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## Historiography of Now

### Russian/Soviet Monuments under Debate in Europe

Many statues and symbols related to Russian imperial and, especially, Soviet power have been removed from public spaces across Central and Eastern Europe and beyond since late February 2022, accompanied by heated discussions. In Ukraine, we are losing countless architectural and artistic monuments to warfare, while in the rest of Europe, the debates and actions vary a lot. The international audience, even in the neighbouring regions, has had very limited access to those debates, which have mostly been held in the local languages. This essentially means that each country has been handling these issues on its own, inventing new solutions to similar problems.

These questions have been addressed from a variety of angles, in both public and scholarly discussions<sup>1</sup>, but the situation continues to change rapidly. How much do the debates in the respective societies – or behind closed doors – today build on previous public debates and acts of iconoclasm from the 1990s or earlier? How much are they connected with the ongoing monument debates elsewhere in the world? The special issue, and the online round-table held at the Estonian Academy of Arts before it<sup>2</sup>, came together to analyse these developments in greater depth, building on the assumption that – to put things into context – a comparative approach and a longer historical perspective were needed. We were by no means the only ones to discover that urgency: the issue also includes papers from one Memory Studies Association conference panel<sup>3</sup>, and was further developed during the *Disentangling Eurasia* summer school<sup>4</sup>.

To follow the months-long debates in the local media, the legal steps and the academic perspectives of history and anthropology, art history and curating, monument protection and conservation, heritage and memory studies etc., authors with varying back-

grounds have been included. All contributions are original articles, although a few are based on the authors' previous texts or interviews in other languages. The special issue seeks to be more or less representative of the region in terms of geographical scope, although not even all of the Eastern and Central European states are covered<sup>5</sup>. In the states that are, we have tried to grasp the full national scale of the debates and actions that have taken place since February 2022, and often a long time before that: their political, specialist (especially heritage management) and artistic dimensions.

Should academics contribute to the processes of political securitisation or social “healing” in the first place, and how? What kind of inter- and transdisciplinary potentialities have not been taken advantage of (enough) to date? And how should we look at so recent past – almost the present – as historians?

#### Monuments as Reminders of a Difficult Past or Security Threats?

Public statues are often the first targets in times of turmoil, signalling an ideological change in the national mindset. This special issue originated from the realisation that during this crisis, monuments talking about our past – not necessarily conveying happy memories, but being witnesses to the tumultuous times we have lived through – were about to vanish in some places, owing to the political messages they were thought to communicate. Art historians, as many of us contributing to the special issue are, tend to be particularly sensitive to the removal, modification or, especially, destruction of monuments<sup>6</sup> – our mission is to protect those signifiers of the past.

In some articles the focus is on physical monuments, while in others it is on commemoration or intervention practices taking place around them (fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Heroes' Monument of the Red Army (1945, designed by S. G. Yakovlev) in Vienna on 9 May 2023, Photo: Kristina Jöekalda.

While the articles' focus is different, "monument" is defined in the wide sense in the special issue, including memorial plaques, statues, monument complexes, commemorative sites and the public spaces around them – especially in the context of "dissonant heritage"<sup>7</sup>. In some articles, architectural objects (especially Soviet symbols or decoration on buildings) are also touched upon. From the point of view of monument removal activists, monuments are relatively easy to get rid of: demolishing buildings simply for their decoration or style would carry significantly higher costs, inconvenience and damage, including to the infrastructure of the surrounding area, than simply relocating or dismantling a statue, even a vast one, something that can in many cases be taken care of in half a day.

It needs to be stressed, however, that when talking about protecting or valuing those monuments of the difficult past, none of the contributors to this issue are proposing this because we value our historical

contacts with the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. We are rather guided by the recognition that these monuments are not merely symbols of foreign oppression – they help keep the very painfulness of our history alive – and that they may communicate other values in addition.

Heritage is very much about ambivalence and liquidity. Indeed, it is particularly the monuments' ability to surge from a state of neglect to key issues of national security that makes them so appealing. These society-wide discussions of Russian and Soviet monuments that were strongly revived in 2022 in much of Eastern and Central Europe form a perfect testimony to what heritage is all about: one's identity (ours vs. someone else's), connectedness to politics, the present and future (not the past), the people (rather than only the experts), the importance of outreach and popularisation (and of recognising populism) and the rewriting of history considering all of the above.

## Common Ground?

There are remarkable similarities – and also remarkable differences – in how this “monument crisis” has been handled across Europe. We are not talking about post-Socialist countries alone – even Germany (see the article by Stephanie Herold) and Finland have taken sharp turns with regard to monuments. While in the Baltic states, the debates over monuments developed into a key issue of national importance in 2022 and early 2023, in several East European countries almost no such public discussions, removals or interventions could be detected<sup>8</sup> (see also Dragan Damjanović and Zvonko Maković).

Working my way through the different contexts of the post-Soviet realm, I have less and less confidence that there is much common ground. It is symptomatic that at the round-table in May 2023, nearly all of the speakers started by explaining that their state represents in many respects a special or unique case. The former socialist countries might appear relatively homogenous to the outer world, but their actual political practices, cultural traditions as well as experiences of World War II were totally different – as are their monuments<sup>9</sup>.

Obviously the monuments have been contested the most in Ukraine, and not only through the violence of battles. One might think that the opposition towards the Soviet monuments would be strongest in the regions immediately under attack or close by, whereas in reality this has not been the case at all. But these regions in Ukraine surely are where the true difficulty and multi-layeredness of the monuments and the values that they carry is best revealed. The ways the new war has activated previous war memorials – indirectly in most of the cases discussed, and very directly in the Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine – is discussed by Mykola Homanyuk, Mischa Gabowitsch and Iryna Sklokina in this special issue.

Looking at the public discussions and acts of iconoclasm on the national level in each of these states, often the movements vary not only based on the community the speakers or authors represent, but also the region of the country in which the monuments are situated. And monuments in capital cities have not necessarily been under the most critical scrutiny (although it is true that sometimes the whole

range of nation-wide discussions has been limited to one or two particularly controversial cases).

In short, the actual decisions and community practices determining the fate of monuments have been shaped by certain historical, geographical as well as political considerations, affected by the locations of the actual theatres of war in World War II, the side the local soldiers were on at a given moment, the owner of the land under the monument, power relations in different parts of the country, the tendency to support conservative or liberal parties, the percentage of the Russian-speaking population or closeness to the Russian border, the role of the local Russian embassy, the effects of upcoming elections, the generation the speaker represents etc. But bordering on the Russian Federation does not seem to be a common denominator for the states that have taken the most radical positions in terms of removing any reminders of the Russian or Soviet past.

In many cases the heritage specialists speaking out against the rushed demolition campaigns against Soviet monuments – without sufficient preparatory assessments and studies – have been systematically marginalised or have even become objects of hostility, by the media or directly by leading politicians<sup>10</sup>. Not surprisingly, in many cases this has brought about self-censorship among specialists: not necessarily fearing for their institutional ties in democratic societies but rather for their reputations. As if the only scenario out there is whether one is *for* or *against* the monuments, or even regarding national values: *with* or *against* “us”. This special issue seeks to remind that things are much more complicated, varied and ambivalent.

In other states, the public discussions have been limited to readers’ letters rather than expert opinions. What remains largely uncovered in the special issue is the perspective of the Russian speakers outside Russia. Several countries in question have a considerable Russian-language community, but either they have stayed more or less silent in the discussions or used different channels entirely for making their points.

## Pre-History of the 2022 Monument Crisis

Many states across Eastern Europe and beyond have sought to come to terms with their difficult Russian

and Soviet past for decades, at times with success, or so it seemed until recently. Some architectural and art works from the previous period were taken down and hidden from the public eye back in the early 1990s, but others became (or maintained their position as) protected monuments. Along with literature, art and theatre works, such monuments have sometimes become cherished parts of collective memory, despite their troublesome aspects. Needless to say, to younger generations or foreign visitors these are often among the most intriguing parts of the local culture.

From a multitude of perspectives, our contributors ask: How has the war in Ukraine changed all of that, or made scholars and society in general rethink those issues? The field of Soviet studies can hardly offer all the answers – the stakes are much higher. And there are pre-histories to those developments that we are not always aware of. Some of the articles go as far back as the 1940s, when many of these monuments were erected and the first opinions were formed. Moreover, the focus here is on the connections to Russia, but in most of the countries discussed there have been many other forces contending over these territories and monuments historically, making the identities even more multi-layered and intertwined.

2022 certainly provoked “discussions that had been put on hold” in the 1990s, or even before that, dealing with collectively suppressed conflicts<sup>11</sup>. In some states 2014 was the turning point, including from the point of view of monuments. Estonia is in fact where one of the first major conflicts of memory around a Soviet monument took place in the “post-Soviet” space in 2007, leading to massive public riots, after the Bronze Soldier (erected in 1947) was relocated from its original site in central Tallinn to a military cemetery a couple of kilometres away<sup>12</sup> (see the article by Linda Kaljundi and Riin Alatalu).

At least based on this special issue, one could say that, in the end, very few of the debates actually touched upon the tsarist era, owing either to the fact that the immediate memories of those long-gone times have faded, or that the historical monuments related to that era tend to be perceived as more intertwined with the national collective memory by now. Or because the more critical monuments from that era had been removed already long ago. And also

because there is still little research on Russian colonial history and its legacies so far.

The two focal points of the articles in this issue are collaboration with communist rule and the memory of World War II. In some countries, the focus of the recent debates has been on statues to Soviet-era intellectuals, whose oeuvre is often difficult to assess as either national or Soviet – even if the sculptors, artists and architects designing their monuments were locals rather than Russians. In other countries, the discussions have been centred almost exclusively on World War II monuments, which have grown into a separate research field, attracting particular attention not only in the research world, but also in public media<sup>13</sup>. Still, it needs to be stressed that in the articles and afterword of this special issue<sup>14</sup> that balance is partly dictated also by the research interests of individual scholars.

The Russian Federation has shown its strong interest in Soviet monuments beyond its borders not only via the recent aggressive media statements and the physical actions taken in the temporarily seized parts of Ukraine, but also via bilateral agreements about such monuments with several countries signed in the 1990s. Besides respective national laws and national lists of protected monuments, we therefore need to take into account the terms for their preservation dictated by Russia almost whenever the removal of a Soviet (war) monument is discussed. There are agreements on similar issues with other countries, too, of course. But the fact that in some of these agreements, Russia has criminalised any acts of vandalism of monuments of World War II located in other countries, and proposed those bilateral agreements about their maintenance in the first place, should leave no-one in doubt how much they have invested their energy in monuments – and how much importance they assign to monuments.

Most recent proof of the close connection between monuments and politics is Russia’s decision to place Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas on its official wanted list under the Criminal Code, shortly before the two-year “anniversary” of the beginning of the war – because of “destroying or damaging monuments to Soviet monuments in memory of Soviet soldiers”<sup>15</sup>.





Fig. 2: Render image by Audrius Ambrasas for his unrealised project *Reduction of Sculptures* (2014), proposed for the Vilnius Street Art festival to artistically reinterpret the Socialist Realist figures (1952, sculptors Juozas Mikėnas, Juozas Kėdainis and Bronius Pundzius) of the Green Bridge before the sculptures were relocated in 2015. Courtesy of Audrius Ambrasas.

### The Biggest Security Threat is Short-sightedness: Alternatives to Removals

Nevertheless, in the crisis around Russian and Soviet monuments, the strong actions are not due to the pressure from the outside, the forced acceptance of values “alien” to one’s culture, but due to an internally generated, yet seemingly insoluble cultural conflict. This seems to be characteristic of young societies, but even the Eastern European states have had plenty of time to grow out of their “teenage” years by now. But the public – and particularly the political – debates over monuments in 2022–2023 seem to have caused “puberty”, with all of its acne, to return in some of these countries.

The crucial question is whether history books will remember 2022 as the year of the biggest plundering of monuments since the aftermath of 1517 in Europe – not to mention other monument crises resulting from the Black Lives Matter movement and the remo-

val of colonial monuments in many parts of the world.

Without a longer historical perspective it is easy to forget that a purely negative approach and forceful action against the former occupier’s monuments is particularly reminiscent of the kind of rhetoric that these (conservative) opinion leaders claim to be opposing. One could even say that the swift and non-inclusive decisions on a massive scale in the Baltic states and Poland, where experts were largely ignored (see the articles by Maija Rudovska, Małgorzata Łukianow and Anna Topolska), look a lot like actions taken during the Soviet era<sup>16</sup>.

Not all monuments are attractive or reflect our contemporary values, but reinterpretations are a part of history: a society’s tolerance of uncomfortable material reminders of past eras is a strength, not a weakness. Not everything needs to be preserved or unaltered, of course, but it is essential that critical debates are welcome. The continuing presence of the

tank monuments in particular had caught the attention of many long before 2022. Still, in the actual procedures and communication around the hurried removals there seems to be a lot to learn.

Whereas the first relocations in most cases moved the monuments to temporary storages or cemeteries, after two years, we can already see some attempts to find longer-term solutions: the museums taking stronger positions and accepting some of these “left-over” monuments to their collections. Setting up specialised open-air sculpture parks for former Soviet statues has been a longer practice: this is one way of producing new and much less serious layers of meaning for the original artworks. Examples such as Grūtas Park in southern Lithuania, Memento Park in Budapest, Hungary, or the courtyard of the Estonian History Museum in Tallinn<sup>17</sup> document history with an ironic smirk.

This special issue, most of all, seeks to gather examples of good artistic and transdisciplinary practices to safeguard or reinterpret the monuments in their original locations – effective recontextualisation can also take place there. It cannot be said that solutions that would have likely satisfied both those supporting removals and art experts were not out there. Indeed, they were often in plain sight, having sometimes gained extensive international attention. Even if renaming the sites is not enough, we have seen that successful or potentially fruitful artistic interventions or creative reinterpretations can be very simple and not necessarily destructive to the monuments. One of my favourites was the sculpture *The Missing Arm of Lenin* (1995) by Krzysztof M. Bednarski in Kotka, Finland, that accompanied the one-armed head bust of Lenin (1979, sculptor Matti Varik); yet, both were considered worthy of being removed in late 2022 (see the article by Olga Juutistenaho).

Another great example was the project *Reduction of Sculptures*, proposed by the architect Audrius Ambrasas in 2014: reacting to the ongoing discussions in Lithuania, it suggested putting the Socialist Realist figures of the Vilnius Green Bridge in steel cages, “as if they were ready for the removal”<sup>18</sup> (fig. 2). The proposal was rejected, but he made another attempt with *Signs of the Green Bridge* in 2021. After the relocation of the figures, several other artists tried



Fig. 3: Mark Soosaar’s project *Attention, the 21st Century* (2006) in Pärnu, attaching the head of the interwar President Konstantin Päts (sculptor Riho Kuld) to the body remaining of the Tallinn Lenin statue (by Nikolai Tomsky, 1950, removed in 1991). Photo: Ants Liigus (Pärnu Postimees/Scanpix).

to reimagine the empty pedestals on the bridge<sup>19</sup>; competitions have even been held (see Violeta Davoliūtė).

Other efforts have dealt with the difficult past by means of turning Soviet monuments into complete farces. This dimension is further stressed by the repetitive or constantly reoccurring nature of many of these actions, each time with an additional twist. The Pink Tank of Prague (by the artistic group Neouchvátní and David Černý since 1991, see the article by Petra Hudek) or the cartoon-like graffiti on the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, Bulgaria (by anonymous artists, most famously in 2011, see Claudia-Florentina Dobre) have perfectly highlighted the complicated multi-layeredness of the symbolic meanings of monuments. In a similar manner, the Estonian documentary film maker, public intellectual and former member of parliament Mark Soosaar undertook, with the sculptor Riho Kuld, a series of performative actions – *Goodbye, 20th Century*, *Attention, the 21st*

*Century* (fig. 3); and *Forbidden History* – in 1999–2008 in Pärnu with a beheaded Lenin statue<sup>20</sup> (by Nikolai Tomsky, 1950; stood in central Tallinn until 1991<sup>21</sup>).

2022 certainly gave such interventionist practices a new life, most often communicated via simple graffiti in Ukrainian flag colours, but, as the previous examples demonstrate, this is not the only option on the table. In the eyes of those granting official permits, moments of heated public debate are hardly ideal for testing out reinterpretation projects, but they are ideal for giving wide publicity to the artistically or creatively spectacular ones. Yet, states' reactions to such interventions, and the risks the authors are taking with them, vary dramatically across the region. As Oxana Gourinovitch has shown in her article, such an attempt in Belarus resulted in the imprisonment and death of the artist.

### Historiography of Now

All of this makes it clear that comparing and exchanging experiences is crucial in this delicate process. Rather than the monuments themselves, the special issue seeks to document the discussions in each country, in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the current situation, as well as its broader contexts. In addition to the nature of the debates, we look at the protagonists: Who are the decision makers in each country? Who are the activists? Who are the opinion leaders? And, not least, who are the people behind these actions of painting, vandalising or artistically and playfully reinterpreting the monuments?

Historiography is usually concerned with a retrospective look at how history has been written some time ago. This special issue aims to document the making of history in the present moment<sup>22</sup>. Although from the point of view of the humanities or museology the conclusions might be different, from the point of view of public space we are clearly at a turning point. The monument wars have made it evident that we are first-hand witnesses to another crisis of time (in François Hartog's sense<sup>23</sup>) – a transition that makes the shifts in meaning and indeed the difficulty in finding the "right" path particularly visible.

Could it be that, quite contrary to the intentions of the removal activists, the steps taken towards the physical destruction or extensive relocation of monu-

ments create an aura of exclusivity around Soviet heritage instead – at least for those too young to remember? There are few things more interesting than hidden or intentionally purged layers of the past. Although the contributors are historians, many of the discussions are indeed about the future, including the opportunities for us as scholars<sup>24</sup>. Critical thinking is the best "weapon" academics can offer to wicked problems like these. This special issue can only give a few answers: much remains for further studies. Our country-by-country case study approach hence aims foremost to exchange information and encourage wider scholarly discussions.

## Endnotes

- To name a few, Rayna Breuer, "Should Soviet Monuments Be Dismantled or Preserved?", in: DW, 7.9.2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/should-soviet-monuments-be-dismantled-or-preserved/a-65949228>; Mnemonic Wars: New Constellations, eds. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Joanna Wawrzyniak and Zofia Wóycicka, in: *Memory Studies*, vol. 5, issue 6, 2022; *Communist/Soviet Historical and Cultural Heritage of Eastern Europe in the 21st Century: Collection of Articles Based on Materials of Round Tables*, eds. Kiryll Atamanchyk, Aliaksei Lastouski and Iryna Ramanava, Brussels / Vilnius 2022, <https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Communist-Soviet-Historical-and-Cultural-Heritage-of-Eastern-Europe-in-the-21st-Century.pdf> (both last accessed 19.12.2023).
- "War on Monuments: Debates over Russian/Soviet Heritage in Eastern and Central Europe since 2022" virtual round-table, organised by Kristina Jõekalda and Linda Kaljundi, 16.5.2023, and hosted by the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture, Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, <https://www.artun.ee/en/calendar/war-on-monuments-debates-over-russian-soviet-heritage-in-eastern-and-central-europe-since-2022/> (last accessed 19.12.2023). I thank Linda Kaljundi – as well as Sofia Dyak and Stephanie Herold – for their help and encouragement in preparing the round-table and the special issue. I am grateful to Richard Adang for language editing the contributions to this issue.
- "Soviet War Memorials and Monuments in Post-Socialist Countries and the War in Ukraine" panel, organised by Petra Hudek and Anna Topolska, 5.7.2023, as part of the Memory Studies Association 7th Annual Conference "Communities & Change", Newcastle, UK, <https://msa2023newcastle.dryfta.com/> (last accessed 19.12.2023).
- "Treating Soviet Legacies: Memory, Heritage and the Environment" round-table discussion, chaired by Kristina Jõekalda, 3.8.2023, as part of the "Disentangling Eurasia: The Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and their Successors" summer school ([disentangling2023.eu](http://disentangling2023.eu), last accessed 19.12.2023), hosted by Tallinn University and the Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn. Some of its position papers have now been published in *Estonian* (Vikerkaar, no. 10–11, 2023).
- For Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, see Caterina Preda, "'Living Statues' and Nonuments as 'Performative Monument Events' in Post-Socialist South-Eastern Europe", in: *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 51, issue 3, 2023, pp. 544–562, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.84> (last accessed 19.12.2023). See also *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia*, eds. Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc, transl. Rawley Grau and Dunja Opatić, Ljubljana 2023; *Baltic Worlds*, vol. 16, no. 4 (special issue: Monuments, New Arts, and New Narratives), 2023.
- Cf. Yevheniia Moliar, "Ukraine Must Stop Destroying Its Cultural Heritage", in: *The Spectator*, 11.3.2023, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/ukraine-must-stop-destroying-its-cultural-heritage/> (last accessed 19.12.2023).
- See J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, Chichester 1994.
- E.g. Nini Palandishvili on Georgia in the "War on Monuments" round-table.
- Cf. Anu Soojärv, "Shared Differences", in: *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi / Studies on Art and Architecture*, vol. 32, no. 1–2, 2023, pp. 276–283, here p. 276.
- See the article by the Estonian Minister of Justice at the time: Lea Danilson-Järg, "Halloo, kunstiinimesed, palun tulge maa peale tagasi!" [Hello, art people, please come back to Earth!], in: *Postimees*, 19.9.2022, <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/7610043/lea-danilson-jarg-haloo-kunstiinimesed-tulge-palun-maa-peale-tagasi> (last accessed 19.12.2023).
- Soojärv 2023, *Shared Differences*, p. 283.
- See *Monumentaalne konflikt. Mälu, poliitika ja identiteet tänapäeva Eestis* [Monumental conflict: Memory, politics and identity in contemporary Estonia], eds. Pille Petersoo and Marek Tamm, Tallinn 2008.
- See Mischa Gabowitsch, "The Limits of Iconoclasm: Soviet War Memorials since the End of Socialism", in: *International Public History*, no. 1 (2), December, 2018, pp. 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iph-2018-0014>; Mischa Gabowitsch, "What Has Happened to Soviet War Memorials since 1989/91? An Overview", in: *Politika*, 9.1.2021, <https://www.politika.io/en/article/what-has-happened-to-soviet-war-memorials-since-198991-an-overview> (last accessed 19.12.2023).
- I wish to thank Mischa Gabowitsch for taking on the task of drawing conclusions about how war memorials are discussed in the region.
- Sebastian Shukla, Anna Chernova and Catherine Nicholls, "Russia Places Estonia's Prime Minister on Wanted List", in: *CNN World*, 13.2.2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/13/europe/russia-estonia-kajakalla-intl/index.html>. See "Kallas on Russia's Wanted List: This is a Familiar Scare Tactic", in: *ERR News*, 13.2.2024, <https://news.err.ee/1609251885/kallas-on-russia-s-wanted-list-this-is-a-standard-scare-tactic>; "Prime Minister: 'Red Monuments' Legislation Must Move Forward", in: *ERR News*, 14.2.2024, <https://news.err.ee/1609252482/prime-minister-red-monuments-legislation-must-move-forward> (all last accessed 14.2.2024).
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- "Green Bridge: Vilnius, Lithuania, 2014", in: *Audrias Ambrasas Architects*, 2014, [https://www.ambrasas.lt/sites/581a723e8b0ad744075a8e44/content\\_entry581a72f08b0ad747601cc1a3/581a74458b0ad747601cc658/files/GREEN\\_BRIDGE.pdf?1478128872](https://www.ambrasas.lt/sites/581a723e8b0ad744075a8e44/content_entry581a72f08b0ad747601cc1a3/581a74458b0ad747601cc658/files/GREEN_BRIDGE.pdf?1478128872) (last accessed 19.12.2023).
- For images, see Donatas Andrijauskas, "An Art Installation Will Rise Again on the Green Bridge", in: *Made in Vilnius*, 10.4.2021, <https://madeinvilnius.lt/en/news/city/an-artistic-installation-will-again-stand-out-on-the-green-bridge/>; Austėja Mikuckytė-Mateikienė, "Ant Žaliojo tilto atsiras Ambraso siulomos konstrukcijos: 'nukeltos skulptūros tapo radioaktyvios'" [Constructions proposed by Ambrasas will appear on the Green Bridge: "The removed sculptures have become radioactive"], in: *LRT.lt*, 9.4.2021, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1383581/ant-zaliojo-tilto-atsiras-ambraso-siulomos-konstrukcijos-nukeltos-skulpturos-tapo-radioaktyvios> (both last accessed 19.12.2023).
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- See Marko Püüa, "Pronks-Leninid tegid laoplatsilt minekut" [Bronze Lenins took off from the storage grounds], in: *Postimees*, 21.4.2007, <https://www.postimees.ee/1652729/pronks-leninid-tegid-laoplatsilt-minekut> (last accessed 19.12.2023).
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- Cf. Sofia Dyak, "From War into the Future: Historical Legacies and Questions for Postwar Reconstruction in Ukraine", in: *Architectural Histories*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.16995/ah.9805>.



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Fig. 1: Kristina Jõekalda.

Fig. 2: Courtesy of Audrius Ambrasas.

Fig. 3: Ants Liigus (Pärnu Postimees/Scanpix).

## Abstract

Many East Europeans probably have the impression that they know more or less what is going on with the monuments in neighbouring regions; that they know what kinds of debates about historical memory have been held in past decades. Do we really? Even if we did know, the situation has changed rapidly over the past couple of years. This special issue documents the recent and ongoing public debates about Russian and Soviet monuments in Eastern and Central Europe. The actions taken in terms of actual removal of monuments vary greatly. While in some countries a shift is barely visible, in others hundreds of monuments have been dismantled or relocated in a short period of time, and it seems that, behind these actions, political – rather than expert – decisions have been the guiding force. The focus of this special issue is the historical and art historical perspective on the statements about monuments by academics, heritage specialists, artists, journalists, think tank members and, of course, politicians. The 12 articles, some covering more than one state's perspective, plus the introductory and concluding articles, offer a variety of analytical views on the developments in each country in a regional and wider comparison, documenting the professional, political and social reactions to the war in Ukraine as reflected in the public space.

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## Title

Kristina Jõekalda, *Historiography of Now: Russian/Soviet Monuments under Debate in Europe*. Editorial, in: kunsttexte.de, no. 1, 2024, section Ostblick, thematic issue: *War on Monuments: Documenting the Debates over Russian and Soviet Heritage in Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. by Kristina Jõekalda (9 pages), www.kunsttexte.de.

<https://doi.org/10.48633/ksttx.2024.1.102627>