

Wars of Statues: *Ius imaginum* and *Damnatio memoriae* in the 20th century Latvia.

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In Latvia outdoor sculpture functions as a medium of political communication. Transformations of political regime engendered the alteration of representation politics aimed at attesting the new power relations. Not always the authorities can topple down a monument and erect a new one to propagate an unambiguous political message. More subtle methods are exploited to depreciate the unwanted sculptures and to break in the public sphere with new political messages. This paper conceptualises the peculiarities of this kind of political communication in semiotic terms. Among the most popular practices are renaming of monuments, change or addition of inscriptions, circulation of new explanations, permitting of natural decay and banal vandalism, modification of environment around the sculpture, and its inclusion in rituals.

Outdoor sculpture as a medium of political communication

Latvia has experienced several waves of erection and destruction of monuments in the 20th century. The change of representation practice coincided with the political transformations in the state. As a part of the memory rewriting project, ostensibly the commemoration of persons and events asserted the regime change and legitimised the power relations. Sculpture's peculiar role in political communication owes to the treatment of visual icon in Russian and Latvian cultural tradition. Roman legal terms *ius imaginum* and *damnatio memoriae* are used in the title to highlight that the controversy over outdoor sculpture has deep roots in the millennia long debate on visual iconicity.

The medieval debate on the nature of image had created the fundamental east/west divide of the Christian Europe. In the Western Christianity, image is an imitation of reality for cognitive aims; the Byzantine Orthodox tradition treats images as the actual presence of reality. In 1918 the Soviet Russia's government adopted the decree 'On the monuments of the Republic' known also as the 'Lenin's plan of the monumental propaganda', which turned outdoor sculpture into a medium of political communication. Treating visual iconicity, the communist sources held up the Platonic ideas borrowed from the Orthodox iconology (discussed in Kruk 2008). The best way

to catch the peculiarity of Soviet art policy is to contrast the definitions of monument given by the British and Soviet encyclopaedias edited in the same year. The former accorded to monument a politically neutral function of ‘recalling to mind or commemorating specific event or personage’ (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1975: 3); the latter specified that ‘usually’ it is a medium of propaganda of the ideas of ruling regime, and it implements an ‘active impact’ on society (*Bol’shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* 1975: 130).

Latvian culture has preserved some of the pre-Christian traditions. Here the stones are personalities endowed with souls, receptacles of solar powers and the forefathers’ knowledge; the sculptor’s task is to remove the shells revealing the old mysteries to contemporaries (Baumanis 1959; Cēbere 2008). Literally the metaphor was materialised by the artistic performance *Talking stones* set for the Latvian festival in France in 2005. Vividly the authors described the human-like activities of the stones: ‘On the squares of French cities nine stones will be placed. The stones will be revived by human faces projected on them. Each stone has its unique temper and character, as well as topics to tell to the visitors. The stones will function in three modes: sleeping mode when no visitor is in proximity; wakeful mode when the stones react on movements; and narrating mode when the stones tell a topic on Latvia to visitors. Every hour all stones sing a song together.’¹ Recently the sculptor Ojārs Feldbergs launched the stone planting performances: smaller and bigger rocks are being dug in during a special ceremony and subsequently the plantation is being watered regularly in expectation of harvest.

As the regimes changed often in this country, each coming authority strove to communicate and impose its own political ideas, and to discredit predecessor’s ones. Placed in visited public space, outdoor sculpture was intended to send an unambiguous message instructing who has the right to semiotise the reality. On the first glance it seems that toppling the old and erecting the new monuments is the most common practice of monumental propaganda. However it is not that simple. The century long history of monuments in Latvia suggests that the state authorities did not enjoy the total power over the three-dimensional outdoor images. The *ius imaginum* accorded to ‘right’ persons did not guarantee their subsequent immortalisation in granite or bronze. Neither have we witnessed a total disruption with the past by

¹ *Amazing Latvia*, <http://www.etonnantelettonie.org/index.php?&14/>, accessed on 31 January 2008.

destroying all the monuments that fell unwanted. Some people and events were fully discredited by the new regime and their images were removed, some others possessed plural identities – being granted a right of image under the adversary regime they may retain their status in the new canon. Cultural respect to dignity of dead protected the sepulchral monuments from destruction. Finally, the large dimensions of unwanted images precluded them from immediate destruction; later as the political climate calmed down the sculptures got reintegrated into daily life through the discourse of fine arts.

Before I start analysing the practice of erecting and toppling down the sculptures, the role of cemetery in organising the sociocultural time space in Latvia should be explained. The Cemetery Day, *kapu svētki*, is an annual summer event that brings people together. They visit tombs of their relatives and then they come together in a public building to share food and drinks. In vain the Lutheran church fought against this tradition; in early 19th century the church ceded and priests took the leading role in the ritual. It should be stressed that villages were uncommon in Latvia, and the socialisation of geographically dispersed inhabitants was restricted to annual fair and Cemetery Day. The sepulchral commemorative signs are, for Latvians, the media communicating the family identity. In Soviet Latvia the cemeteries became the public space where opposing nationalist discourse circulated in implicit form. On the occasion of the Cemetery Day spontaneous religious services were held at the tombs of statesmen of the interwar Republic of Latvia. Visitors were bringing candles and flowers imitating the colours of the pre-Soviet flag. The authorities did not dare to ban the religious services but sponsored an alternative secular ritual – Commemoration of the Dead. People used to attend both events meeting their neighbours twice. The Cemetery Day was included in the canon of Latvian culture set up in 2008.

Manipulations with outdoor sculpture

The most evident case of fighting the messages communicated by outdoor sculptures is to dismantle them. At the outbreak of the war in 1915 the bronze statues representing Russian Empire had been evacuated from its Baltic provinces. After the World War 2 the Soviets demolished most of the Freedom monuments erected in 1930s. By 1962 numerous statues of Joseph Stalin were toppled down attesting the destalinisation policy launched by the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. In early 1990s the authorities of the Republic of Latvia dismantled almost 80 outdoor statues

and busts of Vladimir Lenin, some monuments to the Soviet soldiers and Latvian communists. As a kind of political communication the demolition and erection of monuments is too expensive and technically complicated. When it is impossible to replace the monuments, the authorities exploit more subtle methods to depreciate the unwanted sculptures and to break in the public sphere with new political messages. To conceptualise them in semiotic terms I use the three-dimensional framework of semiotic studies proposed by Charles Morris (1970). Production of meaning is analysed on three levels: semantics, syntactics and pragmatics. While semantics, defined by Morris as the relation of signs to their referents, is researched here in details following the tetragonal sign model advanced by the Groupe μ : stimulus, signifier, signified and referent (Klinkenberg 1996).

In Klinkenberg's definition **stimulus** is 'la face concrete du signe, ce qui, dans la communication, le rend transmissible par le canal, en direction d'un de nos cinq sens' (p. 93). Material characteristics of the sign-form are immediately perceived by viewers, and their denotative meaning is easily accessible for those who do not share the sociocultural code that directs the sign production. An outdoor sculpture occupies a public space serving for different purposes in every day life. Passers-by may perceive it as an obtrusive material object encumbering their daily activities, obstructing movement or spoiling vista. Perfectly fitting in the urban environment it may create perceptive pleasure irrespective of the sign's intended meaning. In cemetery, the physical form, material and its processing technique denote the economic capital of commemorated persons. This is especially salient in case of sepulchral monuments of *nouveaux riches* whose lack of cultural capital is compensated by the usage of denotative signs: tomb stones are made in burnished granite, large pictures and long inscriptions are engraved on stela. Owing to the large size they literally intrude the otherwise modest Latvian cemeteries where boulder and abraded granite dominate.

Intentional demolition and displacement of monuments are the direct forms of *damnatio memoriae*; while the banal vandalism inflicting physical damage upon stimulus may not be directed against objects as the signs. The non-intended communicative effect emerges if the subsequent maintenance and repair is denied. Some Soviet era monuments are physically damaged and stained, overgrown lawn, grass between slabs of pavement depreciates the World War 2 cemeteries, sculptures suffer of natural decay (Figure 1). In 1990s collectors of non-ferrous metals picked

the cast-iron letters from the Monument to Liberators in Riga. The state authorities withdraw the special protection rejecting the responsibility on the shoulders of municipalities and non-governmental sector which lack human and financial resources to maintain the signs suffering of vandalism, natural damage and decay. For the state authorities this tactics allows circumventing the ethical or political considerations preventing from demolition of a monument.

Signifier is theoretical model, idealised representation of a thing. As a matter of fact the conscious physical manipulations with the stimulus fall in this category because the aim of alteration of the sculpture is to incite a different model of representation that would produce a modified interpretation of the sign. The technique is employed when the destruction of images is impossible. In case of iconic signs produced by the corresponding division (*decoupage correspondant*) the elimination of an image's part permits to suppress the corresponding content. The technique was used against the decorative visual images including the symbols and emblems. The communist authority destroyed the symbols of the interwar republic and the Christian crosses carved on the Brethren cemetery walls in the fifties. In 1990s the communist stars were hammered on some Stalin era Corinthian capitals. The National Opera witnessed bizarre transformations. During the restoration works the star was eliminated from an allegoric sculptural composition on the building's cornice. When a pre-Soviet photo had been found showing the star on this place, it was put back.

Sculptures, as a rule, are not carved as divisible works of art. Nevertheless viewers may perceive the corresponding division where it is absent. Particular details like posture and dress may evoke other models of visual representation resulting in irrelevant connotations. Popular anecdote claimed that the monument to the first leader of the Soviet Latvia Pēteris Stučka (erected in 1961) was a remake of unfinished Stalin's statue that fell unwanted after the destalinisation was launched in 1956. Pathetic posture made to think that it was the body of Stalin's bronze sculpture with the changed head. In 2007 Russians defended the Monument to Liberators in Tallinn arguing that it was not a sign of Russian occupation because ostensibly the sculptural soldier was of Estonian ethnic origin – his face was of non-Slavic traits.

Physical manipulations were possible with the monuments composed of several discretionary signs. In 2003 a bas-relief of the composer Kārlis Baumanis was added to the monument commemorating the centenary of Latvian folk song festival unveiled thirty years earlier. The memorial represented images of Latvian composers admitted

by the Soviets. Baumanis was not included into the canon because of his outstanding place in the nationalist discourse – his song was chosen the anthem of interwar Republic of Latvia.

Rīga discussed a proposal to dismount three bronze figures of sub-machine-gunners in the Monument to Liberators; the mother's figure remaining alone would have diminished the bellicose impression (Figure 2). This model of representation conforms to the Latvian cultural tradition with the dominating image of mother. Local iconography has been influenced *inter alia* by the Virgin's cult of the medieval Livonian order. Many Monuments of Freedom erected in 1930s represented the female figures. Among the figurative plastic works in the most prestigious cemetery in Rīga, *Meža kapi*, the female mourner and folkloric symbol of death dominated (Cēbere 1987). In 1960s Latvian sculptors developed the female iconography in the World War 2 monuments, abandoning altogether or reducing the importance of soldier's image. Original conception of the monument in Rīga envisaged only the mother's figure with a child, but the authorities prohibited this design (Spārītis 2007). Artistic style of monuments, i.e. the culturally shared model of representation provides a set of connotations carrying information on ethnic and political distinctions. It becomes visible in the symbolic contestation for rights to arrange the Latvian public space. While the content may become a subject of explicit controversy, the form may carry a more subtle meaning bound to the cultural context and requiring the viewer's interpretative effort. Change of political regime engenders the stylistic changes of visual representation. After the World War 2, Latvians renounced the Classicist style of sepulchral monuments developed by their former landlords the Baltic Germans: polished granite stele, obelisk, and urn were replaced by slightly processed boulder (Figure 3). Modesty of tradition indicated the Latvian 'rural' identity juxtaposed to the 'urban' one of Baltic Germans. The replacement can not be explained by the scarcity of Soviet economy alone. Tombs of the statesmen and artists, whose high social capital would have provided them a special *ius imaginum*, also were decorated with the modest traditional Latvian signs. Erected in 1947, the first state-funded memorial commemorating the communist heroes was reminiscent of the Classicism: it features two granite urns, columns, and entablement. Until the late 1950s the Soviet military stationed in Latvia was confident to this style. By the 1960s Latvia's Russians accepted the modest Latvian style: tombs are included into park's landscape, enclosure is not allowed. Nowadays we witness the stylistic

transformations due to increase of importance of the economic capital. Wealthy Russians (and perhaps some Latvians of mixed origin) return to the lavish Classicism combined with the secular post-Orthodox elements (table, bench and fence carved in polished granite, as well as large engraved portrait). A unique sepulchral monument is erected on the tomb of a poet of Romany origin and his spouse: it features two life size realist portrait sculptures. A number of such sculptures have been erected in the most prestigious Novodevichye cemetery in Moscow, commemorating cinema, theatre and circus actors. In Russia the realist portrait usually remained the principal sculptural sign (Yermonskaya 1979). However in Latvia it is not acclaimed by the educated elite disposing high cultural capital.

Nowadays Latvians negotiate the traditional ethnic identity with one of the urban bourgeois. Sepulchral monument erected in 2008 on the family tomb of the prominent interwar publisher Jānis Rapa is a case (Figure 4). Boulder with inscribed family name 'Rapa dzimta' ('The Rapa kin') pays respect to the tradition, while its artistic style – it is a huge processed granite block shaped as the traditional sign – suggests the businessman's high status among the countrymen. Besides each member of the family is given right to have the own name: plaques with the names and dates of life are placed in front of the granite stone. In the tradition, boulder functioned as an indice demarcating the family owned soil. In Rapa's case the denotative sign was turned into stylistic device connoting the ethnic and social identity.

Owing to the style Latvians succeeded to impose their rules of public representation in the most prestigious necropolis of Riga. Similar trend was observed in the urban public space. In Stalin years from 1945 to 1953 the local sculptors were discriminated against their Russian and Ukrainian colleagues who flooded Latvia with the mass produced concrete copies of Lenin, Stalin and decorative sculptures. To compete with the cheap import, Latvians promoted the original statues carved in permanent material and having aesthetic qualities. Peculiar local style respecting the national tradition of sculpture elaborated by the 1930s – asperity, monumentality, generality of traits, connotative meaning, rough-hewn surface, had outbid the Soviet Russian round naturalist portrait sculpture. Rough monumentality introduced by the end of 1960s distinguished Latvia from the other Soviet republics.

In 1990s the monumental visual language of artistic elite was denounced as the official Russian style. The commission declined due to lack of public funds, municipalities came back to the modest tradition. Victims of the Stalinist terror – the

most diffused topic of outdoor sculpture – were commemorated with boulders carrying an inscription. Wealthy municipalities like Riga accorded considerable budgets and they had to negotiate between the artistic elite devoted to rough abstract symbolism, and the common people demanding the expression of their pains in tightly coded messages – figurative allegoric sculpture. A project featuring three rough and sharp stones was selected in the third artistic competition in 1997. The Association of repressed was frustrated with this abstract composition unveiled in 2001; having obtained the state budget support it held a new competition in 2006. The Minister of Culture, supporting the post-modern art and willing to please the foreign tourists, suspended the results and sponsored a new competition. The bid specified that the monument intended for ‘eternity’ must be comprehensible to the outsiders rather than merely to Latvians. All three designs prize-winners demand from the viewers an interpretative effort. The repressed denounced the ‘complicated’ images, manipulation with geometrical forms to which the authors provide ‘absolutely enigmatic connections between the design and the Stalinist terror’. The Association prefers figurative composition including the sculpture of mother and bas-reliefs representing men behind the bar and women with children (Ādiņa 2007; Bagātais, Skreija and Stefans 2007).

Signified is ‘l’image mentale suscitée par le significant, et correspondant au referent; un modèle, une abstraction définissant l’homogénéité d’une classe d’objets’ (Klinkenberg 1996 : 95). The new authorities treat signs as things that need a corrected verbal definition fitting the memory rewriting project. Incidence of such redefining practices testifies the dominant role of verbal messages in visual communication. New signifieds are imposed in two ways: change or addition of inscriptions on pedestals and adjacent walls, and discursive narrativisation of monuments. Revision of inscriptions is less expensive and engenders less aesthetical harm. This practice is related to renaming of monuments in the public discourse. Monument to the Red Latvian Riflemen – the Lenin’s guard in 1918 – has been renamed ‘Monument to Latvian Riflemen’ and the new designation was carved on the pedestal. Historians explain that marking out only one ‘red’ detachment is incorrect reference to the military union as a whole. Still the men wear caps with red stars referring to their Bolshevik identity. ‘Monument to the Soldiers of Soviet Army – Liberators of the Soviet Latvia and Riga from fascist invaders’ (‘Monument to the Liberators’ in abridged form) is called ‘The Monument of Victory’ now. The words of

thanks to Soviet soldiers disappeared from the pedestal ('To the Liberators of Soviet Latvia. Eternal Honour and Glory'). Verbal comment on a plaque attached to the commemoration stone honouring memory of the Holocaust victims, minimises the effort of Soviet authorities to commemorate the Jews. The plaque says: 'This monument was erected in 1964 under the Soviet totalitarian regime by the activists of Riga's Jewish community. It was the only Jewish memorial to victims of Nazi terror in the territory of the USSR' (Figure 5). The date of dedication was changed twice on the Brethren cemetery gate: the Soviets put '1915-1945', now it is re-chiselled back to the original '1915-1920' despite the fact that the World War 2 soldiers are inhumed here.

Verbal commentaries in press articles, tourist guides, encyclopaedias highlight particular traits of the represented person or event. In 1950s, due to the short history of local communism, Latvians missed the co-nationals serving as model citizens. Communication of verbal and visual messages had to promote the new heroes. Three busts and a sepulchral bas-relief to the leader of clandestine resistance in Nazi occupied Riga Imants Sudmalis (1916-1944) were erected in 1954-1960. His biography was narrated in brochures and media. To strengthen the image, in 1957 he was awarded the top Soviet decoration of the USSR Hero. The irony of fate is that the historians themselves doubted the scale and effectiveness of this clandestine group, but the created narrative permitted erection of an impressive bronze monument in Liepāja in 1978 (dismantled in 1995).

Another verbal tactic is ban on the public mentioning of monuments. Impressive narrativisation work had been done against the Freedom Monument. Erected in Riga's centre in 1935 the sign expressed the Latvians' aspiration to the statehood (Figure 6). The Soviets had not toppled this impressive monument. According to a legend it was saved by the prominent Soviet sculptor, native of Riga, Vera Mukhina who stressed its artistic and aesthetic value (Bormane 2006). Its inclusion into the national narrative was permitted only during a short government of the national communists in the late fifties. Photos of the monument were published in the album *Rīga* printed in 1958 but disappeared from the reprinted version in 1961. *Soviet Latvia Encyclopaedia* had no entry about this artwork (see *Latvijas Padomju Enciklopēdija* 1982, vol. 2). An anecdotic interpretation was used by tour guides who could not avoid explaining the meaning of the sign dominating the city centre. They told that the female figure holding three stars in raised hands was the Mother Russia protecting three Soviet

Baltic republics, whereas in reality this is an allegory of liberty with the stars symbolising three regions of the sovereign Republic of Latvia. Politically acceptable interpretations came along with the perestroika: the prominent artistic heritage was admitted under the conditions that its political, nationalist connotations be suppressed. The monument's genesis was traced back to the sources of communist tradition: evidently the sculptor Kārlis Zāle was inspired by the 1919 project of the Freedom Monument in Moscow. Zāle, by virtue of his social descent, was said to have reflected the liberation from Baltic German landlords and Russian tsarism rather than Latvia's seeking independence from any foreign power. The monument's southwest orientation was explained as being determined by the day light conditions, but it was not a demonstrative setting back to Moscow² (Apsītis 1988; *Enciklopēdija Rīga* 1988).

In these years we witness a contrary process: ideologically alien Soviet monuments are re-admitted the citizenship rights by being redefined first and foremost as the artistic heritage. The memorial ensemble to the victims of Nazi camp in Salaspils was abandoned protection during last 15 years, but today it is included into the government sponsored canon of Latvian culture. Chair of the Riga municipal Council on Monuments Ojārs Spārītis advocates the protection of political monuments because this is a part of historical heritage of Latvians. The council supported restoration of the original inscription on the Monument to Liberators, and the spatial rearrangement of the Riflemen square in order to provide the monument respect it deserves as a work of art (Figure 7).

Referent is 'l'objet du monde en tant qu'il peut faire partie d'une classe' (Klinkenberg 1996 : 97). Selection of a referent for the representation of political ideas is not easy as it might seem. The referent may be a member of different classes, accordingly it may activate dissonant signifieds. In the visual communication an abstract value that the political regime seeks to propagate is being expressed by presenting images of concrete individuals. Real people are full-blooded personalities resisting inclusion in a single class. Probably eschewing the potential controversy is one of the reasons of scarcity of outdoor portrait sculpture. In 1960-1987 twenty three figurative monuments to Lenin and only six to individuals of Latvian origin were

² Female figure of the Freedom Monument and Lenin's sculpture were placed on the central street of Riga turning backs to each other. Freedom's looking westwards and Lenin's eastwards was a usual topic of political jokes.

erected in towns. Likewise the monument to anti-totalitarian resistance failed in this decade. The first problem was personification of the resistance. Historians named and a group of wealthy businessmen and politicians promoted Konstantīns Čakste (1901-1945). The son of the first Latvia's president led an anti-Nazi clandestine group standing for Latvia's independence. Like Sudmalis, Čakste was not widely known and his activity had no political effects. Opponents of the monument mentioned the missing tangible results of resistance as an argument against the commemoration of this person in an impressive monument in the centre of Riga in front of the government building – the spot earlier occupied by Lenin's statue. In fact, by attacking the project the opponents aimed against their political adversaries who sought to increase the symbolical capital. In 2008 another person was proposed for this place – the popular Latvian actress Vija Artmane passed away that year. Despite the great talent, her communist past was the reason to deny the *ius imaginum*. Likewise the recognised Leviathan of Latvian literature Rainis is not embraced as a symbol: besides the category 'artist' he was a left-wing politician. The former member of social democrat party burdened the contemporary right-wing ideology. Rainis's presence in the centre of Riga is tolerated, but the prestigious square is deprived the adequate importance in order to downplay eventual public manifestations by the opposition labour party.

The contemporary ideology's central theme is the suffering inflicted on Latvian nation in the 20th century. Commemoration of the victims of unjust power has turned into a politically sensitive question 'Who has suffered most of others?' – so it was formulated by the daily *Diena* (Arāja 2006). Whether the new monument to repressed has to honour only Latvians deported by Stalin, or the victims of Nazism – Jews and Romany among others – are to be remembered also, making of the monument a warning against any totalitarianism.

Heated debates revolved around the monument to Kārlis Ulmanis – one of the founding fathers of the Republic of Latvia in 1918, who ruled this country as dictator in 1934-1940. His bronze sculpture was erected in a central place in Riga in 2003.

Neither the personalities admitted in the history without reservations are immune to strong criticism. In this case they are implicated in rivalling between political parties: in order to discredit the eventual gain of symbolical capital, the opponents criticise the artistic quality of sculpture, its appropriateness to a particular town etc.

The referent might be transformed with the intention to expand the number of classes it could be categorised in. This is the case of sepulchral monuments which are prompted to be interpreted merely as the indices designating the burial place of now expanded category of people. After the war Riga missed a budget to construct a memorial to fallen soldiers. In 1957 the Latvia Communist Party leadership ordered the Brethren cemetery to accommodate this purpose. The necropolis of World War I and subsequent liberation war soldiers had been founded in the 1920s; now the Soviets reburied the ashes of their military men. The cemetery's 'nationalist' meaning was downplayed, and the communist ritual profited from the solemnity of this impressive architectural ensemble built by the interwar sculptor Kārlis Zāle. In 1990s Latvian nationalists demanded to exhume the ashes of Soviet soldiers, but only the date on the entrance gate was changed to indicate that the Latvian military men fallen in 1915-1920 were commemorated here, however the soldiers perished in 1941-1945 found their last rest here also.

The similar transformation of meaning affected the most prestigious and the most visited *Meža kapi* cemetery. In this 'semi-official necropolis of the bourgeois Latvia' (Stradiņš 1987: 8) state persons, intellectuals and Lutheran clergy were buried in 1920-1940. Just across the street there is another one 'non-confessional' resting-place, the Rainis Cemetery, founded in 1929 for the left-wing politician, the most illustrious poet Rainis. Jānis Stradiņš argues that these two cemeteries was the most telling manifestation of the deep ideological divide in interwar Latvia. The well-established tradition of visiting the cemeteries, and the beautiful sepulchral monuments attracted people to *Meža kapi* making the communist authorities to suspect that citizens were paying respect to the persons and symbols of 'bourgeois Latvia'. In 1958 the Soviet Latvia government decided to commit to the earth the Member of Parliament and intellectual Pauls Stradiņš. He became the first illustrious communist intellectual to find the last resort here. Later communist nomenklatura novelists Vilis Lācis and Andrejs Upīts were inhumed here along the acknowledged pre-Soviet literati. In a peculiar way such an 'appropriation' of the necropolis was a symbolic act to overpass the rupture of Latvian identity.

For all that the confrontation between two cemeteries goes on. In late nineties the post-communist Republic of Latvia took a revanche degrading the Memorial Pantheon of Soviet Latvia's statesmen constituted around the allegoric sculpture the Muse of Revolution (1971) in the 'left' Rainis Cemetery. The business partners and

families of *nouveaux riches* killed in gangland-style shoot-outs were authorised to commit them to the earth nearby the communist leaders' tombs. Impressive tomb stones have been erected here during last ten years going far beyond the modest individual tombs of the communist statesmen.

Syntactics studies relations of signs to one another. Outdoor sculpture is a message on its own and simultaneously it is included in a syntagm along other elements of the urban architecture or other tomb stones in the cemetery. Topographical placement – urban centre, elevation, proximity of and spatial orientation vis-à-vis other valued objects – enhances the meaning. Transformations in the surrounding space permit the authorities to preserve the politically controversial artistic sign by minimising its role in the spatial organisation. In this case the meaning is depreciated while the authorities can disclaim their negative intentions.

In Soviet Latvia the topography of two ideologically adverse sculptures nourished the jokes about the Freedom Monument looking to the West, and Lenin, standing on the same street, greeting the East. Reconstruction of the central Esplanade square in early 1950s aimed at the subordination of the urban topography to Stalin's sculpture. The square had to be given Stalin's name, the adjacent boulevards had to be broadened and renamed Stalin Avenue adapted for parades. The 16-meters tall bronze Stalin would have become the nodal point of the city subordinating the Freedom and Lenin monuments erected on the perpendicular street; radial lanes from the sculpture to the former centre of the Esplanade square the Orthodox Cathedral of Nativity, would made of Stalin's image the new centre of sanctuary.

In the late 1960s the *Meža kapi* was transformed to minimise the impressiveness of the sepulchral monument to the founder and the first President of Republic of Latvia Jānis Čakste (in office 1922-1927). On the long walkway leading to his tomb, the Prime minister of Soviet Latvia, novelist Vilis Lācis (in office 1940-1959), was buried in 1966 (Figure 8). From then on, communist veterans were buried between two graves, and the walk was designated the Alley of Old Bolsheviks. A huge sepulchral monument unveiled on Lācis's tomb in 1974 cut into the solemn space and obstructed the view of the President's monument. In 1966 the widow of pre-Soviet Latvia's minister of war, Jānis Balodis, had managed to obtain permission to bury him next to Čakste. To the great displeasure of the authorities she erected an expensive tombstone.

The Monument of Red Latvian Riflemen is expecting similar transformations. Despite modification of the signified and admittance of the sculpture as the artistic heritage, the unwelcome communist connotation is to be downplayed by erecting nearby another one sculpture carrying anti-communist meaning.

Displacement of the communist icons can create new contexts of perception. Monuments of Soviet Lithuania have been collected in a forest (Grūtas park), the Hungarian ones in an enclosure (Memento park). In this uncommon to works of art syntax, the images of Lenin, Stalin, and local communist leaders are perceived as being isolated in a metaphoric gulag.

The enunciation context may keep producing utterances after the elimination of monument. In Riga Lenin monument was dismantled in 1991, however the spot in front of the Cabinet of Ministers retains the meaning still. Regularly dedicated communists bring flowers celebrating Lenin's birthday and death day, as well as the Revolution day (Figures 9 and 10). Only insiders witnessing these rituals know the meaning. Projects envisaging erection of a new monument met strong objections: memories about the once existed communist sanctuary interfere into the new message. The mayor of Riga banned the public exposure of the recently restored bronze equestrian statue of Peter the Great. It was unveiled in 1910 and evacuated in 1915; in 1935 the Republic of Latvia erected the Freedom Monument on its place. Given the peculiar relations between Latvians and local Russians, Peter's return in the city would have animated commonplace talks on who has the right of precedence to stand on this place.

The most elementary practice of degrading a monument is its inclusion in banal every day urban activities. The Soviets arranged the public transport U-turn around the Freedom Monument. Not only the parked buses and trolleybuses, and aerial contact wires degraded the view, but also obstructed access to the monument. Today the surrounding space is reserved for pedestrians, while the U-turn has been moved to the Monument to Red Latvian Riflemen. Around the Monument to Rainis pleasure-grounds have been set trivializing the image of the left politician.

Pragmatics studies the relation of signs to their interpreters. Outdoor sculpture marks the urban space which may become attractive for a particular social group seeking to demonstrate its identity to the general public. Consequently, appropriate connotations are highlighted making of the sign a symbol of collective identity performed at its foot. Signifieds are adjusted to the practical needs of assembly, public expression and

ritual strengthening of collective identity. The sculpture of futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky unveiled in Moscow in 1958 attracted the regular improvised poetry recitations suspected, by the authorities, in ideological subversion. Since 1965, ideological dissent in the Soviet Union revolved around a monument to Alexander Pushkin in Moscow (unveiled in 1880). Once a year (on Constitution Day, but from 1977 on Human Rights Day) a small group of dissidents held silent manifestations to protest against the violation of human rights in the USSR. Words from Pushkin's poem 'Exegi monumentum' engraved on the pedestal explain the appropriateness of his personality for political activism: 'Kind feelings did my lyre extol, invoking freedom in an age of fear and mercy for the broken soul.'

A monument formerly neglected in public discourse all of a sudden can discover the qualities appropriate for spatial organisation of ad hoc activities. Subsequently it may undergo a process of purposeful reinterpretation. In 1864 Riga unveiled a bust of Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744-1803) honouring his activities in this city. Philosopher's German identity was an obstacle for the renovation of damaged bust after the war, and it was dismantled in 1953. Herder was allowed to return to Riga in 1959 to greet the East German leader Walter Ulbricht during his visit to Latvia.

For many provincial towns missing the historical buildings and places of revolutionary activity, Lenin monuments were the unique communist symbols permitting to localise the global Soviet political communication and to stage the ritualised collective performances of loyalty on state holidays.

Guard of honour, state protocol and festive rituals at the foot of monuments strengthen the preferred meaning and make it visible to outsiders of the cultural context. The dominant political discourse is being challenged around other monuments which subsequently receive an adversary interpretation. In this country the symbolical rivalry takes place between the ethnic Latvians and the residents of ethnic Russian origin. In the early 1990s the provincial municipalities toppled the Soviet era monuments to Liberators as the reminders of the occupation. The monument in Riga was not affected probably because of its gigantism. By the end of 1990s the local Russians appropriated this square for arrangement of public civic activities. Re-invention of the Russian identity strengthened the monument's symbolism: Vladimir Putin initiated the consolidation of national identity of Russian Federation around the V-Day. Liberation of Europe from fascism became a nodal point of pride for Russians. The monuments in Tallinn and Riga attracted people for

mass manifestations facilitating the expression of political demands to their governments. In Tallinn, crowding of people and eventual challenging the passers-by, was the formal reason to displace the monument from the city centre to a cemetery in 2007, and the action triggered an uncommon for Estonia social unrest.

In Riga the recently restored sculpture of the 1812 war hero Michael Barclay de Tolly (erected in 1913, evacuated in 1915) became the venue for small-scale manifestations of the local Russians: besides being easy accessible it is situated in a visible place opposite to the government building.

Merely the fact of civic activity at the monument's foot can redefine its meaning. Groups involved in symbolical contestation of power aim at protection of 'their' respective monuments from inclusion into rivalling narratives. The Freedom Monument is considered to express the essence of Latvian statehood and nationalism, it is included in the state protocol, and the guard of honour is placed here. In 2006 for the first time in the history a non-governmental organisation of local Russians intended to celebrate V-day at its foot on 9 May. This activity was banned, the prime-minister demanded the passage of a law stipulating the occasions when public manifestations could be arranged around the Freedom Monument which is supposed to express exclusively the ideals of ethnic Latvians. The state authorities are bothered also by the radical nationalists who stage their yearly manifestations on March 16 that provoke harsh international criticism. In order to ban political activities in the city centre, in 2009 the City Council demanded a special status for the monument reserving the square for official and state protocol activities.

Conclusions

Art historian Ernst Gombrich says that the outdoor sculpture has a potential to assume a life on its own (1999: 156). Sculpture is included in daily life of the city so that the viewers can participate in production of its meaning. It is up to a passer-by to perceive it as a signifying or intentionally communicating sign, as a clumsy architectural element, or perhaps as a material obstacle to movement. Unexpected shortcut, presence of an alien detail may attract disproportional attention to the signifier and consequently alter the signified. Some general rules of interpretation stem from the cultural tradition. Reverent attitude to the stone enhances the symbolic force of three-dimensional images. Tradition of commemoration of the dead avoids the visual representation of individual identity. Latvian sculptors give priority to visual

abstraction turning the medium into the message – the stone has its own story to tell. Only seven Latvians had their monumental portrait figures have been erected in Soviet years. As a rule, Latvian sculptors represent individuals in portrait busts which are placed outside the reach of large public – in museums, parks, and small towns. Outdoor sculpture therefore possesses a singular potential to impress viewers; inclusion of an artwork in social practice makes of it a powerful political actors. Outdoor sculptures as the physical objects structure the urban space demarcating a territory suitable for collective action. As the signs they provide discourses facilitating the acting social group to express its identity: the signified is actively redefined in order to accommodate the signifier for singular pragmatic needs. In a society where a positive experience of collective movement and universal rights of access to the public sphere are missed, the erection of monuments is perceived as a practice of social differentiation undertaken by a social group seeking to increase its political weight. Mary Douglas holds that protest of contemporary anti-ritualism against symbols is only against rituals of differentiation (Douglas 2003: 165). Authorities employ different techniques against the monuments in order to deprive the rivaling groups of symbolical capital and consequently to impose new rules of social differentiation.

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