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## **VISUALIZATIONS OF THE PAST IN TRANSITION: MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS IN HUNGARY, ROMANIA, AND BULGARIA AFTER 1989**

A traveler's brochure about a spa resort in Croatia catches the tourist attention with a curious, though at first sight "natural," photo: a small picture of Tito smiling and waving his hand at the foreground of a spa building with which the town is famous for. The photo caption clarifies that the spa resort was one of Tito's favorite places for visit and it gained some of its fame and attraction due to the interest of the party leader. Limited to a small-size detail in a page corner of the brochure, the photo can be easily left unnoticed and can remain of insignificant nature. But the purposes surrounding its inclusion, the fact of its appearance in tourist advertisement context, and the possible reference it gives for an interpretative exploration of the functions of memory in a post-socialist context justify dwelling upon this image in the beginning of the current text. Its interpretation might take diverse paths and some of them will resonate throughout the pages to follow, but for a launching point in the analysis two major points would be appropriate to outline.

The first one deals with a particular mode of remembering the period of recent history via a mode of fascination, a mode that rubs shoulders with the discourses of nostalgia and longing for the past, but is never identical with them. In this mode, the past – whether directly experienced or not – is an object of a particular desire to represent and to draw upon, without any inclinations for its resurrection into the present. Eloquently prompted by Susan Sontag's essay on "Fascinating Fascism," this mode of fascination with the past (which might actually be a technique for psychological overcoming of its burden) has hovered in East European societies after the end of communism as state ideology and has largely determined the forms of remembering and representing the period prior to 1989. Exhibitions of the gifts that Ceausescu and his wife received during their rule in Romania, detailed instructions along the sites where Zhivkov went hunting in Bulgaria, socialist monuments gathered and proposed for tourist view in Hungary, sites marking Tito's visits along diverse destinations in former Yugoslavia, etc. – all they shed light on a realm of the past that is not necessarily (though it possibly could be) nostalgic by its nature and an attitude of elaborating attitudes to the past that touch at the pleasure of creating references back in time.

To an extent dependent to this mode of fascination is the second point that I choose to raise here – the issue of the past's museumization and the problem of how the present puts a closure on the past and enacts its showing as already overcome and no longer existent. For, apart from the variety of functions a photo of the kind can serve, it has in itself an implicit meaning of referring to a past and of preserving some of its traces in the visual perceptions of "nowadays' people." The photo dating back from the socialist time in the pages of a post-socialist journal; the recreated images of the "socialist way of life" in a motion pictures; the jokes, phrases and sayings created in the socialist period and recalled today; the gesture of pointing at socialist blocks of flats to a Western tourist, etc – all they, in spite of their variety and dependence of contexts, forms and genres, have at their core the act of past's museumization. They are logical elements to something that has for long attracted the attention of scholars –

the idea that in the period of post-socialism the entire world is itself a “museum” – a world that is destined not to return back, but whose traces seem impossible to root out. But, though parts of this phenomenon, they are also much more than that, since they do not rely simply on the past’s “coexistence” with the present, but also create distances to it, reenact some of its images and forms, direct observers’ attention to it and symbolically digest it. In them – in the visual representation and the footage, in the narrative and the gesture, the past is actively turned into a museum form that, by the very act of recollecting about the past, constitutes it as “excluded” from the present.

The double-bound nature of these two aspects of interpreting the past – the fascination with objects, images, and memories of the socialist times and the museumization as a technique of putting a closure on it – will be an important point of departure in the current text. Focusing on two major realms of representation in the post-socialist period – monuments and museums in three countries of former “Eastern Europe,” the latter will seek to investigate how these institutions of historical representation faced the post-socialist realities and how their fates as reshaped, displaced, and restructured turned emblematic for the post-socialist transition. The dismantlement of the previous ideological monuments and their substitution by new memorial signs, the dropping of the previous exhibitions from national and regional history museums, and the appearance of museums of the communist repressions – all they were a response to the need to visualize the novel notions of history arising after 1989, and elements of constructing a discourse of detachment to the socialist period. Through the techniques that they used to distance from the previous ideological interpretation of history and through the new topics, events and personalities that they started to represent, monuments and museums revealed a new moral and political justification of representation and a new approach to understanding and interpreting the past. Furthermore, the continuous debates related to the metamorphoses of these memory forms, the changes in their appearance – whether gradual and abrupt, realized or remaining ‘in project’ – contributed to the shaping the post-socialist identities and for the post-socialist societies’ “coming to terms with the past.”

The goal of the current text is to study the role and identity of monuments and museums as major forms of past’s visualizations after 1989 in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The research will proceed along three major groups of questions. The first one is related to what happened with the memorial signs and museum exhibitions sacralizing the socialist heroic past, how were they disappropriated from their previous functions of narrating history, and what new forms and meanings did they acquire. The second one would targets at how were the narratives of the past changed with the re-figurations of these visualizations, and what was the interaction between the new modes of historiographic discourse and the related forms of past’s visualization. Thirdly, separate focus of attention is paid on what substituted the previous ideological representations, what new personalities and events entered the commemorative space of monuments and museums, and what new forms were created to narrate the past in a ‘post-socialist mode.’ In the attempt to approach these questions, the text undertakes a comparison between three countries and probes the possibilities for a typology of their different post-socialist approaches to the past. A major point in the approach of the topic is the understanding of monuments and museums as having a key *role* in the new processes of memory that evolved after 1989, as catalysts for structuring individual and collective *identities* after 1989, and as *hybrids* split between the past and the present, preservation and destruction, permanence and change.

A key tool in approaching these issues is the notion of the “remainder,” which reveals an important aspect of monuments and museums’ nature after 1989. The remainder, as the French historian Louis Marin points out, witnesses to a “coexistent and coterminous presence of life and death.” It is no longer a vivid presence of lively bodies, but a form, in which “bodies are existent in their status beyond life.” A remainder is dependent on the body it has once been a part. Its presence and function is telling to a still tangible power of the dead body that keeps on persisting and remaining. “Life and death,” Marin states, “not merely coexist in remnants, but, tightly connected as inseparable units, deliver a special status of remnants - the one of ‘betwixt and between,’ transitory but intransient” (Marin 1988: 51). How did monuments and museums cope with this function as “remainders” and representations of the previous ideology and how did they attain a distance and autonomy from the position of being extensions and “organs” of its body of power? How did they strive to preserve vitality and actuality independent from the previous ideological discourse and what sources of historical and narrative legitimization did they seek in order to re-constitute their “corporate” unity? Lastly, how do they cope with the the ‘fluidity’ of the past and the present; how do they manage with the ambivalences arising in the period of ‘transition’; and how they sustain the realm of the ‘utopic neutral’ (see Marin 1973; Hetherington 1996), which forms the core of memorial signs and museumized representations?

The specificity of the research and the abundance of materials that one has to dwell upon led me to privilege some sources and to use others only selectively. Understandably, monuments and museums are not the sole forms of historical visualizations that one can find both before and after the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe. The choice to pay a focus exclusively on these two major forms of imagining and representing history was guided by several factors, among which: their role as one of the most significant instances for conveying historical narratives along ideological lines before 1989; their being at the focus of the most ardent public debates in the period after 1989; their inherent ‘visual’ aspect, permitting one to trace the specificity of ‘clothing’ verbal narratives in visual forms and spatial arrangements; and, not least their relationship of mutual dependence and self-reflection, frequently expressed in spatial and symbolic proximity between monuments and museum sites. The variety of monumental and museum forms and the impulse for a self-limitation required to concentrate on a particular set of monuments and museums. The large number of monuments raised in the socialist period, the pervasive discourse on museums representations of the party history, and the strong resonance of the appeals for the destruction or reshaping of these historical visualizations after 1989 have led me to develop an overarching narrative across the multiple cases and to maintain my observations with a set of most representative cases. A separate realm of attention is dedicated to the monuments and museum representations that were created after the fall of socialism in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. In spite of the difficulties to trace and register the constantly expanding list of new monuments, my research has sought to “catch” the major trends in the commemorative attention of the transition period.

With respect to monumental objects, the major foci of attention were public monuments of the socialist period that became foci of debates in the period after 1989, and such that were created to the victims of the socialist regimes. Touching briefly upon multifarious cases of ‘monuments’ (statues, pantheons, memorial sites, etc.), the text will focus on monuments with an emphasized ‘commemorative value’, i.e. those that signify places of public commemoration of individuals that were

outlined as ‘special’ during the socialist period, or that gained such a status after 1989. It is important to note that in all these cases, the understanding of ‘monuments’ that I apply in my research relies on a “narrow” definition, which excludes ‘architectural monuments,’ ‘cultural monuments’ or tombstones that relate to forms of private commemoration. Although seeming at first sight to disregard a substantial group of objects deserving attention as ‘monuments,’ the choice has its justification – yet, not only with regards to putting a necessary limitation of the project’s scope. Apart from requiring closer analysis in terms of architectural qualities (a task that the current text does not aim to undertake), ‘architectural monuments’ follow a logic of development and functions that steps aside from the monuments that political groups and communities raise for commemorating historical figures and events in squares and central locations. The reason for keeping a distance to objects that fall within the term of “cultural monuments” but are not in the strictest sense statues, memorial forms, or symbolic representations in dedication to historical figures and events, is because of the wide scope of the term and its inclusion of a wide variety of objects, whose “monumental” value has been defined often at a much later period. Yet, all the monumental forms that I dwell upon in my analysis are by their creation, function, and fate of “public” nature. Located in central locations of the towns and villages, they are translations of a communal intention and agreement to remember (or to forget) and thus serve broad societal purposes. Sharing no intention to disregard the elements of private and individual commemoration in the initiatives for raising such monuments, nor to downplay the role that cemeteries and places of private mourning have in the history of death, in the current text the focus would fall upon the objects and sites, where the “collective representation of death” (R. Hertz) have found its outlined and ultimate expression.

A similar line of limitation and specification goes with respect to museum representations of the post-socialist period. The diverse types of museums and exhibitions (of art history and of literary activities; of natural history – with all the various branches related to botany, zoology, mineralogy, etc.; of history of sciences and technology; ethnographic and archaeological museums; of national history and regional history; dedicated to individual personalities or to concrete historical events, etc.) compel one to focus on particular branch of museum activity, so that to be able to reach more legitimate conclusions. The analysis of the discourse applied by the different museum types during the socialist and post-socialist periods would be a tempting task to do, but, understandably, it can only be targeted by a separate research. In the current study, the main focus of analysis are the changes that occurred with museums whose scope falls within the close definition of history, and most notably of the ‘modern history’ of the countries under concern. Although an orientation glance will be thrown at museums with a different profile (regional history, ethnography, etc.), the main sphere of attention will be museums where the ‘modern’ history’ of these countries have been an object of representation. By presumption, this narrows the choice to the museums of national history, of military history, and to a range of newly-developed museums and exhibitions dedicated to the socialist past. Even with these limitations, the recourse to analyzing the dynamics of the post-socialist museum representations is large enough to encompass the abundance of cases and approaches. While analyzing the appearance and representation of the socialist past in national, regional, and military history museums, requires to keep in mind also the various other changes introduced in exhibition sections of earlier historical periods, the recourse to museums dedicated exclusively to the socialist period faces the challenge of not missing their relationship

with the other forms of museum representation, to which they have often appeared in response. As a way of overcoming this aporia and of drawing a clear line with the analysis of monuments, in the current text the focus will be on the museums' elaboration of a history of the 'recent past' and on the conditions of finding historical and representational legitimation of this temporal realm.

A separate point to specify ensues with the 'geographical scope' of the project and with the selection of Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria as the countries where the analysis of the post-socialist historical visualizations finds its empirical grounds. Partially conditioned by the somewhat better awareness of the author with the new trends of historical reevaluation after 1989 in these countries, the reasons for concentrating on them (and not other) countries are several. Firstly, although research on the post-socialist interpretations and uses of the past is generally lacking in most countries of Eastern Europe, the case of these three countries (and especially Bulgaria and Romania) is truly painstaking. While, for example, Yugoslavia and the states that emerged after its dramatic collapse has attracted a series of both serious and superficial studies on the role of historical memories in shaping the practices of the present, the research on the resonances of the past on present-day concepts of history in these three countries has remained limited to several examples. Secondly, while an exhaustive research on the post-socialist historical visualizations in one particular country has a merit of its own and is worth initiating, a comparative overview of several countries from a particular interpretative angle offers the potential for a more elaborate approach across national and regional formulations. The resources that the comparison between these countries in their post-socialist transition period provides are also enhanced by the numerous parallels, similarities and differences that one can trace between their efforts to create new visions and representations of the past. Furthermore, the different stages of these three countries in the process of European integration, pose yet another element in the policies that were applied for sustaining a historical and conceptual distance to the recent past.

It is important to note here that the preliminary intentions of the project targeted at covering, to the extent possible, the case of monuments and museums in former Yugoslavia – as an additional opportunity for drawing constructive parallels to a region with a different experience from the socialist period and with a different notion of the legacy of those times. Far more ambitious than the framework of the current project could afford, this intention was given up in the course of my research and the preparatory work done at this stage would hopefully serve as a ground for a future more detailed research. The explanation about exercising a limitation on the intended comparative span of the project is grounded, on the one hand, on the incommensurable diversity of cases that each of the countries that appeared out of the garment of former Yugoslavia and on the 'forking paths' of historical visualization that each of them embraced during the years of wars, conflicts, peace treaties, and years of independent rule. Yet, on the other hand, the case of former Yugoslavia is so much strikingly different from any of the other countries under concern in the project that a more attentive attention to this case would risk holding the integrity and the comparative capacity that the project intends. While monuments and museums were crucial points in the visions of the past that each of the countries of former Yugoslavia pursued to establish as a core element of its post-federal identity, their importance was logically superseded by the drama of the war years and the tragic human fates in the vicissitudes of history; by the appalling face of destruction and the efforts to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the region. The destroyed churches and monasteries, the blown up bridges, and the museum exhibitions mobilized in the

purpose of a ‘national’ identity adversary to the one of the neighbors puts the discussion of monuments and museums on an entirely different plane, as well as frames the ‘post-socialist experience’ of former Yugoslavia as a case of its own. For that reason, though some of the observations raised here might pose implicit references to cases from former Yugoslavia, the latter will not be an object of detailed attention in the current study.

The theoretical literature on monuments and museums is enormous and has kept on expanding over the last two decades.(1) The discourses of legitimacy and truth that monuments and museums sustain; their role as ‘factors’ in the production of history; their nature as ‘ritual sites’ for reworking the past and rethinking the public heritage – have been in the focus of attention by a range of historians, anthropologists, and culture theorists. The limits of objectivity and the strategies of inclusion and exclusion that monuments and museums undertake; the link between representation and power, between informing and affirming; the shaping of identities by commemorative signs and material artifacts – all these turned into important topics in scholarly interpretations over the last decades. At the background of previous visions about monuments and museums as sites of political manifestation, there have arisen attempts to see them as contested sites of remembrance and focal points in identity formation. At the retrospective of unifying visions and monologic representations, there have emerged insights about the representational distance and the politics of the view, about the battles of interpretations and the constant flux of meanings.

An outlined significance in these analyses has gained the notion of collective memory(2) and the ability of monuments and museums to represent the latter in artifacts and commemorative forms. Often used as metaphors about the ways in which collective memory operates, monuments and museums seem to have the link with memory as ‘inherent’ in their nature. They both represent objects and people that are absent from immediate contact; both revive ‘corporeal traces’ and ‘former presences’ to the people of today; both ‘memorialize’ and ‘eternalize’ through commemorative techniques. Yet, their relationship with memory has also a genealogical and historical projection, exemplified by their role as sites where the major battles between collective memory and historical visions have been held in the modern times.(3) At the face of the disappearing pre-industrial communal life and the advent of mass culture, these sites artificially organize the past, creating meanings that groups assimilate in order to cope with modernity (Crane 2000: 6). Conveying an illusion of eternity, they express both the fighting with forgetting in the modern times, and the overcoming of collective memory by historical representation (Nora 1996: 8-9).

My own contribution to this historiography is to add another important dimension in analyzing the uses of these historical visualizations – their special status in a period of ‘transition’ when old forms have been threatened by disruption and new ones are in a process of elaboration. While the role of monuments and museums as mediators between the people of the past and those of today, may sound as bearing associations to a trivialized phrase, their understanding as objects ‘in formation,’ as ‘protean spaces,’ and ‘hybrid sites’ where communities rework the visions of their identities still bears the potential of a fruitful undertaking. This is furthermore justified by the opportunity to regard monuments and museums not only as instances of ‘sustaining’ and ‘representing’ memory, but also as ‘fluid grounds’ where the relationships between memory and forgetting, continuity and change are put on display. With their becoming targets of public debates, identity claims, and dynamic transformations, monuments and museums not only turned emblematic for the reworking of the past in

the period of transition, but were also sites where the interaction between collective memories and historical visions was openly negotiated. Yet, this function is especially well expressed at the background of the role they had in the socialist period – as tools to channel the representation of the past along ideological visions, and as forms where the political ‘expropriation’ of the past was clearly expressed.

### ***Monuments and museums in a socialist perspective***

As components of political actuality and material forms of demonstrating power, monuments and museums were the institutions where the symbolic defeat of the collective memory by historicized visions of the past received overt manifestation in the socialist times. A brief glance to the period after 1945 shows that already in the first years after the establishment of the socialist power in Eastern Europe massive investment was made in creating grand monuments that would symbolize and celebrate the new order. While the majority of the prewar monuments were destroyed,(4) at their place were raised large-scale memorials to the socialist victory and to its main protagonists – Soviet army soldiers, emblematic figures of the socialist movement, and, not least – Soviet leaders. Having as a primary purpose to honour the fallen in the war battles, those to the Soviet army for example were swiftly included in the glorification of the Soviet Union as a liberator and were (in A. Aman’s words) “victory monuments in the lands of the conquered” (Aman 1992: 37). This line of glorification was soon taken up by the impetus to commemorate the local heroes of the antifascist resistance, which resulted in a wave of partisan and antifascist monuments in most of the countries. Established as a pattern within the first decade after 1945, this form of political pedagogy through monumental objects was followed with little changes well until the late 1980s. Apart from the destalinization process, when most of the statues of Stalin and his associates were removed, the major ‘turn’ in the socialist monumental discourse was the enhanced attention (at least in countries like Bulgaria and Romania) to commemorate national history heroes and to depict the socialist order as a glorious apotheosis after centuries of national and social struggles. Thus, while after 1945 the election of a group of new ‘special dead’ demonstrated the ideology’s intervention into the afterlife, in the 1970s and 1980s the attention to national history figures signaled a gradual expansion into the pantheons of national heroes.

The consolidation of historical narratives along ideological lines found an overt demonstration in the development of the history museums in the region. In the first years after 1945 decisive steps were taken to reorganize museum institutions and to establish special departments dedicated to the socialist and revolutionary movement. In the end of the 1940s and early 1950s such museums were created in all larger towns of these countries, followed by ‘national museums’ of the friendship with the Soviet Union, and by numerous house-museums to prominent leaders of the socialist and resistance movement.(5) By the end of the 1950s the ideological intervention into the previous museum forms had received clearly stated contours: all the departments of the museums of “Modern” and “Most Modern” History were renamed as “Workers and revolutionary movement” and “Socialist construction” and were thus supposed to view history exclusively in light of the party ideology. The majority of them had identical structure, comprising exclusively representations of the antifascist resistance and the socialist construction. As with monuments, the most noticeable change that was introduced over the years was the enhanced engagement with topics related to the ‘national history,’ and notably to events and figures considered as ‘predecessors’ to the socialist ideas. Thus, while in the first years after the establishment of the socialist

power museums were among the major tools for the ideology's self-legitimation, in the decades to follow, they were instruments for reshaping the entire context of history production and history narration. They not only radicalized the propagation of the ideology's own history, but also reworked the historical visualizations for centuries in retrospective.

A last point to make before turning my attention to the dissolution of these powerful narratives is that both monuments and museums were sites where a range of propaganda related activities were held in the socialist period. While memorial sites were regular destinations for political rituals, commemorative ceremonies, celebrations, and organized visits, museums hosted a range of educational and 'mass cultural' forms: historical talks and thematic lectures; conferences and seminars; ritual occasions (such as, for example, receiving pioneers' and Komsomol membership cards); meetings with veterans and party activists, etc. The forms of these activities far surpassed the territory of the memorial sites and the walls of the museum buildings. Thus, for example, museum workers had to organize regular exhibitions to schools, enterprises, and public institutions, and to provide the latter with documentary and photo displays about important dates and events. The range of all these activities is a demonstration of how the established historical narratives was not only consolidated in monumental and museum displays, but were objects of unending reiteration on an everyday basis. Framing historical identities along ideological lines, monuments and museums were used to reshape the entire image to the past – both in terms of a fixed display of events and characters, and in terms of 'confirming' the settled historical narratives in "political and educational work." By creating norms of representing the past, by sustaining these representations as 'permanent,' and by reiterating them in a range of 'mass cultural' activities, they turned as key instruments for solidifying memory's meanings, and thus – as major points of public contestation in the period after 1989.

### ***Monuments and museums in a post-socialist perspective***

The proper treatment and interpretation of the former socialist monuments was a key issue in all Eastern European countries and with varying intensity preserved its importance throughout the entire post-1989 period.<sup>(6)</sup> The difficulties to 'accommodate' the former ideological emblems into a new political context and to acquire a proper distance from them without losing the memory of their previous function characterized post-socialist societies in general and made monuments emblematic for the post-socialist attempts at self-identification. The ways in which socialist monuments were treated varied greatly. They were destroyed and dismantled, reshaped and expelled from the central places they had occupied, sent to museums and storehouses, or remolded into other forms and symbolic representations. Monuments were 'packed' in advertisement pictures, removed to distant parks, or replaced by memorial signs to other dead. They were targets of vandalism acts, their parts were frequently reused for metal scrap or construction materials, and projects for their re-utilization proliferated. Attempts to reinstall monuments and to reconstitute their former symbolic potential ran parallel to efforts for enacting visual and ideological transformations. Contracts for protecting 'cultural legacy,' declarations for preserving some monuments, and campaigns for cleaning them on anniversaries and memorial days were the most common counteractive measures taken in monuments' support. These acts were responded to with open letters, slogans, and sign-up sheets condemning the "re-communization processes," with strikes and protests against monument reinstallation and renovation.

In all of these cases, the monuments dating back to the socialist period were occasions of fighting the legacy of the socialist past, of reworking its ideological embodiment, as well as of enacting actual displacement of the ideology in power. They had been such strong symbols of authority and perpetuity of the political order that, once the symbolic body of power began to decompose, they were swiftly threatened with destruction and reshaping. In its turn, the disturbed coherence and consistence of their bodies prompted of the vulnerability and weakness of the former ideology and contributed to its symbolical overturning. Monument dismantlement and reshaping reflected upon the nature of the body politic and were acts of disclaim and interruption in ideological continuities. They were forms of undoing the network of symbolic locations, ways of disenchanting space, and “rites of passage” for depriving memorial sites from their aura of legitimacy. Furthermore, their ritual ‘execution’ broke the symbolic structure of the ‘sacred’ that was established during the socialist period. While previously they were pedestals to ‘immortality’ representing an unbreakable continuity between death and life, after the collapse of the socialist ideology in 1989, this strongly sacralized discourse(7) began to wither away, leading often to the disclaim of notions such as ‘heroism’ and ‘sacrifice’ and to their considering as tools in sustaining the ideological discourse.

No less abrupt was the disintegration that ran in the field of the museum representations. Many of the collections and exhibitions of the socialist period were ‘inappropriate’ in a post-socialist context and needed to be changed accordingly. One of the first steps that were undertaken in all the countries of the former socialist bloc was to close the museums of the revolutionary movement and to box up their collections, preventing them from public view for the entire period after. While the buildings of these museums became targets of property debates and restitution activities, the collection of objects underwent a substantial revision in terms of attitude – they held no longer the potential to demand adoration, care and attention. The objects that previously stood on display would not recreate any past, and their enclosure destined them to a symbolic death, confirmed by the refusal of state or other institutions to consider them as ‘historical heritage.’ More complicated was the issue with museums that did not focus exclusively on the revolutionary movement, but addressed regional and national history. Though in many of them the parts that were dedicated to the socialist movement and post-war construction were dropped, the traces of the past narratives were not that easy to take away. The existing objects needed to be classified in different ways; the previous catalogues and museum arrangements had to be reworked; and new principles of museum exhibition was necessary to apply.

More importantly, there appeared a difficulty in accommodating the new visions of history and the constellations of new personalities, events, and interpretative angles that swarmed in the post-socialist context. At the place of the previous grand narrative of antifascism sustained by the regimes in power, there reemerged a series of testimonies revealing the crimes of the regimes and calling for historical justice.(8) The terror of the People’s Courts, the brutal treatment of the democratic opposition after 1944, the murders of political opponents, the purges and terror of the Stalin regime, the vicissitudes of the destalinization process, the “socialist solidarity and internationalism” in events such as the Hungarian revolution and the Prague spring, the crude reality of the camps, etc. – all these stepped out of the realms of silence and turned into foci of political discussions and public recollection. While the pantheon of socialist heroes was gradually crumbling down, the bodies of political victims of the socialist regimes emerged for public view, creating “communities of mourners”

(Verdery 1999, 164) and calling for proper commemoration. Parallel to them, a range of figures that had previously fallen into oblivion received outlined importance. Politicians, intellectuals, and public figures from the pre-war periods that were considered ‘inconvenient’ for public appreciation before, resurrected from the decades of silence and underwent processes of reevaluation.

All these new realms of historical memory exercised a strong impact on the monumental and museum discourse present at the wake of 1989. In the steps of the previous “eternal monuments” and “permanent” museum exhibitions, there came a period of “revisionist readings,” “alternative historical approaches,” and “debatable historical periods,” putting the idea of history on shifting and unpredictable grounds. The dissolution of the previous historical visualizations and the outlining of new commemorative realms faced the need to re-institutionalize the newly emerging memories and the challenge to establish collective identities beyond their diverging paths. Dissociating national history from the socialist narratives posed a demand to produce new narratives about the nations’ past that would show detachment from the previous communist versions. Yet, both monuments and museums had to provide tools to articulate the political changes, and the dismantlement of their previous coherence was not sufficient to provide such articulation. Frequently accompanied by rigorous debates, monuments to the victims of the regime and exhibitions about the socialist terror started to appear in most of the post-socialist countries. Their attempt to narrate about the socialist times through the discourse of repression and pain often had to struggle with the general resistance to historical representation, with the opposition of diverse political groups, and with the unavoidable associations to the didactic representation known from the previous epoch. Lastly, the “visual recovery of the repressed past” (James 2005: 5) posed a challenge to the consolidation of collective identities around commonly embraced narratives – whether of national, historical, or cultural nature.

In the following pages I will outline the general trends of historical interpretation in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria in the period of transition; then I will present the major processes related to monuments and museums after 1989 in Eastern Europe; and, will analyze at a closer distance different cases of monuments and museum discourses in the three countries. Lastly, I will develop a separate section on the challenges of reconstructing ‘national history’ in a post-socialist mode in the three countries, and will conclude with summarizing observations about the role of museums and monuments as institutions that are susceptible to change and themselves are signifiers and catalysts of change. This organization of the project results will be guided by the intention to reveal the role that these instances of past’s elaboration have in the social, political, institutional, and psychological dynamics after 1989; to emphasize their input in coining the post-socialist identities; and to explore their ‘hybridity’ in the context of the post-socialist transition.

## **VISUALIZATIONS OF THE PAST IN TRANSITION: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW**

### **THE CASE OF HUNGARY**

In terms of history writing, a major turn occurring after the changes after 1989 in Eastern Europe was not that much the event itself, but rather the multiplicity of histories and history frameworks that exploded after the fall of socialism. While before the changes an account of the four post-war decades could be literally comprised within a statement, such as “the establishment of socialism in the country and the flourishing of the socialist order,” after 1989 the period appeared laden with

history that was calling for closer attention. It was neither ‘empty’ of events, as it seemed to be from the perspective of the ideological interpretations, nor was it ‘similar’ in all the countries of the bloc, as it was previously imagined. Yet, if under the garment of socialist internationalism the states in the Eastern bloc did not have a well outlined and separate identities, at a closer look each one appeared to have a distinguished profile on its road to “achieving communism.” What previously seemed a coherent and ‘event-less’ period turned out to be saturated with points to remember, truths to reconsider, and moments to question and investigate.

The case of Hungary is an eloquent illustration of the dissimilar grounds of interpreting historical identities in the socialist and post-socialist period. Before, Hungary’s post-war history could gladly rely on two indisputable dates marking the expulsion of the fascist troops from the country in 1945, and the appointment of János Kádár as the first secretary of the Party in 1956. After 1989 these two were found as neither having adequate historical contextualization, nor as holding primary importance in the post-war decades. The show trials of the 1940s, the revolution against the Soviet rule in 1956, the execution of Imre Nagy in 1958... – these were among the many points that stepped out of the previous realm of silence and saturated the preceding period with historical density. The historiographic net was extended both to a more attentive reading of the Kádár years, and to a closer inspection of events that the ideology had sought to conceal and deprive of significance. The recourse to the past triggered an entire realm of memories that emerged after decades of concealment: remembrance about persecution, suppression, and violation of human rights, accounts about the terror of the 1940s and 1950s, reminders of assaulted national dignity and limited freedoms. The glance back faced the challenge to respond properly to all this plurality of histories and to accommodate in a negotiable manner the forking paths of truths and interpretations.

An outlined significance in these processes of remembering in Hungary had the first and only case of taking up arms against the Soviet rule in Eastern Europe, the revolution of 1956. In the three decades after its crushing, the revolution was either spared from mentioning in public discourse or was interpreted as instigated by Western imperialism to overthrow the socialist order in Hungary.<sup>(9)</sup> While the rebellious acts against the Soviet soldiers and the overturn of the socialist symbols were seen as attempts to reinscribe the country into the Western imperialist camp, the invasion of the Soviet camps was termed as a justified attempt to save the threatened socialist republic. On its turn, the brutal crushing of the uprising (resulting in 3,000 Hungarians killed and another 200,000 fleeing to Austria), the terror that ensued,<sup>(10)</sup> and the execution of Imre Nagy in 1958, were duly silenced in the years to follow, introducing a veil of ‘collective forgetting.’ To provide a proper place of the revolution in historical consciousness was not only among the first steps after Kádár’s forced retirement in 1987, but was a major factor for the political changes that occurred. The insistence for commemorating the victims in the 1956 events was inseparable from the calls for democracy that were shouted at the first public demonstrations against the ruling system in 1988. The declaration of the socialist government early in 1989 that October 1956 had been a “people’s uprising” (and not a “counter-revolution”) deprived the regime of its legitimacy and symbolically confirmed its rapid collapse. The renaming of the event and the reburial ceremony of Imre Nagy and his comrades were critical points in the historical reassessment of several decades, and culminating points in the overturning of the political order under whose rule these decades passed.

The abundant representations with which the event is commemorated in state ceremonies, symbols, narratives, and memorial signs seek to overcome whatever remains of its divisive potential along political lines and to construe it as a common experience, one that unites the nation through the collective memory of fight and suffering at the hands of a foreign enemy (James 2005: 8). The regained legitimacy of the 1956 revolution and the open ground for remembering its victims gave impetus to a wave of monuments and commemorative forms: hundreds of memorial signs and commemorative reminders appeared all over the country, emphasizing the notions of valor, martyrdom, and violent oppression. In visual terms these customarily dwelled upon crosses, broken chains, sculptures of dead bodies, fallen five-pointed stars, bells, and trees springing up from stone blocks.<sup>(11)</sup> Especially abundant were also the stone forms with inscriptions “1956” and images of the Hungarian coat of arms or flags of the revolution with a hole in the middle.<sup>(12)</sup> In an intention to trace historical precedents to the 1956 events, many of the “1956” inscriptions were complementing with years of special significance in Hungarian history, such as 1848-49, 1914-18, or 1941-45. The most exploited parallel was the one with the revolution of 1848, inscribing thus the 1956 events within the outlined meaning of struggle against oppression and foreign domination. A huge number of *kopajafa* – Hungarian traditional commemorative columns were also raised in memory of 1956, with peaks in raising such columns in 1989, 1990-1991, and 1996. Using a traditional form of commemorative expression, they regularly included inscriptions, such as “Pro patria,” “Pro Patria et Libertate,” and “Pro Memoria.” Parallel to these, many monuments to participants and heroes of the revolution (such as Cardinal József Mindszenty, Imre Nagy, Istvan Bibó, etc.) were raised and welcomed popular veneration. In a memorial sign of rehabilitation, a special monument to Imre Nagy was unveiled near the Parliament building in Budapest in June 1996. All these monuments were in a way a symbolical “catching up” with the commemorative attention to 1956 provided in numerous monuments all over the world (in USA, Australia, France, Canada, etc.), and filled up the void of proper attention to this event before 1989 in Hungary.

The central place that the revolution of 1956 had in the post-socialist historical narratives is clearly outlined in the recapturing of its interpretation in new museum exhibitions.<sup>(13)</sup> Already in the end of 1989 a museum exhibition on the 1956 events appeared at the Contemporary History museum, taking out from the closets the previously hidden mutilated signs of the Soviet authority.<sup>(14)</sup> Slogans and appeals to arms, newspaper proclamations and photographs of the 1956 events provided an opportunity to regard these as courageous attempts violently suppressed by military interference. The exhibited photos revealed in parallel both the culminating points of the revolution (such as the destruction of the Stalin monument and its ridicule in the square used for socialist parades), and the images of defeat and tragedy, as revealed in the pictures of the invading Soviet tanks and the dead bodies in the streets of Budapest. The exhibition was an opportunity for the Hungarian public to observe primary materials of the 1956 events and to recreate their history as confirmed from previously hidden historical evidence. The museum display signaled an entire wave of historical materials and documentation about the revolution that appeared in newspapers, books, and TV in the first post-1989 years, and had an outlined role as one of the first steps to participate in the changing historical interpretation with authentic materials from the recent past. After the dissolution of the Contemporary History museum in the post-1989 period, the collection of materials collected once with the special purpose to reveal the “counterrevolutionary” nature of the 1956

events, was accommodated by the Hungary's National Museum, where until today these can be seen in an exhibit on the rise and fall of the communist regime.

The vicissitudes of museum representation of 1956 were not limited only to this primary case of dissolving the regime's legitimacy through the power of "authentic" objects and visual documentation, but also in several other attempts that all approached the communist past in museum collections. Separate attention among the varied attempts to represent the revolution in museum discourse deserves the exhibition to 1956 at the Military History Museum in Budapest. Created as a "diary" of the revolution, the exhibition encompasses the short and dramatic chain of events from the student demonstrations on October 23 to the Soviet invasion on November 4. The chronologically shaped discourse is temporarily extended with wider frameworks of reference of fights for national sovereignty (such as 1703, 1848) that are highlighted in the exhibition. The emphasized heroic overtones of rising against the oppressor cohabit with material artifacts of the 1956 events: parts of the demolished Stalin monument and the carved Soviet coat of arms from the Hungarian national flag. The majority of the presented materials (posters, brochures, newspapers, photographs, arms, flags, and uniforms) are arranged along the days of the revolution, opt for a thick reconstruction of the revolutionary events, and demand acceptance of its heroic message. The desire for authenticity is teased however with palpable traces of artistry in the exhibition's arrangement and with the inclusion of mannequins to represent nameless street fighters. The diverse types of materials that are assorted and proposed for the viewers' attention are all subdued to the major overtone of conveying the drama of the revolutionaries in their fight for a doomed cause. The imagined past that the exhibition recreates (though, with somewhat "theatrical style of presentation," as B. James remarks) is one of suffering and lost hopes, and, in spite of the claims for a never ending struggle, remains enclosed within the realm of disillusionment.

The complicated administrative procedures for opening and sustaining museums in a sphere largely dominated by state institutions, have included Hungary in the list of the East European countries where the museum practice is determined to take place mostly within the already existing museum departments. Thus, despite the revived interest in the 1956 events and the inclusion of narratives about it in museums of national and regional history, the sole museum devoted exclusively to 1956 was created in the Hungarian countryside (near Kecskemet and Szeged) and was a result of a private initiative. Representing an exhibition with, which the museum's curator had gathered himself or had received by individual donators, the museum is an example of reconstructing the past in a personalized and intimate manner. An important part of the museum display is the history the exhibited objects: together with the stories about their role in the 1956 events – also, how they had reached the collection and what personal recollections they recreate for the curator. In this museum, as B. James points out, the past is "discursively recalled" with the participation of both the visitors and the museum guide. While the museum tour dwells upon the descriptions of objects and their use during the uprising, the meanings of the exhibition are revealed in conversations, in which "the viewers are instructed into the worldview of the museum owner" (James 2005: 139).

The various examples highlighted so far demonstrate the special place of the 1956 revolution in establishing historical continuities different from the ones of the socialist regime, and reveal characteristic aspect of the new modes of remembrance followed in the post-socialist world. The revival and sustenance of the memory of the 1956 revolution was instrumental for establishing grounds of opposition to the

previous memory frameworks, for reevaluating and paying historical justice to personalities unrelated to the socialist regime, and for eliciting a new group of special dead that would nurture different notions of collective identity. With the supreme examples of valor and dignity and with the resurfacing memories of tragic suppression, the revolution of 1956 helped consolidating public memory around moments of sublime performance and facilitated the interpretation about the ‘unity of the Hungarian nation’ in its fight against the oppressor. Evoking founding themes in Hungarian historical consciousness (of unjust treatment and suffering, of a doomed struggle and redemption), the memory of 1956 – as revealed in monuments and museums – is a testimony of the attempts to accommodate the recent past within the national historical framework.

Still, apart from these processes of consolidation and national legitimation of the revolution, another trend was also well outlined in the post-socialist context. Within a decade after the changes the unidirectional memory of 1956 was gradually overcome (in J. Rainer’s terms) by a diverging one, as expressed in episodes and private histories in which the event was broken up (Rainer, 2002: 304). What could in the socialist times be only outside public commemoration was drawn back to the surface, revealing the multiplicity of memories and the varieties of recollection. Together with its central role in the functioning of the revolution’s narrative, this re-institutionalization of the private memory and the new importance of the private realm in memory dynamics are emblematic of the processes of utilizing socialist heritage after 1989 in general.

### ***The reworking of monumental landscapes***

Having a crucial role in the symbolic overturn of the socialist regime and in working out the distance towards the socialist past, the revolution of 1956 was certainly not the only direction that historical visualizations took in the post-socialist period. Another central point was related to the fate of the visual emblems of the recent past and to their proper allocation in landscapes and public memory. What to do with the monuments and ideological symbols raised in the socialist times, whether to destroy or preserve them, and what means to apply for their appropriate standing in the post-socialist context – these were the major issues that were on the agenda immediately after the regime’s collapse. The option that Hungary undertook as an answer to these questions reveals its distinguished experience in relation to the other post-socialist countries and is emblematic of the museum practices after 1989 in general. The first years of transition in Hungary were not marked, as in other countries of the region, with delirious displays of dismantlement and desecration of the previous regimes’ symbols. Moved from their pedestals in the aftermath of 1989, the monuments stayed for a few years in warehouses, until a project for their exhibiting in special park was realized and they were ensured a somewhat “more dignified” solution.

While most of the monuments were hosted in the “Statue park” museum (see on this museum below), several still remain, revealing a variety of issues related to their preservation. The most representative case in Budapest – the Liberation Monument on Gellért Hill(15) – underwent through rigorous debates on whether the events of 1944-45 were a “liberation” or “occupation” by the Soviets and whether the memorial needed to be destroyed. Finally, the city council decided to leave the monument standing but introduced modifications in its form and interpretation. The figure of the Soviet soldier was removed and sent to the Statue Park; the red star and the inscription in honor of the Soviet army were stripped off; and the monument was interpreted as a symbol of liberation in general. Forming an artistic addition to the

city skyline, the reshaped monument was granted public acceptance. Much different was the case of the Soviet army monument in the center of Pest – in Szabadság Square. Due mainly to diplomatic pressure on behalf of the Russian state, the monument succeeded to survive the wave of other such monuments that were destroyed in 1990s in Hungary. Still, it was a target of incessant anti-Soviet protests after the changes and a fence was built around it for its protection. The nature of the site as a commemorative marker resurfaced yet again in 2002-2003, when during reconstruction work of the square, more than ten bodies of Soviet soldiers were discovered and re-buried in the Soviet soldiers' cemetery in Kőbánya district.

### ***National history in a post-socialist perspective***

The void that was opened after the dissolution of the socialist ideology called forth a reconstruction of other realms of historical experience that would seek to get established as master narratives. In the backstage of the general neglect or ideological interpretation of topics related to national history in socialist Hungary, the upsurge in national celebrations and commemorations of important events of national history in the post-1989 period followed as a logical response. Unlike other East European countries, in socialist Hungary, the spirit of nationalism was not mobilized as a source for the regime's support and the nationalist sentiments were viewed rather as a form of its resistance.<sup>(16)</sup> The loss of political sovereignty, the presence of Soviet soldiers, and the compulsory Russian-language classes all intensified nationalism and nurtured nationally minded impulses that found a logical outlet after the fall of the regime (Berger 1994: 394-95; James 2005: 31). Having got diverse aspects, this process was most vividly expressed in the reemergence of national events, kings, saints and noblemen reemerged, reviving glorious images of the Medieval and early modern Hungarian state and posing an opposition to the communism's short-lived rule in Central Europe.

Among the most notable examples of the revived interest to events and figures of the national history after 1989 were the celebrations related to the 1848 Hungarian revolution and the new place in the calendar of sacred days that it occupied. As a focal point for reinforcing the images of national identity and struggle for independence, March 15 – the date of the overthrow of the Habsburg monarchy and to the declaration of the republic – acquired an outlined significance in the post-socialist context. Having passed through a range of interpretations,<sup>(17)</sup> in 1950s and especially after the revolution of 1956, March 15 received only a limited place and protocol commemoration among the special dates of the socialist calendar. After the fall of the socialist regime, the official reevaluation of the 1956 events was paralleled by the regained importance of March 15, which could become again an official national holiday. The date and the 1848 revolution itself were raised as a 'testimony' of the incompatibility between the national goals and the socialist ideals, and as a confirmation of the stable Hungarian myth of brave revolutions that are doomed to end in defeat. The date not only revoked the old theme of the nation as an innocent victim martyred by foreign forces, but instigated also hopes that this time the revolutionary fervor of 1989 would not be destined to failure. The revolutionary innocence of the 1848 strugglers, their ideals, and the noble cause of their fight were reminded both in the demonstrations against the socialist rule and in various public protests over the following years. The Petöfi square, which had been among the most exploited public places in Budapest for organizing political demonstrations in the first half of the twentieth century acquired these functions again, turning into a focal point of both opposition groups and nation minded political parties.

The revived celebration of March 15 was only an element of an entire process for recreating historical continuities and images around which the popular understanding of national identity revolved. An embracing look back into the centuries of history was prompted by the approaching of the millennial anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian state in 2000. As the millennium was the anniversary not only of the foundation of the Hungarian state, but also of the adoption of Christianity, commemorations and millennial programs were co-organized by Church and State. The celebration included a wide range of activities taking place in the course of several years and animating the visual scene of Hungarian public life with abundant representations of centuries' long historical development. Plentiful political and cultural activities were held on the occasion of the Hungarian millennium, many celebrations and public rituals were organized, and numerous artistic performances, books, exhibitions, and works of art were created. Within several years, urban and rural landscapes in Hungary were populated with statues of saints, kings, and royal regalia; castles and historical sites received an upsurge in popular interest, and symbols of the state received distribution through inscriptions on coins, jewels, clocks, etc. As reminders of past glory, historical and religious scenes considered emblematic for the Hungarian national identity became foci of diverse representations and organized exhibitions.

Although moments of defeat and crises were not obliterated from recollection (such as, for example, in the sober commemoration in Mohács in 2000), the overwhelming tones were the peaks in the Hungary's glorious past and, most notably, the events around the foundation of the Hungarian state. The image of St. Stephen acquired enormous circulation in a wide range of representations, and the major scenes of his life and rule (most importantly, the scenes of his coronation) were abundantly reproduced in monuments, paintings and artistic performances, in works of art and precious objects. Among the more than 300 monuments that were erected in different Hungarian towns and villages (Dédestapolcsány, Ajak, Beszterec, Kondoros, Mikófalva, Kevevermes, and many others) during the Millennium celebrations, about one quarter were dedicated to his figure. The representations of St. Stephen during the millenary celebrations could be surpassed only by his crown, considered beyond doubt as the most important object in Hungarian history. Within several years it received visual multiplication in coins, banknotes, posters and media materials, was depicted in carpets, lace, metal and glass, and was dedicated monuments in stone and bronze (in Szarvos, Hajdúböszörmény and Esztergom for example). There was also a flurry of projects related to shaping buildings, bridges and public institutions in the form of a crown.

More importantly, the crown itself was a cornerstone of specially orchestrated rituals and travels across Hungarian territory. It was transferred to the old royal palace of Esztergom and returned back to Budapest for a permanent display in the national Parliament, opening thus a series of disputes among politicians and in the Hungarian public in general. Proclaiming the will to encourage the development of national, liberal, and conservative values in society, the government of Victor Orbán declared the transfer of the crown to the National Parliament, as part of recognizing the 1000-year existence of Hungary in a dignified manner. The idea was rejected by the opposition and especially the socialist party, which boycotted the symbolic parliamentary session on January 1, 2000. Holding enormous symbolic potential, the debates about the crown indicated that the government parties and the left-wing coalition evaluated differently the basic questions of Hungarian history. Still, despite the ruptures around the proper place of the crown, the first law of 2000 of the

Republic of Hungary stated that the Holy Crown of St. Stephen was to be kept in the Parliament. Hence it was translated, together with the scepter and the orb, from the National Museum on January 1, 2000, turning thus into a symbolic peak of the Millennium celebrations.

Although the political debates about the Millennium celebrations continued for several years, they did take place as planned by the government, extending the particular event of the state formation into a panorama of the centuries of Hungarian history that succeeded it. These were not able to surpass the glory that the founding event had in the state organized celebrations, but the way in which later personalities and events of Hungarian history joined this event in a retroactively affirming manner was itself illuminating. Apart from Saint Stephen and the royal crown, the Hungarian Millennium was an occasion for numerous monuments dedicated to personalities and symbolic events in Hungarian history: medieval saints and kings (Béla, András, Szent László, Lajos Nagy), counts and nobles (Isván Szécsenyi, Istvan Tuca, Eszterházy), modern historical figures (Lajos Battyány, Lajos Kossuth, József Mindszenty), etc. The new representations joined with already existing monuments to these figures and created a thick network of references to national history. A Statue park with monuments of different Hungarian historical figures was inaugurated in the National Memorial Park in Ópusztaszer, joining representatives of different historical epochs in a collective pantheon.

Together with the sculptures of historical personalities, many symbolic representations to the Millennium event were also built, utilizing a common resource of images and symbols – the Hungarian coats of arms, crosses, bells, stags, eagles stepping upon a commemorative column, etc. Parallel to the stone and bronze images, numerous ritual gates and obelisks of wood were dedicated to the Millennium in different towns of Hungary – in Rudolftelep, Pétervására, Tiszacsege, Dövény, etc. A whole series of Millennium parks were created in the country (in Kosd, Detk, etc.), customarily combining monuments to historical figures, symbolic representations, and folk forms of public commemoration. The typically shaped cross of the Hungarian crown was also multiplied in a large number of versions, such as for example the monument in Szarvas – a column raised in the center of a lake, with a pillow with the crown upon it. **(18)** Replicas of the Hungarian crown or of the cross upon it appeared in many other monuments, such as the one in Gádoros (representing a girl, handling forward the Hungarian crown) or in the several sculptures of a miraculous stag with a cross between the horns, as associated with the legend of its leading the ancient Hungarians to Central Europe. In all these multiple representations and forms, the images of the past were linked to the expression of appreciation in the present. Bearing symbolic inscription about the Hungarian Millennium, these monuments were customarily accompanied with the present day Hungarian flag and coat of arms, were covered with flowers and festive wreaths, and were loci of political and folklore celebrations in honor of the anniversary.

Though encompassing the entire territory of the country, the Millennium celebrations did not succeed however to join in consensus and approval across all sectors of the Hungarian society and still keep on producing divisive lines between political, historical, and intellectual positions on the commemoration. Rooted essentially in a critical dispute on the values that Hungarian society should promote and embody, the commemoration revealed the rupture between the ‘conservative’ and ‘democratic’ circles in the country and between their irreconcilable visions of the past. The fissures were deepened not only because of the inability of the government that orchestrated the celebrations to offer a discourse that would be inclusive enough for all

Hungarians, but also because of the rigorous attempt to propagate its own vision as the only legitimate and truthful one. The organized attempt to recreate the image of a nation throughout more than a thousand years of existence was impressive as an initiative, but hardly convincing at a more critical glance. And this was not only because, as all forms of historical representation, bore the signs of selectivity and privileged some events at the expense of others.

The vision that the Orban government proposed was no doubt ambitious for the parallels of unity between former epochs that it proposed and for the symbolic continuities, in which it envisioned the nation. However, it was striking with its monolithic representation and with the silence about previous epochs when such historical glorifications of the nation were also carried out. Announced as a form of opposition to the “national nihilism” of the socialist period, it left without comment the accusations about its relation to the practices of nationalist parties and movements in the first half of the twentieth century. While events of national glory were hauled and those of national crisis were used to emphasize the victimhood of the Hungarian nation, in other problematic fields (such as the irredentist acts against neighbor states in the two world wars and the extermination of the Hungarian Jews in the 1940s), the notions of responsibility and guilt were bluntly avoided. Thus, although the concentration on the national, Christian, and conservative values did have a significant role in limiting the representation of the socialist discourse, it laid the ground (and in some cases even overtly favored) nationalist expressions, which encoded the spirit of national glorification into rightwing overtones. The debate on some of the monuments that were raised on the occasion of the Millennium and were turned into central meeting points for Hungarian rightwing movement continued well after the change of the government. The visual forms of some of them (such as those headed with an eagle holding a sword or a scepter) leave the associations to rightwing ideology unrestrained and complicate the situation around their presence.(19)

Apart from the indiscrete ideological and political implications lying behind them, the monuments raised in dedication to the Hungarian Millennium are a clear demonstration of the new perspectives opened to the interpretation of the national past after 1989 and of the difficulties to construe a vision of the past that would trespass the existing ruptures between political and social groups in Hungarian society. The celebration of the Millennium was an opportunity for the ruling party to accommodate the national past within its political platform and to appropriate it as a legitimation of the causes and values that the party propagated. Still, as a point of pride embraced by large groups of the population, it testified to a symptomatic revival of a ‘utopian memory’ embodied and transmitted by a whole range of popular and cultural imagery. Monuments and statues, previous historical maps, national celebrations, narratives around historical objects – were all factors to mobilize realms of the past and to extrapolate their significance into the present. Deeply nostalgic by nature, it has its roots both in the relative neglect to national history during the socialist period, and to traumatic historical experiences in which the distant past is the only refuge from an “inhospitable” present.

### THE CASE OF ROMANIA

In terms of monumental discourse, the Romanian case bore a strong level of specificity, due to the powerful presence that the First World War commemoration played in the twentieth century. Unlike Bulgaria, where the monuments of the Russian-Turkish war occupied a primary role, in Romania, the War of independence and the Balkan Wars were not followed by an uprising in monumental building. It

was only after the Great War that a ‘cult for heroes’ developed, institutionalized already in 1919 through a royal decree, which established ‘Societatea Cultul Eroilor Mortii’ as the patron for all war commemorative practices (Bucur 2004). Yet, unlike Hungary, where monuments to the dead in the First World War had a relatively limited and were subsumed within the overtones of national tragedy, in Romania, the commemoration of the war dead took the direction of heroic apotheosis and victorious celebration. The successful end of the war for Romania and the special status of the war dead as contributing to the long-term struggles for national unification brought to a wave of monuments to the war dead across the country, their number in the interwar period reaching 3,500 statues and commemorative sites (Bucur 2004, 163). The variety of commemorative types; their appearance in both rural and urban areas, both in cemeteries and central public locations (squares, parks, churches, schoolyards, etc.); and the active involvement of the Orthodox Church in the celebration of the heroes’ cult established a commemorative tradition that served as an active antidote in the post-second world war policies of ideological commemoration. Although bearing unavoidably traces of exclusion and segregation (such as the linking of war heroism to the Orthodox faith, and the marginalization of war heroes of other religious and ethnic backgrounds), the heroes’ cult in interwar Romania lay such an impact on the communal identities in Romania that the new commemorative policies after 1944 were almost unable to compete.

The wave of monuments to the Soviet Army and to the soldiers who fought on the side of the Soviet army after 23 August, 1944, could not overcome the already richly populated with monuments to the First World War memorial landscape in Romania. The previous memorial sites had been surrounded by aura of sacredness that hardly permitted destruction or substitution by new ideological signs. Memorials and obelisks with the communist star atop appeared in many cities and villages in Romania, occupying usually central streets and squares. Still, despite the ideological insistence about their staying in the focus of commemorative attention, their direct proximity with monuments to heroes in the First World War unavoidably posed a corrective distance towards such ultimate claims. The situation got more complicated in the 1950s and 1960s, when there emerged a flurry of interest to commemorate the Romanian heroes in the Second World War, and later – with the “national path to socialism” undertaken by Ceausescu. Some of the monuments to the Soviet Army were removed to less central places in the cities, and were substituted by monuments of a more “national” profile. The monument to the Soviet Army in Bucharest was removed from its most conspicuous place in the Victory Square and placed in a park at the edge of Bucharest (Bucur 2004: 173). The notion of patriotism through the friendship with the Soviet Union (as propagated in the first decade after 1945) was superseded in the 1960s and 1970s by an enhanced attention towards the ‘local’ and ‘national’ expressions of heroism, and by a vision of history that relied on a centuries’-long projections of the nation in the past.

### ***The reworking of monumental landscapes and the heritage of the past***

In light of these processes it cannot be a surprise that the reworking of the socialist memorial landscapes and the debates about the presence of socialist monuments did not gain the resonance in Romanian public after 1989, as it did in neighboring Hungary and Bulgaria. Public discussions and protests against some of the remaining monuments to the Soviet army or to special figures of the socialist regime did take place in the first years of the post-socialist transition, but they did not reach the scale and drama that one could witness in other countries of Eastern Europe. Neither the

scale of monument construction in Ceausescu's Romania was as high as in the other countries of the socialist bloc, nor was the public as much divided in the opinion about whether such monuments would have the right to remain as 'reminders of the past.' The terrifying experience of totalitarianism that Romanians had during Ceausescu's rule provided strong reasons for wanting to erase the memory of the recent past (Light 2001: 67). Until early 1990s, most of the remaining monuments of the socialist period across the country have been toppled down and sent for reuse, hardly evoking any opposition or public discussion. The few examples that were spared destruction (such as the notorious monument of the Soviet army in Bucharest, or memorial signs to participants in the antifascist resistance) remained disregarded in isolated places and left to oblivion in city outskirts.

A major role in the post-socialist monumental discourse in Romania had not that much the memorial sites inherited from the socialist epoch, but the new ones that needed to be built in relation to the dramatic events of 1989. While lacking the centrality of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, a large share of the post-socialist reconstruction of the past in Romania concentrated on the events related to the overthrowing of Ceausescu's regime and on commemorating the victims of the 1989 revolution.<sup>(20)</sup> The debates about the proper nature of these events – coup d'état, a popular uprising, or a revolution, etc., were overshadowed by the need to ensure public remembrance of the dead in 1989 events and to sustain a proper interpretation about their being martyrs in a heroic fight against a brutal regime. To assure an appropriate burial site and commemoration to the dead of the revolution was in the focus of public attention after the drama of the street fights subsided. Cemeteries with the bodies of those who died in the streets protests were created in all the towns where 1989 protests took place; monuments to the dead, crosses, memorial plaques and commemorative signs were raised in all the central places of the revolution. Many of the city parts that were related to the street fights were either renamed or contained explicit references to the 1989 events. In museum terms, museum displays narrating about the dramatic events appeared in the cities where organized protests took place. In the capital, the outmost place for such exhibitions were the Bucharest History Museum (with a display on the events of December 1989), and the Military History Museum, unique with its exhibition dedicated to the role of the army in the overthrow of Ceausescu's regime. Beginning with the defining symbol of the revolution – flags with the Communist emblem ripped out – the display records the soldiers who died in the fighting and includes for example the uniform worn by General Vasile Milea, who had a key role in the revolution and was shot on Ceausescu's orders (Light 2001: 67).

The scale of the protests, the drama of the street fights, and the numerous people who lost their lives, conferred to the revolution an outlined place in the twentieth-century Romanian history, which (similar to the role of 1956 in Hungary) provided a significant resource to develop a discourse of distance to the socialist past. In political and historical terms (yet, also in terms of collective psychology), the sustenance of this distance had important implications for the entire post-1989 period – ranging from fighting the remnants of the Securitate system, to the rebuilding of Romania as a modern democratic country on its road to European Union integration. The resource that the revolution provided for creating a critical detachment to the socialist past was promptly grasped in issues related to historical and cultural heritage, and was utilized in a range of initiatives to preserve and exhibit traces of the 1989 events. Already in the beginning of 1990s there were organized "guided tours of the revolution trail," including the major sites where the events of the revolution took place: the Central

Committee of the Communist Party building (with the balcony where Ceausescu gave his last speech); the square of the revolution (with the row of memorials and cross shaped monuments of those who died in the fights); the bulleted walls of the buildings in the center of the city; the University Square, again with rows of monuments and references to the scene of fighting in 1989 and 1990; the Belu cemetery (where the fallen in the revolutionary events were buried) and the Ghencea cemetery (burial place of the Ceausescus), etc.(21) The legacy of communism and revolution (as D. Light observes), was “constructed as part of the city’s ‘heritage’, at least in the eyes of foreign visitors” (Light 2001: 61) and demonstrated a tourist potential that could be easily exploited in the post-socialist period.

Apart from the possible divisions along political lines or on issues related to the proper terming of the 1989 events,(22) the overthrowing of Ceausescu’s regime (and respectively the decades of Ceausescu’s rule) enjoy a relatively unanimous attitude among the Romanian public. This is however strikingly opposed by the lack of consensus over how to come to terms with the legacy of the socialist period, how to preserve the material reminders of these times, and how to negotiate the painful memories with the historical narratives and visual emplotments.(23) A wide span of positions and opinions appeared on whether to remember (or to try to forget) about those times, on how to represent the painful times and what tools of historical justice to apply. The attitude of denial (as D. Light observes) was palpably expressed in the widespread reservation towards representing the socialist legacy in museum terms. Probably the most notable example is the one with the House of the People (the huge palace that Ceausescu built in the last decade of his regime), used after 1994 as hosting the sessions of the national parliament and as an international conference center. One part of the building was turned into a museum, but both the reasons of sustaining the financially disruptive building (seen by many as a symbol of a period they would rather forget), and the logic of museum representation remained unaccepted by many Romanians. The mere preservation of the premises where the Ceausescu family lived in luxury and the exhibition of the riches, with which they were surrounded, did not create persuasive grounds for an engaged distance to the recent past and for the museum’s existence. Similar is the case with the recently created museum in the birthplace of Ceausescu, which reconstructs the house where he was born and gives a brief history of his life and work. Together with the lack of critical detachment to creating such a museum, the disapproval and rejection to this new museum is strengthened by the fact that the entire town is turned into a place of entertainment, a mini Disneyland.

Notably, however, the elaboration of such an engaged detachment did not appear possible even for the institution that would have as a primary goal to provide an interpretation on the recent period – the National History Museum in Bucharest. Opened in 1972 on Ceausescu’s initiative and reflecting his increasing nationalist stance in the 1970s, the National History Museum was inevitably turned into a means of glorifying the leader himself. A substantial part of the museum was dedicated to the dictator’s achievements and a special exhibition contained thousands of gifts given to him on his birthdays and anniversaries. Although after 1989 the museum put efforts in removing the pervasive ideological representations that suffused its halls before, for the entire period after the changes it did not succeed to create an exhibition on the socialist period in the country. The galleries dealing with the communist period and Ceausescu were closed, but the coverage of the museum stopped abruptly in the beginning of the interwar period. After it was several times closed temporarily, since 2003 all the exhibitions except those with ancient treasures have been closed and

would remain such at least until 2007 (when it is announced that the museum would be open). The pattern of the National History Museum is generally followed by its numerous branches and the regional history museums in the country, where the previous displays of the recent past are dropped, but novel interpretations of the socialist period have not appeared, destining thus the post-war Romanian history into a blank slate waiting for a period to be inscribed anew.

### ***National history in a post-socialist perspective***

The attitude of distance applied to the socialist period brought to a novel interpretation of an entire series of historical figures of modern Romanian history – politicians, intellectuals, scholars, etc.(24) Those who were previously acclaimed as predecessors and collaborators to the victory of socialism found their role in Romanian history problematic and frequently welcoming overt disclaim. Those, who were considered in the socialist times as “archenemies” of the socialist ideology, as political and intellectual opponents to the establishment of socialism, or merely affiliated with political and social groups different from the socialist party, reemerged for public attention and had their role depicted in more positive light. While in most cases, revision of the previous interpretation was beyond doubt a necessary step, the paradoxical logic of equating automatically the anti-socialist and non-socialist with a positive aura is troublesome. The process had well expressed contours in all the other post-socialist countries, where the historical revisionism in the post-socialist period did not leave untouched almost any important figure both the prewar and post-war periods. Although this had multifarious dimensions and depended on a variety of factors provided by the local contexts, a general trend that evolved was the substitution of the socialist special figures with such, to which the ideology had stood in overt opposition. Apart from personalities that have been suppressed by the socialist regimes, the most immediate association was to the political groups and ideologies, which the anti-fascists claimed to have fought against: fascists, figures of the radical right movements, etc. Although (as resulting from episodic initiatives that frequently encountered opposition by the public) such trends need not be generalized, they can be telling about the danger of moving the pendulum of historical interpretation to the other critical pole.

Among the most indicative examples to this in the Romanian case is the post-1989 attempts for revise the figure of Marshall Antonescu and the speculations that his vehement disclaim in the socialist period was ‘solely’ because of his anti-communist persuasion. Understandably, what caught the public sight in the post-socialist period was not that much the persecutions and crimes that he had conducted during in the years before 1944 (all these have been widely narrated during the communist period), but his being in the group of many Romanians, who were put on trial and executed in after the establishment of the socialist power. The perspective of the anticommunist resistance, which emerged to the fore of historical attention after 1989, and the process of redefining the pantheon of heroic figures put Antonescu in the position of “reevaluating” his key role in the terror and mass destruction in the war years, and of finding explanations about the “historical” circumstances that conditioned this role. The new status of dignity that those who suffered in the early Stalinist period in communist prisons achieved, provided convenient grounds for an interpretative slip to seeing Antonescu as a ‘victim’ of the communist terror. A striking example for the new course of interpretation dedicated to this figure was the 1994 exhibition at the Military History Museum, organized as part of the celebrations after the end of the Second World War. In this exhibition, as M. Bucur points out, Antonescu was

presented “unproblematically as the most important leader of the Romanian armed forces in the war” (Bucur 2004: 178). Headed by a bust of Antonescu at the entrance, the exhibition showed Antonescu’s active participation in both military operations and civil events during the war, and remained silent about pogroms and concentration camps in the country under his supervising look. It is important to note that, although realized in a state museum exhibition, such attempts for a novel interpretation did not result from state embraced policy, nor was it accepted without reservation by the public in general. Still, it is indicative about the way in which the reshaped meaning of the Second World War and the historical debates about the post-war years instigated novel trends of justification and mythologization of previously disclaimed figures.

The new course taken after the fall of the socialist regime was well expressed in the changes of public holidays that occurred in the first years after 1989. While the abolishment of the socialist most important state holiday, 23 August (the day of the entering of the Soviet troops in Romania) was no doubt logical, the fate of the other state holidays was not that easy to settle. The shift that had once occurred with the replacement of the Stalinist ideology by a nationalist one had led to the appropriation of the most significant national events by the communist party and their use for celebrating the accomplishments of the regime (Bucur 2004: 176). Most notably this was expressed in the celebrations of December 1, the day of the national unification of Romania after the First World War.(25) Having gained marginal significance in the first two decades after 1944, the holiday reemerged as a prominent date in the late 1960s with the Ceausescu’s consolidation of his control over the Party and the state. Manifested by abundant publications and museum exhibits, the framework of the historical union was extended into the past and sought to encompass the entire Romanian history and historical territories (Bucur 2001, 313). The event was a convenient opportunity for the regime to solidify its control over public memory and to outline the significance of Ceausescu in Romanian history in general. The appropriation of the holiday and its inherent relationship with the glorification of the regime led to distancing of the population and to questioning of its remaining as an official holiday in the post-1989 period. The consolidation around a “most important public holiday” was not that easy, since, apart from several dates connected to the First World War, the only event that remained “untouched” by the nationalist policies of the previous regime and had a clear anti-communist stance, was December 22, the day of the Ceausescu’s flight from Bucharest and the creation of the National Salvation Front. In this way, although the meanings that the socialist regime invested in December 1 still resurface in museum displays across the country,(26) its unifying potential for the Romanian nation is disrupted by the unrestrained associations to its abuse in the socialist times.

Apart from the negotiable grounds, in which personalities and dates of modern Romanian history entered, the period after 1989 in Romania was marked by intensive debates around the problem of “national heritage” and its preservation after decades of neglect and destruction. From the period of Sovietization of the country, and throughout Ceausescu’s national communism, the diverse cultural heritage in Romania was either used to sustain the official discourse on the heroic and glorious “national” past, or (as in the period of the 1980s) was an object of systematic razing for the purpose of achieving the “new man” with “new” spiritual and cultural values.(27) While projects like the House of the People ran with unlimited budget,(28) historical heritage in many towns of the country was either left without support or protection, or was purposefully razed to clear space for socialist

construction projects. Even more disastrous was the condition with the historic and cultural heritage of the ethnic minorities in Romania, which faced the condition of a systematic neglect and disruption. After 1989 there was a pressing need for new legislation for the cultural heritage protection and organized policies to preserve what had been neglected or destroyed in the previous decades. Many areas in the capital and in the larger towns of the country underwent processes of reconstruction and revitalization, among these most notably – the revitalization of the historical center of Bucharest and St. Dimitru’s area, the reconstruction work of the Bran castle near Brasov, and the historical area in Sigisoara. All these often encountered enormous financial and institutional difficulties that marked the period of transition and frequently involved competitions and power struggles for access to the nonetheless limited funding.

The struggles were not only along the lines of funding however, as demonstrated in the heritage battle in the historical center of Cluj in the second half of the 1990s. A town of ethnically mixed population with a substantial ethnic Hungarian community, Cluj is often quoted as preserving abundant historical and cultural heritage from both Medieval and early modern times. The coexistence of different minorities in the town has placed this heritage well beyond issues of ‘national’ appropriation: even today, for example, one of the symbols of Cluj is the statue of Mathias Corvinus, King of Hungary (1458-1490), who was born in this town and exercised a strong historical and cultural impact on it. The sharpness of the ‘minority issue’ that evolved after 1989 in all the former socialist countries received a degree in Cluj that turned it into a notorious example about the difficulties to affiliate historical and cultural heritage along national lines. In 1992 Gheorghe Funar, an extreme nationalist politician, won the local election and became mayor of Cluj – as it turned out, for 12 years. The consistent anti-Hungarian rhetoric and actions both during the campaign and afterwards created frustration among the Hungarian community in Cluj, reaching its peak in 1994, when the mayor decided to reopen the Roman archaeological sites, which lay under the main square. The project threatened to destroy centuries of history that have layered above the traces of the Roman period, and confronted the antique and the medieval historical periods for the sake of politics.

The idea of disturbing the cultural center of Cluj, which had many Hungarian connotations created disturbance among the Hungarian citizens of the town, who went out into the streets to protect the historical monuments of the square. The manifestation started on July 2, 1994, and was very close to becoming a serious inter-ethnic conflict. Temporarily the excavations were delayed, to be started a month later with tight security measures. As it turned out later, the beginning of the archaeological investigations had more importance than the finds themselves. Even those who had supported the investigations in the beginning started to raise their voices against it. The mayor came out with another history-challenging idea: erecting a copy of Trajan’s column in the original size next to the archaeological site. Its footstone was even inaugurated on the national holiday, December 1, 1999, but the town council rejected the project itself. Although the issue of the main Cluj square was introduced on the political agenda, a solution, which would be convincing enough to overcome the divisive ruptures, was not reached in the years to follow. With all the dramatic point accompanying its ten years of unending disputes, the example of Cluj is illustrative at least of two things. While the first one shows the divisive lines opened by the minority issue after the dissolution of the socialist totalizing ideological paradigm; the second prompts about the ‘shifting’ formulations that heritage objects and sites receive when put on the agenda of politics. “Hybrid”

and shared by their nature, they become especially vulnerable when becoming objects of short cut classifications and national, ethnic, or ‘historical’ interventions. As a concluding remark about the processes undergone by monuments and museums in post-socialist Romania, I would need to address again the problem of the way Romanian society constructed a distance towards the recent past and how it historicized the latter in commemorative sites and museum displays. One cannot leave unnoticed that despite the shared revulsion towards the period of Ceausescu’s rule, the majority of museum and monumental representations of the socialist period created a position of distance exclusively through the focus of the events that led to the regime’s overthrowing. While the changes in the national and regional museums comprised a mere dropping of the previous exhibitions, the several attempts for museum narratives about the socialist times were either too small and episodic, or were limited to the first years of the socialist terror and then – to the revolution of 1989. Thus, for example, one of the first attempts to create a museum of communism in Eastern Europe in general – the one located in the former Communist Party Headquarters, and currently the Peasant Museum in Bucharest – was both truly small for its purposes, too compressed in the tiny room in the basement of the building, and in a way too didactic to attract a more thorough attention. The other major example – the Museum of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Sighet (see more on it below) – is probably the sole instance for a museum representation of the painful memories about the communist repression. Still, even in it, the historiographic framework is limited exclusively to the first decade after the establishment of communism, and leaves the period of Ceausescu’s rule strikingly unrepresented. Curiously enough, the main proponents of this period in Romanian museums have appeared to be the exhibitions of gifts and luxury enjoyed by Ceausescu family at the time of their rule. Notably however, the one in the basements of the National History Museum have been closed for visitors (even before the official closing of the entire museum), and the other – at the House of the People receives the objection of the Romanian public and is a target of mainly for foreign visitors. The filling up of this gap in historicizing and visualizing of the recent past is hopefully a project to expect from the years to come.

### THE CASE OF BULGARIA

Unlike Hungary and Romania, who took revolutionary events against the socialist rule as launching points in developing a discourse of opposition, in Bulgaria such a firm memory ground was not at an immediate avail. The complicated situation around the overturning of Zhivkov’s rule and the bothering suppositions about limited expressions of dissident activities in the socialist times put the primary attempts in “remembering otherwise” on somewhat problematic grounds. A major turning point in the attempts to discover proper terming of the past was (as it happened in most former socialist countries) the triggering of the demonological paradigm and disclaim of the socialist period at the uncovering of its crimes. Already in the first months after 1989, newspapers, billboards, loudspeakers, etc. were revealing information about the crimes of the regime, about the trials of the People’s court, murdered opponents of the regime, the appalling face of the Stalinization and de-Stalinization. Terrifying data were revealed about the conditions in the labor camps where political opponents and random people were sent (some of these camps continued its existence well after their closing in other countries of the region);(29) about the rigor of the nationalization program in the first decade of the regime and its long-lasting harm on Bulgarian agriculture; about the previously hailed industrialization and its damages both on the

economy and the environment, etc. All this ‘newly revealed’ data not merely played the role of shaping the political opinions against the communist party and its political successors, but also of reinscribing public memory after decades of indoctrination.(30)

Some of the major debates around issues of public memory ran around the existing monuments of the socialist past, whose treatment (unlike both Hungary and Romania) occupied a central place in public discussions for at least a decade after the changes. The reasons for the centrality of the monument topic are various, but probably the major one is rooted in the dominant place that monuments had as ideological emblems in socialist Bulgaria. Almost all the various types (to the Soviet army, to socialist leaders, to antifascist resistance, and the partisan struggle, etc.) were widely represented in Bulgaria and kept on being raised until late 1980s. Notably, for example, unlike most other East European countries, in Bulgaria monuments and memorial complexes to the Soviet soldiers kept on being constructed up until mid-1980s, with almost the same intensity and attention as in the 1950s.(31) Furthermore, apart from them, especially widespread appearance received those to the partisan and antifascist struggle, which, marking a real outburst in the 1960s and 1970s, did not leave almost any town and village untouched by such commemorative expression. Yet, in the last two decades of the regime, it was namely monuments that exemplified overtly the intervention of the ideology in visualizations of national history.

Foci of special attention throughout the entire socialist period, the monuments occupied the most prominent sites of city topographies and were the core of the major political ceremonies for about four decades. Their prominent presence in the inhabited environments and the fresh memories about the propaganda discourse in which they were involved brought them immediately in the focus of public debates requiring taking a proper position toward dismantlement or preserving. The first years after 1989 witnessed a wave of monuments that were toppled down following public protests and demonstrations. The first ones to disappear from public view were those to the ideology’s founders and most prominent party leaders – Marx, Lenin, Blagoev, Dimitrov, etc. With the major exception of the mausoleum of Dimitrov in Sofia, almost all of these monuments were destroyed within the first two years of the regime and only their pedestals remained to remind about the former ideological signs. While some of them were merely dismantled and sent for reuse, others turned into a focus of initiatives to reshape. Thus, for example, in 1991 the municipality council in General Toshevo decided to dismantle the 3.5 ton monument to Lenin. Out of fear that they might be stolen, the municipality hosted the monument remains and in 2000 approved a project for their reshaping into a sculpture of a white swallow as a “symbol of hope” (*BVI*, 13.09.2000).(32) In a similar fashion, the huge monument to Lenin in Sofia was dismantled in 1991, but the special nature of the square welcomed projects for a new statue, and in 2000 there was inaugurated a symbolic figure of St. Sophia.

In other cases, especially those related to figures of the socialist movement in Bulgaria, there were cases of ‘temporary displacements,’ followed after a period by a reinstallation of the previous monuments. Such was the case with the monument of the founder of the socialist movement in Bulgaria Dimitar Blagoev in Blagoevgrad. It was dismantled in 1992, but in 1996, the Municipality Council of the town voted for the returning of the monument back to its previous place, to preserve in such a way the ‘synchrony’ between the name of the town and the monumental representation of its patron (*Trud*, 134, 18.05.96; *Duma*, 116, 17.05.96). Similar was the case with the town bearing the name of the prominent leader of Bulgarian Communist Party, G. Dimitrov. In 1992 in the central square of the town bearing Dimitrov’s name

(Dimitrovgrad), the monument to Dimitrov was dismantled and together with its pedestal was removed to the park “Maritsa” (BVI, 21, 21.01.92). In 1997, the monument was reinstalled – as if out of ‘fears’ that the town might lose its identity without its emblematic founder. In a similar way, the monument of G. Dimitrov in Pavel banya was dismantled in 1993 and after being removed to the municipality basement was reinstalled in 1996 (*Trud*, 133, 17.05.96). In Shumen, Dimitrov’s monument in front of the High Military School for artillery and air defence “P. Volov” was replaced by a rocket (*Duma*, 107, 11.05.93; BVI, 186, 5.07.93), while in Kurdjali, proposals were made to replace Dimitrov’s sculptured figure with a monument to the Medieval Bulgarian King Simeon the Great (*Duma*, 244, 17.10.95; BVI, 92, 1.04.96). Debates and protests against the monument to Dimitrov were also held in the town, with which he was most closely associated as a young miner and leader of the socialist organization (Pernik). After the monument was removed in 1993, sign-up sheets and meetings in support of its reinstallation in the town center were organized several times in the years to follow (BVI, 345, 11.12.95; BVI, 154, 3.06.97).

### ***The debates around the monuments to the Soviet Army***

Among the monuments that were foci of most serious debates about destruction or preservation after 1989, those of the Soviet army occupy a conspicuous place in Bulgaria. Such monuments had frequently become emblematic sites of city and regional identities, and their “rooting out” from the symbolic topographies was an issue of primary importance. The meetings for deciding on the fate of such monuments, the skirmishes between the representatives of the different political groups, and the inclusion of various cultural, state and private organizations in the debates, shaped the presence of these monuments as central points in the towns where the political was looking for its new contours after the fall of the totalitarian regime. A major issue that was addressed in these meetings concerned the profile of the Soviet army and its role in the history of Bulgaria in the end of the Second World War. The changed political atmosphere after 1989 permitted viewing the Soviet Army as an occupier and declared the public meetings in defence of its monuments as “meetings of shame” (*Demokratsia*, 74, 31.03.93). The Soviet army was no longer considered as bringing sovereignty and freedom to Bulgaria (as the communist historiography had claimed for years), but as damaging its sovereignty and exercising political and cultural domination. What had once been supposed to represent “the force and the unbreakable might of the Soviet army,” and “the gratitude and thankfulness of the Bulgarian people to their liberators,” was interpreted as representing “adulation to the enslaver, fanaticism and oppression” (*Vek 21*, 17.05.93). One need not spare mentioning, however, that the tradition dating back to the previous regime, of emphasizing the Soviet army as the victor over fascism and as a “liberator” preserved its strong voice in the post-1989 debates as well. It kept on being raised as an important argument in public meetings supporting the “sacred” preservation of the monuments and memory of the dead Soviet soldiers. Appeals were made for their proper evaluation in comparison with the monuments to the Soviet army in other countries of Europe, such as Belgium, Austria, England and Germany, where monuments to the Soviet Army are still preserved in a dignified way.(33)

The problems with the monuments of the Soviet army did not, however, concern only historical memory. With their enormous size and imposing structure they were justifiably considered as symbols of the cultural colonialism in the Stalinist period.

The aesthetic function was considered as “frozen” in the years of their creation “when beautiful was thought to be only what responded to the ideological standards” (*Demokratsia*, 49, 26.02.92). These aesthetic reasons blended with those associated with the preservation of the historical truth and the national dignity, and were yet another strong argument in the debates for purifying the space from ideological stamps and for the appropriate shaping of the city centers that those monuments occupied. The considerations for destroying and reshaping of the monuments of the Soviet army were further strengthened by the signs of desecration that occurred at these sites. The denigrating inscriptions and graffiti, the signs of youth popular culture, the political and advertisement posters that populated the areas after 1989, as well as the dirt and waste that were piled at these sites were themselves a political and aesthetic position for the monuments’ fates. Often, this seemed to be a sufficient precondition for taking a decision in favor of monuments’ dismantlement.

The fate of these sites varied throughout the years, but they all passed through a public debate concerning their possible destruction, through signs of protest and youth culture activities, and in the end they either turned into sites of desolation and forgetting or were gradually adapted within the new city environment. In spite of the threat of complete destruction that was faced by all the monuments of the Soviet army in Bulgaria, few of them encountered anything more than a partial dismantlement, the monument in Pleven being the major one that had been destroyed so far. In Sofia, Russe, and Burgas where the monuments had been raised in the town centres, they continued to form aesthetically the most representative parts of the cityscape. After being an object of a fiery debate and a demand for dismantlement, the monument in Russe for example was finally proposed to be “nationalized” as a monument of culture and protected as “state property” (*Trud*, 174, 28.06.96). The statue with the Soviet soldier and the pedestal were cleaned from denigrating inscriptions, and the monument was preserved as a historical object. In other cases, such as in Plovdiv, Varna and Vidin, the difficulty to destroy such enormous complexes resulted in their abandonment to time and weather. In 1992 the Varna municipality announced a secret competition to rent monument of the Soviet army. One of the conditions was to reshape the 10, 000 kg concrete monument, but no offers came forth (*Demokratsia*, 122, 23.05.92; *Demokratsia*, 170, 24.07.92). Until today almost any attempt of sustaining or repairing the monument faces both the protests of political parties and the difficulties ensuing from its exceptional size and rigid artistic performance.

The monuments to the Soviet army that provoked the most intensive debates and symbolic fights over the years were those in Sofia and Plovdiv, which have been in the focus of ardent debates over the entire period after 1989.(34) Regularly covered with graffiti and subsequently cleaned, protested against or protected by live chains of people, they still succeed in preserving their conspicuous place in the two cities. Already in the first years after 1989 there were raised proposals for dismantling the monuments, counteracted by public protests and provoking diverse projects for reutilization of the memorial site. The monument in Sofia was proposed to be taken to a park of horror; to be turned into an Orthodox church (*1000 dni*, 76,12.02.93); to be substituted by a monument dedicated to the Christianization of Bulgaria, by a monument to the national hero Vassil Levski, a statue of the medieval Bulgarian ruler Khan Krum, or by an Arc de Triomphe (*Demokratsia*, 166, 20.07.93; *BPK*, 92, 13.05.93; *BPK*, 127, 2.07.93; *Ranno Utro*, 25.05.93).(35) There was also a proposal to dismantle the monument and to send it (“with the respective honor rituals”) to one of the Sofia war cemeteries, and at its place to construct a new building for the National Historical Museum (*Express*, 1, 26.04.93). The Union of “Art in Action”

suggested the monument to be transformed into a center of avantguard and modern art where the “burying and mummification of totalitarianism” (1000 dni, 76,12.02.93) might be enacted. The Ministry of Science and Culture even took the responsibility to present a program for creating such a museum of totalitarian art (*Express*, 7, 4.05.93), but the project came out with no result. In 1993, a millionaire expressed his intention to “buy” the monument, since it was solely a “political sign,” and thus had to be annihilated (24 chasa, 196, 24.07.93). Public pressure and the administrative difficulties with privatizing and selling the monument prevented this initiative from taking place.

No less curious were the projects for reutilizing the monument of the Soviet Army in Plovdiv. Its pedestal was numerous times covered with paint and labels denouncing the claim for its historical legitimacy. In the backstage of no official decision in favor or against the monument, projects and proposals for reutilizing the memorial site proliferated. Together with the ideas of its full destruction, the projects spanned from its replacement with a monument to Vassil Levski, to building a large bottle of Coca-Cola around it (*Duma*, 153, 1.07.96; *Kontinent*, 157, 7.07.96; 24 chasa, 238, 31.08.99). There were proposals to rebuild the monument into an obelisk symbolizing the independence of Bulgaria (*BVI*, 361, 27.12.95); to replace it by a memorial plaque for the Bulgarians killed in the Second World War (*Trud*, 116, 29.04.96); or, to buy the monument with the entire surrounding area (*Trud*, 284, 16.10.96; *Trud*, 105, 18.04.96). Among the more daring ideas was to ‘counteract’ it by building a statue of Christ on a nearby hill, or to enclose the monument within a metal sphere resembling a sun disk, creating thus a special effect in the skyline of the city (*Standard News*, 133, 5.06.96). In a gesture of ‘mercy’ to the monument, the citizens of Silistra showed interest in having the statue of Alyosha carried to their town, since, as they stated, their town did not have such a prominent monument (*BVI*, 115, 24.04.96). Similar in that respect were the proposals to carry the monument to an intended “Statue park” in Dimitrovgrad, or to the House of Humor and Satire in Gabrovo (*BVI*, 115, 24.04.96). It was also in 1996 when, infuriated with the legal obstacles preventing the destruction of the monument, the poet and politician N. Kolev-Bosia publicly declared that Alyosha should not be destroyed, but other monuments of enslavers (such as Sultan Murad and Basil II the Bulgarian-slayer) should be built near it, turning thus the “hill of the liberators” into a “hill of the enslavers” (24 chasa, 124, 8.05.96; *Kontinent*, 108, 8.05.96; *Duma*, 108, 8.05.96).

Peaks in the public debates around these monuments were the several announcements of the mayors of Sofia and Plovdiv (in 1993, 1997, 1998, etc.) that the monuments would be dismantled and the space that they occupy would be utilized “more appropriately.” Regularly taking place around pre-election campaigns, these announcements faced the vehement opposition of the the Bulgarian Socialist Party and its parliamentary group, of antifascist and veteran organizations, of Russian ambassadors, and, not least by ordinary citizens of Sofia and Plovdiv. Sign-up sheets in support of the monuments were prepared, protest demonstrations were held against the envisioned dismantlement, and even law procedures were started against the municipalities for their decisions to destroy the “city heritage” (*Trud*, 151, 5.06.96; *Standart News*, 1315, 17.05.96). Involving a wide range of social, political, and cultural organizations, these initiatives stated that the destructions would deprive the country from “national memory” (*BPK*, 75, 20.04.93; *BVI*, 69, 9.04.93) and that the appeals for destroying the monuments of the Soviet army aimed to “rehabilitate fascism and to deny the antifascist struggle” (*BVI*, 102, 12.04.93). Appeals were made to state institutions and embassies to obstruct the dismantlement of the

memorial, and proposals for a referendum on the monuments' fate was initiated (24 *chasa*, 82, 28.03.93). The intentions to destroy the monuments of the Soviet army in Sofia and Plovdiv (as well as of those in other towns in Bulgaria) turned into a cornerstone of the diplomatic relationships between Bulgaria and Russia, and were accompanied by a series of scandals by Russian ambassadors around both the initiatives for dismantlement, and the poor sustenance of the memorial sites. The Supreme Council of Russia sent official letters to the Bulgarian parliament, expressing offense with the municipal decisions and hope that the fate of the monuments would be decided in a "civilized way," i.e. in accordance with the Bulgarian-Russian treaty of friendly relations and cooperation (*BSF*, 119, 29.04.93; *Demokratsia*, 99, 30.05.93).(36)

In the course of these negotiations, it was revealed that the dismantlements would break the Convention for protecting the architectural legacy of Europe (ratified by Bulgaria in 1991) that obliged a country to prevent the defacement and destruction of protected memorial sites (*Trud*, 120, 5.05.96).(37) Yet, there appeared interpretations that the monuments were not a municipal but "state property" and a decision on behalf of the municipality was not sufficient to legitimize destruction. Pressed by the public opposition and the administrative complications, the mayors needed to step back and several times canceled the intended dismantlement. After pronouncements of the Supreme Court in 1998 that municipal projects for dismantling monuments were illegal, the political activities and skirmishes in these memorial areas subsided, and debates arise mostly on anniversary days, when the Bulgarian Socialist Party organized commemorative rituals at these sites. On 'ordinary' days, both monuments remain generally unthreatened, emphasized by the gradual decrease of the attempts of assaults and of the graffiti inscriptions on the monuments' bodies. With the years, the sites, that had previously attracted waves of pilgrims, had preserved the "sacred memory" of the victory over fascism, and had visualized the triumph of socialism, progressively turned into objects of only scarce commemorative functions, welcoming indifference, rather than intended attention.

### ***The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov***

Aside from the monuments of the Soviet Army, the monument that attracted most lively attention for an entire decade after 1989 in Bulgaria is the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov. Its fate has already received several detailed analyses in scholarly publications,(38) and for that purpose here will be provided only a brief presentation of its transformations. Already in 1990, the monument was denounced as a "temple of the devil" that had to be fought against both with political protests and with religious rituals. Night processions with lit candles were organized in front of it, Orthodox sanctifications of the square before it were made, protest meetings were held against the embalmed body inside the monument. On July 18, 1990, 41 years after being placed on public display, the body of Dimitrov was removed overnight from the mausoleum and cremated. The urn with the ashes was buried in a family grave in the Sofia central cemetery. The socialist party was planning a major ceremony for the day of burial, but the real scale of the ceremony was much smaller. The celebration of the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dimitrov's birth of on 18 June 1992, managed to compensate in a way the unrealized promise for mass veneration at the burial. Celebrated in a number of towns and villages in the country, with special rituals at Dimitrov's grave, the anniversary brought forth again the contradictions around Dimitrov's figure. He was interpreted as a hero of Leipzig and an "anti-Bulgarian," a KGB employee and a "national traitor," culpable for the suppression and annihilation of the Bulgarian

opposition, but still a “great personality and world-known antifascist.” Both at the time of the anniversary and in the years to follow, publications in the press revealed Dimitrov’s role in the Stalinist purges, the introduction of the Stalinist repression in Bulgaria, as well as his collaboration with Tito for including Bulgaria in a Yugoslav Federation in the Balkans. In light of these publications, Dimitrov’s role as a leading figure of the Communist International during the World War II was also denounced. His defense in the German court against accusations that he had set fire to the Reichstag in Berlin in 1933, a trial that brought him world-wide acclaim, was attacked as being prepared by the Soviets and related to the Comintern propaganda.

After the removal of the body, the demands for the mausoleum’s destruction were more overt and numerous media and parliamentary debates about the mausoleum’s fate were held. Due mostly to the pressure of the socialist party in the Bulgarian parliament, the destruction of the building was cancelled several times. A special municipal commission for proposing a new use for the monument was formed and a suggestion was made to turn the mausoleum into a monument to all national heroes. The opposition expressed its dissatisfaction at the decision by piling mounds of dirt in front of the building, making thus the whole space look like a landfill. Crowds of people settled in tents near the monument in order to prevent the socialists’ attempts to clear the dirt and preserve the former place “sacred.” The walls of the former sepulcher were covered with graffiti, posters and slogans. Unguarded both by state and party authorities, the mausoleum became a blank space that called for a rewriting of the public memory. The square in front became one of the most exploited sites used for demonstrations and political meetings. Parallel to the political and artistic utilizations of the monument, numerous projects were developed concerning its future reshaping. Among those prospective metamorphoses were for example suggestions to build a museum to the history of socialism in Bulgaria; to establish an exhibition place and a large gallery of modern art; and to host the archives of several state institutions, or create the largest disco club in the Balkans. There were also ideas to transfer and preserve the national treasury in its basement, or to turn the building into an open space for theater performances. In 1997, an art project of the Bulgarian National Opera for holding open performances in the square was approved and the monument turned into an opera stage. There were also suggestions for artistic reutilizations of the building, the most original of which was to install an immense sundial inside, which would measure the time after the fall of communism in Bulgaria.

All these projects created a utopian state that the ‘no-place’ and the ‘no-time’ in the centre of the city would start working and functioning. But, to consent to the reshaping meant to accept that the ideological remains in the mausoleum’s nature had reached invisibility, and to believe thus that the building had already been purged from its polluting references. Were the changes with the mausoleum an effacement of its former functions as a locus of symbolic power, or were they rather disguises that masked the denial for a change: this was the question, whose prolonged solution preserved the mausoleum for about ten years after 1989. A step toward solving the dilemmas was taken in 1999 by the government of the Union of Democratic Forces, which announced that the mausoleum would be destroyed, and that a garden would be planted in its place. The destruction started almost immediately, hardly allowing the public to react, and thus most of the debate referring to the governmental decision took place while the actions on destroying the building were under way. The destruction began on 22 August 1999, but the first three attempts to blow up the sepulchre succeeded only in tilting it. Four days later a new and far greater explosion

destroyed the roof and the walls. The difficulty of destroying the monument was interpreted by the public, the media, and the state officials as an “opposition” by the sepulchre against the destruction and as the resistance of the former ideology to clear up the space it had previously occupied.

Taking place almost ten years after the fall of socialism as state ideology in Bulgaria, the destruction of the mausoleum was generally evaluated as already late and untimely. The destruction came after years of public debates and demands for destruction, but the decision for it was actually not a result, nor a response to these debates. The destruction was a surprise for many people, mostly because the mausoleum’s status of indecisibility had gradually been accepted as ‘normal’ - a condition of assent, whose most probable explanation was a lack of other opportunities to undo the knot. Having overstepped by several years the rise of public pressure for removing this communist symbol from the center of Sofia, the destruction failed to meet the boiling point of purging energies in the capital throughout the years of 1989-1997. It came largely as a postponed effect of a ‘symbolic revolution’ that could have occurred years before. Aiming to counteract the memory of the socialist times as a source that might bring about their possible revival, the destruction paradoxically facilitated the extended ‘life’ of the building: people kept on referring to this central spot as “the mausoleum,” confirming thus the sticking of the monument in the people’s memory in spite of its physical absence.

#### ***Anti-fascist monuments, national history monuments, anti-totalitarian monuments***

The mausoleum of Dimitrov and the monuments to the Soviet army were far from the only cases around which intensive debates emerged in the Bulgarian post socialist period. No less ‘dramatic’ was the fate of the monuments dedicated to the dead in the partisan and antifascist movement. The memory of these people had been shaped in a particular way by the socialist regime and had been used as a significant legitimization pillar for its ideological discourse. The post-1989 period faced a real difficulty of how to interpret their death and how to treat the monuments to those who had been thought as “antifascists.” Their self-sacrifice was not easy to bracket and any attempt to clear their memorial sites from ideological associations had the shading of a desecration act and of claiming validity to the ideas these people fought against. The public debates on the legitimacy of commemorating those dead were frequently outstripped by private initiatives of assault or symbolic desecration of their memorial signs. Already in the first years after 1989, the majority of the monuments, plaques and memorial sites dedicated to the partisan and antifascist movement (in towns as well as in the mountains) suffered some kind of attack. They were covered with paint, had their red stars smashed, “acquired” a denigrating inscription, or were partially broken.

In the beginning, such attacks provoked mainly surprise at the possibility of turning profane the sites that still had a “sacred” value in the mindsets of many people. Yet, the presence of death bodies beneath or in the vicinity of these sites was at least troubling in light of the iconoclastic intentions. The reactions to such acts sharply polarized those who sought to destroy all the signs of the previous regime and the fervent protests against what was thought to be barbarity and vandalism. Attempts were made to clear some of the desecrated signs, but they were desecrated again, prompting thus that little consensus could be expected to appear on this issue. Among the partisan and antifascist monuments that attracted the most rigorous debates and contestations, one can list for example, the memorial ensemble to the 1923 September uprising in Montana, the brotherly mounds in Pleven, Plovdiv, and Varna, the

memorial to the “Anton Ivanov” partisan troop near Batak, etc. While in some towns, the assaults on monuments swept around the whole cityscape, in others, the memory of the city preserved moments of ‘ritual’ destruction of separate monuments. The ideas for the possible dismantlement and replacement did not concern only the most representative and huge monuments of the totalitarian epoch, but generally included all signs and memorial plaques that were a legacy of before. The various acts of desecration put at stake the existence of the memorial signs, insisted on their preservation or destruction, and required a response on behalf of municipal authorities. The presence of the monument, the standing of the memorial plaque could prompt generally of the town’s political affiliation and of how it had succeeded to ‘distance’ itself from the recent past.

The practice of reshaping the landscapes where the ideology’s special dead were permanently located was closely related to the practice of renaming villages, towns, schools, factories, and institutions that previously bore the names of participants in the partisan and resistance movement. Until the mid-1990s, many of the institutions bearing the names of former “special dead” received new names. The names of the previous heroes seemed irrelevant in the post-socialist context: they did not confer appropriate information, and, superseded by names adhering to a more commercial and advertising pattern, they tended to disappear. The numerous references to the activities of party activists who had worked and died in towns, were not relevant any more – the tourist brochures stopped mentioning them as sites appealing for tourists, and it was usually the memory of the ancient parts of towns and regions that came forth. Cities advertised themselves no longer through the monuments raised in the period of socialism and through their revolutionary past. The reshaping of heroes’ monuments and the remodeled contours of heroism and sacrifice exercised thus a strong impact on the changes of regional identities and on developing alternative models of reference to the past.

The changes in the monuments to antifascists and socialist movement did not apply only to towns and villages, but also to memorial signs in mountains and valleys, on peaks and along tourist routes. The dedicated visits, the ceremonies and the “touring in the steps of the heroes” that existed in the socialist times disappeared. The history of the partisan units was no longer revived by various maps and tourist routes, and the places of partisan activity stopped receiving care and maintenance. The geographical space lost much of the intense historicity that it had acquired in the period of socialism and relaxed from the load of historical associations that had densely populated it before. Even if the memorial signs might remain in those landscapes, they would generally miss the enlivening annex of the narratives construed as history, and of history as ‘decipherable’ in narratives of death, and immortality. The ideology’s efforts to inscribe traces of socialist history into the permanence of geographical locations appeared to have been in vain and the paths along the former spots of memory got gradually dissolved and forgotten.

Another set of monuments and memorial sites that underwent substantial transformation and reshaping in the period after 1989 were those to national history heroes. Throughout the years of socialism in Bulgaria, one can witness a symptomatic relationship of incongruence and appropriation between the national history monuments and the monuments commemorating the socialist past. While in the first decades after 1944, figures of the national history were generally out of public attention, in the 1960s and 1970s – with the processes of incorporating the ideology within the frameworks of national history, their neglect was largely compensated. As in Romania (though hardly reaching such a nationalistic stance), the upsurge of

commemorative activities dedicated to national heroes at that time in Bulgaria were an opportunity for the regime to trace back age-long continuities, to which the socialist order served as a 'logical' and 'glorious' wreath. From that perspective, it cannot be a surprise that the major focus of the monumental projects in post-1989 Bulgaria was how to root out socialist ideological discourse from the national history framework, and how to construe national history as 'independent' from ideological presuppositions. The figures of national history had to be cleared up from ideological stamps, dissociated from the socialist framework within which they were previously framed, and delegated their appropriate standing in a pantheon emptied from ideological interventions. The post-1989 glance back into the past was guided by attempts to see the national history as principally offering an alternative view to the previous ideological horizon: it was a discourse of opposition, of bringing to light realms of the past that the regime had either interpreted in a paradoxical way or had largely expelled out of view and attention. A significant shift was made to commemorate the dead of the pre-socialist period, most notably the dead of the First World War or national unification struggles. Attempts to dissociate the nineteenth century liberation movements from the previous ideological interpretations and the trend to create monuments uniting "all the dead for Bulgaria" also featured the post-1989 monumental discourse.

These characteristic aspects of representing national history were also affirmed by the various "anti-totalitarian" monuments built in the post-socialist epoch. Already in the first two years after the fall of the socialist regime, demands were raised for commemorating the victims of totalitarianism in Bulgaria. The first memory resource that was traced was related to the events of the so-called *Vazroditelen protses* [Revival process] of the mid-1980s, when the communist state organized a campaign to rename forcefully the Bulgarian Muslims with Bulgarian names and caused their mass emigration from the country. Monuments to the victims of these events were built in many towns where repressions took place (Momchilgrad, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Aitos), and were soon followed by monuments to the dead in the labor camps (Lovech, Belene) and to victims of the socialist terror in the first years after 1944 (Yambol, Perushtitsa, Vidin, Sofia, Plovdiv, etc.) Largely aiming to commemorate the victims of the repressive regime, they were expressions of a refusal to bind meanings across dissimilar historical epochs and of a new approach to the dead - victims rather than heroes, mortal and vulnerable rather than undefeatable. Unlike previous modes of representation, heroic postures were no longer used. Instead, the motifs of mourning and pain infused the memorial sites and the notion of victimhood substituted the previous heroic ideal. Many of those monuments were based on religious imagery and stressed theological aspects of martyrdom. The chapel, the cross, and the tortured human figure were widely used in the anti-totalitarian memorial forms. The funerary symbolism related to the special dead increasingly acquired religious overtones and projected backwards to the memories of religious practices and traditions. Religious organizations increasingly involved themselves in commemorating the victims of totalitarian regime, in the sanctification of these new memorial forms, and in sustaining the religious aspects of commemoration.

The anti-totalitarian monuments not only shaped the attitudes on the socialist past and created new continuities and commemorative occasions, but also posed in a different light the status and function of the monuments raised during the socialist epoch. In fact, many antitotalitarian memorial forms were raised in proximity to former socialist monuments and, spatially coexisting with them, exposed the illegitimacy of their presence. The projects for building monuments to the repressed of the

totalitarian power were a strong argument in the debates about former monuments' destruction. Information about the crimes of the socialist regime increased the readiness to annihilate the monuments to the ideology's special figures and to substitute them with monuments to the victims. The remembrance of the victims of totalitarianism inscribed collective memory with images of torture and guilt and "rewrote the soul" of the national communities with multiple recollections and versatile positions on commemoration. The rigid dividing line on whom to commemorate and how to commemorate made it impossible for the symbolic loss to encompass the whole community. The difficulty rested mostly in the outlining of the two communities - of the repressed (both living and dead) and of those who alleged their affiliation with the socialist ideas. While the former demonstrated their memory as heavily burdened with pain, threat and suffering, the latter insisted on the inherently noble character of the socialist ideal and refused to see themselves as related to the persecutors and oppressors. Even in light of the encounter between these two radically opposed visions, coming to terms with the past in post-socialist societies appeared problematic and uneasy, if possible at all.

### ***The reworking of museum representations***

While requiring no less transformation, the museum discourse in post-socialist Bulgaria did not reach the attention that monuments received. Unlike Hungary, where the historical visualization of the 1956s revolution and the Kádár years was a dominant theme in the post-socialist times and had a crucial role in reshaping the attitudes to the past, the museum representations in Bulgaria remained a relatively marginal topic after 1989. One cannot be surprised that – at the backstage of this overexploited encounter between museums and the population in the socialist period(39) – a critical lack of interest to museums of history collection appeared after the changes. As if following a hidden negotiation, all the activities related to "mass cultural work" among the population disappeared immediately after 1989, and the possibilities to increase the "awareness of the present through observing the objects of the past" were swiftly left to the initiatives of enterprises, schools, and institutions themselves. On the wings of the excitement with the overthrowing of the regime, and, obviously largely overfed with the decades of ideological work that was conveyed from museum institutions, the latter seemed not to have special interest in museum visits. In fact, the problem was rather not *whether* to visit but *what* to see there. The large parts of the history exhibitions in all the museums of the country (may be the sole exceptions were the several museums related to natural history) were suffused by the socialist doctrine and their permanent exhibitions had to undergo a dissolution or a complete reshaping so that to be more 'adequate' to a post-socialist context. But how to carry out reshaping when, at least in the early 1990s, it was not exactly clear where the fall of the regimes would lead; how to achieve rearrangement of historical narratives when the old patterns of imagining history were still the only ones that museum specialists and the public had at their avail; yet, how to create new visualizations of the past when the rooting out of the socialist all encompassing narratives was close to ruining the very notion of the past in general.

In the context of these dilemmas the first step to undertake was to close the museums of the revolutionary movement and to dissolve their collections, preventing from exhibiting everything that had stayed on display for decades. Occupying a central place in the city, almost opposite the National Parliament, the building of the museum of the revolutionary movement in Sofia turned into a debated issue of possible reutilization after the closing of its permanent exhibition. Following several years of

staying empty and desolate, a theater stage was opened in its premises in mid 1990s, and then parts of it were occupied by a bank and private firms. Next to still gaping old windows of some of its exhibition rooms there is currently functioning one of the biggest night clubs in the capital. Though less “successful,” the fate of the other related museums was not much different, as they all became targets of property debates and had their collections dissolved, reevaluated, and boxed up. The challenges faced by all the other history museums were no less serious – both in terms of ‘technical’ rearrangements, and with the need of novel interpretations.(40) The impetus to produce alternative discourses on the recent past was faced with the “sense of disorientation” (Verdery 1999: 35), related to what possible grounds to establish for the new historical evaluation. The role of the Soviet army, the nature of the ‘Bulgarian fascism,’ the interpretation of the dead in the partisan struggle, etc. – i.e. the topics that brought to rereading many of the socialist monuments – exercised a state of perplexity in museum activities, and prevented representations on such sensitive issues. The emptied space left with the dissolved display of the socialist and revolutionary movement, was either occupied by nineteenth-century liberation struggles (which also had to mark a distance from the previous ideologizations), or by realms of national history that the ideology largely suppressed before. The increased interest to the Balkan wars and the First World War, the attention to historical figures of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom, and the revived memory of forgotten figures of the interwar period prompted opportunities for museum initiatives.

Still, in spite of the attempts for revisionist readings of history, museum representations failed to respond to the new trends of historical interpretation. While the museums of the socialist and revolutionary movement were closed, and the exhibitions of antifascist resistance and socialist construction were dropped from all historical museums, museum narratives about the socialist period did not appear. Novel historical materials on the socialist period were produced, and new emphases in the public discourse of the past were developed, but they did not receive a realization in a museum discourse. The several projects that existed (of a statue park of fallen monuments in Dimitrovgrad, Sofia, or Haskovo; of turning Dimitrov’s mausoleum or the house monument of the Party on Buzludja as museums of the recent past) did not come into being – largely because of the polemics that they invoked, and to the lack of persistence in carrying them out. Even at the sites where communist repressions had taken place, museum narratives failed to accompany the memorial signs that were raised. The several exhibitions on the first decade after 1944 that appeared in regional history museums were set up on a temporary basis and did not become part of museums’ ‘permanent’ exhibitions.

With all this, the “most modern” period of Bulgarian history obviously failed to find museum interpretation, and even in history museums of a more general profile it remains a relatively “blank” period. A notable example in this respect is the National History Museum, where the representation of national history merely stops with the interwar period and does not even demonstrate intentions to overcome this self-imposed limitation.(41) In fact, despite the stated attempts for a reworked historical representation, the major realm of history museums’ activities after the changes was related to dissolving the historical presentations into ethnographic ones and to their following a pattern similar to the nineteenth-century Heimatsmuseen.(42) Curious in this respect is that the only community that gathered its efforts to build a museum (in fact, reopening a previously existing exhibition) is by far represented by the citizens of Todor Zhivkov’s birthplace, Pravets, who initiated the sustenance of the museum

to the socialist ruler as a sign of appreciation of his contribution to the ‘country’s prosperity.’

## **NARRATING THE SOCIALIST PAST IN POST-SOCIALIST MUSEUMS**

### ***Museumized reminders, reminding traces: the Statue Park***

Having outlined the major aspects related to the changes that already existing museums underwent after 1989, in the pages to follow, I will draw the attention to the several newly created museums whose major target was the history of the socialist period. Probably the most widely known and pretty well exploited in the scholarly interpretations is the Statue Park (Szóborpark Múzeum) in the Hungarian capital. Located in the outskirts of Budapest, it provides accommodation to statues and memorial ensembles that previously occupied conspicuous places in Hungarian cityscapes. Headed at the entrance by statues of Lenin and of Marx and Engels, the park is a last resting place to about forty monuments with diverse dedication: to the Red Army and to various figures of Hungarian and international communist and workers’ movements; sculpture groups about the eternal gratitude and friendship with the Soviet Union; monuments to the Worker’s Militia and to the Hungarian fighters in the Spanish Civil War; plaques, murals and symbolic representations of the ideas of the people’s power and about the unending fight for communist victory. An isolated, but emblematic reference to the 1956 events is the Martyr’s Monument, raised once to commemorate the “communist victims in the 1956 counterrevolution” and swiftly dismantled after 1989 with the loss of its historical and moral justification.

If given only the silent exhibition of statues replaced from their pedestals, the park would have preserved the solemn statue of a graveyard where the monumental forms would be rather tombstones to an ideology that had reached a dead end. However, the meanings of the museum were far from limited to this realm and already at its establishment, the museum functioned as providing an “extraordinary experience for tourists,” as a place for tourist attraction and, ironically, enjoyment. Widely propagated in the brochures, posters, tourist guides and the web site of the museum, the ability to ensure amusement and “unique experience” to the city’s visitors occupies the core of museum’s meanings. Displacing largely the preliminary intentions of the display as an instructive exile of previous ideological symbols, it consolidated the museum’s functions around an entertaining encounter with a past that for the majority of the visitors have not been experienced directly. The overtones of entertainment are emphasized at the very entrance to the museum, where diverse mementos from the socialist period are put on display or offered for sale and the visitors are greeted with Soviet-era speeches and martial music. The display of diverse mementos of the socialist times (such as a Trabant car, an old telephone box, everyday objects with a hammer and sickle inscription) complement the statue exhibition and strengthen its theatre and somewhat farce appearance. At the museum shop curious objects are sold for souvenirs and gifts - Lenin busts, cassettes of revolutionary and Red Army marching songs, medals, badges, and T-shirts.

The vast range of attitudes among both Hungarians and foreign visitors toward the nature of the Statue Park is indicative of the difficulties that it faces in the attempt to represent the socialist past and to welcome the diverse memories that hover around it. Although on an institutional level the museum seems to have achieved a relatively secure status and to have established itself as an important instance for approaching

the socialist legacy, the criticisms to its techniques of representation have been recurrently appearing. The popular opinion of the unnecessary expenditure of scarce public funds for creating and sustaining the museum merged with the art historians' critique that the museum cannot raise claims of being representative of the socialist realist art. The best examples of the socialist realism dating from the late 1940s and 1950s were not represented, as most of them had been removed from public view before 1989 and have presumably been destroyed. Another critique was that the relatively small number of statues on display and the general lack of contextualizing information about their previous functions limited the vision along a seemingly predetermined track. The lack of adequate contextualization, the surrounding realm of denigrating reminders of the socialist past, and the mocking display of ideological emblems, unchained the associations to the propaganda techniques that were at the core of the previous regime's practices. While declaring a distance to the socialist mode of representation, the discursive approach demonstrated in the exhibition appeared largely as its principal continuation.

Furthermore, the museum raised important critiques about the very decision of museumizing socialism in the form of a metaphoric exile. While obviously serving the intention to "segregate communism from the flow of everyday life" (James 2005: 32; James 1999), the park's distant location and the high walls that encompass it revives associations not only of a mocking-like 'encapsulation' of the past, but also of the policies of memory and forgetting in which the museum involved itself. Already at the time of its creation, suppositions were raised about depriving the country (and most notably the capital) from the visible traces of the recent past and thus of being not much different from the acts of iconoclasm undertaken by the Soviets in the first post-war years. In a reminiscence of the debates in other socialist countries, a recurrent voice was heard that destroying the traces of the past gave grounds to amnesia and deprived memory from its ability to serve as an antidote for future historical fallacies. Yet, though probably more 'dignitary' than an ultimate destruction, the ironic way of exhibiting fallen idols and the enjoyment felt at their humiliating appearance posed also the issues of historical and ethical justification that could hardly be solved only by the standpoint of the regime's deserved collapse.

Diverse in grounds and approaches, the critiques to the museum display in the Statue Park are emblematic of the challenge faced by the post-socialist societies in representing the recent past in historical, artistic, and museum forms. The launching ground of the need to visualize a shared experience over the span of several decades faced the complexity of issues evolving around representing an epoch whose traces are still palpable in landscapes, memories, and experience. While the coherent and convincing narrative of the past that each museum display presupposes is obstructed by the evocations of divergent public and private recollections, the attempt to provide a novel approach to history (and possibly its rewriting) encounters the scarcity of negotiable grounds around which the new discourses would evolve. While the dissolution and displacement of the former ideological narratives are considered as imperatives after the ideology's fall, the elaboration of new visions is perplexed both by the lack of stable grounds to convey new legitimate discourses and by the public reservation towards creating a uniting and "coherent" explanation. How to narrate about the past when the danger to fall into a monological trap and to equate thus with the previous techniques of narration is a truly palpable one? How to represent the past when the very act of public representation is intuitively perceived as an attempt to reestablish a totalizing narrative? Furthermore, while the collection of objects of the past and their exhibition in grotesque context was a possible postscript to a bygone

era, the project of building a “cemetery” of the emblems of the socialist past encountered the “danger” that it could itself become a “memorial” to that period. The double bound nature of representation as signifying both presence and absence cast its spell on the post-socialist historical visualizations and determined their problematic condition for years after the changes.

### ***The House of Terror***

A particular example of the traumatic sense of the past, as evolved in the post-socialist period is the Museum of Terror that, although being a relatively recent establishment, has already acquired international fame and rigorous criticism. Created as a project to visualize the major cases of terror that occurred in modern Hungarian history, the museum concentrates on the periods of fascist and communist rule in the country, regarding them as inseparable and self-complementing manner. In spite of its proclaimed intention, however, for a “peer” and justifiable review of the terror that was spread in Hungary during these two periods, the museum narrative focuses exclusively on the practices after 1945, turning largely into a history of the communist terror. Justifiably, the terror of the socialist times receives plentiful displays in a number of rooms: special halls and exhibitions are dedicated to the post-war reconstruction of agriculture; to the post-war resettlement and deportations; to the socialist judicial system; to the atheistic propaganda and religious persecution, etc. There are also several halls to the 1956 revolution; on the Gulag; a room of the Soviet advisors – all complemented with reconstructed prison cells; rooms of interrogators and political police officers. At the background of these abundant representations, the fact that the terror of the 1930s and 1940s is represented in just one hall with a scarcity of visual and narrative images is no doubt striking. Although the terror of the fascist rule is not completely left without attention, neither the scale nor the interpretation seem at all comparable to the narratives about communist atrocities. While the Stalinization period, the methods of the communist security organs, the crushing of the 1956 revolution, and the repression that followed receive elaborated expression in many museum halls, the terror of the 1930s and 1940s is limited to a brief overview as if being a less significant case. The arrests, interrogation, imprisonment, and murder of tens of thousands opponents to the fascist rule are not dedicated more than brief remarks, yet with an overt implication that they all were incomparable with the repressions and victims of the socialist regime. In a hardly explicable way, even the anti-Jewish repressions in the 1930s and 1940s and the deportation of Hungary’s Jewish population to the death camps fail to receive due attention.

Overexposing the scale and monstrosity of communist repression (at the expense of the downplayed fascist one), the museum achieves a rather disproportionate representation, whose major explanation can be sought in the political goals that pursued. As stated in the museum brochure and in the entrance to the exhibition halls, the museum was initiated by the government of Victor Orban (well known for its anti-socialist, nationalist, and right-wing profile) and has been established under its direct supervision. The political backing of the project gives a hint about the main legitimating framework to which the museum adheres – the body of the nation, which had suffered in the socialist rule and was revived after decades of terror. No surprise that even the titles of museum halls and the labels to museum displays speak about the “double occupation” of Hungary, and “the Hungarian tragedy in 1946” – with no mentioning of the tragedy before, nor of what kind of ‘occupation’ was the first one. Yet, even when speaking about the “continuity between the two dictatorships” the

interpretative angle is the one of demonizing the socialist one as accumulating and being thus 'worse' than its 'predecessors.' In fact, the political agenda props up infrequently in curious slips of the tongue: such as the story of the reconstruction of the "House of Loyalty" building (where the party headquarters of the Hungarian Nazis were located) into a "House of Horror" in the early years of the communist rule.' Or, in the blunt statement that it was "between 1945 and 1956" – the time when the Hungarian Secret Police took up residence here, when "60 Andrassy boulevard has become the house of terror and dread"! The conservative and nationalist inclinations are sustained over the entire exhibition, where the major visual and narrative references of the terror lead exclusively to the years of the post-war decade. The special visual and audio effects (such as Soviet tank in the beginning of the exhibition, the Secret Police car in the first hall, and the telephone receivers where one could listen to speeches of socialist party leaders) are illustrative of the attempts to channel the interpretation along a monologic and propaganda-shaped discourse. With all its drawbacks and contributions (such as, its being the primary case of representing the terror of the socialist times in Hungary), the museum is an overt manifestation of the challenges faced in elaborating discourses of opposition to the socialist period. The delegitimizing of the socialist ideology and its encompassing exclusively within the label of terror lays the ground for a possible relegitimation (whether overt or implicit) of regimes and practices to which the socialist rule had stood in staunch opposition. With all the other consequences for the processes of past's interpretation, the dissolution of the previous binary model permitted also (as vivid from this museum) moments of troubling revisionist interpretation. Even if remaining a reflection of policies undertaken by separate parties and political groups, the substitution of the socialist totalizing narratives with nationally minded ones is no doubt a palpable danger in the post-socialist attempts to historicize the recent past.

### ***The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance - Sighet***

Perhaps the only museum in Romania which has so far attempted to address the Communist period is the "International Centre for the Study of Totalitarianism" opened in 1997 in a building in Sighetu Marmatiei which was formerly a communist prison. The Memorial of Sighet was set up beginning with 1993, when Ana Blandiana presented the project to Council of Europe, who took it under the aegis in 1994. In 1997 the Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Anti-communist Resistance – Sighet has been declared "A Monument of national interest" and one year later was nominated by the Council of Europe among the first three places meant to ward off the European memory, alongside of the Auschwitz Memorial and of the Peace Memorial in Normandy. The Museum contains 45 exhibition halls, illustrating the resistance to communism and the communist repression in Romania; Space for Meditation and Prayer; "The Convoy of the Sacrificed" – statuary group by Aurel Vlad; Cemetery of the Poor, being under development as a landscape monument dedicated to the memory of the prisoners who died in the Sighet prison during 1950-1955. The International Center for Studies on Communism – contains The Oral History Department (3,000 hours of recordings: the testimonies of the survivors of the Romanian Gulag and of the people having witnessed the events during the period 1945-1989; the Editorial Department (for collections, 13,000 pages): - "The Annals of Sighet" (contributions to the yearly Symposia of history); - "The Library of Sighet" (studies, surveys, memories concerning the period 1945-1989 in Romania); "Documents" (collections of documents regarding the history of Eastern Europe); "The Day by Day Life" (recent memories). The museum deals primarily with the

Communist terror of the 1940s and 1950s, and, by presupposition, even here is little inclination to address the Ceausescu period.

### ***Projects for Museum Visualizations in Post-1989 Bulgaria***

At the background of these several examples (and they can be complemented with many others – from Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Lithuania, and even Russia), the lack of a museum to the history of the communist period in Bulgaria is beyond doubt surprising. Can one say that the lack of such a museum is due to a conscious policy undertaken in Bulgarian society after 1989 that seeks to prevent the elaboration of alternative approaches to the 45 years of socialism; or, is it rather because of a deeply nurtured amnesia after decades of indoctrination? Is it because of insufficient empirical and interpretative grounds to set up a coherent museum discourse on the socialist past in ‘post-socialist’ terms; or rather – because of insufficient willingness to recompose the dissolved narratives into new forms and visualizations? Is this lack of museum due to the still “short” temporal distance that prevents the creation of coherent historical narratives, or is it a result of a general impossibility to narrate about the recent period, at least not in the forms that the ideology have appropriated before? Can we talk of a ‘crisis’ in the museum institution in the post-socialist context, or it is rather a matter a psychological barrier preventing the embodying of the past in palpable narratives and messages of conviction?

Any of those possibilities for an explanation were plausible options in one point or another over the seventeen years after 1989 and every of them attains certain legitimating potential. However, what I claim as being of most crucial importance in the lack of such a museum (as well as in the difficulties faced by museum representations in the other post-socialist countries) is the general revulsion to historical visualizations following decades of perceiving them as inseparable from the ideological discourse. As I discussed it in the beginning of the current text, in the socialist period museums served as radicalized forms of past’s expropriation, where the symbolic defeat of the collective memory by historicized visions of the past was systematically carried out. Museums did not only shape collective memory within ideological contours, but also precluded its functioning “in an organic and natural way” (as is Pierre Nora’s interpretation of the sites of memory). In these *lieux de memoire*, history overcame collective memory, encompassing it within its sharply outlined contours, blocking up its enriching potential in the processes of past’s interpretation.<sup>(43)</sup> The deliberate and rigid management of historical visualizations not merely appropriated representation and sanctioned it along ideological lines, but also precluded the possibility individual and collective memory to acquire ‘expression,’ prevented its finding way to narratives and visual forms, kept it beneath the surface of the ‘representable.’ The dissolution of the link between memory and representation that occurred in the socialist period, not only conditioned the characteristic relationship between truth and persuasion at the time, but also laid the grounds of the special status of memory – as stored, but hardly reaching representation in the period after 1989.

The discourses of truth, authenticity, and legitimation have been critical points in all East European countries. However, unlike Hungarians for example, who could use the 1956 events for a ground to establish narratives of their history that is alternative from the socialist mode; and unlike Romanians who could take the stand of opposing Ceausescu’s regime in the steps toward rewriting their recent history; for Bulgarians, a relatively ‘firm’ ground to approach the past was hard to ensure. Testimonies of the regime’s crimes did appear and memories of repression were vivid enough, but still

they could not take impetus in depicting the life in socialist Bulgaria as one of “terror.” The lack of basic human rights and freedoms was accepted as lacking in those times, but still, the memories that it was a period “when basic life standards were covered for everybody” still hover in the air. The imagining of the Soviet Union as external oppressor is still impossible to carry out – both because of the historically nurtured idea of ‘brotherhood’ between the Bulgarian and the Russian peoples, and because of the awareness of the enormous benefits that were brought to Bulgaria as a preferred partner to the Soviet Union in the socialist times. Yet, the outlining of the internal oppressor was also doomed – neither Zhivkov, nor anybody from his circle could attain such a role, and even acts such as the forceful renaming of the Bulgarian Turks in the 1980s and the terrifying silencing of the news about the Chernobyl, are rather looked today as politicized issues whose solutions would be left for the future.

The memory of the communist camps, the repressions and breaks of freedom are for many Bulgarians an experience that, introduced as topics after 1989 and hidden somewhere in the storehouse of memory, does not reach the realm of public representation. On the contrary, the benefits of everyday life, with all the illusions of well-being that they created, are a realm that is deeply inscribed in the memories of the witnesses, and in a curious way overshadows their general approach to the past. In a notable way, whenever coming to the fore (as for example in commemorative ceremonies around the so called anti-totalitarian monuments), the voices about the crimes of the regime are sharply counteracted with the protests of those for whom the latter had provided them with “everything necessary.” The approach to the socialist period appears thus problematic not that much with a confessed trauma of the past, but rather with a manifested trauma of the present, since the problems of the transition period are for many Bulgarians much more unacceptable than the restrained but suited life that they had before. In itself an expression of nostalgic mood, it can help explain the motives and the conviction of the people from Pravets to sustain the museum of Zhivkov in their city. With its reconstitution of “worthy” personalities and “unforgettable” experiences of the socialist period, this museum is an ironic replica towards the prevented representation of a past that is still remembered by a substantial part of the population.

The lack of museum realizations about the recent past in post-socialist Bulgaria may be an indicator of the processes related with learning how to forget after decades of instruction of how to remember. It may be regarded as a reaction of memory to discard some of the load that it was vested for years and to relax from the obligation to be constantly wakeful. However, it testifies also to processes of sustaining certain realms of memory out of representation and of their being superceded by discourses that are principally contingent with those that were propagated before. An illustration of the difficulties to elaborate new discourses on the recent past, the failed projects about a museum of socialism in Bulgaria is also telling of how the museum in the post-socialist mode lost the capacity for a historical and moral “reanimation” of the Bulgarian society, and how it continues to be a memory form where the past and present are still not in an open dialogue. In between the two poles of the representation field – the one of the museum in Pravets, and the other of the market display of artifacts from the socialist period – there stays a general lack of a critical and thoughtful approach to this period of Bulgarian history in museum terms. In a curious, but understandable way, the discussions and visualizations of the recent past occur already not in public museums, but exclusively in the media and the Internet. The several sites dedicated to the socialist heritage and the web forums with individual memories about those years have taken much of the functions that

museums had as institutions of preserving and representing the past. Their failure to do so with respect to the recent period is an open field to be occupied by new means of sharing and distributing knowledge, yet probably of the new forms of museumizing the past in the future.

### **ROLES, IDENTITIES, AND HYBRIDS: A CONCLUSION**

The various examples highlighted so far demonstrate the role of monuments and museums in establishing historical continuities different from those of the socialist regime, and reveal the new modes of remembrance followed in the post-socialist world. In the attempts to overcome the crisis of historical representation faced with the political changes after 1989, monuments and museums in the three countries under concern witnessed the elaboration of diverse techniques and strategies. The rearrangement of historical chronologies; the reevaluation and paying historical justice to personalities unrelated to the socialist regime; the eliciting of a new group of special dead; the establishing of a new discourse of authenticity and persuasion – were among the main processes that marked these sites during the transition period. Although the forms and emphases were different in the three countries, and although they had varying expressions in monumental and museum terms, the trends and processes occurring with these representations were largely shared. In the concluding remarks to the current project I will throw a summarizing glance to the major issues manifested at these sites, i.e. those related their role in the reshaping of post-socialist identities; their input in the new processes of memory after 1989; and, lastly, their nature of ‘hybrid objects’ representing a utopic state where the horizons of desire and impossibility coincide.

The various cases of dismantling and reshaping of socialist monuments and of transforming the previous museum exhibitions played a major role in restructuring the collective identities in the three post-socialist countries. The public meetings to ensure a proper interpretation of the 1956 revolution and the commemoration of its dead in Hungary; the enhanced attention to preserve the traces of the 1989 revolution and to ensure a visualized remembrance of those who died in it in Romania; the wave of debates and rituals related to dismantling former socialist monuments in Bulgaria – all these had enormous consequences for the identity transformations taking place in the period. Occupying a central role in reinscribing the national pasts along lines that diverged from previous interpretations, monuments and museums also laid the grounds (whether achieved or only ‘in project’) for accommodating the recent past within the new configurations of the national identities. The identity-shaping aspect of these visualizations found a particular expression in the psychological and social transformations that evolved with monument and museum’s reshaping. The debates about public commemorations instigated collisions between political parties and groups, catalyzed opinions towards the proper terming of the socialist period, and formed positions on major issues of public importance. Joining protests around monumental sites, sticking labels and carrying slogans, debating on the proper narration on historical personalities, etc. represented a substantial component of the post-1989 political culture, as well as was a turning point in developing new communal dynamics and new patterns of civic behaviour at the time.

Thus, while previously being a part of a strategy to sustain a venerable distance towards ideologically ‘sacred’ figures and events, monuments and museums after 1989 turned (more often than not) into motors of change, into sites welcoming civic involvement, and into visible expressions of the new identities embraced by the societies in transition. Furthermore, their metamorphoses revealed the problematic

input of institutions responsible for the fate of monumental and museum sites. The transformations not only provoked individuals and groups for taking response towards the previous interpretations, but also called forth the elaboration of institutional policies on how history would be interpreted and visualized. Mayors and diplomats would insist on destroying or preserving monuments, municipal authorities would take decisions on the fate of museum exhibitions, and political groups would claim validity on their right to protect or oppose their preservation. As major institutions of sustaining 'coherent' and 'negotiated' collective images of the past, monuments and museums appeared as among the most 'unstable' forms of the transition period. Representing controversies and welcoming debates on their possible solution, they have been focal points for interventions of other institutions for their possible 'normalization.'

The scope of the identity shifts was especially well expressed in light of the memory issues in reshaping these visualizations of the past. Without the surrounding context of the previous references to 'sacred' narratives, monuments and museums could no longer "perpetuate" memory (as was their function before), but rather invoked disturbing encounters between former patterns of remembrance and new angles for recollection. The 're-habilitation' of previously forgotten personalities and the reemerged attention to fighters, opponents, and victims of totalitarianism not only emphasized the brutal nature of the regimes, but also put at sharp lines all claims for an 'undivided' representation. Acting to dissolve the previous monolithic framework, they signaled the wave of a multiplicity of memories (ranging from nostalgia to retribution) that insisted on a possible institutionalization. The attempts to do this, however, faced both the difficulty to incorporate the new memories in the ossified forms of the recent past, and the obstacles to establish notions of 'collective identities' beyond the diverging lines. A major challenge, however, was related not that much with how the past will be 'remembered,' but with how it will be 'represented.' The firm links between exhibition and pedagogy, between representation and propaganda that were established during the socialist times, kept on resonating in people's minds and frequently nurtured the resistance towards narratives of the past in general. To create a narrative distance to the recent past is implicitly associated with exercising a moral judgment on the period – which often failed to establish a dialogue with the complexity of memories about this epoch. While to establish collective visions of the past (even if through notions of martyrdom and valor) gets prevented by the forking paths of individual memories, the 'unity' of representation is disrupted by the altered values applied to the past's visualization, and by the 'protean' nature of monumental and museum forms.

Yet, another factor joined the list of those that perplexed representation – the increasing distance from a past that is still called a "recent" one. While in the first post-socialist years, the need to "remember otherwise" (Rév 1995: 9) encountered a diversity of approaches for alternative recollection, with the gradual distancing from the socialist period the remembering stepped on shifting and often unpredictable grounds, turning thus the very idea of 'remembrance' problematic. The distinctions already followed not the cutting line of 'positive' or 'negative' evaluation of the past, but rather of the presence or lack of a shared experience in those years, of the availability or lack of memory about that period. The new generations for whom the socialist times have been nothing else but a period preceding their lives; the returned emigrants for whom the socialist reality was a terra incognita, the tourists (with all their variety of "Westerners" and "Easterners," "locals" and "foreigners") – all they introduced new spheres of imagining and perception, added 'new eyes' to previously

celebrated forms, and offered novel opinions of the past's representation. Thus, beyond the dilemmas of representing and aside from the power struggles of who to carry out the public commemorations, the role of monuments and museums as sites for "coming to terms with the past" is beyond doubt one of a crucial nature.

The parallel cohabitation of different and incompatible cases is probably the mark that distinguishes most clearly the post-socialist world from the one experienced before 1989. Time and its major constituents not merely fell apart from their previous monolithic ideological embodiment, but were paralleled with other time frames, paces of life, and projections of the past. The diversity of time references and the multiplicity of contextual remarks is what determine the shifting grounds between irony, parody, and grotesque in the post-socialist period. Whether coming forth as replacing former representations or establishing themselves in simultaneous presence, the new visualizations all bear the traces of an inherent connection to an epoch that they come in stead, and are doomed to relate to it much differently from merely a metonymic manner. The cross raised at the place where the toppled Stalin's monument once stood, the museumized hand of that statue in the National Museum, the museum created in the radio station where the 1956 revolutionaries pleaded against the Soviet occupation, the communist pins and medals for sale in antiquarian shops, etc. – all these reveal not a neutral relation of *qui pro quo*, or *pars pro toto*, but a valued reference to a past that has laid its trace upon the present.

What I pose as an argument in these concluding remarks is that the very condition of the past's visualizations as working 'in stead' is a fertile ground for tropological work that has blended the poles of irony, parody, and grotesque together. They establish a ground in which the different tropological tools overlap and complement each other and rework the recent historical experience via a joint network of strategies. The elaboration of a proper attitude to the past cannot be a prerogative of solely one of the tropes, nor can it be achieved only by their mutually exclusive powers. The disintegration of the past and its reconstitution back again into discourses of the present necessarily spans across an array of approaches, none of which can claim for a priority. The toppled monument and its commemorative replacement, the museumized ideological sign and its ironic exile, the Soviet uniform grotesquely cladding museum mannequins, the kitsch appearance of socialist memorabilia on sale – all these share a common ground of past's representation, the one that has previously belonged to the unimaginable. Diverging in their aesthetic and political effects, they are joined in the common intention to undo the former representation and in the shared task to visualize the rupture opened between the present and the past.

All these aspects of monuments and museums in the transition period pose the issue of their hybridity in a special light. The changes of 1989 brought to reappropriating the nature of memory as unfixed and protean, as a realm that welcomes the constantly attachment of new interpretations and meanings. Reflecting and catalyzing the dynamics of political transformations, the nature of these sites is one between life and death: they are faced with destruction and reshaping and at the same time they preserve a potential of vitality and permanence. Indicators of the pace of transition and level of distance to the recent past, monuments and museums acquire a problematic identity themselves – one of undergoing change and of being in a 'continuous transition.' Taking lines of similarity with Foucault's idea of heterotopia, these visualizations of the past act as sites in which things that were previously displaced, rejected, or ambivalent come into view, becoming grounds for an alternative mode of ordering and an opposition to the disciplinary powers of the previous visualizations (Hetherington 1996: 159-160). But, the logic of their

development does not only oppose the ideological claims of coherent and systematic historical narratives, but also seems to reject any claims of ‘purity’ or ‘fixity’ in representation. In a period of ‘transition’ (with all the accompanying notions of deconstruction, displacement, and transformation), such sites become both an opposition to resist the monological language of authority, and tools to discredit the very notion of “identity” – as a notion that values fixing rather than mixing, stability rather than volatility.

With all this, monuments and museums are an example of how Louis Marin’s notion of utopias (realms of a “spatial play over this no-place/ good-place ambivalence”) (Marin 1973; Hetherington 1996: 161) acquires special scope and meaning when these realms are put into a state of ‘transition.’ In Marin’s understanding, it is in their nature to represent both another world of good life, *eu-topia*; and an imaginary *no-place* that is destined not achieve ‘ultimate’ representations. They are a dream space where the object of representation is both ‘constituted’ and ‘dominated,’ both included and excluded, revived and shown as already absent. In the context of the ‘transition,’ in which they are actively involved, these meanings become intensified and turn monuments and museums as focal points in the social negotiations about the desired and the unachievable, about the horizons of the imaginary and the limitations of the real. From the perspective of the symbolic work they apply to the recent past, monuments and museums become sites of its ‘neutralization’: it is ‘accommodated’ within commemorative forms and displays, and is ‘standing apart’ – as something that will no longer interact with the present. Furthermore, from the perspective of their nature of engagement with the past, they are spaces where the exclusion of the past is overturned and brought to its contrary. They are a space of the ‘not yet’ as Ernst Bloch might have called it, that seeks to turn this ‘not yet’ into a ‘there’ (Hetherington 1996: 161). This hybrid nature shows them thus as sites where social ambivalences of the past are engaged and then neutralized; and as sites of difference where the transition itself – from the past to the present, from ‘un-presentation’ to ‘representation’ is both constituted and taken over.

### **References:**

1. For a general introduction on museums as historical representation see Alexander 1996; Ames et al. 1992; Belcher, 1991; Bennet 1995; Carbonell 2004; Crane 2000; Crane 2004; Findlen 2004; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Karp and Lavine 1991; Karp et al. 1992; Kavanagh 1996; Knell 2004; Macdonald 1998; Pearce 1993; Pearce 1994; Pomian 1994; Sandberg 2003; Well 1995, etc. On monuments see esp. Fabre 2000; Heathcote 1999; Kosellek 2002; Lerner 1993; Melion and Kuchler 1991; Michalski 1998; Milton 1991; Prost 1997; Riegl 1982 (originally published 1928); Verdery 1999; Winter and Sivan 1999; Young 1993.
2. The literature on the problems of memory is extensive and can be referred here only selectively. For a general introduction to the problems of memory, see Confino 1997; Crane 1997; Gillis, 1994; Huyssen 1995; Huyssen 2003; Olick and Robbins 1998; Ollila 2000; Todorova 2004. On the social and psychological aspects of memory, see Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Hodgkin and Radstone 2003; Cattell and Climo 2002; Radstone 2000; Schachter 1996; Schwartz 1982. On the relationship between memory and historical discourse, see Assmann 1955; Boyarin 1994; Friendlander 2000; Halbwachs 1992; Hutton 1993; Nora 1996; Samuel 1995. On the relationship between memory and commemorations, see esp. Ashplant 2000; Bodnar 1992; Schwartz 1991; Schwartz 1996; Sider and Smith 1997. For investigations on memory dynamics in historical context, see esp. Rousso 1991;

Sherman 1999; Young 1993; Zonabend 1984. For a critical overview of the expansion of memory studies, see esp. Klein 2000; Kansteiner 2002.

**3.** See for example Pierre Nora's argument that "sites of memory," such as museums and monuments, have emerged in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries because "collective memory no longer functions in an organic and natural way" (Nora 1996). The interpretative potential and the debatable aspects of this argument have been emphasized in the many reviews to Nora's work and need not be discussed here. For a critical overview of the major points in Nora's argument, see Wood 1994.

**4.** The major group of commemorative forms that was spared removal in these years were those to the fallen in World War I, but they were not relegated the attention that the newly built memorial sites achieved.

**5.** In the Bulgarian capital for example, such museums were created to the founder of the Bulgarian socialist party Dimitar Blagoev, to the prominent leader of the international socialist movement Georgi Dimitrov, to Dimitrov's main collaborator in the socialist movement – Vassil Kolarov, as well as to many other less prominent figures of the party history.

**6.** The literature on the changes of 1989 and the period of transition in Eastern Europe is extensive. Here I would draw attention to some of the books that address more closely the problem of treating monuments and ideological emblems in the period after 1989: Ash 1990; Greenblatt 1995; James 1999; James 2005; Kubik 1994; Kukral 1997; Levinson 1998, etc.

**7.** On the function of the ideological signs as 'holy' or 'sacred' places, see Lane 1961: 223.

**8.** The literature about the crimes and the victims of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe is enormous. Among the numerous studies of the memorial movements during and after the socialist period, see esp. Adler 1993; Farmer 1995; James 2005; Merridale 2000; Smith 1996; Rév 2005; Todorov 1992; Todorov 1999; Tumarkin 1993.

**9.** In fact, already about a month after the suppression of the 1956 revolution the newly formed government of János Kádár officially qualified the 1956 events as a "counter-revolution" aimed against the socialist revolution in the country and seeking to restore the order prior to World War II (Litvan 1996: 116; Rainer, 2002: 292).

**10.** Some 16,000 people were convicted of participating in the uprising, while many more were harassed and lost their jobs (James 2005: 7).

**11.** For an extensive photo documentation of these monuments, see Boros 1997.

**12.** As a separate case of historical visualization, see also the depictions of scenes and emblems of the revolution (coat of arms, obelisks, flags, etc.) on coins after 1989.

**13.** Here and in the pages to follow I am especially obliged to the work of B. James, whose detailed analysis of museum exhibitions in Hungary after 1989 was of crucial significance to prepare this part of my text.

**14.** As B. James points out, already in 1957 there was attempt to display the "counterrevolutionary attempt to destroy the People's Republic" – in an exhibition organized by the Institute for Party History in June 1957. In this exhibition, the evidence of the assaulted socialist state (torn red banners, national flags with the communist emblem carved out, etc.) sought to prove the reactionary nature of the 1956 uprising. However, the ambivalent status of such objects in the eyes of the observing public was however swiftly realized by communist authorities and the collection of such objects was swiftly boxed up and prevented from display.

**15.** The Liberation Monument - a female figure of victory with a palm leaf, guarded by a Soviet soldier and with figures symbolizing progress and destruction - was

designed as an ostensible reminder of the Soviet victory and a sign of glory of the Soviet army. At the background of the post-war regarding of Hungary as a defeated enemy nation, the monument and its dominating role above Budapest public space served as an overt demonstration of the established Soviet control of the conquered territory (Fowkes, 2002: 71). On the major trends in the monumental discourse in socialist Hungary, see also Fowkes 2003; Sinkó 1992.

**16.** See in this respect the classical work of K. Verdery, 1991a. Illuminating points on the cohabitation of socialist and national ideology in Eastern Europe can be found also in Berger 1994, Csepeli 1997, Gál 1991, Haan 1998, Lampland 1990, Schöpflin 1993, Schöpflin 1997, Sugar 1994, Sugar 1995, Verdery 1991b.

**17.** For a detailed analysis of commemorating the 1848 revolution in Hungarian history, see Freifeld, 2001. About the interpretation of March 15 in the first post-war decade, see Fowkes, 2002: 73. About the symbolic potential of the 1848 revolution in the events of 1956 see Lampland 1990, 189; James 2005: 66.

**18.** Similar monuments – of a column with coats of arms and wreaths were raised also in Mikófalva and in Nagyvárad, and they all reminded visually of the widely reproduced photo of the ship with the crown during its travel to Esztergom.

**19.** See in this respect the recent debates about one such monument in the XIV Budapest district, raised on the occasion of the Millennium. Using a Hungarian traditional commemorative form of a *turul* (a winged eagle upon an obelisk), it overtly displayed a nationalist outlook and logically turned into a focal point for ritual gatherings of nationalist groups. The status of the monument and the meanings, which the rituals around it conveyed, instigated voices about its necessary destruction.

**20.** On the Romanian revolution in 1989 and the fall of Ceausescu, see Gilberg 1990; Ratesh 1991; Roper 2000; Siani-Davies 2005.

**21.** For a closer attention and interpretation of the ‘tourist’ uses of the sites of the revolution, see Light 2001.

**22.** See more about the “myths and realities” of the revolution in Siani-Davis 2005.

**23.** On the interpretations and negotiations about the recent past in contemporary Romania, see Deletant 1998; Fischer-Galati 1991; Hitchins 1997; Light and Dumbraveanu 1999; Light 2001. For a general overview of the issues related to the transitional period in Romania, see also Gallagher 1995; Nelson 1992.

**24.** On the post-socialist interpretations of the national past in Romania, see Bucur 2001; Bucur 2004; Fischer-Galati 1994; Gilberg 1990; Niessen 1995; Verdery 1996.

**25.** For a detailed analysis of the changed meanings of this day in twentieth-century Romanian history, see Bucur 2001.

**26.** See for example the 1993 exhibition at the Museum of the History in Transylvania, which, with only slight changes – related mostly to dropping Ceausescu out of representation, generally repeated the structure and the narratives about December 1 that were used in the socialist times (Bucur 2001, 315).

**27.** On the national path to socialism in Ceausescu’s Romania and the Romanian nationalism in the socialist period, see Jowitt 1971; Kligman 1998; Verdery 1991a; Verdery 1991b.

**28.** For more details on this, see the project of Mihail-Christian Lotreanu and Monica Lotreanu about the cultural heritage in Romania after World War II. Open Society Archives.

**29.** Thus, for example, already in the end of 1989 wide popularity received the map of Bulgaria with images of skulls on it, designated with the places where labor camps (in fact, rather “death camps”) functioned. See Todorov 1992; Todorov 1999.

- 30.** On the dynamics of memory in post-socialist Bulgaria, see esp. Deyanova 1999; Mihailovska 1999; Todorov 1999.
- 31.** In fact, the major reason was that Bulgaria was the only country where the idiom of the “liberation” by the Soviet army could find firm grounds both in previous historical experiences and in the existing monumental discourse prior to 1945. The entering of the Soviet army in Bulgaria in September 1944 was termed by Bulgarian historiography as following the pattern of the liberating mission pursued by the Russian troops in the war against the Ottoman Empire in 1877-1878.
- 32.** *BVI*: Bjuletin BTA “Vatreshna informatsia” [“Internal Information” of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency].
- 33.** For the counterposition to this issue, see for example *Zora*, 17, 27.04.93. “We should not compare the monuments of the Soviet army in Belgium, Austria and England and the former German Federal Republic with those in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. In the first group of countries the monuments were built by the allies of the USSR, without that bringing to a change for decades of the form of government. In Eastern Europe the monuments have a completely different meaning and thus the reaction is utterly different.”
- 34.** These two monuments have been discussed in larger detail in some of my publications, so I will afford here only an outline of the major aspects in their reinterpretation after 1989. See for example Vukov 2006; Voukov 2003b.
- 35.** *BPK* - Bjuletin BTA, “Presofis “Kurier” [Bulletin Press-office “Courier” of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency].
- 36.** *BSF* - Bjuletin BTA “Sabitija i fakti” [Bulletin “Events and Facts” of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency].
- 37.** Also, it was revealed that the monuments cannot be dismantled because this might break point 14 of the Contract for cooperation and friendship between Bulgaria and Russia, in which the two countries seek to preserve the monuments related to the history and culture of the two countries. *BVI*, 172, 20.06.96; *Duma*, 145, 21.06.96.
- 38.** About the various transformations and the eventual destruction of Dimitrov’s mausoleum in Deyanova 1997; Gradev 1992; Ivanova 1995; Voukov 2000; Voukov, 2003a; Voukov 2005b. The fate of the mausoleum is discussed in detail in my Ph.D. dissertation at the Central European University (Voukov 2005).
- 39.** On the museums of Bulgaria during the socialist times, see Bozova and Antova 2004; Problemi 1986; Raichev 1981. General observations on Bulgarian museums can be found also in Miladinov 2002; Nedkov 1998; Rusev 2000.
- 40.** On the challenges to historical museums in the period of transition in Bulgaria, see Bojnikov and Yankov 1998; Bozova and Antova 2004; Razvitie 2001; Sachev 1997.
- 41.** On the National History Museum, see Tsekova 2002; Muzeini orbazovatelni programi 2002.
- 42.** This is especially explicit in the educational and cultural programs carried out by Bulgarian museums after 1989. On them, see Drugiat muzei 1998; Muzeini orbazovatelni programi 2002; Rusev 1998.
- 43.** As D. Rihtman-Auguštin remarks in relation to the monument in the main square of Zagreb, “[t]he institutionalization of collective memory – as tradition and history – is tantamount to the institutionalization of forgetting” (Rihtman-Auguštin 2004: 195).

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