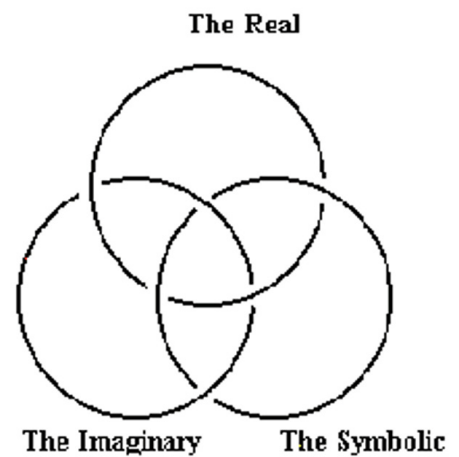


# MONUMENTALITY IN TALLINN

AR3A010 Research Plan  
Methods of Analysis and Imagination  
A matter of scale



Tutors  
Klaske Havik  
Jorge Mejía Hernández  
Willemijn Wilms Floet

Yiying Dai  
5795451

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# INTRODUCTION

The most explicit feature of Tallinn city is hybridity: the co-existence of buildings from different eras, roads with different scales, and layers of renovation on building appearances...On one hand, it weaves a wondrous and multi-experienced fabric, while on the other hand, results in a chaotic and confusing spatial composition in the vast and empty city. The complexity can be retrospect in six crucial periods that Estonia had experienced: rule of the Tsarist Russia (1796-1917), first independence (1917-1940), first Soviet occupation (1940-1941), Nazi German occupation (1941-1945), the USSR period (1945-1991), and as a sovereign state (1991-). The turbulent political situation brought legacies from different cultures and times to Estonian society. However, none of the periods is long-term and stable enough to develop an identity as an essential existence throughout history.

In contemporary understandings, monumentality is always related to ideology and national identity to remind people about political traumas. Public monuments carry collective memories that take a great part of the spirit of a city or a country. However, what to memorize seems to be an unclear topic for Estonians with such vacillating attitudes during their traumatic history. In Figure 1, taking some of the political monuments in Tallinn as samples, it can be found that a) monuments were mainly built after 1991 independence; b) people tend to build monuments in or after the period; c) among them, "communism terror" seems to be a more discussable theme that represents the last era: the USSR period (1945-1991). In addition, in all monument samples, there is a force of defense and rebellion. The political tendency and identity establishment in Estonia were based on what they did not want to become. The opposing attitudes can find proof directly in the urban fabric.

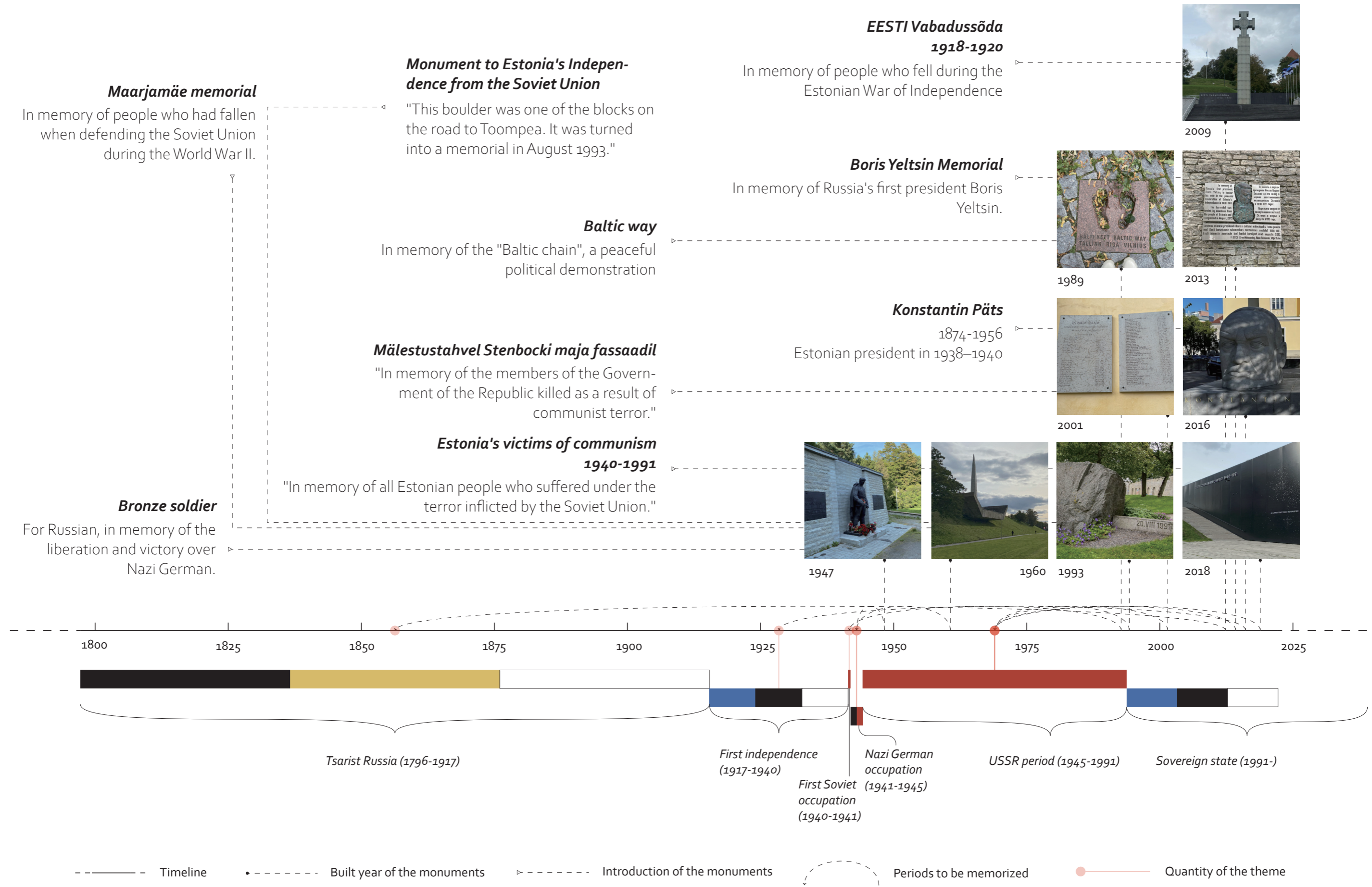


Figure 1: Timeline of historical periods and public monuments

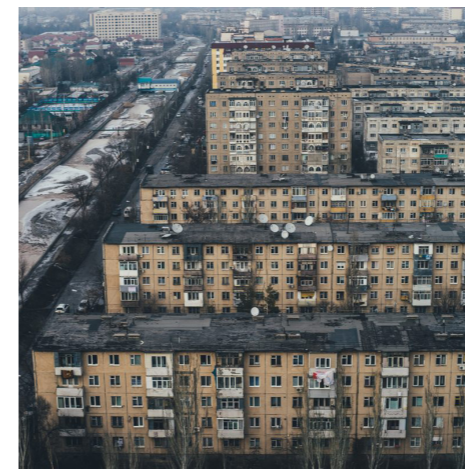
For instance, Baltic cities integrate “Western ideas and the specific context of the Soviet system”<sup>1</sup>. Compared with other countries of the Soviet Union, residence blocks in Baltic cities have looser density, more fragmented layout, nicer landscape design, and organism ideas in material use and façade decorations (Figure 2-5).

They were in a certain ideology while opposing it at the same time. On one hand, it is apparent that public monuments in Tallinn are basically to warn, oppose, and remind people of suffering memories that do not resonate with young generations. However, with nothing to persist, the opposition becomes meaningless. In this case, everyday memory becomes a more appropriate medium for people to grasp the essence of life, build their world, and learn about themselves<sup>2</sup>. Everyday monuments carry the celebration, commemoration, delight, and collective memories that support the national culture and spirit. On the other hand, the confrontation becomes the root of the hybridity in the city fabric, which creates fascinating binaries as entity/unfinished, trauma/forgetfulness, and nostalgia/envision. This provides a new sight to read the monumentality through traces and evidence of how people respond to huge social changes. It has the capacity to tell later generations about an era in a modest and implicit way. In summary, new monumentality shows in response to trauma<sup>3</sup>, namely the changes, the shock, and the vulnerable symbolic system that can no longer be maintained, in an implicit way in commonplace spaces.

1 Hess, Daniel Baldwin and Tammaru, Tiit, "Chapter 1 Modernist Housing Estates in the Baltic Countries: Formation, Current Challenges and Future Prospects", *Housing Estates in the Baltic Countries: The Legacy of Central Planning in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (16th: 2018: Venice, Italy). Cham: Springer Nature, 2019: 13.  
 2 Taul, Gregor, "Free Some Space for Weak Monuments", *Estonian Art* 1 2018, Estonian Institute, 2018: 5.  
 3 Foster, Hal. 2010. "New Monumentality: Architecture and Public Space." *Perspecta* 42 (2010): 136.

"In 1923, In the Estonian village of Torma, a statue of a kneeling warrior was put up to confront the East. When the East tame a few years later. the statue was turned to face the west, **who then came and turned him around.** followed by the East, once more, who made him face the West, before **blowing him to pieces.** In Estonia, monuments dance."

(Tadeás, Ríha, Linsj, Laura, and Reemaq, Roland, 2018.)



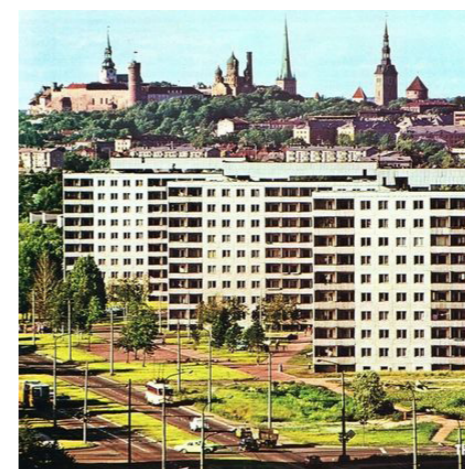
South Gates Microdistrict, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Figure 2



TP-8 type dormitory building, Vorkuta, Russia

Figure 4



Tallinn, Estonia

Figure 3



Pae, Tallinn, Estonia

Figure 5

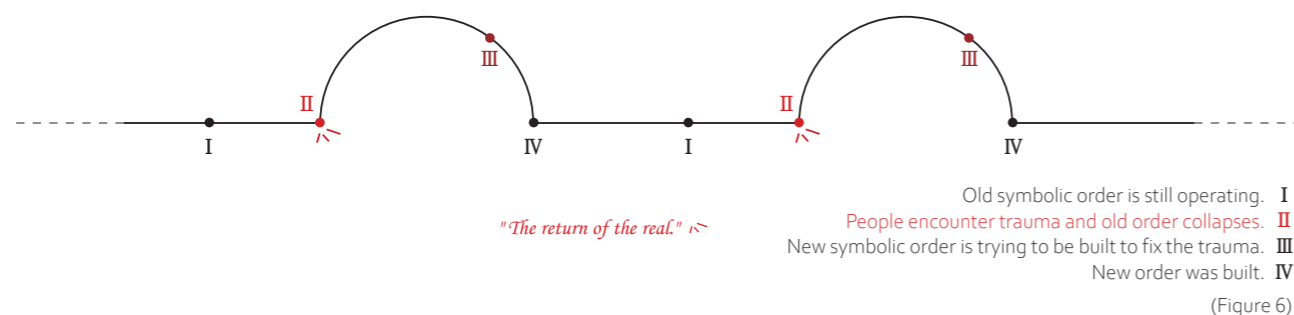
**Density**

**Material**

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Monumentality in response to trauma was raised by Hal Foster as "the return of the real"<sup>4</sup>. He proposed "the real" in two senses: "First, in the common sense of social reality- a re-engagement with life as lived, apart from the sense that everything is mediated- and then in the Lacanian sense of the real as the traumatic- the abject body, in particular, was presented as an allegory of an abject society"<sup>5</sup>.

In Lacanian senses, trauma is the moment when people directly encounter the Real without the Symbolic as a mediation due to some fundamental contradictions that are unable to be symbolized<sup>6</sup>. Apart from the traditional understanding of the Symbolic as ideology and language, regulations, disciplinary orders, and social crises can also be extended as a symbolic order. Trauma makes existing symbolic order collapse, leading to an iteration. Through generations and generations of collapsing and rebuilding, the society develops, layers are added to the existing sites and the city gradually builds itself (Figure 6).



<sup>4</sup> Foster, Hal. "New Monumentality: Architecture and Public Space." *Perspecta* 42 (2010): 136.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>6</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "The Parallax View": 25-26, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006.

Public monuments are responses to trauma as well. However, they are intentional responses that limit the understanding of monumentality. The original meanings of a political monument were valid only when the ideological framework was still in place<sup>7</sup>. Monuments need to be adapted to new interpretations or functions otherwise they are just a base. For Riegl Alois, monumentality is revealed in unintentionally built monuments that allow open interpretations and new adaptations<sup>8</sup>. When later generations read the architectural details: the rhythm of the façade, material use, the room layout, the layers of renovations...they would uncover subtle hints of people's attitudes and reactions facing the traumas in old times. People can have an instant experience of multiplicity<sup>9</sup> when they have this nuanced exploration and see how the hints are connected with each other in the same fabric. It holds a more implicit manner than a stone proclaiming that "I am a monument". However, it is stronger and more striking in its richness of memories.

<sup>7</sup> Tadeáš Riha, Linsi, Laura, and Reemaa, Roland, "Weak Monument: Architectures Beyond the Plinth", International Architectural Exhibition (16th: 2018: Venice, Italy). Zurich: Park Books, 2018: 13.

<sup>8</sup> Riegl, Alois, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development", *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, Los Angeles: Getty Conversation Institute, 1996: 78.

<sup>9</sup> Tadeáš Riha, "Weakness in Architecture", *Estonian Art 1 2018*, Estonian Institute, 2018: 17.

In the common senses, Hal Foster explains “the return of the real” as “re-engagement with life as lived”, which, in my personal perspective, can be interpreted as “weak monument” raised by Laura Linsi, Roland Reemaa, and Tadeáš Říha (Figure 7-9). They borrowed the term “weak” from Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo to capture “the condition of relativity and rootlessness”<sup>10</sup>. They point out the character of transience in architecture and suggest that monuments need to be adaptive to new needs for long-term maintenance due to “the inevitable degradation of the built, and the irreversible decomposition of the organized”<sup>11</sup>. This kind of monument is not everlasting anymore. It loses the feature of resisting time, instead, it becomes fluid, temporary, and adaptive. Compared with public statues, the weak monument is more related to everyday life. Architecture is communal “as a good that is shared by citizens and offers access to the tradition of the ordinary”<sup>12</sup>. The everyday experiences in the space have a full immediacy which allows commonplace to become “a locus that has meaning for many and thus receives the status of a monument”<sup>13</sup>.

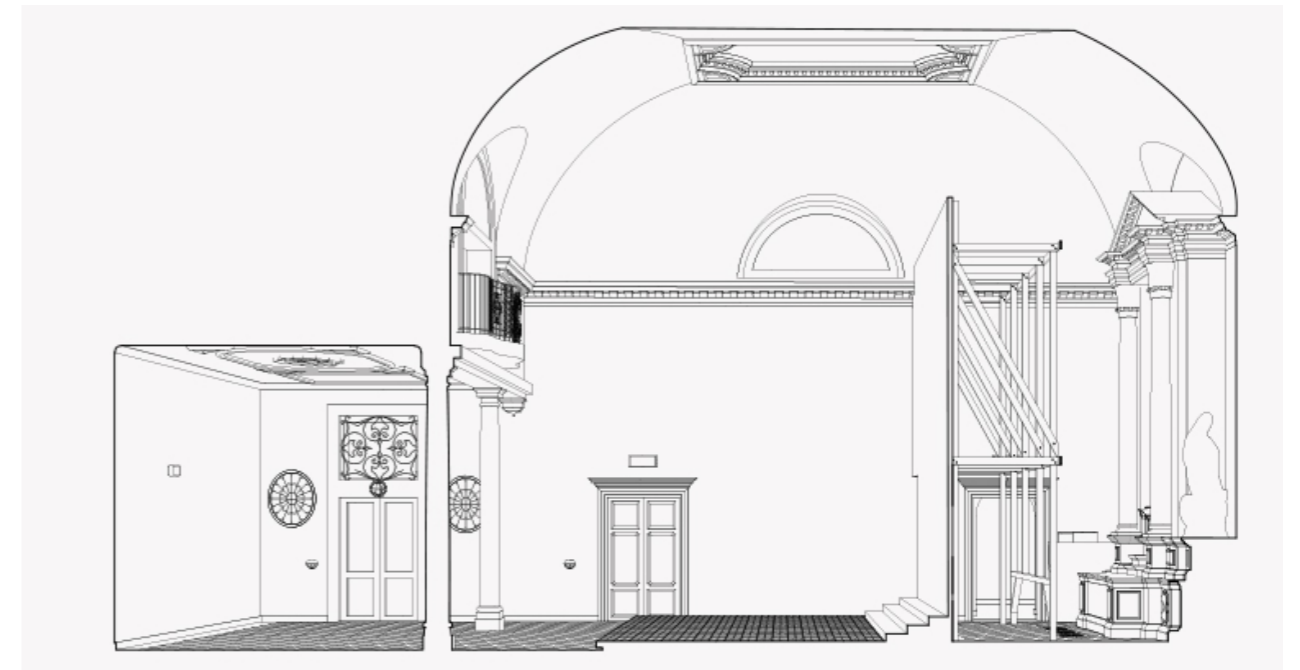


Figure 7



Figure 8

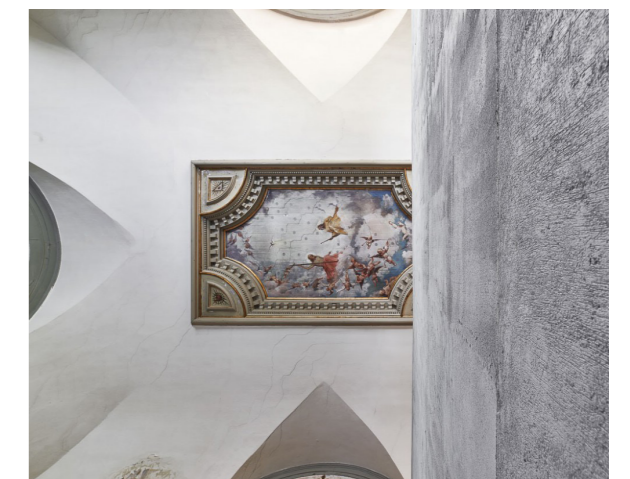


Figure 9

The Estonian Pavilion at the 2018 Venice Biennale designed by ŘíhaTadeáš, Laura Linsi, and Roland Reemaa.

10 Tadeáš Říha, “Weakness in Architecture”, Estonian Art 1 2018, Estonian Institute, 2018: 14.

11 Avermaete, Tom, “Towards Another Rhetoric: Or the Importance of Thinking the Weak Monument”, International Architectural Exhibition (16th: 2018: Venice, Italy). Zurich: Park Books, 2018: 30.

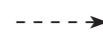
12 Ibid., 33.

13 Ibid., 33.

**WEAKNESS**

**TRAUMA**

"...the cultural-political framework that stood at its erection is still in place<sup>14</sup>."



**Transience**



After old symbolic system collapse, the legacy of the old appear to be the evidence of trauma in the new system.

"To think of the monument as a movable, temporary, even rentable set <sup>15</sup>..."

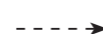


**Adaptation**



Monumentality reveals in iterations of symbolic systems, in terms of architecture, in hybrid context of different eras.

"In the case of the unintentional monument, it is 'we modern viewers...assign meaning and significance to a monument <sup>16</sup>'"

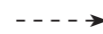


**Open interpretation**



Legacies from old times can have new interpretations when new layers are added.

"If the architectural form is at all political, it is mostly political by implication<sup>17</sup>."

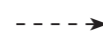


**Implicitness**

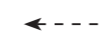


Architectures are unintentional monuments that in a implicit way record stories of what have existed, to be or not to be memorized.

"...the capacity of architecture to act as a "charged void" with the "capacity to charge the space around it with an energy which can join up with other energies, to influence the nature of things that might come<sup>18</sup>."

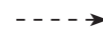


**Connection**



The way that how iterations happen matters. The connection between different iteration layers takes the responsibility to allude the stories.

"...the commonplace in the city and its ability to act as a monument...as a good that is shared by citizens and offers access to the tradition of the ordinary<sup>19</sup>..."



**Ordinary**



Everything can be monumental. Commonplace, which carries the collective memory of the whole society, from a bottom-up perspective, shows even clearer the situation of an era.

14 Tadeás, Riha, Linsi, Laura, and Reemaa, Roland, "Weak Monument: Architectures Beyond the Plinth", International Architectural Exhibition (16th: 2018: Venice, Italy). Zurich: Park Books, 2018: 13.

15 Ibid., 15.

16 Avermaete, Tom, "Towards Another Rhetoric: Or the Importance of Thinking the Weak Monument", International Architectural Exhibition (16th: 2018: Venice, Italy). Zurich: Park Books, 2018: 26.

17 Tadeás, Riha, Linsi, Laura, and Reemaa, Roland, "Weak Monument: Architectures Beyond the Plinth", International Architectural Exhibition (16th: 2018: Venice, Italy). Zurich: Park Books, 2018: 11.

18 Avermaete, Tom, "Towards Another Rhetoric: Or the Importance of Thinking the Weak Monument", International Architectural Exhibition (16th: 2018: Venice, Italy). Zurich: Park Books, 2018: 31.

19 Ibid., 31.

By putting the summaries of both senses together, 6 features of new monumentality can be concluded: transience, adaptation, open interpretation, implicitness, connection, and ordinary. A vision of a new monument gradually emerges:

- a) to consider the life span of the physical form;
- b) to adapt it to new demands;
- c) to allow free and open understanding of its value;
- d) to include as many as historical evidence in details;
- e) to link it with the surrounding sites or architectures;
- f) to memorize an everyday life theme.

# METHODOLOGY

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS MONUMENTALITY?
2. WHAT IS THE IMPLICIT MONUMENTALITY IN TALLINN, IN THE EXISTING CONTEXT?
3. HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE MONUMENTALITY AND POLITICS IN THE SMALLEST UNIT?
4. HOW DO THESE UNITS FUNCTION IN COMMONPLACE?



## SUB QUESTIONS & POSSIBLE FORMS

### 1. WHAT IS MONUMENTALITY?

Morphology study and theoretical research

### 2. WHAT IS THE IMPLICIT MONUMENTALITY IN TALLINN, IN THE EXISTING CONTEXT?

What is the problematic situation in Tallinn city that is no longer able to persist? (Disfunction, disorder, disconnection group analysis)

If there any existing "monuments" revealing these 6 terms in the existing urban fabric? (Contextual case study)

What are the traumas they respond to? How do they layered on each other? (Time line + Typology analysis on layering)

### 3. HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE MONUMENTALITY AND POLITICS IN THE SMALLEST UNIT?

What are everyday politics? (Morphology, function, role in everyday life)

(List of analyses on basic elements, pavement, fence, plinth, stairs...)

### 4. HOW DO THESE UNITS FUNCTION IN COMMONPLACE?

What are the places carrying collective memories? (Narratives and stories)

How events happen in everyday routine? (Maps and patterns)

## PROJECT BRIEF



IS IT POSSIBLE TO BUILD A MONUMENT?

## WHY?

There is no monument carrying people's collective memory that properly functioned as a symbol of the time.

## WHAT?

A "monument"

## WHO?

For local citizens

## How?

Renovation / intervention

In the chain of daily routine, find one or multiple segment(s) to:

- a) strengthen its connection with the whole chain
- b) adapt it to new demands, at the same time, preserve the old evidences
- c) implicitly show monumentality (weakness / trauma) based on the study on everyday politics

## WHERE?

In residential districts (For example: Raua district)

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**Figure 2:** Arseniy Kotov. *South Gates Microdistrict, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*. Photograph. A Photographer's Ode to Everyday Soviet Architecture. 5 November 2019.  
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**Figure 3:** Arseniy Kotov. *TP-8 type dormitory building, Vorkuta, Russia*. Photograph. A Photographer's Ode to Everyday Soviet Architecture. 5 November 2019.  
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**Figure 7:** Tadeás, Ríha, Linsi, Laura, and Reemaa, Roland. *A perspective section drawing of the Weak Monument installation, showing the construction of the installation within the baroque church*. Drawing. PIN-UP Magazine. May 2018.  
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**Figure 8:** Tonu Tunnel. *A visitor seated on a bench within the installation of Weak Monument*. Photograph. PIN-UP Magazine. May 2018.  
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**Figure 9:** Tonu Tunnel. *A ceiling detail of the deconsecrated church Santa Maria Ausiliatrice where Weak Monument was staged*. Photograph. PIN-UP Magazine. May 2018. <https://archive.pinupmagazine.org/articles/james-taylor-foster-estonian-pavilion-venice-biennale-2018>