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# Enacting Identities in the EU–Russia Borderland

## An Ethnography of Place and Public Monuments

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Drawing on Rogers Brubaker's theoretical analyses of "nationness" and nationalism in post-communist Europe, this article examines the dynamics of social identity within the nationally contested setting of the Estonian–Russian borderland. Since 1991, the city of Narva (96% Russophone by population) has customarily been defined (both politically and academically) in binary national terms as a "Russian enclave" within a unitary and "nationalizing" Estonian state. An ethnographic approach to the case, however, gives a rather different perspective, pointing to hybridity rather than nationality as the defining characteristic of identity politics within the city. In what follows, we bring to bear the results of extensive fieldwork carried out in Narva during 2006–2008. We first examine how different identity categories (local, national, meso-regional, and supranational) are being officially inscribed within Narva's sites of memory. Thereafter, we focus on how these discursive-material articulations of place are implicated within the everyday performance of identity amongst the city's population. Using the novel methodology of photo elicitation, we examine how residents of Narva appropriate but also subvert the identity categories that elites and outsiders (including ourselves as researchers) would seek to impose on them from above. This study (we argue) is significant for its methodological novelty, as well as in terms of giving a more nuanced understanding of Narva's situation at a time of continued ethnopolitical contestation within Estonia as a whole.

**Keywords:** *identity; Estonia; monuments; nationalism; Narva; place; heritage; photo-elicitation*

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In a series of works published since the early 1990s, the sociologist Rogers Brubaker has argued for a performative understanding of social groups and of group identity. Ethnicity and nationhood, he insists, should be viewed not as properties of substantive, stable entities but as social categories that can be invested with varying degrees of groupness, depending on the particular context within which they are invoked.<sup>1</sup> Following Brubaker's approach, "The fundamental question is not 'what is a nation' but rather: how is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalised within and among states? How does nation work as practical category, as classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame? What makes the use of that category by or against states more or less resonant or effective? What makes the nation-evoking, nation-invoking efforts of political entrepreneurs more or less likely to succeed?"<sup>2</sup>

According to Brubaker's performative understanding, "groupness" is constructed within discursive social fields. In his view, the study of "nationness" (and other contingent identity events) requires us to look first of all from the top-down, at the ways in which nationhood and other social categories are "institutionalised, discursively articulated [and] . . . embedded in culturally powerful and symbolically resonant myths, memories and narratives."<sup>3</sup> Place evidently has an important part to play within this process. Through place-making—most especially the construction of officially sanctioned "sites of memory"—elites seek to materialize and eternalize particular claims about groups and their past.<sup>4</sup>

As Brubaker acknowledges, however, our understanding of identity dynamics can be significantly enhanced by adopting an ethnographic perspective and examining the perspective "from below."<sup>5</sup> His most recent work thus urges us to look beyond the macro-political level and pay attention to "the ways in which [those who are] categorised appropriate, internalise, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them."<sup>6</sup> In saying this, he follows Eric Hobsbawm's celebrated observation that "nations and nationalism are constructed from above, [but] can only be fully understood from below, in terms of the needs and expectations of ordinary people, which are often not national, still less nationalist."<sup>7</sup>

Similar ethnographically based insights have been usefully applied to recent studies of place-making and the constitution of "heritage." All too often, the focus in this area is on the "symbolic struggles" of elites and how, through these, the meaning of historic sites is continually reconfigured, interchanged and "tailored to [meet] the needs of the present . . . and especially the future" in an effort "to determine, delimit, and define the always open meaning of the present."<sup>8</sup> Seen from this perspective, places of memory are first and foremost "sites for symbolic control and symbolic resistance."<sup>9</sup> As Tadhg O'Keefe has observed, however, the engagement of "non-elites" within place-making cannot simply be reduced to acts of compliance and non-compliance with discourses of power.<sup>10</sup> By imposing their own everyday meanings and perspectives on the places they encounter on a daily basis, the residents of particular places are themselves active participants in the symbolic construction of landscape.<sup>11</sup>

O’Keefe also reminds us that the relationship between humans and landscape is not simply one way: just as people make places, so landscape itself has an active role in the shaping of “our simultaneously multiple identities as humans.”<sup>12</sup> Such an understanding is central to the theoretical approach of Actor Network Theory, which views the social not as a purely discursive construct but as enacted through the associations of human and non-human entities.<sup>13</sup> Within this reading, material things are themselves performative: rather than simply responding to human action, they “exert force themselves [. . .], change and shape human intentions, meanings, relationships, routines, memories, even perceptions of self. . . . Things exert attachments that *enact identities*.”<sup>14</sup>

The object of the ANT approach is not to assert the primacy of one category over another but rather to understand how the human and the non-human interact within networks to produce particular “things” and particular “effects,” the latter of which may be either fleeting or of a longer, more stable character.<sup>15</sup> As we discuss in our case study, this approach can be easily exemplified with reference to the materiality of a state border, which clearly influences the understanding of particular contiguous places held by residents of the border area. The presence of a border—the material embodiment of an imagined spatial boundary—and the act of crossing it also enmeshes a person within a network or regime of governance comprising rules and related norms, a range (usually) of documents as well as other material enactments such as border posts, signs, state symbols, uniforms and so on. This invariably affects, however temporarily, a person’s sense of self, as any regular traveler would testify.

The agency of the material can also be illustrated with regard to public monuments. While the latter cannot lay claim to autonomy from the context within which they are seen, they nevertheless have agency in the sense that they elicit a range of responses at precise moments of commemoration or at times of heightened political awareness.<sup>16</sup> Sites of memory amplify political protest and messages, which is why people will habitually gather at particular places to give power to their protest. Monuments can thus be characterized as *catalysts* in the enactment of identity: they do not *cause* the effect in question, but they clearly affect the process, without necessarily undergoing any physical change themselves.<sup>17</sup> In the words of George Schöpflin, “monuments are integral to identity construction and maintenance”;<sup>18</sup> the network of relations that sustains “nationness” and other performances of identity cannot be fully understood without reference to the input from the object, which can be crucial to the experience of “being overcome by nationhood,” to use Slavenka Drakulic’s term.<sup>19</sup>

At other times, public monuments may elicit no political effect whatsoever. In this connection, they have been famously described as “invisible,”<sup>20</sup> though they might equally well be characterized as “mute.” The role of monuments and other objects in the enactment of identity, however, is not necessarily confined to official moments of commemoration—as Michael Billig has famously observed, “the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being constantly waved

with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.”<sup>21</sup> Exactly how these objects function in different contexts is best appreciated by means of ethnographic investigation, with its “unreplicable insight into the processes and meanings that sustain social groups.”<sup>22</sup> It was an investigation of this kind that we embarked upon in Estonia’s eastern border city of Narva during 2006 to 2008.

### **“Woe from Stones”: A Macro Perspective on Monuments and Identity in the EU–Russia Borderland**

Viewed from a macro-political perspective, the significance of monuments to identity enactment has been abundantly clear during the political changes and upheavals that have occurred in Central and Eastern Europe following the end of state socialist regimes and the demise of the USSR.<sup>23</sup> One of the best-known recent examples can be found in Estonia, a “plural society state”<sup>24</sup> that remains enmeshed within an avowedly post-colonial network of identity political discourses<sup>25</sup> encompassing the Estonian state, its Russian-speaking population (most of whom were denied the right to automatic citizenship following the reestablishment of Estonia’s independence in 1992), the Russian Federation and the governments of the EU and other European and Euro-Atlantic organizations.<sup>26</sup> In the course of 2004–2007 a conflict (the so-called War of Monuments) was enacted around two sites of memory—the first, inaugurated in summer 2004 by veterans groups and local council leaders in the western Estonian town of Lihula, was a small stone tablet bearing a relief of a soldier wearing the uniform of the Estonian SS Legion, along with a dedication to “Estonian men who fought in 1940–45 against Bolshevism and for the restoration of independence”; the second—colloquially known as “Alyosha” or the “Bronze Soldier”—was a statue of a Soviet soldier erected in 1947 as a monument to the liberation of Tallinn from fascism. The monument was left in place after 1991, but its inscription was altered so as simply to commemorate (in Estonian and Russian) “the fallen of 1939–1945.” When, in response to external protest, the Estonian government intervened to remove the Lihula monument, this prompted an Estonian nationalist mobilization that began to call for the removal of the Bronze Soldier from the centre of the capital Tallinn. The decision by a later Estonian government to accede to this demand elicited a counter-mobilization amongst local Russians in defence of the monument, culminating in three nights of rioting during April 2007.<sup>27</sup>

Using the strap-line “Woe from Stones” (*hüda kivide pärast*), an Estonian newspaper editorial would later ponder how so much fuss could be caused by a few statues. The research project described in the present article—which was actually elaborated in summer 2004 just prior to the start of the “war of monuments”—essentially turned this question on its head, for it sought to ascertain why the insertion of particular memorial objects to a particular environment in post-Soviet Estonia did *not* in fact

elicit a greater degree of contestation. The environment in question is Estonia's north-eastern city of Narva, which—both historically and from a contemporary perspective—has been habitually constructed as a contested borderland.<sup>28</sup> In the centuries prior to the Russian Revolution, Narva experienced periods of Danish, Livonian, Swedish, and Russian rule. Inter alia, it occupies a particular place in both the Swedish and the Russian historical imagination, as the site of two significant battles during the Great Northern War of the early 1700s. By spring 1917 ethnic Estonians made up a narrow overall majority of the population of Narva and its contiguous settlement of Ivangorod on the other side of the Narva River. The inhabitants of the two towns opted in a referendum to join the autonomous province of Estland in spring 1917 and ultimately became part of the independent Republic of Estonia established following the victory of nationalist forces over the Bolsheviks during 1918–1920. Estonia was then forcibly annexed by the USSR during 1939–1940, before being occupied by Nazi Germany during 1941–1944. In 1944 the historic Swedish-era centre of Narva was reduced to rubble by aerial and artillery bombardment, as the Soviet Army advanced to drive out the Germans and reclaim Estonia for the USSR.

After the War, Narva was rebuilt as an architecturally modernist “Soviet place” and resettled almost entirely with new inhabitants from the Russian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian republics of the USSR. By the time Estonia's independence was restored in 1991, 96% of the city's inhabitants declared that Russian was their mother tongue. The resumption of Soviet rule after the war was also decisive in shaping Narva's current identity as a border city. For 300 years prior to this, Narva and Ivangorod had in effect functioned as a single agglomeration. In 1945, however, the Soviet authorities designated the Narva River as the boundary between the Estonian SSR and the neighbouring RSFSR: Narva was thus assigned to the Estonian Republic, and Ivangorod to the Russian. Following the collapse of Soviet authority, this border became a “hard” inter-state border between Estonia and the Russian Federation. From 2000 it became subject to the Schengen regime, in preparation for its new role as external border of the European Union following Estonia's accession in May 2004.

Over the past two decades Narva and its surrounding region of Ida Virumaa (82% Russian-speaking by population) have formed the object of a number of academic studies exploring how this putative “Russian enclave” sits within the structures of the re-established unitary Estonian nation-state, and the imagined political community that is being constructed around these.<sup>29</sup> Of particular interest for our purposes were two studies focusing on place and identity that were carried out unbeknown to us but almost simultaneously to our own project. In the first, Robert Kaiser and Elena Nikiforova made Narva the focus for a geographical study on “the performativity of scale,”<sup>30</sup> which focused on how discourses of Estonianness and Europeanness are allegedly being used simultaneously to naturalise the nation-state as the dominant scale-based ontology within the city. Russian sociologist Olga Brednikova, by contrast, highlighted what she saw as a more diverse set of spatial practices in her own study of identity dynamics within the city. For her, “what is being brought up to date [in Narva] is not a policy of

difference and opposition (typically found in border zones), but a policy of identity in connection with . . . the most diverse forms and images.”<sup>31</sup>

This latter view broadly corresponded to our own image of Narva when devising our own research project back in 2004. For us, Narva was the place that exposed the limits of the “nationalising” state model commonly applied to the new or reconfigured states of Central and Eastern Europe, a city where the logic of local politics dictated an altogether “fuzzier” approach to the articulation of “stateness,” “nationness” and other social categories.<sup>32</sup> What one finds in Narva’s commemorative landscape is not a coherent chronotype connected with an Estonian nation-state but an array of different—in some cases one might say diametrically opposed—narrations of political space coexisting uneasily yet peacefully alongside one another.

The sovereignty of the Estonian Republic has been enacted in Narva through the display of flags on public buildings and other “banal” everyday manifestations of national identity. A partial de-Sovietisation of public space was also carried out following a decisive change of city government in October 1993: streets were renamed, and the city’s Lenin monument was removed from its plinth in the centre of the city’s main square. Initially deposited in a nearby timber yard, this statue later re-appeared in a quiet corner of the grounds of Narva’s historic fortress. In addition, the Old Narva Society (*Vana Narva Selts*), an association founded by the city’s original pre-war inhabitants and their descendents, has in recent years erected a series of small memorials marking the site of key public buildings from the old city that were destroyed in 1944 and not subsequently rebuilt. While these can be seen as an embodiment of a cosmopolitan as opposed to peculiarly ethnic Estonian memory, they nevertheless also create a social space defined by a contemporary need to return to the “normality” that purportedly existed before the onset of “illegal” Soviet rule in 1940. The identity of “Old Narva” is also performed through numerous books, calendars, and a series of photographs that adorn the outside terrace of the city’s newly refurbished central hotel.

These manifestations of “Estonianness,” however, coexist with numerous surviving Soviet-era sites of memory dedicated to the 1944 liberation of Narva from fascism, which have remained unaltered since the reestablishment of Estonia’s independence. Also still in place are monuments commemorating various figures in the city’s late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century labour movement. Alongside these still visible symbols of the Soviet past one can find a bronze bust of the Russian national poet Aleksandr Pushkin (erected in 1999), tsarist-era monuments to the Russian troops who fell during the two battles of Narva during the Great Northern War, as well as a restored World War II German military cemetery and a White Russian military cemetery from the time of the Russian Civil War.<sup>33</sup>

The particular monument that inspired our research project was the so-called Swedish Lion, which was erected in Narva in November 2000 as the centerpiece of a week-long “Swedish days” festival staged on the three-hundredth anniversary of

the first Battle of Narva, when the army of Charles XII defeated a much larger Russian force under the command of Peter I. Donated to the city by Sweden, the monument was framed by Narvitian and Swedish elites not as a symbol of a historic Swedish victory but as a memorial to all the fallen of the Great Northern War. Primarily, however, it was represented as a symbol of what Kaiser and Nikiforova term “future Narva.”<sup>34</sup> In the words of one local commentator, the monument was intended to function as a “visiting card” of Sweden that symbolized the city’s growing economic and cultural ties with the country during the 1990s and hopes for continuing engagement within the framework of the emerging “Baltic Sea Region.”<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the monument could indeed be construed as part of a scalar politics designed to naturalize the new Estonian Republic: dominant historical narratives within Estonia hark back to the “Happy Time” during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the territory of present-day Estonia formed part of the extended Swedish realm. For Narva’s post-Soviet political leadership, too, the city’s Swedish era has clearly been pinpointed as a “usable past” that can be employed as part of efforts to forge a new identity for the city in the present. By way of further confirmation, the Lion was modeled on a similar monument put up in 1936 during a visit to Narva by the Swedish Crown Prince, but later destroyed during the War.

The categories “nation” and “Europe” have not always been coterminous in the case of post-Soviet Narva. This much became clear during the inauguration of the Lion, when Estonia’s minister of education expressed a hope that local residents would find time to learn Estonian before embarking on the study of Swedish. In other contexts, too, local visions of a future “Europe of the Regions” have jarred with the dominant nation-state conception held by elites at the state centre.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, to outside eyes, the re-establishment of the Lion monument could easily be construed as a provocative act in a city where the overwhelming majority of the population today declares itself as ethnically Russian. Such an interpretation can be found, inter alia, in the 2004 edition of the *Rough Guide to the Baltic States*, whose brief section on Narva claims that the Lion monument is “barely tolerated” by local people.<sup>37</sup> This suggestion, however, scarcely corresponded with the impression gained by the present authors, one of whom had happened to be present at the unveiling of the monument in 2000. How, then, did the insertion of this particular object into Narva’s diverse commemorative landscape affect the practice of collective identity in the city?

Initial investigations for the project during 2006–2007 explored the perspective “from above,” by means of elite interviews and analysis of the local media. These confirmed that the Lion most certainly acted as a catalyst to renewed public debate around sites of memory in the city. It was in this connection that one local journalist reminded his readers of the empty plinth left behind on the city’s main square following the removal of the Lenin monument, calling this “the empty place that needed to be filled.”<sup>38</sup> Here the article drew attention to ongoing calls within some political circles for a statue of Peter I to be placed upon the site. This proposal gathered



momentum over the next few years, as the Chair of Narva City Council Mikhail Stalnukhin began to make active preparations to install a small statue of the Russian Tsar. This project was justified using a purely local frame of reference: after all, it was reasoned, had not Peter I been an equally important figure in Narva's history as Charles XII, allegedly symbolised by the Lion and whose bust now sat within the city museum? In what amounted to an alternative vision of "future Narva," Stalnukhin maintained that putting up a monument to the Tsar would attract additional tourists (presumably mainly from Russia) and thus additional revenue to the town.<sup>39</sup> The fact that the former "Lenin Square" had now reverted to its historic designation as "Peter's Square" only added weight to the argument in the minds of these commentators, as did the fact that an obelisk commemorating the Tsar's birth had stood in "Old Narva" until 1922, when it was removed by the authorities of inter-war Estonia.

Attempts to claim Peter I as a figure of local significance to Narva have been overshadowed by his standing as a Russian national symbol and his identification in the minds of some Estonian commentators with the past subjugation and oppression of the Estonian people. In September 2006, within the unfolding political context of Estonia's "war on monuments," the Narva-based initiative for a monument to Peter I elicited a furious riposte from the Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, who had recently made a commitment to remove the Bronze Soldier monument from the centre of Tallinn should his party continue in government following the elections scheduled for March 2007. According to Ansip, neither Narva nor Estonia had cause to commemorate the actions of a Tsar whose forces had allegedly deported or killed a significant proportion of Narva's inhabitants following their conquest of the city in 1704. Also, to put up a monument to Peter would be to "spit in the face" of the leaders of inter-war Estonia, who had removed corresponding monuments from Tallinn and Narva back in 1922. In recent times, he asserted, Estonia had too often allowed the infiltration of signs and symbols "alien" to its culture: "We have been ultra tolerant during this time, but tell me: what should foreigners (presumably Russians) admire when they come here? That which is already familiar to them from their homeland?" A monument to the Tsar might indeed attract thousands of tourists and millions of dollars to Estonia, Ansip maintained, but not everything should be reduced to money and especially not symbols, which have "*a far more substantial significance*" (our italics).<sup>40</sup>

Since its installation, the Lion monument has also functioned as a catalyst for other somewhat less contentious performances of "Russianness" within the city. In November 2003, for instance, military history enthusiasts belonging to a recently formed local chapter of the St Petersburg–based Preobrazhenskii Regiment re-enactment society used the Lion as the starting point for an alternative commemoration of the 1700 Battle of Narva in the form of a parade through the city to the tsarist era monument dedicated to the Russian fallen. Like its 2000 predecessor, this was portrayed as an inclusive event in memory of all the fallen of the Great Northern War. However, local commentators close to the event also claimed that the group was formed in

order to counteract what was seen as an ongoing marginalization of Russian culture. As for the march, this was a way of filling the void left behind by the Swedes, who had allegedly “come, put up their monument and left.”<sup>41</sup>

Subsequently, however, military history enthusiasts from Sweden (and indeed from across the whole of Northern Europe) have joined the Preobrazhenskii group in an annual re-enactment of the second battle of Narva of 1704, when Peter the Great’s army conquered the city for Russia. Held each July/August, this event now forms the centerpiece of an annual Narva historical festival, which offers a fascinating insight into the palimpsest of uneasily coexisting narratives that are being performed in contemporary Narva. When we attended in August 2008, military re-enactors had set up Swedish and Russian army encampments in the grounds of the historic fortress. Adjacent to these was a re-creation of an early-modern Estonian peasant encampment with an accompanying plaque describing how in the thirteenth century Estonians had been deprived of their ancient freedom, falling victim thereafter to successive wars waged by foreign invaders on their soil. Deliberately or otherwise, this camp had been erected in the shadow of the city’s Soviet-era Lenin monument, which since its removal to the castle grounds has apparently become something of a magnet for tourists travelling from Tallinn to St Petersburg, who stop briefly to stretch their legs before crossing the Estonian–Russian border on the adjacent square. The repackaging of this monument as a piece of post-Soviet “kitsch” for the benefit of passing visitors once again testifies to a latent tension between the categories of “Estonianness” and “Europeanness” that is being played out not only within Narva but across Estonia as a whole.

### **The View from Below: Photo Elicitation and Everyday Narrative Topographies of Narva**

If one were to examine the identity politics of contemporary Narva solely from the top–down and the outside–in, one might easily draw the conclusion that nationhood is the defining social category within the city. However, as Brubaker reminds us:

Viewing nationalist politics from a distance, and from above, fosters a kind of optical illusion. National claims and counter claims, easily legible from afar, stand out in bold relief; and the path of least resistance for the analyst is to take them at face value. Without intending to do so, it is all too easy to adopt the language of nationalists themselves, to report that “the Albanians” demand this, “the Kurds” that, “the Hungarians” something else. Yet it is an elementary observation, if one all too often forgotten, that the beliefs, desires, hopes, and interests of ordinary people cannot be inferred from the nationalist (or other) utterances of politicians who claim to speak in their name.<sup>42</sup>

The second part of our research project, conducted during the spring and summer of 2008, set out to capture this perspective “from below,” by exploring how public

**Figure 1**  
**The Swedish Lion**



monuments and other heritage objects contribute to the everyday enactment of identity amongst the city's wider population. To achieve this we used the methodology known as "photo elicitation."<sup>43</sup> As a first step, we took our own photographs of three sites of memory within Narva. Our research team, consisting of four students from Narva University College, then approached more than a hundred respondents on the streets of Narva over the space of two days and asked them simply to "say something" about each of the images. Respondents were not required to divulge their identity, but for information purposes were invited to supply details of their mother tongue, place of residence, place of birth, occupation, and citizenship status. The first photograph (Figure 1) showed the Swedish Lion; the second (Figure 2), Peter's Square, with the empty plinth visible in the centre. This reflected the role of these places in recent public debates around the politics of commemoration, as described above. When it came to the image of the square, respondents were asked as a follow-up question to indicate what, if anything, should be placed on the empty plinth.

The third image (Figure 3) used in the project showed the building usually referred to as the Narva Town Hall (*Raekoda* in Estonian, *Ratusha* in Russian) and its surroundings. This site was interesting to us in that it could be seen to represent

**Figure 2**  
**Peter's Square and the "Empty Plinth"**



various aspects of Narva's multilayered past, whilst also constituting a focus for contemporary debates over its present and future. Originally built in the seventeenth century, the Town Hall was one of the buildings from Narva's Swedish-era baroque old town to be reconstructed after the war. It was restored largely on account of its symbolic value to the Soviet regime, for it was here, in November 1918, that the Bolsheviks had proclaimed the short-lived Estonian Workers Commune as part of a failed effort to reclaim the territory of Estonia for Soviet power. A monument was later mounted on a wall alongside the building, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Commune's establishment. In a further symbolic act of "de-Sovietisation," the City Government removed the plaque in February 2008, around the time of the ninetieth anniversary of the proclamation of the inter-war Estonian Republic. This action was justified by reference to a petition submitted by six hundred local residents, but attracted some degree of discussion and criticism in the online comment pages of the local newspaper.

The building itself was employed as a House of Pioneers during the Soviet era, and the square in front of it bore the name Pioneers' Square. In the latter years of Soviet rule, the Town Hall began to acquire heritage value as a surviving relic of

**Figure 3**  
**Narva Town Hall**



Narva's Swedish-era past. This formed part of a programme of historical preservation initiated by Eldar Efendiev, formerly Head of the City Museum and Mayor of Narva, who was able to confer protected status upon the territory and remaining artifacts of the old town. Since 1991, however, the Town Hall building has stood empty and in an increasingly poor state of repair. At the time of the research, there was continued public debate as to how it might best be used in the future. This debate dovetailed with plans to develop an adjacent vacant lot, in the left-hand foreground of our picture. Until 1944 this was occupied by the Narva stock exchange, another landmark of the Baroque old town. At the time of the research, the site had already been earmarked for construction of new premises for Narva University College—a filial of Tartu University and the city's only institution for higher education—and EU funds obtained for this purpose. In an intriguing piece of post-modern architectural design (titled "Rain") a new state-of-the-art structure will be built according to the functional needs of the College. Superimposed onto this, however, will be a replica of the façade of the former Stock Exchange building. This proposal was subsequently contested by the City Government, which voiced its support for an "authentic" reconstruction of

the old Stock Exchange building according to its original design. The matter went to court and, ultimately, the dispute was settled in favour of the “Rain” structure. In this way the proposed object had become the catalyst for competing visions of “future Narva” which, one could argue, revolve around the two principal articulations of Estonia’s identity in the post-Soviet period—the first (temporal) founded on a discourse of historical restorationism, the second (spatial) on a “forward-looking” articulation of Estonia as an innovative, economically dynamic “Nordic” country.

What responses though, would these images elicit from the “ordinary” residents of Narva, as opposed to the city’s elites? According to Rose—and in keeping with our own “catalyst” analogy outlined earlier in the article—visual objects have the capacity to “mobilize certain ways of seeing” as part of the social practices and processes within which they are embedded.<sup>44</sup> In this particular instance, our respondents’ constructions of place must be seen as deriving from a network of socio-material relationships encompassing ourselves as research project conveners, our interviewees as respondents and our researchers as interviewers, our photos as research materials and the particular spatial and temporal context within which the interview is conducted. In producing the three photographs, we as researchers were actively engaged in the construction of place: we were framing these areas of Narva not only as sites of memory but also as sites of latent political contestation. Nor was the timing of our survey in any way “innocent”: we chose the occasion of the annual historical festival in the expectation that our respondents might be attuned to issues of memory politics. However, we tried as far as possible not to advertise this perspective explicitly to our respondents. The explanatory information we gave to participants stated simply that we were seeking to uncover the different “ways of seeing” and understanding the urban landscape of Narva. One of the advantages of photo elicitation, according to Rose, is that it allows the images used to “talk back,” thus prompting talk in different registers.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, our hope and indeed expectation was that our respondents would—to go back to Brubaker—“subvert, evade, or transform the categories that [were being] imposed on them” and that the images would elicit a whole spectrum of narrative topographies of the city, including narratives that were neither national nor nationalist.

## Survey Analysis

In many of the responses obtained, the chosen sites clearly carried a symbolic significance. This was most obvious in relation to the picture of Peter’s Square, where local people’s views of the place have evidently been shaped by the proximity of the border crossing between Estonia and Russia, erected just a few metres away from where this photograph was taken. As can be seen from the following examples, several of our respondents felt that the “empty” site should be symbolically marked

as a border place, an attribute that could less obviously have been assigned to it during the Soviet time.

Table 1

- a. Because this place (so to say!) is the entrance to Estonia—surely some kind of visiting card of Estonia has to put there! Put some kind of . . . monument, perhaps. Maybe some kind of monument that symbolises contacts between the Russian and Estonian peoples. (Student, Female, 22, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- b. I think flower beds should be put there . . . make it look pretty! After all, it's the entrance to the town, the entrance from Russia! It's a view of Estonia, let's say. (Male, Retired Engineer, 69, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- c. Some sort of monument to someone, or just decorate it with some kind of flowers, so that it looks pretty! It's the entrance to Narva, and it should look nice! (Student, Male, 21, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- d. It's by the entrance to Narva, from the Russian side. A deserted place . . . Taking into account that now there's a tent standing there—some kind of temporary bar. What to say here? Nothing more! (Student, Male, 22, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- e. It's no place for a pub! Some kind of monument dedicated to the town! This little square hits you in the eyes as soon as you enter the city. (Fisherman, Male, 46, Russian-speaker, Russian citizenship)

In this regard, however, it is notable how many people spoke of this place as the entrance from Russia to *Narva* rather than the entrance from Russia to Estonia, suggesting the importance of locality as a basis for self-identification. This is a point we return to below in relation to other sites and objects.

For other respondents, the image of the square carried ethno-political associations linked to the previous year's contestations surrounding the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn, 164 kilometres away. For instance, one respondent remarked ironically that the empty plinth should carry a statue of Andrus Ansip, the prime minister who ordered the relocation of the Tallinn monument. In the same vein, another suggested a statue of Adolf Hitler, thereby suggesting that the removal of the Bronze Soldier had been tantamount to support for fascism. Two more of our respondents suggested a statue of a Russian soldier; building on media discussions, a further eight argued for Peter the Great.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the historical figure most commonly alluded to in relation to this place was Lenin. Several of those who mentioned the Soviet leader argued that his statue should not have been removed, or that it should be returned to its original place, as illustrated by the following three uncannily similar responses.

Table 2

- a. I wouldn't have taken Lenin away. It was history, it happened! ("Worker," Male, 30, Russian-speaker, Russian citizenship)

- b. Put Lenin back! They stuck him in a corner! And I'd also say: don't pretend history didn't happen—it did! (“Worker,” Male, 30, Russian-speaker, aliens passport)
- c. You know, I was against the removal! Throughout the world people put up monuments to remember their history, whether it was bad or good! It simply shouldn't have been taken away! Everyone would understand for themselves: should you bow before this Lenin, or not. But you've got to know history. (Company Owner, Male, 36, Russian-speaker, Russian citizenship)

What comes across in these exhortations is an aspiration to renegotiate the current regime of memory in Estonia and achieve an acknowledgement that a significant proportion of the resident population can link its very presence in the country to the half-century of rule by the USSR. Whatever view one takes of the Soviet past, it cannot simply be “airbrushed” out of history. Thus, in the same way as the memorial plaques put up since 1991 to mark the buildings of old Narva destroyed during the war, the empty place in the centre of Peter's Square also gives shape to “felt absences, fears and desires”<sup>46</sup> that haunt the contemporary society of Narva and Estonia's Russian-speaking population.

These “felt absences” were even more apparent in relation to the image of Narva's abandoned Town Hall. For those respondents born in the 1960s and 1970s, this invariably elicited references to the Pioneers' Palace and the various groups and circles that they attended in their youth. In a clear expression of nostalgia for the Soviet period, one fifty-four-year-old respondent compared what she saw as the unbridled individualism of today's neo-liberal Estonia with the purportedly more organised, collectivist ethos of its predecessor: “During the Soviet time, the young people were organised somehow. . . . I mean, now they have no-one. I tell you, in a few years a gap will appear, a hole, and there won't be anyone or anything there to fill it, because the young people today are just out for themselves: everyone just does their own thing” (Doctor, Female, 54, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship). For many residents, too, the image of this derelict structure was emblematic of the town's economic and social decline and the apparent inability of the authorities to reverse this. One noted that “You've got to preserve such things, look after them! . . . They mustn't be shut! Absolutely not. . . . And as for there not being enough money for anything nowadays . . . well, that's just stupid! You've just got to use the money some other way.” Another rued the fact that “since 1990 or 91 it [the Town Hall] has just been, like, empty. As things are, it's of no use to the town, not even as an adornment. You can't even call it an adornment, because it's just falling to pieces!” (Male, Russian-speaking, other details withheld).

More broadly the responses gave significant pause to reflect further on what, in the context of Narva, constitutes “our” heritage. The “restorationist” discourse harking back to “authentic,” “Old” Narva dismisses the current modernist Soviet architecture of the town as abhorrent and ugly, indeed emblematic of the damage inflicted on the “real” western Estonia by fifty years of Soviet occupation.<sup>47</sup> This is the dominant perspective that emerged from interviews we carried out amongst ethnic



Estonian respondents in the university city (and oft-termed Estonian “nationalist heartland”) of Tartu, as well as from ethnic Estonians interviewed in Narva itself. Here, the dominant view is encapsulated by the words of one respondent, who noted “when I think of Narva, I think of the old Narva, the one that my grandparents knew before the war. For Estonians, *Narva is a sad thing*.”<sup>48</sup> For the vast majority of the respondents we encountered in the city, however, this Soviet architecture has real value—indeed in many instances they or their forebears had an actual hand in its construction, as part of the post-war “development” of Estonia. This became clear first and foremost in the responses elicited by the image of Peter’s Square, where at least every second person who was interviewed referred not only to the square and the plinth but the high-rise building behind it; indeed, for many it was the primary point of reference, ahead of the square itself. It would be fair to say that we did not imbue the building with any particular significance when it came to framing the photo. As can be seen from the examples in Table 3, however, the answers we obtained suggest strongly that this is in fact an object of civic pride and genuine symbol of “our” local identity.

Table 3

- a. The first high rise in Narva. (Accountant, Female, 55, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- b. The tallest building in Narva—the twelve-storey. (Electrical & Gas Technician, Male, 47, Russian-speaker, aliens passport)
- c. Our twelve-storey. (“Worker,” Male, 30, Russian-speaker, Russian citizenship)
- d. That’s the high rise on Peter’s Square. It was built in the 1960s! (Engineer, Male, 70, Ukrainian, Russian citizenship)
- e. And in the third? That’s the tall tower, which beautifies our town. (Educational Inspector, Female, 71, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)

The same is true, however, of the surviving artifacts of “old Narva,” which, according to one prominent local commentator are today “an integral part of the identity of any Narvitan.”<sup>49</sup> While the castle is one obvious and widely known symbol of the city—alluded to by several respondents when talking about the Lion and its background view—the Town Hall clearly carried a similar significance for many of our respondents. One called it “a historical treasure of Estonia that is familiar to everyone”; another described it as “our Swedish monument,” which, “in the opinion of leading Swedish experts . . . was the most valuable architectural treasure in the town.” Attachment to this part of “our” heritage was apparent not least in the opposition that several of our respondents expressed towards the “Rain” project for the new Narva College building (see Table 4).

Table 4

- a. The Tartu filial called “Rain” . . . the architecture isn’t appropriate for us. (Pensioner, Male, 62, Russian-speaker, Russian citizenship)

- b. The inhabitants were against it. That's where the stock exchange building used to be. And the inhabitants didn't want this new building to change the outlook of old Narva. Although in my opinion that's unwise. (Teacher, Female, 28, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- c. Don't put anything there! No college . . . It'll spoil the whole situation! Personally, I'm against! Even though I live here, I don't think we need any kind of college here. And in any case, there's no room for it there. It's of no use to Narva. In all honesty, there are hardly any workers—that's to say graduates of that college—actually in Narva. But they've got to build something, do something, just to spend the EU's money! Well, let them go and build it some place else! Just not here! (Retired Engineer, Male, 69, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- d. We Narvitiens . . . we're against it! . . . Would have been better to have restored it as it was—pre-war Narva! . . . If they put that building there in place of the stock exchange . . . it'll spoil everything. It'll spoil everything that already exists: all the fascination of this little corner of old Narva! ("Worker," Male, 30, Russian-speaker, Russian citizenship)

Speaking in a similar "heritage" vein, a further respondent opined that "everything in the *Ratusha* was special: this is why it was restored after the War." This claim is, of course, not correct—the building was restored not on account of any intrinsic architectural value but because it was the seat of the Bolshevik-led Workers Commune in 1919. None of our respondents, however, alluded to this fact, while only one actually mentioned the Commune. No one spoke about the removal of the Commune memorial which had briefly excited local opinion in February 2008. The originally ascribed meaning of the Town Hall thus appears to have been superseded by other understandings.

It is important to note, however, that in most of the responses elicited by our images, symbolic connotations were either muted or completely absent. For example, the presence of the border adjacent to today's Peter's Square prompted many local residents to no longer view it as a suitable location for a site of memory. Rather, it is a place of transit and perpetual movement, which is frequently filled with parked vehicles; many felt that if the former site of Lenin's statue were to be filled at all, it should be used as a site for benches or a small park, where people could stop to rest after crossing the border on foot—something many Narvitiens still do on a daily basis. Numerous other responses alluded to the fact that tourist buses now regularly stop in the square as they wait to cross the border en route from Tallinn to St Petersburg, and thus suggested laying on "something for tourists." Such a facility was in fact already in place when we arrived to do the final tranche of our fieldwork in August 2008. As can be seen from the last two responses cited in Table 1, the "empty space" of March 2006 had been filled at least temporarily by a "summer café"—basically a tent selling beer. For some, at least, this structure had clearly become an established part of Narva's summer landscape. By the same token, several respondents alluded to the fact that in a new symbolic departure, the plinth now becomes the site for the city's Christmas tree during December.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of our findings was the almost complete absence of any ethno-national associations in relation to the Lion. For one respondent, the Lion “shows that Estonia never had its own republic,” while another declared that “[this is a] Monument in honour of the fact that the Swedes conquered the Estonians. . . . They were under the heel first of the Germans then the Swedes. Well, now we’ve separated again and I dunno . . . they probably built that Lion to please the Swedes” (Cleaner, Female, 67, Russian-speaking, Russian citizenship). These, however, were exceptional responses to the object in question. Instead, nearly everyone interviewed saw the Lion and its surrounding park as a place to walk, rest or admire the view of the Narva River and the two castles that frame it. Some typical examples can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

- a. It’s a really good place to walk, and for teenagers. In the evenings people usually chat, drink beer, or there are couples out for a walk. It’s really beautiful in summer, and the place is done out with flowers. (Student, Male, 22, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- b. Now this place has really been improved, because everyone rushes to have their picture taken by the Swedish Lion. Also, there are flower beds like there used to be. . . . So, in summer it’s a really, really beautiful place, where Narvians really love to be. And they love to be photographed against the background of the two fortresses and the Swedish Lion. (Female, details withheld)
- c. The second one is of the Swedish Lion. We often walk here: it’s a beautiful place, with a beautiful view on the river, lots of young people, lots of parents with kids. I like it here. (Female, details withheld)
- d. In the second picture I see the monument to the Swedish Lion, and in the background the really beautiful view of the Narva and the Ivangorod fortress. It’s a really popular place for tourists. (Male, Student, 21, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- e. Oh, that’s the little lion. We walk past there. It’s a really beautiful place! (Female, “nearly 80,” retired textile worker, Russian-speaker, Russian citizenship)

These remarks support the assertion by Kaiser and Nikiforova that the Lion has been “Narvanised” following its creation.<sup>50</sup> This is to say that it has become an icon of the city and is viewed within a predominantly local frame of reference that ruptures any national scalar narrative. Our own study of the decision-making process surrounding the monument, however, would suggest that this was always part of the intention. While national-historical connotations could be readily attached to the Lion, this meaning is downplayed and, one might even suggest, deliberately obscured when it comes to the particular form of the monument: thus, while the plinth is inscribed with the phrase “Memory of Sweden” and the date 1700, these are in Latin (*Svecia Memor*) and in Roman numerals respectively. To any visitors unfamiliar with the history of the Baltic provinces and indeed—as we discovered in our survey—

to many local residents, it would not be immediately clear which event the Lion commemorates. Associations with the Great Northern War and inter-war Estonia were further muted by the fact that the 1936 Lion stood on the site of the battlefield on the western approaches to Narva, whereas its 2000 successor (which was smaller, different in form and facing west rather than east) was sited in the town centre, albeit away from what had hitherto been understood as Narva's main memorial spaces. Local leaders that we interviewed about the Lion insisted that the statue was conceived primarily as an aesthetic object and as part of a functional installation (park and vantage point) that would (re)create<sup>51</sup> a resource for the townspeople and attract tourists.

While the results underscored the “polyvocality”<sup>52</sup> of the chosen images, one must also remain alive to the importance of context when evaluating the responses and the enactments of identity that they represent. Had this part of our fieldwork been carried out a year earlier during the height of the “monuments crisis” the photographs would in all probability have elicited a very different set of responses. To give one obvious example: when the Bronze Soldier was removed from Tallinn, a person or persons within Narva targeted the Lion monument as a symbol of state power, scrawling abusive graffiti about prime minister Ansip upon its base. In the summer of 2008, however, not a single interviewee alluded to this fact. At that same juncture in April 2007, an estimated three thousand people had gathered at two Soviet-era war memorials in the centre of Narva. Both of these are in the vicinity of Peter's Square—indeed, one is adjacent to the aforementioned “empty plinth.” In the course of our own survey, not one person mentioned these objects, which had clearly reverted to being entirely “mute” monuments.

For all of the obvious iniquities of the state order established after 1991, the response of those Russian-speakers marginalized by the new arrangements has for the most part been one of pragmatic adaptation to post-Soviet conditions. From 1992 to 2007 Estonia was notable for its ethno-political stability, a state of affairs that rested among other things on the country's relatively robust economic performance and a strategy of divide and rule (or “segmentation”) pursued by the state. Since 1992 Estonia's Russophone population has been divided into: those who obtained Estonian citizenship automatically by virtue of descent from the inter-war period (and are thus deemed representatives of a “genuine” national minority); those who have obtained citizenship through naturalization (which includes the requirement to pass an Estonian language test); and those who reside in the country on the basis of either Russian Federation passports or so-called Aliens passports issued by the Estonian state. The responses to our survey provided an indication of the extent to which people in Narva have begun to appropriate these imposed categories as part of the everyday performance of identity. For instance, the simple factual request at the end of the interview to provide information on citizenship, place of birth, and language elicited answers along the following lines:

Table 6

- a. My age—46 . . . I was born in Narva, as were my parents; I live here permanently, too. My native tongue is Russian, my citizenship—Estonian *by birth*. (Electrical maintenance technician, Male, 46, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizen)
- b. Place of Birth?  
Narva, Republic of Estonia.  
Native tongue?  
Russian. But I understand a little (Estonian)—they taught it at school.  
And your citizenship?  
Estonian.  
(Seamstress, Female, 58, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- c. And your place of permanent residence?  
Narva, always Narva.  
And your native tongue?  
Russian—but I have Estonian citizenship.  
(Pensioner, Female, 70, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- d. Native Language? Russian. I can speak English. I don't know Estonian. Citizenship—Estonian by naturalisation. I answered sixteen questions and promptly forgot them. That's it! (Educational Inspector, Female, 71, Russian-speaker, Estonian citizenship)
- e. Citizenship?  
“Aliens”—you see, I came from another planet! (Male, details withheld)

Thus, in imparting this information for the purposes of a survey, people felt the need to affirm that they were an Estonian citizen “by birth,” or to underline that they do “speak Estonian”—something that is deemed essential to current institutionalized understandings of national community. Yet as can be seen from the last two examples cited here, respondents frequently resorted to irony when describing the citizenship policies of the Estonian state, something which in turn bears out suggestions by other researchers that virtually no Russian-speakers identify actively with the political community as presently configured.<sup>53</sup> Within this context, monuments such as the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn and the war memorials on Peter's Square in Narva have been able to catalyze enactment of “Russianness”—that is to say assertions of a distinct national identity by representatives of Estonia's “non-titular” nationalities.

In the aftermath of the 2007 “statue crisis,” members of Estonia's ruling elite frequently characterized these events as externally orchestrated by Russia as part of a deliberate effort to overthrow the Estonian government. Those who rioted were described as a small criminal element that was completely unrepresentative of the “Russian-speaking population” as a whole. Most local Russophones were indeed alarmed and appalled by the violence that occurred during these nights. However, a majority were

also alienated by the decision to relocate a monument which for them retained huge symbolic importance and stirred strong emotions. By focusing wholly on the external dimension to this crisis, the Estonian government also denied the possibility that its local opponents might have their own voice and subjectivity independent of Russia. An ethnographic analysis of the kind carried out in summer 2008 helps to uncover the more complex picture that lies beyond nationally based discursive practices. The results of our survey show that most residents of Narva still identify strongly with the symbols of the Soviet past. Most also operate within a transnational Russian cultural space. However, it is equally clear that their sense of place is strongly linked to the specific territory of Estonia; to an increasing extent in the post-Soviet era it is linked to the specific locality of Narva, which has now become one of the few unambiguous bases for self-identification available to residents.

These trends can be attributed at least in part to the materiality of the post-Soviet and more especially the post-Schengen border, which has clearly contributed to the institutionalization of new social categories in post-Soviet Estonia. And, yet, if one looks back to the pre-existing spatial order, Narva's residents did not simply exist—as Kaiser and Nikiforova assert—within an unrestricted “space of flows” between the Estonian and Russian Republics, despite the absence of any obvious “hard” border controls when crossing the river Narva to neighbouring Ivangorod and beyond.<sup>54</sup> As Brednikova<sup>55</sup> suggests, and anyone who has spent time in the city will testify, the ESSR–RSFSR border was imbued with strong symbolic significance already during the Soviet period, and a distinct “Baltic Russian” identity articulated and institutionalised long before 1991. This is a phenomenon which arguably merits further enquiry from a post-Soviet nationalities literature that is still apt to think in terms of binary national oppositions, thereby treating (as Brubaker would put it) “categories of practice as categories of analysis.”<sup>56</sup>

In this regard, our survey dispelled external claims that Narva is a “Russian city.” “Russianness” is certainly one of the identity categories available to and utilized by local residents, but far more prevalent in the everyday practice of identity is a complex local hybrid identity that does not sit comfortably with either of the potentially competing nation-building projects (Estonian and Russian) operating within this borderland space. In the period since the early 1990s, Narva and its surrounding region has on occasion been identified as a potential site of secessionist politics. Such claims, however, appear exaggerated: the dominant local aspiration has rather been one of redrawing the contours of the current nation-building project and engineering a shift towards a more “multiculturalist” understanding—one that constructs Estonia as the homeland not just of a single ethnically defined nation, but also of a variety of minority groups. “This includes the Russian diaspora, who . . . can legitimately claim to have a relationship with the region that stretches back centuries.”<sup>57</sup> Within this context we find calls in Narva for a kind of “memory pluralism” or, to use Jan-Werner Müller’s phrase, a politics of “negotiated memory” which does not prioritise one single thick narrative of history but gives equal space to all aspects of Estonia’s contested past.<sup>58</sup>

This raises the question—ever more actual following the “statue crisis” in April 2007—of how place might be deployed in the enactment of more multicultural forms of collective identity. The goal of “multicultural integration” was actively promoted by the European Union during the pre-2004 negotiations on Estonia’s accession, and has been rhetorically deployed by elements of the national political elite. Once again, the construction of national heritage through place has a crucial role to play here, for “those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly ‘belong.’”<sup>59</sup> In the midst of the unfolding statue dispute during 2006–2007, there were suggestions that Tallinn’s Bronze Soldier should be left in situ and its surrounding square be remodeled into a shared site of memory where any resident of Estonia could go to commemorate the past as she or he thinks fit. This approach was ultimately disregarded, even though a site of memory fitting this description currently exists on the outskirts of Estonia’s capital.

In Narva, it has been decided that the Town Hall building (still derelict in summer 2008) will in due course again become the home of the city government, albeit with some space set aside for a museum. Given the range of meanings and interpretations attached to this structure by local residents, there seems clear potential for this museum to serve as a catalyst for a more multicultural reading of the city’s past. In the eyes of many, the Town Hall is first and foremost a symbol of Narva’s Swedish past. Yet the building could equally be described as a Soviet monument: restored to being in the 1950s, it was devoted to the Estonian Commune of 1919. More importantly, as the former House of Pioneers this structure immediately evokes memories of everyday life during the Soviet period. If local people are to identify meaningfully with the new Town Hall and its museum, it will have to be constituted as a polyvocal object offering vantage points from multiple presents onto multiple pasts, just as the Swedish Lion and its site—on the one hand a symbol of Estonian nation-statehood and western “Europeanness”—also serve the same function as the viewing platform that stood on the site during the Soviet era.

## Conclusions

This article was originally conceived as a reflection upon the performativity of collective identity and mobilization of “groupness” within a politically contested and inherently “fuzzy” borderland setting. On one level it explores how social categories are articulated through place-making, with a particular focus on the meanings ascribed to public monuments and other heritage sites by “everyday” residents of the EU’s eastern border city of Narva. At the same time, the aim was to show how these places are themselves actively implicated in the enactment of identity, as part of a network of material–human interactions: thus, public monuments can within particular contexts cease to be “mere stones in the landscape”<sup>60</sup> and function as

*catalysts* in the mobilization of groupness, affecting (though not causing) this process, without necessarily undergoing any physical change themselves; similarly, within the context of visual ethnographic research, researcher-generated images articulating particular constructions of place can acquire their own agency and *elicit* a range of different narrative topographies of Narva's urban landscape held by its residents. These various narratives in turn convey something of the complexity of identity within this borderland setting, a complexity which is still insufficiently acknowledged not just in political but also in academic discourse around the interface between the European Union and Russia.

## Notes

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