

# From war port to peace port

A case for Karosta



Research Paper

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## Abstract

Former military infrastructure, in the form of individual structures or whole military areas, tend to become functionless, often further becoming neglected. Additionally they tend to act as a source of dissonance, contestation, different interpretations, especially in places with histories that have diverse perspectives rising from different ethnic groups. They entangle a variety of issues - political, cultural, social, urban. Could there be an alternative to such sites? Instead of becoming neglected with their stories and histories forgotten, could they become an integral part of their surrounding context, encouraging remembrance and co-existence of a multiplicity of narratives and voices? Could they become a catalyst for communities to come together and encourage an exchange of knowledge?

The former fortification complex around the city of Līepāja together with the former military base of Karosta presents a site that entangles both neglect and dissonance. Having lived through a variety of historic periods and being mostly associated with the Soviet Occupation, the place has always been seen and portrayed as one with a heavy and dark past. The research therefore aims to unpack the reason for the neglect present in the neighbourhood as well as to uncover stories of the place that have not been exposed. The research outcome comes together as a biography of place that addresses the complexity of the site and provides a further base for the design proposal on the chosen site.



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Former bunkers, forts, watch towers, military bases. Once purely functional places. Now decaying relics. Places that appear to be misplaced and displaced. Out of context. A series of voids, rupturing the urban fabric. Yet certainly not meaningless. They carry stories and histories that perhaps have gone untold. Alienated from their context and detached from the present. What relevance do these military structures hold today? What stories are they to unfold?

Karosta is an example of a former military site that presents both such architectural artefacts and the associated problematics of heritage that seems to be out of place and hence uncared for as well as contested heritage. Located on the west coast of Latvia, the neighbourhood of Karosta (which directly translates to warport) in Liepāja presents a unique set of circumstances. As one encounters the place, one becomes exposed to a series of ruins situated in the present, rooted in the past, yet undetermined in the future. The urban fabric is composed of two architectural typologies, ones of a military base and ones of a fortification complex, situated within Karosta and around the neighbourhood and the rest of the city respectively. The unifying aspect of this collection of objects found on site - forts, bunkers, viewing towers, a manège, residences, shipyard workshops - is their state of neglect. In some cases more prevalent than others, decay is what characterises them all. Could this suggest our indifference towards the past or point to our natural response of wanting to forget difficult pasts?

Furthermore, it is these relics of the past that generate a sense of a contested place. Having withstood the test of time they remind of times past. They denote military activity and events, wars as well as the Soviet occupation. The narrative today seems fragmented and not very clear. A range of meanings are being projected onto the concrete blocks, without clarity of what is true or false. Another dimension to consider is the presence of both a Latvian and Russian speaking community, each with their own story. In the midst of being flooded with a range of narratives, how could this dissonance be dealt with?

## Neglect

verb [with object]

- fail to care for properly
- not pay proper attention to; disregard

noun [mass noun]

- the state of being uncared for
- the action of not taking proper care of someone or something
- failure to do something



## Problem statement

Neglect is the word that best describes these remains of the coastal defence line forts. The remnants are decaying, deteriorating, disappearing. Over the course of time the military objects have repeatedly appeared in the headlines of the local newspaper 'Kurzeme Vārds'. The headlines are usually framed similarly to 'The forts have flooded and continue to deteriorate' (Kilevica, 2022).

The military structures of Karosta convey a lack of care and a sense of disregard. The forts have become subject to the crashing waves and shifting dunes. The bunkers have been overtaken by the grasses and woods of the forest. Despite being in an arguably better state, a fair amount of the red brick buildings of the military base can also be perceived as uncared for as well as unused in a meaningful way through being attended, lived and programmed. In most cases abandoned after the fall of the Soviet Union, the buildings have been destructed and vandalised. Roofs have been stripped away and windows bricked up. Nature has enveloped the interior and exterior, blurring the boundary between the built and the natural.

The remnants date back to 1890, when their construction commenced during the rule of Tsarist Russia. It took a decade for the fortification complex together with the military base to be completed. The city was selected to become a fortress due to its strategically beneficial location, positioned between the Baltic Sea on the west and the lakes of Liepāja and Tosmare on the south-east and north-east respectively. The fortification complex was composed of a terrestrial and a coastal defence line.

However, soon these structures lost significance. In 1907 the defence complex status was removed, causing the military structures to face decline. The commencement of World War I in 1914 further left a mark on the defence infrastructure. Liepāja was bombarded by German ships. Due to fears of valuable assets of the city becoming available to the enemy, the Tsarist military leaders decided to blow up parts of the fortification in 1914, with the main explosions taking place in 1915. In 1919, Latvian armed forces used the military fortification embankments and coastal batteries during the Freedom battles. After gaining independence, the Latvian army made use of these structures between World War I and World War II.

With the start of World War II, the Latvian government was forced to sign a contract on 5 October 1939 with the Soviet Union that would permit the use of its military base in Karosta. The Latvian army was forced out of the military base and defence complex in Liepāja, providing space for the armed forces of the Soviet Union. Karosta became an autonomous area, inaccessible to the rest of the population of Liepāja. The coastal artillery batteries on both the north and south of the city were utilised, while also the terrestrial defence structures were put into use and benefitted from to repel the German forces.

However, the resistance didn't prevail for long. On 28 June 1941 German forces occupied Liepāja. From this point on, till the end of World War II and onwards, the active use of the fortification infrastructure halted. The German troops didn't make use of the military infrastructure built during the rule of the Russian Empire, marking the end of active engagement with the fortification complex.

Latvia's independence was restored in 1991. And only in 1994 the military base of Karosta was abandoned by the army of the Soviet Union.

Time has passed, yet Karosta can still be perceived as a city within the city. The weight of the past can still be experienced in the built environment of the neighbourhood. Voids of once functional spaces puncture the urban fabric and present themselves as challenging to associate with. The decaying remnants suggest a position of passivity. Further deterioration will lead to complete erasure and forgetting. Insight into the main historical events suggests reasons for the dissonance present there, revealing the main issue of the place. As Māris Zanders, a leading figure in political debates and discourse in Latvia, has stated in a reflection on 9 May - Victory Day, which commemorates the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, 'The problem lies in the diversity and multiplicity of interpretations of our history'. And despite the fact that there is an abundance of interpretations and hence inevitably a lack of agreement between parts of them, there exists a silence surrounding the issue, which in certain cases has led to neglect in the face of degradation.





Fig.1 *Map of Latvia in relation to the broader context and Russia, in particular*

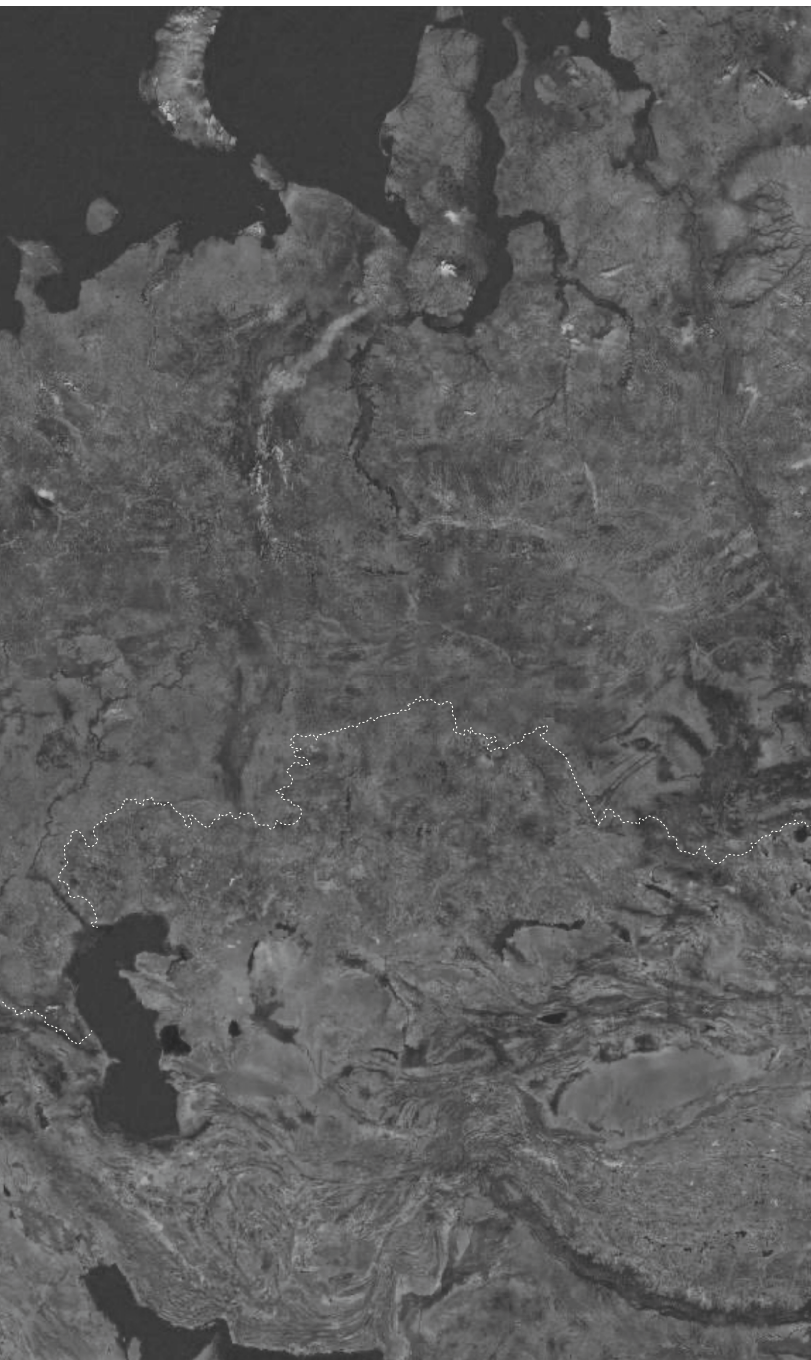




Fig.2 Map of Latvia and location of the city of Liepāja, situated on the south-west coast





1.

Fig.3 Map of *Liepāja* in relation to water bodies surrounding it





*1. The Baltic Sea; 2. Lake of Tosmare; 3. Lake of Liepāja*

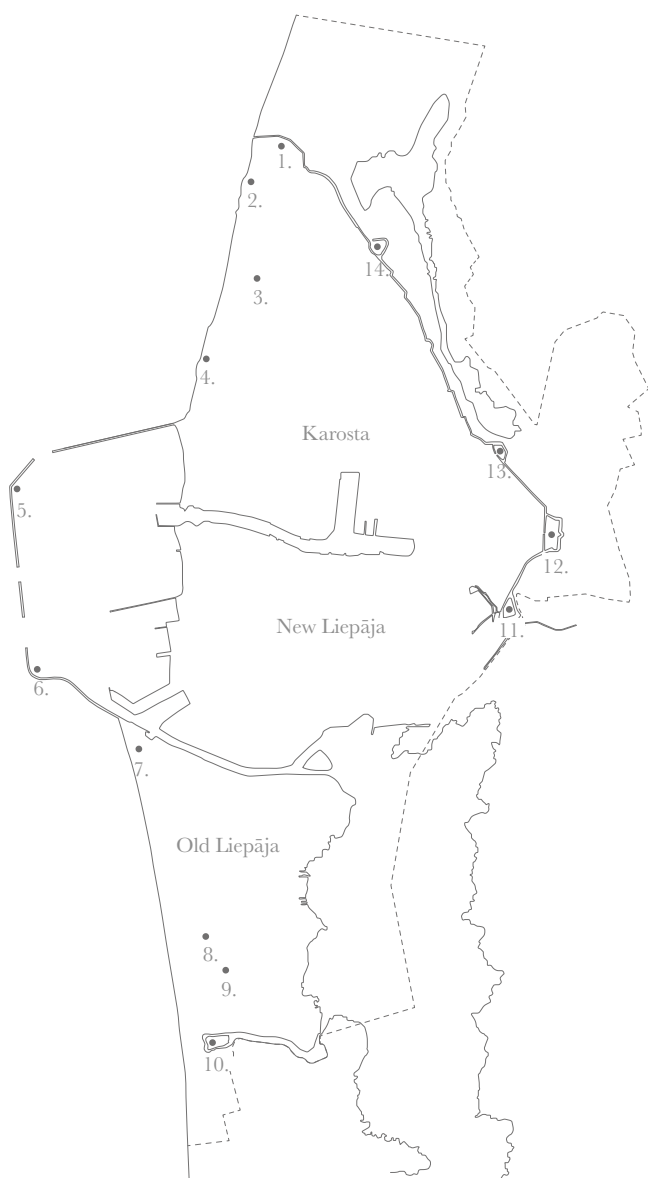


Fig.4 Map of Karosta and location of chosen site in relation to it.



1. Northern Forts
2. Artillery Battery 1
3. Artillery Battery 2
4. Artillery Battery 3
5. Artillery Battery 4
6. Artillery Battery 5
7. Artillery Battery 6
8. Artillery Battery 7
9. Artillery Battery 8
10. Southern Forts
11. Middle-South Fort
12. Middle Fort
13. Middle-North Fort
14. Redan

Fig.5 *Map of the fortification, with both coastal and terrestrial defence line remnants around Liepāja*





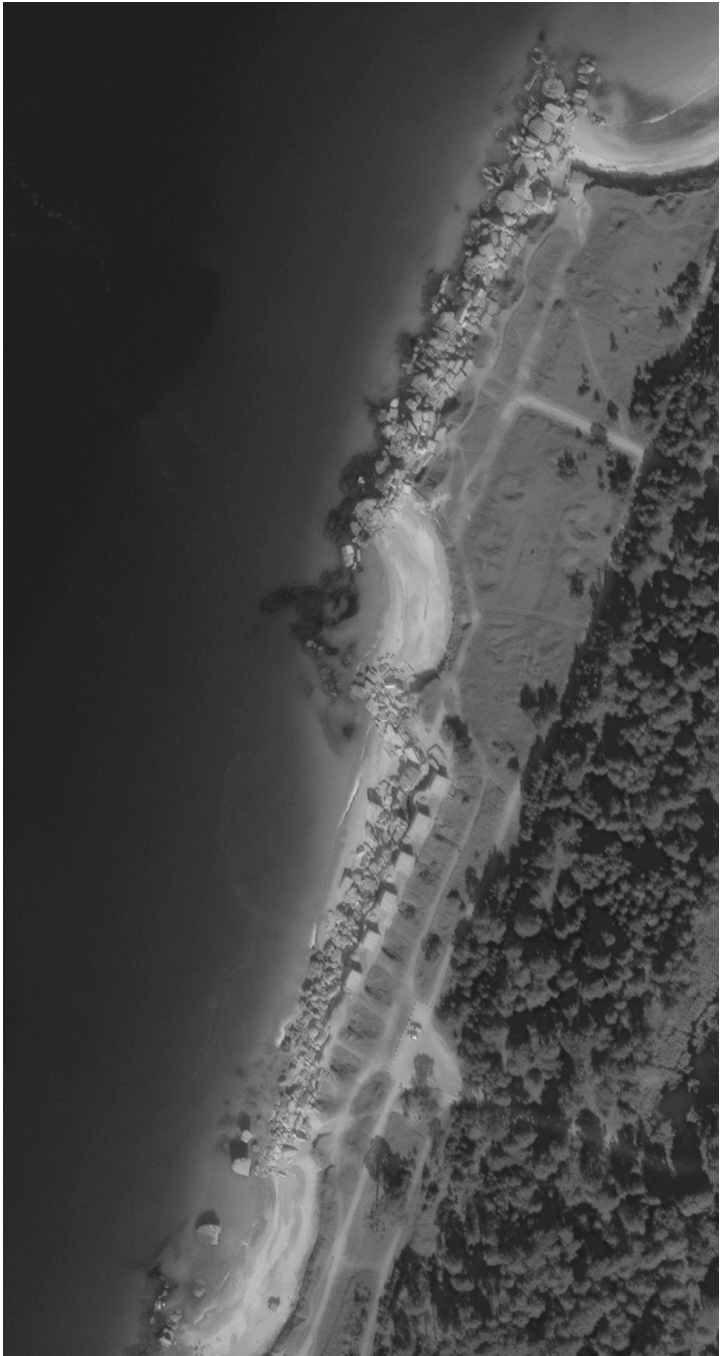


Fig.7 Map of chosen site at Artillery Battery 3



Fig.8/ 9 Images of the forts at Artillery Battery 3 (in collaboration with F. Klanberg)



Fig.10 *Image of the fort sequence at Artillery Battery 3 (in collaboration with F. Klanberg)*





Fig.11 *Image of the forts at Artillery Battery 1 (in collaboration with F. Klanberg)*

## Research questions

Forgetting and the erasure of the past is very likely. Just as the history of the place has been particularly political, so could the present act of forgetting and neglect be considered political. Yet could there be an alternative to this scenario? I ask myself whether there lies value in the untold, unexpressed story of the place and people. Could we aim for a more intentional interaction with the military artefacts, the witnesses of the past? Are there lessons to be learnt from them and shared with generations to come? The space could perhaps acquire a new identity and promote cohesion between the two communities. Through raising awareness, revealing and exposing layers of history and local stories, the military artefacts could be reframed and rehabilitated. Therefore, the main research question and further sub-questions that could be posed are:

### Research contribution and aim:

- How can the military remnants of the dissonant Karosta neighbourhood act as catalysts for reconciliation and recollection?

### Methodological question:

- How can speculative histories impact the way we view neglected and dissonant heritage sites?

### Subquestions:

- What is dissonant heritage/place?
- How does dissonance determine how we approach heritage?
- What is the cause of dissonance in Karosta and how is it manifested?

## Theoretical framework

Bunkers. Fortifications. Former military infrastructures. Abandoned. Derelict. Empty. Uninhabited. Once functional spaces now functionless voids. Neglect is what they convey and portray. How should these structures be viewed and approached? How should sites, formed of entire neighbourhoods of a city once defined by their military identity, become an integral part of the city?

In *Bunker Archeology*, Paul Virilio describes these military objects as spatial phenomena where history is stored (Virilio, 1997). The architecture is situated in the present where it appears to be ‘out of tune with the urban environment’ yet recollects the past, acting as ‘silent witnesses to a warlike climate’ (Virilio, 1997). While describing the structures, Virilio points out that they exude a sense of repulsion and heaviness (Virilio, 1997). Neglected they are decaying and deteriorating. One could say they are in a state of ruin.

Similarly by reflecting on *Sealander*, a film by Jane and Louise Wilson, Darian Leader in his essay ‘The Architecture of Life’ confirms the tension that is created between the decaying bunkers and their context resulting into alienation (Dillon, 2011). What’s more, he emphasises that they are structures that have lost their purpose, and are now deemed useless (Dillon, 2011). Leader even refers to them as ‘debris’ out of place from times past and questions whether their role in the present is purely memorial, since their symbolic meaning has been lost (Dillon, 2011). But could the focus be shifted towards cultural value instead? The insights on the military structures invite to further unpack terms such as ruin and decay, meaning and purpose.

In his book *Ruins*, Brian Dillon unpacks a series of ruin categories, through a selection of writings, be it the modern ruin or the industrial and military ruins. He establishes that ruins present ‘a set of temporal and historical paradoxes’ and points out that they bring together aspects of the past, present and future

and juxtapose aspects of architecture, history, culture and politics. Similarly Andreas Huyssen in his essay 'Authentic Ruins' reflects on how the ruin presents a 'problem of a double exposure to the past and the present', further highlighting that the fragment situated in the present showcases the 'imagined present of a past' that is accentuated through its deterioration. It appears that the ruin could be susceptible to contestation.

Furthermore, while referring to Georg Simmel's essay 'The Ruin', Dillon points out that ruins are an intersection between culture and nature, where the built fabric transitions towards an 'organic state' and eventually fully disintegrates and is taken up by nature, acquiring a new form altogether. Ruins are both a state and a process. (Dillon, 2011) Rose Macaulay reveals they are 'always dynamic and in process'.

It is not only their physical state but also their meaning that is in a shifting state, prone to changing over time. In the case of the remnants in Karosta, despite their out-of-placeness, to some they may appear meaningless, while for others they are structures onto which a range of meanings are projected. There seems to be a dichotomy, a tension, an unclarity of narrative. Indeed perhaps it is not a history everyone wants to recall or associate with, but it cannot be denied. The situation presents a case for dissonant heritage.

Shaped in a cultural, political and social framework, heritage is defined as both a tangible and intangible practice and process, which aims to attribute, shift and validate meaning that is relevant in the present. It is a constantly-evolving concept due to shifting principles regarding what constitutes heritage, how it should be used and which stakeholder opinions should be voiced and taken into consideration. The variety of aspects influencing heritage has hence led to the emergence of contestation within the field.

Dissonance, contestation, conflict, contradiction are all terms that convey the essence of dissonant heritage. A term studied and unpacked by Tunbridge and Ashworth in their book *Dissonant Heritage*,

dissonance has been described as lack of agreement that is an integral and unavoidable part of heritage, as it inherently implies varying positions and hence conflict with regards to ownership, interpretation and use (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1995).

## Translations

For the remnants of the military base and the fortification complex in Liepāja, it is specifically the interpretation aspect that is relevant. Three key ways, in which contestation with interpretation can arise, have been identified. Firstly, it can stem from the true story and history being altered with the intention of promoting heritage, resulting in lack of authenticity. Secondly, it can result from attempts to erase unwanted histories, aiming at forgetting painful memories and pasts. And thirdly, it can arise from contradiction in interpretation within a certain community regarding the heritage (Liu, et al. 2020). This dissonance can consequently have an impact on how the heritage is dealt with. It may determine whether it will be preserved, restored, reconstructed, regenerated or demolished (Liu, et al. 2020).

Just as ruins are in an ever dynamic state, so is contested heritage. It is subject to generations projecting different meanings and memories onto it, since heritage seeks to construct and negotiate values and meanings in the present (Sorensen, Viejo-Rose, 2015). And despite this, it is not very clear how dissonance and coexistence of a multiplicity of interpretations should be managed.

## Methodological framework

### *Biography of place*

To answer the research questions and gain a holistic understanding of the site - past, present, future, a biography of place is suggested as the main methodological approach as well as the principal outcome of the research. The methodological framework will aim to link the theoretical framework with the site, resulting in context driven research that will create an understanding of how the terms - neglect and dissonance, are manifested on site. (Lucas, 2016) An overview of the place is to be established. Due to the isolated nature of the site over the span of history, not a lot of archival information is available about the site or the structures of the military base or the fortification complex. The remnants in themselves act as an archive of the place.

A biography of place has been identified as an appropriate approach as it is an account of one's story and history, hence allowing for the embedded layers of Karosta to be uncovered and brought to light. An approach and concept suggested and utilised by Marie Louise Stig Sorensen and Dacia Viejo-Rose in their book *War and Cultural Heritage: Biographies of Place*, the authors present the biography as a medium that unfolds how meanings shift and change, are acquired and lost, are shaped and distorted (Sorensen, Viejo-Rose, 2015). The biography also provides an opportunity to understand how the notion of interpretation is linked to time, giving a useful insight into the transitory nature of memory especially in places of conflict (Sorensen, Viejo-Rose, 2015).

Having established the biography of place as an all encompassing approach to the proposed research, it will provide a visual inventory and semantic repository to narrate the past and present in order to acquire a position to curate the future of the voids. Since biographies tend not to follow a strict chronological order of events, the piece won't aim to stick to a timeline, but will rather expose the reader to different time periods, creating a spatial and temporal collage, reflecting the nature of the juxtaposed narratives in Karosta.

Organised around the notions of scales and encounters, the piece follows the following structure:

- Emergence

Chapter I

Divided Unity

*At the Bridge*

- Existence

Chapter 2

Powerful / Powerless

*The Palace*

Chapter 3

Repulsive Attraction

*The Church*

Chapter 4

Violated

*The Panel Building*

- Disappearance

Chapter 5

Permanent temporality and Frail monumentality

*The Forts*

Each chapter will unfold a different story based on the military object and the encountered body. Based on the scale, a range of methods will be applied to unravel the artefacts story - its material, spatial, atmospheric, contextual, social, cultural, political story.

The biography of place allows for as a two-way reading of place - allowing for the reader to follow the storyline from emergence to the disappearance of the silent witnesses, the forts, and reversely from disappearance to emergence.

The first reading builds up a storyline that slowly reveals and accumulates the reasons for which the space and the silent witnesses can be perceived as contested and dissonant. The narrative is constructed through a political, social, urban lens told through a series of objects, which embody the essence of these themes. The story unfolds itself following the order in which one would encounter the objects during a walk from the city to the forts, starting at the Bridge across the canal, the physical and psychological separating element between the city and the former military base. The following encounters are with the Palace, the Church, the Panel building and eventually the Forts, the encounter shaped by land and sea. The majority of the encounters reveal a key event that characterises them and that has shaped the perception people have of Karosta nowadays, revealing instances throughout the course of history.

The latter reading builds up the narrative in the opposite way. The storyline commences with the subject - the Forts, focusing on their present state of decay and disappearance. Acknowledging their state of neglect, one enquires about the story behind them, the reasons for their presence, their abandonment and their relevance in today's context. Through a walk along the coast, the main reason, the driving force behind the existence of the coastal defence line and the fortification as a whole is revealed. It is the encounter between forces greater than human power, the land and sea that one is confronted with from the offset of the storyline. The link between the Forts and the city, is further established through a reverse walk towards the Bridge, during which the presence of the protagonist - the fort, and associations and meanings that are projected onto it are justified and revealed through the key forces, which are conveyed through the objects along the route - the Panel building, the Church, the Palace and the Bridge.



The story told in both readings is the same, only the direction in which it is read changes. The reading starting at the bridge accumulates the background information, events and key forces that have shaped the way in which the place is being interpreted, therefore determining how the forts on the coast - the final object of the walk - are seen. The reading starting at the forts, establishes the focus of the biography and the problematic addressed in the piece from the outset, gradually unlayering stories, events and key moments that have lead to the present state faced by the structures on the coast. With each object along the walk referring to a specific theme, the story of Karosta and the forts is not revealed in a chronological order, but rather through a melange of instances and highlights in the story and history of the place.

Walking is established, not only as a methodology to get to know the place, but also as an approach for structuring the biography, it provides space for one to situate themselves within the context as well as to establish a sense of place.

The objects that have been chosen for the biography, have a predominant presence in the neighbourhood and hence can be seen as characters, protagonists and symbols that tell a certain story that is not fully complete.

The objects as witnesses:

- The Bridge - an element of division and unity at once - the introduction
- The Palace - a symbol of power - reign and rule of empires - the political force
- The Church - a figure representative of a people, a community - the social/psychological force
- The Panel building - a symbol of violation - the urban force
- The Forts - the silent witness - the carrier of the political, social, psychological burden and weight of the place



Fig.12 Image of the O.Kalpaks bridge



Fig.13 *Image of the Palace*



Fig.14 Image of the Russian Orthodox church



Fig.15 *Image of the panel building*



Fig.16 *Image of the fort unit ruin at Artillery Battery 3 (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)*

## The structure

### I Emergence

1. Divided unity - At the bridge - one world behind, another in front  
An introduction of the neighbourhood as an entity that is spatially, socially, politically and temporally divided from the rest of the city and which 'seems to be alienated from the rest of Latvia'. A recount of not only the beginnings of the place, but also how division has been experienced over time.

#### Sources:

- Talk with historian Juris Raķis - the beginnings of the construction of both the military naval base and the fortification complex
- Interview with Carl Borsmark
- Interview with Andra Manfelde
- Essay by Māra Zeltiņa. Padomju armijas pēdas. - Soviet times
- TV programme Ielas garumā. Liepājas Karosta. 1.stāsts/ 2.stāsts
- Interviews from book: Karostas stāsti - personal experiences
- Essay Zane Gailīte. Pilsētas kultūras zīmes un nozīmes.

### II Existence

#### 1. Power-ful/less - The palace - political lens/forces

An account of how power, rule and governance of space has shaped the political scene in Karosta. A narrative of how the place came to be what it is today - transitioning from a place that showcased power and a range of political regimes, to becoming a power-less land once the reign of the Soviet Union came to an end, leaving it as a territory out of place. What once became a key point on the "border" of the Empire, resulted in becoming the new border of an empire of our time - the EU and the NATO.

- Book Virsnieku sievas by Andra Manfelde
- Film Borderland by Carl Borsmark
- Interview with Carl Borsmark
- Articles from Kurzemes Vārds, irLiepāja, Liepājniekiem on the military territory becoming a point of interest for NATO - ('a new empire')
- Documentary Karosta by Kristīne Želve
- Book Noslēpumainā Karosta by Andžils Remess and Juris Raķis

## 2. Repulsive attraction - The church- social/psychological lens/forces

A narrative of the social fabric of the place, uncovering the tensions between people that have built up due to differences in language, ethnicity, religion, due to prejudices, anger, resentment, pain, curiosity and jealousy. The social dynamics and relationship between the place and the rest of the city has always been framed from a rather negative point of view all throughout history, despite the fact that there has also been a constant pull towards the autonomous territory, due to life being arguably better on the other side of the canal during Soviet occupation. The pain and trauma of the past, however, has always outweighed the few good aspects of the place, leaving it as a wound that is in need of time to heal, in need to admit the pain of the past in order move forward.

- Interview with Andra Manfelde - a novelist who has written about Karosta extensively and has spent years living in the neighbourhood, as someone who was not brought up in the area
- Interview with Monta Krafte - the head of the Karosta Preservation Association, originally from Liepāja
- Interview with Carl Borsmark - filmmaker, artist, originally from Sweden, but moved to Riga, Latvia for creative projects and eventually to Karosta to start a volunteering association K@2
- Talk with Andris Ivanovs, passersby and locals in the city
- Poetry Ziemeļu tīrgus by Andra Manfelde

## 3. Violated - The Panel building - urban lens/forces



A storyline of the moment the Soviet Army left marked a moment that left the enclosed territory exploited, violated, untamed and unattended. The place had always been seen as an annex, not needed, not desired, not considered. No investment was put into the place, buildings were left to decay. The outcast place, through its condition reveals neglect, lack of care and interest. The way it has been treated, showcases a general attitude of people, the current government. The potential of the place that could offer so much more, is not being fully engaged with.

- Documentary Karosta: Life After the USSR
- Interview with Andra Manfelde
- Interview with Carl Biersmark
- Articles from Kurzemes Vārds, Liepājniekiem - urban challenges, deterioration of the urban landscape, lack of willingness to invest, lack of ownership, loss of value - referring to urban situation in Karosta as a whole, not only referring to the Soviet panel houses, but decay in general.

### III Disappearance

#### Permanent temporality and Frail monumentality - the Forts

The Forts, standing on the coast, stand as a witness of a story that has been built up over the course of time, a story of different approaches, interpretations, associations. It is a place with a multiplicity of stories and voices. Through a blindness, ignorance and insensitivity towards the wealth the place has to offer, the value and importance is slowly vanishing, resulting in a frail monumentality. The force with which the place came into being has allowed its remnants to remain present to this day, resulting in a permanent temporality - an entity that seems to be hard to be erased, yet temporal since they no longer serve an evident purpose. The monumental remnants are at war with themselves and greater forces - the sea and the people.

- Book Kurš no mums lidos? by Andra Manfelde
- Interview with Monta Krafte
- Interview with Al Sticking - French artist who made a wall art piece on one of the walls of the forts
- Articles from Kurzemes Vārds, Liepājniekiem - decay of the structures, erosion, programme.





# Biography of place

A case for Karosta



*For the one that chose...*  
*to see the unseen*  
*to hear the unheard*  
*to speak the unspoken*  
*to feel the unfelt*  
*to see the light in place of dark,*  
*peace in place of war*  
*to choose peace at the warport*





## I Emergence

### - Chapter I -

Divided Unity

*At the Bridge*

## II Existence

### - Chapter 2 -

Powerful / Powerless

*The Palace*

### - Chapter 3 -

Repulsive Attraction

*The Church*

### - Chapter 4 -

Violated

*The Panel Building*

## III Disappearance

### - Chapter 5 -

Permanent temporality and Frail monumentality

*The Forts*

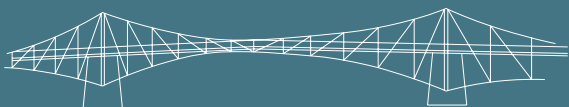






# Divided Unity

*At the Bridge*





Bus 22 /  
Direction Atmodas Bulvāris

Pētertirgus.  
Līva.  
Tirgus iela.  
Zemnieku iela.  
Miltu iela.  
Metalurģs.  
Olimpiskais centre.  
T.Breikša iela.  
1905.gada iela.  
Sliežu iela.  
Buru iela.  
Ziemeļu kapi.  
Piltenes iela.  
Šķēdes iela.  
O.Kalpaka vidusskola.  
Turaidas iela.  
Studentu rotas iela.  
**Atmodas Bulvāris.**

Mini bus 22, direction Atmodas Bulvāris - Boulevard of Awakening. A 24 minute ride from the Pētertirgus (Peter's market) at the heart of Liepāja towards the neighbourhood of Karosta - tucked away in the north of the city. 17 stops. Līva. Tīrgus iela. Zemnieku iela. Miltu iela. Metalurģs. Olimpiskais centre. T.Breikša iela. 1905.gada iela. Sliežu iela. Buru iela. Ziemeļu kapi. Piltenes iela. Šķēdes iela. O.Kalpaka vidusskola. Followed by Turaidas iela. Studentu rotas iela. Atmodas Bulvāris. The final stop at the heart of Karosta.

Waiting at the market bus stop, she stood and observed. People coming and going. Some rushing to catch a bus after the daily market visit. Others slowly lingering in the crisp November Saturday morning sun. Liveliness. Motion. The city felt alive. As she caught a glimpse of the mini bus arriving, she drew closer to the queue that was being already formed by the impatient commuters. As she got on the bus, she placed the ticket she had bought at the kiosk in the ticket punch. A journey worth 66 Euro cents one way. Punched and now valid, the bottom edge of the little card ticket now read '8:00 25.11.2023'.

Surrounded by silence at times, chatter of the young and babbling of the elderly at others, her ear distinguished an interweave of both the native and the foreign - the Latvian and Russian languages. Nothing out of the ordinary, of course, rather a usual occurrence of the everyday. She couldn't imagine that this exact ride only 30 or so years ago could have had a very different soundscape. One constructed and orchestrated solely by words and sentences in the language that was never officially accepted even after years of occupation by the Soviets. A Latvian passenger heading to Karosta at that time would have been a fairly unusual scene. Yet the one who would dare to do so, most likely not from Liepāja, but rather elsewhere, would end up hearing the word "Karosta" being repeated over and over again in Russian, and would without a doubt think that it almost sounded French, or another foreign language...a term unspoken, a place unheard of (Manfelde, 2023). It used to be a place that was so known to the inhabitants of Liepāja, yet so alien to the rest of the country. A mysterious place that was to be introduced to and discovered by many. And yet it was exactly them - the outsiders, the ones not from Liepāja that dared to discover the place before it crossed the minds of the locals to do so (Krafte, 2023). An



unthinkable reality in the present day, when Karosta is a pulling force for so many. An unstated symbol (Balcere, 2008).

And so she slowly made her way to Karosta. She observed a transition from driving through old Liepāja, across the bridge over the Tirdzniecības kanāls (Commerce canal) through to new Liepāja. The urban fabric changing from one curated with red brick buildings, old timber buildings and some remaining cobblestone streets here and there to one distinguished by concrete five storey apartment blocks. The fringe of the city saturated with the concrete remnants that had been introduced during times of occupation. The further away from the city centre she got, the bigger of a contrast she experienced in the cityscape that surrounded her, accompanied by a sense of soullessness, remoteness, isolation.

As she caught a glimpse of a bridge ahead of her, she knew she was nearing her destination. A transition from Jaunliepāja (New Liepāja) to Karosta (War port). She pressed the “Stop” button and descended at the next stop. O.Kalpaka vidusskola. (O.Kalpaks high school). The last stop on the land of likeness before stepping onto the land of otherness. A walk of 100m, 200m, 300m, 400m from the stop...and then an encounter: Oskars Kalpaks bridge. An entity of power and frailty with the grand capacity to unite and separate (LETA, 2009). A fragile link shaping and defining the territory as a whole. Spatially. Temporally. Culturally. Politically. An entity that has marked the beginning and end of a land that has witnessed powers change and rulers come and go. An entity that has faithfully marked the transition from the so deemed safe side to the dangerous side (Björnsmark, 2023). Most of the time independent of the rest of the city. Independent of the country. A link that allowed for a controlled autonomy to be supported throughout time - favourable for some, hostile to others.

On one end the high school of Oskars Kalpaks, on the other the entry point to the former military base. On one end O.Kalpaka street, on the other its continuation denoted as Atmodas bulvāris - Boulevard of Awakening. Two separate entities. The timber surface of the bridge reconfigures itself into an alleyway. An avenue, now paved, demarcated with rows of linden and chestnut trees.

The bridge initiates the story of the place appraised as -

a time machine,  
a mosaic,  
an appendix,  
a city within a city -  
unaccustomed,  
powerful,  
mysterious,  
uncared for,  
forgotten,  
endangered,  
separated,  
paradoxical,  
not understood,  
absurd,  
dark,  
abandoned,  
broken,  
inherent,  
tragic,  
harsh,  
one with lost potential,

by some.

A safe haven,  
a happy place,  
home,

by others.

Now marked by a commemorative plate, a set of barriers, a screen with the schedule of the opening times of the turn bridge. The rhythm of place dictated only by the hour of the day. It is hard to think that it could have been any different. Could it have been any different?

Standing at the threshold between here and there, she crossed it step

by step, traversing the length of 138,23 metres across the physical boundary formed by the canal of Karosta. The swing bridge is where a certain dynamic starts and another ends. A dynamic perhaps that used to be more prevalent than it was now. Today the bridge solely in charge of free flows of cars, minibuses, people. Flows from Liepāja to Karosta. From Karosta to Liepāja. Across the perpendicular flow of the canal with occasional ships. Its dynamic dictated and orchestrated by the hour of the day or the schedule of any incoming ships alone. Open four times a day for shipping traffic. From 1am to 5am. From 10.30am to 12pm. From 2.30pm to 3.30pm. From 7.30pm to 9pm. Meanwhile closed for road traffic and pedestrians. A temporary halt. An ordinary occurrence. A dynamic that daily commuters knew so very well. A dynamic that determined their coming and going.

However, the coming and going could be disrupted in an instance. A malfunction of the mechanism. A technical issue. At its best. An accident. At its worse. Something that nobody would have or could have imagined. A destruction of the link in its entirety. Damage done to such an extent that would stop any and every movement across from one side of the canal to the other and vice versa. Damage done to such a degree that would not only have a physical impact but somehow trigger something in the psychological realm too. Could it cause memories and trauma of the past to resurface? The trauma that runs deep. A scare. The daunting power of the link so fragile and intricate.

And yet 2006 marks exactly that (Liepājniekiem, 2006). July. Wednesday afternoon. 3pm. That very moment the Georgian ship “Anna” struck the bridge, breaking it into pieces. A result of the operator of the swing bridge failing to fulfil his duties. In an instant Karosta became cut off from the rest of Liepāja. Though not for the first time. Certainly an event not anticipated since Karosta was liberated from being separated from the rest of the city for years just 10 years ago. Not through the breaking of the actual link, but rather an imposed separation through the Soviet regime, the body ruling within the walls of the military base. A regime that determined who could step onto the territory of the city within the city. The swing bridge being the point of entry to a place secluded from the rest. Where only a permit issued by the Soviet authorities would ensure the possibility to enter (Biersmark, 2023).

And despite everything the separation, the event unthinkable, took place. In pure daylight Karosta once again, the island of otherness, floated away. Even though this time round there was an absence of any power involved, the act of separation was so vivid in a metaphorical sense that it stirred up a lot of memories and negative emotions. Even though the place seemed to have never integrated with the rest of the city, this event, a tragedy, revealed that perhaps it wasn't so black and white. The fact that there were fears showcased the sensitivity towards the past. The freshness of the wound that had started to heal, but all of a sudden became ripped open. Even more so, what became clear was the fact that the place had started to build bridges with the remaining city, rather than walls. It wanted to be connected, accepted and part of a bigger whole. Perhaps a unilateral wish, greeted with a reluctance, a lack openness from the city.

At the bridge, in the moment she could not fathom that the simple link between either side of the canal carried so much weight. In the present nothing spoke of it. Visually nothing pointed towards valid reasons for such an absence of acceptance. Extant only in the memories of the people living in Liepāja, Karosta were the scenes of the past. The scenes that held the key for the justification for the nature of the place. Absent from her view were scenes from the 90s. After being freed from Soviet armies, once the bridge lost its function as a checkpoint that would dictate who could and could not enter the military base, even when the “doors” were wide open, an invisible barrier withheld people from Liepāja to traverse to reach Karosta. The boundary screamed terror (Manfelde, 2023). Crime. Vandalism. Danger. Nobody wanted to step their foot on the ground. Not during the day and even more so during the night. Anyone who needed to reach Karosta after 10pm was to be dropped off at the bridge, usually by taxis, to make their own way to the other side (Biorsmark, 2023). At their own risk. If unlucky, who knows what could happen on the dark avenues, boulevards of the military base lacking street lighting. Rape, theft, death.

Absent from her view were scenes from the occupation times when only a piece of paper could ensure the entry into the isolated, independent city within the city with its own order, facilities, infrastructure (Raķis, 2008). Movement from Liepāja to Karosta and back was possible, given

that the key was there. And entrance was allowed not only to the Soviet occupiers alone, but also to anyone who was requested to deliver in the area, to work. Of course the limited entry could have been seen as hostile, but anyone who did gain this access could catch a glimpse of what was concealed from the rest of the world. A glimpse of what everyone outside the walls of the war port thought to have a better life, imagining that the grass was greener on the other side of the mysterious curtain. It was an assumption that people of Liepāja thought to be true, but that was not necessarily fully true. They were not aware of the challenges, the pains, the burdens experienced on the inside of the walls (Manfelde, 2017). A stronghold that had its weaknesses and sadnesses. People on the inside were not made of steel. They too had hearts of flesh with emotions that could feel deeply and truly. A truth that was overseen and even not recognised to be true by the outside world.

Instances throughout the past, with their physical traces having been removed, spoke of a peculiar place. Unusual. Alien. But at the same time so interesting, so unique.

And how symbolic and telling could the reopening ceremony of the bridge be? The song of choice for the opening in 2009 entitled “Between Islands” (Liepājniekiem, 2009). A pairing of words encapsulating the whole essence of place. It was the simple structure of the bridge that held the islands of Karosta and Liepāja together. Denoted as islands, the city and its neighbourhood, suggested an absence of a belonging to each other. Rather seen as two separate, independent entities. It was the simple structure of the bridge that had the power to unite or separate the lands and their people.











And once she had crossed the bridge, she stepped on land - undeniably Latvian but simultaneously so alienated from everything and anything Latvian. Starting with an architectural language so different to anything seen on the other side of the bridge. Imperial. Grand. Continuing with a different layout of the streets. Wide avenues. Once built in such a manner so as to ensure accessibility at all times, even in a case where the military town would be attacked and the houses demolished (Raķis, 2021). Wide enough to still pass through amidst torn down buildings. A territory out of place. Existing outside of time but also in different timeframes at once. It seemed as if time had stopped here some time ago. The place a phenomenon embodying the true essence of the history of not only Liepāja or the Latvian nation but even places beyond the national border, places that once were one, unified not by choice but rather by the force of occupation. By looking at Karosta, the seemingly insignificant military base in comparison to the scale of the country, the narrative of the past as well as the present could be stitched together and understood, revealing the story of Latvia as a whole (Björnsmark, 2023). A record of a history. Encapsulating times of a different century.

And so as she strolled along the Atmodas Bulvāris (Awakening Boulevard), she caught her gaze slowly but steadily becoming transfixed on the grandeur that gradually revealed itself between the shimmering and rippling leaves of the linden tree crowns. A palace. A pearl in isolation. Fenced off. Guarded. Unaccessible. Uninhabited. Embalmed in its past glory yet in search of restoration. Only a sign spelling out - militārais objekts (military object). A place apparently military in character. Up until this point nothing had pointed to Karosta being a military base, apart from its own name. A name consisting of two words - karš and osta - war and port. Despite its seclusion and apparent quietness, if listened to carefully and attentively, the Palace could speak loudly and pronouncedly, testifying to the remarkable scope of events, encapsulated in its fabric (Manfelde, 2023). What splendour. What gravity. What mystery. Passing by, she could but imagine what used to be and what could have been. Her mind became a playground for her imagination.

Empires. It was this word that she puzzled in her mind. Now under

the rule of the Ministry of Defence, and back then under the rule of Alexandar III, she couldn't comprehend that a place of power could also become a place of no power. Under the authority of the Ministry it lied in a state of restoration. What good was it to keep it in a state of isolation. Unaccessible for the general public to see its beauty (Manfelde, 2023). What could have become a palace for the people, has become an uninhabited object.

Too great for her to grasp and fathom just yet, the war port was to reveal that it was a place that not only witnessed powers shift and change, responded to wars near and far but also was at constant war with itself. Since its inception, the script of the place was prescribed. It was deemed to witness struggles, conflict, occupation. But could this dominion take on different colours...had anyone ever known its true colours? And could Karosta ever become a place of freedom, victory and peace? A place that could also embody the opposite of heaviness and darkness?

"It could be maintained only if it were in the hands of an empire" were words that she had heard (Silakaktiņš, 2008). The place once built for an Empire was now presumably in the hands of the Latvian state, the city of Liepāja - the new power in charge since Latvia gained its independence. But reading between the lines of the statement, could it be assumed that there was a lack of an empire. A lack of a modern empire. Throughout time the place was always accompanied by a power. The Russian Empire, Republic of Latvia, Soviet Union, Republic of Latvia once again. It seems that the place had never been taught to exist on its own. Only knowing how to survive with a power in place. A power not just overseeing, but also and more importantly taking care of it, taking ownership. Under the current rule it was in need of more than surviving. It needed reviving. It needed maintaining (Krafte, 2023). To exist on its own was a thought hard to imagine. And yet it was exactly that state which it was in. It found itself in a powerless state - weak and increasingly on the verge of a collapse. Only because nobody now dared to care about a land that embodied everything that was unfamiliar and alien. A land that after its creation, was never accepted and never claimed as one's own...ever since the day of the liberation from the foreign power. Nobody dared to own it, to care for

it, to appreciate it.

In that moment of liberty, in the transition from power to power, from the rule of the outsider to the rule of one's own, when room for the reclamation of place was made and even anticipated, the place became power-less. When the curtain separating the two independent units - Liepāja and Karosta - was torn in two and when a union could have been anticipated. In the moment of nationalistic pride and celebration of absolute freedom, following the final eviction of the enemy after a period of three years in place of the initially allocated three days (Raķis, 2021). In the moment marked by the sound of trumpets playing national anthem "Dievs, svētī Latviju" ("God Bless Latvia"), and the raising of the Latvian flag up into the skies in the coastal breeze, while sending off the last ships of the Soviet fleet from the harbour of the war port. Transitioning from the grand force of thousands (3000-4000 fleets) to the minuscule force of 6 of the Latvian border guard (Raķis, 2008). In that moment a hold of the vacated territory, that was yet to be discovered by many, got lost.

And after this departure, the place was left for a year...two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine years. Left as a land of its own, while being under the Latvian rule. Untamed. Unattended. And yet what it was truly in need of was a power. Ultimately a trinity that would work in tandem, hand in hand, in favour of the place not against it. The local, the city, the country. Where there would be initiative, financial and moral support. Where the empty imperial buildings would be given new life, new purpose through a programme not previously explored.

For almost a decade, even though theoretically under the rule of the Latvian state, the place was in a state of in-betweenness, not knowing how to move forward, whether and how to unite with Liepāja, how to co-exist. An abundance of questions, yet a great scarcity of answers. A situation that perhaps nobody knew how to deal with. And instead of anyone taking an initiative to find answers, to seek knowledge, to be proactive, all there was was a passivity, a lack of engagement (Biørnsmark, 2023). A lack of interest, curiosity. There was a mutual lack of experience with such a situation. Just as there was a lack of knowing how to deal with and work with such a place for the city, so there was a

lack of awareness on how to establish links with the outside from within the island of otherness. Who was to blame for a lack of action? The place continued to live, to exist on its own.

And even though the heard words described the place needing an empire, could it be that it was another type of empire that it needed. With time moving forward, with conditions changing. With the place no longer needing to serve the purpose that it was built for in the first place. Perhaps it was a change of perspective that was required. Could it be that instead of an empire with officers overseeing the military base and ordering it, it was in need of a people's empire. Instead of a cold, distant, soulless ruler, rather a gentle, lowly and present force. Who would have thought that after years of suffering in silence, and not having found its place in the world that there would come a moment when locals, enthusiasts and believers in the place and its power would come together, unite and become the heroes that would ultimately save the place or at least give it another chance. A strength that rose from within. A bottom-up approach. A modern empire. The Karosta preservation association. Karosta has not yet been saved entirely and is in constant need of being saved day in and day out (Krafte, 2023).

And then came the "occupation" of two other empires of our time (Biorsmark, 2023). The EU and NATO. 2004 marked the year when a sense of belonging to a greater whole was once again reestablished (Biorsmark, 2001) . A favourable union this time. One establishing a sense of safety and stability. After years of a state of in-betweenness, there was a sense of a clear identity. Latvia, Liepāja and Karosta was clearly not part of the former Russian empires, it now belonged and was taken under the care of the west.

It was a union of the two, a co-existence of the bottom-up and the top-down empires that sustained and have continued to sustain the place to this day. Not necessarily a collaboration, but rather two separate rulers working on different agendas, with a local scope and an international reach.



# Repulsive Attraction

*The Church*



And despite the presence of the new empires, characterised by a grandeur, it was a silent force rising from within well before the arrival of the external powers, that managed to maintain a degree of humanness, even warmth within the military port, not quite visible to the outside world, not quite acknowledged by others, but present nonetheless.

As she strolled through, she observed a mix of people, a blend of generations. Young families with children in the park, at the playground. Elderly walking home from the bus stop, after a return from the market in the city centre. Youngsters riding on their bikes home from school. A dynamic. A certain liveliness and a sense of community. As she continued to walk through Karosta, the language duality that she heard back in the mini bus on her way there could still be very much heard and perceived. Certainly expectable. And perhaps somewhat intriguing to actually hear relatively much of the Latvian language, since it hadn't always been like that. Russian used to be the sole language that could be heard on the boulevards, avenues and streets of the military base. Initially spoken by the fleets, of different national origins, and then even after they had left (Rakis, 2008). The only way to integrate with the remaining community would have been to learn to speak it. A skill that could have been acquired quickly by immersing oneself in the language pool of the locals (Biorsmark, 2023).

An immersion into the unknown just because of immense faith and trust in the potential of the place so unique, so alien. And this immersion was something that those who came and became almost obsessively fascinated with the place and everything that it held and captured actually experienced. By being present and open, the encounters with the people of Karosta and the exposure to their reciprocal communication day in and day out would provide opportunities to absorb the Russian tongue almost involuntarily. The people that decided to leave the familiar to invest in the place and its people - a project that they didn't know whether it would succeed or not, experienced this first hand (Biorsmark, 2023). Through baptism of fire they eventually integrated and became accepted by the community.

If it were a political and military army in 2004 that took over the place as a whole and dictated its general purpose to a certain degree,



then it was a social army of individuals within that stood in solidarity after Karosta became freed of its military role. In that moment it was only the human relations that could sustain life. Between those who remained, between those who came from the outside. It appeared as if a certain healing of place was taking shape through the social fabric.

Shaken to the core after the Soviet fleets left, the Russian-speaking community that remained, could be seen as one of the lifelines for the place. A humanitarian aid. An unclaimed resuscitation mission stirred up by multiple actors - the Orthodox church, the non-profit organisation (K@2), consisting of individuals not from Karosta or Liepāja, but rather Rīga, the capital itself.

The church was the place that many found a home in. It was the place where newcomers, ones just introduced to Karosta, felt a sort of acceptance upon arrival despite apparent differences - ethnic, background (Briede, 2008). And this acceptance didn't last just at the outset of the new chapter for the place, but rather continued over a period of time. A very unexpected, yet incredibly appealing quality. Those who put in effort to seek, could find. They could find a kind of belonging to the place that seemed repulsive. By syncing with it. By understanding it. By understanding its people. Becoming so closely acquainted with it that differences diffused...even vanished.

It was the church, its congregation, its people that made this possible, that allowed for these bridges to be built. It was this internal dynamic that was central to the place - literally and figuratively. It was this that created a dimension of unity, allowing for a favourable collision between opposites, making the different equals.

The church. The only place on a cold winter's night that would radiate a light brighter than anywhere else around it. Drawing people towards itself, drawing people in across the threshold of the massive carved timber door. It was here that outsiders, not from the place, who had just arrived from afar, would be welcomed without words (Briede, 2008). It was here that a mutual, yet unspoken, understanding on a different level could be established. Humbling. Human. A gesture of unearned, unreasoned acceptance. Where otherness could become a uniting element.

In a first instance a provision of a shelter on another a distribution of meal. The hospitality, that the apparently neglected place had, seemed to be boundless, perhaps even unseen. The sustaining element. An abundance of generosity found in a place of scarcity. A bowl of soup was not only to be provided to the less fortunate of Karosta, but also the stranger, the passerby, the curious, the one who did not expect this from the church's volunteer soup kitchen (Briede, 2008). When the new-comer's sole intention was to simply talk to the ones queuing for a warm meal on a cold day, to have a conversation, to witness life on the streets of Karosta, the volunteers of the church chose to treat also them, even though they had a livelihood of their own that could sustain them. They were invited to join at the table. To share a moment of the everyday life. And so the stranger became one with what the city saw as the outcasts.

Not a present reality, rather a past reality, but one speaking loudly of the forces within.

Becoming one with the locals, paved a way for integration. A connection much deeper with its people than just surface level. It was a connection that allowed for a successful continuation of the further stay of the outsider. It was a connection that allowed for a successful establishment of a movement of sorts that would care for people, for children and aim to unlock the cultural value of the place by setting an art scene at the heart of the neighbourhood, in the former residences of the naval fleet officers (Biorsmark, 2008). Bringing a fresh breath to the place. A fresh outlook and perspective on things.

By interacting with the residents of Karosta, by meeting them where they were at, the outsiders could establish a strong, humanly bond, one on which further trust could be built.

Yet already at the beginning, once action was set into motion by the newcomers, it became evident that there would be challenges. Where they were expected, there were almost none. Where they were not anticipated, there were multiple, rising almost out of nowhere. Being present in the place, showcased a painful scene, one which could be experienced only while being there. Something unseen by the rest of

the world. Years after the place was left by the fleets, and once the place had been recognised as safe enough to visit from the outside world, members of churches, missionaries from around came to bring care packages to the people of Karosta (Briede, 2008). Food packages. Packages for children - with treats and toys. They sang Christian songs. Expressed their apologies for the difficult circumstances that the people there had to experience and face. Encouraged with words. Encouraged with Bible verses, reminding them that ultimately it is God who is helping them to get through it. And then left. The instance showed the harsh truth. People acknowledged the difficulty of life in Karosta, yet all they were willing to do was to pass by, comfort for a split second and leave (Briede, 2008). Not actually delve into the pain. To remain by their side. To become one with them and face the difficulties through joint efforts. They were willing to provide a bandaid for a wound that needed more attention than a temporary solution. A wound that wouldn't heal by acts of kindness alone. Perhaps it left them feeling better about themselves because they did a good job, but it also revealed that they were not willing to get their hands dirty to change something about the circumstances. It was something that required continuous attention, work and genuine, heartfelt care. The world around acknowledged the toughness of life within the walls of the military base, but only a few could bear the weight and actually dare to step in and do something to help.

And could it be that there had been an instance where the world around really saw Karosta and its people as some sort of aliens, as objects to see? Absurd. But it happened. Tourist buses would drive through the neighbourhood and their passengers would point at the people they saw with fingers - as if they were any different from themselves (Biorsmark, 2008). As if life and people there were a spectacle. An attitude of cruelty, brutality. And perhaps this instance alone was strong enough to prove a point. The point that since forever Karosta and its people were looked down on and, according to a certain part of the society, it was the place that was never going to belong to Liepāja. The tension had always been present.

And yet the tension seemed to disappear in the midst of the people in Karosta. It perhaps didn't matter too much whether one was from

there or rather had infiltrated into the community at some other point. To a certain degree there was a sense of collectivity. The stairwell of an apartment building, an ordinary setting, could become a place where differences drew people closer and it didn't matter whether there was a mutual understanding of the story of place or not, whether there was a language barrier or not (Manfelde, 2023). And could it be that in that instance a silent agreement could be made between the Latvian and the Russian speaking members of the community, allowing for a coexistence of stories, rather than encouraging further tension. Could history and its interpretations as well as what it meant and what it symbolised become a rich source of understanding the place and its people as well as understanding the different layers and influences that had shaped and formed the Latvian nation and country? Rather than seeing the place from a perspective that focuses solely on the negative aspects and darkness that they carry.

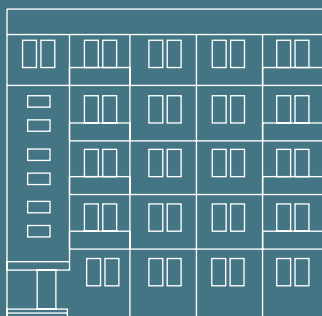
And despite all negativity, all heaviness, all issues, people found light, found hope, found joy. People from outside found a home in Karosta. Whether it was when the neighbourhood offered cheaper housing than in the centre of the city and hence everyone thought that it was the place where the poorer and less fortunate lived (Briede, 2008). Despite the voices and hurtful claims, Karosta became their home. Whether it was when one was in search of a place that would offer a sort of an escape from everything that one was used to (Biorsmark, 2008). In search of a truly inspiring place and environment. In search of an alternative way of living and doing life. Whether it was when one was in search of finding themselves. Whether it was when one was in search of a new family home. Whether it was when one was in search of a spiritual belonging (Manfelde, 2023). Whether it was when one wanted to be closer to nature. Whether it was when one believed in the place so much that they were willing to sacrifice a lot to be present and set roots in the alien place, that became home. A place of war, tension and conflict had the potential of becoming a safe haven. After all, despite the neglect and division, the people of Karosta, in the past, present and future, were, are and will be dealing with the same issues, with the same problems, with the same pain, sickness, struggles...in need of care and love (Manfelde, 2017).





# Violated

*The Panel Building*



As she opened the door of the cathedral, she left the majestic behind to face the mysteries of the Khrushchevskas. Encompassing the circumference of the church, whose golden domes appeared to hover above them, the concrete panel apartment blocks revealed themselves as a vivid tapestry (Briede, 2008). A weaving of a multiplicity of identities, personalities, stories... all displayed in full glory through the setting of each individual balcony. Almost like a stage set, they revealed how each dweller had tried to make the uniform into their own, through the way they inhabited and adapted the small exterior pockets. A collage. A collage that used to be even more vibrant than what she saw now. She roamed around the courtyards in between the concrete blocks, which spoke a language so different to the one heard before. She could trace a clear distinction between what was from the more distant and what was from the more recent past. A collage. Once again. A mosaic. A juxtaposition of time and history in a clearly defined space (Manfelde, 2023). It was a different view of what she had seen at the beginning of the neighbourhood where red brick buildings one after the other

History revealed itself to her in front of her eyes. She drew a mind map in her head of the time frames that the place had lived through. Tsarist Russian times...the 60s...70s, when the block houses were built (Manfelde, 2023)...“А потом 90-е!” (And then the 90s!) an elderly lady sitting on one of the benches in the courtyard exclaimed. The girl recalled that this was when the Soviet army had left. But how did it tie in with what she was seeing...with the narrative that she was unravelling and weaving anew?

She began to unearth what was not evident nor present in what she could observe around her. Could the peaceful, almost idyllic setting have been any different? Could words such as violated and exploited have ever embodied the essence of place? In unbelief, she had to admit that it indeed was so.

What she was seeing now had come at a cost. The cost of labour and effort. Not of armies or national guards. Not of the Latvian state or local authorities...as one might think and assume... But of the people of Karosta itself. People who had chosen to take on responsibility after the place had been wrecked, demolished, raped... A force rising from



deep within, from a position of benevolence and care. From a choice not forced, but rather voluntarily made. A sacrifice made by simple people, who acknowledged the potential of the place. Who saw the value it held, despite the questionable and devastating state it was in.

Absent from her view were the horrors of the most recent shift of reign, from power to power (Silakaktiņš, 2008). The transition from the rule of the Occupier to the rule of ones own. Could it ever have been foreseen that once the Soviet armies left, once every single house, apartment, every inhabitable space handed over to the local authorities in a state of order, that immense chaos could arise out of the blue and lead to destruction...leaving the place wounded deeply...not just for a while but for a whole decade starting from the year 1994 (Silakaktiņš, 2008).

As they left, they locked the doors of their properties...one by one...one after the other...often times leaving most if not all belongings behind. An apartment with a number of rooms fully furnished. A sofa, a table, a couple of chairs, a bed, a bath. Towels and curtains hanging...fresh bed sheets and linens covering the bed (Maksimova, 2008). Just in need of a voice telling "Come on in! Make yourself at home!". And yet out of the innocent gesture of departing from ones own home stemmed hostile acts of wickedness. Where valuables were to be found, there destruction was to be anticipated. Anything that could be collected, stripped away and exchanged for a coin or two, was worth it. Anything that could be left at the metal scrap yard...a business typology which had all of a sudden multiplied exponentially...open day and night...was worth the effort to be removed, damaged, making it no longer good for use, further making it seem less likely that it had been stolen (Kornikova 2008). Anything that could be taken to the collection point and exchanged for some amount of money, no matter how much or how little, was taken. Places, homes were left with tiles, radiators and baths stripped away, windows broken, metals collected .

These actions of violence and vandalism, once again caused by the forces of the outsider, extended beyond the doorstep of the home, apartment or house. The looting, the robbing was in no way confined to the intimate setting of the home. Treasure, that was to be taken advantage of, was to be found beyond...beyond and across that

doorstep, that boundary that separates interior from exterior...it was to be found in the vastness of the urban wilderness too. Through officially organised and favoured acts of destruction or through individual illicit action. Either through the selling of the red bricks of the Tsarist officer buildings...brick after brick...again in return for just a few coins... through the supervised disassembling of the red brick ammunition depots....or through the secret deconstruction of the wide paved boulevards...rock by rock...a number of almost successful efforts and attempts, if it weren't for the local watchmen, who had taken on the role of one themselves, who caught the evildoers in action (Korņikova 2008). Due to these acts of destruction, the place was in a constant state of transformation. What was present one day, during one moment, could be gone and non-existent on the next day, in the next moment. In a blink of an eye, if attentive to one's surroundings, one could see things shift, disappear and hence become irreversible. It was within the limits of a single day that things could happen (Raķis, 2008).

Having walked along the houses, imperial and Soviet, it was evident to her that since that time when the neighbourhood had been figuratively and literally taken apart, the place had healed to some extent, however still with traces left of an ongoing lack of care in the present as well. Mostly with the red brick buildings, where window panes had been broken, never repaired only closed off with planks of wood, facades cracking, roof tiles removed, with only the timber roof framework left intact and birch trees growing in the drain pipes.

What had been removed for good were the so called ghost houses (Manfelde, 2023). Out of her and anyone else's sight. A scare. A series of unfinished block houses in a corner of the neighbourhood. Bare walls, balcony platforms, openings for windows. Never finished. Never lived in. Only temporarily occupied by youngsters years ago (King, 2001). Thankfully the blocks did not make an appearance anymore and did not infuse a further sense of abandonment, lack of life. A further sense of neglect. Torn down for good.

The place made so accustomed to tearing and destruction within such a brief instant, during which such hostility became almost acceptable... and even the norm...that it was just a matter of time till the damage

and wounding done would become irreversible. A loss of something that never got a chance to be appreciated, valued, simply seen for what it truly was - a pearl. A vapour in the wind - now present but vanished the next second. A loss experienced in front of the eyes of the ones who could have done something but were too ignorant, too indifferent to actually do, to dare to see beyond the veil of darkness, to feel beyond the pain and anger. How far could it go?

Could it go as far as desperately needing someone but not actually admitting it. In need of an outsider, a stranger to the place telling one to wake up, to see what is right in front of them. A number of strangers from near and far...from just across the border and from lands overseas - Lithuania, Germany, Sweden, Canada (Korņikova, 2008). All as one pointing to the greatness of the place, pointing in unison to the wealth that is being sunken in the depths of sea of neglect...the intrinsic value of the place manifested and revealed through what has remained, speaking of history at every corner, intersection and turn. Every inch infused with a legacy. It wasn't just a plain territory, as often seen elsewhere, with other military leftover spaces, left as wastelands, hardly hinting at any of the site's past. Often stripped, laying flat, with no character, no quality. But that was not in any way the case here. Quite the opposite.

And despite that, the slightest attention, not even mentioning prompting of a revival of sorts, was given by the outsider. An outsider foreign to Karosta, but familiar with and familial to Latvia. It was not, and indeed it would have never been, someone from Liepāja that would dare to step onto the land over the bridge to give it another chance, a fresh start (Krafte, 2023). Because Karosta was not a place where one would feel a sense of belonging. An outsider that left everything to start something new from scratch, without any reassurance, certainty or security that it would work out as intended. Only because of deep belief and trust in what could come out of it. A courageous step and act of faith in hopes of something great perhaps. A reliance solely on intuition due to an energy and pull of place hard to resist (Björnsmark, 2023). At least for some.

About half a decade after the destructions, once a sort of internal order

had been reestablished, the vision of the outsider, a group of artists and creatives, started to take shape and come to life. Having a vision as the only sustaining element, a start was made through acquiring a right to gain temporary ownership of a house...one, two, three (Bioorsmark, 2023). Handed over by the authorities, the Imperial buildings, that once housed navy officers and their families, were now in the hands of a novel force, surrendered to a set of ideas growing, flourishing and multiplying in the minds of the enthusiasts, inexperienced but with a burning passion.

A gesture of empathy towards and faith in the place. Expecting nothing in return, this is what they offered, lavishing the place with a sacrificial love. Something that the alien space had never experienced before and perhaps was too shy to admit that it did not fully know how to accept it. They were small gestures that caused a visual change and a shift in perception (Biorsmark, 2008). Repairs, external, internal. Work on the front garden. Small actions that spoke volumes. It was an investment of precious assets - time, money, energy, both physical and mental, that was poured into the urban ruin (Biorsmark, 2023). Not knowing whether they would ever get any of it back. Yet little by little, the actions did have a rippling effect towards the rest of the neighbourhood. Just by showing that things could be done differently, change was being brought about. A reward. A certain sense of accomplishment.

And yet when there was initiative, willingness and a driving force, still carried by the outsider and now lasting for multiple years already, and an internal appreciation of the action taken by the insiders of the former military base, a resistance was experienced. By those in power. The ones who could have stewarded the place from the outset and curated its future, but who chose to not lift a finger...what else could be expected from a body who had always seen it as an appendix of the bigger whole, the city... even after being confronted by foreigners, who chose to speak up for what they saw as a gem and dared to say that there was a strong lack of appreciation for the fact that there was such a place like Karosta (Biorsmark, 2023). Worthless efforts...as if talking to a brick wall. Could anything have the power to shift mindsets, to reshape perceptions of the power in charge?

It was a resistance that stemmed as a result of a clash between individuals on the opposite ends of the spectrum. One as a member of the local community, in a self assigned position in favour of a hierarchy-less approach to the historic and urban fabric, the other in a position of authority, in favour of an agenda different to the artists', one with an economic rather than cultural or societal value, one which had assigned the island to be almost a wasteland worthy of industry and factories alone. When there was willingness that came with an increasing degree of success, it was the power that chose to drive out the outsider (Biorsmark, 2023). That chose to disregard everything that had been done, to promote healing, recovery, integration, belonging.

And when the place was still in a salvageable state, with life within its walls thriving, the good work that had been started, all of a sudden became halted. As a result, what could have been saved, restored, became abolished, abandoned...again. And since then...some action had been taken. Some buildings reclaimed. But not to the extent that one could say that the whole neighbourhood had been revitalised, restored carefully (Krafte, 2023).

Having made her way through the neighbourhood, what she realised was that, one could not say that the place was currently in a violated state. But what she could tell was that if only the early initiatives could have lived on from the beginning, when the place was still more malleable due to its level of decay being less severe, then perhaps the place would have lived or rather aged better. Year after year, more and more of the imperial was and is being lost (Krafte, 2023). Now reaching a state where it is no longer reversible. Time and ignorance leaving traces and marks of persistent inaction.

Besides the resistance of the ones in power, it seemed like the place was resisting what was being done to it as a result of being seen as a financial resource rather than holding cultural value (Biorsmark, 2023). Perhaps it was exactly this resistance that highlighted that the wrong thing was being done to the place, that it was being stirred in the wrong direction, that it deserved more attention, deeper understanding and care.

By reflecting on what she had seen, what she had heard and what she had learnt, her thoughts aligned into a sequence that seemed to reveal a sort of truth about the neglect, the pain, the healing. It seemed to her that it was distance, with a degree of proximity, that allowed for the place to be seen as valuable. It was the acknowledgement instead of denying of what had happened that allowed a fresh outlook to be encouraged (Manfelde, 2023). She saw that it had been an outsider who grew to appreciate the outsider, the outcast, the alien to the rest of the city. It was an empathy and profound comprehension that grew between the two. A sort of productive synergy resulting in a beautiful exchange that flourished and uplifted, rather than tore down. The place needed someone who dared to move forward, to see beyond what was in front of them and someone who could dream and imagine. It was this dynamic that the place had screamed for...and over time it had received it. And perhaps the first time, just a few years after the occupants had left was just a few years too early for something to be started...a premature idea, not unsuitable or unviable (Biorsmark, 2023). Time was needed to heal. Distance was needed to heal.











Fig.17 *First fort (In collaboration with EKlanberg)*



Fig.18 *Second fort (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)*



Fig.19 *Third fort (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)*



Fig.20 *Fourth fort (In collaboration with EKlanberg)*



Fig.21 *Fifth fort (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)*



Fig.22 Sixth fort (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)



Fig.23 *Sevnth fort (In collaboration with EKlanberg)*





Fig.24 Eighth fort (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)



Fig.25 *Second fort as seen from the sea (In collaboration with FKlanberg)*



Fig.26 *Third fort as seen from the sea (In collaboration with EKlanberg)*



Fig.27 Fourth fort as seen from the sea (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)



Fig.28 *Fifth fort as seen from the sea (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)*



Fig.29 *Seventh fort as seen from the sea (In collaboration with F.Klanberg)*



Fig.30 Eighth fort as seen from the sea (In collaboration with FKlanberg)





Fig.31 Image of fort ruin (K. Ustuba)





Fig.32 *Image of fort ruin (K. Ustuba)*



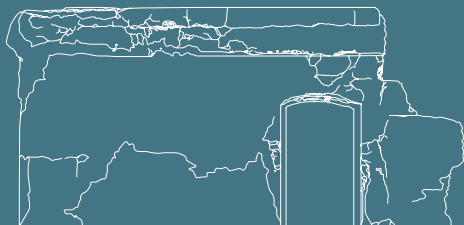
Fig.33 Image of fort ruin (*K. Ustuba*)



Fig.34 Image of fort ruin (*K. Ustuba*)



Permanent temporality and Frail monumentality  
*The Forts*



At last she arrived at the shore, for a split second, forgetting everything that was. The grandness of the Imperial military island, vanished in the sea breeze and instead a scenery of simplicity, rawness, authenticity was painted in front of her eyes. The land of otherness, characterised by everything but what by definition was or could be Latvian, suddenly became a landscape embodying everything a typical coastal landscape would be composed of (Tišheizere, 2008). The shore spoke of the familiar, without being tainted with hues of alienation. At the shore the spirit of one's own land was revived (Tišheizere, 2008). The same spirit encapsulated in the spaces encircling the neighbourhood. Same as in old Liepāja, the lakeside towards the south of the city, the grasslands on the outskirts of the city. At the shore, the place once again got in tune with its innermost being, it became its true self. The tall pine trees, marking the border between land and sea, the white sand, the rounded pebbles, the water drawing close and far. The sound of waves crashing against the shore. The sound of the pebbles hitting against each other step after step. The sound of the wind rustling through the crowns of the slender pine trees...at times lightly...at others violently.

It was as if time stood still. It was as if the crashing waves were washing away the memory of everything that had passed, everything that had been observed and captured between the bridge - the entryway to the land of otherness, and the block buildings marking the end of the neighbourhood that was built, before the seemingly infinite forestland began. The sea appeared to have the capacity to blur even the tensions extant in the present. The weight of the place so heavy, seemed to evaporate (Manfelde, 2023). A safe haven in the midst of the place defined by and its identity so rooted in war, conflict, power. A place of rest. A place of healing. A place of lightness. The darkness of the once innocent place all of a sudden painted in colours of hope and change. At the shore, her gaze was directed in a single direction. Nothing else could capture her gaze but the sea. Vast. Boundless.

Freedom. That is what she felt. A multiplicity of freedoms. Rooted in the realms of the tangible and the intangible. The coast portrayed a physical quality of freedom. An elongated strip of land on the verge of Latvia, encased by the sea on one side and the two lakes on the other. A natural dead-end. A spatial glimpse of freedom (Tisenkopfs, 2008). And furthermore a figurative epitome of freedom. In the presence of the sea, she and anyone else could feel free. It prompted one and offered a chance to think about things unseen, to ponder, to wish, to wonder. To believe. To simply be. To feel weightless when surrounded and torn by the coastal winds. She embraced the encounter and felt the release of the burden of the place, but also of her own. The relief could be felt deeply. And yet the notion of freedom ran deeper still...transcending and encompassing something far greater

than the individual. She did not realise yet that it was collective freedom that was at stake. It was at the scale of the nation as a whole, that this notion took on an importance greater than the freedom of one's own. A part of the story and history overlooked by and unknown to many (Krafte, 2023).

She stood in the presence and company of the omnipresent and omniscient yet ambiguous figures of land and sea. Both simultaneously ever and never changing. Figures so plastic yet rigid and consistent in keeping a record of the place since the very beginning. But what was the beginning for a place that had been shaped and reshaped so many times. A place with a plurality of beginnings. A plurality that, however, seemed to have been rejected, ignored...not embraced at all. Where new beginnings did not entail accepting and moving on from what had been, but rather implied an ongoing carrying of the weight...a sentiment opposite to what the landscape provoked.

It was rather a sole truth (actually a half-truth) accepted by the public that anchored and framed the place. With the multiplicity of stories overlooked, the place found itself in a state of a silent war with itself as a result of not being able to tell everything that it held within. The story did not unfold beyond the Soviet occupation. The beginning and inception of place, as known today - a militarised island of otherness in the midst of a land of the familiar, in reality encompassing only a fraction of time, disregarded the actual beginning of place and the several beginnings that followed through time. The story of the place was in need of being unfolded and retold for what it actually was. Beyond preconceptions, beyond assumptions, beyond prejudices.

She walked along the coastline. Northward. Away from the city. Away from the urbanity of the military town. Towards the wilderness. Stepping on the soft surface of the sandy shore, onto the undulating fabric of the dunes. Sand filling up her shoes one grain at a time. An increasing remoteness. However, a remoteness not accompanied by an anticipated solitude. She was not alone. A distant yet somewhat imposing presence caught her attention. Yet another encounter.

What seemed to be a territory dictated by the rhythms of the sea and land, water and sand, encompassing within itself an inherent landscape of temporality, introduced itself anew as the centre stage for a relic of the past. The place that seemed to solely revolve around an encounter with the present, where the shore line was being drawn and redrawn day in and day out by the crashing of the waves. Where the storms of fall and winter redefined the steep coast, moulding and sculpting it season after season, witnessing the transfiguring power of nature. Where the sea orchestrated the motion and dynamic of the place. All of a sudden

turned into a territory curated by what once were the walls of the Imperial Russia. Forming the coastal defence line. The most western point of the Empire (Raķis, 2021). A military base together with a fortification complex encircling the whole city.

As she approached the structures, the faded silhouettes became less ambiguous. More pronounced. Eventually a clear view of an infrastructure, primitive in construction revealed itself. An assembly of concrete military buildings. Some individually lying in the water, so eroded that they almost appeared as natural rock formations. Others lying in a clear sequence half-intact, individual yet interlinked. And yet others lying as a mound of rubble. All evidently in some state of decay and deterioration. And despite their brokenness, they had a voice, a story to tell. Yet for now and for years they had remained silent. Or rather had been silenced. A line of silent witnesses. Had anyone ever really understood them and valued them? Did anyone desire to see their potential?

Deemed as a strategic mistake, the forts once built, were never used for the purpose they were constructed for in the first place (Krafte, 2023). The forts once built yet destroyed, partially or fully, to prevent anyone - any potential opponent, from benefitting from the infrastructure (Raķis, 2021). An absurd scenario that became an absurd reality. And although time has passed, the absurdity has continued to prevail, materialising itself in a different manner, however. Absurdity in the way that the structures have been treated, approached. The way they have or rather have not been framed and curated...integrated in their surrounding landscape. Some sign posts here and there speak of and for the silent witnesses. With information, with cautions. Speaking of the past and its events - political, historic. Speaking of the present and its dangers - environmental, structural. The erosion of the steep coast and the subsequent triggering of the quiet yet forceful and profound disintegration and decay of the blocks, seemingly so robust and rigid...a thread so common to the woven discourse surrounding the structures.

The coexistence and juxtaposition of the three bodies, forming an intricately intertwined trinity - sea, ruin and land, revealed a different face of the sea. The sea that could wash over one with great sense of freedom and sink one in peace indescribable...in other words to move one emotionally, now revealed itself as a force capable to move also physically. It had the power to shape, to mould, to tear away. Silently yet undeniably, the sea was able to shift, to change its surroundings, leaving a mark. Perhaps a process imperceptible to the naked eye at one instance, but definitely noticeable at another time...after seasons of winds and storms, year in and year out. The fabric was in a state metamorphosis. When violent, the sea had no grace, and did not spare a thing that crossed its path. It



was here at the interface between the land, the sea and the military artefacts that the battle, the war between the trinity could be seen. It was here that she was made aware of the magnitude of that force and the difference it had in relation to what it could do and what man could do. Man is strong. That capacity had been made clear through the way the structures had been bombarded, exploded. Destructing, decomposing and breaking the artefacts to a certain degree. In an instant. But that ability was not comparable to the secret power of the waves of the sea (Zeltipa, 2008). Confronting the structures every day, with varying degrees of impact. It could be that there were days when the two bodies could maintain distance, coexist, live in harmony. And then there could be days that would challenge that unity.

Walking alongside the forts that were still standing in their original shape to some extent, however only as halves of the initial volumes intact and the other as halves of deconstructed elements, some larger, others smaller, sunken in the underlying sand bed. It was not an entirety that she was seeing. She could only imagine how the coastal defence line could have been previously. Her mind tried to piece together a coherent whole by reconstructing the structures in her mind based on the scattered elements she could observe. And yet, what would have never occurred to her since no traces had been left was the fact that the coastline that she had walked along and hence the line where the forts were aligned one after the other, had been two hundred metres away towards the west. The defence line that now had encountered the sea face to face, had been hidden from it when it was built. A reality unimaginable. Once again capturing the sea's force that could not be withstood by the land nor the concrete blocks...blocks that had been built to withstand war, attacks...to defend. Now defenceless. And yet despite the tension it was certain that the forts would remain in some shape or form for another hundred years to come.

And despite the forces surrounding the structures, the masses, unquestionably were to be seen as an embodiment of permanence. Yet a layer of transience was what covered them. The structures in themselves an imprint on the land, covered by an imprint of their surrounding forces - mortal, natural. What she could see was a diversity of veils covering the skin of the silent witnesses. Skin marked by fractures, ruptures, crevices both faint and surface and pronounced and deep. A soft veil of greenness - mosses, algae covering the surfaces touching the water bit by bit weaving a new fabric on the structures themselves. A mark in and of time. The structures once independent, were now becoming part of the landscape, morphing into a singular unity with the land, with the sea, with the coastal air. In a state of symbiosis.

And yet another veil of temporality wove and wrapped itself around every corner of the seemingly unwavering concrete blocks. Different in nature than the veil of greenness. This time rooted in an act of violence towards the silent witnesses. Violation, vandalism. A transient cover of colour, shapes. Graffiti. Tags. The place offered planes and planes of opportunity to be consumed. Exterior walls. Interior walls. Any surface, somewhat flat, was to be perceived as a canvas. As a result the skin had become fragile, on the verge of crumbling, turning from a flat plane of plaster and concrete to a mosaic of textures, revealed through the stripping of layers, showing glimpses of the material, tactile build up behind the skin. Concrete. Smaller rocks. Larger rocks. A rawness.

Appropriation had become an act of disregard. An act of denial fuelling the growth in the volume of the fabric hinting at neglect (Sticking, 2023). Resulting in an increasing repulsion.

Yet it was evident that the spaces had not been forgotten and were very much inhabited by a specific group of individuals. The cold concrete rooms were being inhabited by a certain public, during a specific time of day. And perhaps even different groups depending on the time of year. The corners of interior spaces marked by litter. Cigarettes. Rusty aluminium beer cans. Plastic bottles. Tissues. Empty packaging of all sorts. Spaces marked by soot, burnt wooden pieces. Signs of unlawful, secret occupation of space. Squatting. Nothing but traces left of the inhabitation.

The traces spoke of life, but so did the present group at other times throughout the day. The mother who had brought her children for an afternoon walk, the elderly lady that had come for her morning nordic walk, the man bringing his dogs for the daily walk, the tired young man taking in the view of the sunset at the end of the tiring day of work.

While passing the remaining forts, she exchanged a glance with people who had come to visit the forts. Young. Old. Separate. Together. In couples. As families. Once again plenty of cues that the place was certainly not forgotten. It gathered people, even more so than any other landmark in Karosta. An unspoken symbol of the place (Balcere, 2008). Interaction with the historic fabric was being maintained, however, was it being done in such a manner so as to honour it, to unlock its fullest potential. The shape the interaction took perhaps questionable. An interaction described as surface.

As she meandered through the site, from one fort to the other, from the outdoor path above, to the indoor path below, embedded in the coastal dunes, from the

open outdoor space to the tight indoor spaces, she was accompanied by an indifference, an ignorance of the others.

The place had the chance to teach, to tell. There was an opportunity. An opportunity that was not being engaged with. The history was not being actively uncovered and discovered by many. Certain generations were not aware of the different time frames that the place had lived through. Other generations were not aware of the fact that it was exactly thanks to the fortification and the defence line at Karosta that Latvia had gained its independence during the freedom fights. The freedom that was provided for the whole nation. A story that was worth telling. And here the place lay still. Capturing so much. Yet in a state of silence. It was ready to speak, to show. It was ready to counteract the disappearance - of itself and memory. To encourage a collision and cohesion of a multiplicity of views and perceptions just to reveal its beauty in its diversity. The place could become an epitome of freedom, reconciliation. Instead of neglect it could be cared for. It could be valued, just as it held value.





Emergence. Existence. Disappearance.

These are the words that allowed to frame the story of Karosta in light of the neglect that has been fuelled by dissonance.

Reappearance.

The word that allowed a position towards the problematic to be established and to be proposed as a reaction towards it.

From the offset of the research it became clear that the place had value that was to be unpacked and the chosen site had potential, currently overlooked, that was to be revealed and consequently engaged with. From the offset of the research it was clear that the theme that it dealt with was sensitive and heavy, requiring attention and care in how it was coped with, addressed and ultimately used in order to act as a driving force for a suitable translation of the research findings into a set of design principles and proposal as a whole.

Entangling the themes of dissonance and neglect, the site called for a close reading of both the tangible and the intangible heritage of the place. To study and build a well rounded understanding of how these themes exhibited themselves in the chosen context, it became clear early on in the process that there was a need for a material and immaterial approach, one that would provide an overview of the different layers of information that could be gathered from the site. The biography hence juxtaposes the very material, rich, imposing protagonists, together with the immaterial, content-dense stories and histories. Not repeating the usual narrative told, but rather unearthing new layers, with an alternative point of view.

The site, one of multiple along the encircling defence line, both coastal and terrestrial, showcases the overall attitude of the general public as well as the local authorities towards the structures. The abundance of the structures has made them redundant in the eyes of the average Latvian. If it were a single fort then there would be an added value to them, but now since there is an abundance, it supposedly loses value.

Through the research and the gathering of information from a range of resources, it became clear that the site, despite having multiple voices having an authority over it, had lost its own voice and had been silenced. It is not solely the physical disappearance and decay of the artefacts that is at stake. It is also, and perhaps more importantly, the psychological, mental disappearance of these structures and the narratives surrounding them that matter.

The loss of memory. A sort of amnesia.

The loss of conscience. A sort of blindness.

The loss of curiosity. A sort of deafness.

The challenges faced by the place, made an invitation to consider what would be required to encourage an alternative response - to remember, to see and to hear. And to ultimately serve an act of care as a counterpart to the neglect. The dictionary's meaning of the word neglect specifies that it indeed is to "fail to care for properly/not pay proper attention to; disregard". It is an action that is devoid of care. Hence, further enhancing the need to care not only towards the historic fabric, but also the people of Karosta - both the Latvian-speaking community and the Russian-speaking minority, and the landscape - the edge between land and sea. It is this seemingly simple act that the place is in need of.

The tensions of the site - political, social, urban, suggest that this notion of care could be built up through the introduction of relationships and encounters. Between people. Between site and people. Between the old and new. Between past and present. All feeding into something that would result in a meaningful interaction, that would promote reflection, meandering, slowing down. Actions making one aware of the passing of time. Making one aware of the richness of the surroundings historic fabric.

And still, it is even more specifically the unconscious search for healing that the place and people are yearning for. Healing that could come from facing the past, acknowledging it instead of denying it or trying to erase it. It is a balancing act that needs to be done in the present to bridge the gap between the past and future. The past needs to be remembered while maintaining a forward trajectory. Just as the biography adapted an additive quality, so is the design proposal, part of the reappearance chapter of the piece, to have an additive quality. Working together with the structures present on the site, rather than against them. Acknowledging them rather than ignoring them. Clearly distinguishable, complementing not competing. Light rather than heavy. Contrasts that speak of the approach and position adapted towards the military remnants.

And it is healing that the proposal aims to design. From the research it became clear that healing would come with time and the shift of perspectives. It would come with acknowledging the weight of the past. And by choosing to move forward. It is a past and a topic that will never leave the Latvian society and will forever have a hold on one, tighter or looser. Already with a generational perspective shift currently taking place, it has become evident that different generations have different understandings and interpretations of the past. With this taking place, it has become evident that there is a need for conserving the history for what it is and to raise awareness especially in the midst of younger people who know either nothing or very little about the sites history, about occupation periods. A hint that lead to a proposal for a programmatic approach. An archive. A notion that not only could work with the immaterial heritage of the

place, the neighbourhood and the site but also with the tangible military heritage on the coast - the ruins of the defence line.

It is evident that it would take years for the memory, just as for the remnants, to be erased, to disappear completely, so it is a matter of making peace with it, it is a matter of establishing a relationship with it, to co-exist, to keep distance, but realise the need for a proximity too. A beginning of suggestions for a spatial translation, a spatial response toward the ruins. By establishing a certain closeness, a meaningful engagement, a sense of belonging could start to take shape.

The site has not been forgotten. Consciously or not it is clear that, the place gathers people for one reason or another. Moreover, despite the stance of ignorance of many, the assumption that the ruins are useless, the structures have undeniably become an unspoken symbol of the city. A contradicting yet true statement. And despite being a place that draws people, what the setting around the military artefacts conveys is a lack of curation, a lack of attention to how people can gather, approach the site, and be informed about what they can observe. Metal fences and concrete blocks separating the parking spaces from the elephant paths around the structures. Sign posts speaking of histories. A wind generator on one of the coastal defence line sites. Interventions not granting added value or appreciation towards the site. All choices that had been made by authorities, people in power who did not attribute value to the coastal military site.

Through the reconsideration of how the site could be framed, approached and explored, an architectural proposal would provide an alternative way of meaningful engagement and encounter not just with the military ruins but also the landscape - including the land and the sea and the people. A network of relationships curated around notions of invitation and openness, experiences of inhabitation and ever increasing proximity. Providing a base for a proposal that would acknowledge the conditions of the site and the sites dependence on its ever present companions - the sea and the dunes as well as its moldability in time.









Karosta. A place that stemmed as a military base in and a fortification complex around Liepāja, a city tucked away on the west-coast of Latvia. The neighbourhood evokes and provokes. It has been a place of paradoxes and a place that has absorbed caused clashes in interpretations, associations and meanings. The place stemming from Russian Empire times, living through independent Latvian times, Soviet occupation times and then once again the current independent Latvian times, the major and focal history of place that has been repeated constantly goes back to the Soviet times. A period that has caused many scars, wounds and pain to the Latvian nation. The place is rooted in a difficult, diverse and mostly dark past. It is a place with many voices, some louder, others quieter, some superior, others inferior. It is an abundance of voices, each speaking so differently to each other, claiming an abundance of stories. Some stories that have been told within the walls of the military town only. Stories that have been told outside the walls. It is a lack of unity between them, that has caused the place to become an arena of contestation. It is dissonance that defines the neighbourhood. It is because of this that many see Karosta as a place that epitomises the painful past. For many, it is to be avoided, instead of being faced. It is to be rejected instead of being embraced. This in turn has translated into the neglect of place, that can be observed throughout the neighbourhood. The imperial Russian buildings and the military buildings of the fortification are being neglected. It is dissonance and contestation that fuel this lack of care of place.

The interlinked issues and history of place form the beginning of the graduation project. From the outset of the project, the research aimed to address the multiplicity of voices, relate to the observed neglect, and respect contrasting stories through an additive framework. A biography of place was the main method of research. To study and to create a more cohesive overview of the place and its poly-vocal stories. The biography does not aim to cover the whole history nor to recount every event throughout each historic period, but rather to weave a multiple narratives. The biography showcases the reasons that left the place in its current state. It unpacks the driving forces behind the visual, tangible lack of care present in the dark part of the city. The narrative of the place was pieced together through a diverse set of sources, newspaper entries, published interviews, novels, poems, documentaries, television programmes, conducting interviews and interacting with locals. This creates a narrative different in nature to the conventional story. Providing a different point of view, a different perspective that is in favour of the place rather than against it, one acknowledging the tensions present in and surrounding the place, rather than denying them. The goal of the research was not to eliminate or erase certain stories of the place but rather to add to them. To unearth and highlight a reality true to the story of Karosta and its military heritage. Additive in nature, the biography creates a base that seeks to be objective, impartial, ultimately revealing the value of place, while still

acknowledging the weight the neighbourhood carries.

The success of this method, resulted in the synthesis of findings and information that had not been previously correlated, providing an outlook that could be used in a productive manner so as to establish an architectural translation of the research findings and to become an integral part of the design proposal. The project, through the unlayering of the richness of stories and dynamics of the site, establishes the richness of the place and acknowledges the fact that it has value not only in the richness of the stories, but also in the landscape - the sea and dunes, the environment of the Latvian coast, surrounding the structures. The design proposal hence learns from the surroundings composed of the ruins and the steep coast, acknowledges its challenges and tensions and aims to add to the already existing value on the site. In a state of increasing disappearance - the stories, the histories, the ruins, all acknowledged in the biography's chapters, are met with a design proposal that adds to the story of the site, that seeks to counteract the disappearance by encouraging reappearance.

A reappearance achieved not through the active preservation of the place and the remnants but rather through the raising of awareness of people of that embedded value, the promotion of encounter with the forts, their ruins and the landscape. The design acknowledges the weight they carry, and instead of competing with the existing fabric, adds to the site with simplicity. The design principles, just as the biography, acquire a language that is additive in nature. Adding, rather than removing. Enhancing, rather than diminishing.

The research and design can be perceived as an act of care towards a place neglected and overseen. A care that seeks to provide healing. A healing that stems from facing the difficult, painful past rather than rejecting it. At the core, the project tackles issues of collective memory, trauma, generational differences in how place and history are perceived and heritage that seems to belong to everyone yet no one simultaneously. Incorporating and raising questions related to political, social, cultural issues, the project's relevance goes beyond the city of Liepāja, not only in the Latvian context but also beyond its borders, in countries that share a similar history to Latvia's, countries that have gone through the similar occupation scenarios. Having established itself as a place that encapsulates the whole of Latvia's history, where by looking at Karosta alone, one could read and understand the whole history of the country, the project fundamentally invites one to not only explore the place, but to delve into understanding the root cause of the social, cultural dynamics currently present in the neighbourhood and in the country as a whole. While difficult, these chapters of the past are crucial in the shaping of Latvia as a nation. By looking at the past, the present could be understood and a hope for a better future brought about. Hence the project

incorporates a time dimension, that aims to address the past, the present and the future.

Throughout the research and design phases of the graduation project, through the continual building of new knowledge about the place, the site and its people, a clearer understanding of what would a suitable architectural proposal be was established. Through the understanding of the sites specificity and contextuality, an appropriate programme could be built up as well as a material response created. Acknowledging the challenges both tangible and intangible - environmental and urban; political, social and cultural.

As a continuation of the graduation project over the coming weeks, the aim will be to tie together further and stronger the link between the research and the project, re-establishing a clear narrative throughout - revolving around and rooted in the meaning, materiality and context of the project as a whole.









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## Interviews

Monta Krafte, interview by author, 5 January, 2024

Andra Manfēlde, interview by author, 5 January, 2024

Carl Bioršmark, interview by author, 13 January, 2024

Al Sticking, interview by author, 8 January, 2024

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Interview transcripts

- Interview I -

Andra Manfelde

*Writer, poet, novelist*

- Interview II -

Monta Krafte

*Head of Karosta's preservation association*

- Interview III -

Carl Biorsmark

*Founder of K@2 organisation*

- Interview IV -

Al Sticking

*Artist*



A.M. My Karosta story is a strange one. I'm Orthodox. I'm from Kuldīga. When I became Orthodox, which was in 1993 or 1994, our church was closed, held Sunday services very rarely and then even decided to take a break, which I found very bizarre. How can a church decide to take holidays? To clear my head, I decided to go on a pilgrimage. I looked for churches elsewhere. Searched for one on the map. At that time we didn't have Google. I found four Orthodox churches in Liepāja. So with my last coins that I had I went. To make it back I had to hitchhike. I got to Liepāja, walked around, found two of the churches. Looked in the map again, found the third one and thought to myself that I need to get on the mini bus and go to that one too. I went there not knowing anything. Not knowing anything about Karosta, nothing. Once I reached the place, I got out of the mini bus and was shocked. It was the 90s. The multi-storey houses, that have now been somewhat tidied up, stood there with facades like a variegated blanket. Each balcony was painted in a different colour...some had bits falling apart. At that time the so called ghost houses were also still present, I even witnessed how they were torn down but now have been demolished. They were buildings that only had their skeleton left. And in the midst of it all, almost as if landed from the sky, it still feels like that, but in the first time, not knowing what to expect, I was shocked by what I saw. All buildings had 5-stories and then like a spaceship, a huge Orthodox church hovered above them. It

has remained a surreal view to this very day. It appears as if it would be invented, made up. At that time it had been painted yellow. It didn't have the beautiful golden roof tiles. It was a truly wild experience. It was August. The sea with layers and layers of algae. Walking from the church, after a while you end up encountering the sea face to face. At that moment I thought to myself that there can be nothing more beautiful than this. And so I thought that once I'll grow up, I'll come back to live between the sea and the church. And so I returned back home, and for about half a year, I told everyone that I had been at Karosta. Only after a while did I realise that it's actually kara osta. Since the mini bus on my way there was full of Russian speakers, all I heard was "Karosta, Karosta" (mispronounced). I thought oh what a great name, almost sounds French. And so I studied, raised my first-born, lived in Tukums, Felt like my soul was missing something. And at that moment, in 2008, when the financial crisis was in full swing, and properties were incredibly cheap, I sold my apartment in Tukums and bought two in place in Karosta, still having money to do renovation work. And so I ended up living in Karosta for about 7 years. What fascinated me the most was that it felt like it was a time machine and its proximity of nature. A time machine in the sense that you could observe traces from the rule of Tsarist Russia, its architecture.

What I realised that the neighbourhood changes swiftly from kilometre to kilometre. When I first went there I encountered a lady who (9:23) tried to communicate with me in Latvian, but who felt incredibly bad for the language barrier. She felt outcast, excluded. And I felt like it would be very interesting to do a survey with the locals of Karosta, to ask them what did they used to do here. Ask "Did you sit around on the benches outdoors, did you play chess? Or did you go visit each other?" To understand and grasp what life used to be like over here. And several years later this idea of documenting the place, turned into a writing project for the "We, Latvia, 20th century" project. And so I realised that this is my idea, for that time frame. And so it all came together in my book called "The governor wives", where I used material collected during my interviews with people that used to live in Karosta, who lived in Liepāja, But this information didn't come easily. When I told people that I was a writer then nobody wanted to open up to me to share about themselves. It was only after a while, and after the locals started to see and acknowledge me as a local since they had noticed that I'm a regular attender of their church, that people started to open up to me.

There were so many prejudices linked to Karosta, especially during the 90s. Taxi drivers refused to drive there. When the Soviet army was leaving, it was harsh everywhere but especially in Karosta. They started to sell arms as soon as the regime collapsed. Weapons and arms became the new

currency. For years people refused to go there, drive there. It was at this time that people from Liepāja developed these prejudices, some of which I think are justifiable. Such as that only Russians and the socially poor lived in Karosta. Now it's over. But I'd say that this has happened a bit too late, since the heritage has been ruined. There were times when people were offered to pay minuscule amounts of money to buy the red bricks of the Tsarist buildings, to get rid of the ruins. So many buildings were left abandoned, got destroyed due to lack of maintenance and soon after turned into wrecks.

When people said that it is only Russians who live in Karosta. From personal experience I can claim that it was not at all like that. There were such people who didn't know how to talk in Russian and then there were some who didn't know how to speak in Latvian. So there were moments of mutual misunderstanding. And while I lived there, I never experienced a dangerous situation. Of course I didn't walk around at night, in the dark, in a mini skirt. I felt safe there. It was frightening.

But it was this juxtaposition of the Tsarist Russian times, the 60s - the Stalin time buildings, 70s - when the block houses were built and the 90s when everything was destroyed. The whole of the 20th century gets revealed in a single space. And it's such a shame that it's now too late, I believe, to save something. Save buildings and their whole appearance of a specific time frame.

They were built, but never were used in war.

I have also visited the palace, which has now been clenchd by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nobody is allowed in anymore, which is complete nonsense. When I went there I needed two permits. The acoustics of the place were incredible. There have been times when I have cycled past the palace at night and seen that the ministry has organised an event with live music. And then it has felt like a time machine. Taking me to times that can no longer be experienced.

K.U. As you mentioned it yourself. Karosta has been described as a place of paradoxes, of contrasts. What word would you choose to describe it.

A.M. Time-machine.

K.U. The Latvian society has contradicting opinions about the place. Many associate the place with Soviet times, even though it was built during the Russian Empire times. But at the same time, Karosta has been important during the Latvian Independence War. Dissonance seems like the word that embodies the spirit of place. What would you say is the root cause of the diverse interpretation of the history

of the place? And did you encounter these contradictions while living there or is it something that dissipates while living there, in the daily life.

A.M. I think the cause of this is the so called “Russian times”. There’s been quite a lot of resentment, because Karosta was a closed area, but shops there were better, supplies better, locals from Liepāja tried to get access permits to get into Karosta.

I myself was born In 1973. When I went to Riga too a shop and started talking in Latvian, the saleswoman screamed at me in Russian. I don’t personally have a resentment about it, but I understood that it took several decades that in the people in Liepāja felt like they were secondary and that everything in Karosta was better. And hence this resentment and offence has become ingrained in the people of Liepāja. It has resulted in a trauma, I’d say.

I approached the place from a different point of view. From a faith and church perspective. From an artist’s point of view and hence I didn’t really take that into consideration.

While living there, I got along with the different people living there, perhaps it actually was the most challenging with fellow citizens. For example I knew a lady called Lidiņa and she for example didn’t know how to speak Latvian. I was not going to accuse her for not speaking Latvian, I was not going to tell her “You should learn Latvian”. She lived in her world of its own, in Karosta, in a bubble.

It always was structured in such a way - you had the canal, the bridge that opens and closes off, previously also the permits and during the Tsarist Russian times Karosta had a postal index of its own, perceived as a city of its own.

While living there I got along with everyone. If someone previously asked me if I lived in Liepāja then I always replied by saying “No, no I’m from Karosta.” I didn’t want to be associated with Liepāja. But now it’s my third year since I’m living in Liepāja. It feels like a totally different place.

It’s all based on prejudices and trauma. It makes sense that when you’ve been exposed to so much “Russianness” (during the Soviet occupation) that preserving some buildings, houses that were built by them seemed to be the last thing on one’s mind and even caused a sense of disgust.

And this in turn resulted in a resistance towards Karosta. It’s really sad that at the very beginning we didn’t realise the wealth and potential of the place. A place with an Imperial character - massive, monolithic.

Now that has started to change. But when I lived there,

nothing was happening.

K.U. While living there did you experience that different social groups had different interpretations of the past? Was there a sense of inconsistency between the interpretations and a friction between whose is right?

A.M. I tried to understand, because there was this sense of resentment also among the Russian speaking community, because when the officers were leaving the territory after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they left everything behind and then it wasn't necessarily only Russians who stole and demolished everything, but also Latvians. And so it left the Russians feeling not understood and rejected. At that moment there the language law was introduced which now has also been implemented. There were discussions that schools would transition to teaching solely in Latvian. Many were also left unemployed. Many also didn't have citizenship and still don't have it. They lived in their bubble and thought that somehow they'll manage and get through it. Many left but many also chose to stay. It is still very much like that. If you live inside a bubble then inevitably you'll experience some sort of friction when crossing the boundary, the threshold.

When I meet people I usually listen to what and how they tell the story, their story, perhaps I don't believe and agree with everything, but I try to understand them.

For example the main character of the book is a Russian lady. She explained her story very vividly and beautifully. How she arrived. I also added some of my own life. And by combining different facts and stories created the fictional character and her life. She explained to me that the Cathedral, she didn't know that it was a cathedral, since she lived behind this iron curtain, so nobody referred to it as a church. Nobody dared to claim that with their mouths.

The people that were brought here, had no choice in deciding whether they wanted to come or not. It was just a system that determined who, what individuals and what families would have to come to Karosta.

Then there was the sailors club. Now it all seems absurd, but that was the reality back then. Dances were organised in the church, at some point there was also a cafe. Everything took place there. Drinking, pissing. Everything...in a pace of worship. It fascinates me that something like that actually happened and took place.

K.U. Do you think with time passing by, there is a chance that the identity of the place could disappear? Do you think that it's an issue that the witnesses of time and history - the military heritage - could eventually also disappear with time

passing by? Do you think it's likely that we will forget the importance of the place?

A.M. I think that many artists, the Karosta Preservation association also. People have finally realised that something needs to be done. You also have these hidden objects, for which there probably isn't enough money to do something with them. That's a shame. Now you have the industrial zone that's been established in Karosta. Then you also have the manège, which used to have a glass roof...of course it won't get restored but perhaps it could somehow be conserved. Then efforts are being made to restore the officer's palace, but nobody's allowed inside...which doesn't make sense. Hearing stories about how it used to be in there, you get upset about not having the opportunity to access that. If only everything had been conserved and restored on time. It is beautiful. It is tragic. It is strange. And that's where I found home.

But it was not practical to live there with two small kids. To go to school we had to cross the turn bridge. Which was open at specific times. When there are no more ships coming in then they don't close the bridge. When there were storms and the ships had to get into the port then sometimes we had to wait an hour and even longer to wait until all the ships had entered and the bridge could be opened again. Alternatively we could have taken a bus that would take us around the canal, but instead we waited...in November...it sounds romantic, but a harshly romantic.

The people that live in Karosta are either the poor, the artists, the middle class, and some Lithuanians, for whom it is their summer resort. But I guess that a normal, logically thinking individual would not choose to live here under any circumstances.

K.U. Would you say that people in Liepāja don't see the potential of it?

A.M. They didn't used to. Maybe some, but the vast majority certainly not. But also one has to consider the distances between places. Yes, Karosta is a neighbourhood in Liepāja, but for Latvian standards, it is quite far a way from the city centre, about 7km. Also then the whole aspect of not knowing whether the turn-bridge will be open or closed. Public transport links are also very poor, buses and micro buses run very rarely. So you are very dependent on your own car.

K.U. Would you say that Karosta is still segregated, separated? Or has it become an integral part of Liepāja?

A.M. It is finally slowly becoming part of Liepāja.



K.U. And while being in Karosta, it seemed like the importance of the place disappears. In particular while being at the forts it seemed like people were just taking a stroll, taking pictures of the sunset, children were jumping around on the ruins. It appeared as if while being in a place that is so saturated with history and a difficult past that people become blind to its importance.

A.M. I'll take this chance to talk about my book. The main idea is...it's about these children that live in the block houses and one day a huge fog covers the place, which my daughter actually experienced. She went outside, stretched her hand and could not see her hand in front of her. It's a typical occurrence during the spring time. When the air is hot but the sea is still cold, fog covers everything. And hence my daughter could not see the church anymore, since we lived just around the corner, and so she asked whether it had collapsed? And so. The story is about these children who look for the missing church. They find three pieces of miracle glass. And through these glass pieces they see that a princess of sadness lives in the vandalised ghost houses, an anger lady lives in the water tower and then they eventually get to the palace. And the main take away is that we get accustomed to places, to everything really. Just as the children stopped seeing the cathedral that is so central to the place in the midst of the thick fog. Whatever is self-explanatory, self-evident, loses a sense of a miracle, a sense of the extraordinary. While living in Karosta, I understood that we tend to become desensitised and blind to what is around us. In Karosta this is very evident.

Karosta - everything is escalated, everything is saturated.

K.U. Previously Karosta had this military and strategic importance, what would you say is the role of Karosta at both the scale of the broader city and the country as a whole?

A.M. Everything should be made available, unlike keeping it closed as the Ministry of Defence has closed off the palace and places should be preserved. I don't think that there are many places like it around Europe. It's unique. And even now there is a NATO secret military object, a military base. A place I encountered by accident.

K.U. While reading your poetry, one of your poems starts with - And then you end up in this territory where love is in the air but buildings die?. What is this love that you write about?

A.M. The beauty of the place. You live in a painting. Despite the typical Russian character and nature, you cannot claim that there is a lack of sincerity. The faces of love are really harsh. The intensity of place is surreal.

K.U. And later on you write that “The world that starts after the bridge with Eiffel balustrades and key chains around them, this war port will once again open its borders and float away in the sea.” When will this day when the borders will disappear come about and will Karosta ever be accepted as part of Liepāja or will it always remain as a city within a city?

A.M. The wounds have somewhat healed, but they have been triggered once again with the war in Ukraine, raising up those national questions once again and causing an encounter with the painful past again. Maybe the place is becoming Latvianised, I don’t know, I don’t live there anymore. With the older generations having passed already. Maybe it’s a sign that it is socially healing

K.U. How to remember a past infused with traumas, pain and wounds but still move forward?

A.M. In order for these scars and wounds not to dominate, one has to acknowledge them. If you acknowledge their presence, choose to understand them and name them, then you can get rid of them and move forward. But if you decide to avoid facing them, and move them under the carpet then they maintain some control and power over you.

I feel like the place has retained imprints and traces of the past just because of the sheer amount of everything -tragedies, suffering that has happened here.





K.U. What do you associate Karosta with and what word would you choose to describe this place?

M.K. Unaccustomed. It's a more difficult question, as I associate Karosta with the prison because those are my personal associations. But I would maybe say - opposites, if I have to look at it through a more philosophical lense.

K.U. And what sparked your interest in this place? Do you recall a moment when this happened?

M.K. I'm someone who doesn't plan much in life, I'm always in search for a flow. I used to work in the city council's tourism information office. My boss Andrew Maisiņš took me to Karosta when the Soviet Army had left. Up until that point I had never been there. People that lived in Liepāja had visited the place of course, but I hadn't had the chance. And as weird as it might sound, he also took me to the prison that time. I remember it was still that time when the Latvian naval force. And it was a time when foreign journalists started to come, from Spain and elsewhere. At that time it was rare that foreign journalists would come visit. And they were told that they could only visit sites around the city centre, the Trinity church and so on. It was a very 'correct' route that was proposed to them by the city council. But then they noticed the Karosta cathedral on the cover of a booklet that we had

handed out. They said 'We need to see this!' So then we thought to our selves that it will be a disaster if the heads of our department will find out that we took them there. And maybe it was then, that I saw through the eyes of the Spanish journalists and realised that Karosta is interesting just because it is just so different from anywhere else. And it was through its messiness, of course back then it was even more so unaccustomed than it is now. And then there was another instance when my boss Andrew Maisiņš was organising a tourism event, tourism day so then he took me to the Karosta prison, where he had organised a little event and this was the first time I actually visited the prison. Several years later we were again organising tourism events for tourism agencies for tourism journalists so that they would come, get familiarised with the place, so they could include them. Several people signed up but the majority had come to visit the previous year already. We just had managed to make the event so enjoyable that they wanted to come again. It was 2002 and development in Liepāja was not so rapid, we didn't have anything new to show. They had seen hotel Amrita, they had seen Porīņš, but nothing new had been created over the course of the year. So we were thinking, what should we show them? We should think of something new. I had had been at the prison, so I thought let's do an event here. It will be nice. It was planned to do it just this one time, for this small group, so they could have fun, enjoy themselves. So we got actors from the Liepāja theatre involved, Vilsonu and his wife, other young actors of the time, Gods and Maģets, acting as prisoners, playing cards in their cell. They (the journalist) were really moved. They said it was the biggest event of their lives. So they immediately asked how much does this cost? But we were not prepared for such questions of course. In reality it was our goal to show them something which they could then offer for their tourists. But this was not something that had crossed our mind, yet we were forced to look into the opportunities as the following week we were contacted by the Lat-agency stating that they want this for their tourist group. And this is how it started. It's not that this is my life dream to be the head of the prison. If I have to be completely honest then it's not my interests. What I find more interesting in the whole thing is the development aspect that you can create something from complete scratch. There are hundreds of buildings like that in Karosta.

K.U. It's such a shame that so much of what Karosta has to offer doesn't get used and engaged with.

M.K. Yes, yes.

K.U. As you mentioned before Karosta, is a place of contrasts and multiple times the place has been described as a place of paradoxes, and the local community has

contrasting views with regards to the place. Many associate it with Soviet times, even though the place was created during the Russian Empire times. But at the same it's been an important place during the Freedom fights linked to Latvian Independence. It seems that dissonance reflects the spirit of place. What do you think of the contrasting views for the diverse social groups with regards the place. Does this add value to the place?

M.K. I would say that it only makes the place more valuable. We see it all from a tourism point of view. This diversity means that the individual who's interested in how it used to be during the Soviet times, the individual interested in the freedom fights, the individual who's interested in the architecture of the place, the one interested in contrasts - where could you find a more beautiful contrast - the contrast between the grand cathedral of Karosta and the block houses in either the background or foreground, together with the lines of garages. Candy for the eyes! And that is one of the trajectory in which we have worked. The prison of Karosta is a product of niche tourism. Tourism students come and are interested in niche tourism, dark tourism, military tourism. And in reality one has two knowledge that at the end of the day the object has surpassed niche tourism and has become of Latvia's mass tourism. Everyone comes to the prison. Children, kindergarteners, families, pensioners, students, Latvians and foreigners. All interest groups. We have previously done so much to make it this way, to attract a variety of target audiences. And this is also one of the reasons we have started to organise the Karosta festivals during which we exhibit a series of artworks and are also open to different collaborations, because we acknowledge the fact that we can't do everything alone. We have had a variety of projects, not longterm, an example of that is the air soft. All of a sudden a group a interest that wanted to offer air soft on site. So we were asked to organise and make it happen, so then we had a period of Air Soft. Then we have hunted ghosts, because people are incredibly fascinated with everything to do with ghosts in haunted places. There has been a wide variety of things and programme that we have offered and which we have promoted temporarily. At the end of the day it is all there to reach a wide target audience. And it is good. Of course you also get people who say - "oh I won't go to the prison because I'm on vacation and who wants to go to a prison while on vacation, it's something dark, something that doesn't belong to holidays." But a festival may appear more appealing, hence we play with this idea. That is a way how we entice people to come and explore Karosta. That's why I think that this enormous diversity is Karosta's biggest advantage and greatest asset. And I'm so pleased to have so many collaborators and companies who are interested in working on promoting a programme in Karosta and for

Karosta together with us - the preservation association of Karosta - we have showed and proved that we can. We can create something noteworthy in a hopeless place. It inspires and gives the courage to try out different things.

K.U. Have you noticed a difference in how people perceive Karosta in Liepāja, the capital in Riga.

M.K. People from Liepāja were the last to step their foot on this side of the canal. We were highly appreciated by people abroad. Then people in Lithuania acknowledged us, then people from around Latvia. At some point there were a number of schools from which every grade of particular age groups had come to visit. But people of Liepāja, no. They are proud. They come only when visitors highlight that there is such a thing as the prison and only then do they start to find where it actually is located. Then we started to participate in Museum Nights. If it's for free then the locals also dare to come and explore. In a similar manner we started to organise free of charge events at the Redan. Through that we attracted the locals. Now we have also started to organise free events which also tend to be attended by the people of Liepāja.

Karosta has changed a lot. There are many new players that

Very little gas remained from that past.

K.U. Would you say there is a different attitude towards the past and the heritage present in Karosta among different social, age groups? Do young people know about the history of the place and engage with the importance of it for is there an indifference.

M.K. The youth doesn't know anything. They don't know it and don't want to know it. It depends on the age group. Of course some know some history but what we offer is a very distant history which they are careless about.

This is one of the reasons why we created the Freedom Fight museum in the Redan. Because we were thinking that now some people understand the importance of November 11, but many still don't. And very few know what happened during that time in Liepāja. It wasn't any less important than what was happening around the country. And in the context of Liepāja it was very important actually. Hence we understood that it should be our mission to honour the individuals who fought in the battles and who fought so that we could live the way we live today. And secondly we understood that it is our task to summarise the main information that we have and that we know and to present it in an understandable manner. And what better way to do that than presenting it directly at the spot where the vents



took place.

At the Redan there are two parallel permanent exhibitions - both equally important. First of all there is one about Karosta itself and secondly about the war of Independence - looking at what happened in Liepāja and also specifically in Karosta and the Redan, the embankment on the terrestrial defence line.

We approached it with a sense of a mission because we felt like it is really important that this information is gathered somewhere and gets displayed and showed, because many don't know about this. And there shouldn't be any shame in not knowing because how could they know. Hence if people do want to find out about these events, we have created this place for them to come and find out. What I clearly know is that my parents and that generation (1940s) don't know anything, nothing about the Freedom fights nor the place. They have grown up during the Soviet times, have not thought about and hence don't know. Once again we can't blame them about it since during those times these events were not discussed and could not be discussed. And perhaps the new generations, those growing up now, who go to school where the history teachers are very engaged with the local history, hence organising school excursions to these places, visiting the exhibitions and organising their own events around these topics.

K.U. Through these museum exhibitions you achieve the preservation of the collective memory.

M.K. Yes.

K.U. Historically speaking the place has had a military and strategic importance and role. What would you say is the significance of the place and military infrastructure, including the forts, nowadays?

M.K. Nobody in Liepāja needs the forts, nobody sees them as valuable because we have them all around us. I think there are very few people in Liepāja who are actually interested in them and who would consider them as valuable, as something that we should preserve, as something with potential. Just because we have so much of them. If we would have one single fort then maybe one would think "Oh, what will we do with it?" But we have them all around the city, and hence why would they be interesting to anyone?

K.U. Which is a shame!

M.K. Of course it's a shame! That's why I'm so happy that at least the War Museum has undertaken to establish a branch at Artillery battery number 2,. It's a state

structure, hence has a degree of seriousness to it. But this single initiative doesn't solve the whole issue. We have an abundance of forts, one could do so much with them. For example, our initial project was at the Northern Forts. We organised excursions and an outdoors game in and around the forts - Escape from the USSR, which we still do. We started in 2006. Back then we had decided that we want to make one, one, single fort as a base for our visitors so they could leave their belongings there and also create another space for an exhibition perhaps. Hence we decided to install a door, not even a door, a gate with bars to make it more secure. They remained in place for exactly one day. They were ripped out. Someone must have really needed that steel. Several times a number of solid wood tables were brought there to create a picnic area. Also a project organised by us but funded by the city council. But these, for example, were burnt on 9 May. In moments like this, you lose any desire to continue or to put any more effort in making something out of the place. You simply don't want to invest any more money into it. It's clear that once in a while something wears out, something gets broken, but if a gate gets stolen on the first night, then you don't really want to put a new one in on the next day.

But also regarding this, one has to acknowledge that the progress is astounding and unbelievable, because in 2019, we had our first Karosta festival.

K.U. Of course the main issue faced by the forts is coastal erosion and the disintegration of the structures themselves. Have there ever been efforts made to save or preserve the structures.

M.K. As far as I know, no. What will you preserve there? It's not possible to save them anymore. But do we have a shortage of forts? One should walk around to find out that there is plenty more all around. We need to preserve the ones that can still be preserved. What needs of drown will drown. But there are multiple sequences of forts that are in much better shape and condition that could be saved to some extent.

The best we can do now is to invite people to come and see them before they have totally sunken. To invite people to come and become witnesses of history since your children will most likely not see them anymore. It does not make sense to invest in efforts to preserve the disappearing. It's impossible to fight against the sea. There is room to work with the forts over and over if anyone would be interested and willing.





K.U. Could you tell me about your story and your encounter with Karosta? And what brought you there?

C.B. It's a long story and it's a long time ago. I myself have kind of left it all behind, and doing other things. So for myself I need to recap a bit.

I can tell you that I'm always, several times each year, being reminded of Karosta in one way or another. People, meetings, articles, films. It pops up all the time.

The background is. I'm Swedish. I came to Lavia, first time during the Soviet times, like 87, 88, 89, something. Then I moved there in 1991, to Latvia from Sweden. I was living in Riga for 10 years. And we founded a film studio in Riga - Locomotive for film and television. And with this film studio we were travelling, making documentaries and TV programmes all over the world. In those days there was no YouTube, no Internet. So what we did was, we had an idea for a programme and we sold it to television stations in France, Sweden, Russia, Spain, Latvia. So my background is film and photography. Also as a journalist and writing. One time I got a message from a Swedish journalist and he was going to go to the Baltic states to make a reportage about the baltic States as such. All three of them. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. I had learnt the Latvian language at that time. This was 1995 maybe. So I was his interpreter, his

driver, I was his photographer. And was the journalist. So I was like his facilitator. And then we were driving to the Russian border, and we entered the zone, with a sign where it said "Robežjosla" (Borderland). And I took a picture of this sign and it was never used in the article but I had it in my camera and I put it on the wall in the film studio. I had this picture on the wall. "Robežjosla". No! "Pie robežas josla". And it was hanging on my wall for maybe a year. 95, 96. And then I started to think that this is actually very interesting. What does it mean "Pie robežas josla"? Of course I understood what it meant, but in deeper meaning, psychologically, philosophically, geographically. What is a "Pie robežas josla"? And in English on the same sign it was written "Borderland". It was not in Russian. I think it was in English on top and in Latvian underneath. So I started with film team, we started to travel all these "Pie robežas joslas". In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Belarus, Kaliningrad. And somehow during this process we ended up in Karosta. As a director and camera man, my focus was on borders as such. And then we came to Karosta by chance somehow, maybe in 97. And I felt like all these... this was a process of two, three years...so I felt like well Karosta is the fantastic metaphor for the phenomena "Pie robežas josla." Even though it wasn't a border land in a geographical sense because it was in Latvia. But for me, after these two, three years of investigation and research, I felt that Karosta was like the borderland. So I started to go there more and more. I was living in Riga at the time with my girlfriend and the team we had. And I started to go more and more to Karosta because I found it so intriguing discussing this topic of the borderland. And then maybe in 1998, 1999, before the Millennium, because I wanted to finish the film before the Millennium because that also was like a borderland 1999, 2000. I felt like this was the time for the film. And also at the time Latvia was not part of the European Union, so these borders that we were travelling - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, would finally, very soon become the frontier border of the European Union, towards Russia. So it was a future borderland for the European Union. And then in the year of 2000, we made big art happening in Karosta, called "Transit Zero". Going into thee zero. That was a collaboration with almost 120 filmmakers from all over the world, like 40 nationalities. We flew in people in military aircrafts, we flew in from the airport in Sweden to the airport in Liepāja, And then we spend three days with these 120 people in Karosta. Watching the exhibition, discussing. That was a big experience. It was a mess up. A big mess up, but it was an extremely interesting thing, because all these people that came from South America, Africa, Japan, India and yeah. We felt that what we had been feeling in Karosta for maybe two, three years. We felt that these are documentary filmmakers, let's show them this place that we have encountered. We could have great stories a fantastic place. But that was theoretically. But

when they came, practically it didn't work out as I had thought. So it was not a success at all. But it was a fun time. And a very special time. So when all these filmmakers flew back to their countries, after three, four days, I sat down and felt empty. You know you had been working on the project for so many years and now "tukšums" (emptiness). And then I talked to my friends, to my girlfriend, to my Mexican friend, to my Latvian friends. I said "You know what I'd like to do?" I would like to settle down over here. Here in Karosta, I would like to settle down. And to start this process but from scratch. Not like coming as a filmmaker, doing documentaries, and then leaving and going to festivals showing the films, but I would like to do it the other way around. Put down the camera, take the camera away and start to work from scratch in the place, with kids, with parents. A social project. A cultural project. And we did that. I had to convince my friends a little bit, but some of them said "Okay, let's give it a go, let's give it one year." So we moved from Riga to Karosta. Not to Liepāja, but to Karosta. It's a big difference. In those times it was a very big difference. So we moved from Riga to Karosta. And we started to work. From morning to night. We got a house. We were not squatting. But, we got a contract with the Liepāja city council, for a big house and we got a rent contract, I think it was one year or maybe two years rent contract. And in the rent contract, the sum was very low. But in the contract we wrote that we will help to renovate the building. So everything was official, with stamps, with decisions from the Liepāja city council and Karosta name pārvalde (housing!!!). Everything was official. So we started to work. 2000. 2001. 2002. 2003. Until 2008. 8 very intense years. And at the time I think, Latvia entered the European Union in 2001 maybe. And then I didn't finish the film in 2000, I finished my film that is called "Borderland", I finished in 2001. It's a collage of these "Pie robežas joslas". It's a document of time. Time document. You could never make such a film 10 years before and you could never make such a film today, you could only do it in this border time that was in those days. So it's a document.

We continued the work. We founded this NGO called Kultūras un informācijas centrs K@2. (Cultural and information centre K@2). You as bring fluent in Latvian, you will understand the deeper meaning of the name. Because it's a joke with words. The address of our house was Katedrāles iela 2. That was the address of the house. So K@2. But also when we started out we had no funding, nothing, we just started out as some individuals and what did we do? We walked around. We walked and walked and walked. Which is K2. So it's like a joke.

And then 2008, came this big financial crash in the whole world. And can you imagine running a cultural centre in a suburb of Liepāja in the time of global recession.

And at the time we had started to rent more houses, so we had a total of six houses, with contracts from the local government. But you know we were growing and getting kind of important in the cultural life of Latvia. And you know sometimes, the cultural minister, it was Jelena Demakova at that time, she came to visit us a cultural minister just to see what we do, not talking to the mayor of the city. And the mayor of the city got angry because if the cultural minister comes to my town then she should come to me not to these artists. It was not our intention to become like powerful. We just wanted to work in the area. With people. I felt that things were starting to break down. It was too big a burden. Too heavy for us. So people started to do other things. I didn't give up. I wanted to continue this. Fight for it. And then a very crucial point was the exhibition I made myself. We had an art gallery as well, called K@Māksla (K@Art - What is art?). And in that gallery I made, I had been working for two years on this other film called "The presumption of innocence". It's like you are not guilty until you have a sentence from the court. And that's a theme and art project about a latvian aviator Herberts Cukurs, during the second world war. And he was claimed of genocide of Jews. 21:55 But I made a big exhibition about him and his history. It was like a hot potato at that time, you could not speak about this because he had a bad reputation in Latvia. But I went to Brazil to find his grandchildren, and we found archives that they had brought from Latvia to Brazil after the war. So I made a big exhibition. And then the shitty began, the whole Jewish community went crazy. So we had to shut down the whole exhibition. We didn't shut down the exhibition. It was the mayor of Liepāja, at that time Sesks, that was very angry that I did this. So not only we became big but we also made things that made problems for the society, for the so called politically correct society. But that is what artists have to do. It's the aim of an artist to raise questions. And this was 2007. Then came the crash. And people left. But I tried to stay on and I had a court case with the city council, because we had invested so much money, private money, plus fund money. Not from Latvia, but from the European Union, money that could have never ended up in Karosta, if we didn't have the project. So we had invested, we had fixed the houses, not all six houses but two, three of the houses were in great condition in comparison to the two. So I started to read all the legislations of Latvia about privatisation and stuff, and I came to the conclusion... because at this time we had prolonged our rental contracts up to even 99 years, some were 25 years, others 45 years and even 99 years...and then I started to read myself the Latvian legislation, and I came to the conclusion that with these long contracts and our investments in real estate we had the right, Latvian law told us that we had the right to privatise this as a private entity. And then if you have. Private entity then you can take. Loan in the bank, you



can keep on renovating. But when I went to the mayor Uldis Sesks, eye to eye win his office, just him and me, and I told him “You know what? If we cannot agree on these things, I will go to court. And he said “ I’ll see you at the court!” So I went to court and I won, I won the first case, I won the second car, We went to Rīga, we went to high court. And I won all the time. Because I was right. But he didn’t give up. For him it was a prestigious thing. I was not about the buildings anymore, it was about him being the mayor. No artist could tell him what to do. And then I remember exactly, which year it was, it was 2010. That should be the local election in Liepāja, And I understood that if he is mayor, Uldis Sesks, if he wins that election, and becomes mayor for another four years then I have to leave. But if he doesn’t win, with the new mayor, because we had veery much feedback from the society of Liepāja, artists, intelligent people who said that the mayor is not doing the right thing. The artists are. So we had big support. Emotionally. But then he won the elections. And then I said to myself, no another four years fighting with this guy, I can;t. I have another life to live. So then we handed back all the contracts and said good luck. Bye-bye. That’s my story.

K.U. As a follow up question. Karosta has often been described as unaccustomed place, place of paradoxes and opposites.

C.B. And paradoxes and opposites are great for artists. We love that stuff!

K.U. Could you mention what are the paradoxes that most stand out to you from the time first arrived there and when you left?

C.B. People change as time goes. People go into new situations saying that they will do this and then after time they don’t do it or they do something opposite. People change, which is normal. But when you see it face to face and close to you then you feel strange.

Of course there is visual things like the old Tsarist buildings and the Soviet time Kručovskaas. And then this cathedral. It’s crazy. It’s really crazy. Visually crazy. And at the same time beautiful landscape. The sea. The fresh winds. The forest, the one forests. The Beberliņi lake. These boulevards. It’s not Liepāja. Karosta is Karosta and Liepāja is Liepāja.

Even one year we got the, we received the main culture prize of the Latvian nation, called “Trīs brāļi” (The three brothers) for the K@2. And there was a ceremony in Dailes Teātris. When I went on stage to thank for the prize, I told a story, and this is very funny, that Liepāja is Liepāja and Karosta is Karosta, that we had these 120 filmmakers who

came. Some we kept in contact with and one said “You know what, I have this photograph I want to send to you, can you send the address.” So I sent the address, “Cultural and information centre K@2, Katedrāles ielā 2, Karosta, Liepāja, Latvia”. And he wrote me back saying “What is this Liepāja?” Because he didn’t know, he just knew Karosta.

And also for Liepāja people, people from Liepāja, at the time they didn’t; t go to Karosta. They couldn’t take taxi. When the sun went down, we could not take a taxi to Karosta. Nobody drove to Karosta. They drove us to the bridge. And then we had to walk. Now it’s different. I’m speaking now about 95, 96, 97.

Speaking about paradox, all the time it; s not only black and white, but plus, minus. Intriguing.

K.U. Just as you were saying about Liepāja being Liepāja and Karosta being a separate entity. Would you say that there was a progression from the entity, the city within a city being closed off all the time or did it progress over time and did people become more open minded.

C.B. It progressed every day. Every week. Every month. And what I see now. Was contacted by some artist, some two years ago. I see now that people have been allowed to privatise. So what we were not allowed to do, other people were allowed to do. And that’s what I wanted to do. Because when you have something private. You can invest and you can develop it. But we were not allowed because we were too early. But other people who started, who knew the mayor, the brother or sister, they were allowed to. And they do it now. I mean it’s okay. I was caring about the place. About the process. And what I see now is happening and maybe has been happening for the last 5, 10 years, I; m very happy to see that it works. But I do think, if we wouldn’t have started the process, it wouldn’t have happened today. Somebody has to start.

K.U. The separation of the two and Karosta being this isolated neighbourhood, what would you say were the main interpretations and associations of the people of Liepāja that they were projecting onto the place. What was the main repulsive

C.B. Kiev, krievi, krievi (Russians, Russians, Russians). Russian people. Russian, Russian, Russian.

K. U. While you were there was it really the social context that you encountered or just this assumption that because it was a Soviet military base that was the reason it was just associated with Russians or was it justified?

C.B. When we came it was 98.9% Russians. Or Russian-speaking. It could be from Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan, or wherever, Russian-speaking. I, maybe knew 5 Latvian people and the rest was Russian-speaking. And that is how I learnt my Russian also, by living in Karosta, because nobody spoke Latvian. So that; s true. Since I know Latvian history very well then of course I fully understand all the Liepāja people that say that this is an appendix, we don't want this Karosta, the Russians, the Soviet times. But they didn't; t see the potential of it. But now they do. And hat; s very good. And I'm very happy for them.

K.U. As mentioned before, dissonance is really this word that describes the nature of the place. A place that encompasses a diversity of histories and time periods. So would you say that at the root of this dissonance, of this tension is the fact that generations and different social groups interact with it differently or is there another cause?

C.B. I don't have a straight answer, but I think, to find the true answer to your question I think you have to ask the guys who came there in the late 1900s, who decided to build Karosta. But why did they do it? Why did they put it in that place? Because it has a power. And there is a ...I'm not superstitious in that sense...but I have read, have heard, have spoken to people that say that there are energies flowing where the cathedral is built. So when the tsar or Russia, when he decided to put in 1 million rubles or something to build Karosta, that was to have a window towards Europe. But why didn't he build it in Palanga? Why didn't he build it in Ventspils? Why did he choose a place that was uninhabited in that spot, where Karosta is today? I think if you look back then you will find the answer to your question. And I think you will find quite astonishing things, doing with energies and history, and dimensions, nature. And since that was built it has just grown and grown and grown and grown. And then it came to some explosion, when everybody left in the 90s or late 80s and now its a new process. And once again to find the true answer to the question, I think you would have to ask the question again in 20 years from now, because Karosta is has this dynamic built on energies. It is a magic place. And I think these guys in late 1895, when they came there they just felt that this is the place. This is the place.

K.U. And nowadays I guess people mostly associate the place with this military past and the military activity and that is kinda at the core of the identity of the place. Would you say that there is a case for the place in need of a healing or its rather the people that need healing with regards to this past? So mostly people maybe associate it with Soviet times.

C.B. I think neither, nor. I think it's a matter of time, of

generations dying out and new generations coming in, taking over the place. And as I said, I think we were way too early. We were way ahead of time, 20, 30 years before we should have done it, but we couldn't do otherwise. But I'm sure, I'm convinced that everything is going in the right direction. And that the biggest healing has been overcome and now it's a bright future. Maybe in 100 years from now again something else will happen. You know everything goes in cycles. But no I don't think you need to do anything special - not with the people, not with the place, not with healing. The healing is happening. Day by day. Step by step. Minute by minute. And you can't fasten it up. It's just as Latvian society as such. I mean 50 years were taken away from the Latvian history. It was just raped for 50 years and now its coming back to what it should have been. So I think it's the same for Karosta. But Karosta is a very good metaphor for the whole Latvian society. I remember I was thinking a lot about it while I was living there, that you could look at Karosta to understand Latvia. It's like a metaphor. You can look at Karosta to understand all the countries during Soviet times.

K.U. So I guess it's just a matter of processing the past and letting go of the past at some point. And moving forward with what has been left.

C.B. And not forgetting what has happened in the past. Not taking it with you as a burden, but to cope with it, to understand it, to put it into the right frameworks. And to see the potential. More and more people do now see the potential. But mainly people now see it as a potential economically. Economical potential. They have built factories, shipping companies and now some big water terminal to pick water to Africa. But I think people have not fully understood is the culture and the energetic context of the place. I'm not speaking about economics and financial status, but about culture and energy.

K.U. Could you elaborate on that.

C.B. Once again you would have to go back to the 1880, 1890s when the guys from Moscow and St Petersburg decide to build Karosta. Why? Why? Why in that place? I think that's your key. If you find the answer with that key - why did they choose Karosta, 150 years then I think you're close to the answer. But I don't have it. I have felt it. This might sound strange to you, but I have seen, not in the later years but when we started to live there, day and night in the '90s, 2000s. And this what I'm going to tell you now finished in 2003 and 4, but for my first two or three years in Karosta, when it was 1h before the funeral In the cathedral, all dogs of Karosta, stray dogs, ran around like crazy, screaming. 1h before the funeral. Go figure. But when more people came then that phenomena disappeared. But

it happened two, three times a week - these crazy dogs running around yelling. The first time I saw it I thought what is happening. But then I understood that they have feelings and somethings happening. Big energy! Big energy! And I think those guys that came in the 1880s, 90s. Hired by the Tsar, they were highly-educated, they felt it.

K.U. And what would you say is the role and purpose of such a place nowadays? At both the scale of Līpāja and Latvia as a whole.

C.B. What I see is that it has veery much turned into this financial district. Factories, shipments. Using territory as an industrial park and special economic zone. That's one thing I see. But I don't think that that's the right way to go. And that's why I was also fighting with this mayor. Because he was going for the economic side and I was going for the culture side. I remember one he said to me, because we had many many meetings face to face. And once he said "You know Carl, there will never be any cultural activities in Karosta. Never. This is for industry. And we keep a few houses just for history." And I think he was wrong. He is wrong. But he's not in power anymore. The guy who is the mayor now, Anšiš, he was the second deputy, so he has the same philosophy of the city council. Do it financially.

K.U. And I guess that maybe reflects the city as a whole maybe and its approach to Karosta. The fact that they see it as this annex as you called it. That I was never really part of the city.

C.B. I called it an appendix. Nobody knows why you have it, but when its goes bad then you can die. So I think many people have been looking and are still looking on Karosta as an appendix but I think this appendix has enormous potential.

K.U. We don't acknowledge the place enough and it feels like we have lost a sensitivity towards it.

C.B. Yes I think that is very correct. And I also think without being a crazy artist, I think the place itself feels that it's not appreciated enough. I believe that a place by itself has an energy, a will and power. When people do the wrong thing to the place. The place doesn't respond. But when people do the right things to the place, the place responds in a good sense.

K.U. And I guess you can see that also in the urban context as well. All the military infrastructure, such as the forts on the coastline, and the Tsarist red brick buildings, they're just decaying and deteriorating. And so there isn't an appreciation for that and it's being left on the side and not being engaged with. Not preserving it. Not understanding

that there is something for future generations as well.

C.B. Very correct. And we're having the wrong type of conversation with the place.

K.U. How would you say we can remember the past while moving forward?

C.B. You know there is a music festival in Sweden that is called Future Echoes. And I have a friend working in a company called Recorded Future. So if you take Future Echoes and you take Recorded Future, both of them are not logical. Because you cannot record the future and the future cannot echo. So by being open-minded and without preconceptions. Take the helicopter, fly up and look from above what is happening. Not like what is my neighbour saying and why is that house broken down. Fly above, have a big view and think from scratch and ask what is actually happening. Try to be not too subjective. Try to be as objective as possible.

K.U. If you had to choose one word to describe the place, what would it be?

C.B. Nesaprasts. Un-understood. Not understood. But I would like to repeat that it's going in the right direction.







K.U. Could you tell me about how you came across Karosta and what brought you there all the way from France?

A.S. So basically I'm a painter, artist from France. I live in Montpellier, south of France. And in 2015 I just decided to do a new project, a nomad project. The first one was a prototype, just in France. I created a Facebook page and proposed to anyone in France or outside, I've been in Switzerland too, to go to meet them to listen to their lives and stories to propose a painting for locals in their home. That was the first step. And I really enjoyed it. I really enjoyed doing it for two months. I've been to so many places in France and Switzerland too, where I met so many beautiful people, listened to their stories and created paintings. So I developed new techniques, developed new friendships too. So it was a very good idea. So then the year after, the next summer in 2016 and would like to continue to develop this project and I was like kinda frustrated about my school lessons about history. There is a lot of conflict that I didn't really know, or only the main lines, but I wanted to meet these people who were living during these times, to listen to them. The first conflict I wanted to discover and to know more about and study was the conflict in Ex-Yugoslavia. So I've been firstly to Croatia, then Serbia, Romania, a lot of different countries. Just on my own, with a backpack, with not a lot of knowledge about

everything. The main goal was to go in some cities, some time randomly and to meet people and listen to them. And the first one was in Osijek, in Croatia. It was kind of crazy, because there is an old town in the city where you can see a lot of bullets on the walls, and the city has been almost destroyed by the Serbian army at this time. So it was like a travel in the past. But not a fast history. So I was inside and could see what war can leave in the landscape. So I met some younger and older people. The conflict with Ex-Yugoslavia is really confused, because when you change from one country to another, it's really a different story. And it's really interesting to know each one of them. I don't know each of them but some part of them. So I made a big tour before going to Sarajevo. So I would like to continue but in 2017 I was preparing a big exhibition in Montpellier, so I didn't move at all, but the next year, 2018, I wanted to know more about the Cold War. Because when I was talking to people especially in Latvia, Estonia, Russia too, I wanted to know more about the Cold War but especially in the Eastern block, Eastern Europe. So I started with Prague, visited a small city near Prague, an old factory, abandoned factory, about iron stuff. Really interesting. I found an old worker, a guy who was working in the factory back at the time. I took a picture of him and painted him on a wall of the old factory. He told me a lot of stuff, he scraped Prague before the end of the Cold War and then came back for work. But the factory was down. And then after I've been to Berlin. I learnt a lot about Stasi police. I didn't know a lot about the Stasi's. So I went to the museum, the Stasi jail, to meet people, to lost places. It was really interesting. After Berlin I've been to Poland in the south of Poland, in an area called Silesia, the part of the country that moved and changed a lot during the 20th century. And I went to a mine, and it was really interesting, I learnt about the story of the mine workers who protested during the Cold War in 1981, because the way of working was too hard, so they stopped to work, and went on strike. And then the police government just acted by sending Russian militia open fire and killed nine workers. So it was like a tragedy. I found a picture of the guys and made a big painting and in Polish I put some letters in their faces, saying "We will never forget". After Poland, so I would like to move to the Baltic countries, so my first step was in Kaunas. I didn't know where I would go before leaving Poland. I just started by looking on stuff on the computer and I just saw an old nuclear base from Soviet times, they used the territory to put a secret base to send nuclear weapons on London, Paris, Berlin if the war was real. It was really strange, it was huge. But if you look on google satellite images, you can see nothing, because everything is underground. And so I've been there. It was crazy. I found a bunker where I made a painting about a girl, as if she was just waking up at a time when a nuclear attack was coming. It was harsh. It was a reference to Hiroshima too. And by

the way, the girl I met to be the model, was the most famous person in Lithuania, a famous swimming champion. It was an adventure to go there by night. It was a bit scary. The next day, I now come to Latvia and Liepāja. Why did I come to Liepāja. I don't know, but I took a bus from Kaunas to Riga, and just arrived in the evening in Riga, moved around and just didn't feel a good atmosphere to create something, it was too big a city. I wanted to discover something else. So I did some research on my computer. And that was the first time I saw Karosta. So I was like, okay, let's try it. So I just slept in Riga and then in the morning went to Liepāja. Arrived in the city, found a place to stay for sleeping and then take a bike to see Karosta. I will always remember that when I first arrived there I just firstly saw this big wind stuff (wind generator). And then I arrived at the beach, and then wow. I saw all of these concrete stuff, destroyed and it was a really really strong feeling. And as an artist I really can feel something strong when I know that there is a place where something happened or will happen, I know that. I feel it, really. And so I moved around, checked every stuff, and was like wow! That's big part of history! What happened there? What is this place? I would like to know more, but I know it was the place where I would like to work. I remember I called some friends to say to them you can't imagine where I am, this crazy place. At this moment I was like, okay how can I do to do something here? Because I have big respect for history, but I want to do a painting there. I don't know for now, but will know in the next few days. And I want to do a painting here. Do I do it in an illegal way, so I just go by night? What can I do to work here? In a legal or illegal way, I didn't know. So I came back in the city, I did some research about the place, walked in the streets, talked with some people to know more, and I saw in the map that there is a church - Saint Anne's church in Liepāja. And I got a specific link with Saint Anne church because the year before, the big exhibition I made in Montpellier, was in an old church called Saint Anne too. It was my bigger project of all time. So I was like okay, let's go and see this Saint Anne's church. So I've been there and when I entered to the church I just saw this old lady, very, very old, who was sitting on the bench, praying, being there. I think she's there all day long. I've been to her, trying to speak to her, but she didn't speak English at all. It was quite frustrating. So in the evening, I went to a bar in the city and I just saw some young people who were there, so I went to them, speaking to them, explaining my project. And one girl in the group was speaking French and so was really interested by the project and so we made a meeting to go to the church the next day, to help me speak with the old lady. I got a lot from this meeting. This old lady was living in Liepāja since the beginning. And for me she was representative about all the history of Liepāja and Karosta. I don't know if she told me everything, but it was a lot. So

while my friend was talking to her, I took some pictures and I got this one, where she got her eyes looking up the church. I got the visual, I got the model, I've got the place, but how can I do? I've been to the council. "Hello! I'm Al. I'm a French artist. I would like to meet the people working in the city, please because I want to propose a project. Okay let's do it! The people at the entrance, proposed to me the meeting point the next day with these people. So I came back to the council, meet the people, showed my all stuff, my projects from before. And they were like "Yeah, he's good, he's good". So I told them, okay so I saw this place in Karosta, I want to do a painting, It will be free for you. I don't want money, I just want to do that. Please give me the permission to do that. One hour later I got the paper signed by the mayor and permission to do it. Let's go! And it was quite difficult to organise this. I think I used two or three days to work there. To paint every day this visual. It was funny because there is not a lot of people, walking by at this time. It was august, maybe September. I didn't see a lot of people walking there. But one guy arrived one day and screamed "What are you doing? You are disrespectful for the history..." I showed the paper from the mayor. He was the only one not okay with this action. So my friend was there with her father. They tried to explain to him, but the guy was not okay. It was like this. I respected it. So then I think I finished the work a few days later, it was quite hard because the ladder was in the sand and the sand was not right, it was like this (tilted, sloped), and with the waves of the sea crashing, and it was a really high bunker, with a really high wall, so it was not as easy, but it was really good to do it. I love to create this visual. I could go on and on.

Thank you for asking this question. Because this is some project that I would like to propose in an exhibition, but I didn't do that because of Covid, I would like to continue to move to other countries, to finish the war project because after this I continue to work on the Second World War and so on. The project is not finished yet, so it's kind of exclusive to speak about it.

K.U. With regards to the wall and the people you met. During your time there you spent time to get to know the people and the place. What was your main take away from your interaction with the locals and the urban context? And did you observe a difference between Russian speaking part of the community and the Latvian speaking community?

A.S. I think I've been speaking to mostly young people, and it was kind of easier for me because I can speak English. So I think the Russian part of people I met was in Karosta, between the beach and the ruins of the bunkers of Karosta and the city of Liepāja city centre. At the centre you gave the cathedral and when I crossed the place I tried to speak with people there, but it was not as easy. It was kind of

closed and sometimes, not aggressive, but not open minded, not really easy to meet and speak with. I think they don't care about art projects so yeah. So I didn't have the good connection with the people. It was kind of frustrating but yeah. It is like this.

K.U. When you were talking about first arriving to the site, you mentioned the large wind generator and realised that it's there. Did that cause an interesting emotional response to you? Did you see it as a weird act in such a historical place?

A.S. It was so strange, it was like a big contrast, because before seeing the beach, the ruins and the bunkers, I just saw that, because it's so massive and huge and it is like a misunderstanding. Big, modern stuff. Firstly I saw this wind generator and then when I went on the beach and forget this path, then I checked all the other stuff around. It seemed like two worlds in the same place. It's something you can see from far away. It's kind of absurd.

K.U. You said that when you were there, you really felt the weight of the history and that it felt like it was a special place. When seeing all the structures covered in graffiti, do you feel like this goes against the importance of the place?

A.S. By the way, I think this time, there was only one painting on the wall. Only saw some little tags, words, sentences, but not so many big graffiti, or drawings. This is why I think I decided to ask the council. Because it was almost virgin.

We didn't spoke about the history of the place. Which is particularly important. The creation at the end of the 19th century, beginning of the 20th century, by Tsar Alexandar III, and using it then during the independence of Latvia use I too, and something we don't speak about a lot is the German, the Nazi uses it during the Second World War, and then Soviet times, and then the end of the place in the 90s. So yeah too many different use and history and people. The old woman and the wall speak about this. The artwork speaks about this. That there are some missing points in the history and it's kind of sad.

K.U. As you just said, there is a lot of different stories and histories, and different people have different associations with the place. And do you think that's an issue? That should be resolved and that somehow we should curate the history in a better way?

A.S. Yes, as you can see in Berlin, they don't want to hide the Nazi times, because you have a lot of museums talking about it. I assume that everyone, kids, adults need to know about what happened in every way, in every part of history

and in every place, every mentalities of those times. This is some tragedy but we can't hide this to people. I don't know how you Latvian kids are learning about the history of this period and this places. I don't know how tourists can be introduced to the history. I think we need more panels, signs and writing, maybe QR codes, I don't know but every way to make people aware.

We need to know and respect the place but we also need to look to tomorrow. To create our stuff and maybe give a new use of this place. I think like with everything in life, we need to find balance. To know about this place and respect but slow to propose something new. It is something that we cannot hide. The ruins exist as the history. So we need to live with and we have to be conscious and to find some ways to use it. It's too expensive to destroy and to put off. It's everywhere. That's history. Can't hide history. It's visual. Such places, for example, in France are used for painting. We give new life about this. I think this is to every artist or visual people to know what they are doing and to be smart to propose some smart stuff in such places not just "I love you". You have to be smart, you have to be conscious. You need to learn. It's a good way of learning. They are not normal walls. When you are such places you need to act in different way. People have to be involved with what they are doing.

K.U. Also related to the forts. They were bombarded and exploded in the past and now they are just being deteriorated by coastal erosion. Do you think that's an issue that these historical structures that act as witnesses of times past and history that they are disappearing in front of our eyes.

A.S. I don't think they can disappear. They are too big, too huge. If it disappears, it will be in some centuries.



