

The dead body of the leader as an organizing principle of socialist public space: The mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Sofia

Elitza Stanoeva

IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. XXIX © 2011 by the author

Readers may redistribute this article to other individuals for noncommercial use, provided that the text and this note remain intact. This article may not be reprinted or redistributed for commercial use without prior written permission from the author. If you have any questions about permissions, please contact the IWM.



Historical and spatial frame

On September 9, 1944, a long period of socialist governance in Bulgaria was begun with the overthrow of the government by the left-party coalition, Fatherland Front. In its aftermath, the city center of Sofia was subjected to an intensive reshaping that aimed at recreating, in visual codes, the new ideological identity and political course of the state. The main task that urban planners faced was to erase or, at least, symbolically overshadow the royal emblems of the former, now delegitimized, political regime and to replace them with new urban artifacts in a socialist key, which would facilitate the ritual legitimation of the new power. Within the parameters of subsequent architectural competitions and in proliferating urban planning projects, the “main civil square” was prioritized as the functional and symbolic core of the socialist city.

Though its borders were retailored, the former, palatial square of pre-socialist Sofia became the main civil square of the socialist capital of Bulgaria. During the events that led to the radical shift in the political governance, this square acquired a novel historical meaning: it became the stage of the September coup, whose hotspots were in its immediate vicinity, as well as a tribune from which the victory of the communists was claimed to have been solemnly declared – as portrayed year after year in the socialist mass parades which celebrated the September 9 anniversary:

“On this spot, 17 years ago [in 1944], the red flag of victory fluttered high. And every year on the Ninth of September, the square rapturously counts yet another zealous step along the path of socialist building. As a loyal chronicler, the square remembers every day of our impetuous time. And it will remember them forever!”[2]

Insofar as it was here that the “socialist revolution” in Bulgaria assumed public visibility, the square gained new semantic layers that, in a sense, sacralized its space: it became a point of departure for the Bulgarian project of state socialism to which the square’s new name (as of 1947), the “Ninth of September”, unambiguously referred:

“For each Bulgarian [the square] is *one and only*. And it is not due to some urban-planning decision but *by the logic of historical regularity* that it has become *a symbol of the new day of the nation*. A symbol of the eternal overthrow of the monarchist-fascist dictatorship and of the victory of the pure and sacred republic. [...] For each Bulgarian it is one and only. The one and only square, *coeval of liberty*. Always bright, always clean, always festive, given forever to its lawful masters – the people of labor.”[3]

Through an inversion of the symbolic meaning of the site, the square of the former palace that once celebrated the rebirth of the Bulgarian kingdom was now branded as the birthplace of Bulgarian state socialism. However, the former royal palace, which was the established core of the square, could not be itself so easily situated within the altered symbolic order of the city: as an institution embodying the detested monarchy, it did not succumb to a lasting semantic inversion and stood out as an anachronistic residue of the renounced past amongst the ideologically sanctified space of the socialist square. In the first months of the socialist era, the palace served as a tribune for its heroes: the speeches delivered from the palatial balcony were a pronounced declaration of triumph and, from there, “the day one of the pure and holy republic was heralded”[4] in 1946. Thus, the monarchic décor became a scene of conquest and rejection of the monarchy. That symbolic annihilation of the palace involved physical obliteration as a politically consistent next step. Accordingly, the first postwar master plan of Sofia, drafted in 1945 under the guidance of Lyuben Tonev with the expert assistance of prominent Soviet architects, envisioned the site of the palace taken over by a monumental Town Hall. In the following decades, the numerous architectural competitions for a reconstruction of the city center of Sofia adhered to this concept and focused their designing efforts on the edifice to be constructed on the site of the palace.[5]

In March 1946, a few months before Bulgaria was declared a people’s republic, the fence and the guardhouse of the palace were ceremoniously destroyed and shortly thereafter, “together with the high iron fence around the Palace, the crown on the coat of arms was pulled down forever.”[6] The trees and other vegetation in the royal garden were cut down to open the square and to “allow the easy march of huge parades of the exultant nation in front of its beloved representatives.”[7] In parallel with the pulling down of the “accessories of monarchism,”[8] new symbols of the republic were erected. On September 8, 1946, the day of the referendum on the establishment of a republic, an eight-meter high plaster Statue of the Republic, sitting on a three-meter high pedestal, was installed in the square, its monumental countenance intended to reflect the projected new political status of the country.[9] After the revolutionary fervor at the change of the state system had abated, the statue was removed from the square – two years after its erection.

In anticipation of the final design project for the square, the building of the former palace was put into provisional use as the headquarters of the Council of Ministers. While the palace retained its political functions *formally* and *provisionally*, political propaganda

emphasized the evolution of its political role, in which the very seat of monarchic power had been opened to the broad masses. This public access was interpreted as a triumphant victory of the proletarian revolution in Bulgaria. An example of this ideological discourse can be found in an article depicting the public festivities on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Sofia from Ottoman rule (1878) that was published in *Serdika* magazine, the official organ of the People's Council of Sofia City:

“In the sparkling reception hall where, decade after decade, the German dynasty had conspired plots against the Bulgarian people [...], today we could see the true representatives of the people – the workers. With hands hardened by corns, in rough homespun clothes and shoes with thick rubber soles, the workers felt like masters who held power in their own hands. That reception was indeed popular in the full meaning of the word.”[10]

All the while that the former palace, uncontestedly destined to be demolished, was used as a temporal seat of the new power, Bulgarian architects and urban planners continued to focus their efforts on the task of reconstructing the architectural framework of the Ninth of September Square and creating a new emblematic structure as the symbolic heart of its public dynamics.

The concept of the socialist mausoleum

On July 2, 1949, Georgi Dimitrov, the proclaimed “leader and teacher of the Bulgarian people,”[11] died. At a mournful meeting the following day, the Bulgarian Politburo decided that his body would be embalmed and placed in a mausoleum that then needed to be built within a week. The mausoleum was to be located on the Ninth of September Square, facing the building of the Council of Ministers (that is, the former palace).[12] The task was immediately assigned to the Central Architectural Designing Organization at the Ministry of Construction and Roads. Overnight, the architectural unit elaborated two draft projects for the future building. Following approval of one of these, designed by the architects Georgi Ovcharov and Racho Ribarov, the construction work itself started on July 4 with the shock-work mobilization of 600 laborers and technicians who worked round the clock in four shifts. As a result, the building was completed in a record-breaking 130 hours.[13] At the same time, the body of the deceased leader was mummified through a secret Soviet technique – which had previously only been applied to Lenin's body – and was laid to rest in the mausoleum on July 10 following a two-day funeral procession.

At the time when the mausoleum for the Bulgarian socialist leader was erected, the peculiar architectural genre of the secular sepulcher with a transparent sarcophagus displaying the mummy had only been realized in the prototype of Lenin's Mausoleum in Moscow,[14] built a few days after Lenin's death on January 21, 1924.[15] This first socialist mausoleum, originally constructed in wood as a temporary tomb, and this first socialist mummy, initially embalmed through traditional techniques to postpone the process of decay for a short time, underwent substantial modifications that transformed the last honors to the deceased leader into a long-lasting secularized cult of immortality. Illustrative of this idiosyncratic transformation was the new name given to the institution

in charge of implementation: two months after the construction of the wooden entombment structure, the Funeral Commission was renamed into Commission for the Immortalization of the Memory of V. I. Ulyanov (Lenin)[16] and, with that act, its mission changed from facilitating the funeral ceremony to materializing a living cult. Shortly thereafter, the efforts of the Commission focused on rebuilding the tomb. The new structure, although also of wood, was a step towards the museumification of the dead body of Lenin: whereas the first “temporary mausoleum” was a “sort of shed built of grey-painted wood” with “the body in the middle of the room, lying in its open coffin in a grave three meters deep,”[17] the second one, also temporary, was a “rectangular building surmounted by a low stepped pyramid” with a viewing stand at the front from which the Soviet leaders “could watch the military parades designed to glorify Soviet power.”[18] In parallel with the upgrading of the grave into a mausoleum, a scientific team under the direction of Professor Vorobiev applied an innovative preservation technique on Lenin’s body to avert the natural process of decomposition.[19] In 1929-1930, a permanent mausoleum of stone, marble and granite with the same pyramidal design was completed. Since the mausoleum was introduced, “Lenin’s body, displayed as a holy relic, has been, paradoxically, the most evocative symbol of Lenin’s immortality.”[20]

Thus, the socialist mausoleum was invented as a unique type of institutionalized site of memory. It was neither a monument, nor a sepulcher, nor even a classical mausoleum (where the dead body is concealed from the gaze). In the socialist mausoleum, monumentality was not an artistically mediated visualization; instead, in the mummified body, the signifier and signified fell into a complete symbiosis and, hence, the historical symbol was stripped of its metaphorical symbolism. Rather than “necrophilic” extravagance,[21] the body’s display served the paramount purpose of perpetuating the presence of the leader, which could still therefore be of use as a powerful endorsement of the legitimacy of the present power.

Even though it is not that common as a type of monument, the socialist mausoleum was nevertheless emblematic for the monumental striving of Stalinist architecture as well as for the general ideological climate of the time. Indeed, it was the most acute material expression of the personality cult promoted by Stalin. One of the pillars of Stalin’s self-glorification was his close association with Lenin as a “follower and pupil of Lenin” and as the “embodiment of Lenin and his ideas.”[22] Because of this aspect of the Leninist succession, whereby “in the dual cult the younger figure [of Stalin] emerged as Lenin’s alter ego,”[23] the perpetual revitalization of the cult of Lenin did indeed fuel the legitimacy of Stalin’s regime and the concentration of power in his leadership. This disguised the authoritarian usurping of power as a continuation of an uncontested ideology as it did the usurper, as a mere instrument of a greater doctrinal objective. Yet the quasi-theocratic qualities of this worship of ideology and leadership – merged in the personality of Lenin and, later, by rites of succession, in the personality of Stalin – elevated the leader from being a face of the doctrine into an indispensable person in command.

Being a materialization of the personality cult to the Soviet leader, the Mausoleum of Lenin makes the religious roots of this secularized form of remembrance tangible. Many researchers highlight how various elements of Russian peasants' system of beliefs, which blended Orthodox Christianity and folk superstitions, were directly appropriated in the devising of the personality cult as an "elaborate mystique around the leader." [24] As Tumarkin puts it, "Russian popular religious culture – with its hagiography of saints and demonology of devils and monsters – provided the formative vocabulary of the emerging Lenin myth." [25] Focusing on the internal contradiction of this transfer of symbolic practices, Tucker concludes that "the Lenin cult, whose obvious religious overtones were at variance with the Communist Party's professed secularism, is likewise an example of how Soviet culture came to incorporate certain elements of the Russian past, in this case the ruler cult." [26] In this way, the appropriation of the otherwise repressed spiritual culture of pre-October Revolution Russia included the "low" ritualistic customs of the Russian peasantry as much as the "high" ritual practices of imperial rule.

Within the political culture of state socialism based on the Leninist succession in principles and practices, the homage to the deceased leader created concentric circles of legitimacy in a ripple effect that was felt both across time, in the legitimacy of his successors in power, and across space, in the legitimacy of the adherents to his principles and practices in the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. Similar to Stalin's self-representation as a "follower and pupil of Lenin," the public image of Georgi Dimitrov in Bulgaria drew potency from his proclaimed status of a "loyal disciple and associate" [27] of both Lenin and Stalin. Besides reinforcing legitimacy down the succession line of rulers, the cult also extended the legitimization effect to the collective impersonal agency of power, the Party, since "the cult has sought firmly to root the legitimacy of the leader in the complex of symbol and myth upon which the party itself relies for legitimacy within the society." [28] This second channel of legitimization shows the systemic elements of the personality cult, in contrast to its seemingly random and voluntaristic nature described in explanatory models preoccupied with Stalin's psycho-entropic qualities. As stated in an analysis on Gorbachev's reform policy,

"Stalin's power stemmed not from the drives of his psyche, but from a set of institutions: the monopolistic, monolithic Party operating on the principle of "democratic centralization," or command from the top down, and on the myth of the historical inevitability of socialism. The Party, as an institution, cried out for personification in a Leader." [29]

As the cult of the leader was the symbolic bond between successive rulers, safeguarding their actual power to rule, the mausoleum became the material link between the deceased leaders, signaling their equal right to immortalization. Upon his death in 1953, Stalin's body was embalmed and placed in the mausoleum next to his predecessor as a final grandiloquent gesture within his own cult. It was removed in 1961 during the process of de-Stalinization begun by Khrushchev's Thaw, which took place between the mid-1950s and early 1960s. Yet, even after the official denunciation of the personality cult following the "Secret Speech" of Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1956), the cult of the deceased leader was never completely dissolved. The

most explicit and material trace of the cult – the Mausoleum of Lenin – remained in place, with the body of the pioneer-founder of the first socialist regime on display for public commemoration.[30] Deriving from the cult of Sovietism rather than from the personal megalomania of Stalin, Lenin’s deification was vital to the consolidation of the Soviet political system. As demonstrated by Gill, the “amorphousness of the political arena at the apex of the system”[31] created a deficit of legitimacy in the Soviet Union, which, given that purely political mechanisms for legitimizing the form of government were bypassed or discredited, had to be compensated for by an *apolitical* recognition of authority. In practice, this involved the figure at the top being accepted not as an electable and accountable representative of a legalist system but rather as a messianic leader with powers to authoritatively shape the polity.

On these grounds, as an alternative or supplemental interpretation to that of quasi-religious worship, the immortalization of the deceased leader, as well as the corollary monumentalization of his body, might be analyzed by reference to the concept of charismatic leadership. Tucker’s “functional theory of charisma”[32] is especially applicable, although he does not refer to the mausoleum when citing examples from Soviet political life. Yet, he interprets the “cult of the departed leader” as a way for charisma to endure once the charismatic leader is gone.[33] Thus, the void left by the loss of charismatic leadership does not inevitably transmute into a crisis of the political system behind it. The symbolic presence of the deceased, not to mention his material presence as a mummified body, becomes a guarantor of the continued political course of the regime that the leader had built:

“A regime that derives its legitimacy from a ruler risks instability upon his death. If, however, the ruler is the object of a cult predicated on his immortal power, then the cult can serve as a stabilizing force.”[34]

Thus, the Mausoleum of Lenin was as much an altar to socialist ideology as it was a stabilizing mechanism for the socialist regime in rule. Moreover, the mausoleum as a generic monument became a carrier of political loyalty to Leninism and its replication in other states of the socialist bloc signified their acceptance into the circle of most valued associates of the Soviet Union. Besides Georgi Dimitrov, the leaders who were endowed with the special honor of becoming recipients of the secret Soviet technique of embalment were the Mongolian dictator Khorloogiin Choibalsan in 1952 (although “on orders from the Kremlin” he was not “accorded long-term preservation”[35]), the Czechoslovakian communist leader Klement Gottwald in 1953 (his body was buried only in 1956), the Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh in 1969, the communist president of Angola Agostinho Neto in 1979, the leader of Guyana Linden Forbes Burnham in 1985, and Kim Il Sung of North Korea in 1995.[36]

The mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov: Political and spatial functions

After its speedy completion in 1949, the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Sofia appeared to provide the replacement symbol sought after to transform substantially the scenography of political rituals in the capital of socialist Bulgaria. Propaganda described it

as a “sanctuary for the entire Bulgarian people, for all workers,”[37] and, with its cult-building qualities, it became the symbolic center of Ninth of September Square. Unlike the earlier Statue of the Republic, which was an abstract symbol, the Mausoleum of Dimitrov was a modern pantheon that showcased socialist ideology not allegorically but explicitly; indeed, it visualized the political legitimacy of the regime as embodied not in the *attributes of power* but in the *persons in power*.

The myth-creating force of the mausoleum was twofold: it involved the heroization not only of Georgi Dimitrov, as a personification of Bulgarian socialism, but also of the nameless masses, as an active participant in the historical progress of socialism. Whereas the mausoleum monumentalized the lifework of Dimitrov, the fact that its construction was completed in less than a week was itself interpreted as an expression of the proletarian masses’ dedication to the socialist ideal. Accordingly, the process of building was itself immortalized by the mass media as an epic narrative of the people’s identification with the (people’s) government as a dual process whereby the regime gained both legitimation and gratitude from below:

“The 4th of July. By the afternoon, several hundred heroes of peaceful labor were already digging the foundations of the Mausoleum. But what they have done by midnight got flooded by heavy rain during the night. Waist-deep in rainwater, the workers scooped up water with buckets, working ceaselessly to drain the foundations. The work continued throughout the night. On the morning of July 5, the bricks laid lined up like soldiers, waiting for their turn to get walled inside the holy place that would guard the body of the great deceased from the teeth of time and atmospheric impacts.”[38]

Ultimately, the significance of the mausoleum in the urban topography reflected the significance of Dimitrov in history: it was not merely a place for the lamented leader’s eternal rest but, above all, it was a “monument to the Dimitrov’s era.”[39] That rendered it a variant on the museum of national history as a site of collective memory. Drawing on Boundjoulov’s analysis of the museum as “the place proper of the public space of history,”[40] I extract four basic characteristics of the general category of the national museum: the teleology (i) and holism (ii) of the constructed narrative of the past, and the normativity (iii) and reflexivity (iv) in reading it from the perspective of the present.

First, the teleological aspect is applicable to the museum because there “[the events], which have happened, [are] present [...] as oriented towards one future. [...] [They are] not merely debris of the past but objects that reflect the light of one Goal, one Meaning, one Project.”[41] Thus, through the “thread of *telos*,”[42] the museum constructs and preserves some sense of coherence between the past, on the one hand, and the present and future, on the other. Similarly, the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov represented “Dimitrov’s era” as a coherent historical (and political) reality that predetermined the law-governed unfolding of historical time.

Second, regarding the quality of holism, the museum conserves historical time in a collection of objects that are extracted from their everyday “mode of practical usability” to become “evidence” within the interpretative matrix of the historicized memory of the past. [43] However, inside the mausoleum, what lends consistency to history is not an

exposition of artifacts but the body of the leader itself which, much more than “evidence” of the past seen from the present, is a symbolic witness to, and even an arbitrator of, a future built upon the present. Clearly, there is also an ontological difference between the national museum and the socialist mausoleum: whereas in the museum the exhibited object is extracted from its everyday context and is, in that sense, dead, embalming, quite to the contrary, extracts the dead body out of the context of death and inscribes it in the ritualized everyday of the socialist citizen.

Third, the categorization of the museum in terms of normativity is justifiable due to the “hidden program of civic education, conduct and identity” which the museum embodies. By that, it presents history “rooted in the normative structures of publicness, of the ‘universally accepted contemporary standpoints.’[...] Each and every exhibit, each and every name has come to be included by no random chance but in relation to a certain ‘*must*.’”[44] Yet the socialist mausoleum’s normativity is not abstract or anonymous. There, in the perspective of the present oriented towards the future, the historical truth of socialism assumes the solid form of a “must”; yet, in the perspective of the past oriented towards the present, the historical truth appears also in the form of a possibility, a unique historical chance, *endowed* by Dimitrov. Along these lines, the *telos* of history is a product not only of historical necessity but also of the individual volitional act of the deceased leader.

Fourth, the category of reflexivity applies to the museum insofar as the legibility of the past is mediated through specialized devices such as catalogues, guidebooks, etc.[45] It is in this aspect of reflexivity that the mausoleum most fundamentally differs from the museum. The mausoleum does not invite a distanced gaze into the past but rather an intimate empathy that requires neither specialized knowledge nor special mediators. The presence of history in its immediacy is the most crucial specificity of the socialist mausoleum as a site of institutionalized memory. Inside the mausoleum, the “program of civic education, conduct and identity” is not tacitly encoded but is explicitly imposed. The qualities and deeds sanctioned as “good” are personified in the leader and, in that sense, immediately inspired by his – albeit mummified – presence. Hence, the socialist mausoleum shapes and legitimizes not only a certain reading of the past but also a responsibility for the future. An instance of its power of moral sanction is seen in the Youth’s Oath of Loyalty to the Lifework of Dimitrov which was sworn on the day when his body was laid to rest in the mausoleum:

“In the dearest memory of our wise leader, teacher and father, we swear a sacred youth oath: *Dimitrov’s cause* shall live forever in our hearts. We shall unite the young generation around the *Party of Dimitrov*. With *Dimitrov’s love*, we shall love our beautiful motherland, we shall defend its freedom and independence. [...] We shall serve our heroic people *valiantly and loyally* as *Comrade Dimitrov served it*. We shall strengthen and build the invincible Bulgarian-Soviet friendship *as Comrade Dimitrov taught us*. We shall be staunchly loyal to the great Party of Lenin and Stalin, we shall tenaciously learn from it *as Comrade Dimitrov repeatedly taught us*. [...] We swear that with *Dimitrov’s will and zeal*, with the Communist Party in the lead we shall build a mighty socialist Bulgaria. We swear, Comrade Dimitrov, to cultivate within us *Dimitrov’s*

revolutionary virtues. To grow up as fearless and firm, honest and truthful, brisk and modest, strong and cultured *young Dimitrovists – a new generation worthy of Dimitrov*.”[46]

A similar oath – for the ceaseless pursuit of the model set by the dead leader – was sworn to Lenin on the eve of his funeral by his self-acclaimed successor, Joseph Stalin: he “enumerated Lenin’s ‘commandments’ and swore to fulfill them in the name of the Communist Party.”[47] This form of homage underlined the dual standing of the dead leader as a “recipient of loyalty and bestower of tutelage.”[48]

In addition to its cult-building functions, the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov had a no less important role in the urban rebuilding of Sofia’s center. In spatial terms, the new building altered the symbolic arrangement of the Ninth of September Square: being a stage for parades and celebrations, now the square had its perspective inverted, and, by that, diverted the public gaze from the palace. The mausoleum became the new frontal axis of the square and a special viewing stand for political leaders was provided at the façade which thus redirected the acclamations of the marching masses. Therefore, the mausoleum determined both the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of the square: that is, the plane of demonstrations of popular support and the hierarchical elevation of the guiding leaders, respectively.

Moreover, the mausoleum provided the political regime with a powerful mechanism of symbolic legitimation: behind the present socialist leaders standing on the platform, there lay the dead and at the same time “immortalized” body of the author of the Bulgarian socialist Constitution and, hence, pioneer-founder of Bulgarian state socialism, and this suggested a direct line of succession between them. The physical proximity to the body of the late leader could be alternatively considered within the perspective of dominance rather than succession in the case of a new leader rising to impersonate power and thus striving to crown himself with a twin-cult. Although this interpretation is not justifiable in the Bulgarian case, where no leader contested Dimitrov’s primacy, it certainly might be valid in the Soviet case as an arguable perspective through which we can examine Stalin’s exploitation of the leader cult. As suggested by Bowlt, “for Stalin, there was also the appeal of the ancient ritual of the early dynasties, whereby the aged leader was killed in order to make room for his younger successor. The ‘ritual sacrifice’ of Lenin countenanced the ascension of Stalin, so that Stalin, standing atop the mausoleum, now controlled the dynasty bequeathed to him.”[49]

Through this symbolic emanation of rule, the solidified time of the historical meta-narrative embedded in the mummified leader and, from him, piercing teleologically through to the present and the future as a project, the regime’s *power over* the present and the future was legitimized. The link between actual and mythical leaders was embodied in the mausoleum, whereas the link between the leaders and the people was simulated by the mass parade as a pseudo-expression of popular will.[50] Hence, standing on the viewing platform in front of the resting place of Dimitrov, political leaders gained a double legitimacy: on the one hand, the right to rule was delegated to them by

the workers' masses marching beneath them *through people's (albeit fictitious) vote* ; on the other hand, power was passed on to them by the "leader and teacher" *through historical necessity and continuity*.

At the time that the Ninth of September Square obtained the central landmark of the mausoleum, the former palace, which was converted into a National Art Gallery in 1950 and thus stripped of any residual political connotations, became a blacked-out background for the main square. In the important days of festival parades, the palace, together with the other surrounding buildings, was used as a billboard for political placards and slogans. It was thus transformed from a blacked-out background into a reflective surface. According to the canonical scenography of the public parade, which prescribed the spatial-visual combination of ideological symbols, the façade of the former palace carried the "title" or the "conceptual-thematic definition" of the celebration.[51] Disguised by these imposed ideological messages, the palace lost its own historical meaning – and, in that sense, it was concealed from the public eye. Its metaphysical erasure from public space did not weaken the desire for its destruction but, quite the opposite, simulated the obliteration before the actual fact of obliterating it. In subsequent designs for the city center's reconstruction, the palace was always absent from layout plans for the Ninth of September Square.

In search of architectural solutions for the square and its architectural framework, the bureaucratic machine of the socialist creative competition was set in motion again and again throughout the following decades, producing time after time a series of mutually annulling operations: forming working teams, reworking the plan in consecutive stages, redefining the contest phases as "surveying," "conceptual," "preliminary" and others, and institutionalizing new designers' units.[52] Yet, any proposed solution for the reconstruction of the Ninth of September Square confronted a technical problem that was never satisfactorily resolved. This issue was a variation in the terrain levels of the existing buildings, the result of the elevated location of the palace and its garden, and of the recently erected Mausoleum of Dimitrov and the House of the Party (1954), both designed and constructed in a shock-work fashion ahead of the final plan for the entire central area of the city.

After thirty years of postponed demolition, the fate of the palace was finally and irreversibly decided in 1975, a year which the Council of Europe declared European Architecture Year, thus promoting the preservation of architectural heritage in Europe. The initiated international campaign brought about a change in the values underlying attitudes towards historical sites in Bulgaria. As a result, by Decree 36, dated June 1, 1976, the Council of Ministers "declared the central historical core of Sofia a historical-archeological reserve"[53] and the plan to demolish the palace was abolished. With regard to the socialist treatment of landmarks of the previous regime – which were subjected to ideological delegitimation – what is symptomatic however is not the ultimate preservation of the palace but rather the intention (although unimplemented) to demolish it since it was precisely this intention that guided, for decades, the assimilation of this central topos into the modified symbolic order of the city.

Epilogue

In the post-1989 era, it was not only the utopia of the socialist regime that was dismantled, but also its symbols which had been solidified in concrete and stone. In the former Soviet republics and the Soviet satellites of Central and Eastern Europe, approaches to inherited public monuments varied from ostentatious destruction, to inventive replacement, to artful relocation, to pragmatic reuse and, most notably in Moscow, to uncritical preservation. In Sofia, the utopian spirit crept out of the mausoleum in 1990, when the mortal remains of Georgi Dimitrov were removed and – in fulfillment of the last will of the deceased and the wishes of his family – finally buried. Yet, apparently, the myth invested in the monument remained to haunt the political imagery of the new leadership, which was eager to demonstrate its divorce from the legacy of state socialism. After a decade of improvised temporary reuses of the structure (as a background of the “City of Truth,” a protest camp in 1990, as a billboard of political graffiti, etc.) and creative architectural designs for a transformation of the building’s function and meaning, the fate of the mausoleum was ultimately sealed not through public or expert deliberation but through a political act. In August 1999, the government of Ivan Kostov embarked on the demolition of the mausoleum which, to the joy of those seeking irony in historical parallels and the benefit of mass media headline writers, took six days and numerous detonation blasts to destroy.[54]

This event demonstrates that it is impossible, or at least highly problematic, to reconcile the public memory with the public culture of remembering, as suggested by Forest and Johnson with regard to Lenin’s Mausoleum in Moscow: “The physical separation of the body and the mausoleum may ultimately provide a political compromise whereby Lenin would be reburied, but the mausoleum itself would remain in place.”[55] In a treatment as far removed from the latter compromise as was the annihilation of Georgi Dimitrov’s Mausoleum (although with the essentially opposite effect), Lenin’s Mausoleum in Moscow is preserved, corpse and tomb alike, and is today still open for visits of respect. As was the case with the mausoleum in Sofia, public debates and public opinions notwithstanding, the fate of the mausoleum in Moscow was decided solely by agents of political power.

Cited works

Boundjoulov, Andrey. *Heterotipii* (Heterotopies). Sofia: Critique & Humanism, 1995.

Bowl, John E. “Stalin as Isis and Ra: Socialist Realism and the Art of Design.” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 24 (2002): 35-63.

Damyanova, Neli and Stoyan Mavrodiev. “Golyamata byala zhena : Simvolat se razhda otново” (The large white woman: The symbol is born again). *Sofiya* 4 (1980) : 3-4.

Deyanova, Liliana. “Bitkata za mavzoleya” (The battle for the mausoleum). In *Dokladat na Brodie : Publichno prostranstvo i obshtestveno mnenie* (Brodie ’ s report), 260-268. Sofia : Critique & Humanism, 1992.

Forest, Benjamin and Juliet Jonhson. "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92 (2002): 524-547.

Ganchev, Hristo. *Sofiya – ulitsi i ploshtadi. Planovo i obemno prostranstveno prouchvane* (Sofia – streets and squares. Schematic and tridimensional research). Sofia: Komitet za kulturata, 1983.

Gill, Graeme. "The Soviet Leader Cult: Reflections on the Structure of Leadership in the Soviet Union." *British Journal of Political Science* 10 (1980): 167-186.

Lai, Delin. "Searching for a Modern Chinese Monument: The Design of the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64 (2005): 22-55.

"Mavzoleya" (The mausoleum). *Serdika* 1-2 (1950) : 43- 4 5.

"Mavzoleyat na Georgi Dimitrov" (The mausoleum of Ge o rgi Dimitrov). *Arhitektura* 1 (1950): 4-5.

Minev, Todor. "Ploshtadat" (The square). *Sofiya* 9 (1979): 9-11.

"Postanovlenie 36 na MS ot 1 yuni 1976 g." (Decree 36 of the CM from June 1, 1976). *Darzhaven vestnik* 47 (1976) : 2.

Slavchev, I. "Ploshtadat pomni ..." (The square remembers ...). *Rabotnichesko delo* 251 (9 September 1961) : 3.

Stanoeva, Elitza. "Tsentralniyat gradski ploshtad kato legitimatsionen resurs: Pl. 'Deveti septemvri' v sotsialisticheskiya tsentar na Sofiya" (The Central City Square as a Legitimation Resource: The Main Square of Socialist Sofia). *Critique & Humanism* 33 (2010): 111-138 [English version in *Critique & Humanism* 35, forthcoming].

"Tarzhestveno otpraznuvane na 70 godini osvobodena Sofiya" (Festival celebration of 70 years liberated Sofia). *Serdika* 1-3 (1948) : 9-24 .

Todorova, Maria. "The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as *lieu de memoire*." *The Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006): 377-411.

Tonev, Lyuben. *Ploshtadat. Etyud* (The square. An essay). Sofia : Pechatnitsa na BAN, 1949.

Traurno zasedanie na Plenuma na TsK na SNM, 9.07.1949 (Mournful session of the Plenum of CCPYL, 09/07/1949). Sofia : Narodna mladezh, 1949.

Trufeshev, Nikolay. "Politika i estetika. Praznichnata ukrasa na stolitsata" (Politics and aesthetics. The festal decoration of the capital). *Sofiya* 8 (1979) : 20-22.

Tucker, Robert C. "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership." *Daedalus* 97 (1968): 731-756.

Tucker, Robert C. "The Rise of Stalin's Personality Cult." *The American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 347-366.

Tumarkin, Nina. "Religion, Bolshevism and the Origins of the Lenin Cult." *Russia Review* 40 (1981): 35-46.

Tumarkin, Nina. "Political Ritual and the Cult of Lenin." *Human Rights Quarterly* 5 (1983): 203-206.

Yokimov, Petar. "Za sgradata na Natsionalnata hudozhestvena galeriya" (About the building of the National Art Gallery). *Sofiya* 3 (1979) : 22- 23.

Z. "To the Stalin Mausoleum." *Daedalus* 119, no. 1 (1990): 295-344.

Notes:

1. This paper is a short version of one of the chapters of my on-going dissertation entitled *Discipline Architecture and Monumental Body: The Socialist Concept of a City Center, Sofia (1944-1989)*. I am grateful to Ivan Krastev, who was the commentator of my paper during its conference presentation, and to my colleagues and friends from the IWM for all the feedback and valuable discussions. Special thanks to Ekaterina Popova, Lois Lee and Ahmet Selim Tekelioglu for their style-related improvement suggestions.

2. I. Slavchev, "Ploshtadat pomni ..." (The square remembers...), *Rabotnichesko delo* 251 (9 September 1961), 3.

3. Todor Minev, "Ploshtadat" (The square), *Sofiya* 9 (1979) : 9, 11 (*italics* – added, E. S.).

4. Petar Yokimov, "Za sgradata na Natsionalnata hudozhestvena galeriya" (About the building of the National Art Gallery), *Sofiya* 3 (1979): 23.

5. For a detailed overview of those projects, see Elitza Stanoeva, "Tsentrlniyat gradski ploshtad kato legitimatsionen resurs: Pl. "Deveti septemvri" v sotsialisticheskiya tsentar na Sofiya" (The Central City Square as a Legitimation Resource: The Main Square of Socialist Sofia), *Critique & Humanism* 33 (2010): 111-138.

6. Minev, 11.

7. Lyuben Tonev, *Ploshtadat. Etyud* (The square. An essay), (Sofia: Pechatnitsa na BAN, 1949), 85.

8. Hristo Ganchev, *Sofiya – ulitsi i ploshtadi. Planovo i obemno prostranstveno prouchvane* (Sofia – streets and squares. Schematic and tridimensional research), (Sofia: Komitet za kulturata, 1983), 32.

9. Neli Damyanova and Stoyan Mavrodiev, "Golyamata byala zhena: Simvolat se razhda otново" (The large white woman: The symbol is born again), *Sofiya* 4 (1980): 3-4.

10. “Tarzhestveno otpraznuvane na 70 godini osvobodena Sofiya” (Festival celebration of 70 years liberated Sofia), *Serdika* 1-3 (1948): 16.

11. General Secretary of the Comintern from 1934 until its dissolution in 1943, Dimitrov was the most prominent member of the Bulgarian antifascist movement, known worldwide for the trial against him on the accusation of setting the Reichstag in Berlin on fire. He was the first prime minister of socialist Bulgaria after it was declared a people’s republic. He was the main author of the republican constitution of the country, adopted on December 5, 1947, and thereafter known as Dimitrov’s Constitution.

12. “Mavzoleyat na Georgi Dimitrov” (The mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov), *Arhitektura* 1 (1950): 4.

13. Ibid., 4.

14. In the period 1925-1931, another socialist mausoleum was built, the one of Sun Yat-sen, the first provisional president of the Republic of China, who had himself left instructions that “his remains be preserved in the manner of Vladimir I. Lenin’s.” Delin Lai, “Searching for a Modern Chinese Monument: The Design of the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64 (2005): 24. However, the body of the Chinese leader was not permanently exposed on display “due to the poor quality of the coffin provided by the Soviet government, which was made of glass and tin rather than the crystal and bronze used for Lenin.” Ibid., 24. The Soviet government never shared the highly protected secrecy of the embalming procedure with the Chinese, refusing their later request of mummifying the body of Mao Zedong upon his death in 1976. As a result, the know-how for the creation of Mao Mausoleum at Tiananmen Square in Beijing was supposedly imported from Vietnam where, with the permission of Soviet authorities, the secret technology was applied by Soviet specialists on the body of Ho Chi Minh a few years earlier.

15. According to one of Lenin’s biographers, N. V. Valentinov-Volsky, the embalming of Lenin’s body was discussed even prior to his death: a few months earlier, in light of his aggravating health condition, Stalin is said to have summoned a secret meeting of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the USSR and, in the presence of six of its eleven members, to have promoted the idea of embalming Lenin with the objective of “preserving his body for a considerable time, long enough at least for us to grow used to the idea of his being no longer among us.” Cit. in Ilya Zbarsky and Samuel Hutchinson, *Lenin’s Embalmers* (London: The Harvill Press, 1998), 9-11.

16. Nina Tumarkin, “Religion, Bolshevism and the Origins of the Lenin Cult,” *Russia Review* 40 (1981): 40.

17. Zbarsky and Hutchinson, 19.

18. Ibid., 86.

19. Ibid., 21-31.

20. Tumarkin, “Religion, Bolshevism and the Origins of the Lenin Cult,” 37.

21. The necrophilic qualification is a repeated motif in the civic debates on the socialist mausoleums in post-socialist times. Ilya Zbarsky, who himself was a member of the embalming team at the laboratory at Lenin’s Mausoleum from 1934 until 1952, speaks of his work as necromancy and sacrilege. Zbarsky and Hutchinson, 76.

22. Graeme Gill, “The Soviet Leader Cult: Reflections on the Structure of Leadership in the Soviet Union,” *British Journal of Political Science* 10 (1980): 168.

23. Robert C. Tucker, “The Rise of Stalin’s Personality Cult,” *The American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 364.

24. Gill, 167.

25. Nina Tumarkin, “Political Ritual and the Cult of Lenin,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 5 (1983): 204.

26. Tucker, “The Rise of Stalin’s Personality Cult,” 347.

27. *Traurno zasedanie na Plenuma na TsK na SNM, 9.07.1949* (Mournful session of the Plenum of CCPYL, 09/07/1949), (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1949), 23.

28. Gill, 175.

29. Z, “To the Stalin Mausoleum,” *Daedalus* 119, no. 1 (1990): 309.

30. The body of Lenin left his mausoleum only temporarily immediately after Operation Barbarossa due to the possible threat to it posed by the invading German army. According to Zbarsky and Hutchinson, in the emergency situation of Germany turning from an ally into an enemy, one of the first decisions of the Politburo, made on June 26, 1941, regarded the transfer of Lenin’s body from Moscow to a small town far away from the potential targets of air raids. Zbarsky and Hutchinson, 118. The mummy was returned to the mausoleum in Moscow in March 1945. This episode highlights the significance of the dead body of the leader, being a politically loaded relic of prime importance, as a strategic target in a war-time context. During the Vietnam War, the preserved body of Ho Chi Minh, who died in 1969, was a sacred object of similar treatment: it was removed into a secret laboratory in the jungle under increased guard. As one of the Soviet members of the embalming team retells, “Ho’s body was regarded as sacred, and they [North Vietnamese generals] knew that its capture or destruction would deal a fatal blow to the morale of their troops. ‘If the Yankees ever did get hold of it,’ a general on the base told us one day, ‘we’d be prepared to hand over all our American prisoners in exchange for it.’” Cit. *ibid.*, 184-185.

31. Gill, 175.

32. Robert C. Tucker, “The Theory of Charismatic Leadership,” *Daedalus* 97 (1968): 734.

33. *Ibid.*, 754.

34. Tumarkin, "Political Ritual and the Cult of Lenin," 205.
35. Zbarsky and Hutchinson, 179.
36. Ibid., 180-204.
37. "Mavzoleya" (The mausoleum), *Serdika* 1-2 (1950): 45.
38. Ibid., 44.
39. Ibid., 44.
40. Andrey Boundjoulov, *Heterotipii* (Heterotopies), (Sofia: Critique & Humanism, 1995), 139.
41. Ibid., 146.
42. Ibid., 142.
43. Ibid., 140.
44. Ibid., 144-146.
45. Ibid., 144.
46. *Traurno zasedanie na Plenuma na TsK na SNM, 9.07.1949, 22-23* (*italics – added, E. S.*).
47. Tumarkin, "Religion, Bolshevism and the Origins of the Lenin Cult," 38.
48. Lai, 41.
49. John E. Bowlt, "Stalin as Isis and Ra: Socialist Realism and the Art of Design," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 24 (2002): 62.
50. On the celebration parades on the Ninth of September Square, see Stanoeva, "Tsentralniyat gradski ploshtad kato legitimatsionen resurs," 121-122.
51. Nikolay Trufeshev, "Politika i estetika. Praznichnata ukrasa na stolitsata" (Politics and aesthetics. The festal decoration of the capital), *Sofiya* 8 (1979): 20.
52. For a more detailed expose, see Stanoeva, "Tsentralniyat gradski ploshtad kato legitimatsionen resurs," 128-133.
53. "Postanovlenie 36 na MS ot 1 yuni 1976 g." (Decree 36 of the CM from June 1, 1976), *Darzhaven vestnik* 47 (1976): 2.
54. For an analysis of this event, see Maria Todorova, "The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as *lieu de memoire*," *The Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006): 377-411. For an overview of the early debates on the fate of the mausoleum, see Liliana Deyanova,

“Bitkata za mavzoleya” (The battle for the mausoleum), in *Dokladat na Brodie: Publichno prostranstvo i obshtestveno mnenie* (Brodie’s report), (Sofia: Critique & Humanism, 1992).

55. Benjamin Forest and Juliet Jonhson, “Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92 (2002): 534.

Preferred citation: Stanoeva, Elitza. 2011. The dead body of the leader as an organizing principle of socialist public space : The mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Sofia. In: *Modernities Revisited*, ed. M. Behrensen, L. Lee and A. S. Tekelioglu, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conference Proceedings, Vol. 29.