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ARTICLE

"Where the Aura of a Tyrant Remains": Absent Presence and Mnemonic Remains of Socialist-Era Monuments

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to the absent presence and mnemonic remains of the socialist-era monuments in eastern Europe. Mnemonic remains is a metaphor I employ in this paper to direct our attention to the physical absence of monuments after their removal. But it also speaks of a monument's role *in absentia*, its continued existence in and its effects on the collective memory beyond its physical presence. The phenomenon, sporadically acknowledged but rarely subject of investigation in academic literature, is explored and illustrated through the lens of the removed V.I. Lenin monument in Riga. The absent monument, I contend, performs the function of a phantom monument, exerting mnemonic agency beyond its physical presence through its representational value for other memory projects. This is highlighted through the study of the proposed and completed, but never unveiled, monument to Konstantīns Čakste on the site of the former Lenin monument in Riga.

Keywords: absence; collective memory; iconoclasm; Latvia; Lenin monument

Regime change is often accompanied by the acts of iconoclasm or a purposeful destruction, removal or dismissal of monuments and symbols. The end of socialism in Europe in the late 20th century was one such momentous moment in recent history. Stanislav Holubec and Agnieszka Mrozik even argued that the scale of changes to memorial landscapes in Europe after 1989 is comparable only to the "removal of Roman memorials by Christian zealots in late antiquity" (2018, 11). In turn, the removal of the socialist-era monuments produced "leftover landscapes of emptiness" across the cites in eastern Europe in the wake of the collapse of socialism (Czepczyński and Sooväli-Sepping 2016, 248). However, as I argue in this article, the absent monuments did not merely leave behind seemingly "obscure public squares or city parks" (Moore 2021). Rather, the mnemonic remains they left behind constitute part of the "contextual forces influencing urban form, identity and discourse" (Diener and Hagen 2013, 490). Mnemonic remains is a metaphor I employ in this article to direct our attention to the physical absence of monuments after their removal. But it also speaks of a monument's role *in absentia,* its continued existence in and its effects on the collective memory beyond its physical presence.

As far back as the early 1990s, the productive absence and mnemonic endurance of the removed socialist-era monuments began to attract attention of scholars and artists alike (Yampolsky 1995; Calle 2013). Despite that, detailed studies of absent monuments remain sparse in scholarship except for the often-brief references to the phenomenon. In Yerevan, Diana Ter-Ghazaryan writes that "the emptiness and absence left behind by where Lenin used to stand looms large" in the context of post-Soviet memory work (2013, 584). In Riga, Sergei Kruk observes that "the Lenin monument was dismantled in 1991; however the spot in front of the central government building still retains its

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meaning" (2009, 715). In Nowa Huta (Kraków), former home to the largest Lenin monument in Poland, Kinga Pozniak relatedly remarks how even "though the statue is no longer physically present, 'the square where Lenin used to stand' (*plac po Leninie*) is nonetheless an empty monument" (2014, 53). However scarce, observations such as the above highlight the role and spatialization of memories that keep the monuments alive as "felt absences" even in the absence of their physical traces (Smith and Burch 2012, 413–14). In other words, memories can recreate and sustain the absent monument. In this way, the absent monument could perhaps be conceptualized as "a *lieu de mémoire détruite*, a curious site of destroyed memory with the preserved memory of the destruction," after the suggestion made by Maria Todorova in the case of the destroyed Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Sofia (2006, 408). Although undoubtedly not all socialist-era monuments left the same mark on collective memories to qualify as such, as I see it, there are at least two implications that can be drawn from the existent scholarship on post-socialist iconoclasm and its legacies.

First, the persistence of mnemonic remains of socialist-era monuments, as observed in the literature and further illustrated in the latter sections of my article, questions the often-presupposed linear relationship between iconoclasm and forgetting (Buchli and Lucas 2001, 80–81). Relatedly, the ability of iconoclasm to prolong memory calls for the recognition of a "theoretical distinction between memory and material survival" (Forty 1999, 12; Gamboni 2016, 168). As a result, I argue, it is important to take note of the multitude of survivals when it comes to monuments and to look beyond their materiality to fully understand their mnemonic lives and subsequent afterlives (Cherry 2013, 3). In this article, this is achieved through the lens of what Derek N. Boethcer refers to as "an expanded conceptualisation of iconoclasm," which takes account of a "series of post-fall responses to a monument and its site's physical state and context over time, the site's continued symbolic meanings, and the site becoming home to new monumental or other symbolic expressions" (2020, 594). The physical absence of the monument becomes a starting point for this study rather than its end point. In turn, my goal is to highlight the agency of absence, as it is animated through collective memory. In this, my article and its focus on the new monumental expressions offers a complementary discussion to recent scholarly work on artistic and performative responses to the "missing" socialist-era monuments (Belcheva 2022; Gemziak 2022; Preda 2023, 558).

Second, it is important to recognize the fact that absences are not matters in and of themselves. Rather, as Morgan Meyer observes, they are "something that is made to exist through relations that give absence matter" (Meyer 2012, 107). That is, the agency of absence is activated and performed through the connections we establish with the immaterial. As Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sørensen elaborate, "the absent elements are sensuously, emotionally and ideationally present to people, and are articulated or materialized in various ways through narratives, commemorations, enactments of past experiences or visualisations of future scenarios" (2010, 3–4). My discussion in this article explores these constituent elements through which absence is experienced and made to matter in the present. Merging this relational-ontology-of-absence approach with that of the expanded conceptualization of iconoclasm, my article offers a framework through which to disentangle the absence of one of the socialist-era monuments in eastern Europe and the role of their mnemonic remains when it comes to the engagements with their empty sites (Meyer 2012, 107; Boethcer 2020, 594). Namely, my article looks at the mnemonic legacy of the monument dedicated to Vladimir I. Lenin (hereafter, the Lenin monument) that was unveiled in Riga on the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1950 and which was removed in the wake of the August Putsch and the declaration of de facto independence of the Republic of Latvia in 1991 (Andrejevs 2022a, 47–76). Even with the proliferation of Soviet monuments in Riga throughout the second half of the 20th century, the Lenin monument remained the central symbol of the Soviet regime in the city with the help of its central location, integration into Soviet rituals such as celebration of state holidays or circulation of its images via postcards and books (cf. Kruk 2010, 257–59; see figure 1). In this article, I examine its mnemonic legacy through the study of conception, reception, and contestation of the proposed, completed but never unveiled monument to Konstantīns Čakste on the site of the former Lenin monument to illustrate the

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СКУЛЬПТУРНЫЕ ПАМЯТНИКИ ГОРОДА

Латышская скульптура, как и все искусство латышского народа, особенно начала развиваться после восстановления Советской власти. Скульпторы стремились в художественных образах запечатлеть события жизни латышского народа, увековечить память революционных борцов, виднейших политических и государственных деятелей

В канун десятилетия Советской Латвии, 20 июля 1950 года, на перекрестке улиц Ленина и Кирова был сооружен памятник **Владимиру Ильичу Ленину**. На пьедестале из украинского красного гранита установлена шестиметровая бронзовая статуя Ленина. Общая высота монумента — более 12 метров. Его авторы: скульпторы Б. Боголюбов и Е. Ингал, архитектор — действительный член Академии наук Латвийской ССР Э. Шталберг.

Памятник выдающемуся деятелю Коммунистической партии Латвии **П. И. Стучке воздвигнут** в 1962 году в сквере на площади Пионеров. Автор — известный латышский скульптор проф. Э. Мелдерис.

Гранитный бюст Сергея Мироновича Кирова установлен в парке его имени. Работа выполнена в 1954 году латышским скульптором В. Рапикисом.

Памятник героям революции 1905—1907 годов находится на Комсомольской набережной, где проводятся праздничные демонстрации. Памятник этот — символ непобедимости революционного знамени пролетариата. Авторы — скульптор А. Терпиловский и архитектор К. Плуксна, монумент создан в 1959 году.

Памятник В. И. Ленину

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Figure 1. The Lenin Monument in Riga, the Central Symbol of the Soviet Regime (1971).
Source: Kalnroze/ Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

push-and-pull effect that the mnemonic remains of the removed monument can have in the context of memory production (2002–2004).

Taken together, I argue, the empty sites of absent monuments have the potential to offer an intriguing category of study through which to explore tensions between remembering and forgetting or the intersections between "forgetfulness through negation: clearing away the old monuments" and "affirmative commemoration: replacing old monuments with new ones" that was a visible facet of monumental activity across post-socialist cities after the fall of the Soviet Union (Assmann 2022, 27). Likewise, my article directs attention to the relationship between mnemonic remains of absent monuments and what Chryssanthi Papadopoulou refers to as the "phenomenon of the phantom place" whereby "a bygone place can acquire such representational value *in absentia* as to become an immaterial presence that shapes current experience of the tangible place" (2016, 378). My proposition is that the absent Lenin monument could be thought of as a *phantom* monument in so far as the mnemonic remains of the absent monument became a representational filter through which the proposed monument to K. Čakste on the site on the Freedom Boulevard was conceptualized, received, and contested by memory actors involved as well as the broader public. As such, my notion of mnemonic remains rests on the heuristic dichotomy of mnemonic and physical remains. The latter category is taken to consist of the tangible leftovers of monuments, whether this be a statue, pedestal, or even a minuscule fragment. Monuments are thus broadly conceived as "material" and "plastic" objects (Young 1993, 3–4). In practice, the two proposed categories are interrelated. After all, a tangible piece of the monument can serve as a mnemonic device and thus contribute to the persistence of the monument in the collective memory. However, although the afterlives of monuments in this article are taken to refer to a broad range of actions and media (e.g., relocation, photographs, fragments), the mnemonic remains of the monument are in

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turn understood as a subset of the afterlife that relies on the immateriality of the absent monument. That is, memories of the monument, unmediated by or through its physical remains, are at the core of the proposed phenomenon.

The arguments in the article rely primarily on the documents from the Latvian State Archives, the Riga City Council Archive, and those held within the Monument Documentation Centre of the State Inspection for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (Heritage). The minutes of the advisory body of the Riga City Council that reviews and assesses monument proposals, the Monument Council, and the reports and correspondence available in the Monument Documentation Centre in relation to the monument to Konstantīns Čakste offered insights into the institutional reception of the monument proposal. This was supplemented with the LURSOFT newspaper library, which covers over 100 national- and regional-level newspapers published since 1994 as well as the collection of digitized and print newspapers in the National Library of Latvia. My engagement with the newspaper databases was guided by keyword searches in relation to the monument and events under consideration (e.g., central actors involved). This was further refined with the help of the National Bibliography database run by the National Library of Latvia, which offers information on serial publications such as newspapers, journals, and magazines published in Latvia since 2000. The collection of published interviews, articles, and letters helped me to gain an insight into public reflections on the above-mentioned monument proposal. However, although my discussion touches on the matters of memory transmission and reception, the nature of the sources at my disposal means that it remains largely conceptual. Rather, the focus is dedicated to the production of memory and by extension the products of memory work, "all the different spaces, objects, 'texts' that make an engagement with the past possible" (Irwin-Zarecka 2017, 13). To draw on the approaches to memory reception, proposed by Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Tea Sindbæk Andersen, and Astrid Erll, my article is implicitly concerned with the "mediated reception" or extrapolative "reception via production" (2017, 7). Albeit interrelated, the converse study of "reception of mediated memory in the minds of individuals" would be driven by different research aims and set of sources, which are outside the remits of this article (Törnquist-Plewa, Andersen, and Erll 2017, 7–8).

Drawing on the above sources, the remaining discussion in my article is split into four sections. The following section introduces the pertinent context of post-Soviet collective memory dynamics in Latvia and situates the monument proposal under consideration in this article within it. The second section discusses the influence of the existent memorial landscape in Riga on the selection of the Freedom Boulevard site for the proposed monument. In addition to observing the importance of memorial landscape on the proposed placement of the monument to K. Čakste, my discussion proposes mnemonic remains as a pertinent factor within memorial landscapes that needs to be accounted for. The third section looks at the intersection between mnemonic remains and imperatives of affirmative commemoration. That is, this discussion explores the favorable role mnemonic remains can play in reinforcing commemorative significance of absent monuments for new memory projects, as captured through public perceptions of this relationship. Following from that, I focus on the opposite, detrimental effect that mnemonic remains of the absent Lenin monument had on the institutional and public response to the proposed placement of K. Čakste monument. Looking at the nature of existent memory of K. Čakste and the Latvian Central Council in the mid-2000s, my final section offers brief observations on its role as a productive backdrop for the activation of mnemonic remains of the Lenin monument. Taken together, these sections are dedicated to elucidating the role of mnemonic remains of the Lenin monument within conceptualization, reception, and contestation of the monument to Konstantīns Čakste on the site of the absent socialist-era monument.

Post-Soviet Memory Work in Latvia: In Search of New Heroes and Usable Past

Over the course of the 20th century, it is possible to speak of at least three political regime changes in Latvia. The Republic of Latvia emerged on the contemporary political map after the proclamation of

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independence from the Russian Empire in 1918. The interwar independence was lost during the Second World War to two occupying forces, Nazi Germany (1941–1944) and the Soviet Union (1940–1941, 1944/45–1991), and then fully restored at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991–present). Already at the time of the independence movement in the late 1980s, as debates became more open under the auspices of late-Soviet reforms, complexities of this 20th-century history began to come to the fore in Latvia. In particular, the history of Soviet repressions offered the "emotional current" on which the late-Soviet memory work was carried (Zelče 2014, 199). Remembrance and commemoration of the victims of the Soviet regime continued to form the dominant anti-Soviet consensus within national memory even after the restoration of independence in the early 1990s (Zelče 2009, 46–48; Kaprāns 2016, 78–80). During this stage of memory production, anti-Soviet actors were elevated to the status of national heroes. The commemoration of Latvian soldiers conscripted into the Latvian Waffen-SS (or the Latvian Legion), part of the German forces during the Second World War, and postwar partisans exemplified a new heroic narrative (Kaprāns and Zelče 2011, 41). Although the conscription into the two divisions of the Latvian Legion was officially recognized as a violation of international law, the parliament of the Republic of Latvia further argued that "the aim of the soldiers enlisted in the Legion and who joined voluntarily was to protect Latvia from the restoration of the Stalinist regime" (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 1998, 5). Controversies around a compartmentalized perspective on the Latvian Legion, as merely anti-Soviet, as well as local collaborationism during the Nazi German occupation led to a gradual shift in the national memory work (Onken 2007, 33–34; Zelče 2009, 48–50). With accession to the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on the political agenda, as Aija Rozenšteine et al. observe, "integration into the European historical space also meant abandoning the mid-1990s discourse about Latvian legionnaires as heroes of history" (2011, 151). More broadly, the Western pressure on the memory work in late-1990s and early-2000s led to the reexamination of history of the Nazi German occupation, Holocaust, and more broadly that of the Second World War (Kangeris 2010; Bērziņš 2017, 278–79; Plakans 2018, 95–96). As I suggest, it is within this shifting memory landscape that the abortive work on the monument dedicated to Konstantīns Čakste and the Latvian Central Council (hereafter, the LCC) can be situated in.

The LCC was founded in August 1943 by the representatives of the four major political parties of the interwar period as an underground resistance movement that positioned itself in opposition to both Nazi German and Soviet regimes.[1] Konstantīns Čakste, a professor of law at the University of Latvia and a son of the first president, became its chairman. Čakste was arrested by the *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Gestapo) in 1944 and died during the evacuation of the Stutthof concentration camp in 1945. In the context of the controversies around the commemoration of the Latvian Legion veterans, albeit without the participation of government officials after 1998, the tentative calls for and steps toward inclusion of the LCC and Konstantīns Čakste into national memory as alternative sources of heroic past could be observed (for example, Caune et al. 1999; Latvijas Republikas Saeima 1999, 6; Neiburgs 1999). In 2000 the Latvian Soldiers Remembrance Day, associated with the commemoration of the veterans of Latvian Legion, disappeared from the official calendar and the most consequential shift toward engagement with Konstantīns Čakste and the LCC could be observed not long after.

Most notably, in 2002 an article appeared in Latvian press, titled "Latvian in the Second World War" (or in the English version, "The True Freedom Fighters"), written by Jānis Peters, one of the most prominent intelligentsia figures of the independence movement of the late-1980s and the ambassador of the Republic of Latvia to the Russian Federation until 1997 (Peters 2002a; 2002b). Acknowledging that Latvia's role in the Second World War is commonly presented through the mobilization of the population into either the Red Army or the Latvian Legion, Peters expressed regret that not more had been done to highlight the "third way" (cf. Ezergailis 1997; Swain 2009; Zelče and Neiburgs 2018)—that is, the national resistance movement as a proud and heroic example of Latvia's role in the Second World War. Peters insisted that with the approaching 60th anniversary of the LCC, in 2003, "Konstantins Cakste and the movement he led have earned

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the recognition of Latvia and its citizens" (2002b). Noticeably, Peters' article followed the commemorative narrative that had evolved in the course of the 1990s.[2] It positioned the LCC, however imprecisely, at the forefront of the national resistance movement and elevated the role of Konstantīns Čakste within it (on the national resistance movement(s), see Neiburgs 2011; Neiburgs 2018).

The article by Peters became a catalyst for the establishment of a contract society [līgumsabiedrība] or the initiative group for the construction of a monument to Konstantīns Čakste as "one of the most courageous and selfless Latvian people" (Berķis et al. 2002a, 2002b; Stranga 2002) and "in his symbolising image—to the whole Latvian national resistance movement led by him" (Peters 2002c, 5; Peters interviewed by Šteimane 2003a). Established in October 2002, the initiative group consisted of 25 mostly well-known business owners and politicians who committed to donate 10,000 lats (approximately 10,600 in British pound sterling) or otherwise contribute to the promotion of the initiative.[3] The composition of this support community ensured the immediate availability of capital for the memory project and the institutional standing of its members secured an initially favorable political reception of the initiative. However, by the start of 2003, the motivation of the constituent members of the support community as well as the boldness and hastiness of the initiative became the subject of public contention. As Ojārs Spārītis points out in the discussion of the political context of monument construction in Riga, "the large number of unpopular surnames among its supporters instantly awakened public distrust, and the impression of oligarchs yet again capriciously erecting something in place of the former Lenin monument" (2007, 198). It became seen as a top-down endeavor led by political and economic elites, as an imposed "history lesson in lats and meters" (Avotiņš 2002). In the context of unstable or at worst subsiding public resonance of promoted memory of Čakste and the LCC—a point I return to in the closing section of my article—the announcement of the monument was perceived as an instance of "history management" *by* elites and *for* the benefit of the elites (Zelče 2002). Notwithstanding these heighted levels of suspicion, in the first few months, it was precisely the elite nature of the initiative group that allowed it to secure a swift institutional approval of the monument. The approval of the location for the monument was one of the tasks achieved in the process.

Memorial Landscape and Its Influence on the Proposed Placement

The site on the Freedom Boulevard, the intersection of Freedom Boulevard and Elizabeth Street, the former location of the Lenin monument, was selected for the monument to Konstantīns Čakste from the start (see figure 2).[4] However, this choice was not justified through the associations of the site with the removed monument. Rather, the choice of the site was most vocally defended by the lawyer-cum-politician widely associated with the process of denationalization in the 1990s and one of the most active members of the initiative group, Andris Grūtups, via the need to safeguard it from other monuments. As Grūtups himself wrote, "it became known that the place near the Cabinet of Ministers was already reserved for Peter I, thus the question about the place for the K. Čakste monument became a matter of principle" (2002). The statue of Peter I, once located on the site of the interwar-built Freedom Monument in Riga, was reconstructed with the financial support of a local businessman Evgenii Gomberg (see Spārītis 2007, 192). Between 1999 and 2007, the businessman financed the restoration and commission of seven statues and 10 commemorative plaques in Riga. Although some of the earlier restorations—the statues of Peter I (1910/ 2001) and Barclay de Tolly (1913/ 2002) in particular—resulted in a pro-Imperialist label being leveled against him, it was an interest in the history of the city that had fuelled this restorative agenda, as Gomberg explained to me.[5] In 2001, the statue of Peter I was offered to the city as a gift on its 800th anniversary. It quickly became a point of contention and beyond its controversial and limited appearance remained placeless (Bleiere 2010, 388–391; Gombergs 2010). However, in contrast to what Andris Grūtups insisted was the case, in my archival research I found no evidence of such a proposed placement for Peter I. Evgenii Gomberg likewise publicly insisted that he had never envisioned the statue on the site (2004).

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Figure 2. Freedom Boulevard, the Empty Site of the Former Lenin Monument (2021).
Source: Author.

In the context of the restoration of 19th- and early 20th-century sculptures in the city, as I see it, the stance taken by Andris Grūtups can be understood through its perceived potential to gather support. In other words, the monument to Konstantīns Čakste was presented as a patriotic counterweight to what was regarded by some as the "un-Latvian" sculptures unveiled with the financial support of Evgenii Gomberg. Proximity to the Freedom Monument and its central location, which as implied by discussions within the Monument Council, meant "that the simplest sculpture would become significant here," seemed to further increase attachment to the site.[6] The 42-meter Freedom Monument was unveiled to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the War of Independence (1918–1920) and had quickly become an encompassing symbol of independence since then (see Spārītis 2007, 33).[7] Located just a few hundred meters away from the location in question, the proximity between the two was perceived as indicative of the potential dialogic commemorative augmentation (Dwyer 2004; see figure 3). After all, as Owen J. Dwyer observes, "rather than forming an inert backdrop for the public representation of history, the relative location of a memorial is an integral component of its meaning" (2002, 32). That is, the placement of a monument contributes to the creation of a spatial narrative that acts as a filter through which the commemorated past is interpreted (Alderman, Brasher, and Dwyer 2020, 40). The proximity and commemorative significance of the Freedom Monument were perceived to have the potential to enhance commemoration of K. Čakste as, to borrow the description of the LCC offered by the Commission of Historians, "the only one that consistently advocated for the restoration of an independent, democratic, 18 November 1918 established Latvia" (Caune et al. 1999). As observed by Anna Glew in the context of post-Soviet Ukraine, the interplay between perceived symbolic potency and availability of sites can influence the construction of new monuments in reference to the location of existent monuments (2021). In Riga, the spatiocommemorative influence of the

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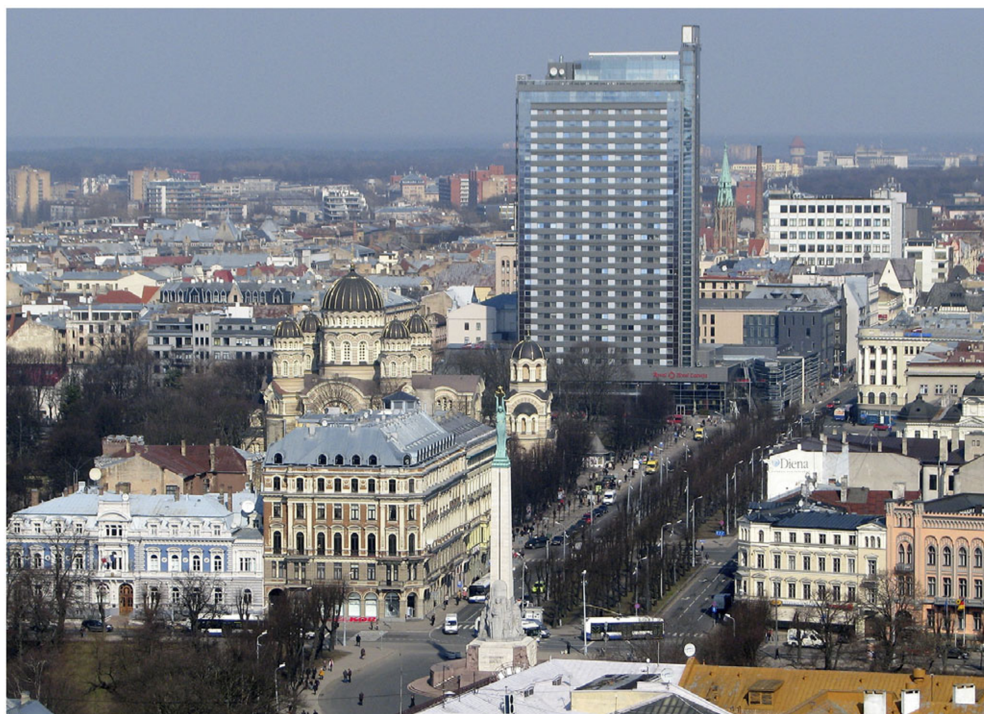

Figure 3. Freedom Monument and Freedom Boulevard (2010).
Source: Evita/ Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

interwar Freedom Monument was likewise recognizable in suggestions that the new monument be constructed in its proximity.[8] But as I argue in the next section, the proposed use of the site of the absent monument was perceived not only through its availability in the context of the symbolic potency of the Freedom Monument. Rather, the empty site contained its own mnemonic atmosphere that could be mobilized and augmented by that of the nearby Freedom Monument.

Mnemonic Remains as a Foundation for the Affirmative Commemoration

Although the site chosen was not publicly defended by the members of the initiative group in terms of its association with the former Lenin monument, this mnemonic connection became a noticeable strand in public discussions of the envisioned location for the monument to Konstantīns Čakste.[9] Even at the opening discussion, in October 2002, of the proposed monument, by the Monument Council, a connection between the removed and proposed monument was being made. In the minutes of the meeting, it is recorded that "discussion arises over the suitability of the placement. It is noted that replacing one statue with another is fundamentally wrong. To build a monument on this site would be amoral [amorāli]."[10] Thus, not only was the location associated with the removed Lenin monument; the proposed monument itself was perceived as its replacement. Unfortunately, the minutes stop short of expanding on the perceived amorality of the site proposal. Questions about the chosen site could still be heard a month later at the meeting of the Monument Council attended by the members of the initiative group. Yet, the language of the minutes of the meeting suggests a less strong reaction and overall the Monument Council remained conceptually supportive of the proposed monument.[11] Despite questions about the suitability of the envisioned site, by November 2002, the Cabinet of Ministers officially supported both the proposed monument and the chosen site,[12] and in December 2002, Riga City Council gave the green light to the monument,

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albeit leaving the exact spot on "Freedom Boulevard, the section from Kalpaka Boulevard to Elizabeth Street" unspecified.[13]

At the early stages of the monument approval, in 2002, the choice of the site associated with the removed Lenin monument was not exclusively seen as detrimental. The president, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, welcomed the idea of the monument and in one of the published interviews, she offered the following assessment of the proposed location:

> [T]hat place would not be bad at all. Just as the Freedom Monument stands in the place of the former symbol of the tsarist empire [Peter I], in the former place of Lenin we are now erecting a monument to a defender of Latvian freedom and democracy. It seems to me that symbolically it would be wholly appropriate. (interviewed by Krēvics, 2002)

Inadvertently or not, the envisioned location of the K. Čakste monument prompted reflections that associated the proposed monument with that which it was replacing and saw it as a positive substitution for the removed Lenin monument. Further, it was perceived to have the potential to liberate the site from the memories of the former monument. As one of Čakste's extended family members suggested in a letter I found in the Riga City Council Archive, the monument on this site had the potential to "slowly erase [izdzēstu] from the nation's consciousness this site's meaning of the earlier, bygone time, and give it something to connect it with Latvian history."[14] This sentiment was publicly repeated by the chairman of the board of the Latvian Cultural Foundation, Pēteris Bankovskis (2002), who wrote that

> it is understandable that the initiative group wants to place a monument in the centre of Riga, in the vicinity of the Freedom Monument, with another symbol relevant to Latvia's statehood, to erase another—a symbol openly hostile to this statehood, more precisely, this symbol's shadow. (memories about the former Lenin monument by Bogolubov and Ingal)

In other words, similar to the way in which not many recall the monument to Peter I on which foundations the Freedom Monument was built as a pertinent fact, it was argued that the memories of the removed Lenin monument would become irrelevant with time and with the construction of the K. Čakste monument. The monument would reclaim the space, both physical and mnemonic. The proposed monument was perceived to engage in the simultaneous negation and affirmative commemoration (Assmann 2022, 27). However, Riga is hardly the exception in this. When it comes to the sites of former Lenin monuments across post-socialist capital cities, it is not uncommon to encounter replacements and new monuments.[15] Kristoffer Michael Rees, for instance, observes in relation to the new monument on the site of the former Lenin monument in Almaty, that "being built on top of, and marching forward from, a Soviet-era foundation, the monument serves as a metaphor for the decolonization of a state built on its Soviet past" (Rees 2020, 450). In contrast, the proposed construction of the monument to K. Čakste and the LCC emphasized another symbolic trajectory—one that turned away from the Soviet past and returned to/moved forward to the ideals of interwar independence epitomised by the Freedom Monument.

Mnemonic Remains as a Commemorative Obstacle

However, the salience of the location is not necessarily unidirectional and can be mobilized by both proponents as well as opponents of its selection (Benton-Short 2006). As the project continued to evolve, the mnemonic association drawn between the envisioned site and the former monument were increasingly mobilized against the project. Looking through the corpus of newspaper articles compiled with the help of the National Bibliography database at the National Library of Latvia and the LURSOFT newspaper library, one theme was particularly intriguing. There was a striking incidence of references to the supposed "bad aura" of the site. Although the bad aura was not

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defined in the letters or articles that employed it, it gave the empty space of the former Lenin monument characteristics of a site of memory. After all, as Pierre Nora suggests, a site of memory emerges “only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura” (1989, 19). In this process, the surviving mnemonic remains of the Lenin monument, synthesized with the proposed monument to K. Čakste in the mnemonic imagination, connected the experiences of the past with the unfolding present and projected future to the detriment of the latter monument (Bille, Hastrup, and Sørensen 2010, 3–4; Keightley and Pickering 2012, 43–80). Bracketing the wider discussions of the monument, in some cases the mere fact that the Lenin monument once occupied the site, fueled arguments that maintained it would be unacceptable or even offensive to commemorate K. Čakste on the site “where the aura of a tyrant remains” (Tarvids 2002). Further, as suggested by the report prepared within the Riga City Council’s Department of City Development, there were concerns that both negative and positive memories behind these auratic associations of the site with the Lenin monument might lead to a skeptical reception or even vandalism of the proposed monument (if or once it was constructed).[16] But as the above discussion has already highlighted, not everyone perceived this aura to be detrimental, and they remained more optimistic. As the prospective Minister of Culture Helēna Demakova suggested after the completion of the first round of the design competition in 2003, a skilful monument design would be able to “deconstruct” the bad aura and to “rehabilitate” the site (Demakova 2003; Demakova cited in Kļaviņa 2003).

The desire of the initiative group to see sculptural likeness and the figurative design by Gļebs Panteļejevs (sculptor) and Andris Veidemanis (architect) led to further parallels between the monuments being made (see figure 4).[17] As Wendy Bellion observes, “figural sculpture may be especially susceptible to such ghostings […] for its signifying power turns in part on its recognizable conventions of scale and iconography: of what, in short, came before” (2019, 128). In Riga, during the viewing of the mock-up of Panteļejevs’ design, the head of the State Inspection for Heritage

Figure 4. Visualization of the Monument to Konstantīns Čakste and the National Resistance Movement (2004). *Source*: Gļebs Panteļejevs and Andris Veidemanis/ Riga City Council Archive.

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Protection of Latvia Juris Dambis similarly commented, "I wonder if there should be a sculptural image, because when the figure is placed on the pedestal, associations with the old times are formed, and with this, the monument loses out [zaudē]" (cited in Āboliņš 2004, 3). The former Head Architect of Riga Gunārs Asaris further insisted that "it is not acceptable that the sculpture is oriented to the east, thus causing lighting problems, and the monument will be associated with the Lenin monument."[18] Likewise, some further questioned the suitability of the site, vis-à-vis its relative location to the Freedom Monument. Even among the observers who otherwise might have been indifferent to the project, the proposed placement was contentious. As one letter published at the time put it, "I do not know how much K. Čakste contributed to the good of Latvia, but it is difficult to concede that he was such a scoundrel that he would turn his back on the Latvian Freedom figure as a monument" (Šķiezna 2004, 2). The monument to K. Čakste had to contend with not only the bad aura of the site of the former Lenin monument but in equal measure with the "aura of the Freedom Monument," its mental and physical "space of influence" [iedarbības telpā] (Šteimane 2003b, 3; Ilmārs 2004). The figurative design by Gļebs Panteļejevs was subject to two mnemonic filters through which the memories of the Lenin monument and the former symbolism of its east-facing placement, away from the Freedom Monument, were projected onto it. Both mnemonic accents were mobilized against the monument.

The sculptor understood and addressed the mobilized memories against the monument. In an interview that took place before a mock-up, Panteļejevs noted that "this place has been compromised by Ilyich" but insisted that "the spatial location of this site is [more] difficult" (interviewed by Kļaviņa 2004, 13). The sculptor redirected the focus toward the spatial context of the site as the barrier that had to be overcome rather than its supposed bad aura. Panteļejevs was not the only one to highlight factors such as a lack of access to the site, the surrounding heavy traffic, and the influence of the nearby architecture. Nevertheless, media focus on the bad aura of the site persisted. A few months after the above-cited interview, Panteļejevs was once again asked to comment on the view that some people perceived the monument as a "replacement of one uncle in a coat by another uncle in a coat" (Mūrniece 2004). The sculptor replied briefly and emphasised the malleability of memories over time—"yes, our generation and older people can still see it [that way]. But not young people' (Panteļejevs interviewed by Mūrniece 2004, 19). In this way, Panteļejevs suggested that there are generational fault lines when it comes to the mnemonic effects of the removed Lenin monument. In this, he was not alone. Not too long before the above interview, Gundega Cēbere (2004, 2) similarly responded to criticisms of the by then almost ready monument and its proposed location:

> The press has for some time continued to lisp [čalošana] about the bad aura of the site, although a new generation has grown up that does not know that the Lenin monument stood [...] at the intersection of Freedom and Elizabeth Streets, unless it is unmeritedly and constantly being reminded of.

Although I do not have extensive evidence to elaborate on such generational memory fault lines, having been born after the collapse of the Soviet Union myself, it is hard not to agree with Panteļejevs and Cēbere. It was the decorative sculpture dedicated to the 800th anniversary of Riga, which stood on the site between 2001 and 2004, that was my primary mnemonic anchor (see Spārītis 2007, 183). Indeed, a small-scale survey commissioned by Riga City Council in 2004 indicated that younger respondents (18 to 24 years old) were most likely to support decorative sculptures and installations at the intersection of Freedom and Elizabeth Streets rather than another monument (as well as 33.7% of the total number of respondents, as reported in LETA 2004). Nevertheless, the absent Lenin monument in Riga can be likened to the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, in so far as Maria Todorova suggested that it "will remain as an image in the purview of the collective and personal memories of the generation that has seen it" and "is likely to remain at least in the verbal memory of the next generation as one of the prime symbols of the period" (2006,

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410). Even without a clear articulation of generational differences in the perception of the mnemonic remains of the Lenin monument, one thing remains certain —"absences need memories to fill them with life" (Meier, Frers, and Sigvardsdotter 2013, 425). In the present case, it was the intersection of personal and mediated memories or the convergence between "an embodied intergenerational" and "a disembodied and reembodied transgenerational memory" that sustained the absent monument (Assmann 2008, 56). Undoubtedly, mnemonic remains of the absent monument are likely to have their expiry dates. However, as long as mnemonic connections are being made and mediated between the site and the absent Lenin monument, it is not completely free from its former occupant. The most recent public art installation, dedicated to the centenary of independence proclamation—*the Gate of Honour*—which stood on the site from 2018 to 2021 and one of the acquired pejorative nicknames of "Lenin's Pants," is a case in point (see Bormane 2018).

A Note on the Termination of the Monument Construction

Although memories of the Lenin monument endowed its former site with a bad aura, I argue, a lack of memories about the LCC and Konstantīns Čakste made the proposed monument a *premature* monument. The idea of a premature memorial was proposed by Ann Rigney in the context of the Irish National War Memorial Gardens. Exploring the history of its construction and the commemorative context, Rigney observed that

> whereas public monuments are usually the outcome of a long process leading to official recognition [...] the Islandbridge monument was put down in the public space before the story it mediated had found a place within the dominant memory of the Irish state. (2008, 94)

Thus, as with the memory of the Irish soldiers (who served in the British Army in the First World War) at the time of the Islandbridge memorial construction in 1930s Dublin, the monument to the LCC and Konstantīns Čakste was proposed at a time when they were largely absent from the wider memory culture in Latvia. The existent infrastructure of collective memory of the LCC and Čakste was not sufficient enough to form the basis on which memory work around the proposed monument could rest. In my conversation with Aivars Stranga, the historian who was involved in the early stages of the initiative, it was suggested that perhaps the mistake was "that the idea of the monument came first, and everything was twisted around it, [even] before a very serious conversation took place about the contribution of this Latvian Central Council."[19] Another Latvian historian, Daina Bleiere, likewise contends that "probably, the project was started from the wrong end" (2010, 401). In many ways, the resultant situation could be described as a *monument before* or perhaps *instead of memory*, to draw on my discussion of the monument with Ojārs Spārītis.[20] In other words, the monument was proposed at a time when memory of the war-time resistance and the role of Konstantīns Čakste within it were yet to find their place and recognition in the national memory. The proposed monument and the associated side products in the form of books and documentaries became merely a stage in the memory work on the way toward such acceptance (Neiburgs 2011, 117).[21] The incomplete diffusion of this memory could be observed even in the immediate aftermath of this mid-2000s memory work. Even a few years later, only 21% of surveyed high schoolers identified K. Čakste as a member of resistance movement(s) during the Second World War, with 40% mistakenly associating him with the chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (Makarovs and Boldāne 2009, 9). In the end, as Jānis Lejnieks observes, "the bad 'aura' of the place was the main argument for public opinion makers along with the generally unknown personality of Čakste" (2017, 63). And although the Council for the Preservation and Development of the Historic Centre of Riga (formed in 2003) refused to give its permission for the construction of the monument on the grounds of the architecture of the site and the design of the proposed monument, the bad aura of the site undoubtedly remained a potent albeit unspoken barrier in the final decision on the monument.[22] Ultimately, as I argued in the

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above sections, the mnemonic remains of the absent monument became a representational filter through which the proposed monument to K. Čakste on the site on the Freedom Boulevard was conceptualized, received, and contested by memory actors involved as well as the broader public. The lack of consolidated memory of K. Čakste and the LCC became a backdrop for the activation of these mnemonic remains.

Concluding Remarks

My article highlights the role mnemonic remains played in sustaining the Lenin monument as a phantom monument, which exerts mnemonic agency beyond its physical presence through its representational value for other memory projects (whichever the polarity of its value). Situating the monument to Konstantīns Čakste in the wider context of post-Soviet memory transformations, I highlight the intersection between the imperatives of affirmative commemoration and the legacies of the negated Lenin monument via the employment of its mnemonic remains in memory work. The discussed case underlines the malleable borders between remembering and forgetting. That is, mnemonic legacies of the absent Lenin monument are not linear. Neither are they one-sided. On one hand, engagement with mnemonic remains of the Lenin monument was seen by some as an appropriate step toward negating the mnemonic hold of the absent monument over the vacant site. On the other hand, the same mnemonic remains of the Lenin monument hindered the proposed site reuse and affirmative commemoration. Pronouncedly, my discussion of the public and institutional responses to the K. Čakste monument highlights how references to the bad aura of the site, based on the mnemonic associations of the site with the absent monument, were mobilized against the proposed monument. These mnemonic associations led to the K. Čakste monument being perceived through the lens of the absent monument. The projected figurative similarities, like placement and eastern orientation produced mnemonic equivalence between the "old" and the "new" which was detrimental to the favorable reception of the K. Čakste monument. In this, as my discussion highlighted, the commemorative expanse of the Freedom Monument became an additional reference point for the post-Soviet memory work in Riga. The lack of stable memories of K. Čakste and the LCC further offered fertile conditions for the articulation of the memories of absent monument through the proposed site-specific connection.

Thirty-one years since the removal of the Lenin monument, on the twenty-fifth of August 2022, the main column of the Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders (more widely known as the Victory Monument) was demolished in Riga (see Spārītis 2007, 41). The demolition of the largest Soviet-era war monument in Latvia took place in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Andrejevs 2022b).[23] Although an analysis of the influence of the war in Ukraine on the Latvian memorial landscape is beyond the scope of this article, the mass removal of the Soviet-era war monuments across the country does have an important implication considering the arguments presented in this article. For instance, in the wake of the removal of the Victory Monument in Riga and more broadly of the Soviet-era monuments across eastern Europe since the invasion of Ukraine, Helen Parrish argued that the "empty spaces left by statues communicate a message that is as powerful as the propaganda of the statue itself" (2022). Although the long-term mnemonic influence of the removed Soviet-era war monuments and their messages are yet to take their conclusive shape in Latvia, my findings in relation to the removed Lenin monument and its mnemonic remains do suggest that the mnemonic connection between the empty sites and the absent Soviet-era war monuments is likely to be one of the legacies of their removal. At the very least in the case of the Victory Monument, I would propose that the monument possessed enough mnemonic energy or symbolic power to fuel the formation of associated mnemonic remains in the aftermath of its removal (Procevska, 2016; Yekelchyk 2021; ISSP 2023). A future study of the nature and configuration of the mnemonic influence of the Victory Monument could be one of the lenses through which the effects of this latest wave of de-Sovietization of public space could be examined.

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Notes

1 After the coup d'état and establishment of authoritarian rule in 1934, led by the first prime minister of the Republic of Latvia, Kārlis Ulmanis, the parliament was dissolved along with the political parties (on the period see Hanovs and Tēraudkalns 2013; Stranga 2018). The LCC was comprised of members of four such parties that participated in the political life during the parliamentary period of the Republic of Latvia between 1922 and 1934: the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party, the Democratic Centre Party, the Latvian Farmers Union, and the Latgalian Christian Farmers and Catholic Party.

2 Between 1993 and 1994, two commemorative plaques were dedicated in Riga to Konstantīns Čakste "under whose leadership the Latvian Central Council—the National Resistance Movement Center—was founded in August 1943 in opposition to [cīņai pret] foreign occupation powers' (text from the plaque on Dzirnavu Street 31).

3 For the list of contributors, see Berķis et al. (2002a) or Berķis et al. (2002b). The conversion of lats into British pound sterling was done with the help of the online currency converter for historical rates, run by the Bank of Latvia (Latvijas Banka 2022).

4 Between 1950 and 1989, Freedom Boulevard was part of Lenin Street. The interwar name was restored as part of the street name restoration campaign that began in 1987 (see Eglitis 2002, 129–44). Along with several other streets, the rest of Lenin Street regained its interwar name (that is, Freedom Street) in late 1990 (Latvijas Valsts arhīvs (hereafter LVA), 1400. f., 13. apr., 1377. l., 241–47. lp.).

5 My interview with Evgenii Gomberg, Riga, August 2019.

6 LVA, 2220. f., 2. apr., 1320. l., 102. lp. Note: post-1997 documents within this collection/ fond are currently stored in the Riga City Council Archive.

7 Although the Freedom Monument survived the wave of removals of comparable interwar monuments across Latvia in the 1950s, it was subject to discursive as well as urban marginalization for much of the Soviet regime's fifty years (see Kruk 2009, 712, 715). The construction of the Lenin monument on the same axis as the Freedom Monument in 1950 meant that for the next forty years the symbolic opposition of the two monuments was a constant for some residents of Riga (Svede 2002, 237–39; Kruk 2009, 714).

8 Recently, the spatial relationship between the two locations was codified in the "Freedom Monument and Rīga Brethren Cemetery Law," whereby Freedom Boulevard and consequently the empty site of the Lenin monument became the "protective zone" of the Freedom Monument (see State Language Centre 2020). As a result, the commemorative significance of the vacant site became even more pronounced, even though the new law is unlikely to facilitate construction of new monuments.

9 Commitment to the site on the Freedom Boulevard was not universal within the initiative group. Whereas Andris Grūtups and the record keeper [lietvedis] of the initiative group, Jānis Naglis, defended the choice of the site, Jānis Peters continued to publicly remain much more flexible about the location of the monument (Peters interviewed by Šteimane 2003a; Peters cited in Petrovs 2003; LVA, 2220. f., 2. apr., 1320. l., 101. lp.).

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10 LVA, 2220. f., 2. apr., 1320. l., 61. lp.
11 LVA, 2220. f., 2. apr., 1320. l., 101–02. lp.; LVA, 2220. f., 1. apr., 2558. l., 122–23. lp.
12 The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia of November 4, 2002, from the folder on the K. Čakste monument in the archive of the Monument Documentation Center of the State Inspection for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (Heritage).
13 LVA, 2220. f., 1. apr., 2557. l., 164. lp.
14 LVA, 2220. f., 1. apr., 2998. l., 165. lp.
15 New monuments and sculptures appeared on the sites of former Lenin monuments (or in their near proximity) in cities such as Tashkent in 1992, Dushanbe in 1994, Almaty in 1997, Sofia in 2000, Bishkek in 2003 and 2011, Tbilisi in 2006, Chișinău in 2010, or Bucharest in 2016 (cf. Cummings 2013; Rees 2020; Adams and Lavrenova 2022).
16 The review of the monument proposal, prepared within the Department of City Development in October 2004, from the folder on the K. Čakste monument in the archive of the Monument Documentation Center of the State Inspection for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (Heritage).
17 Panteļejevs and Veidemanis took over the commission after the contract with the first sculptor, Ojārs Feldbergs, was terminated in 2004. The design by Feldbergs was much more abstract, but reportedly was too expensive.
18 LVA, 2220. f., 2. apr., 1324. l., 4. lp.
19 My interview with Aivars Stranga, Riga, January 2020.
20 My interview with Ojārs Spārītis, Riga, December 2019.
21 A step toward inscription of the LCC into national memory was taken in the summer of 2021 with the elevation of the anniversary of the "independence" memorandum signed by the members of the LCC on March 17, 1944 as the Remembrance Day of the National Resistance Movement (on the LCC memorandum, see Kvāle 2014). However, the ambivalence of the referent in the title of the Remembrance Day still leaves the LCC obscured in the broad narrative of national resistance movement. The facets of the 20th-century national resistance are currently subject to the Latvian State Research Programme "The Archaeology of Independence: Towards a New Conceptual Perspective on National Resistance in Latvia."
22 The minutes of the meeting of the Council for the Preservation and Development of the Historic Centre of Riga of October 6, 2004, from the folder on the K. Čakste monument in the archive of the Monument Documentation Center of the State Inspection for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (Heritage).
23 By November 2022, 124 "Soviet regime glorifying objects" were removed across Latvia under *the Law on the Prohibition of Exhibiting Items Glorifying the Soviet and Nazi Regimes and Their Dismantling in the Territory of the Republic of Latvia* (June 2022).

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