

MONUMENTAL INDIFFERENCE IN TALLINN

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On December 8, 2013 demonstrators toppled and decapitated a granite statue of Vladimir Lenin (1946) located in front of the Besarabsky Market in Kiev, Ukraine (Figure 1). The statue survived the iconoclastic purge of communist icons after the collapse of the Soviet Union only to fall in the latest round of conflicts over the country's relationship with Russia. Opposition protesters targeted the statue in order to draw a comparison between the customs union with Russia proposed by Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych and the domination of Ukraine by Russia within the Soviet Union.¹ The annexation of Crimea by Russia in response to Yanukovych's ouster and the geopolitical tensions that followed have led to the vandalism of other Soviet-era monuments and renewed calls for their removal in Latvia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and elsewhere in Ukraine.²

These controversies recall an earlier one regarding the removal of the so-called "Bronze Soldier" from Tõnismägi Park in Tallinn, Estonia, in April 2007. Erected in 1947 as the *Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn* (Figure 2) by the newly installed government of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, this sculpture of a soldier in Soviet uniform with head bowed and helmet in hand set against a light gray wall marked the burial location of 13 Soviet soldiers. While the fate of the monument was periodically debated after Estonia declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the memorial only became a focal point for tensions between Estonian and Russian activists around 2004.³ A new government came to power in 2007 with a promise to move the statue. Despite demonstrations and riots by ethnic Russians in Estonia and diplomatic protests and economic retaliation by the Russian government, the monument and graves were hastily relocated to a military cemetery on the outskirts of the city.

These examples serve as dramatic reminders of how monuments continue to be used to rewrite histories and negotiate identities in the urban spaces of the former Soviet Union.⁴ Both monuments were erected immediately after the end of World War II (WWII) and sought to affirm or impose a Soviet identity onto their respective cities. The Lenin statue in Kiev marked the end of German occupation and reaffirmed communist control. After the signing of the secret Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact that divided Eastern Europe between Nazi Germany and the



Figure 1. Protesters destroy the monument to Vladimir Lenin in Kiev, Ukraine. December 8, 2013. Photograph courtesy of Mstyslav Chernov/UnFrame.

U.S.S.R. in 1939, Estonia was invaded by the Soviets in 1940, then by the Germans in 1941, and again by the Soviets in 1944. For ethnic Estonians the official title given to the monument elided the fact that the Soviets were first occupiers and only afterward “liberators.” In contrast for the ethnic Russians who moved to Estonia during the 1960s and 1970s and their descendants (who make up approximately 40% of the current population of Tallinn and a quarter of the population of the country), the Bronze Soldier monument served as an appropriate commemoration of the millions of Russians who died in the fight against fascism.⁵ The removal of the statue from the city center simply inverted the officially sanctioned positions of each version of the past.⁶

If monuments are most visible at the moments of their creation, contestation or removal, what characterizes them between these events? Set in Tallinn just



Figure 2. Enn Roos. *Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn*. 1947. Shown at its original location in Tõnismägi Park, Tallinn. April 3, 2007. Photograph: Paul Wilson.

before the removal of the Bronze Soldier, Anu Pennanen's short film *Friendship* (2006) explores the relationship of teenagers born after Estonian independence to the monuments and architectural landscapes of the city. Its fictional plot follows two groups of friends, one ethno-linguistically Estonian and the other Russian, as they move between abandoned communist monuments and the new Viru Centre shopping mall. While monuments are often assumed to be invisible or forgotten when not the subjects of active public debate, the film represents the response of the teenagers as indifferent, an indifference that functions as a critical strategy for resisting the ethnically divisive historical narratives inscribed on the urban landscape. The film presents the informal ways in which teenagers actually use the monumental spaces of the city, but it employs a fictional scenario to explore how these uses of space might offer possibilities for inter-ethnic friendships.⁷ Thus the film is both a critical reflection on traditional forms of public art such as memorials and monumental architectural spaces and the product of newer forms of socially engaged public art. This reading of *Friendship* helps us to understand indifference and also to recognize the role of film within contemporary public art practices.

THE INVISIBLE OR FORGOTTEN MONUMENT

The Austrian writer Robert Musil's pithy observation that "monuments are so conspicuously inconspicuous. There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument" has been repeated so often that today it is rarely questioned.⁸ Already in 1989 Werner Fenz described this quotation as "old and hackneyed," yet admits that it "gets to the core of the matter."⁹ Indeed, the assumption that the traditional monument is invisible has decisively shaped the design of monuments and theories of public art since the 1980s.¹⁰ Maya Lin described her *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982) in Washington, D.C., as an anti-monument, and its minimalist design influenced a generation of artists, sculptors and landscape architects. James Young theorized these new approaches to monuments in an influential 1992 article on the counter-monument. Using Jochen and Esther Shalev's *Monument Against Fascism* (1986) in Harburg, Germany, as a paradigmatic example, he defines counter-monuments as "memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being."¹¹ The counter-monument offers silence in place of narrative, absence for presence. Young suggests that it has an ethical charge: "For once we assign a monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember."¹² If traditional monuments concretize memory into tangible form but become invisible — condemning the memory they hold to oblivion — then by refusing to embody memory in monumental form, counter-monuments compel people to remember.¹³ In this line of argumentation the logic of the traditional monument is inverted,

and Musil's observation that a conventional monument easily disappears into the fabric of the urban landscape transforms into a claim that it actively inhibits memory.¹⁴ These ideas have been highly influential in art and architectural history, as well as in the field of memory studies.

The incidents in Kiev and Tallinn, however, should make us reconsider some basic premises in this discussion. First, is remembering always preferable to forgetting? While this idea is deeply ingrained in our intellectual culture, particularly after the Holocaust, Paul Connerton critiques the common assumption that forgetting *always* constitutes a personal or collective failure.¹⁵ He distinguishes between types of forgetting that have different purposes and ideological resonances, three of which have relevance for controversies over Soviet monuments. He describes "repressive erasure" as the violent suppression of individual or collective memory by a totalitarian state. The Bronze Soldier is a good example of a monument originally tasked with the erasure of Estonian nationalist memory. In contrast, "prescriptive forgetting" is a social agreement between aggrieved parties to forget past conflicts and grievances in order to move forward. This forgetting is also imposed (or at least encouraged) by the state, although with the assumption that it is in the best interest of everyone. Nevertheless, the distinction between these two can be unclear. The Estonian government, for example, made every effort to present the removal of the Bronze Soldier in dispassionate, logical terms: unidentified soldiers should be buried in a military cemetery, not in an ordinary park.¹⁶ Nonetheless, protesters understood the action as an attempt at repressive erasure. The third type of forgetting Connerton describes is "forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity."¹⁷ This happens when individuals let go of memories of past relationships, affiliations and social connections that no longer affirm their current identities. While he characterizes this as an individual phenomenon, something similar happens with groups as the contours of collective memory shift over time.¹⁸ We might say, then, that monuments become invisible when they no longer serve to sustain an individual or collective identity. Of course, the goal of monuments is precisely to forestall such forgetting.

What of the assumption that the invisibility of the monument is the result of some sort of forgetting? For a viewer without personal or collective memory of a particular monument's meaning, "ignorance" is a more precise term than "forgetting." But if a viewer sees a monument (monumentality tends to ensure this) and recognizes its ideological message but refuses to acknowledge it, then he or she is indifferent toward it. Musil describes how invisible monuments "are impregnated with something that repels attention, causing the glance to roll right off...without even pausing for a moment."¹⁹ With indifference, this dynamic is reversed: the monument's stare rolls off the indifferent viewer.²⁰ In urban landscapes where monuments recall past conflicts and perpetuate current ones, such

indifference can be seen as a critical strategy — a refusal to take the bait.²¹ Pennanen's *Friendship* makes an argument for the strategic value of “monumental indifference.”

THE TALLINN PROJECT

The 30-minute film *Friendship* is a part of the *Tallinn Project* (2004–07), a collaboration initiated by the Finnish artist with a small group of teenagers from Tallinn whom she met in public spaces or recruited through announcements in local schools.²² The project began with research on the urban development of Tallinn after WWII followed by a series of interviews and group discussions with the teenagers about their everyday experiences of the city and its architecture. Next, Pennanen wrote a loose film script based on these discussions. This was refined in improvisation workshops with the teenagers and then used to make a narrative film featuring the nine participants, which was screened at festivals and in galleries. Later, she edited the footage into a shorter three-screen video installation specifically for exhibition in museum and gallery spaces.²³ Although relational aesthetics (discussed below) was the dominant interpretative language for discussing this kind of site-specific, project-based work in Europe at the time, the project also has characteristics associated with new genre public art of the 1990s and contemporary social practice art. While Pennanen does not explicitly locate her art practice within any of these frameworks, the *Tallinn Project* fits within the socially engaged art trends of the late 1990s and early 2000s: the artist as a kind of researcher/ethnographer who comes to a location and mobilizes an “invented community” (the teenagers and other collaborators) in order to interpret or represent the social or political concerns of a larger community (Tallinn).²⁴ If the making of a film served as an initial impetus for Estonian- and Russian-speaking teenagers to meet, discuss the political dimensions of urban spaces and collaborate with one another, the completed film functions as a tangible outcome of the participatory project, which can then be exhibited.

Although the plot is fictional, the ways in which the film depicts teenagers using urban spaces are realistic. At the beginning of the film, individual teenagers or pairs of friends are shown whiling away time in the Soviet-era monumental landscapes of Maarjamäe, Linnahall and the Mustamäe suburb, and at the medieval walls of Old Tallinn. Later they converge at the new Viru Centre bus station and shopping mall in the city center and coalesce into two larger, ethno-linguistically defined groups. The interaction between the groups alternates between friendly encounters and tense exchanges, but the film ends with the teenagers negotiating a tentative camaraderie. The age of the participants is significant. At 15 and 16 years old, they are the first generation of Tallinn residents without personal memories of the Soviet period or Estonian independence

movement. The Estonian-Russian title of the film, *Sõprus – Дружба (Friendship)*, refers to the name of the imposing Stalinist-classical movie theater in Tallinn that inspired Pennanen to initiate the project.²⁵ “Friendship” not only describes the theme of the fictional plot but also hints at the historical resonances of the term within the geopolitical relationships between Estonia, Russia and Finland. After WWII both Estonia and Finland were connected to the U.S.S.R. through “friendship” agreements; however, the terms of these agreements were very different. Despite its official status as a sovereign state Estonia had no autonomy from the central government, and the Soviet rhetoric of friendship carried a strong propagandist tone — for example, in the construction and naming of the movie theater in 1955. Finland remained independent and officially neutral during the Cold War, although it often deferred to the wishes of the U.S.S.R. in matters of international relations and occasionally in domestic politics as well.

The terms of the friendship between Finland and Estonia are quite different from the Soviet model but are still structurally uneven. Their capitals are located just 55 miles apart from one another across the Gulf of Finland, and there are strong ethnic and linguistic ties between them. Both also gained independence from Russia during the communist revolution and developed close political, cultural and economic relationships in the interwar period. After a time of Soviet imposed isolation after WWII, limited connections resumed in the 1960s when Finns could again travel by ferry to Tallinn. During the waning years of the U.S.S.R., Western media and consumer goods began to flow into Estonia via Finland. After independence, Finnish corporations invested heavily in the country and tourists became an important component of the Tallinn economy. While both countries are now in the European Union, there is some lingering anxiety in Estonia that the domination of one great power has been replaced by another; if not Finland specifically, then the West more generally.

MONUMENTAL INDIFFERENCE

The fictional narrative, architectural landscapes and participatory nature of *Friendship* are all essential elements of its complicated historical, national and ethnic relationships. The first half of the film is dominated by the *Maarjamäe Memorial* (1960; 1965–75), a stark military burial site, and Linnahall (1980), a massive cultural and sports complex next to the harbor. Both monumental landscapes are strongly associated with the Soviet period. In contrast, the second half is set in the Viru Centre (2004), a sleek shopping mall emblematic of the architectural and economic transformation of the city center after independence. While only *Maarjamäe* is a conventional monument, all three sites share a monumental scale that visually dominates and physically immerses the



Figure 3. Allan Murdmaa, Matti Varik, and Lembit Tolli. *Maarjamäe Memorial*. 1965–75. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Estonian Architecture.

teenagers.²⁶ Linnahall and the Viru Centre remind viewers of the power of the state and capitalist investors, respectively, to command resources and dramatically reshape urban space, even if they do not contain specific exhortations to remember a historical event as does *Maarjamäe*. The teenagers in the film, however, use these sites identically, and this indifference to spatial distinction is the key argument of the film in regard to the theory of the monument. Their everyday activities such as sitting, skating, wandering and playing, diffuse these monumental landscapes, transforming them from predetermined places of memory or sites of commerce into open spaces of experience.²⁷

The film opens at the *Maarjamäe* memorial complex, located on a small hill approximately two and a half miles northeast of the city center along the coast (Figure 3). The site was first a burial location for German soldiers who died capturing the city in 1941. The Soviet army removed the crosses marking the German graves in 1944 and reused the site to bury its own soldiers who had died retaking the city. In 1960 a tall white obelisk with bronze plaques was raised on the site to mark the Ice Cruise of the Baltic Fleet, a defensive military action carried out near the end of the World War I (WWI) by Bolshevik sailors based in Tallinn, when



Figure 4. Anu Pennanen. Film still from *Sõprus—Дружба (Friendship)*. 2006. 16mm film with surround sound transferred to Digital Betacam. Courtesy of the artist and Virta Productions.

Estonia was still a part of Russia. By connecting heroic communist military actions from 1918 and 1944, the monument strategically erased the period of Estonian independence in between. The rest of the site was developed between 1965 and 1975 as a formal memorial complex dedicated to all those who died in the fight against fascism. After 1991 the site was stripped of this carefully crafted narrative. The eternal flame in front of the enormous hand imprints in a stone wall was extinguished; the plaques from the obelisk were removed; and a few clusters of stone crosses marking the German graves were erected in the grassy area behind the plaza. Today the memorial hides in plain sight next to a main road, left to crumble slowly back into the ground like the fallen soldiers whose resting-place it marks.

The film juxtaposes the severe monumental spaces of the memorial, designed to evoke reverential awe and accommodate state performances of memory, with the ways teenagers use the space in the present (Figure 4). The long shots in the opening sequence emphasize the geometric angularity of the site: broad walkways, distinctive intersections and precisely sculpted forms. One can imagine Soviet schoolchildren walking reverently along the pathways and sitting neatly on the concrete steps during a program in front of the immense sculpted hands. The only visitors to the complex in the film are teenagers who skate, smoke and bike. Their dark clothes, informal groupings and chaotic movements disrupt the visual precision and



Figure 5. Raine Karp. Linnahall. 1980. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Estonian Architecture.

geometric purity of the site. (Close-ups reveal not only the expressionless faces of the teenagers but also the grass and weeds growing out of the crumbling stone and concrete.) The visual contrast between the rigid order of the site and the informality of its uses emphasizes a disconnection between past and present. Given the debates over the future of Soviet-era memorials at the time the teenagers at least know, presumably, the Soviet origin of the monument, but neither the grand ideological gestures of the past nor the attempts of the current state to reinterpret the site as a place to reflect on the tragic history of the Estonian nation seem to interest them.

Linnahall, or the Lenin Culture and Sports Palace as it was originally known, was built for the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow and included a concert hall and indoor ice rink (Figure 5). Since it was the largest auditorium in the city, seating 4800 people, it also doubled as a location for Communist Party meetings. Later, it was used for independence rallies. The unique design of the building (often compared to a Mesoamerican pyramid or Babylonian ziggurat) places the vast interior spaces underneath a bunker-like structure, transforming nearly the entire roof into a series of stepped plazas (Figure 6). The building — designed by Raine Karp, an architect favored by the Estonian government during the 1980s — embodies Soviet power in its very materiality: brutal, hulking and gray, and yet so



Figure 6. Anu Pennanen. Film still from *Sõprus — Дружба (Friendship)*. 2006. 16 mm film with surround sound transferred to Digital Betacam. Courtesy of the artist and Virta Productions.

quickly and cheaply constructed that it now seems to be in ruins only a few decades after its completion. Although the ice rink is now closed and the concert hall seldom used, the building is never devoid of activity. It creates an enormous, unmonitored public space just adjacent to the modern city center and medieval Old Town, and there are always groups of teenagers sitting, talking, drinking, skating and graffiti tagging across the sprawling concrete plazas and sunken courtyards — exactly as depicted in the film. As with *Maarjamäe*, the film presents the building as stripped of its previous ideological functions and instead serving as a platform for informal activities and interactions.

Yet the film suggests that some ideological charge remains in both of these sites. In the opening sequence of the film the actual sound of skateboards and inline skates at *Maarjamäe* is layered with battle sounds. At one point a crackly gunshot (as if from an archival film) rings out at the moment an inline skater falls. The sequence at Linnahall begins with two friends roaming around the exterior of the building. One of the girls, feeling ignored by the other, walks off alone and finds herself inexplicably drawn into the empty cavernous auditorium by disembodied voices of people chanting the independence slogan “Estonia is in our hands.” She ends up standing onstage alone engulfed by the soaring speech of a nationalist leader followed by cheering and applause. While these instances make direct



Figure 7. Vilen Künnapu and Ain Padrik. Viru Centre. 2004. Photograph: Paul Wilson.

reference to the history of the places depicted, both consist of sounds heard by the viewer but not the teenagers in the scenes. It is as if the past lingers at the sites, trying to engage the teenagers but without apparent success. At a moment when Estonian nationalists and Russian activists politicized Soviet era monuments, the teenagers seemed to hold onto their indifference.

The Viru Centre is a mixed-use development consisting of an underground bus station, two stories of shops wrapping around a sky-lit atrium and two levels of parking on the roof (Figure 7). The film presents it as the obvious counterpart to *Maarjamäe* and Linnahall. If these are paradigmatic of the communist past, then the Viru Centre is the glossy symbol of the capitalist present: if these show their age with crumbling cement and graffiti-covered walls, the reflective glass and metal facades of the mall seem impervious to decay. If the public gathering-places of the communist era made explicit political demands on their publics, the Viru Centre seems to require nothing of its visitors. It demands only contractual compliance, not patriotic devotion.²⁸ There are no commands, only enticing choices and options; one is always free just to look, if not buy. The building does not attempt to preserve memory, but instead cultivates the planned obsolescence of consumer



Figure 8. Anu Pennanen. Film still from *Sõprus – Дружба (Friendship)*. 2006. 16 mm film with surround sound transferred to Digital Betacam. Courtesy of the artist and Virta Productions.

culture.²⁹ In contrast to the stable long shots used to depict the earlier landscapes, the filmmaking here highlights the complex visual spaces of the Viru Centre where the self becomes an image reflected in mirrors or glass storefronts and other people become transitory objects passing by our fields of vision. Despite these differences, the teenagers act much as they do at *Maarjamäe* and Linnahall. They spend time sitting on benches, browsing aimlessly in stores and looking and being looked at across the multileveled atrium (Figure 8).

Just as the past occasionally bears upon the teenagers at the communist sites, the subtle ideological pull of capitalist space shapes the movement and dialogue of the teenagers in the mall: everything circles in endless repetitions. In one exchange, an Estonian-speaking boy and girl sit on a bench talking. He asks her what she has been doing:

Girl [replies]: “We went to the cosmetics department.”

Boy: “Oh, did you find anything?”

Girl: “No.”

Boy: “You always go there but never find anything.”

Girl: "What did you do?"

Boy: "Checked out what's going on."

Girl: "Was anything going on?"

Boy: "Always something."

The next scene follows the Russian teenagers as they walk along a mall corridor. One of them talks about rising economic inequality, using Marxist rhetoric. His friends listen distractedly, but it is clear by their blank expressions that they have heard the same speech before. Conversations about shopping and revolution have the same affectless quality. Another scene echoes the dream-like sequence at Linnahall. Against a backdrop of ethereal electronic music, the camera pans slowly across a sleek cosmetics department before cutting to a close-up of a girl applying tester mascara in a Clinique mirror. When she notices an aloof shop attendant staring at her, the spell is broken. The music fades and the sound of the mall floods in. The mall is designed to indoctrinate its users much as the older monuments were, but instead of national subjects the mall shapes consumers.

The indifference of the teenagers to the ideological and spatial distinctions between communist and capitalist architectural landscapes might be read simply as apathy, but a closer examination of the history of these sites suggests that they have more in common than is initially apparent. The Viru Centre is connected via a skyway to Kaubamaja (the only department store in Tallinn during the communist era), making it merely the latest accretion of consumer space in this location. The mall itself is an addition to the older Hotel Viru. When it was completed in 1972 this soaring, 22-story international-style hotel (with an adjoining section of street-level restaurants and retail spaces) was a powerful symbol of cosmopolitan modernity in the city. The Soviet state tourism agency Intourist commissioned and financed the hotel, and even chose a Finnish construction firm to build it in order to ensure that it met international standards. It became the preferred destination for Finns visiting Tallinn in the 1970s and '80s. During the last years of Soviet rule it functioned as a space in which foreigners could enjoy illicit sex and cheap alcohol while Estonians could experience Western-style entertainment and service.³⁰ Considered within this specific historical context, the Viru Centre represents not a stark break with the past, but rather a continuation of preexisting patterns of urban use.

Distinctions between the communist past and capitalist present also begin to break down in regard to Linnahall and *Maarjamäe*. Andres Kurg persuasively argues that Linnahall ushered in postindustrial, postmodern Tallinn as much as it embodied Soviet power.³¹ Its construction marked the beginning of the

transformation of the harbor area from a restricted military and industrial zone into a place for leisure and consumption as it formed an enormous pedestrian bridge over a set of rail tracks, connecting the city center and the sea for the first time since WWII. The much-maligned design of the building was actually an ingenious solution to the constraints placed on the first public building on the waterfront. *Maarjamäe* as a funerary landscape is obviously more distinct from the glass-clad skyscrapers that now dominate the city center, but even its design is aligned with international architectural trends of its time (such as brutalism) rather than with the traditional monument design of the Bronze Soldier. This blurring of spatial distinctions is not meant to deny the very specific historical differences between these sites, but rather to suggest that the indifference the teenagers exhibit toward ideological distinctions has some basis in the materiality of the sites. The teenagers respond with indifference to monumental landscapes representing opposing ideological origins that are ironically similar.

THE ART OF FRIENDSHIP

The plot of the film only begins to develop after the teenagers have congregated at the Viru Centre. After the groups meet they go to the open-air parking lot on the roof, where they take a shopping cart and leave behind the car of a Russian teenager. The fun ends when the cart falls with one of the Estonian boys inside it, prompting the group to storm off. Later when they encounter each other again inside the mall a fight breaks out, and private mall security guards remove them. The final scene is set in the public plaza in front of the Centre where the teenagers take revenge for being kicked out by shooting paintballs filled with red paint at a monumental bronze sculpture of a nude woman titled *Dusk* (Figure 9). After this moment of impulsive unified action, the groups depart in different directions.

The film highlights the physical spaces available to teenagers to negotiate friendship in contemporary Tallinn. In spite of their differences, both the abandoned monuments and monumental mall offer opportunities in which Estonian and Russian teenagers can actually meet and interact outside of their linguistically segregated schools and ethnically defined neighborhoods. Paradoxically, these locations are those with both the most and least economic and symbolic value in the contemporary city. These possibilities for friendship are always tenuous, as demonstrated by the ending of the film: the final scene provides a narrative resolution, but offers no indication that the groups will meet again. For Pennanen, this is a compromise between a desire to provide a conclusion to the film but not an overly simplistic one.³² The primary cultural goal of the film, however, is not so much to offer a symbolic resolution of ethnic tensions but to bring indifference into focus as a strategy for defusing them.



Figure 9. Anu Pennanen. Film still from *Sõprus — Дружба* (Friendship). 2006. 16mm film with surround sound transferred to Digital Betacam. Courtesy of the artist and Virta Productions.

The final scene also returns to questions regarding the visibility or invisibility of monuments and other forms of public art. Mare Mikofi's *Dusk* (2004) is the tallest statue in Estonia, but it is actually just a modified and enlarged version of an 1882 statue by the Estonian sculptor August Weizenberg.³³ It was paid for by the city of Tallinn and, according to the architects who designed the Viru Centre, was selected for its site so that its graceful form would soften the masculine architecture of the building.³⁴ After vandalizing the statue one of the teenagers declares: "It's art!" Another agrees: "Definitely." As they begin to go their separate ways a Russian-speaking girl, who has silently tagged along with the Russian boys throughout the entire film, stays behind for a moment and walks up closer to the statue. Looking up, she lifts her hand in an imitation of its gesture. As her hand rises to her forehead, her body slips into the same contrapposto pose as the statue. This is the first time in the film that one of the teenagers actually looks closely, when a gaze stays focused. Her character seems to identify with something in the statue, but the inset white eyes of the monumental figure stare blankly past her. As an oversized reproduction of a popular artwork placed in front of a shopping mall, the statue represents public art in its most clichéd and conservative form. Out of all the architectural and sculptural forms depicted in the film, why is this the one that finally overcomes indifference?

This final gesture of identification suggests that public art might, in fact, engage viewers meaningfully. If this particular public sculpture can affect a character in the film for a brief moment, then imagine what more innovative and participatory forms of public art might do! Of course, this possibility is challenged by the behavior of the other teenagers. Their attention is neither about identification nor indifference but destruction, although this might be seen as a critique of “plop art” rather than all forms of public art. When one exclaims: “It’s art!,” to what is he referring — the statue now splattered with red paint, or the collective activity of the group? From the perspective of relational aesthetics or new genre public art, the answer is clearly the latter. Ultimately the exclamation is self-referential, as it refers to the vandalized statue and the film project. While the film depicts physical spaces in the city where inter-ethnic friendships can develop, the project itself constitutes a space of friendship in which teenagers meet, collaborate and create, bridging the very ethnic divisions that are the subject of the film. It eschews a political utopia in favor of an artistic “micro-utopia.”³⁵ The optimism of these readings, however, needs to be balanced against the strategic indifference that the teenagers display toward the sculptures, monuments and architectural spaces that attempt to cast them as citizens or consumers throughout the rest of the film. Might indifference even be a valid response to the open-ended, dialogic and project-based art, especially given the recent critiques of participatory art practices that note their tendency to replicate dominant economic and political systems rather than resist them?³⁶ When public art in its myriad forms demands engagement and identification, what would it mean to recognize indifference as a valid response?

INDIFFERENCE AS PRESERVATION

Sasha Senderovich laments that the destruction of the Lenin statue in Kiev removed a poignant reminder of the failed promises of both communism and capitalism in Ukraine. He explains that “the statue was treated by many residents of Kiev as a potent visual pun. It stood in front of the Besarabsky covered food hall — a structure plastered with glitzy ads for European banks and merchandise — and was dubbed the ‘Lenin who shows the way to the market.’”³⁷ Given the debates over the status of Soviet-era monuments in contemporary urban spaces, it is important to note that the Lenin statue was neither invisible nor forgotten prior to being singled out by protesters and then destroyed. While passersby disregarded its original message, they wryly noted the parallels between the commanding statue and brash advertisements. They were not oblivious to difference; rather, they read the competing messages indifferently. Indifference to the statue initially preserved it, creating opportunities for residents to assess the past and present

critically; but to be indifferent to the message and presence of a monument does not necessarily connote indifference to its removal. In addition to making indifference legible as a response to public art, *Friendship* makes an argument for keeping Soviet monuments to create spaces in which teenagers might negotiate friendships and forge new identities positioned somewhere between ethnic nationalism and global consumerism, between monument and mall.

NOTES

¹ David M. Herszenhorn and Andrew E. Kramer, "Crowds Topple Lenin Statue as Civil Uprising Grows," *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 2013.

² Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, "Post-Communist Monuments Project" (<http://postcommunistmonuments.ca/wp/>). (accessed 28 Apr. 2015).

³ See Martin Ehala, "The Bronze Soldier: Identity Threat and Maintenance in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 40.1 (2009): 141–43. The Bronze Soldier controversy can be seen as a continuation of an earlier one surrounding the Lihula statue.

⁴ See Taline Ter Minassian, ed., *Patrimoine et architecture dans les états post-soviétiques* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013).

⁵ Siobhan Kattago, "Commemorating Liberation and Occupation: War Memorials Along the Road to Narva," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39.4 (2008): 435–36. Kattago analyzes how the Soviet rhetoric of antifascism simplified and glorified its military actions in Estonia during WWII.

⁶ See Ehala, "The Bronze Soldier," 144–45. Ehala identifies four different meanings assigned to the statue by competing interest groups in regard to the events of 1944.

⁷ The ways the film represents teenagers using these sites matches my own casual observations during visits in 2007.

⁸ Robert Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago, 2006), 61.

⁹ Werner Fenz, "The Monument is Invisible, the Sign Visible," *October* 48 (Spring 1989): 75.

¹⁰ See Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1994); and Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Features* (London: Routledge, 1997). In place of conventional sculptures, many artists, public art critics and curators advocated for the disappearance of the autonomous art object in favor of discourse, site-specificity and community.

¹¹ James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry* 18.2 (Winter 1992): 271.

¹² *Ibid.*, 273.

¹³ See Thomas Stubblefield, "Do Disappearing Monuments Simply Disappear? The Counter-Monument in Revision," *Future Anterior* 8.2 (Winter 2011): 1–11. Stubblefield offers an insightful critique of Young's theory of the counter-monument.

¹⁴ See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–24. Young uses Nora to help construct a theoretical genealogy for this claim.

¹⁵ Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," *Memory Studies* 1.1 (2008): 59–71; Harald Weinrich, *Lethé: The Art and Critique of Forgetting* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). Weinrich provides a history of philosophical attitudes toward forgetting.

¹⁶ See Peeter Kaasik, "Common Grave for and a Memorial to Red Army Soldiers on the Tõnismägi, Tallinn: Historical Statement," Tallinn: Estonian Foundation for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, <http://valitsus.ee/static/ClientFiles/download/482> (accessed 8 Feb. 2014). The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned this history of the monument and justification

for its removal. It was published on the official website of the Estonian government in 2007; it has since been removed.

¹⁷ Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," 62.

¹⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

¹⁹ Musil, *Posthumous Papers*, 64.

²⁰ See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 170–77. Althusser's theory of interpellation offers a useful model for understanding the encounter between ideology and an individual subject.

²¹ See Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69.1 (Spring 2010): 93–119. Zahra recovers the history of Central European populations who were indifferent to the nationalist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perceiving indifference as a decision rather than an omission is a critical interpretive turn.

²² The teenage participants are Ilja Alpatov, Erich Hartvich, Madis Mäeorg, Sille Paas, Ronald Pelin, Olena Romanjuk, Häli-Ann Reintamm, Mari Tammesalu and Steven Vihalem. Other parts of the project include a short film documenting the improvisation workshops leading up to the film, a series of still photographs and a published roundtable discussion on the Bronze Soldier controversy.

²³ This reading is based on the 30-minute, single-channel version. It has a meditative quality that highlights the monumental landscapes and their use by the teenagers. This quality disappears in the shorter version with its quicker cuts across three screens, one of which is almost always used to move the narrative forward.

²⁴ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 171–203. Foster critiques the phenomenon of the artist as ethnographer. See also Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 126–137: Kwon distinguishes between different models of interaction between artists and collaborators in new genre public art practices. An "invented community" is one that is brought into being by the collaboration.

²⁵ Lolita Jablonskiene, "Political Refractions: Cities, Societies, and Spectacles in the Work of Anu Pennanen," *Framework: The Finnish Art Review* 8 (2008): 94.

²⁶ See Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003). While the monumental connotes power, the political form that that power takes and the ends to which it is used varies.

²⁷ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). de Certeau's distinctions between place/space and strategies/tactics offer ways of reading these everyday activities as contestations of power. See Quentin Stevens, "Visitor Responses at Berlin's Holocaust Memorial: Contrary to Conventions, Expectations and Rules," *Public Art Dialogue* 2.1 (2012): 34–59. Stevens also explores unauthorized or unintended uses of memorials, using the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin as a case study. The key distinction between that monument and the Soviet ones in Tallinn is that the latter are ignored and neglected by the city government. The teenagers in the film break implicit rather than explicit rules of use at the sites.

²⁸ See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995), 82.

²⁹ See Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," 66–67. Connerton identifies planned obsolescence as yet another type of forgetting.

³⁰ See Andres Kurg, "The Cold War, Sex and the City," in *A User's Guide to Tallinn*, ed. Mari Laanemets and Andres Kurg (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2002): 101–3; and Sakari Nupponen, *Aikamatka hotelli Viruun* [Time travel to the Hotel Viru (Helsinki: Ajatuskirjat, 2007)].

³¹ Andres Kurg, "Estonia: The Remarkable Afterlife of the Linnahall Concert Hall," *Architectural Design* 76.3 (2006): 53.

³² Personal interview with Anu Pennanen on 6 Feb. 2007, Helsinki, Finland.

³³ The original marble sculpture in the collection of the Art Museum of Estonia is just 142.5 cm. (55 in.) high.

³⁴ Merike Teder, "Eesti kõrgeim skulptuur valmib sügiseks" [Estonia's tallest sculpture will be completed by the autumn], *Eesti Päevaleht*, 15 Apr. 2004, <http://epl.delfi.ee/news/eesti/eesti-korkeim-skulptuur-valmib-sugiseks.d?id=50981527> (accessed 2 Jul. 2015).

³⁵ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), 31.

³⁶ See Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Art World Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004); and Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Third Text* 21.4 (2007): 369–386. Both offer critiques of participatory, project-based art in regard to neoliberalism and service economies. See Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 51–79 and *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 138–155. Bishop critiques the ways that relational aesthetics and other participatory art practices tend to theorize community and democracy.

³⁷ Sasha Senderovich, "Goodbye, Lenin?," *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/10/opinion/goodbye-lenin.html> (accessed 2 Jul. 2015), para. 12.

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Paul Wilson is an assistant professor of art history at Ithaca College in New York, where he teaches Contemporary Art and Museum Studies with a research focus on art practices after 1990. His article "What's the Time in Vyborg? The Counter-Restoration of a Functionalist Monument" (2012) in *Future Anterior* investigates a collaborative art project by Liisa Roberts that intervenes in the politics of post-Soviet memory in Vyborg, Russia. Wilson's other research on Finnish and South African artists has appeared in journals and anthologies in the United States and Europe.