibition will be set up in an apartment-like space, it has a good opportunity to complete the abovementioned scheme.

In the first room there are two video documentaries reflecting ritual behaviours – the traditional festivities of 9 May – in its original location at Tõnismäe seen from two different angles. A black-and-white version

20 See, for more detail: P. Burke, History as Social Memory. – P. Burke, Varieties of Cultural History. New York: Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 43–59.

shows regimented behaviour models in the Soviet era (1947-1990). This documentary material is shown from a small LCD screen that has been planted inside a larger one, showing the same rituals from 9 May in the years 1995–2007, but with colour and voice. From here we can see spontaneous cultural practices – those gathering at the Bronze Soldier sing, read poems and, naturally, drink vodka. It is clear to see and understand that this oral method of transmitting memory and the Soviet estranged pomposity has been replaced with more intimate attitudes.

In the second room there is a gadget that Norman has called the *Kinetics of Power*. It is a mechanical solution known from outdoor advertisements, where prism-shaped polyhedrons circle around their axis on a permanent location and change a picture with each rotation. Through a full rotation it is possible to see photographic records of three major spatial views of the Bronze Soldier: the statue at Tõnismäe in its original location, the same place without the Bronze Soldier and the Bronze Soldier in its new location at the Defence Forces Cemetery. In this setting it is necessary to stress the spatial channel of transmitting memories. *Kinetics of Power* is machine-like, repetitive, routine, mechanical and at the same time de-territorialising.

In the third room of the exhibition we see video materials of the April events, consisting of the material recorded on the nights of 26th and 27th of April 2007. This part of the installation could be equated to a visual mediator of memory. It is basically reportage of a rebellion – "violence without reason" between young people and police, during which a city, otherwise clean and proper, acquires a rather brutal character. Brian Holmes, analyzing bursts of violence in France, claims that the reasons for this kind of street violence are socio-political – this implies that a certain community is lacking an evident spokesperson, concrete demands and political representation and therefore their only tool is violence.[21]

21 B. Holmes, Images Of Fire – The banlieue riots and the unanswered question of the welfare state. A text for Jordan Crandall's Under Fire program, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin, 26. III 2006 (http://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2006/03/26/images-of-fire/).

The central element of Norman's installation is a golden polyester replica of the Bronze Soldier. It is placed in the fourth room horizontally, as if lying down, maybe even levitating weightlessly in the air. Considering the pose, emptiness and the weightlessness of the monument implying its status as having been "pushed from the pedestal", this large golden statue could be taken for a fetish, a representation of an "unchanging and indestructible body" and an implication of "a body inside a body" or a sublime object that is like the victim's body from Sade – enduring all the tortures and yet preserving its beauty intact. This replica is actually the first thing that the visitor to the exhibition sees, and after looking at the rest of the work has the opportunity to look at it once again, but this time with a more contexualised viewpoint.

The active channels for communicating the memories are represented in the fifth room of the exhibition, where we can see a video documentation of Norman's action of 9 May 2009. To put it briefly, it shows the transportation of the abovementioned golden replica in the back of a truck from the previous location of the Bronze Soldier to its current location. This is a symbolic repetition of the relocation the Estonian government ordered in 2007. This represents Norman's proposal for a new cultural practice, that as a spontaneous ritual, would provoke dialogue between communities and at the same time proposes the idea for a "third monument". The golden monument is an icon that is used for a ritual journey; it is a re-animation that determines the trauma of the relocation of the Tõnismäe monument as a bodily ritual and an act of symbolic power.

Onwards

The Bronze Soldier has for a long time carried many latent meanings. The dramatic events of April acted like a catalyst that caused voices, until now hidden in the shadows, to be heard, and the different positions present in the Estonian community to come into contact with one another. The

monument and history became symbolic resources that were now used intensively in a discursive conflict between the different groups. A broad range of topics began to circulate on the Internet, ranging from the various versions of history to topics that covered general statehood and democracy. Emotionally charged representative systems that cancelled each other out became apparent. During the Soviet period there was one dominant system of representation and according to this the monument was single-mindedly dedicated to the memory of the Soviet soldiers who liberated Tallinn. This meaning was held aloft and supported by using a number of different institutional and symbolic devices – the media, writings on history, public rituals (the eternal flame, guards of honour, the placing of flowers) and others.[22] All other possible meanings were suppressed and didn't appear in public. It was a single-minded monologue.

If we analyse the events surrounding the removal of the Bronze Soldier, we can, along with Raivo Vetik, highlight the developments that support the mentioned aims, "Firstly, the activities of extremist groups actualise the contradictory meanings of the Bronze Soldier for Estonians and Russian-speaking Estonians. This means that for Estonians it reinforces the Bronze Soldier as a symbol of the occupation, and therefore it must be removed, whereas for Russian Estonians it becomes an embodiment of their identity and therefore must be protected at all costs. Secondly, the plan by the Estonian government to remove the monument and then its actual removal activates the entire community and it isn't just the extremist groups who are involved in the conflict. Thirdly, the accelerated instability and polarisation of the community starts to hinder the processes of conciliation and neither side wants to admit to their mistakes. This instability within the community becomes a permanent feature and Estonia becomes easily influenced by external factors. The political developments that culminated in the

22 See, for more detail: A. Kurg, Whose Monument? – A Prior Magazine 2008, No. 17, pp. 111– 120.

removal of the Bronze Soldier monument confirmed the inherent everyday perceptions held by both Estonians and Russian-speaking Estonians, thus accelerating the growth of ethno-centric positions in society."[23] These positions sharply divided the Estonian community into "us" and "them" and attempted to exclude any other possible positions. No doubt these developments were already apparent before, but the Bronze Night acted as a catalyst.

In conclusion

In April 2007, the Estonian government, for purely populist reasons, removed a monument commonly referred to as the Bronze Soldier from a prominent place in the centre of Tallinn, where it had stood since 1947. This psychogeographical manoeuvre carried out by the Estonian government provoked protest by the Russian-speaking community and was followed by two nights of rioting on the otherwise calm streets of Tallinn.

The memorial, officially called "The Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn", was dedicated to the Red Army soldiers who fell during what in Russia is known as The Great Patriotic War (World War II), but for most Estonians, this memorial was a symbol of Soviet occupation. It was often simply referred to as "Alyosha" after its centrally positioned statue. The monument was removed from its original site and relocated 2.5 km away in the military cemetery. Now it was, so-to-speak, "out of sight, out of mind", and the original location was planted with low shrubs and flowers as if there had never been a monument there.

Estonia is a traumatised society where two communities exist side-by-side in two separate realities (70% Estonian: 30% Russian speaking). The larger of the two communities upholds the values of a small nation that achieved independence through great difficulty and worries about the

23 R. Vetik, Etniline domineerimine Eestis, p. 117–119.

future of its national culture and language in an increasingly globalising world, as well as alongside the large population of non-Estonians existing in close proximity. In addition, this small nation's subconscious retains the terrifying image of its large neighbour – Russia – who on the basis of past experience is seen as a possible aggressor. The other community, which has relatively fresh memories of a time when they were the privileged group, is experiencing a painful period of marginalisation accompanied by the fear of losing their own identity. According to Kristina Norman, "Both communities are dominated by fear and unforgiveness."

Both communities are dominated by fear and unforgiveness.

Her installation *After-War* deals with a culture whose central symbol became the Bronze Soldier. Norman dissects the changing rituals, meanings, customs and cultural practices surrounding the monument in the current political time-space environment.

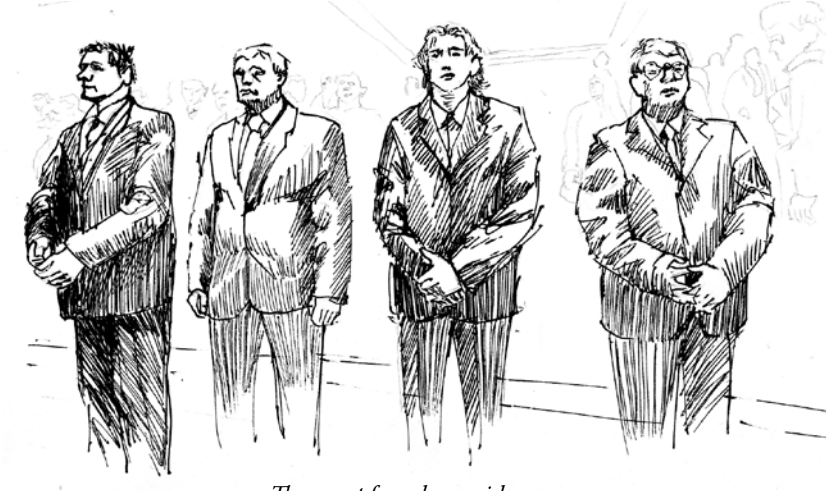
The title of the installation is derived from Carl Von Clausewitz's famous line that "war is merely a continuation of politics" (*Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln*). By turning this line

around we inevitably arrive at the conclusion that that which follows war is not just post-war or "after the war", but can also be an "after war". This is a continuation of the conflict on the level of political gestures, cultural discourse and the collision of different morals. It is similar to the period defined as "after 9/11", in other words the "after-party".

The Bronze Soldier Monument and its Publics

by Andres Kurg

While writing this article, a news announcing the acquittal of the three activists from a pro-Russian NGO charged with organising the riots against the relocation of the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn, in April 2007, was circling in the media. The court found no evidence that these men were responsible for organising the demonstrations. With around two thousand, primarily local, Russian-speaking participants, the protests took a violent turn once the night had set in: the defenders of the statue were breaking shop windows and grabbing free liquor from the shelves, lighting fires on the streets and turning cars upside down. Against the general conspiratorial opinion – that the events were orchestrated by the Russian secret service



The court found no evidence.

FSB – or the more far fetched, yet more elegant one – that the street riots were provoked by local police forces in order to keep the protesters away from the monument itself, where the vanishing act could then be safely performed – the court concluded that the riots had advanced spontaneously. This news was followed by a wave of accusations in the media, that the court had betrayed the "public sense of justice" and the judges had not done their work properly.[1] Politicians from the conservative right called for changing the criminal law and to convict the activists for treason and anti-Estonian behaviour. There were also right-wing politicians who wanted to assert that the riots were solely criminal in nature with no political character whatsoever. As an MP from the neo-liberal The Estonian Reform Party (*Reformierakond*), Igor Gräzin put it: "The events in Tallinn in April [---] were clearly a case of hooliganism, and did not contain any ideological element. Two events, quite independent of each other, coincided in time. The relocation of the Bronze Soldier and a mass psychosis, which had to do with crimes against property and human beings, as well as attacks against the police and the state."[2] I want to show that these interpretations aimed to exclude the voices of the protesters from the public political discussion, thus isolating them, and working against the alternative public practice that had taken place at the foot of the monument since the mid 1990s. The community that gathered there, a counter-public I propose, encountered not only a loss of a representative site in its symbolic urban geography, but was also denied its existence. In contrast to interpretations of the events at the Bronze Soldier that see it as a symptom of some larger processes (of identity formation, post-socialist democratization, reactions to globalisation and consumerism), I would like to put the monument and the practices surrounding it at the centre of the enquiry and also view the

1 E. Rand, Reinsalu: aprillirahutuste kohtuotsus on jama. – Eesti Päevaleht Online 6. I 2009.

2 E. Rand, Igor Gräzin: pronksiöölaste protsess on seotud vandaalitsemise, mitte poliitikaga. – Eesti Päevaleht Online 15. I 2008.

historical background leading up to that night in April 2007 when the violent protests were triggered.[3]

The second "news" at that time was a remark dropped in an interview by the US ambassador in Estonia, that the so-called Bronze Night, the same riots in April 2007, and the relocation of this Soviet-era memorial to the World War II, gave Estonia some international press. As he put it: "When someone has problems, and the world notices, then they do not look only at the problems themselves, but also how this situation evolved, what is the history and what this person has achieved in the past."[4] Instead of viewing the riots as instigated from Moscow, perhaps a conspiracy theory would be more appropriate here for interpreting the comment along the lines of what Naomi Klein in her "Shock doctrine" has described as disaster capitalism: where breakdowns and crisis are part of the functioning of a neo-liberal economy. The removal of the Soviet monument was then not only an attempt by the Reform Party (the initiator of the removal) to win over constituencies from the national-conservative Pro Patria Union (*Isamaaliit*)[5] or symbolically reconcile the class who has been hit the hardest by the free-market economy, but also an attempt to re-brand the country in the global media (and for global investors), away from its

3 One curious feature about many of the articles analysing the events following the removal of the Bronze Soldier was their neglect of the "pre-history" at the site. This applies even to in other sense rigorous analysis, e.g. Marek Tamm and Saale Halla write: "If initially it seemed that the monument has lost its social actuality, then as a result of several coincidences (Russian influence, Estonian internal political struggles and the activities of Estonian as well as Russian extreme right groups) the monument in Tõnismäe was born to a new life..." The authors were either not familiar with the events that took place there since 1996, when the area was changed and thus the spontaneous practice of sticking flowers to earth was born, or they do not regard it as "socially actual". See: M. Tamm, S. Halla, Ajalugu, poliitika ja identiteet: Eesti monumentaalsest mälumaastikust. – P. Petersoo, M. Tamm (eds.), Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008, p. 43.

4 L. Past, Eestist lahkunud USA suursaadik: pronksiööl pani maailm Eestit tähele. – Eesti Päevaleht
24. I 2009.

5 Since 2006 officially registered under the name Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica (Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit).

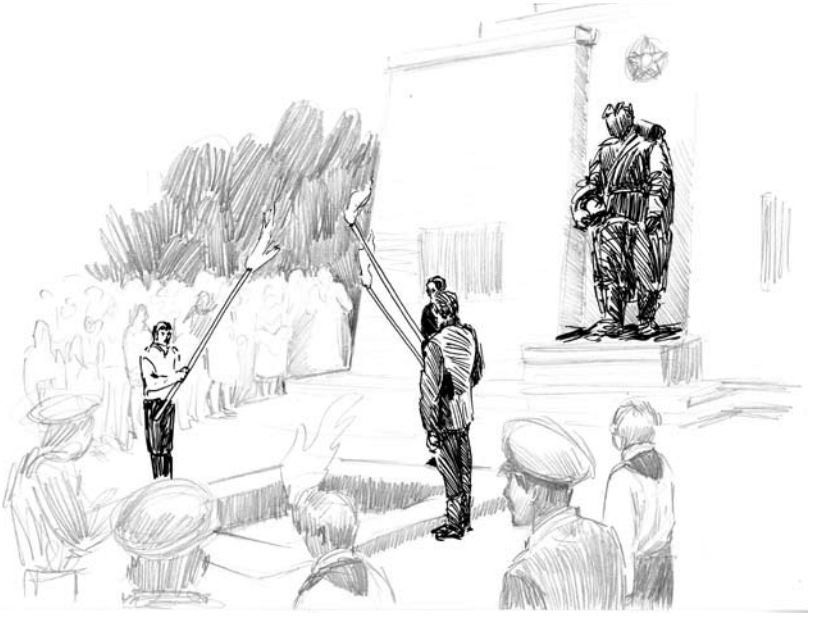
post-Soviet-bloc reputation, stuck in the past, towards a more spectacular techno-utopian future.[6])

*

The statue of the Unknown Soldier by sculptor Enn Roos and architect Arnold Alas, erected in 1947, was situated on top of the supposed common grave of twelve Soviet soldiers who were killed near Tallinn in September 1944. Owing primarily to its central location in the city – the monument was situated a few hundred metres away from the main (Victory) square, at the end of Kaarli boulevard – the Unknown Soldier with the eternal fire before him, remained the most important World-War II monument in the city throughout the Soviet period. Yet, especially in the late-Soviet period, as a site of rhetorically repetitive and hollow performative rites, it was also somewhat invisible at the everyday level – with its fire, the flowers and wreaths placed there by visiting delegations from a brotherly city and the guards of honour (young pioneers with wooden imitation automatic guns), it belonged to the official geography of the Soviet city, represented endlessly in tourist books and postcards, but seldom visited by tourists.

The early 1990s witnessed an iconoclasm of former communist monuments in most East-European countries; the bulk of Soviet statues in Tallinn were removed during 1990 and 1991. More than once, the Unknown Soldier stood at the centre of discussions about its removal, but mostly it was defended by the municipal government of Tallinn, and it remained in its place. It was also at the beginning of the 1990s that World War II veterans started to gather there spontaneously on memorial days (9 May

6 Ibid. Estonia has accused Russia of "cyber attacks" against governmental and public institutions after the removal of the Bronze Soldier. Russia claims that the attacks were not organised officially and were done by random hackers. However, one of the results of the events has been establishing a NATO cyber-defence centre in Tallinn. The US ambassador pointed this out as a positive result of the so-called Bronze Night.



As a site of rhetorically repetitive and hollow performative rites, it was also somewhat invisible at the everyday level.

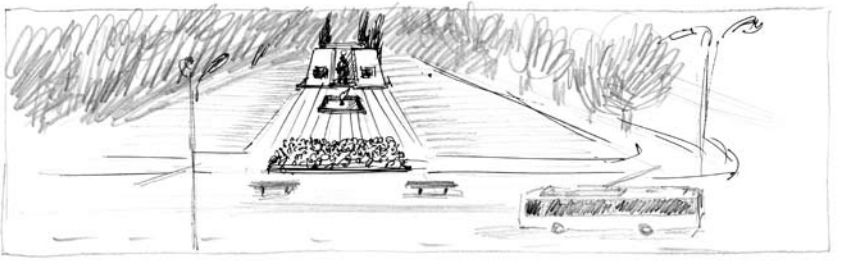
and 22 September).[7] In 1993, Tallinn municipality turned off the eternal fire in front of the statue, arguing that it would save money – Russia had recently raised gas prices for Estonia (however, on 9 May 1993, the fire was reignited for 5 hours). A strong voice for the monument's protection at that time came from the Estonian Artists' Association and the National Board of Antiquities. In their account it represented the best example of post-war monumentalism in Estonia, stating the monument also to be an "Estonian face in a Russian uniform" and that it would be a "European solution" to let the monument remain.[8] If placing it in an aesthetic context worked to depoliticise the monument, then this rhetoric at the same time

7 During the late Soviet period official veteran gatherings took place in the World War II memorial grounds in Maarjamäe, off the city centre.

8 See: Monument jääb Tõnismäele. – Eesti Päevaleht 27. V 1996.

pointed to a split in Estonia during World War II, when some men were fighting in the Soviet army, and others, partly as a reaction to the Stalinist mass deportations in 1941, joined or were mobilised into the Waffen SS. The "Estonian face in a Russian uniform" thus could have pointed to a redefinition of the site as a more inclusive monument to World War II and a way of overcoming the growing split on ethnic grounds.

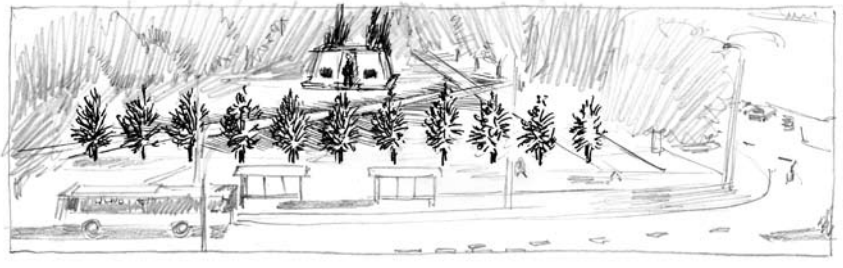
Indeed, in 1994, the monument was listed as a cultural landmark and a decision was made to let it stay in its place; this was followed by an invited architectural competition for the reconstruction of its surroundings (this was already necessary for the removal of the former site of the fire) so the



The monument site before...

monument could commemorate all victims of World War II. In the brief, Tallinn municipality had stressed the possible future role of the site as an "urban park" and of changing its solely memorial function. At the same time, the architects had to take into account that the plot was also an actual burial ground. The winning work, by architects Jüri Okas and Marika Lõoke, added a black granite plateau to the existing memorial, a colonnade of the same granite and a seven-metre high steel cross to counterbalance the communist ideology of the monument. The design was, however, soon viewed as too expensive and abandoned; only the burnishing of the site was completed according to the project. Eleven lime trees (bought from Finland) were planted to separate the site from the neighbouring street, the site for the fire and the area for the guard of honour in front of the statue

was replaced with a lawn and the axially placed square was replaced with a diagonal pedestrian path crossing the lawn. The path took pedestrians from the street crossing straight across the former memorial area towards the new National Library, thus joining the site to a practically functioning street network and erasing its symbolic function. The figure of the soldier was now separated by greenery, as if pushed out of the centre of the square, and turned into a single object standing alone, without the support of a spatial context. This worked to depoliticise the site, forcing pedestrians to approach the monument as if always in passing (it could only be seen properly when approaching it from the pedestrian crossing and travelling



...and after the reconstruction in 1994.

towards the library, not the other way around), and creating a certain new invisibility for the object itself.

The celebration of Victory Day in 1996, after the site had been reconstructed, spontaneously introduced a practice that was then carried out every year until its ultimate removal: the former place for the fire and guard of honour in front of the monument, now just lawn, was covered with flowers, usually red carnations, by sticking them vertically straight into earth as if winning back the area that had been changed by the official reconstruction works. The flowers temporarily re-created the commemorative space for this occasion, and the territory that had been neutralised was now as if empowered again by cutting it out from the practically functioning city structure and giving it back its symbolic

function. The "inserted" red carnation figured in this for the participants as a double symbol, the common one of tribute or commemoration, but also, as one journalist described it, the "carpet of flowers" was the "eternal fire that used to burn there"[9].

Judging from the popularity of this practice throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the monument became more "successful" in fulfilling its role as a repository of memory than it had ever been in the Soviet period. If initially it was foremost an event for war veterans, who occasionally used it to protest against their status in Estonia (*e.g.* in 1996 they displayed slogans like "No to Estonian fascism" and "Not a liberator but a bloody occupant", the latter ironising the change in the dominant discourse of history in the country) and show their yearning for the Soviet Union (in 2000 a portrait of Stalin was glued to the base of the monument), then by the beginning of the new century the participants included very different age-groups from the Russian-speaking population in the city. The Victory-day celebration became then a central event in the practice of identity-construction for the local Russian community under the changed circumstances of Estonian independence, having less to do with the reactionary Soviet nostalgia and more with public representation that posed an alternative to the dominant sphere.

In addition to the economic growth, the building boom, changes in property relations and the urban restructuring in Tallinn in the 1990s, it was also a decade of radical changes in the representational and symbolic structures of the city. The removal of communist monuments was the most visible part of this, followed by the renaming of streets and squares and the removal of the Russian language from street signs. The new typologies, shopping centres, parking lots and office buildings formed a new identity for the city as belonging now to a "Western" consumer culture; this coincided with re-branding Tallinn strictly in terms of national culture – Tallinn as the capital of the Republic of Estonia – or selectively through history – Tallinn

9 В. Фридлянд, Когда праздник один на всех. – Молодеж Эстонии 10. V 2000.

as a medieval city or an ancient Hanseatic town. Reacting to the Russian dominance of the Soviet period, the essentialised notion of Tallinn as a mono-ethnically Estonian town was strongly established and the "other" urban experience rarely got any voice and was largely neglected in various representations. Thus, there was a dominant image of the city that almost half of the city's population could not identify with. The struggle over the monument of the Bronze Soldier could then be viewed more broadly as a struggle waged over the signification of the city. It filled in a gap that was left after the positive identity for the Russian-speaking population had disappeared. As Mikhail Lotman already wrote after the removal of the monument, commenting on the large number of young people who had gathered to its defence: "Young people needed a sign of positive identity, something that would be entirely their own, that on the one side would differentiate them from the indigenous population and on the other would be undeniably positive."[10] Not insignificant in this struggle to reclaim the site of the monument, to spatialise it differently, was its location in the centre of the city. Situated next to a busy traffic line and in the vicinity of the National Library, the monument was potentially more open to other significations than just being a gravestone; and the practice of putting flowers was always guaranteed a visibility that was needed in manifesting an identity and claiming recognition.

The removal of communist monuments

10 M. Lotman, Märulisemiootika Eesti pealinnas. – Postimees 2. V 2007.

Criticising the idea of a single dominant public sphere in liberal democracies, political theorist Nancy Fraser has suggested the existence of a plurality of competing and conflicting publics. According to her, throughout history subordinated social groups have found ways to constitute alternative publics that contested the norms of the dominant public sphere and elaborated different ways of acting and talking in public. These, what she calls subaltern counterpublics, exist as "parallel discursive arenas where members [---] invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs."[11] The models for her are to be found foremost in the feminist movement in the US, but also in the gay and ethnic minority movements. It could be argued for example that the critical literary and artistic circles in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 80s that gathered around various *samizdat* journals, but also cafes and salons, constituted such a counterpublic. I want to suggest here, however, that the community of people gathered around the Victory Day celebration in Tallinn constituted a similar counterpublic: not satisfied with their role and rights in Estonia and being excluded from the dominant public (on the basis of nationality mostly, but also class), they were attempting to make themselves visible in space. The character of the counterpublic sphere is to function on the one hand as a space of withdrawal, to be able to set up one's own ways of doing things, and on the other hand, these publics are directed toward a dialogue with a wider public. Fraser states that these subaltern counterpublics need not always appear socially progressive, they can be antidemocratic or anti-egalitarian or reactionary, but as they emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, the counterpublics help to expand the discursive space: they bring out topics and assumptions previously neglected. By keeping the issues public they evade separatism. "Insofar as these arenas are publics, they are by definition

11 N. Fraser, Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. – C. Calhoun (ed.), Habermas and the Public Sphere. Cambridge: MIT Press 1992, p. 123.

not enclaves."[12] What is significant in Fraser's account of the plural publics, is their culturally specific character, constituted of "various journals and various social geographies of urban space", that she sees as specific filters and frames for the discourse. This perspective puts the Bronze Soldier at the very centre of the formation of the Russian counterpublic in Tallinn, giving rise to certain practices and utterances and not others. But it also helps to understand how the violent restructuring of this counterpublic sphere might have affected its position vis a vis other publics: if we see the monument as the main framework for a dialogue between the counterpublic and the wider public, then once it is removed, the communication is disrupted and the community is potentially enclaved (of course, in the longer perspective it can find new filters for presenting its voice, yet these will also prescribe its new character).

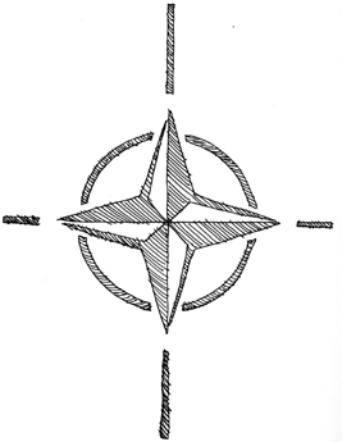
A dramatic turn of events took place at the monument during the Victory Day celebration in 2006. Two men with Estonian national flags went to the Bronze Soldier to demand its removal; they were attacked by people celebrating Victory Day; subsequently the police had to drive them away from the site. Retrospectively, one of the protesters has admitted that their aim was intentional, to "dishonour the flag" in order to "wake up Estonian people, numbed by the welfare society."[13] That same year the monument went from being a thus far repressed subject in the Estonian media[14] to being the most talked-about issue; and the promise of its removal was one of

12 Ibid, p. 124.

13 Quoted from: Martin Ehala, Venekeelse põlisvähemuse sünd. – Vikerkaar 2008, No. 4–5, p. 102.

14 A characteristic example of this repression was a questionnaire in 2000 in the leading daily paper Eesti Päevaleht, which asked different people about the meaning of the 9th of May. The interviewees featured a young posp-star who had her birthday that day and a loyal officer of the Foreign Ministry who explained that 9th of May was Robert Schuman day or European day: "Of course I am aware that during the past decades this day has been celebrated for other reasons. However, as an Estonian and European, for me this day today is European Day." See: Mis päev on 9. mai ja mida see teile tähendab? – Eesti Päevaleht 9. V 2000.

the main slogans in the parliamentary election campaign for the Reform Party (who consequently won the elections) in early 2007. While the question of the monument's removal had thus far been a matter for Tallinn municipality (who objected to it), now the parliament passed a bill that regulated that the removal of war graves and headstones and the issue of the Bronze Soldier should be decided by the government. As the monument was standing on top of soldiers' remains it was transformed from a monument to a gravestone (devoted PR agents in the government even advised newspapers to use the more neutral "gravestone" instead of "Bronze Soldier"), and thus it could easily be removed. One possible reason why the politics on the street was so readily picked up by the institutional policy makers was the country's recently gained secure membership in the European Union and NATO. As sociologist Tõnis Saarts has pointed out, a priority for all of the governments since the beginning of the 1990s has been a "return to the West", joining international institutions.[15] To reach this goal, the politicians were ready to suppress or compromise issues that could have endangered that access. However, as a member of the European Union (since 2004) there was no more reason to "demonstrate" how progressive and "Europeanised" the country was, and several repressed issues could now be actualised (used in an internal political power-struggle).



15 T. Saarts, Pronksiöö – sundeuroopastamise läbikukkumine ja rahvusliku kaitsedemokraatia sünd. – Vikerkaar 2008, No. 4–5, p. 108.

Thus, on 26th April 2007, the bronze statue of a soldier, a Soviet-era monument to World War II, was relocated from the centre of Tallinn to a military cemetery 1.5 kilometres south of its original location. The remains of 12 soldiers buried at this site were excavated and reburied at the same cemetery; some of the remains were reclaimed by the soldiers' relatives in Russia and reburied there. The mass protests evoked by the removal turned into violent riots for two consecutive nights and also resulted in one of the protesters being killed in a street fight. Already before the statue was removed, it had been hijacked by institutionalised politics, turning it into a weapon in an election campaign inside Estonia, or an excuse for Russia to aggressively re-order relations with Estonia. This was supported by the rather uniform media representations that on the one hand accused Estonians of rewriting the history of World War II (or the Great Patriotic War, for that matter) and thus supporting fascism, and on the other hand, portrayals of Russians as chauvinists who would happily see Estonia as part of Russia rather than an independent country. It is true that for the majority of Estonians, ready to imagine only "one evil at a time",[16] the monument symbolized the years of Soviet occupation rather than the end of the German invasion. This dedication to the liberation of Tallinn from the fascist troops in 1944 simultaneously also signified a new beginning for the Soviet era.

The more conservative side of the Russian-speaking community, however, and especially the war-veterans, were still holding to the rhetoric of liberation and were opposed to all attempts to contest this Soviet view of history as dangerous revisionism. Thus represented foremost as an "ethnic" or "cultural" conflict, it was cast into an either-or situation and given no space for a more ambivalent position. This polarity continued after the monument's removal and the violent street protests, with each side interpreting the event in their own best interests. With a few exceptions, the

16 M. Tamm, Üks kuri korraga. – Eesti Ekspress 9. I 2003.

Estonian media labelled the protesters criminals who should be punished as such; the Russian Federation on the other hand saw it as a struggle for the rights of its citizens and reacted by sending their parliamentary members to investigate the situation. What was common for both sides at the state level, however, was their willingness to tame the politics in the streets that could potentially move beyond pre-conceived political divisions and might not conform to the concept of representational politics – the politics of the politicians. Thus, the Estonian defence police tried their best afterwards to show the protests as being orchestrated by the Russian security office; likewise, the Russian Federation, assuming the borders of nationality to be absolute, did not really mind seeing the monument issue altogether as "theirs" (it is telling that the pro-Kremlin youth organisation, who sent their members to protest against the removal of the statue, bares the name Nashi – *i.e.* "Ours").

A cutting-edge office, spa and restaurant complex.

There are two aspects to the riots that demand attention. The first could be perhaps called the semiotics of the broken buildings: on the second night of rioting, when the protests had spread to different parts of the city centre, a special detour was made to break the windows of a recently opened Emporio Armani boutique. Situated in a cutting-edge office, spa and restaurant complex, the structure features a 12-metre overhanging cantilevered volume with a dramatically lit square/

shop entrance underneath it, symbolising almost physically the dominant consumerist course of the past years, or as I have called it elsewhere, a transition from post-Socialism to a city of the spectacle.[17] The desire to destroy the centrally located consumerist icon thus reveals that the conflict was not spreading on entirely ethnic grounds or it was intertwined with issues of class and inequality (or more precisely, spatial inequality, as supposedly most of the protesters came from the prefabricated tower block suburbs constructed in the Soviet era).[18]

Another unusual feature of the protests emerged when, after the police had dissolved the crowd from the monument, some younger participants started rhythmically shouting "Russia". This was especially remarkable, as in general there was a lack of (political) slogans during the demonstrations (the only one was "Shame", addressed supposedly at the government). According to the general interpretation, these protesters were

A prefabricated tower block suburb constructed in the Soviet era.

17 A. Kurg, Postsotsialismist vaatemängulinna. – Maja - Estonian Architectural Review 2007, No. 1, pp. 44–51.

18 The issue of class has been strongly repressed in public vocabulary and rejected for its communist associations. As Rein Ruutsoo has described it recently: "In the dichotomic and eschatological accounts of history, classes were simply substituted with "nations" (the formation of nations, including the formation of the Estonian people is the aim of history, politicians and scientists are the "agents" of this processes and their duty is to carry out their historic mission by validating this process). See: R. Ruutsoo, Järeleaitav demokraatia Eestis: saavutused ja väljavaated. – Vikerkaar No. 4-5, 2008, p. 117–118.

"calling Russia for help" or swearing their loyalty to Russia rather than Estonia. Philosopher Tõnu Viik has concluded that "by scaring the people with Russian intervention", the "Russian vandals" put themselves in a different position to protesters in Paris, Copenhagen or other Western-European cities: "There they vandalise from a non-existent power-position and a position of threat. The proximity of Russia and its position in the past century, however, forced Estonians to look at the threatening Russian protesters with a greater sense of fear."[19] Viik thus demands that the protesters voluntarily renounce their means for empowerment, and that they continue to speak from their "non-existent power-position", in order to remain in dialogue with the wider public. Yet, it could be argued that the annual practices at the monument on Victory Day represented this "non-existent power-position" of the subaltern counterpublic, and an attempt to gain power through dialogue, but once the monument was removed, the protesters reached for the easiest means available (or the most easily understood vocabulary). The cry for "Russia" on the night of the removal of the monument, thus demonstrates a change in the means of expression for the counterpublic once its discourse framework had changed, it showed a retreat from dialogue and a move towards separatism.

What was then lost in the monument's removal in the context of the city was the public space (in the most widely political sense) that had emerged during the Victory Day practices, and which filled the gap in the representational politics for the Russian-speaking counterpublic. Of course, this practice will be carried on in the monument's new location in the cemetery, yet the new site, through its context, has closed down the potential new meanings for the monument, which is now clearly linked to its military past and has a strictly commemorative function. It would be hard to see a place there for practices that try to overcome the ethnic split over questions dealing with World War II (for example, in 2006 an

19 T. Viik, Pronkssõduri konflikti loogika: lähedus jõledus hüsteeria deemon. – Postimees, 26. V 2007.

Estonian anti-fascist movement, the "8th of May Movement" was organised in protection of the monument in its former location), and that would open it up for the wider participation of different groups. It is the city then, as a democratic public terrain, as a social and political space with the potential to counterbalance institutional politics, that has lost the monument, now hijacked by national politics (both Estonian *and* Russian).

The Work of Politics in The Age of Technological Reproducibility

by Alexander Astrov

The Estonian entry at this year's Venice biennale of visual art reminds us of Walter Benjamin's famous call to respond to the aestheticisation of politics with the politicisation of art. A monument in Tallinn first found itself at the centre of a severe political storm. Now its status as a work of art (assuming it actually possessed one at some point) is being reclaimed in a statement whose clear political overtones tend to overshadow (yet again) any artistic sensibilities.

Still, can we really appreciate the statement, or the metamorphosis itself, if we take Benjamin's call to refer to a straightforward reversal of the relationship between art and politics – a relationship in which one mode of experience is necessarily privileged at the expense of the other? What is the character of this relationship to begin with? And how is it related, in turn, to the crisis triggered by the monument?

"This thing is not a soldier!"

First, the crisis. Ever since the peaceful restoration of its independence in 1991, Estonia was, by and large, wearing its Sunday best as far as politics, domestic or international, was concerned. To be sure, there have been tensions and disagreements, but things never got out of hand altogether, while in some areas, such as taxation or electronic voting, the country was

not merely following the lead of the "old Europe", but setting new standards for the entire continent. In fact, Estonian politicians have always rejected the old/new distinction, insisting on their country's return to, rather than entry into, Europe.

Of course, there has always remained the "Eastern question"; but then, again, it was Russia that was not playing ball, especially since Vladimir Putin's ascendance to power. Even here one could still turn the persistence of problems into a sign of success, as the Estonian president did: "For several reasons, the success of liberal democratic changes in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland is especially painful for Russia, which is why, in a peculiar way, Russia has resorted to the rhetoric of the 1950s when dealing with these countries"[1]. Rather than responding in kind, Estonia practised restraint; and nothing could possibly serve as a better illustration of that than the monument in the centre of Tallinn. It stood there, right by the National library, almost untouched, for fifteen years – in spite of the Soviet military uniform, in spite of the memories, still alive, of the first provisional monument erected by the Soviets on that very spot and then blown up by Estonian youngsters, in spite of its role as a focal point of all the official rituals throughout the decades of Soviet rule, in spite of the fact that ever since the restoration of independence continuous attempts by several groups to erect a similar monument to Estonians who fought on the German side in World War II were invariably suppressed by

A monument to Estonians who fought on the German side in WW II.

1 T. H. Ilves, The End of the Post-Cold-War Era. – Diplomaatia No. 49-50, October 2007.

successive Estonian governments. All this time this monument was still standing there, in the centre of a rapidly transforming city, quietly undergoing peculiar transformations of its own.

Perhaps, the most significant change occurred at around 1995 with the removal of the "eternal flame". Initially, the Bronze Soldier gazed at the flame at his feet. In this manner the flame short-circuited, as it were, the overall composition, visibly separating it from the largest of Tallinn's cathedrals located across the road from the monument. Now, standing in front of the church, staring at an empty space, both his gun and his head lowered, this particular Soviet soldier, unlike many of his siblings in other European capitals, looked almost remorseful. If not for those who came to visit him every year on the day when Russia celebrated its victory in the Great Patriotic War. Their posture was that of defiance. And if etymologically "defiance" denotes the renunciation of an allegiance, then what particular allegiance were they renouncing in this manner?

By 2006, for many in Estonia, the answer was obvious. Thus, on May 4, representatives of the Pro Patria Union (*Isamaaliit*) warned that if local Russians gathered by the monument again, this would be a "mockery of the Estonian state". In what exactly the alleged challenge to Estonian statehood consisted remained to be seen, or rather – decided. At first, however, the decisions seemed to be suspended. After the initial skirmishes by the monument on May 9, and a string of aggressive pronouncements and actions by the members of the Estonian Nationalist Movement (*Eesti Rahvuslik Liikumine*)[2] demanding the removal of the monument, the government announced that police had more important things to do than to protect "this monument". As if the monument was abandoned by the state and the area around it turned into a piece of territory where men were invited to act in their "natural" capacity as men, and stripped of any easily identifiable legal status.

2 A relatively marginal and small movement in the current Estonian political field established in 2006 and led by Martin Helme (born 1976).

Initially, this locally created "state of nature" did not produce, as Hobbes contended it should, any "war of all against all". The monument attracted local Russian youths who, at that stage, expressed themselves by bringing flowers and candles, claiming nothing but their readiness to protect the monument not from the state, but from those who threatened to remove it by taking justice into their own hands. A few days later, when some form of direct encounter between them and Estonian skinheads began to look inevitable, the government reversed its initial position and issued a decree prohibiting all forms of public self-expression in the area. All flowers and candles were removed overnight and a blue-and-white police strip appeared instead to remain there for the next four months.

This, however, did not alter the status of the monument. Appearances notwithstanding, the police cordon surrounding it was not protecting the monument from those who pledged to destroy it. Rather, it was guarding the established legal order of the state as a whole from the localised zone of lawlessness in which the validity of this order was temporarily suspended by the government's decision.

Perhaps this is when the similarity between the status of the monument and the position of the local Russians in Estonia came to the fore. Unwelcome, but tolerated, included through exclusion. Since their presence in Estonia had been officially interpreted in the early 1990s as an outcome of the Soviet occupation, the majority of them were legally defined as stateless. Approximately one third later received Russian citizenship. Another third opted for naturalisation into Estonian citizenship. Hundreds of thousands got stuck in the zone of a non-citizen. Despite some pressure from Russia and international organisations, this situation was generally perceived in Estonia itself as "natural" even if not entirely normal. Individuals have made their choices and such choices are what liberal-democratic citizenship is all about. Moreover, the "fundamental human rights" of the non-citizens were firmly secured by Estonian and European laws. The only thing they lacked was political participation at the national level. But that was not really high among Estonian citizens either.

When the crisis began to unfold, this generally-held opinion started to take grotesque and often less benign forms. When interviewed by one of the national television networks about the so-called Bronze Soldier – this is how the monument was now routinely referred to by Estonian media – one of the activists of the Estonian Nationalist Movement shouted into the camera: "This thing is not a "soldier"! This is Alyosha!" The immediate reference was to the Soviet song written about a similar monument in Bulgaria. The meaning ran deeper. It amounted to the denial of any social status to the monument, to all that which and all those whom it has come to represent.

The Estonian President, T. H. Ilves

And the message did not fail to reverberate. A year later, after the first night of riots caused by the government's eventual decision to relocate the monument, one of the leading newspapers in the country ran an editorial entitled "The unknown Russian hoodlum" in which faceless and nameless rioters (and local Russians generally) were explicitly juxtaposed to the venerable anonymity of the Unknown Soldier. Two months later, in his interview with Spiegel, the Estonian president asserted that for Estonians, "our people were not murdered by communists or Nazis, but by Germans and Russians"[3]. Finally, this recurrent reduction of politics to ethnicity culminated in a ghastly statement by renowned writer and Soviet-time dissident Hando Runnel, whose phone call back in 2006 had reportedly convinced Prime Minister Andrus Ansip that the monument could no longer be tolerated[4]. Now, when four individuals initially charged with the organisation of the riots were acquitted after a year-long trial, Runnel, in

3 T. H. Ilves, We Want to Re-Write History. – Spiegel Online 26. VI 2007.

4 A. Ideon, Sulev Vedler, et al, Peaministri salasõda. – Eesti Ekspress 3. V 2007.

an interview with the national news-agency echoed the president: "It does not matter whether it is capitalism or socialism, it is the balance of power that matters"; adding a biological metaphor for the understanding of the balance in question: "when a healthy organism is invaded by alien elements, it looses its ability to cleanse itself and dies"[5].

Runnel, of course, was not the first of the post-1989 East European ex-dissident writers whose views on politics sounded like a recipe for disaster. Yet, in Estonia such people are usually kept at arm's length when it comes to politics. In fact, one man whose decisions contributed to the violent escalation of the crisis more than anyone else's, had very little to do with dissent, with art, or with nationalism for that matter.

The curious case of Andrus Ansip

A. Ansip

There was nothing "natural" in Andrus Ansip's decision to support the long-standing demand by Estonian ultra-nationalists and remove the monument from the centre of Tallinn. After all, they had also demanded his own removal from power. Before converting to liberalism, Ansip had abandoned what looked like a promising academic career in chemistry for a slow but steady rise through the ranks of the Soviet party-nomenclature. By the time he reached a junior position in the municipal Communist hierarchy in the city

5 H. Runnel, Soovin õnne väljasurejatele. – Interview to ERR Uudised 13. XII 2008 (http://uudised.err.ee/index.php?06147632).

of Tartu, however, some of his senior comrades in Tallinn were already jumping ship. Still, for Ansip it looked like his brief stint in Soviet politics was never really about ideology, while his administrative skills were soon to be appreciated by the new regime. Until 2006, he was often criticised for a lack of imagination and creativity, as well as for a certain unscrupulousness in his choices of allies. Unlike the president, he readily spoke fluent Russian and, while being the mayor of Tartu, invested in the restoration of the city-park where local Soviet war-veterans held their annual celebrations.

Estonian flags.

Throughout the crisis, Ansip's justifications for the relocation of the monument were never really consistent. There were at least two themes in them. One clearly placated the usual critics of all things Soviet. The other attempted to transcend political, ideological and ethnic divisions through appeals to the higher value of order as such. There is no way of knowing for sure which of the two was used strategically and which reflected his personal convictions (if any). What is clear – and curious – is that both contributed to the deterioration of his relations with the local Russians.

Predictably, many Russians, both inside and outside Estonia, were infuriated by Ansip's public allegations that the remains he was about to exhume and relocate to the military cemetery along with the monument, belonged not to war-victims, but to a bunch of marauders accidentally murdered by their drunken comrade (a particularly vicious take on the "this thing is not a soldier" theme, and the only utterance of his for which, later, Ansip came close to apologising). What is less obvious is that a significant escalation of conflict occurred after his remarks clearly aimed at distancing himself from *both* Russian and Estonian activists.

That happened at an early stage in the development of the crisis when the government's belated attempt to secure the area around the monument failed to prevent public confrontation between Estonian nationalists and local Russians. The confrontation was mostly symbolic and did not result in physical violence. This, however, was due not so much to the effectiveness of the police, but to the dispositions of the two conflicting groups. Although the meeting was initiated by Estonian activists, the Russian response to this initiative was overwhelming. Fifty or so Estonian youngsters waving the national flag and trying (but failing) to sing the national anthem (it turned out, they did not know the lyrics) were met by more than a thousand local Russians carrying with them nothing but flowers. When police prevented them from laying those down before the disputed monument, they marched to a nearby monument known as the Freedom Clock (*Vabadusekell*), and commemorating the restoration of independence in 1991, and left their flowers there.

Carrying nothing but flowers.

This incident was perceived by many Russians as a sign not only of a moral victory over the skinheads, but also a political redemption of sorts. On this occasion, and in this manner, they were not opposing the Estonian state or Estonian independence (as was the case with some of them in the early 1990s). Rather than rejecting "Estonian order" altogether, they were asserting their place within it, and in so doing insisting on their right to count for more than just "Alyoshas", "Russians" or "alien elements". Asserting, in other words, that there was more to them and their presence on this land than just biology. Also, there was a clear expectation that now, once this assertion had been made publicly, peacefully and unambiguously, some form of political recognition would

follow. In fact, several Estonian parties did propose a comprehensive round table on the issue. Ansip responded by reiterating his intention to relocate the monument, adding that he had neither time nor desire to talk to the marginals. And although by "marginals" he clearly meant both Russian activists and Estonian nationalists, such equalisation of the two sides in what was perceived by Russians themselves as an asymmetrical conflict was taken as adding insult to injury. From that moment on, their understanding of the conflict was steadily sliding towards confrontation with the state; a confrontation that resulted in two nights of violent rioting in which stones and Russia's national flags took the place of flowers, and no Estonian symbol, be it Tammsaare's monument[6] or the cult-pub Woodstock[7], was spared.

All this is not meant to justify violence in practice or to explain it away theoretically by tracing back its alleged cause to a single ministerial remark. The point rather is to indicate that the remark in question was not an isolated one, but represented a tendency, clearly audible on different levels of Estonian discourse, and characterised by the denial of any social or political significance in the actions of local Russians and thus local Russians themselves. Its apparent impartiality, grounded in the belief that *any* impartiality requires a reduction of social life to the lowest common denominator of mere biological existence, and the corresponding understanding of the "protection of basic human rights" as, first and foremost, the protection of such biological existence, revealed itself as nothing but a set of extremely partial policies.

This, however, is a preliminary point. My main point concerns the exact character of this extreme partiality. We tend to identify it with nationalism, not least because we also tend to believe that extreme forms of nationalism

6 A monument in the centre of Tallinn, erected in 1978 and dedicated to one of the most highly regarded Estonian pre-war writers A.H. Tammsaare. During the riots in Tallinn it was vandalized.

7 A popular bar in central Tallinn – the place that was perhaps one of the most damaged locations in the centre of the city.

are a thing of the past, at least here in Europe. This gives us some confidence in the various tools – "pragmatism", "civic nationalism", "multiculturalism" and so on – with the help of which nationalism was made a thing of the past. Yet things may begin to look different if, following Hannah Arendt, we understand nationalism as a reaction not to the threats posed by other nations, but the much more severe threat of being collectively reduced to mere biological existence, and thus, to the realm of necessity in which there is no place for either freedom or politics and therefore for genuine humanity. Man is and ought to remain a political animal unless he is prepared to become an animal pure and simple. We may then see the waving of Russian flags during riots in Tallinn not as an expression of solidarity with Russia's painful reaction to the successes of liberal democracy in Estonia, nor as a mockery of the Estonian state, but rather as the peculiar insistence by local Russians of their nationality, as "the last sign of their former citizenship, as their only remaining and recognised tie with humanity. Their distrust of natural and their preference for national rights comes precisely from their realisation that natural rights are granted even to savages"[8].

Waving of Russian flags during riots.

We may then gather factual support for the contention that Ansip's flirtations with nationalists, as well as his later presentation of the choice he and the whole of Estonian society had to make as that between a return

8 H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973, p. 300.

to the Soviet past and the continuation of democracy, constituted neither less nor more than strategic manœuvring.[9] His deeper concern was not with the possibility of an alternative order, whether its alterity was to be defined ethnically or ideologically, but with the fundamentals of sovereign order as such. So that in responding to a question about the price society was about to pay for the ongoing police operation around the monument, he said that "order is expensive" (*kord on ka kallis*), and the state will not allow "some self-founded bunch" (*isehakanute seltskond*) to control a bit of its territory.[10]

One problem with this argument though is that it is based on Arendt's sharp separation of public and private, *oikos* and *polis*, necessity and freedom; a separation which does full justice neither to the world as we find it today nor to the ancient one.[11] One peculiar development in Athenian art and politics illustrates this point, while getting us closer to the issue of the relation between politics and art. A sudden explosion of the images of Amazons at the time of the Peloponnesian war has recently prompted Andrew Stewart to revisit the following question: "Why did the Greeks need Amazons? What could the Amazons say about otherness that Trojans, Giants, and the rest could not?"[12]

While tracing the development of the Amazonomachy in Homeric and Archaic Greece, as well as throughout the Persian and Peloponnesian wars, Stewart examines the generally held view which, one way or another, locates the Amazons not "in the midst" of Greek citizenry, the dwelling place of politics proper, but "at the margins: geographically and socially

9 A. Ansip, CCCP – forever või ei iialgi? – Postimees 16. VII 2007.

10 See: Stenographic record of the press conference of Government of Estonia 22. VI 2006. http://www.valitsus.ee/brf/index.php?id=34966&op=print

11 See, for more detail: J. Rancière, Hatred of Democracy. London: Verso, 2006.

12 A. Stewart, Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens. – Poetics Today 1995, No. 16 (4), p. 572.

a liminal place, the inverse of the polis", and refines it by highlighting one persistent characteristic of the Amazons often overlooked in discussions "obsessed with structuralist polarities, ancient matriarchies, psychoanalytic diagnoses or feminist political agendas": their status as *parthenoi* or unwed females unfamiliar with the proper "works of women".[13] During the Persian wars, this specific characteristic of the Amazons, once mapped onto representations of the enemy, allowed the Greeks to emphasise their own masculine prowess without denigrating the Persians through straightforward association with docile femininity. Unlike mature Greek women, *parthenoi*, and by extension the Amazons, were presented as wild, reckless and aggressive, but manifestly lacking in one crucial female virtue: *sophrosyne*, self-knowledge leading to a measured self-control, acquired not, as was the case with Greek men, through rational knowledge of one's limits, but through submission to male governance in marriage. Like Greek female adolescents, the Persians were seen as suffering from a bad case of arrested development:

> "They neither lived in proper cities nor were ready for the self-discipline required by equality of rights or isonomia, the cornerstone of Athenian democracy. Though personally brave, they often fought with the bow, from long range, not with the manly spear, and from horseback, like Greek aristocrats of old, not on foot. They knew nothing of the democracy of the phalanx, where all are equal and interdependent, and (because generals were elected and campaigns decided upon by free vote) decisions were "in the midst"."[14]

In this sense, "this thing", the Amazon, "was not a soldier" indeed; the affirmation of the virtues of the Greek way of life (democracy included) was here achieved not, as in the Estonian case, through the reduction to

13 Ibid, p. 578.

14 Ibid, p. 585.

An Amazon.

biology (not a soldier, but Alyosha; not communists, but Russians; not an ideology, but the right balance between healthy and alien elements in a living body), but through a typically Greek way of transcending biology by way of a distinctly political self-understanding. And Greek art, in this case, was not merely "reflecting" or "representing" a political agenda through Amazonomachy, but worked as an integral part of this self-understanding.

During the Peloponnesian wars though, an inverse development seems to be taking place. The Periclean Citizenship Law of 451, marked with the substitution of *astoi* ("people of the city") for the traditional *politai* ("citizens"), was accompanied by a surge in the production of Amazon images. Only now, according to Stewart's hypothesis, were these images part of the overall process of depoliticisation in which the peculiar status

of the *parthenoi* gave new meaning both to the Greek understanding of alterity and to the texture of their *polis*.

If the rigid private/public divide corresponded to the Greek female experience, in which there was "no prime, only a season of unripe virginity followed by a season of overripe maturity, with the moment of defloration as the dividing line"[15], the *parthenoi* made visible the in-between condition marked, above all, by its unruliness. Increasingly difficult to be ruled within the confines of the private realm of their birth, and not yet subject to the rule of their husband's household, the *parthenoi* are presented now as a threat to the established order coming from inside this order itself and yet subject to measures usually reserved for outsiders. Thus, already Solon's code "mandated that a father or brother could sell into slavery a *parthenos* (daughter or sister) caught in bed with a man [---], the only occasion when a free Athenian could be so treated. For since transgressions of this kind struck at the very heart of society, overturning the normal order of things and insinuating bastards into the body politic, her guardian could literally treat her as a foreign body"[16].

Periclean Citizenship Law went further by defining *any* "union between Athenians and foreigners, both Greek and barbarian, as concubinage, and its offspring as bastards. By so doing, it proclaimed that the citizenry of Athens was now one big, endogamous family. Henceforth, only pure Athenians would share in the benefits of citizenship and thus of empire; they would constitute an imperial elite".[17] This change was, perhaps, caused by the massive immigration crisis triggered by the Persian wars. Now the aliens constituted almost one half of the population of Athens. This, together with

15 A. Carson, Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire. – D. M. Halperin; J. J. Winckler; F. I. Zeitlin (eds.), Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990, p.144.

16 A. Stewart, Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens, p. 579.

17 Ibid, pp. 587–588.

huge losses of men in the Peloponnesian war, turned migrant *parthenoi* into a source of a very special security-concern:

> "Probably less strictly closeted than their Athenian counterparts and encouraged by parents eager to improve their position, these metic girls surely posed a far more substantial threat than metic men to the local marriage market. For in a traditional agrarian society, sons tend to remain at the paternal farm or business whomever they marry, while daughters are usually traded in alliances that improve the family's status; and in archaic and classical Athens, this meant marrying an Athenian. [---] In a city that prided itself on its autochthony, these alien parthenoi could justly be represented as draining the city of its remaining eligible bachelors, depriving its daughters of their birthright, and mongrelizing the community."[18]

Consequently the Amazonomachy of that period bore witness to the transformation of Athenian polity along the lines reminiscent of the modern nation state, while the source of this transformation, located in a zone of indistinctness between public and private, political and non-political experiences, could no longer be unambiguously classified as being native or alien either.

This zone of indistinctness has recently come under sustained theoretical scrutiny, in large measure due to the work of the post-World War II movement which set for itself the task of breaking the tradition of thought predicated on the necessity to posit and to subsume an "outside" in the name of constructing a "totality"[19]. This was also the objective of Benjamin's "politicisation of art": a reinscription of art into human experience that would make it impossible for the work of art to be put

18 Ibid, pp. 588–589.

19 See: A. Negri, Giorgio Agamben: The Discreet Taste of Dialectics. – M. Calarco and S. DeCaroli (eds.), Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007.

into the service of totalitarianism. But then, was not this also the declared task of the relocation of the monument in Tallinn? Perhaps, we should now reformulate this question by asking whether the relocation of the monument, the way it was understood, performed and justified, really stood up to the task, as articulated by Benjamin and others.

Technocracy and lumpen-nationalism

If the story of Athenian Amazonomachy, by moving the metic *parthenoi* from the geographical limits of Greek political experience to the very centre of it, questions Arendt's conceptualisation of the ancient polis and of contemporary politics, it nevertheless conforms with Arendtian understanding of the relation between *poiesis* and politics. Arendt suggests that *politai* needed the *polis* so that their words and deeds, that is, their actions as the source of their personality, would be recorded and remembered even if there were no poets around at the moment of actual performance. The possibility of political institutions performing the same role as poetic creations was grounded in the unity of the Greek understanding of *poiesis* as *anything* "that brings into existence something that was not there before"[20]. This same unity ensures that the surge in the artistic production of Amazon images registered and interpreted by Stewart happens in the first place and can be related to specific political experiences. Also, the creators of Amazon images of the Periclean era, while introducing or emphasising specific new features which Stewart relates in his analysis to the *parthenoi*, are still drawing unproblematically on a long-standing tradition stemming from Homeric times; and so does Pericles in his oration, assuming, it seems, that at least this part of the overall Greek experience is shared not only by *politai,* but also by *astoi*.

20 Plato, Collected Dialogues: Including The Letters. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 557.

Within this tradition, poetry, understood as a form of *techne* (itself a species of *poiesis*), is not different in kind from other skills practised in the *polis*. In a sense, even nature has the character of *poiesis*, although Aristotle distinguishes it from *techne*, as long as human creations, unlike natural ones, do not contain within themselves the original principle of their creation. Still, insofar as human artifice was viewed as sharing with nature its poetic character, the aforementioned capacity of Greek men to know their own limits was not that inconceivable, given that the specific form of any creation, natural or human, was governed by its origin, be it the order of things natural or the order of tradition. Apart from anything else, that ensured the reproducibility of tradition generally and political institutions, as well as artistic creations, in particular. This is why Arendt could plausibly relate Greek politics to poetry through reference to memory rather than innovation.[21]

Once this link can no longer be articulated, however, reproducibility stops being the function of the origin and becomes that of technique. This affects not merely the work of art which, torn out of its specific place in tradition, loses what Benjamin calls its "aura"; that is, authenticity or originality in the initial Greek understanding of the term as proximity to the origin. The artist, now opposed to the manufacturer, attempts to hold on to the idea of originality, but the idea itself undergoes a disastrous transformation: "Everything that in some way constituted the common space in which the personalities of different artists met in a living unity in order then to assume, within the strictures of this common mould, their unmistakable physiognomy became a commonplace in the pejorative sense, an unbearable encumbrance: the artist in whom the modern critical demon has insinuated itself must free himself from it or perish". This is why Hölderlin, for example, contrary to the spirit of his age, was more concerned with the demise of reproducibility in art rather than with originality.[22]

21 H. Arendt, The Human Condition. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 168–71.

22 G. Agamben, The Man Without Content. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 62–63.

A similar development was under way in modern politics. Ever since the jurists of the Renaissance reasserted the primacy of republican practices over the body of imperial legal doctrine, republican city-states have been seeking new grounds for their own authority. Quite fittingly, one of the directions explored at the time lay in the study of *auctores*, or classical authors, whose character, expressed in their individual rhetorical style, was meant to serve as a model and also an integral part of any sound advice to *podestà*. There was, however, significant opposition to this emphasis on the individual style, when the study of the various techniques of composition was conceived as "nothing more elevated than a business course"[23]. And although, viewed anachronistically, long stretches of European "politics" seem to be dominated by "Machiavellianism" with its close proximity to the former approach, in fact, when the word "politics" did reappear in European vocabulary in recognisable form, it was rather in the title of the *prévôt de la police* in France, for example, whose main concern was not with the personality of the state's citizens or rulers, but with the efficient administration of the market-places of Paris.[24]

This opposition between originality and technical reproducibility is, perhaps, most clearly visible in European imperial practices, when administration or "effective occupation" was clearly preferred to genuine political ruling[25]; but also in contemporary practices of "promoting democracy" grounded in the belief that "states and citizens can be socially-

23 Q. Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 35.

24 J. G. A. Pocock, The Political Limits to Premodern Economics. – J. Dunn (ed.), The Economic Limits to Modern Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 141.

25 See, for more detail: G. W. Rutherford. Spheres of Influence: An Aspect of Semi-Suzerainty. – The American Journal of International Law No. 20 (2), 1926, pp. 300–325; M. Lyons, From 'Death Camps' to Cordon Sanitaire: The Development of Sleeping Sickness Policy in the Uele District of the Belgian Congo 1903-1914. – The Journal of African History No. 26(1), 1985; M. Koskenniemi, The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

engineered by correct practices of external regulation", while "the problems of politics can be resolved outside the realm of the political, in the realms of law, social policy and administration"[26]. What is less clear is how this opposition can be understood in terms of the "aestheticisation of politics".

Here we have to recall the meaning of "aesthetics" which, most likely, informed Benjamin's construction. Like the opposition between originality and reproducibility, it is grounded in the related experience of a radical split: this time between the artist and the spectator. A split in which the very withdrawal from the process of creation and thus the alleged disinterestedness and potential universality of the spectator's judgement ensured his privileged position in the overall construction, as argued by Agamben. It is this construction, only applied to politics, that Carl Schmitt described as an aesthetic attitude characteristic of "political romanticism" that invariably prefers the state of eternal becoming and unrealisable possibilities to active participation in the creation of a concrete political world.[27] Benjamin, as was often the case in his engagements with Schmitt, subverts his critique of romantic depoliticisation. As long as the split itself – between the artist and the spectator, or between the ruler and the ruled, and ultimately, between individual and tradition – remains intact, the most decisive of "political" stances remains wedded to the idea of artistic self-gratification, while politics remains in the grip of aesthetics.[28] The "politicisation of art", as a genuine response to the aestheticisation of politics, cannot possibly mean a simple reversal of the two poles, but should be aimed instead at that which constitutes the split itself, be it in modern aesthetics or in modern politics. As "politicisation", in other words,

26 D. Chandler, Back To The Future? The Limits of Neo-Wilsonian Ideals of Exporting Democracy. – Review of International Studies No. 32 (3), 2006, p. 482.

27 C. Schmitt, Political Romanticism. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986, p. 66.

28 See, for more detail: W. Benjamin (ed. M. W. Jennings, et al), The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap.

it is opposed not to the aesthetic attitude of "political romanticism", but to the technological reproducibility which alters the character of both politics and art.

But then, again, is it possible to perform such politicisation without asserting any returns to the mythical origin or any "overcoming" of currently existing divisions in the name of some all-inclusive totalities?

It is time to return to the Amazons, or rather to the *parthenoi* in whose image they were created. Their radical marginalisation was not meant to deprive them of any privileges: both as metics and females they were already excluded from the *polis*. By radicalising this exclusion, the Periclean Citizenship Law, in fact, redefined boundaries within the Athenian empire, opposing "pure" Athenians to the rest of the Greeks. Put differently, that which was not part of the Greek system of political signification anyway served the purpose of readjusting that system. But that, as Ernesto Laclau has recently restated, is how any system of signification operates.[29] To use Laclau's examples, to construct a coherent story of "world history", Hegel had to "put aside", to exclude from historicity altogether, the "peoples without history". And later when Marx, retaining the Hegelian idea of world history but redefining it in terms of the antagonism between the proletariat and the capital, performs exactly the same operation by isolating from this struggle a separate entity, *lumpenproletariat*, which, at bottom, performs the constitutive function of setting the outer boundary of a system of meaning within which all other oppositions (such as the working class and the capital, the state and civil society, Athens and the rest or democracy and autocracy) can be articulated.

There is little doubt that the space that Estonia's initial post-Soviet politics inhabited was in large measure defined by the idea of "nationalism". Yet, contrary to often repeated allegations, Estonian nationalism was never really directed at the local Russian community. Its target was located

29 See: E. Laclau, On Populist Reason. London: Verso, 2005.

beyond the state-borders, since "nationalism" here signified the idea of a world organised by and into nations. Hence "not communists or Nazis, but Germans and Russians". But, as with any such system, the condition of its existence is some kind of "lumpen-nationalism", the existence of a group whose ethnicity can be ascertained but which, nevertheless, does not fit into the existing ordering principle. Although to find oneself on the receiving end of such an attitude is hardly any better than to be an object of xenophobia – such radical exclusion, according to Laclau, does not have to lead, as in Arendt's or Agamben's accounts, to extreme forms of depoliticisation. In fact, as careful analysis of Marx demonstrates, *lumpenproletariat* could not be unproblematically confined to the outskirts of "the anatomy of civil society", but instead it invaded, like "the alien elements" indeed, the whole body of Marxian theory; just as, under the conditions of globalisation, Hegelian "people without history" have "occupied the centre stage to the point of shattering the very notion of teleological historicity"[30]. Insofar as such groups are amenable to political articulation, even if in the form of outright denial, as in "this thing is not a soldier!", they are the very stuff of politics proper...

Not in the curious case of Andrus Ansip though. Here we saw repeated attempts to escape politics or to confine it to the graveyard. On the continuously repeated assumption that there its meaning would no longer be ambiguous; and so the monument itself would no longer be divisive. The dream of a perfectly neutralised, perfectly homogenised society come true. The Saint-Simonian dream, that is, of transition "from the government of men to the administration of things"…

But now the monument has escaped. Not, hopefully, into the realm of art. Perhaps, now it is in a zone of indistinctness between art and politics. Where the objects of "ready-made" and "Pop Art" find themselves for the brief moments of transition from one mode of human experience to another. And although such moments do constitute brief instances of

30 Ibid, p. 148.

escape from the grip of technological reproducibility, they are neither more nor less than a reminder that the real work of politics proper under these conditions is still to be done.

Repeated attempts to escape politics or to confine it to the graveyard.

Between Nation and People: On Concepts of (Un)Belonging

by Airi Triisberg

A well-known photograph by the artist Meir Gal, *Nine Out of Four Hundred (The West and the Rest)* from 1997, shows him holding nine pages of a Jewish history textbook used in schools in Israel, demonstrating the number of pages dedicated to the history of the Mizrahim, the Jews of Middle Eastern, Asian and African origins. With this gesture Meir Gal refers to the fact that the official historical discourse in Israel is almost exclusively focused on the history of Ashkenazim, the Jews of the European origin, even though the Mizrahim make up an estimated 50% of the Israeli population. In a written statement accompanying the photograph, Meir Gal explains his intention to put an end to the speculations whether or not Mizrahim have been discriminated in Israel by setting a clear example of how the non-European majority has been made a minority by the state.[1]

This work by Meir Gal has always inspired me to conduct an analogous experiment with the 302 pages of *Lühike eesti kunsti ajalugu (A Concise History of Estonian Art)* published in 1999 by Sirje Helme and Jaak Kangilaski, which focuses predominantly on the 20th century. As this is one of the main textbooks currently being used to teach the history of Estonian art, it reveals a great deal about the statistical discrepancy between the rich demographic composition of the Estonian population and the poor representation of that ethnic diversity in the public sphere. While the first part of this book (a brief insight into art production in Estonia from the Stone Age to the turn of the 20th century) perfectly acknowledges the fact that the geographical territory that became the nation state of Estonia in 1918, has never been socially, culturally or ethnically homogenous,

1 M. Gal, Nine Out of Four Hundred: The West and the Rest. Republished in Springerin. – Hefte für Gegenwartskunst, 2/2003.

the remainder of the book appears to suggest that ever since a time that coincides approximately with the end of World War I, Estonia suddenly became a mono-ethnic country. In fact, from the pages discussing the 20th century, it is impossible to find a single one that could be lifted up in the spirit of Meir Gal.

The main problem I want to address in this essay is the ethnocentric discourse dominating the contemporary art field in Estonia. As this is part of a broader phenomenon structuring the processes of inclusion and exclusion in society at large, I am also pointing out the mechanisms whereby ethnic nationalism has been produced politically, and how it has been problematised in the field of critical theory. At the end of this essay I will discuss some examples from the field of visual culture in Estonia, looking into how the prevalent imagery of a monolithic ethnonational identity has been contested from the perspective of the "third space".

One of the first questions I find myself faced with is how to frame my argument without falling into the trap of reproducing the very ideology that this essay is intended to speak up against to. From the anti-nationalist perspective, an art event such as the Venice Biennale should simply be boycotted, since it is virtually impossible to escape the fact that every contribution in this publication is implicitly meant to serve the purpose of national representation, however critical one might wish to be about it. Similarly, it is quite a challenge to discuss the relationship between contemporary art and nationalism in the specific context of Estonia without using expressions such as "Estonian art", "art in Estonia" or "Estonia" (just to name the terms that have emerged so far), and therefore, inscribe oneself into the system of nation states in the existing world order instead of problematising it from its root.

One way to think beyond this contradiction has been proposed by Rosi Braidotti, Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova in the publication *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*, which formed part of the Dutch contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2007. In the introduction to

the book, they suggest examining the current situation in the Netherlands as an *example* that, according to Giorgio Agamben, is by definition always located "beside" itself, being neither particular nor universal, yet full of the potential to reveal something about both.[2] Apart from that, I am also very sympathetic to the idea of bringing the discussion about contemporary art and nationalism to a place where the alliance of the two appears to be the strongest. Therefore, this essay is not about Estonia *per se*, but it takes Estonia as a case study, not least because it is the context I happen to know best.

Who can be seen and who can be not seen?

As someone with a rather short historical memory, I would claim that the question of nationalism has never been discussed in Estonia as heatedly in the past as it has over the last few years. In the field of art history writing, the discussion was only opened up as recently as 2007 with Margaret Tali's article *Why have there not been any Russian artists in the contemporary art field in Estonia*?, even though there has been a growing number of artworks, exhibition projects and discussion events dealing with the notions of nation, nation state and nationalism in recent years. The question posed by Margaret Tali is definitely the most pressing one, but it is also somewhat paradoxical that it was only addressed at the moment when the contrary could be proven perhaps more easily than ever before. Moreover, formulated as it is, this question lacks some accuracy, since it reproduces a very common practice of misidentifying all national minorities living in Estonia with Russians, while the "Russian-speaking" population[3] in Estonia comprises many nationalities from the former

2 R. Braidotti, C. Esche, M. Hlavajova, The Netherlands, for example. – Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example. Utrecht: Bak – basis voor actuele kunst, 2007, pp. 19–20.

3 I am using the term "Russian-speaking population" in quotation marks because not every-

Soviet Union, with Ukrainians and Belarusians constituting the largest national minorities along side Russians.

Nevertheless, to date Margaret Tali's article remains the only serious attempt to analyse the ethnocentric layout of the contemporary art field in Estonia structurally. By rephrasing the famous question from feminist critique, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, Tali approaches the problem via analytical tools allocated by Linda Nochlin in her notable essay from 1971.[4] Implying that the participation in the art world has as much to do with artistic talent as with the ideological structure of social and cultural institutions that enable and support the production of art(ists), Tali doesn't go in search of forgotten, unrecognised or excluded artists who could be rehabilitated and incorporated into the narrative of national art history. Instead, she focuses on mechanisms of institutional exclusion, arguing that, for one, the shortage of "Russian-speaking" artists in Estonia is to a large extent caused by higher art education not being equally accessible, and the lack of art education in the Russian language.[5]

Even though I completely agree with the general premises of Tali's criticism, I find it more problematic when it comes to referring to the "Russian-speakers" as monolingual, as this has also been a central argument used in nationalist discourse. Of course, the language question has been a prominent issue in all types of integration debates, and not completely without reason. Indeed, inadequate skills in the Estonian language make it more difficult to obtain a higher education, and there should definitely be

one characterised with this term speaks Russian as their first language, even though Russian has been adopted as the lingua franca among most residents who immigrated to Estonia during the Soviet period (and their descendants). I am also reluctant to use the term "Estonian-Russians" that has been coined recently, because, apart from the argument posed above, it reproduces the practice of treating the notions "ethnos" and "nation" as synonymous, instead of defining the term "nation" as a political entity.

4 L. Nochlin, Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? – ARTnews, January 1971.

5 M. Tali, Why have there not been any Russian artists in the contemporary art field in Estonia? – M. Henriksson, S. Boynik (eds.), Contemporary Art and Nationalism: Critical Reader. Prishtina: Institute for Contemporary Art "EXIT", 2007, p. 92.

sufficient opportunities for obtaining an education in the Russian language in Estonia. Yet, a substantial part of younger generation "Russian-speakers" can often master more languages than the "Estonian-speakers". In fact, (when talking about the younger generation) the linguistic difference between "Russian-speakers" and "Estonian-speakers" tends to be more and more often simply the fact that the first speak both languages in question and the latter only one of them. And still there appears to be a statistically ill-founded majority of ethnic Estonians obtaining higher (art) education!

Tali's second point of criticism is directed towards the practices of specific art institutions, especially the local branch office of the former Soros Center for Contemporary Arts network, which played a central role in supporting and producing contemporary art in Estonia throughout the 1990s. In this context, Tali is claiming that contemporary art in the 1990s was largely conceived as a tool for national representation, instrumentalised for the purpose of positive image branding in the West, and, therefore, leaving little room for the articulation of problems related to social and political exclusion within Estonian society.[6] A telling example in support of this argument, just to name one, would be the fourth annual exhibition of the Soros Center *Estonia as a Sign*, curated by Ants Juske in 1996. The ambition of this exhibition, according to the curator, was to look into how artists relate to national symbols and concepts of national identity in a state of transition, that is, five years after the establishment of national sovereignty in Estonia.[7] What is evident from Juske's curatorial statement, is an appeal to create positive concepts that would, for one, provide a new sense of community in the situation where the well-established binary opposition of nationalism versus totalitarianism had lost much of its credibility and the status of nationalism was shifting, and secondly, as

6 Ibid, p. 93.

7 A. Juske, Estonia as a Sign. – Estonia as a Sign. 4th annual exhibition of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 1996. Tallinn: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 1997 [pages not numbered].

the title also suggests, help to reconsider the notion of national identity in reference to international relations, especially concerning Estonia's geographical location between Russia and the European Union. What is completely missing from the picture, though, and this goes as much for the texts published in the exhibition catalogue as well as for the artworks shown in the exhibition, is even a remote reference to the challenges that the multi-ethnic composition of Estonian population would pose to the totally ethnocentrically constructed notion of national identity that the exhibition *Estonia as a Sign* was unconditionally reproducing.[8]

Apropos feminism, the first programmatic feminist exhibition in Estonia, which took place in 1995 in Tallinn, was titled *Est.Fem* and curated by Eha Komissarov, Mare Tralla and Reet Varblane.[9] This title points to another aspect in the concatenation of contemporary art and nationalist ideology that was especially prevalent in the 1990s. In a context where most strands of critical theory, such as feminist discourse, for example, were basically missing, almost every attempt at cultural translation was very likely to be framed in an ethnonational dressing, where "national" was identified with ethnic Estonian. Art critic and curator Anders Härm once noted that the dominant misconception of Estonia as a mono-cultural country is often accompanied by the tendency to confuse the notions of "local" and "national".[10] To my mind, this is exactly what the title *Est.Fem* indicates – as

8 It is even more striking that one MA thesis in art history written as recently as 2008 in the Estonian Academy of Arts, focusing specifically on the analysis of Estonia as a Sign exhibition, also fails to address this aspect.

9 In fact, an international exhibition with feminist outset, titled Code-Ex, had been held in Tallinn a year earlier, but the importance of Est.Fem which featured exclusively Estonian artists, appears to be estimated higher in art historical writing, whereas this might partly be due to the fact that the feminist position remained somewhat poorly articulated by the participating artists in Code-Ex exhibition. See, for example, the curatorial statement by Reet Varblane in the catalogue of Est.Fem – M. Tralla (ed.). Est.Fem. Tallinn, 1995, p. 7.

10 A. Härm, Oh my God! Oh my God! There is no Estonian in the Show! – R. Artel, A. Triisberg (eds.), Public Preparation – Biennale of Young Artists. Tallinn: Public Preparation, 2007, p. 79.

much as it was an attempt to produce situated knowledge about gendered discourse in a specific locality, the concept of Estonian feminism that was engendered in the mid 1990s can be criticised for affirming the cultural hegemony of ethnic Estonians[11], since the feminist art practice of the period ignored the processes of double-marginalisation dramatically affecting gendered subjects of various ethnicities in Estonia at the time.[12]

A third aspect that should be considered as evidence of the strong alliance between nationalism and contemporary art throughout the 1990s, is the discourse of art history which was at the time largely occupied with revising the historical narratives originating from the Soviet period and (re-)writing the (un)written histories. A substantial body of work being done in this context focused on rehabilitating unofficial art that had been unaccepted during the Soviet period, whereas the adoption of national

11 Art historian Katrin Kivimaa has extensively written on how the art practice of the 1990s was problematising the dominant visual imagery of femininity and questioning women's role in the representation of national identity. Nevertheless, the critique of nationalist gender ideology was only articulated within the framework of ethno-national space at the time. For more detail, see: K. Kivimaa, Nationalism, Gender and Cultural Identities: The Case of Estonian Art from the Impact of Modernity to the Post-Soviet Era 1850-2000. An unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds 2003.

12 A similar trend has been evident in the attempts to introduce postcolonial theory in Estonia. In 2003, the literary theorist Tiit Hennoste published the article entitled Postcolonialism and Estonia, a small lexicon of the key terms of postcolonial theory accompanied by a number of proposals for how these terms could be applied in an analysis of Estonian history and culture. Even though the article was published in a literary magazine that was at the time published both in Estonian and Russian, Hennoste chose to completely ignore the question of how postcolonial theory could be applied in the post-socialist condition, especially in relation to ethnic minorities living in contemporary Estonia. – T. Hennoste, Postkolonialism ja Eesti. Väga väike leksikon. – Vikerkaar, 2003, No. 4/5, pp. 85–100.
An even more poignant example of how the multinational aspect of Estonian society systematically lacks representation in the academic discourse, is a recently published anthology of texts reflecting on the preconditions and repercussions of the mass protests that followed the relocation of the "Bronze Soldier", a Soviet World War II war memorial, in Tallinn in April 2007. A substantial part of this publication is made up of the documentation of texts related directly to the Bronze Soldier conflict, including a selection of essays published in the daily media shortly after the protests. Again, it is illuminating that not a single text published in the local Russian-speaking media was included. – P. Petersoo, M. Tamm (eds.), Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008.

conservative ideas by artists was considered as a form of resistance, Here, it is also notable, how often the phraseology of art history and criticism includes expressions such as "we", "us", "our artists", "our history", *etc*.[13]

Even though the processes described above are to a large extent still prevalent in the cultural field in Estonia, it seems to me that there was something much more systematic in the way how institutional exclusion was produced in the 1990s. At the same time, these processes were not only characteristic to the art field, but coincided with the establishment of ethnic domination on political and social level at large.

If elections changed anything, they would be forbidden

In the book *Inventing the People: the Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* Edmund S. Morgan poses the question: how is it possible to explain the ease with which the many are governed by the few. In Morgan's view, the success of any type of government requires the acceptance of fictions.[14] In his book, he describes how the fiction of the divine right of kings became replaced by the fiction of the sovereignty of the people in 17th and 18th century England and America, arguing that the concepts of popular sovereignty and political representation are political fictions that help to sustain governmentality. According to Morgan, modern democracy does not reside in the absence of domination,

13 See, for example, the above-mentioned curatorial statement by Ants Juske in the catalogue of Estonia as a Sign exhibition; Sirje Helme's introduction to the publication Idealism of the Cultural Space of the 1970s. Addenda to Estonian Art History (Tallinn: Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 2002); or, more recently, Maria-Kristiina Soomre writing about the Estonian contribution to the XI Venice Biennale of architecture, Impeeriumikollane madu in the cultural weekly Sirp (19. IX 2008), and consider Benedict Anderson's argument of nations as imagined communities, since "the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members" (B. Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, & New York, 1983, p. 15.).

14 E. S. Morgan, Inventing the People: the Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988, p. 13.

but in the establishment of a set of institutions through which domination can be produced and sustained, but also contested and limited. Similarly, in *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson places the appearance of nationalism precisely at the moment towards the end of 18th century characterised by the erosion of religious imagery and the decline of the dynastic realm – first in Europe, later elsewhere – which, according to Anderson, made it historically possible to imagine a sovereign nation.[15] Nationalism thus appeared as a mechanism for the transmission of power – originally conceived as a political instrument for weakening the absolutist state and strengthening modern democracy, but ultimately, by establishing a new type of state system – the nation state with its own apparatuses of inclusion and exclusion, constituting just another means for legitimising hegemony.

It is exactly this aspect that is interesting to keep in mind in the post-totalitarian context of the Baltic States, where the establishment of national sovereignty after the collapse of the Soviet Union was based on the legal restoration of pre-Soviet nation states. In countries such as Estonia and Latvia, this act of restitution enabled the construction of a politico-legal framework for an ethnocratic regime based on the idea that a particular ethno-national group is entitled to a privileged relationship with a territorial state.[16] Ethnic domination in Estonia and Latvia was established through legal segregation, which deprived the majority of "Russian-speaking" residents from their social and political rights. To bring an example: in the referendum of 1991, an estimated 150 000 "Russian-speaking" residents supported the restoration of the independent Republic of Estonia[17], whereas

15 B. Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, p. 40.

16 Apart from the Baltic States, constitutional and legal structures that privilege members of one ethno-nation over other residents can be observed in many post-socialist countries, especially in Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, Hungary, etc.

17 As stated by Sergei Stadnikov, see: S. Stadnikov, Venelastest Eestis: mõningaid heiastusi. – Vikerkaar, 2008, No. 4–5, p. 154.

a year later the majority of them were barred from voting since only citizens were allowed to participate in elections. Meanwhile, the citizenship law that had been passed in February 1992[18] granted automatic citizenship rights to those who had it before the Soviet occupation in1940 and to their descendants, while the residents who had arrived in Estonia during the Soviet era (and their descendants) were classified as alien's and could only obtain citizenship through naturalisation or otherwise had to apply for residency permits to legalise their status.[19] The naturalisation terms that were set in 1992 included a two-year residency requirement, the ability to speak Estonian, and a one-year waiting period after applying – apart from the fact that the majority of "Russian-speaking" residents were not prepared to meet the language requirements, the one-year waiting period had direct implications on their political status because resident non-citizens were ineligible to vote in the June 1992 constitutional referendum and the September 1992 parliamentary elections.[20]

Here I would like to refer to an article by Giorgio Agamben titled *We Refugees*. In this text, he returns to an essay of the same title written by Hannah Arendt in 1943 in which Arendt focuses on the condition of the refugee and stateless person in order to highlight the paradox that precisely the figure that should have incarnated the rights of man *par excellence*, the refugee, constitutes instead the radical crisis of the concept of the "Rights of man". In line with Arendt's argument, Agamben follows that in the nation-state system, the inalienable rights of man prove to be completely unprotected at the very moment it is no longer possible to characterise

18 In accordance with the general politics of restitution, it was the citizenship law from 1938 (based on the principle of ius sanguinis) that was restored in 1992.

19 Approximately 1/3 of the Estonian population (approx. 500 000 people) were denied citizenship in 1992. In 2008, 8% of the Estonian population still had undefined citizenship (and approximately 8% were citizens of Russian Federation.or some other country)

20 At the same time, voting rights were permitted for non-resident ethnic Estonians – mostly people who had emigrated between the two World Wars or during the Soviet period (and their descendants).

them as rights of the citizen of a state. He notes that while the nation-state makes nativity or birth the foundation of its sovereignty, it is exactly the reason why the refugee should be considered as a central figure of our political history because – by breaking up the identity between nativity and nationality, between man and citizen – it throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty.[21]

Political theorist Alexander Astrov has analysed the situation of "Russian-speaking" non-citizens in Estonia in the light of Agamben's notion of the "state of exception". In a recent essay he states that the restrictive citizenship procedures that were implemented at the beginning of 1990s, both included and excluded the "Russian-speaking" population from the existing legal order – the non-citizen residents were included in the jurisdiction of the state just to be excluded from the space to which the legal order itself applies. Astrov argues that this kind of exclusion, as opposed to direct deportation, is exactly what defines the state of exception. Deprived from their political rights, the "Russian-speaking" non-citizens were reduced to mere biological existence, or what Agamben calls "bare life", while the state of exception was made into a norm.[22]

Towards the end of *We Refugees,* Agamben refers to the demographic situation in the global industrial North, and particularly in contemporary Europe, that is characterised by a growing mass of permanently resident non-citizens who neither can be nor want to be naturalized or repatriated, concluding that the concept of citizen is no longer adequate to describe the socio-political reality of modern states. He thus suggests that the figures of refugee and (illegal) migrant call into question the very principles on which the modern nation-state system is based, and proposes the option of thinking of Europe as an aterritorial or extraterritorial space in which

21 G. Agamben, We Refugees, 1994. Retrieved from http://www.makeworlds.org/node/161

22 A. Astrov, Monumentaalne kriis: "natsid", "okupandid" ja teised nihilistid. – P. Petersoo, M. Tamm (eds.), Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008, p. 106–107.

all the residents of European states (citizens and non-citizens) would be in a position of exodus or refuge, ultimately replacing the concept of nation with the concept of people.[23]

We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us

Jacques Rancière has stated that the moment where politics begins, is when parts of society that are not represented institutionally, start claiming their participation.[24] A poignant example to explicate this point would be the anti-racist network *Kanak Attak* formed in Germany in 1998 to provide a political platform for migrants of the 2nd and 3rd generation, that is, people who were born and raised in Germany, but due to their migrant family background are still referred to as *Ausländer*, foreigners. By re-appropriating the word *Kanake*, a derogatory word used in Germany for immigrants and foreigners, *Kanak Attak* set out to fight against the "kanakisation" of certain groups of people through racist ascriptions and repetitive symbolic acts of expatriation (fairly often articulated in the form of the question "Where are you from?" or "When are you going back?"). In a situation where people of migrant background were still lacking representation in the German public sphere as political subjects and the discourse around the notions of immigration, cultural identity and social-political rights was to a large extent defined from the dominant position of "bio-Germans", *Kanak Attak* started to call for the right to invent one's own terms in the discourse of migrant subjects, proclaiming the slogan "This song is ours", as well as "Integriert uns am Arsch". Apart from political and theoretical work *Kanak Attak* has also been actively engaged in cultural activities such as video-activism, performances, cultural hoaxing, image production, sound and audio creation.

23 G. Agamben, We Refugees.

24 R. Jacques, Das Unvernehmen. Politik und Philospohie. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2002, p. 24.

In the context of Estonia, or also the Baltic States, (post-)migrant self-organisation and/or collective attempts to open up a discussion from the perspective of identity politics are virtually missing in the cultural field. The few exceptions that can be named in this context mainly originate from the field of poetry, such as the multi-media collective *Orbīta*, a Riga-based group of Latvian russophone poets and artists who mix poetry, electronic music and video art in their work; *Углы*, a collective of Tallinn-based poets writing in Russian; or *Tuulelohe – Воздушный змей*, a bilingual collective of Tartu-based authors writing in Russian and Estonian. Nevertheless, as much as the entry of russophone poets into the ethnocentrically constructed literary field in Estonia and Latvia constitutes a significant fact in itself, the political aspect is not necessarily central in the work of the authors associated with the above mentioned collectives, as the experience of difference, in-betweenness or hybridity is employed only occasionally in their poetry.

However, I am now stating that a certain process of politicalisation has been set in motion in the cultural field in recent years, even though it has been more explicit in the work of individual artists, writers and filmmakers. In the following section I want to discuss how the notions of (national) identity and migration have been addressed in the particular context of Estonia from the perspective of the "third space", focusing on the visual representation of subjectivities that cannot be defined in terms of monolithic ethno-national identity. Even though my main object of interest lies in the field of contemporary art, I will also focus on a number of examples from documentary film making, as the tradition of producing visual documents about cultural difference is considerably stronger there. As my starting point, I want to point out a notion that Irit Rogoff has proposed – in her book *Terra Infirma* she uses the expression "unhomed geographies", suggesting, similarly to Agamben, that the event of dislocation or deterritorialization implies an opportunity to contest

the power of the state with its various apparatuses for granting rights and determining issues of belonging.[25]

In this context, I want to discuss three films that are creating an arena for "unhomed geographies". *Family* (*Perekond*, 2004) is a film by Sulev Keedus that bears witness to transnational subjectivities originating from the internationalist legacy of the former Soviet Union. *Family* is a portrait of three women – the mother Ida and her two daughters Natasha and Larissa. The men of the family only appear as side characters in the film, gaining a role mainly through the stories told by the women, but it is suggested that it is due to the military career of the family father Fjodor that Ida, who originally comes from a southern area of the Soviet Union, now lives in the north. The "North" is not defined in the film and possibly includes other locations that the family travelled to before settling in Tallinn, from where Ida regularly commutes to Moscow as she works on the Tallinn–Moscow rail route. It definitely also includes Riga and St Petersburg where Larissa and Natasha are respectively living. And it is particularly the fact that the questions of nativity and nationality are not explicitly addressed in the film that puts the trajectories of geographical routes to the forefront, creating a transnational space rooted precisely in displacement, and thus decisively resisting the nation state borders that where established at some point when Larissa and Natasha were young adults. For the characters of the film, it is primarily the affectionate, though often also difficult, family relations between parents, daughters and sisters on the move that determines their belonging, rather than the authoritative trinity of state/nation/territory.

A completely different study on dislocated subjects is presented in the film *Opinionator* (*Meeleavaldaja*, 2003) by Meelis Muhu, documenting the political activities of an elderly lady named Esja Shur. She is a retired resident of Sillamäe, a city located in the north-eastern region of Estonia that was heavily industrialised during the Soviet period, mainly relying

25 I. Rogoff, Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 4.

on immigrant workers from other parts of the Soviet Union. Having worked in Estonia for most of her life, she is fighting for the social and political rights that were taken from the majority of the residents in this region with the re-establishment of the independent Republic of Estonia in 1991. As a citizen of the Russian Federation, she urges Russian state officials to support her struggle against the discrimination of Russian citizens in Estonia. In a situation where people who were once equal before the law, have been turned into privileged citizens and underprivileged subjects lacking political agency, she is trying to fill the legal vacuum that is a condition of the "state of exception". As her attempts to stretch the protection of the Russian legal sphere to the territory of Estonia and, in a way, to undo the border that has suddenly put her in such a precarious situation result in constant conflicts with Estonian authorities, she finally turns to a transnational structure, the European Court of Human Rights.

As my third example from the field of documentary filmmaking, I want to discuss *Intimate Town* (*Intiimne linn*, 2003) by Kristiina Davidjants. The film features interviews with the prototypes of Sergei Dovlatov's novel *The Compromise*, an autobiographic story that was published after Dovlatov settled in New York, based on his experience of working as a journalist for the newspaper *Sovetskaya Estonia* (*Soviet Estonia*) in Tallinn from 1972–1976. Thanks to his dissident status in the former Soviet Union and subsequent literary breakthrough in the United States, Dovlatov is one of the few "international darlings" who has been idolised in Estonia for his affectionate relationship with Tallinn, as he is most often remembered by the quote "I am convinced there are only three cities worth living in: Leningrad, Tallinn and New York". At first sight, *Intimate Town* seems to follow exactly the pattern of enforcing the myth around Dovlatov's personality in order to claim leftovers of his international fame for a small locality in the middle of nowhere. But following in the footsteps of the world-famous writer soon appears to be an alibi, an excuse to retell and complete the stories about the Soviet intelligentsia who had settled in the

Soviet Republic of Estonia and, as opposed to Dovlatov, chose to stay. In the first instance, *Intimate Town* is a document of exodus and refuge, as the Baltic countries were considered the most "Western" in the Soviet Union, attracting people who were drawn by the liberal atmosphere that gave the sense that more things were possible, for example, in Tallinn than in Moscow. In that sense, the film implicitly erodes the discourse of "occupants" that dominates the narrative of the Soviet past in Estonia, by showing a variety of personalities who were equally affected by the totalitarian regime in the Soviet Union. At the same time, it is evident from the film that the Soviet émigré community in Tallinn formed an enclave of diasporic culture that, regrettably enough, has found no significant place in the cultural history of Estonia. From this perspective, *Intimate Town* is one of the first attempts to celebrate the "unhomed" cultural legacy of the Soviet period that has so far been not sufficiently appreciated.

As I am now turning to look at contemporary art practice, it should perhaps be noted that this doesn't bring a substantial change in the genre of the material I am intending to discuss, since the majority of the works I want to point out are somewhat representative of the documentary turn in contemporary art. Hence, the distinction between documentary and contemporary art practice is primarily constituted on the basis of the individual curricula of the authors, also allowing a space for in-betweenness, as for example in the case of Riga-based artist Kaspars Goba, who is at the same time positioning himself as a photographer, journalist and film-producer. In the film and photo series *Seda – People from the Marsh* (2004) he portrayed the residents of Seda, a small town in the north-eastern part of Latvia where the country's largest peat mining company is located. The population of Seda mainly consists of former immigrants originating from different parts of the Soviet Union and their descendants. The majority of the town's multi-ethnic community have no Latvian citizenship, and their language of communication is Russian. The film deals with the fate of migrant workers, forming an isolated transnational community

in a remote area of Latvia. Another project focusing on subjectivities beyond political representation, *Atom Cities* (2006) by Berlin-based artist Eléonore de Montesquiou, is an anthropological study of two cities in Estonia: Paldiski and Sillamäe. During the Soviet period, both cities were closed due to nuclear facilities and classified military secrecy, forming sort of autonomous worlds that officially almost didn't exist – Sillamäe for example was given a code name and virtually erased from the maps. Notwithstanding the isolation, living standards had been relatively high in Paldiski and Sillamäe during the Soviet period in order to motivate the workers, but after the collapse of the Soviet regime both cities completely lost their purpose. Economic decline was followed by a second act of erasure, an administrative exclusion from the politico-legal framework of the re-established state of Estonia, as the people of Paldiski and Sillamäe are also mainly former immigrants from the Soviet Union. However, *Atom Cities* is not just a document of social and political inequalities in Estonia, but an investigation about the formation of a new type of social belonging created by migrants. From the interviews that de Montesquiou has published in a double publication forming a part of the *Atom Cities* project, it is evident that the residents of Paldiski and Sillamäe identify neither with the national space of Estonia nor with the respective countries they are linked to by birth (or the birth of their parents), but rather with their city and the hybrid cultural space it represents. What is often articulated by the interviewees, is a sense of difference that constitutes them as unique subjects of a particular transnational condition.[26]

Kristina Norman's video *The Pribalts*[27] (*Прибалты*, 2006) makes a survey into that space of difference – in a sort of travelogue from Tallinn

26 For some, this transnational subjectivity appears to be essential enough that it even turns the question of citizenship obsolete – for example Vladimir Krotov, a resident of Sillamäe, states "The passport of a state binds you to that country. As I don't have any citizenship, I am a citizen of the whole world." See: E. de Montesquiou, Atom Cities. Sillamäe. Artist's publication, 2006, p. 172.

27 "Pribalts" is a word used for referring to the residents of Baltic States in Russia.

to Moscow, Norman documented her re-union with former classmates she had studied with at a russophone school in Tallinn some ten years earlier. Of course, what this document reveals, is a variety of personal geographies, experiences, choices and positions that the protagonists of the video are voicing, but as opposed to the authors discussed so far, Norman explicitly focuses on her own generation, speaking from the minority perspective she herself inhabits. In that sense, *The Pribalts* is one of the first works in the contemporary art field in Estonia constituting the emergence of a new type of cultural object – one that brings the contested notions of ethnic, national and cultural identity into the realm of visibility while speaking from the very position of difference that the artworks address. A second artwork claiming representation for subjectivities marked by marginalisation is a photo from the *Positions* series by Tanja Muravskaja which she started in 2006. After having made a series of nude portraits featuring younger generation Estonian artists posing with the national flag of Estonia, Muravskaja concluded the series with an auto-portrait. *Position* (2007) shows her in a black *chador* posing against the blue-white background, referring to an Estonian government official's remark that as Estonia is facing the "threat" of a new wave of immigration from Islamic countries, the local "Russian-speaking" population should be appreciated more since "they" are culturally closer to "Estonians". By appropriating the image of the "absolute Other", as it is currently perceived in the Islamophobic West fighting an alleged war against "terror", Muravskaja refers to the absence of political and visual representations in Estonian society that go beyond the conservative phantasms of social, cultural and ethnic homogeneity that stigmatise her, due to her migrant family background, as an alien.

Whose song?

While a number of significant art projects raising the issue of ethnic nationalism from a critical perspective – including *Atom Cities* by Eléonore de Montesquiou, *The Pribalts* by Kristina Norman, the *Positions* series by

Tanja Muravskaja, but also the curatorial exhibition *The Blood Project* by Rael Artel – date from the year 2006, it is tempting to refer to that year as a decisive moment witnessing a paradigmatic shift in the contemporary art field in Estonia. In a way, a significant shift did emerge approximately at that time in terms of a certain politicalisation of art practice and the unprecedented emergence of strong artistic positions that speak from a minority perspective, calling attention to the processes of exclusion that the "Russian-speaking" population has been subjected to and claiming a right for equal terms of participation in the public sphere. On the other hand, this statement could be rather easily criticised as reproducing the multiculturalist imperative that imposes on artists associated with minority affiliation an obligation to articulate their difference in order to be able to enter the space of cultural significance. In fact, there are a number of artists who do not identify 100% as ethnic Estonians, but have been active before and after 2006 and thereby contributed to the gradual disintegration of the simulated ethnic homogeneity in the cultural sphere of Estonia without necessarily putting the question of presumed otherness in the centre of their practice. In this regard, the question also arises of the extent to which my own views expressed in this essay originate from the hegemonic position (of an ethnic Estonian) that only recognises minority artists within the framework of multiculturalism, insisting that there should be an explicit manifestation of difference in their practice.

In *Terra Infirma* Irit Rogoff asks whether we can actually participate in the pleasure and identify with the images produced by culturally specific groups to which we do not belong?[28] However, as much as the question of who is represented by whom and who has the legitimacy to speak in the name of others is an important one, there is a certain danger of essentialism that comes with an extreme particularism. This leads me to conclude with a few notes on the notion of authenticity. In 2008, journalist and writer

28 I. Rogoff, Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture. Routledge, London 2000, p. 30.

Andrei Hvostov published a collection of short stories titled *Võõrad lood* (*Strange Stories*) comprising four historical episodes set in Estonia, yet featuring virtually no characters identified as ethnically Estonian. As an attempt to create counter-narratives that would disrupt the ethnocentric historical discourse, *Võõrad lood* is aiming to tell the history of Estonia by considering the totality of all ethnicities and nationalities that have resided in the territory of Estonia and thus, contributed to its history.[29] Hvostov's book proved polemical, raising allegations that his ambition to displace ethnic Estonians from the exclusive position that the ultra-nationalist historians have been striving to grant for them in the official historical narrative, represents a "different historical consciousness"[30] than that of ethnic Estonians. What is evident from this accusation is an assumption that there exists an ontological link between nativity and cultural identity that cannot be transgressed. Hence, Hvostov who – apart from his multi-ethnic family background, was born and raised in Estonia, has gone through the Estonian education system, has been working as a journalist in the Estonian media for years and, moreover, is also known for his membership in the voluntary national military organization *Estonian Defence League* – is subjected to a symbolic act of expatriation that deprives him from any legitimacy to speak about the history of Estonia, since his perspective can supposedly not be authentic enough to have any validity.

To conclude with a reference to the *After-War* project, I want to point out that there is a re-occurring motif in the visual representations of those "unhomed geographies" discussed in this essay, indicating that it is precisely the celebration of Victory Day that forms a central arena where cultural difference is articulated and performed in the public space. In the prevalent discourse, the current polarisation around the commemoration of World War II in Estonia is usually represented as an unbridgeable

29 Though it predominantly features Russians and Germans as main characters.

30 See: Ü. Mattheus, Ideoloog Hvostovi eestlasteta ajalugu. – Sirp 1. VIII 2008.

conflict between two memory collectives, both trying to universalise their particularism. It is from this essentialist perspective that the writer Hvostov is denied from intervening in the revanchist discourse of the dominant historical narrative that is preoccupied with privileging the position of ethnic Estonians in order to compensate for the traumatic events of several "foreign rules" in the past, including the Soviet regime – he is not considered Estonian enough. And it is from an equally essentialist position that the artist Norman is advised not to intervene in the "sacred" ritual of Victory Day celebrations[31], forming a positive moment in the cultural identity of the "Russian-speaking" population that partly compensates for the social inequality in the present – she is not considered Russian enough. However, what is not recognised in this simplistic schema of binary opposition is the autonomous space of in-betweenness that Hvostov and Norman inhabit, forming a paradigm for a new historical consciousness, as Arendt would put it.[32] In this regard, it is utterly symbolic that the *After-War* project returns to the legacy of World War II, which largely laid a foundation for the post-national idea of Europe that Agamben was dreaming of. At the same time, the ultimate impossibility of claiming a monopoly over the commemoration of World War II is exactly the point where the *After-War* project reveals that the existential presupposition for every construction of identity is the condition of being a minority.

31 See, for example: V. Ladõnskaja, T. Muravskaja, K. Norman, L. Siib [roundtable talk], I constantly feel as if I am some sort of Michael Jackson. – Estonian Art 2008, No. 1–2, pp. 23–25.

32 As referred to in: G. Agamben, We Refugees.

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by KRISTINA NORMAN

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