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# DEATH AND VITALITY IN MONUMENTAL ART IN EASTERN EUROPE AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*La mort – une récomposition du passé qui  
donne le sens du présent.*

M. Augé

A well-known and frequently quoted example reminds us of how the principles of the mnemonic technique were discovered in antiquity. In Book II of Cicero's *De Oratore*, Antonius discusses with his friends the value of memory training and recounts how one day Simonides had just stepped out of a banquet hall when the roof collapsed, killing all who had remained inside. Simonides was able to reconstruct the guest list by recalling the location of each person's seat at the table. By placing images in their spatial backgrounds in his memory, he managed to provide an account of the order, and to revive the identity of those who lay dead under the fallen roof (cf. Carruthers 1990:22, 147; Carruthers 1998:27-28, 197; Marin 1992:197-209).

There is a certain retrospective and retroactive potential in this mnemonic technique, which, though frequently referred to by scholars of memory, has never ceased to evoke amazement with the lucidity of its anecdotal wisdom. It is this potential and a line of figurative comparison, which draws my attention to this episode in the history of mnemonics at the beginning of this paper. Monuments of the socialist past – the primary object of my concern and research – have been important guests at a table, which has collapsed with the fall of socialism as state ideology in Eastern Europe. Whether completely destroyed, mutilated, or shaped anew, inscribed with new meanings, forgotten or merely neglected in the new contexts following the changes, the monuments of the period all share the same fate of remaining under a fallen roof. Any approach to

them is, therefore, an approach conscious of a crucial distance, seen through eyes which have stepped across the threshold of the destroyed house and have looked back to remember (mostly with the purpose of localizing in a proper way) the remnants of the presences that remain under ruinous cover.

Apart from the metaphorical potential of this image, there are two presuppositions I would like to emphasize before approaching closely the relationship between death and vitality in the socialist monuments of Eastern Europe. Looking back at the monuments of the socialist past is, as in the Simonides example, a step in the recreation through memory of things which were not imagined as possibly “dead” before the falling of the roof; that is, there is a certain shift in the relationship between life and death in these loci, and a different treatment and attitude towards them when looking back across the threshold. Death, as encoded and perceived in these loci, possessed meanings and sense quite different from that attributed to it after the regime of permanence in the socialist system of representation had been discarded. It is this core meaning of death, in particular, enclosed within temporal limits that this paper aims to trace while keeping at bay the husks of inscriptions and new meanings that inevitably appear in a post-mortem stage. A second presupposition that needs to be pointed out is that approaching the monuments of the socialist past in Eastern Europe represents in itself a mapping of monumental sites and forms which have visually stuck in our memory and which, to anybody witness to this epoch, can easily be recognized as being *present* there, not completely effaced by the passage of time. However – and this must be emphasized – “recreation” through memory does not have as its aim the reconstitution or re-legitimization of socialist monuments as important elements of the system of representation, nor the taking of sides in the agora of ideas sustaining or disclaiming the existence of socialist monuments. Rather, it is a look back to a time before the representative power of the monuments had come to an end, a time in which the presences of the monuments, having already lost some of their vitality, started for the most part to become realities of memory.

## **Fields, Limits, Contours**

How can we talk of socialist monuments in Eastern Europe, when the face of socialism in the different countries throughout the region was so varied that their discursive practices frequently provide grounds for contrast? How can we refer to post Second World War monuments in Eastern Europe as representing history when up until 1945 national and regional histories had followed streams which did not at all appear to be flowing into the same sea? The various referential frameworks of these countries as regards what and how to commemorate up until the Second World War, their swerving paths of inclusion, participation, fighting, and resistance during the war, their fates and roles in collaborating with or opposing fascism, as victorious or defeated states at the end of the war, as having regional and local partisan groups or being solely dependent for their 1944-1945 "liberation" on the successes of the Red Army, and last, but not least, the various levels of their expressions of faithfulness and affiliation to the Soviet type of socialism after 1945, etc. – all these factors, as well as undercurrents, lead to the suggestion that monumental representation cannot be encompassed within a common realm.

Approached from the perspective of background knowledge and the undercurrent motives which are expected to help mold history into palpable representations, the map of Eastern Europe's monument history seems to be traversed by lines of distinctions and particularities. Among such distinctions and particularities, the following examples could be cited: the inexistence of monuments to the Soviet army and Soviet soldiers in post-Second World War Yugoslavia as compared to the common presence of such monuments in the other countries of Eastern Europe; the plethora of monuments dedicated to resistance fighters and partisan communists in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia as compared to the rare presence of such monuments in Romania, Hungary, and East Germany; the different historical events and narratives used as legitimization in the monumental traditions in those countries after 1945; the ways in which these traditions were realized in national histories during antifascist and socialist movements, such as independence struggles, popular uprisings and revolutions, the First World War, etc. However, it must not be forgotten that, throughout the period of socialism, monuments in Eastern Europe were developing and attitudes towards them underwent important changes in different countries. While shaped generally as a representative form of visual discourse in the 1940s and 1950s, and legitimized by Lenin's plan

for monumental propaganda,<sup>1</sup> monuments took on varying functions and public meanings over time. Attitudes to monuments related to liberation from fascism by the Soviet army, for example, underwent a polar change after the 1956 Hungarian, and 1968 Czechoslovakian uprisings, as well as in the period following the rise of Solidarnost in Poland (cf. Béke 1992; Kubik 1994). Interest in raising “purely” ideological monuments in Ceausescu’s Romania appears to have been very low,<sup>2</sup> especially when compared to the persistence of such interest in neighboring Bulgaria, for example.

All these lines of general distinctions and peculiarities confirm that, with respect to monuments (as well as to many other spheres of life under socialism), no socialist country could be considered “typical” – each had its specificities, and each shared certain characteristics with some countries of the bloc, while differing from others (cf. Verdery 1996:11-12). While fully aware of the existing differences in monumental traditions in Eastern Europe during socialism, I have chosen in this paper to probe the possibilities and limits of a single analytical model. As K. Verdery points out, for analytical purposes, the family resemblances among socialist countries may appear more important than their variety (Verdery 1996:20), and their treatment “under one umbrella” may appear more productive in the attempts to reveal the generic underlying mechanisms of the cultural practices developed under socialism. The approach undertaken is, no doubt, preconditioned by the scope of preliminary research and by the nature of questions raised in the course thereof. Apart from the huge amount of data needed to be processed (most of it scattered among distant sites or in archives and collections that require direct access) and the various blank spaces that result from the attempt to map the problem in spatial and geographic terms, perhaps the greatest challenge to the historian of post Second World War monuments is the extreme variety of examples he/she is faced with. This variety is expressed in many ways, most importantly in referential terms: monuments to the Second World War, or monuments built simply in the period after it; monuments to the Soviet army in the region, or busts and statues built at former battlefields, concentration camps, and sites of destruction; monuments commemorating the war dead, or those raised in honor of the founding figures of socialist ideology, such as of Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc. Variety could be identified in the different functions of monuments – overtly commemorative monuments; explicitly celebratory monuments, attesting to victories in the war and the struggle for socialism; allegoric



monuments, as embodiments of everlasting ideas; decorative and artistic monuments, intended to fulfill a more utilitarian function, etc. Even a close observation of monuments of a predominantly commemorative nature reveals an array of types and realizations – societies in Eastern Europe created various forms of monumental expression: stone plaques, war memorials, brotherly mounds, collective or individual monuments, mausoleums, house-monuments, hut-monuments, museum-monuments, park-monuments, fountain-monuments, etc.

It is clear that, given such a wide range of aspects of the problem, any research on post Second World War monuments in Eastern Europe has either to be limited in scope, or sheltered within a framework large enough to encompass the numerous forking paths traversing it. In this paper, I have tended towards the second option, and, by means of discursive analysis, intend to investigate the implicit meanings of the relationship between death and vitality in post Second World War socialist monuments. This text aims to pursue the shaping of the socialist discourse of representation within the death and vitality idiom, within a framework of ideas that refer directly to death and overcoming. To this end, I have dedicated special attention to the particular ways in which death was encoded by means of metaphors of life and regeneration; to the representations of the body in statues and monumental ensembles – as dying but victorious, killed but surviving; to the special status of heroes represented in monuments – as split between life and death and sacrificing themselves in the hope of defeating the latter; and, last, but not least, to mausoleums of socialist leaders – as representing the power of ideas through the simulated and miraculous incorruptibility of their bodies. For all intents and purposes, this approach represents an attempt to look at socialist monuments not from the perspective of the overtly political aspects which monuments had and expressed, but from the view of those undercurrent motives and mechanisms for producing meaning in what was among the most representative of traditions in the socialist period. For, despite the varying faces of socialism in Eastern Europe and the different histories of attitudes to monuments and their referential potential, every country in Eastern Europe witnessed a wave of monumentalization and commemorations which, though subject to a cycle of different peaks and troughs over the years, nonetheless remained characteristic for the whole of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the search for a common key to understanding and explaining the ideological suppositions behind this wave is not only justified, it is also of utmost necessity.

## **Death and Sources of Life**

As has been pointed out by most anthropologists and historians of death,<sup>3</sup> the desire for immortality and attempts to transgress the finality of death can be considered universal (Heathcote 1999:6; Morin 1970:129). Death causes “disintegrating impulses” and “threatens the cohesion and solidarity of the group” (Gittings 1984:159), and most mortuary practices are aimed at fighting its destructive impact upon communities. The rotting of the body, especially that of kings or other special dead, is disturbing and often associated with a decomposition of social fabric. Anthropological investigations into practices related to death have often stressed that a corpse is feared because, until its reconstruction in the beyond is complete, part of the spiritual essence remains behind (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:81). To overcome this fear, present in all civilizations (Ragon 1981:5), mortuary practices include separation, transition and incorporation,<sup>4</sup> and are aimed at establishing and reestablishing a proper relationship between the worlds of ancestors and the living. Of crucial importance for the life of every community is that its dead, or most significantly, its special dead, are manipulated in such a way so as to reduce possible hostility on their behalf and to make them serve broad societal functions. In such manipulations, in the rituals of treating the dead, and in the various expectations associated with them, the society of the dead is shown to be structuring the society of the living (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:83).

One of the most characteristic features of this particular relationship with the dead is the ‘alchemy’, identified by Bloch and Parry, by which mortuary ritual transforms death into fertility and life.<sup>5</sup> Much of funeral behavior is an attempt to redress the imbalance caused by death by means of a symbolic increase of vitality. Initially expressed through mourning, extreme grief is often replicated and compensated for by great celebration, which finds expression in various festive, food-eating, wine-drinking, animal fighting and sexual themes. At the root of all of these lies the idea that “it is not enough merely to bury someone, or to dispose of a body: the survivors must bring a renewed conception and rebirth of their deceased kin to the world of ancestors” (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:129). In many religions the process of entering the world of the dead is interpreted as the inverse of the process of entering the world of the living, expressed in the belief of the resurrection of the dead, which can also be “understood as a resurrection of hope in survivors about

continuity in life.”<sup>6</sup> As R. Hertz observes, the notion of death is closely connected to that of rebirth and resurrection, and the exclusion of the dead from the community (always followed, however, by new integration), has at its roots the impulse of resurrecting and symbolically reinstalling the dead among the living (cf. Hertz 1960:79, Seale 1998:67; Mathieu 1986).<sup>7</sup> Resurrective practices restore a sense of basic security fractured by death (Seale 1998:4), and by stretching over this rupture it fights death, symbolically overcomes it, providing “proof” of continuities which death has tried to destroy.

The bones of the dead, as Hertz persuasively demonstrates, can become protective relics, representing benevolent ancestral spirits, and can serve as a main source in defining and sustaining the idea of the sacred, as well as of the belief that relics ensure the material bridge between life and death. Most clearly expressed in Christian tradition, though well-known to other religions and cultures, the belief that a “holy” body refers to a body which has overcome the corruptibility of the flesh, and that, by the relics it has left and the martyr’s or heroic narratives it has given rise to, it “stretches” towards resurrection, “strives” to take hold of time, overcomes time’s passing dominion. By their ability to fight the corruption of matter, dead bodies can turn into *vis vegetans*, *vestigium vitae*, and can serve as sources of life, as tools for transforming the pure negativity of death, as means of achieving fertility and hope. According to Hertz, the presence of the dead, duly honored, guarantees the prosperity of the living, and thus, by establishing a society of the dead the society of the living “regularly recreates itself”.

As validity of the symbolic mechanisms underlying religion, traditional culture, and folklore, these features of the holy dead have not lost their special importance for the modern methods of ordering and perceiving the world. It is particularly interesting to see how this functioned in the general discourse of life and death in socialist Eastern Europe, where the bodies of communist heroes, as represented by socialist monuments – dying but uncorrupted, victims but heroic in overcoming defeat, killed but victorious – are turned into images personifying death and the regeneration of life. Monuments built after 1945 in Eastern Europe provide numerous examples of a particular interpretation of death through the notion of vitality. The enormity of death in the War was replicated, not so much in images of mourning, but in abundant expressions of victory and celebratory spirit. Moving representations of “overcoming” death and surviving the finality of life, images of fighters going beyond the

limits of bearable suffering and trials of death, motifs of success and victory – all these flooded monumental space, affording monument stylistics a particular regenerative and optimistic character, stronger than the memory-ridden and painful. The death and vitality symbolism was often inherent in the very act of building a monument as it often coincided temporally with the reconstruction of towns which had been destroyed during the war or with the creation of the so-called model socialist cities in the 1950s and 1960s (cf. Aman 1992:147-164). It found expression in numerous architectural elements emphasizing the boundary between life and death, in details such as brass or stone wreaths, urns covered with stone flowers, and in eternal flames “frozen” into marble and concrete. All these, as characteristic elements of funerary art in general, were complemented by the explicitly celebratory mood of socialist symbolism – five-pointed stars, the hammer and sickle, pierced fascist casks, broken chains, unfolded banners, etc. The rhetoric of life as stretching beyond death is especially vivid in the inscriptions on monuments. The variety of phrases used were based on one basic formula – “you died so that we will live happily, and thus you will live forever”. The characteristic First World War monument formula “Rest in Peace” does not appear on the monuments of the Second World War, in which death is of more watchful and restless nature – as if only its standing to alert and incomplete separation from life could guarantee the peace achieved.

In all representations of life and death in socialist monuments a merging of the commemorative overtones with the language of the undefeatable can be witnessed; of the spirit of loss and bereavement with the pathos evoked by the victory of all progressive forces of the world against fascism. All monuments to the Second World War, including those at concentration camps and sites of destruction, overtly expressed the notion of victory – sometimes even displacing the representation of death. Inherently present in monuments to the Soviet army, or in those dedicated to victory in battle by communist groups, this notion appeared and often predominated in monuments to events which were not victories. Monuments in Pīrchupis (Latvia), Hatyīn (Belorussia),<sup>8</sup> Lidice (Czechoslovakia), monuments to those who died in battle, the numerous brotherly mounds of soldiers who died at war, and even monuments at the sites of the fascist concentration camps – Salaspils (Lithuania, 1967), Treblinka (Poland, 1964), Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald (GDR),<sup>9</sup> all these stood not merely as signs for the thousands and millions of tortured and dead, but also as a backdrop to optimistic and reviving spirit (cf. Kosellek 1997:148; Frank

1970:11 sq) which marked the period. In Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald, for example, statues depicted defiant male prisoners with raised fists and their staunch Soviet “liberators”. As J. Young points out, they were not so much intended to mark loss of life but rather to illustrate the glory of resistance and to celebrate the socialist victory over fascism (Young 1993:74). In this way, Cl. Koonz observes, they taught the lesson

that fascism and monopoly capitalism bore the responsibility for the war crimes; that the German working class, led by the Communist party, and aided by Soviet troops, had bravely resisted Nazi rule; and that this heroic heritage set the stage for the GDR’s unflagging battle against international capitalism in the future (Koontz 1994:265-266).

Similarly, the red stars on the memorial plaques at Auschwitz were not merely there competing with the yellow stars that symbolized the Jewish catastrophe, but were also rewriting memory through the narrative of heroic resistance which foreshadows victory. Or, to take another example, in the Warsaw uprising memorial, where the iconographic position is that of heroism rather than suffering” (Heathcote 1999:70), Jewish rebels are depicted sharing in much of the pattern of representation of communist fighters and heroes.<sup>10</sup>

Resistance in the East was symbolized primarily by the Communist party and by the martyrdom of its leaders (Young 1993:73), the same way as victory was appropriated only as a result of the exploits of the Soviet army and of the communist party members in the countries of Eastern Europe. This found expression in the numerous monuments to the Soviet army, the majority of which was created immediately after the war, before any other permanent symbols of power of the new political order existed (Aman 1992:35). As Aman has pointed out, there were already about 200 such monuments in East Germany by the 1950s, and in Poland there were more than 300 (Aman 1992:37). One of the most representative examples of this is the Soviet victory monument in Berlin-Treptow (1951), which can be regarded as a victory monument in the land of the defeated/ “liberated” (Aman 1992:23). It honored the fallen, but only those who fell on the winning side (*ibid.*), and celebrated the Red Army as a symbol of freedom and liberation. Occupying a huge amount of space, with brass flags, marble tombs, and mass graves, the Berlin-Treptow memorial has as its central the figure that of the liberator – a Soviet soldier with a child in his hands.<sup>11</sup> Monuments to the Soviet soldier were sometimes

erected on a hill above a town, so as to give it the symbolic function of a guardian protector outlined in the cityscape (for example, the monuments to the Soviet army in Plovdiv, Bulgaria [fig. 1]), at the very center of a city, or at one of its main entrances (for example, the monument to Bulgarian-Soviet friendship on the northeast side of Varna, Bulgaria [fig. 2]). In numerous cases, the figures of the Soviet “liberators” were



FIG. 1 – MONUMENT OF THE SOVIET ARMY IN PLOVDIV, 1956.  
PHOTO: D. PARUSHEVA, 2002.



FIG. 2 – MONUMENT OF THE BULGARIAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP IN VARNA, BULGARIA.  
PHOTO: N. VUKOV, 2002.

accompanied by representatives of national communist traditions. The monuments of the Soviet army in Sofia, Bulgaria (1954, [fig. 3]), for example, and Arad, Romania, (1959) – both very similar in composition and visual language – represented unity in the struggle and again employed the idiom of “liberation from fascism”<sup>12</sup> as a launching pad from where to emphasize the idea of post-war revival under the protection of the Soviet army.

Monuments did more than simply “commemorate” historic events – death had to be celebrated as overcome and defeated, with military parades, manifestations and festive celebrations taking the place of the cemetery pilgrimages that were the typical memorial-day activities of the First World War (Gillis 1994:13). Every year, monuments provided the venue for celebrating, with full military honors, the anniversaries of the “liberation from fascism”, of the Great October Socialist Revolution, of the dates when the Red Army victoriously entered the countries of Eastern Europe, etc. As they held special importance throughout the period of socialism, anniversaries regularly witnessed a wave of new monument



FIG. 3 – MONUMENT OF THE SOVIET ARMY IN SOFIA, 1954.

PHOTO: N. VUKOV, 2002.

erection – most of the monuments dedicated to Stalin in Eastern Europe, for example, were built either to celebrate his anniversary, or to celebrate the anniversary of victory in the Second World War. Monuments, as one historian of Bulgarian monumental art observed, were “connected with the necessity to create a celebratory mood and to decorate and aesthetically shape the town or the village” (Trufeshev 1978). This spirit of celebration and festivity suffused the whole context in which monuments of the period functioned. The laying of wreaths, holding of memorial celebrations, fireworks, oath giving rituals, etc. – these were all elements of a discourse, in which the enormity of death was encountered and surpassed by the vitality of the post-war period, by the notion of revival and rebirth following the war. Even special days dedicated to dead heroes and tragic events were “indirectly connected with the happiness of the overcome grievous occasion and the coming of a happy future” (Trufeshev 1978). All this not only made life and death exchange their meanings, but also helped reverse meanings, as if, in the dialectics



of the ideological context, life were dependent on death, and were centered permanently on its remembering and re-articulation, while death were infused with regenerative vitality, with faith in the control gained over the future.

It is important to point out that this particular form of interdependence between life and death was among the most important features of socialist art in general. While its emphasis varied among topics and motifs, it enjoyed a long-term presence in the art of the whole period. Vitalistic overtones were clearly expressed in the many pictures depicting construction plants and factories, of peasant labor, of harvesting and plowing, and in pictures of the everyday life. Images of cornfields as signs of fertility; of happy children and cheerful pioneers; of bread and wheat, which were present in almost every picture of socialist rural life; the visual framework of continuity and succession (such as that of the father with his son as a pioneer); images of miners and construction workers set against the background of new plants and factories – all these introduced emphatically the spirit of revival and regeneration which socialist ideology aimed to embody. These expressions of vitality were shown as parallel to the other major theme – that of death as remembrance those who had died for this earthly happiness. This topic was developed strongly in the visual representations of fights and armed battles of the Second World War, in the iconographic representations of dead heroes and of scenes related to their death in fight or torture; in the retrospective reading of national and regional revolutionary traditions; in the recurrent presence of the revolutionary and anti-militarist topics, etc. Death informed art, but at the same time, art was informed by the richness of ideologically shaped vitalistic imagery. Death and life not only permeated art through different branches of topics, motifs and images, but also reflected each other, not as separated, but as closely brought together components of a powerful *seme* of trials and salvation.

The general context of expressions of vitality in the art of the period is of particular importance for the understanding of how the death and vitality idiom functions in socialist monumental art. The compositions of many monuments included scenes representing the happy life established after the Second World War. Scenes of technological and scientific progress, of agricultural abundance and grandiose constructions were regular *topoi* of the various genres and functions of monuments. They were frequent elements of the friezes on Stalin's monuments in Eastern Europe (cf. Béke 1992; Aman 1992:181-210);<sup>13</sup> were present on a regular basis in

monuments to the Soviet army in the region and in allegoric representations of victory (for example, the victory monument in Constanța, Romania, [fig. 2]); were inseparable elements even with brotherly mounds and war memorials (for example, the brotherly mound in Sofia, [fig. 3]). To give just one example – the image of the child in the soldier's hands (introduced by E. Vuchetich's monument to the Soviet soldier in Berlin-Treptow), found expression in numerous monuments of the period. Children were depicted as the first to meet the liberators and as happily rejoicing at the overcoming of the trials of war and the victory of socialism. Being in the hands of the saviors was meant to be the most secure position possible; offering a child to be hugged and caressed by the victors was considered a sign of utmost respect for their humane mission; having a child represented as rejoicing in the monumental composition was the most powerful way to introduce the idea of the happy future, which was believed to have been established with the coming of socialism. What is important to emphasize is that this atmosphere of the festive spirit was depicted as possible due to the sacrifice and dedication in battle, with continual representation in parallel pictures. The greater the happiness and rejoicing, the higher the cost paid for it. Images of war, soldiers on the attack and dying comrades, were inseparable elements of the scenes of victory – remembering death, though regarding it as historically determined and necessary starting point for the life to come. The carnage of war, the representation of which was primarily justified by its nature as a source of life and regeneration.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the relationship between death and vitality owes much of its specificity to the general system of representation during the socialist period and to the rules and visions regarding the function of art, which, though they seem distant and hostile to opinion today, not that long ago were believed to be innovative and effective. The transparency of meanings, the extreme "actuality" of art in the period, related to its high propaganda function. The concept of art as a weapon, fighting for particular goals,<sup>14</sup> the context in which the language of art loses its variety and freedom and turns into a figure reflecting ideological postulates – all bear witness to a special mode of representation, which monuments of the socialist period used to demonstrate. In such a way, the real, though having been strongly proclaimed to be the ultimate and only goal of representation in art, fell away, leaving room for ideological assumptions and postulates to take advantage. But the problem is not only about the nature of truth and

about the validity of the real in socialist art – questions broad enough to be discussed here – it is, rather, about a symbolic technique, which preconditioned this particular relationship between life and death, and which, in constituting the very entity of images and meanings in monuments, was then itself constituted by them in a sort of reflexive dialectics. This happened because, “behind and between” the ideological suppositions and their monumental realizations, between the realm of instigating ideas and material bearers of representation, there were other forces that “ordered” and conveyed meaning to the world. Who would be considered as special dead and receive monumental representation; who would be regarded as a hero whose exemplary life people could follow; whose body would be accepted as sufficiently valid to cross the border between destruction and new life; who can retroactively be considered as being worthy of sacrifice – these are all issues, to which the answers formed not only a backdrop, but also the real means through which representation in monuments of the socialist past was made possible.

### **Bodies, Heroes, Sacrifices**

The dynamics of the relationship between life and death cannot be traced without analyzing the idea of the human body represented in the monuments of the socialist period. On the one hand, it is a body, that is missing and which the representation aims to make up for, to recreate through visual means. On the other hand, we have the body’s exclusive presence in monumental art – a presence, which unites the missing body of the dead with the represented bodies of those who fought and who survived. Numerous monuments of the period include these two realms of bodily presence in representations of various sides and parts of monuments, in the inclusion of scenes of dying and victory, in the literal presence of the dying comrade in the hands of the surviving victors, etc. An important characteristic of these representations of death is that the figure of Pieta, so present in the visual art commemorating victims of the First World War, is distinctively absent from post-Second World War monumental art in Eastern Europe. Of the numerous examples of Bulgarian and Romanian monuments, which I have studied in some detail, there was only one monument, in Bulgaria, in which a true representation of a mother mourning above the body of her dead son can be found; while in the several others, in which a remote association to this theme is evident,

the mother is seen instead as carrying on the struggle or appealing for battle. The man-woman couple, representing death, bereavement, and pain for the irrecoverable loss, was notably replaced in socialist monumental art by a comrade-comrade couple, in which emphasis was given to overcoming death through war, and to the firmness and courage required to face war [cf. fig. 4].



FIG. 4 – MONUMENT-PANTHEON OF THE FALLEN IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM AND CAPITALISM, VARNA. PHOTO: N. VUKOV, 2002.

An important aspect of the specific representation of the body in socialist monumental art is that it is a body shown as being in a state of torture – tense and mobilized in its stature of protest, wounded and mutilated, but nonetheless victorious. It is a body in a restless state; its handsomeness and dignity lies precisely in its fearless opposition to death, its ability to transcend death and its transfiguration by death. The wounded and dying body was turned into a position of central significance in this ideological and representative discourse. However, it was not a *transi* body – a representation of the corpse in the process of decay as in the typical representations of the effigy in the fifteenth century<sup>15</sup> – rather it was a body mobilized and tense so as to provide firm grounds for the metaphor of death overcome. Even when represented as ugly, crude, and subject to fragmentation, the body of the dead was aestheticized within the sphere of the metaphor and within the ideological coverage it aimed to sustain. The totality and enormity of death and pain was mirrored by the totality of the indestructible and incorruptible bodies in fight, by the corporeal wholeness they managed to preserve in trials and in death. This is why, the body of the victor in monuments of the socialist period who literally survived death so often cannot be distinguished from the body that died but scored victory over death through the legitimacy of the ideas. They might stand together, line in line, forming one community of intransient nature, or they might merge their statuses within figures, in which commemorative and celebratory elements are closely intertwined.

The indestructible status of the dead bodies was perhaps the strongest vehicle with which incorruptibility was delivered to the socialist idea and the universalist dimension it claimed to possess in the post-war period. At its core, this reflected on a well-outlined feature of the discourse of the period – that of the utter unity of ideological and social systems “modeled around bodily organization” (Hillman and Mazzio 1997:xiii). As Mary Douglas points out, “the human body is always treated as an image of society and ... there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension” (cf. Douglas 1982:70; Laqueur 1987:4). Socialist monumental art testifies to a new discourse of the body that dominated the period, which, to use Gallagher and Laqueur’s description of the nineteenth-century discourse, “not only attributed a new set of social, political, and cultural meanings to bodies but also placed them at the very center of social, political, and cultural signification” (Gallagher and Laqueur 1987:vii). The body as represented in monuments was one of the chief loci, where ideas about

destruction, corruption, and, notably, about the possibility of overcoming death and generating belief in the building of a new life in the post-war period were most richly expressed. The miraculously surviving body surpassing corporeal finitude, the mobilized body – perfect in its pre-mortem dedication to the idea – became an important tool for establishing the hope of a perfect society and the ideas of order and harmony claimed to have been established with the end of the Second World War.

The female body also played a very specific role in this dialectics of life and death. Up to the 1940s, the representation of women in public monuments was predominantly that of allegorical embodiments of ideas, such as, independence, freedom, victory, etc.<sup>16</sup> – all essentially different from the realm of images and meanings attributed to men in their monumental representation, mainly that of fighters and the fallen in battle, as the objects of mostly metonymical, rather than allegorical, representative techniques. The new ideological and imagerial discourse preserved some of the basic elements of this fundamental division between the sexes as belonging to separate realms of representation, but it did make some steps towards bridging this difference, to including it in one homogeneous realm of images and meanings. Although the allegorical representations of women continued to abound in the post-Second World War period, they were complemented by the proliferation of monumental images of women as being equal to men in life and death, as sharing one similar and often identical fate in the carnage of war and rebellion. The introduction of the woman-hero, of the female partisan in the heroic pantheon [cf. fig. 5] had lasting significance for social, political, and ideological dispositions, and for the general system of representation in the period. The female body was not only that of mother bereaved by the loss of her sons (as so often had been her basic function in the monuments of the First World War), not only the maiden, whose image could take on important humanistic ideals, rather, for the most part, it had already become the figure of the rebellious woman, who had fought shoulder to shoulder with men in the struggle and has taken a share in the heroic life and death of men. The corporeal concreteness of women's bodies in monuments of the socialist period also took on an enormous new weight of cultural meaning. The reproductive potential of women's bodies was complemented and expanded into another version of reproductivity – that of dying in armed struggle and resurrection by the validity and incorruptibility of ideas. In this new vision of women's symbolic potential, the female and male variants of sacrifice and reproductive suffering for



FIG. 5 – BROTHERLY MOUND TO THE FALLEN IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM AND CAPITALISM, SOFIA. PHOTO: N. VUKOV, 2002.

the community tended to merge, becoming one dominant discourse of reproducing the future through fight, of recreating the socialist idea through the trials of death.

All this helps outline important characteristics of the notion of the hero as envisioned by socialist ideology and represented in monuments. Heroes are split between life and death – they have either died for the realization of ideas or, having faced death in the struggle, survived victoriously.<sup>17</sup> The ancient division between heroes and martyrs, between heroes and victims, has been notably reshaped in the socialist pantheon in favor of the heroic status. No one could remain merely a victim of the fight; nobody could stay immobilized or untouched by the polar disposition of struggle. The choice in interpreting the dead was of an exclusively polar nature – one was either a fighter or the enemy: “he who is not with us, is against us” – as the famous slogan said. Yet, every hero was himself or herself a martyr to the socialist idea – undergoing unbearable treatment and suffering, but remaining firm in his/her beliefs. A major characteristic

of the martyred flesh, as C. W. Bynum points out, is its being “capable of impassability and transfiguration; suffering and rot could not be the final answer. If flesh could put on, even in this life, a foretaste of incorruption, martyrdom might be bearable” (Cf. Bynum 1995:45). The power of belief in the communist idea helped to endure the pain and kept their heroes’ gaze permanently fixed on the future.<sup>18</sup>

A key to this firm and unflinching acceptance of pain can be found in the very nature of sacrifice as “magical, systematic and universal exploitation of the fecund force of death” (E. Morin). Narratives about communist heroes and the inscriptions on monuments relating to them, seldom failed to mention the act of “sacrifice”, made voluntarily by the heroes in their dedication to a social or humanist ideal. While to make a sacrifice is to exploit to the extreme the fecundity of death, to offer oneself as a voluntary sacrifice is a powerful votive, striving to transform one’s own death into life well before the act of death has taken place. No self-sacrifice is involuntary, and the stronger the will to offer one’s life for the success of ideas, the firmer the belief that ideas would gain realization. Providing a differentiating line between heroes and victims, the voluntary deaths of those who sacrificed themselves for “us” brings with it obligations for the living and assures that fecundity and rejoicing inevitably follow as a consequence of the self-sacrifice.

A closer look at the abundant narratives belonging to this heroic tradition, which developed after the Second World War, reveals a reification of old mythological motifs and heroic narrative schemes. Earlier rituals and myths of death and rebirth were actualized in a tradition shaped and fashioned by the heroic mode.<sup>19</sup> Communists’ experience as fighters and rebels was clearly interpreted as a legendary descent to hell, as a repetition of the life and standing of Prometheus, as an image of the Phoenix rising from the ashes alive. When they die, the heroes sing, when they survive, they sing for the victory of the ideas they fought for. Though always victorious in the end, the fight is emphasized as uneven – it creates a notion of unfair conflict and an image of the enemy, who is threatening life in the community. Every sacrifice, as V. Turner points out, requires “not only a victim, [...] but also a sacrificer” (Turner 1974:69). The firm standing of the heroes on the side of “right” also helped create an array of images of evil, a realm of infernality, which, though once defeated by the victory of socialism, further demanded watchfulness and alertness.<sup>20</sup> As special representatives of the community, heroes served to validate that it consisted of fighters and was pure from contamination.



To have a local hero in a town or village was sufficient precondition for raising their status. Not only were towns and villages renamed after special figures of the antifascist and communist movement, but the practice of upgrading villages to towns or regional centers because an important hero or influential antifascist was born there was not an infrequent event. Ironically, it seems, the magical power of relics and of sacred biographies does not seem to have changed much throughout history.

Equally reminiscent of older epochs, heroes in the post-Second World War pantheon served as exemplars<sup>21</sup> – death and exploits needed to be repeated. The presence of exploits had to permeate everyday life and bodies had to live an intensified life, in a position of permanent attentiveness. The steps and the deeds of the heroes had to be followed so that their will of a “bright future” would come true. The acts of Heroes of denying death (by its fearless acceptance) had to be reenacted by observation and attentiveness so that their acts would live for “us”. Only by being with the heroes, and thus being a hero himself/herself, could the enormity of death be faced and surpassed. Only a hero could actually transform death into life, the morbid into regenerative status. Socialist heroes were not simply mediators between those radically opposed worlds, but figures, which covered and encompassed this polarity within them. However, it is possible to suggest that the fact they were such powerful symbols is mainly due to their split and double nature, that is, as V. Turner would say – “precisely because like all dominant or focal symbols, they represented a coincidence of opposites, a semantic structure in tension between opposite poles of meaning” (Turner 1974:89). They were at once victims and victors, dying and living, then and now.

Monuments served as embodiments of these exemplary narratives and life-providing narratives of communist sacrifices. They had to cover the wide span of meanings inscribed in the ideological dialectics of death and life, and to give it vivid expression. An important element of this regime of life and death symbolism was the notion of the sacred, which permeated the space of socialist monuments and constituted the nature of the ritual acts performed around them. It could be traced in the images of sacred life and death, as represented in the monumental compositions; in the waves of pilgrimage and ritual meetings on special occasions around monuments; in individuals’ ritualized behavior around monumental sites; in the establishment of cult and even “totemic” figures of reference, narratives, and interpretative frameworks, etc. The monumental embodiments of socialist heroes were loci where the “divine” power of

ideology could be encountered and received, and where following in the footsteps of the heroes could once again be reenacted and confirmed. Much like the requirement at the end of the ninth century that all churches should contain the relics of saints, so it was with the socialist practice of establishing a monument and the cult of the hero in almost every town or village. Although attempting to express the sacred in an ideological and counter-religious mode, although shedding new light on the relationship between life and death, socialist ideological discourse was nonetheless a reworking of older notions of sacred bodies and sacred spaces and was symbolically legitimized by the “holy” bodies visualized and revered in the monuments of the period.

### **Continuities, Discontinuities and Displacements**

Having already shed some light on similarities with mortuary practices of earlier epochs and various cultural contexts, the impression of the representation of death in socialist monuments as not being historically specific may be difficult to avoid. How are we to consider the appearance and evolution of this particular relationship between death and vitality in the socialist period – is it a result of a split from previously existing systems of representation – comparable in its spirit of invention only with the social order claimed to have been established? Or is it a continuation and the “logical result” of a continuous trend of utilizing and interpreting death, meaning that its contours can be considered to have been prepared and predicted by preceding periods and systems of representation? Or, as seems plausible, is it in fact a reworking, in a particular way, of notions and ideas whose importance for sustaining symbolic power, legitimacy and persuasion have so often appeared to be crucial throughout history? In order to approach these questions, it is necessary to look at the post-Second World War’s direct chronological predecessor in coping with a powerful presence of death – the First World War – and to attempt to explain the typology of the relationship between these two realms of “managing and representing the enormity of death”. In spite of the numerous parallels, distinctions and interpretations that have been made, certain aspects of the relationship between the utilizations of death in post-First and post-Second World War experience have still not been investigated, most notably in the case of monuments built to the east of

the Iron Curtain. I will try to sketch some of the most important features of this diachronic relationship of continuity and distinction.

The economy of utilization of death after the Second World War in Eastern, as well as in Western Europe, differed significantly from that which was visible in the monumental art following the First World War experience. In contrast to the post-1918 period, the rupture of language and imagery which followed the Second World War was profound and enduring (Winter 1995:8).<sup>22</sup> The difference was first of a referential nature, in so far as the experiences of the particular states in the world was varied radically, and in so far as the welcoming body of the pantheon of the WWI dead was that of the national state. It was an all-inclusive pantheon – no one's memory was disclaimed, no dead were disallowed the right of being a hero. Thus, while in the monuments of the First World War we can trace a certain unity of representation, any unity of representation of the community of the sacred dead in the Second World War was ruptured by ideological and group belonging, by distinctions and clearly cut lines of classification. The logic of interpreting and commemorating death in the post-Second World War period was carved out from within by the divisions between those who had died properly enough to be commemorated, those who had fought on the "right" side, and those whose death did not confer the right to commemoration. However, it was not only the enormity of death which made it impossible to encompass all the dead in commemoration, but also the internal necessity of the commemorative thought to classify and group, to provide a narrative of inclusion and exclusion for the dead.

Unlike after the end of the First World War, when art and representation were flooded with images of death, bereavement, and unbearable pain, the world after the Second World War seemed, paradoxically, much different. Death and pain were coupled with motifs of fighting and overcoming, and the figures of loss were inseparable from those of victory and vitality. These vital metaphors, themselves rooted in ideological notions and paradigms, were a kind of an antidote to the horrors of war and a useful tool for the newly established ideological order to gain power and control in its role as savior. The establishment in power of communist regimes in Eastern Europe after the Second World War introduced a certain new order to utilizing the dead – an interpretative framework, in which what had been lost, was gained in the progress towards a better life; those who died, died for "us" to live. The persuasive potential of this dialectics in the sphere of meaning helped polish over

the ruptures of exclusion within the post-Second World War pantheon, and facilitated the openness of the ideological paradigm to temporal planes where this dialectics was seen as erupting and prefiguring the victory of socialism. Certain historical figures and events dating back to the ancient and medieval times – rebellions against established order,<sup>23</sup> etc. – were allowed to be drawn within the referential system of this paradigm. This openness, in particular after the 1960s, not only permitted the spirit of monumentalization to flourish in figures and events belonging to national regional histories, but also marked the highly inclusive nature of the Second World War towards heroes of former époques.

Although examples of such utilizations can also be seen in post-Second World War monuments in Western Europe, it remained largely a characteristic of monumental art in Eastern Europe. The tradition of listing the names of the dead from the 1939-1945 period to the monuments which already existed is referred to by R. Kosellek as a practice, which took place mainly in France (Kosellek 1997:157). Although little research has been carried out into this phenomenon East of the Iron Curtain, my observations on post-Second World War monuments in Eastern Europe show that, apart from the Soviet Union where the First World War was denounced as a product of czarist policy and its dead were not commemorated publicly, all the countries of Eastern Europe had monuments whose referential framework included First and Second World War experience together. In Romania, for example, where the First World War held a special place in the national historical paradigm and was represented in more than a half of all existing monuments, the raising of monuments to both the First World War and the antifascist struggle<sup>24</sup> was to a large extent the result of a technique to increase the symbolic capital of the latter. Though not uncommon in earlier phases of monumental traditions,<sup>25</sup> this phenomenon often represents an example of the rooting of socialist monumental traditions in the traditions of high legitimacy in the national historical paradigms of the countries of Eastern Europe (for example, wars of independence, the Balkan wars, the First World War, etc). This rooting was, in fact, an act of displacement, an example of commemorative coexistence, adding new meanings to the initial event that had served as host.<sup>26</sup> Apart from being an attempt to stress and gain further legitimization from a historical event with high symbolic meaning, it was also a way to strengthen the notions of victory and rebirth that, in Romania in particular, were strongly associated with World War One.



FIG. 6 – VICTORY MONUMENT IN CONSTANȚA (1968), PHOTO: N. VUKOV, 2002.

Another characteristic of this relationship between the First and the Second World War utilizations of death can be pointed out. It is actually a consequence of those characteristics already mentioned. In an insightful analysis of the ways in which monuments to the dead shape the identity of the living (Kosellek 1997), R. Kosellek dedicates special attention to the occurrence of the process of democratization of death which can be traced in the history of public monuments and reaches a peak in the monuments to the dead in the First World War.

The equality in death is replaced by equality, which guarantees national homogeneity: the homogeneity of the living and the survivors. Monuments are erected by political entities, which mutually demarcate each other. That is why the function of the monuments to the dead tends to a *religion civile*, in the sense meant by Rousseau, and contributes to the foundation of democratic legitimacy (Kosellek 1997: 151).

As R. Kosellek describes it, this is equality between those who fell for the fatherland, an equality internalized within the national framework. Although traces of continuity can still be found, the monuments to the dead built after the Second World War seemed to step aside from the process of democratization written about by R. Kosellek. For Eastern Europe (though not only), the framework within which the dead could gain equality was no longer national. In a period when validity was reserved for ideas of an international nature, the war dead (and most notably the “heroes of war”) were no longer of “internal” use only, but also were known and commemorated across boundaries. Together with facilitating the “export” of special dead to brotherly countries,<sup>27</sup> this period was witness to the formation of a pantheon with predominantly ideological contours. Within this pantheon, international socialist heroes would often outnumber national heroes, thus according them more regional, if not completely marginal, importance.<sup>28</sup>

Even on a regional level, however, death was far from being considered as democratically represented. Apart from the politics of exclusion of those unworthy of commemoration, and apart from the special selectivity of those who were considered true embodiments of the ideas propagated in the post-Second World War discourse in Eastern Europe, it is important to point out that hierarchies within the post-Second World War pantheon were clearly expressed and frequently reiterated. The special status of local heroes was rarely strong enough to compete with the high status of communists whose exemplary life and death gained nationwide and international (within Eastern Europe) importance. The latter, for their part, received power and coherence from the founders of socialist ideology and the most special communist leaders to whose words and exemplary behavior their images were constantly referred. The hierarchy among bodies was directly reflected by the placing of monuments dedicated to them in the geography of communist sacred places. If, in the representation of heroes in public monuments, the dead body, though resurrective in its heroic vitality, was nonetheless absent from vision and its corporeal features described in stone or marble monumentalizations, then in other monuments – those of the specially designed tombs to communist leaders – the dead body had a strong presence. Once again – this time in material terms – death was shown as having been defeated by life. Through a simulacrum of corporeal remains preserved as incorruptible, the mausoleums of dead leaders utilized to the very limit the sacred powers of dead bodies and, as ultimate expressions of a “magic” transformation

of death into life, occupied the very heart of communist monumental discourse: located at the center of capitals, raised above the flesh-consuming earth, closer to heaven.

### **Between Heaven and Earth: Mausoleums**

Though far from being characteristic of all the countries of Eastern Europe<sup>29</sup> and no doubt lacking a widespread appearance, the mausoleum can be regarded as a type of monument that played a key role in the socialist system of representation – a monument in which the interpretation of death as vitality was revealed in a new, yet more profound and expressive way. In spite of the rhetoric of persuasion about the established control of communist regimes over the mortality of heroes, signs of the perilous affliction of death could not completely be avoided in the long run. Though locked, once and for all, behind the slamming doors of the 1945 victory, death nevertheless managed to sneak up and surprise its victims from among the ever-watchful guard of the party leaders. The deaths of Stalin, G. Dimitrov, Cl. Gottwald, G. Georghiu-Dej, as well as of many other prominent figures in the communist parties of Eastern Europe, of resistance fighters and revolutionaries who had survived the war, all posed a challenge to the ideology, which overtly rejected the power of death over ideas. The exploration of ideas of immortality, as Heathcote emphasizes, proved to be a fundamental cornerstone of Revolutionary art: the Revolution and its leaders had to be seen as immortal (Heathcote 1999:50) and cults, rooted in the idea of god-building,<sup>30</sup> were to be built around them. By constructing specially designed tombs for its leaders, the communist regimes of Eastern Europe attempted to utilize to the extreme the possibility of transforming death into metaphors of vitality and immortality, and thus, exercising strong pressure at the limits of representation, to make the specific interpretation of death not merely a simulacrum of the real, but “reality” itself, proven by the miracle of the exhibited as incorruptible body matter.

Mausoleums and various forms of mausoleum existed (and in certain periods proliferated) well before the second half of the twentieth century,<sup>31</sup> but it was the period of socialism in Eastern Europe which developed functions and meanings for the mausoleum that were hardly known until then. The abundance of mausoleums created in Eastern Europe to commemorate the heroes of national revivals and those who fell in the

First World War<sup>32</sup> was marked by explicit impulses to create national pantheons and democratize the death of those who had fallen fighting for national independence and national unification. Being richly represented in various traditions of funerary architecture, the mausoleum was too powerful a form to be underestimated by the post-World War II communist regimes in their attempts to demonstrate their control over death. However, it was not a premeditated attempt to utilize the product of elaborate architectural traditions developed throughout the ages; rather, it was an invention of tradition, a modeling of the visual expression relating to particular notions of death, memory and representation which the newly established social order had come to require.

Although elements of the mausoleum can be identified in the numerous memorials and brotherly mounds which were raised to commemorate the dead of the Second World War, the ultimate realizations of the idea of the mausoleum were those several examples of funerary architecture which served to preserve inside and to exhibit to visitors the dead bodies of communist leaders. Far from being limited to the countries of Eastern Europe only,<sup>33</sup> and far from being deprived of local, regional and historical specificities, mausoleums to the communist leaders represented a case in which death and vitality intersected and exchanged meanings intensely. The bodies to be commemorated in them were those of the most special dead, of the founders and leading followers of the communist idea. Their lives and deeds were believed to be expressions of complete dedication to the idea – they not only presented it, but embodied it without leaving any remainder. The idea was fused into their bodily concreteness, “sanctifying” any sign of their bodily presence. This unity of representation stabilized the function of the idea, delegating the proof of its validity to the body of the leaders, who, while still alive, had every deed, movement, thought and gesture guided by it. The representation with no remainder, itself a special form of conversion of the real, could not to take place in *everybody*, though *all* bodies had to strive to achieve such a high (though never ultimate, in so far as only the founders or leaders had the right to and power of this absolute) representation of the idea throughout their lives. The main point where this juncture of representation faced overt threat was where the body encountered its material finality – death.<sup>34</sup> This was a point of real concern – does the idea die when its absolute embodiment is no longer alive? Does it have to change, mutate, transform, while adapting to another body in which it would achieve a new absolute representation? Or is it beyond bodies, and does its everlasting or temporal





FIG. 7 – THE MAUSOLEUM OF G. DIMITROV IN SOFIA. POSTCARD, 1949.

nature not depend on one particular body only? How can the materially and tangibly the concreteness of an idea be proved when the life-source of the material bearer had become a victim of decomposition?

The spirit of disorder and the production of such alarming questions are not new in themselves and, as anthropologists have often pointed out, considerable alarm within communities is expected to appear especially when the matter is about the deaths of leaders (cf. Hertz 1960; Bloch and Parry 1982). The alarm is related mainly to the split which the death of leaders has brought to the ultimate unity of representation and is actually about the continuity of power, which, surpassing the body natural of the king and his successor, has to unite them in a timeless institution, a divine center of order, a perpetual source of life. The necessity to minimize the crisis and cause it to happen as if outside time was expressed in the magic-like appearance of mausoleums in several cases of death of a communist leader – huge and elaborate buildings, erected within days of a leader's death. The immediate and sudden blow of death was replicated by immediate assurances of the everlasting nature of the ideas,

which, though painfully harmed by the loss of a leader, the party and the people claimed to be fighting for with renewed strength. The death of the leader itself presented an opportunity to turn mourning into victory, martyrdom into triumph (Ioan 1996: 77), and, in the short period in which such merging took place, death's miraculous metamorphosis into vitality can again be identified.

However, it was the materiality of the bodies preserved in these specially designed tombs, which had the most important say in this miraculous transformation. The bodies of the leaders had to be presented as intact as possible, successful in their fight over decay. Their often visibly incorruptible remains were reminiscent of saints and to their miraculous abilities to overcome decay and putrefaction. Whether embalmed inside the tomb or not, the body of the leader was an object of adulation and pilgrimage, while the permanence of the bodily standing in the mausoleum accorded a non-passing status to the represented ideas. The bodies were exhibited as sleeping, rather than dead, as watching "us" rather than being watched. As ultimate points in elaborate systems of stairs, levels and mazes in the mausoleums, they were to be approached and wondered at – dead ends, where the make-belief of socialist ideology found firm launching ground for legitimization.

In this attempt to interpret death through an incorruptible metaphor, it is again, as in the general tendency to raise monuments for the purposes of propaganda in Eastern Europe after the Second World War, that the example of Lenin proved convenient. Created shortly after Lenin's death and reconstructed several times until it reached its permanent red-granite form,<sup>35</sup> the Lenin mausoleum served as a pattern for the immortalization of those great figures, whose bodies the party would not surrender unto death, and chose to turn into objects of esteem and veneration. The Lenin mausoleum served as an archetype for other mausoleums built in Eastern Europe, and it was this cornerstone of the communist monumental tradition in which the two basic features (the importance of the body's public visibility and the demonstrated appearance of incorruption)<sup>36</sup> found their inspiring pattern. Though never able to surpass in extent and intensity the worship of Lenin, the rhetoric of extreme adulation addressed to dead leaders throughout the years has been shaped by the all-encompassing and persistent Lenin cult and shared much of its forms and expression.

Underpinned by old mythological motifs,<sup>37</sup> and surrounded by a festive, rather than mournful spirit, mausoleums functioned as holy centers for the socialist ideologies of Eastern Europe – sites around which important

trends of the ideological discourse started and developed. Mausoleums served as local shrines for the veneration of the memory of leaders and were loci where the “truths” of the vivifying power of ideas was revealed. They helped to organize the system of representation in a way that showed death not only controlled and overcome, but also institutionalized as an object of adulation and a source of life and inspiration. As B. Zbarsky, the head of the team authorized to embalm Lenin’s body, has pointed out, “the opportunity to see the favorite leader, though immobile, would partly calm the pain of the loss and would inspire further struggle and fight” (cf. Zbarsky 1946:22). The exhibition of leaders’ bodies served to make mausoleums pivotal places, “anchoring the space of the living to a particular location and sacralizing it in the world” (Heathcote 1999:6). It was by means of this ultimate concentration upon the body of the leader – dead but vital in its uncorrupted materiality – that the gift of fertility, simulated and promised as a reward of proper celebration, could be monopolized (cf. Bloch and Parry 1982; Seale 1998:68) by the ideology in power and used in its exercise of social control.

## Conclusion

It can be claimed, and quite justifiably so, that the relationship between life and death lies in the very nature of a “monument”, not only of socialist monuments. As K. Verdery puts it, “tearing down and erecting statues goes on all over the world, in times past as well as present, [and] there is nothing post-socialist about it” (Verdery 1999:6). One aspect most overtly expressed in commemorative monuments, though shared by all other types of monuments, is that monuments are generally built as expressions of the victory of life over death, as objects indicating the defeat over time. Having its roots in ancient practices of ancestor worship,<sup>38</sup> raising a monument to the dead suggests their being “not completely dead, not utterly gone, finished, complete” (cf. Greenblatt 2001:17); yet, it is an act to be perceived much more as an active investment in a community’s present and future,<sup>39</sup> rather than merely being a resurrective approach to the past. Notably, while all this can be identified in any particular example of monuments, a much stronger example of this would be the weight of symbolic investment and expectations expressed emphatically in a whole outburst of monumental expression over several decades in a large part of Europe.

The visual expression of life and death has been one of the most characteristic features of monumental art in Eastern Europe after the Second World War and has contributed enormously to the specificity of the East European monumental tradition after 1945, to its distinctive difference from monumental forms in other countries and previous historical periods. The ideological context that engendered and surrounded the particular forms of monumental art in Eastern Europe played a decisive role in this regional and historical specificity, though it would have not possessed the expressive power it had, had the interpretation of death, finality and mourning have not been so closely intertwined with overtones of vitality, regeneration and celebration. Nor would understanding of the general ideological context, of the power of representation and the representation of power, have been complete without the problem of death and vitality and have been put to interpretative use in the analysis of the cultural and social processes in Eastern Europe after 1945.

As clearly demonstrated by the monuments of the socialist past, the Second World War marked the beginning of a new epistemics in Eastern Europe, that of a special relationship between death and vitality. It was determined by the enormity of death and destruction in the war, by the necessity of their overcoming in the post-war years, and by the clearly shaped dividing lines between fascist and anti-fascist affiliation, between fighting on the "right" and fighting on the "wrong" side. Heroic tradition and the supreme worlds of life experience dedicated to the communist idea functioned as an antidote to despair, as a tool for overcoming the trials of war and destruction and as legitimization of the special regime of power in the period. In its monumental representations, the economy of life and death under socialism can be seen as affording death a passing status, shaping it as a transitory phenomenon which was stepped over by the permanent nature of incorrupt ideas, an instance to be remembered mostly because of its function in enabling the gap between the past and present to be bridged. Death and the special bodies of communist heroes were seen as producing knowledge, as being the true symbols of the discourse of "make-belief" under socialism. In its particular methods of "preserving the bodies" – by visual means, by authentication through names, narratives, biographies, etc. – monumental art under socialism played an important role in sustaining knowledge and structuring postwar community identities. It appears not only as a visual representation of the special dead of various communities, but also as a kind of "prolongation" of the identity of the dead themselves, a means not only

of displaying but also, in a way, “displacing” the dead bodies they initially came to represent through images of victory and rebirth.

The relation to monuments is a relation to time. However, in the socialist period it was shaped in a particular way that faced the open futurity of the ideological narrative and conceived the past as a revelation of the truth to come. This way of relating to the continuous and encompassing nature of time attributed the meaning to death that it was a point to be surpassed, a limit to go beyond. Thus, in socialism, death was expressed and represented, though it was rarely interpreted in autonomous terms. It was “naturally” placed under another symbol – not allowed to be “consumed” as existential or neutral from the point of view of ideological implications, and was always coupled with images of the overcoming and optimistic spirit. In fact, this was a matter of a very powerful undertaking which socialist ideology insisted it was able to carry out – the ability to control, express and represent death, to cope with it despite its “vivid” presence.

Behind this imposing visibility of control, however, other, invisible, slips and displacements took place. The notion of the “death worth dying” with all its metamorphoses throughout the ages – from the idea of the sacrifice of Christ in the Christian religion to the sacrifice of the soldier for the country, as so persuasively demonstrated by Kantorowicz, was important during socialism in the modeling of the socialist party as a “corpus mysticum” (Cf. Kantorowicz 1997), something previously represented by the state. By sticking closely to the enormity of death and providing tools for, narratives and exemplars of its fighting and overcoming, the communist representative discourse appropriated the role of “magically” transforming death into life, of being the only one able to link such unbridgeable realms. It was exactly this role which the monuments of the period, as particles in a general discourse of transforming death into life, clearly demonstrated.

Was it not difficult to imagine that a “demystification” of this power relation would some day be possible; that, as in the case of Simonides, the roof over the table where monuments and heroes had been such precious guests, would someday, inevitably, collapse?

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lenin's plan for visual and, in particular, monumental propaganda was announced by a Decree of the Council of commissars of the republic, dated 12.04.1918. For a detailed analysis of the realization of this plan in the first years of the Russian revolution and for its subsequent effects on socialist art in the countries of Eastern Europe after World War II, v. Bowlt 1980; Golomstock 1980; Blomqvist 1987, Aman 1992, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The memory of the generally unfriendly policy of Ceausescu's regime towards monuments to the Soviet army and to symbols recalling the Soviet post-World War II domination in the region after 1945 evolved to the widely accepted belief that "socialist monuments almost did not exist in Romania throughout socialism". In order to counter this belief unsupported by actual data, I provide here a more extensive list of socialist and antifascist monuments in Romania, fully aware that persuasion cannot be achieved by means of a list only.

Monuments to the antifascist war and to communist resistance were built in almost all larger towns and villages in Romania: Alexeni (memorial plaque dedicated to the heroes of the antifascist war, 1964), Arad (monumental bust to the communist Ilie Pintile; monuments to the heroes in the antifascist war; memorial plaque dedicated to the patriots in the insurrection of August 1944), Bacău (monument to the heroes in the antifascist war, 1959), Baia Mare (monument to the heroes in the antifascist war), Băile Felix, Balta Doamnei, Beiuș, Bod, Bozeni, Brașov, Bucu, (1954), Câmpia Turzii, Carei, Căscioarele, Cehu Silvaniei (1959), Chișineu-Criș (1946), Cincu, Cluj-Napoca (a monument and several memorial plaques to anti-fascist heroes; a memorial plaque dedicated to the revolution of social and national liberation), Constanța (monumental bust to the communist Filimon Sîrbu, 1976; monument to the heroes in the armed struggle; monument to victory, 1968), Covasna (1973), Dăișoara (1981), Deleni (1957), Dobolii de Jos, Doftana, Epureni (1965), Galați (monument in honour of the hero of the working class, 1956), Gerăusa, Giurgiu, Ghenci, Gugești, Fetești, Flămânzi (1964), Herepeia (1958), Jimbolia (1979), Jucul de Jos (1960), Lăpușel (1975), Luduș (1960), Mădăraș (1958), Mirăslău, Miercurea-Ciuc (1974), Moldova Veche, Moreni (1958), Oarba de Mureș, Odăile (near Otopeni), Pașcani, Păuliș, Piatra Neamț (1954), Pianu de Jos (1980), Ploiești, Rucăr (1957), Scărișoara, Sanica de Sus, Sebiș (1959), Sofronea, Șomcuta Mare, Stănișești (1948), Suceava, Tășnăd, Tăuții, Tăuții Măgherăuș, Teliu, Tîrgu Lăpuș, Tîrgu Jiu, Timișoara (monument to the fighters for communism), Tunari, Turda, Turnu Măgurele, Urziceni, Valea Plopilor, Văleni-Stînișoara (1964), Zimnicea (1974).

Only in Bucharest could at least two memorial plaques dedicated to the Congress of the Romanian Communist Party be found; monumental bust to

the communist Ilie Pintilie; monument to the Soviet soldiers (1946), memorial plaque dedicated to the fighting communist Olga Bancic (1912-1944); memorial plaques dedicated to communists Bela Brainer, Nicolae Mohănescu, Pompiliu Ștefan, Filimon Știrbu; memorial plaques dedicated to *luptele insurreționale* [insurrection fights] (1944) at the Square of Independence, at the Military Academy (Monumentul Eroilor Patriei, 1958, inscription: "Monumentul eroilor luptei pentru libertatea poporului și a patriei, pentru socialism"), on the București-Constanța and București-Ploiești highways, at Băneasa airport, etc.

For a thorough description of these monuments and visual material about them v. Tucă & Cociu 1983, as well as references to some of these monuments in: Grozdea 1974; Grozdea 1987, etc. In this list I did not include monuments of the so-called "mixed" type, i.e., those dedicated, for example, both to the First World War and to the antifascist war in so far as I mention them later in this paper. Other exclusions include general monuments such as those dedicated to the Romanian soldier, although by their visual framework and contexts of celebration throughout the period of socialism most of them had meanings which bring them close to monuments of the antifascist type (i.e., such monuments as in Arad, Baia Mare, Carei [1965], Oradea [1958, inscription: "Glory to the Romanian soldiers, who fought with heroism against fascism for the liberation of the country, for the freedom and independence of the Romanian people!"]; Bucharest [1946], with the Soviet coat of arms and the scenes of meeting the Soviet soldiers in Romania], etc.). Even from such a brief and far from complete list of socialist monuments built in Romania after 1944, it can be concluded that, though not on a par with such monuments in other socialist countries, Romania can hardly be seen as exceptional as regards the wave of socialist monuments which flooded Eastern Europe after World War II.

- 3 From the abundance of anthropological literature on death and mortuary practices v. in particular Frazer, J. 1934; Hertz 1960 (1907); Tenenti 1952; Lévi-Strauss 1955; Bloch 1971; Morin 1970; Ariés 1975; Ariés 1977; Vovelle 1974; Vernant and Gnoli 1982; Vovelle 1983; Vovelle and Bertrand 1983; Bloch and Parry 1982; Thomas 1980; Thomas 1985; Geary 1986; Geary 1994; Geary 1995; Paxton 1990; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Bynum 1992; Bynum 1995; Schmidt 1994; Ratzinger 1994; Bendann 1996; Prigent 1996; Tréffort 1996, Verdery 1999; Schmitt 2001, etc.
- 4 Van Gennep analyses of funerals as involving rites of transition, whereby mourners travel a path parallel to the journey of the soul (Van Gennep 1960). An analysis of the stages of this transition cf. Hertz 1960, Metcalf and Huntington 1991.
- 5 Cf. Bloch and Parry 1982, Seale 1998:110. Following M. Eliade's analysis of the numerous zones of interference between fecundity cults and funerary

- cults, E. Morin also defines fecundity as solicited by death, and death as “universal source of fertility” (Morin 1970: 129).
- 6 Seale 1998:194. For a thorough analysis of the evolvement of this doctrine in Western Christianity v. Bynum 1995.
- 7 In archaic thought, for which the elementary experiences of the world are those of metamorphoses, disappearances, reappearances and transmutations, as E. Morin observes, “all death is informed by rebirth, every birth is preceded by death, every change is analogous to death-and-regeneration – and the cycle of human life is inscribed in the natural cycles of death and rebirth” (Morin 1970:123).
- 8 Cf. *Nabat Pamyati – Sovetskie memorial’nye ansambli, posviashtenye zhertvam fashizma*. “Iskusstvo”, Leningradskoe otdelenie.
- 9 About the post-World War II monuments in GDR, v. Frank 1970.
- 10 For a detailed analysis of this monument v. Young 1989; Young 1993.
- 11 Cf. *Pamyatnik voenam sovetsoj armii pavshim v boiah fashizmom, Berlin, Treptow-Park*, Moskva, 1961.
- 12 The establishment of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe was facilitated to a large extent by the moral, administrative, and economic vacuum left by the Nazis and their allies after the Second World War (A. Aman), and by the symbolic capital communist parties gained as taking the posture of “liberators from fascism”. For the history of antifascist movements before and after the World War II, and the specificity of communist antifascism, v. esp. Groppo 2000.
- 13 The evolving scenes of Stalin monuments in Budapest depicted the history of the Soviet soldier until the liberation of the Hungarian people, while the other part represented “life renewing in its wake – the sharing out of the land to the peasants, the reconstruction, pioneers, soldiers, sportsmen, etc.”. Cf. Béke 1992:278.
- 14 Cf., for example, the widely popularized in the socialist aesthetics phrase of V. Mayakovski about slogans and art in general as “artillery, beating at the rear rows of the enemy”.
- 15 The characteristic representation of the dead in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was a two-tiered tomb, whose upper part represents the body in glorious clothes and armor, while the lower part is a representation of the corpse in the process of decay. Cf. Cohen 1973; Panofsky 1964; Tristram 1976:15.
- 16 Cf. Warner 1985; about the rare presence of female figures in the First World War monuments, v. Agulhon 2001:37.
- 17 For some basic aspects of the constitution of heroes in culture and history, v. Campbell 1972 (1949); Raglan 1979 (1936); Fabre 1999; Centivres et al. 1999.
- 18 Compare with Tertulian’s note about Christian martyrdom – “the leg feels no pain in its tendons when the soul is in heaven” (quoted in Bynum 1995:45). The promise of rising again, C. W. Bynum emphasizes, “makes it possible



- for heroes and ordinary Christians to face [...] the humiliation of death and the horror of putrefaction" (Cf. Bynum 1995:45-46).
- 19 About the special role that the figures of heroes played in socialist culture, v. Clark 1981; Morris 1993; Unfried 1999.
- 20 Cf. C. Lefort's analysis of "the representation of the People-as-one", as built on a denial that society consists of divisions. As a consequence of such policies, he claims, "In the so-called socialist world, there can be no other division than that between the people and enemies" (Lefort 1986). More about the construction of communist parties' identities by defining and sustaining a wide array of images of enemies, cf. in K. Verdery's interpretation of Lefort's thesis, in Verdery 1996:93.
- 21 V. in this respect P. Brown's classic text about saints as exemplars in Late Antiquity (Brown 1983). Cf. also K. Verdery's analysis of the importance of "exemplary biographies" of "remarkable men" in shaping Romanian national sentiment – just as medieval Christians absorbed the exemplary lives of saints, she points out, so 20-century Romanians learned to identify with exemplary national heroes. Cf. Verdery 1999:77. The conscious appropriation by communists of the technique of exemplars found in ancient and medieval religious traditions should not be overestimated, though clear questions of this technique in the communist persuasion after World War II in Eastern Europe may often amaze the researcher.
- 22 About monuments to the First World War, v. esp. Fussell 1975; Descamps 1978; Mosse 1990; Prost 1997; Winter 1995; Kosellek 1997; Heathcote 1999: 42-47; Winter 1999; Agulhon 2001:35-46, etc.
- 23 Cf. for example, the pervading wave of monuments in all Eastern European countries dedicated to rebellions and uprisings which communist ideology considered as preceding and foreshadowing its own victory.
- 24 Cf., for example, such monuments as those in Băleni-Sîrbi, Bujoreni, Fîntînele (1976), Focșani, Lăpușel, Olteni, Sălcina de Sus (1946), Scărișoara (1980), and Valea Doftanei. An interesting example is a monument in Pătîrlagele. Built in 1928, it was initially a monument to the heroes of the First World War, but, to the inscription "Celor ce s-au jertfit pentru patrie", another obviously later inscription was added – "Heroes from Pătîrlagele, who fought against German fascism, 1944-1945."
- 25 In Romania, for example, monuments of this "mixed" type were widely spread in the interwar period, bringing together the wars for independence and the First World War. Cf. such monuments as those in Corod (near Galați), Români (near Neamț), Ruginești (near Vrancea), Tîrgoviște, Devesel, Vlădeni (Dîmbovița), Ghigoești, Glodeni (1938), Ianca, Vaslui (1934), Liteni (1923), Zimnicea (1930). Attention should also be drawn to cases of really wide continuity, such as the monument in Hălmagiu, which represents a memorial ensemble dedicated to martyrs of the rebellion of 1784, to the heroes of the revolution of 1848-1849 and to the First World War.

- <sup>26</sup> Here I refer basically to the working definition which St. Greenblatt gives of “displacement” – as a “process whereby a prior symbolic structure is compelled to coexist with other centers of attention that do not necessarily conflict with the original structure, but are not swept up in its gravitational pull” (cf. Greenblatt, 1980:230).
- <sup>27</sup> This aspect of post-World War II commemorations deserves a thorough analysis. Communist internationalism found various expressions, but among the most persistent throughout the years was the practice of dedicating special days to heroes and important dead of other socialist countries, those of the Soviet Union being the most numerous, though far from all the cases.
- <sup>28</sup> To a great extent this appears to have been quite different in Ceausescu’s Romania, where national heroes were strongly exalted, at the expense of heroes and special figures of international origin (cf. Verdery 1991; Verdery 1996:42).
- <sup>29</sup> In Eastern Europe mausoleums particularly dedicated to prominent communist leaders were built for Lenin, Dimitrov, and Gottwald. The Dimitrov mausoleum in Sofia was built in 1949 and remained preserved until the changes of 1989, when after long and vigorous debates Dimitrov’s body was taken out of the mausoleum in 1990 and the tomb itself destroyed in 1999 (on Dimitrov’s mausoleum v. Gradev 1992; Vukov 2002). The miraculous appearance of a mausoleum marked the news about Gottwald’s death in 1953, however the Czech communist leader was less lucky as regards staying “untroubled” for long, in so far as, in the 1960s, after a series of demonstrations, his body was expelled from the tomb (Crampton 1997:320). Expulsion was the fate of Stalin’s body, too. Having been exhibited in the Lenin’s mausoleum together with the body of Lenin, Stalin’s remains were swiftly removed from Lenin’s tomb and buried within the Kremlin’s walls. A collective mausoleum to the heroes of 1948 revolution and communist heroes in Romania was built in Parcul Carol (former Parcul Libertății) in Bucharest after the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, in 1965. The Romanian communist mausoleum, still preserved, though closed to visitors, was dedicated to “fighters for the liberation of the people and the fighters for socialism” – Ș. Gheorghiu (1879-1919), I. C. Frimu (1871-1919), Dr. Petru Groza (1884-1858), Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901-1965) (cf. Gheorghescu et al. 1966).
- <sup>30</sup> On the god-building idea in Marxist, socialist and revolutionary thinking v. Tumarkin 1983.
- <sup>31</sup> On mausoleums and funerary architecture, v. Panofski 1964; Cohen 1973; Krautheimer 1975; Ragon 1981; Vovelle 1983; Curl 1980; Ragon 1981:37-49; Curl 2000; Ozouf 1997; Colvin 1991; Davies 2000, etc.
- <sup>32</sup> In Bulgaria, for example, the period from last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1940s witnessed a proliferation in Church-monuments and mausoleum-monuments – temple-monument Alexander Nevski, temple-monument

- Shipka, mausoleum-monument to Al. Batenberg, mausoleum to T. Kableshkov and N. Popstoyanov in Koprivshitsa, mausoleum to Bacho Kiro and Pop Hariton in the Dryanovo monastery, etc. (cf. Trufeshev 1981). The situation in Romania was – immense mausoleums to the fallen in the First World War were built in Braşov, Buzău, Măraşti (1928), Soveja (1929), Tîrgu Ocna (1925-1928), Topliţa (1925), Tulcea, and Valea Mare-Pravăţ. Cf. Tucă & Cociu 1983.
- 33 Examples of communist leaders embalmed and/or exhibited in mausoleums were widespread throughout the communist world, ranging from China and Vietnam to Angola. Cf. Zbarsky and Hutchinson 1999.
- 34 The body, as Jankelevitch points out, is “not only means for the individual for expression and communication, it is also ... the place of the principle of finality and the use of time” (cf. Jankelevitch 1966:407).
- 35 The symbolism of the color of the Lenin mausoleum (as well as of the other mausoleums built for socialist leaders) had special importance. As the symbol of the revolution, the red was the color considered to symbolize struggle for revolution and to inspire feelings of pride in the victory achieved by the people under Lenin’s leadership. Black, as the color of mourning, “expressed convincingly the infinite sorrow with the loss of the favorite leader” (cf. Stoyanov 1950:65). For more about the Lenin mausoleum and the evolving Lenin cult v. Zbarsky 1946; Stoyanov 1950; Tumarkin 1983; Heathcote 1999:50-52; Zbarsky and S. Hutchinson 1999; Dickernan 2001.
- 36 Cf. Dickerman 2001:79.
- 37 Cf., for example, the mythological image of tombs and caves as places of regeneration and mystical rebirths of exemplary heroes (cf. Dragan & Ioan 1996:28).
- 38 Ancestors, as K. Verdery reminds us, were buried in the soil around the dwelling; their presence consecrated that soil, and continuous rituals connecting them with their heirs created a single community consisting of the dead, their heirs, and the soil they shared... The dead were thought to live underground and to require frequent nourishment with food and prayers; in return, they offered their descendants protection (Verdery 1999:104).
- 39 As A. Boime puts it, monuments reconfigure the memory of the past in order to structure the present (Boime 1998:11) and expectations of the future; they create a link with the past, which, in its turn, facilitates a passage into another state and another time (Heathcote 1999:207).

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