The "Unmemorable" and the "Unforgettable"

"Museumizing" the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria

NIKOLAI VUKOV

About 60 km from Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, lies a small town which currently represents the primary case of what can be described as a "museum of Socialism in the country." The town has nothing that can be compared to Budapest's Statue Park, nor is it a place where the heritage of the socialist period is put on display, decontextualized and recontextualized in a post-socialist mode. It would be wrong to suggest that the town was once the location of a labor camp or a prison for the socialist regime's opponents. The town is not, or at least not directly, related to people and families who were persecuted by the regime; it is not a place where political opponents were executed after the socialists came to power, nor is it a place where demonstrations were held by dissidents. However, both before and after the fall of the socialist system, the town has been known to every Bulgarian and its name has become an emblem that one can hardly dissociate from those times. The special feature of this town, which until 1980s was only a village, is that it was the birthplace of the man who from the mid-1950s until the end of the regime in 1989 was the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the Head of State of the People's Republic of Bulgaria: Todor Zhivkov.[1] An important detail, one would say, especially bearing in mind the old joke from the last years of Communism, that while Marx had the idea of Communism being victorious in a well-developed capitalist country, Lenin attempted to realize it in an underdeveloped one, Honecker in a divided country, Ceauşescu in one family, and Zhivkov in his own birthplace: Pravets. Joking apart, if there was one place in Bulgaria where most of the socialist dreams were largely realized, it was in Pravets. There is no need to list the many benefits that the social-

[1] With Decree no. 2190 of the State Council of the People's Republic of Bulgaria of 16 October 1981. Pravets was declared a town and in the same year a History Museum was created in it.

ist regime showered on the village, the most conspicuous being that a university was actually built there in the period—to the envy of many larger towns. But the benefits were by no means only educational and the citizens of Pravets have innumerable reasons for feeling nostalgic about the socialist era.

The purpose of starting the present chapter with this example is not to pay tribute to the efforts made to establish Communism in at least one town in Bulgaria, but rather to point out that this town's decision to re-open the previous museum exhibition devoted to the socialist leader is in fact the main example of a "museum of Socialism" being initiated in Bulgaria.[2] Other projects for museums have existed; indeed there are numerous examples of such initiatives; but none of them were ever realized. Already in the first years after 1989, when many socialist monuments (mostly those to socialist leaders) fell from their pedestals, there were suggestions about gathering them in a museum exhibition.[3] During the intensive debates about the fate of the Soviet army monuments in the largest Bulgarian cities, ideas about their possible preservation were voiced, but on condition that a museum of Communism would be created nearby.[4] After the edifice which served as a monument of the Party (a huge construction on the mountain peak of Buzludja) lost its function, there were suggestions that the grand building should be used for a museum of the recent past.[5] None of these ideas bore fruit, largely because of the polemics that they provoked, the scarcity of funds, and the lack of a real will to carry out such projects. Monuments to the victims of communism and to those oppressed by the totalitarian regime were raised in many towns in the mid-1990s,[6] but, apart from the texts on memorial plaques and inscriptions, historical information or museum exhibits seldom accompanied them. The major (and for a while, the most plausible) option for the creation of such a museum was the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Sofia, a large building which could have housed a museum display inside, in place of Dimitrov's body, or could even have preserved the body as an exhibition object.[7] But, in 1999, as is frequently reported in presentations on Bulgaria's post-socialist transition, the mausoleum was blown up and a flower garden laid out in its place.[8]

[2] The museum of the communist leader (including the house of his birth and an exhibition building dedicated to his achievements) was established soon after Pravets had received the status of a town. The museum was a regular destination for visits until the end of the communist rule in Bulgaria. Soon after the political changes of 1989, the museum was closed, to be reopened again in the 1990s at the initiative of the local community to commemorate Todor Zhivkov as a major figure in national and local history.

[3] Ideas for creating museums of communist statues were raised in relation to Sofia, Plovdiv, Dimitrovgrad, and Montana, but no real steps were taken towards putting these ideas into practice. About the theoretical implications of the museumization of socialist monuments see Svetlana Boym, "Totalitarian Sculpture Garden: History as a Pastoral" in her *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 83–108; Beverley James, "Fencing in the Past: Budapest's Statue Park Museum," *Media, Culture and Society* 21 (1999): 291–311; Nikolai Vukov, "Monuments beyond the Representations of Power: Monuments of the Socialist Past in post-1989 Bulgaria" in Arnold Bartetzky, Marina Dmitrieva, Stefan Troebst (eds.), *Neue Staaten—neue Bilder? Visuelle Kultur im Dienst staatlicher Selbstdarstellung in Zentral- und Osteuropa seit 1918* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 211–9.

[4] Such was the case with the monument to the Soviet army in the center of the Bulgarian capital. In the whirlpool of discussions about its destruction or preservation, in 1993 the government proposed a project (unaccomplished, however) for creating a museum of totalitarian art in the spacious area around it, Todor Varchev, "Kabinetat podlozhi demontazha na pametnika" [The cabinet postponed for a while the dismantlement of the monument], *Express* 7 (4 May 1993).

[5] Thus, for example, the municipality in Haskovo intended to open a museum of totalitarian art on the peak to collect busts, monuments, pictures, and brochures from the entire country, as well as to reinstall the destroyed mosaics with the images of socialist rulers that existed in the edifice. About the media announcements of this project, see *24 chasa* 14 (18 January 1993); *Duma* 132 (8 June 1995); *Duma* 138 (15 June 1995). More about the Buzludja monument and its fate after 1989, see in Nikolai Vukov, "Les metamorphoses du corps de la pouvoire: le Buzludja maison-monument de la Partie," *La Nouvelle Alternative* (Numéro special "Politiques symboliques en Europe Centrale") 20 (October–December 2005): 183–8.

[6] Taken up by the raising of commemorative signs to the so-called "Revival process" of the mid-1980s, when the communist state organized a campaign to forcibly rename Bulgarian Muslims, the process also involved erecting monuments and memorial plaques at former labor camps and at sites where the victims of the regime were persecuted and murdered. By the end of the 1990s collective monuments to the victims of communist repression had been built in most large towns in Bulgaria.

[7] On July 18, 1990, 41 years after being placed on public display, Dimitrov's body was removed from the mausoleum and cremated. The decision was taken after a series of public calls for the proper burial of Dimitrov as an act that would symbolize the end of one-party rule in Bulgaria. With the removal of the body the empty sepulcher became the focus of various projects for its reutilization, some of which included installing a museum of the history of Socialism in Bulgaria, establishing a gallery of modern art, or housing a section of the National Museum in it. About the various transformations of Dimitrov's mausoleum see Lilyana Deyanova, "The Battles for the Mausoleum: Traumatic Places of Collective Memory" in Jacques Coenen-Huther (ed.), *Bulgaria at the Crossroads* (New York: Nova Science, 1997); Vladimir Gradev, "Le Mausolée de Dimitrov," *Communications* 55 (1992): 77–88.

[8] In 1999, the government of the Union of Democratic Forces took the decision to destroy the mausoleum and to reconstitute the former royal garden that existed before its con-

Thus, in spite of several random attempts on a regional level, the "most modern" period of Bulgarian history failed to find presentation and interpretation in a museum and remains, even in historical museums with a more general profile, a relatively "blank" period. Several short-term exhibitions have appeared in some regional museums,[9] but they have not been systematically carried out and cannot be considered as serious attempts to investigate the issue. Novel historical materials on the socialist period have been produced and new emphases in the public discourse about the past have developed, but they have not been embodied in any museum exhibition. So far, the town of Pravets is the prime example of a community that has united its efforts to open a museum reflecting on the socialist past (Fig. 1, Fig. 2), and it seems that this situation is unlikely to change in the near future. The current article approaches this characteristic situation of museum displays in Bulgaria after 1989, when the earlier network of meanings and discourses has been dissolved and new ones have not gained sufficient justification to embody post-socialist visions of history in museum narratives. Throwing light on the reshaped nature of socialist museum displays after 1989 in Bulgaria and on the emergence of new topics and events in the modern history of the country, I will discuss the new concepts applied to the construction of historical legacies and the discourse of "difficulty" surrounding historical representations in a post-socialist mode.

Before approaching the problem of the shift away from committed museum practice in the post-socialist era, an explanation of the interpretative distinction offered in the title of this chapter is needed. While exploited in both the classical and the modern traditions, the opposition between memory and forgetting is one that frequently ignores a third component in the processes related to memory: the "unmemorable."[10] The latter does not

struction. The decision was enacted in a swift and uncompromising way and within days no trace remained of the huge building. About the fate of the mausoleum and the memory after its disappearance, see Maria Todorova, "The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as *lieu de mémoire*," *The Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006): 377–411; Nikolai Vukov, "The Destruction of Georgi Dimitrov's Mausoleum in Sofia: The "Incoincidence" between Memory and Its Referents," *Octogon* 10 (2003).

[9] For example, Tinka Bozova, Zlatka Antova, "Vruzkite na savremennia muzei s jivota" [The links of the contemporary museum with life] in Krassimira Cholakova (ed.), *Moderniat muzei—modeli za adaptacia* (Veliko Tarnovo, 2004), 144.

[10] On the theoretical elaboration of the relationship between memory and forgetting, see Aleida Assmann, Dietrich Harth, *Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991); Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990);

designate things that memory cannot hold and has relegated to the realm of forgetting, but rather things that are not "worthy" of remembrance and that, although remembered, never enter the realm of representation. The "unmemorable" refers to experiences that are well-known and can be revived by an act of recollection, but are generally not treated in that way.

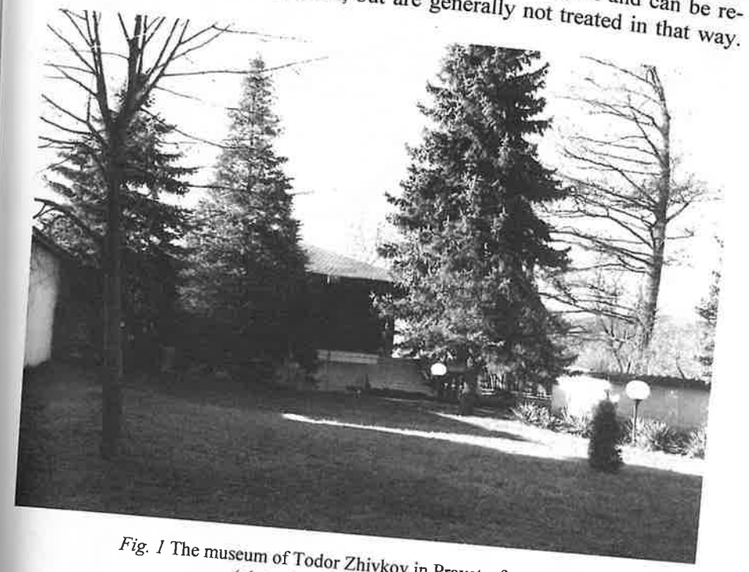

Fig. 1 The museum of Todor Zhivkov in Pravets, front view (photo: Nikolai Vukov, 2007)

Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millenium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1994); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Attention to memory traces that do not enter the realm of representation can be found in the abundant literature on traumatic memory. For example, Paul Antze, Michael Lambek (eds.), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1966); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); K. Hodgkin, S. Radstone (eds.), *The Politics of Memory: Contested Pasts* (London: Routledge, 2003). Taking a different course, in this chapter I direct my attention to realms of memory that are not necessarily associated with trauma, but that remain unrepresented and "unremembered" rather because of the complex intertwining of nostalgia, uncertainty about the grounds of interpretation, and the attitude to what is "unworthy" to be remembered.

Fig. 2 The monument to Todor Zhivkov in front of the museum in his honor in Pravets (photo: Nikolai Vukov, 2007)

They are not forgotten, but on the contrary they can sometimes be remembered much better than anything else that the storehouse of memory preserves. They are retained in the memory but are prevented from being displayed; well-known and shared by many individuals at the same time, but wrapped in silence; present in the mind, but hidden from view; they

have undeniable presence but are denied materialization. The factors and conditions that lead to this field of memory being held "in reserve" can be diverse and can result from different psychological processes and narrative constraints. Among them, a central criterion for understanding the nature of the "unmemorable" is "worthiness," which determines that certain acts or events should neither reach the level of expression, nor be entirely omitted from the realm of memory. The "worthiness" of certain events (and the "unworthiness" of others) serves to legitimize the logic of hiding certain remembered things from view, and is susceptible to such legitimation due to its highly selective and discriminative character.

What is probably more important to emphasize here is that the "unmemorable" is a fighting ground not so much between memory and forgetting (because, I insist, it needs to be considered as a separate category), but rather between memory and representation, thus constituting the "limits of representation" that historians such as Saul Friedlander have tried to probe.[11] It is therefore the nature of the "unmemorable" that, in my view, is especially applicable in approaching the issue of museum representations of recent history in post-socialist Bulgaria—as a concept that denotes things that are not subject to forgetting but face restraints in representation, that are stored in the mind but not employed in narratives, that are preserved as memory traces but not embodied in materialized forms. To approach the logic of this case of simultaneous remembering and forgetting in a post-socialist context, it may prove useful to revisit the history of museums in socialist times.

Museums and Memory in Socialist Bulgaria

As early as the first years after the establishment of the socialist regime in Bulgaria, decisive steps were taken to reorganize the historical museums and to create special departments dedicated to the socialist and revolutionary movement in the country. The first indicative example was the National Museum of the Revolutionary Movement, built after a decision of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) in 1948. It was preceded in 1947 by a National Exhibition of the Resistance in Sofia, which brought together materials about the antifascist struggle of the working people of the entire country. This exhibition served as a basis

[11] Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

for the museum, which was opened on 23 September 1950. It held over 3,000 photos, objects, weapons, documents, maps and works of art that recreated "the struggle of the working people under the guidance of the BKP against Capitalism and Fascism."[12] During the 1950s and 1960s several branches of this museum were opened in regional museums in the larger towns of the country (Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, etc.).[13] Several of the former prisons where Communists were detained and tortured were turned into museums.[14] The art galleries that were opened at the time (Plovdiv, 1952; Varna, 1950) also directed much of their activity to exhibitions on the topic of the resistance movement. Furthermore, in that period, many "house museums" dedicated to prominent leaders of the socialist and resistance movements were created in the places where they were born or lived. In Sofia alone, such museums were established to Dimitar Blagoev, the founder of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, to the prominent leader of the international socialist movement, Georgi Dimitrov, to Dimitrov's main collaborator in the socialist movement, Vassil Kolarov, and to many less prominent figures from the history of the Party.[15] Special museums were created in Mihailovgrad—to the 1923 September uprising (1953), and in Dimitrovgrad—to socialist construction (1954). Another addition to the development of museums was the creation of the National Museum of Bulgarian–Soviet Friendship (opened in 1958), which also provided a pattern for similar units in regional museums elsewhere in the country.

[12] Mihail Raichev, *Muzei, starini, pametnitsi v Bulgaria* [Museums, antiquities and monuments in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1981), 16.

[13] In Plovdiv, the Museum of the History of Capitalism, the Workers' Revolutionary Movement and Socialist Construction was built in 1948 and opened to visitors in 1954. In Pernik, the Regional Historical Museum was created in 1952 as a specialized museum about mining work in the region, but both its first exhibition in 1957 and its subsequent function defined it as a "museum of the revolutionary movement in the region." A notable detail is that the exhibition ended with an original pantheon—a photographic installation of images of local heroes who died in the struggles for national and social liberation.

[14] In Burgas, for example, the island of "Bolshevik" (former "St. Anastasia"), previously a camp for political prisoners, was turned into a permanent exhibition about the revolutionary struggles in the region. In Veliko Tarnovo a special prison museum was created at the place where Communists and resistance fighters had been held prisoners.

[15] Such museums were also built and dedicated to Georgi Kirkov (a prominent journalist and socialist tribune), Alexander Stamboliyski (a leader of the Bulgarian Agricultural Union and Prime Minister after World War I, murdered in the June 1923 uprising), Nikolai Hrelkov, Hristo Smirnenski, and Nikola Vaprsarov—poets with unconcealed sympathies for socialist ideas.

At the beginning of the 1960s, in line with enhanced attempts to trace the local roots of the antifascist and resistance movements, many "house-museums" to partisans and fighters were opened in towns throughout the country, and a series of "hut-monuments" (tourist complexes with museum displays dedicated to partisan troops) established along the tourist routes in the mountains. In addition the Culture Houses (*chitalishta*)–characteristic establishments dating back to the nineteenth-century Revival period which exist in almost all towns and villages in Bulgaria–played the role of housing museum exhibitions wherever regional museums or specially developed venues were not available. What is more, all the regional museums made efforts to develop memorial sites related to the history of the revolutionary movement, which they used as branches of their museum activities. Thus, for example, following a decision by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the BKP, the "Garrison Shooting Ground" Memorial, where many political prisoners were executed in the early 1940s, was turned into a department of the Museum of Sofia in 1969.

Although the pace of these developments varied in different parts of the country, by the late 1960s the majority of museums dedicated to the socialist and revolutionary movement had been created and their status and functions were firmly outlined. They were institutions financed by the state, with a fixed structure and two levels of governance: one involving museum specialists and the other (often more important) of Party secretaries affiliated with these institutions. This structure applied to most museums in the country, whose number was estimated in the 1980s at about 200.[16] The characteristic mode of shared governance had a significant impact on the procedures leading to opening a museum exhibition and on the very nature of museum display itself. The rules demanded that every exhibition or permanent display relating to modern history must be approved by the Regional Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. As a result, museum departments dedicated to "Modern" and "Contemporary" History were labeled "Workers and the Revolutionary Movement" and "Socialist Construction," and they interpreted history in the light of the Communist Party's ideology.

The permanent exhibition was the obligatory core of museum displays at the time, and its structure also followed a specific pattern. Thematic museums were not popular, because they were considered as a result of

[16] Mihail Raichev, *Muzei, starini, pametnitsi v Bulgaria*, 5.

bourgeois, Western and decadent thought.[17] With the exception of those dedicated to individual figures or events of national history, museums generally had to present history chronologically from antiquity up to the present time. Thus, no matter what possible variations might appear on a regional basis, or depending on the chosen focus of an exhibition, they would all have rather similar, or even identical, structures. All had to go back as far as possible to traces of antiquity and, more importantly, all had to include substantial sections dedicated to the antifascist resistance and to socialist construction in the country. The exhibitions strictly followed the Party doctrine and were synchronized with the political holidays in the calendar—the October Revolution, the Anniversaries of the Socialist Victory, the Days of Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship, and so on. In the majority of cases they were standard photographic exhibitions with an emphasis on their documentary value and clear propaganda overtones. Exhibitions with a more historical (rather than ideological) profile, dedicated for example to the local historical and cultural characteristics of towns and regions, were generally an exception.

The guidelines that each museum was supposed to follow were determined on the one hand by the ideological vision of "the progressive development from prehistoric times until the socialist victory," and on the other hand along the axes of the "national history" paradigm, which attributed a relatively firm set of points around which "museumized" historical narratives could evolve. While largely ignored during the first two decades after the establishment of the socialist order, in the late 1960s and 1970s national history regained its proper place for historical investigation and representation, largely thanks to the possibilities that it provided for the ideology to "recover its roots" far back in the past.[18] Apart from revealing the glory of the Medieval Bulgarian Kingdoms, the Middle Ages, for example, provided a useful occasion to remind people of the social rebellions that were predecessors to the socialist revolution. The nation-building struggles and the nineteenth-century revolutionaries against Ottoman domination were shown as prefiguring the antifascist struggle, and the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–78 was interpreted as a model on

[17] Bozova-Antova, "Vruzkite na savremennia muzei s jivota," 144.

[18] On the main lines of interpreting national history in Bulgaria before and after 1989, see Nikolai Vukov, "Representing the Nation's Past: National History Monuments in Socialist and Post-Socialist Bulgaria" in Seventh Annual Kokkalis Program Graduate Student Workshop, Harvard, 2005. Available at www.ksg.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW7/Nikolai%20Voukov%20_paper_.pdf (accessed 20 November, 2006).

which the "second liberation" of the country would take place in 1944. Thus, while in the first years after the socialists came to power the museums of the revolutionary movement were among the most important conditions for the ideology's self-legitimation, in the decades that followed they became instruments for reshaping the entire context of the production and narration of history. They not only radicalized the historicization and propagation of the ideology's own history, but also reworked the retrospective historical visualizations of previous centuries. Tracing historical identities back to times immemorial, they also succeeded in reshaping the entire image of the past—not only in terms of concrete visualizations, but also as a settled and "permanent" display of "indisputable" events and characters.

An important issue in this respect concerns the activities in which museums and museum workers were involved at the time, and how the "appeal" of these exhibitions was sustained despite the expected danger of boredom with the redundant narrative. A good illustration of such activities is provided by the yearly meetings of museum specialists that were held in the 1970s and 1980s. The content of the publications that resulted from such meetings did not differ much, as the reports generally stressed the important role of museums in "popularizing and propagating the history of the revolutionary movement and the victorious march of the Bulgarian people along the road of Socialism." They were all guided by the belief in "mass-political work, which gives an enormous opportunity to contribute to the class-party and the patriotic and international education of the working people and youth."[19] What is especially impressive in such reports is the experiences that people shared through the abundant museum activities at the time: "Every day in the halls of the National Museum of the Revolutionary Movement there are overviews and thematic lectures, mass cultural activities: meetings with veterans, participants in the revolutionary struggles and in the war, with excellent production workers and prominent representatives of literature and art, with outstanding party and social activists; party and Komsomol membership cards are distributed, there are seminars, conferences, solemn meetings, pioneers' clubs, etc."[20] The museums were special places for carrying out

[19] Tania Burova, "Masovo-politicheskata rabota na Natsionalnia Muzei na Revoliutsionnoto Dvijenie s trudovite kolektivi" [The mass-political work of national museum of revolutionary movement with working collectives] in *Problemi na kulturno-masovata rabota na muzeite s trudovite kolektivi* (Sofia, 1986), 17.

[20] Ibid., 17.

political education and for organizing political rituals: "Often in the halls of the museum and in the "Workers' club" department membership cards were distributed. In the period of four years about 2,000 young Communists and 4,000 Komsomol members were admitted in the department."[21] An interesting area of museum work was the organization of various sporting activities, such as the annual "Marathon for Freedom," dedicated to the 9th September socialist revolution.

Certain forms of museum activity went far beyond the walls of the museums. A widespread idea was that of displaying museum materials (personal belongings of socialists and antifascists, documents, photos) in specially arranged windows in schools, enterprises and institutions, or in central locations of the city. In a new approach, the activities of the museums took place among the collectives, the territory of the workers' enterprises. In 1985, eighteen such activities were organized in the Kremikovtzi steel production plant, half of them related to the rituals of giving names to eleven workers' brigades in the plant. A specially prepared window displayed the personal belongings of the heroes the brigades were named after.[22] In less than two years, in 1984–85, ten thematic exhibitions and about twenty museum windows were arranged in the plant, which was one of the largest in the country at the time: "Behind the bars of the fascist prisons," "The beginning [of the antifascist struggle])," "Partisan everyday life," "Parachutists and submariners," "Bulgarians who took part in the Great Patriotic War of the USSR," "Relics from the collection of National Museum of the Revolutionary Movement," and so on. The materials in the "Partisan everyday life" exhibition included 100 objects and over 200 "Relics from the collection of the National Museum of the Revolutinary Movement." Five exhibitions were mounted in the Trade Union House of Culture in the plant, and five directly along the production lines.[23] In 1984 the number of complex mass-political activities organized in or outside the halls of the Museum of the Revolutionary Movement in Sofia reached 490. In the first half of 1985 an activity involving a working collective took place in the museum almost every hour. The lecturing activity of museum workers in plants and factories was also impressive. As reported, in three years the regional historical museum in the town of Pernik held 1,292 thematic talks and lectures, often accompanied by exhibitions.

[21] Ibid., 18.
[22] Ibid., 18.
[23] Ibid.. 21.

The radical way in which this mass-political work was carried out by museums in the last two decades of the regime comes as no surprise. It was clearly defined in documents as a necessary step to be taken in order to increase the people's awareness of the rich historical traditions of the Communist Party and of all working people. As one museum specialist admits, "Many of the work collectives did not want to visit the museum just to attend a lecture. That is why we had to find the most suitable form of mass culture work with them. In this respect we were greatly helped by the contracts signed in 1981 for joint activities with enterprises, institutes, institutions, departments of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education, teachers' collectives, etc."[24] In order to fulfill the terms of these contracts the museum specialists had to provide these various enterprises and institutions with regular exhibitions, photographic displays, and other visual materials related to important dates and events. If the institutions specially requested it (and it seemed that they did, since they were guided in these requests by party secretaries, Komsomol, and social organizations), museums facilitated them in organizing and carrying out festive meetings and conversations with veterans, as well as many other activities related to anniversaries and special days. Convenient occasions for this fell 100 years after the birth of Dimitrov, 60 years after the creation of the USSR, 65 years after the October Revolution, 40 years after the victory over Fascism, and so on. An especially "interesting" form of project with working collectives were the complex activities named "Veterans narrate." These were considered "appropriate for all social groups—workers, intellectual workers, clerks, army workers, teachers, students, etc."[25] and organized again on those (as well as on many other) occasions.

THE RESHAPING OF MUSEUM PRACTICES AFTER 1989

It is not surprising that, given this overexploited encounter between museums and the population in the socialist period, a critical lack of interest in museums with historical collections became dominant after the change of regime. As if following a hidden agreement, all the activities related to "mass cultural work" among working people ceased immediately after 1989. The task of maintaining a contact with the exhibited objects of the past was swiftly left to the initiatives of enterprises,

[24] Ibid., 35.
[25] Ibid., 35.

schools, and other institutions, which, obviously overfed with the decades of ideological work, seemed no longer to take any special interest in museum visits. However, the real problem was not *whether* to visit museums but rather *what* to see there. Large parts of the historical exhibitions in all the museums in the country (with the exception of the museums of Natural History) were suffused by socialist doctrines, and their permanent displays had to be demolished or completely reshaped to suit a post-socialist context. But how to carry out this reshaping when, at least in the early 1990s, it was not quite clear whether the stage was already a "post-socialist" one and whether the transition was irreversible? How to achieve the rearrangement of historical narratives when the old patterns of conceptualizing history were still the only ones that museum specialists and the public had at their disposal? How to create new visualizations of the past, when the attempt to root out the all-encompassing socialist narratives came close to destroying the very notion of the past?

In the face of these dilemmas the easiest step to take was to close the museums of the revolutionary movement and to place a large part of the regional museums' collections in storage, from which they would not reappear for public view again. Occupying a central location in the city, about two minutes' walk from the National Parliament, the building of the Museum of the Revolutionary Movement in Sofia became the subject of debate about its re-appropriation and reutilization after the closing of its permanent exhibition. After it had stood empty and abandoned for several years, a theater was opened on its premises in the mid-1990s, and subsequently parts of it were occupied by a bank and a number of private firms. Next to the still gaping old windows of some of its exhibition rooms, now one of the biggest night clubs in the capital operates. Though less "successful," the fate of other similar museums was not very different, as they all became the targets of property debates and restitution activities. The collections that were accommodated in the closed museums, and the material objects that circulated for display in enterprises and institutions, no longer hold the potential to command esteem, care or even attention. The objects that were previously on display would not recreate any past, and their association with the previous networks of representation condemned them to a symbolic death, overtly expressed in the refusal of state or other institutions to consider them as cultural and historical heritage.

More important and complicated processes affected those museums that did not focus exclusively on the revolutionary movement, but rather

addressed regional and national history. Though in many of them the sections dedicated to the socialist movement and post-war construction were closed, the traces of the past narratives were not so easy to eliminate. While in technical terms there were enormous tasks associated with the preparation of new catalogues and a different classification of the existing objects, the challenges at the level of interpretation were no less serious. The need to produce alternative discourses on the recent past was met with a "sense of disorientation"[26]: on what possible grounds could the new historical evaluation be established, and how could the recent past be represented in a strongly politicized field? It took a decade to settle (though debates still resurface) issues such as the role of the Soviet army in Bulgarian history in the 1940s, the nature of "Bulgarian Fascism" and the attitudes towards those who died in the partisan struggle of the late 1930s and 1940s. Many of the nineteenth century liberation fighters had to undergo a new interpretation of their historical role, usually in line with the nation-building process rather than with the history of the social struggle. In several cases, areas of national history which the socialist ideology had largely suppressed provided opportunities to fill the empty spaces left by the displays of the socialist and revolutionary movement. An increased interest in the Balkan wars and the First World War, attention to personalities and events related to the Third Bulgarian Kingdom and the revived memory of forgotten figures of the interwar period were all trends that marked post-socialist museum initiatives. However, in spite of the attempts at reworking historical representations, the major field of activity for museums after the changes was related to dissolving the historical presentations into ethnographic ones, following a pattern similar to the nineteenth century *Heimatsmuseen* with their emphasis on local cultural traditions at the expense of critical historiographic reflection.

The avoidance of the recent past is clearly demonstrated by the National History Museum in Sofia, in which the representation of Bulgarian history ends with the establishment of the socialist regime in Bulgaria without a separate section on the period after 1945. The lack of tangible material (objects, documents, photographs) is not a reason, since as early as the beginning of the 1990s the National History Museum (which already had its own collection from the socialist era) was enriched by the transfer of historical objects from the National Museum of the Revolu-

[26] Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 35.

tionary Movement and the Museum of Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship. However, neither the earlier collection nor the new acquisitions were put on display, but remained in storage. This is all the more surprising if we remember that the new building which the museum took over in 2000 is the former principal residence of the communist leader, Todor Zhivkov.[27] As a site where the main ceremonies of state were held and the main decisions related to Bulgarian history were taken, the former residence in a curious way contradicts the limitation that the museum has evidently embraced: from 7000 A.C. until the mid-twentieth century. Although physically situated within the material framework of the socialist period, the museum refuses to narrate it, and has positioned itself entirely within a "national past" that preceded the socialist era—Prehistory, Ancient Thrace, the Middle Ages, the Bulgarian Lands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the Third Bulgarian Kingdom (1879–1946). The only case of an exhibition including explicit references to the socialist period is the collection of aviation objects dating from Bulgaria's membership in the Warsaw Pact (1955–1989). Apart from the display of these objects, the representation of national history simply stops with the Second World War and no intention to overcome this self-imposed boundary has been announced. The appropriation of the former communist leader's residence by a museum of national history and the elimination of the socialist period from museum display become emblematic of the politics of forgetting that surrounds this museum exhibition. The reluctance to reflect about the powerful *milieu* that hosts the exhibition itself disrupts the legitimacy of this museum project and raises legitimate suspicions about the political implications of the "unmemorable."

This overt "innocence" of the museum displays is shared by the other regional museums in the country, where the pattern of exhibitions generally comprises sections on archeology (including Prehistory, Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Numismatics), the Bulgarian Lands of the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries (with the periods of the "National Revival" and "Ethnography"), and "Modern History" (covering the period from the National Liberation until the Second World War). Almost without exception, in regional and local museums the turbulent 1940s, the

[27] Created in 1973 and holding its first representative exhibition in 1984, in honor of the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian State, for almost three decades the National Museum occupied the grand building of the Law Courts in Sofia. When the building was reappropriated by the courts and regained its previous functions, the museum was moved to the former residence on the outskirts of the capital.

antifascist resistance, and the socialist period are denied representation and limited to brief allusions to the establishment of the socialist regime in 1944. A more tangible set of references to the socialist period can be found in the National Military History Museum, where the exhibition of military technology and documents about the history of the Bulgarian army extends from the Middle Ages until today. However, despite this openness to the period after 1945, the thematic specificity of the museum and the focus on military problems allow relatively limited attention to be paid to the socialist period *per se*. Almost without exception, the rule for all the regional and national museums across the country is the avoidance of the socialist period. The empty space left by the discarded socialist regime's representations was not utilized for creating alternative representations on the most recent period of Bulgarian history, but rather for extending the museum narratives about figures and events across the large span of pre-socialist times. Although sometimes it served to re-legitimize areas of history which previously stood in the shadow of the ideological master narratives, the exclusive concentration on the period before the 1940s is a symbolic act that circumscribes the socialist times, denying the possibility of a meaningful reflection on that period.

This symptomatic feature of historical museums after the changes leads us to another important point. As an extension of the earlier period, the space in these museums cannot be a heterotopic one. It fails to testify to the existence of alternative orderings, meanings and practices, but rather prolongs the inertia, excluding from display everything on which there is no official policy of visibility. Heterotopia, as identified by Foucault, refers to places that are "capable of juxtaposing in a single real space, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."[28] It is "necessarily a relational phenomenon: no site is heterotopic by itself, it only becomes so through its juxtaposition with other sites around it."[29] In the post-socialist situation of the socialist museums in Bulgaria, this relation and juxtaposition seem to have been impossible to implement. While in the first years after the changes the representations of the heroic socialist struggles and the supreme achievements of the socialist order were

[28] Zeynep Kezer, "If Walls Could Talk. Exploring the Dimensions of Heterotopic at the Four Seasons Istanbul Hotel" in Dana Arnold, Andrew Ballantine (eds.), *Architecture as Experience: Radical Change in Spatial Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004), 214. On heterotopy, see also Kevin Hetherington, "The Utopics of Social Ordering—Stonehenge as a Museum without Walls" in Sharon Macdonald, Gordon Fyfe (eds.), *Theorizing Museums* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell—The Sociological Review, 1996), 153–60.

[29] Kezer, "If Walls Could Talk," 214.

dropped from visibility, in the years that followed the policies on their relations, both to the present and to the other museum narratives that remained, were vague and unsettled. Even so, their attempts to reach back to the realm of visibility were doomed, at least in the light of the unaltered understanding that a history museum should be a stage where only historically firm, crystallized, and more or less uncontestable narratives would be permitted. The problematic and the arguable, the multivocal and contradictory would not be represented, would be left without a say, or—at most—would be limited to a brief label statement. In a tradition that reaches back before the socialist rule, but that gained its ultimate expression during that period, the museum space is expected to be one where only what is publicly embraced and officially sanctioned will find representation. The physical and temporal adjacencies between objects belonging to different discursive realms seemed not only inadequate, but hard to justify in the severe policies of inclusion and exclusion after 1989.

As illustrated by these examples, a "museumized" representation of the socialist era has not found a place in the previous museum forms—both because of the "earthquakes" that museum institutions encountered after 1989 and because of the impossibility of replacing the previous monolithic discourse by a heterotopic and polyphonic one. At the background of this virtual atrophy of the existing museums, a way to represent the socialist period was sought mainly by creating a separate museum about that era. Since the early 1990s discussions have been taking place on the possibility of creating a separate museum of Socialism in Bulgaria, but, as I have already mentioned, these have not borne fruit. One of the most intensive debates about such a museum was held in the late 1990s with the participation of prominent writers, architects, historians, and painters, but being both politically and economically inappropriate, the idea was doomed to failure. Since the beginning of the new millennium the issue of creating a museum of the socialist past has been transferred increasingly to the Internet, and this has led to the first versions of such a museum—the electronic forum "I Lived Socialism" and the exhibition "Inventory Book of Socialism," both of which appeared in book form in 2006.[30]

Initiated by the Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov, the first project represented a forum where individual stories about the socialist era were collected and shared with the other participants. Welcoming participation

[30] Georgi Gospodinov (ed.), *Az zhiviah sotsializma. 171 lichni istorii* [I Lived Socialism. 171 Personal Stories] (Sofia, 2006); Yana Genova, Georgi Gospodinov, *Inventarna kniga na sotsializma* [Inventory Book of Socialism] (Sofia, 2006).

by people across the generational spectrum, the project succeeded in gathering eyewitness narratives from the 1950s through the 1980s and evoking diverse spheres of public life in those times. Avoiding the risk of superimposing historical narratives about the socialist period, the project gave predominance to personal narratives and private recollections. The goal was to extract the most immediate and expressive stories that people remembered and associated with Socialism, and to bring them out to the public, giving a voice to experiences that have remained unspoken and unshared for decades. Although differing in principle from conventional museum forms, the web forum and its book version undertook largely the functions which the previous museum forms have failed to perform. They preserve memories of the past that are otherwise destined to disappear, providing an open ground for reflection and self-reflection related to recent historical experience, and sustaining the freedom of expression and association which every museum object should ideally have. All the constituents of the project are essentially different from those involved in the "traditional" museum forms, indicating as they do that the "unmemorable," in order to transmit itself to the present, needs to find alternative forms of tangible recollection. In the project in question, it is the personal story that is turned into a museum object: each of the participants in the forum tells the most vivid and expressive story that he/she regards as representative of their personal experience in the socialist times, and relate it to the personal stories of the other people in the forum. The stories are not encompassed within a master narrative, either on the website or in the book, but joined together by the formal identifier of the decade that each story refers to. In that way, the multivocal and the dissonant, the incomprehensible and the inexpressible not only find their place in this forum, but provide alternative ways of overcoming the rigidity of the earlier museum discourse.

Inherently connected with the "I Lived Socialism" project, the "Inventory Book of Socialism" exhibition goes one step further in realizing the "museumization" of the socialist era. Initiated by Yana Genova and Georgi Gospodinov, the Inventory Book consists of material objects (and, in the book format, photocopy images), which were inherent parts of socialist everyday life: socialist brand TV sets and electric appliances, chocolates and candies with characteristic wrappers, cigarettes and soft drinks typical of those times, shoes and soap, and so on and so forth. The display traces the development of the design of over 500 everyday objects from the 1960s until the 1980s, and thus provides an account of areas of life that were not represented in any archive, record, or museum exhibit.

Collected from cellars, attics and storehouses, the objects are labeled with brief texts that situate them in the context of their use in the socialist era. Directly related to the private sphere, the exhibition reveals the extent to which the boundaries between private and public life were blurred under Socialism, and the high level of uniformity that marks the material heritage of those times.

The Inventory Book of Socialism is a good testimony in the debate on the willing forgetfulness about the socialist period. For many viewers the objects are easily recognizable as things that they once used, saw or were in contact with; objects that they have heard about; or objects that are still part of today's households. Despite the variations of age and lived experience among the visitors to the exhibition (and readers of the book), and despite the differences in taste and attitude to these objects, the Inventory Book serves to unveil memories about the material life that surrounded people and exercised a lasting impact on their senses and perception. The memories are retrieved and retroactively extracted, but they are also created, constructed, and implanted. For people of the generation that witnessed these objects directly, the inventory is an opportunity to look at them in a new way, as if exhibited in a glass case; it is a way of making these artifacts visible after many of them have stopped eliciting immediate associations with the socialist epoch. For the visitors of the youngest generation, the exhibition is an occasion to see some of these objects for the first time, to observe them as parts of the past and to be fascinated by them. They are "imagined memories" of a time that has not been lived through and as such they bring that time closer to the viewer than any of the other institutionalized forms of historical "museumization."

In the context of these examples, it should be much easier to understand the presence of the Todor Zhivkov museum in Pravets. Unlike the National History Museum in the former residence, where the ruler spent most of his life in power, the local museum in his birthplace relies on the link with his childhood and sustains this link in a way that is strongly reminiscent of the "museum houses" of the nineteenth century fighters for national liberation (Fig. 3). The small two-storey house preserves everyday objects from the first half of the twentieth century, surrounding them with an aura of authenticity. The kitchen and the dining room where the ruler's family had their meals, the crockery and cutlery that they used, the loom on which their home-made clothes were prepared, the fireplace, and so on—all insist on the idea of ordinary origins destined to give birth to "extraordinary" achievements (Fig. 4). The value of simplicity conveyed by the small house is combined with that of aesthetic sensitivity, as expressed by the neat arrangement of the rooms and by the small flowerbeds around the house. Upon reflection, however, the apparent harmony is disrupted—on the one hand we have the ideological sanctification that surrounded the leader before 1989, and on the other the amnesia after the end of his power, and especially after his death in 1998.

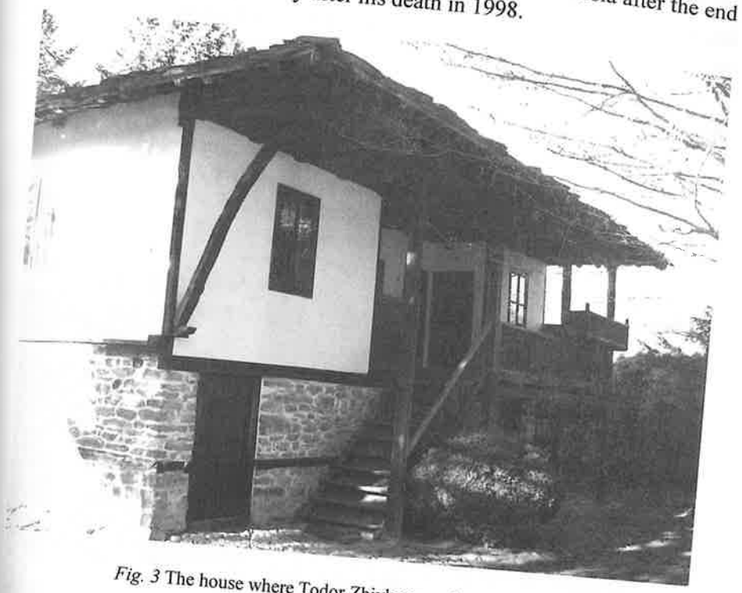

Fig. 3 The house where Todor Zhivkov was born in Pravets (photo: Nikolai Vukov, 2007)

Recreating the everyday life of a poor family in the first half of the twentieth century, the house became an object of the care and attention of the Communist Party, a site where the humble origin of the leader was emphasized and affirmed as a precondition for "great deeds." Although sustaining the link with its sanctification in the socialist period, the house as an exhibition object acquired a different dimension at the post-1989 stage. The viewer is already aware of the post-socialist disavowal of the Party and its leader, and is thus guided by either opposition or allegiance to this process. Whereas in the socialist period the ideologically loaded implications of this museum site were coupled with the idea of the permanency of the political and representational order, in the period after the

changes this pair is challenged by the notions of discontinuity and rupture. To the political changes after 1989 and to the years when the museum was closed, yet another discontinuity was added—the death of Todor Zhivkov in 1998. While the other ruptures remain practically silenced in this museum, the death of Zhivkov (as evoked by the necrologues of the eight years after his death) adds a commemorative tone to the entire comlex.

Fig. 4 The dining room of the house where Todor Zhivkov was born (photo: Nikolai Vukov, 2007)

This mode of solemn attention to an individual destiny, which began in this humble house, would have a better chance of success, if its message of simplicity and modesty were not overshadowed by the grand museum building nearby (Fig. 5), dedicated to Zhivkov's supreme achievements as a communist leader. Following the architectural fashion characteristic of the deliberately impressive residential and recreational buildings of late Socialism, the museum combines stylized elements of nineteenth century revivalist architecture with modernist approaches to external design. The exhibition is located on two floors—the first consisting of a hall that was obviously designed for hosting official meetings and small ceremonies,

and the second focusing on objects connected with the life of the leader. The interior and its decoration are preserved as they were at the time the museum was created, the most notable feature being the mural representing a flock of white doves flying across a background of red floral motifs. The exhibition hall concentrates exclusively on the gifts that the socialist leader received from statesmen and politicians all over the world in recognition of his role on the stage of world politics. If one can find a heterotopic experience in any museum dating back to the socialist era, it is surely in this exhibition, which brings together statues of elephants from India, pictures of elks from Northern Europe, ritual masks from African and South American countries, china, silverware, and copperware from all over the world. All these objects not only gather together distant geographical locations, but in the context of the museum also turn the lack of practical purpose that such gifts embody into an "absolute value." The supplementary information about these objects is also varied—only a few are accompanied by tags or labels, obviously leaving the task of further explanation to the museum curator.

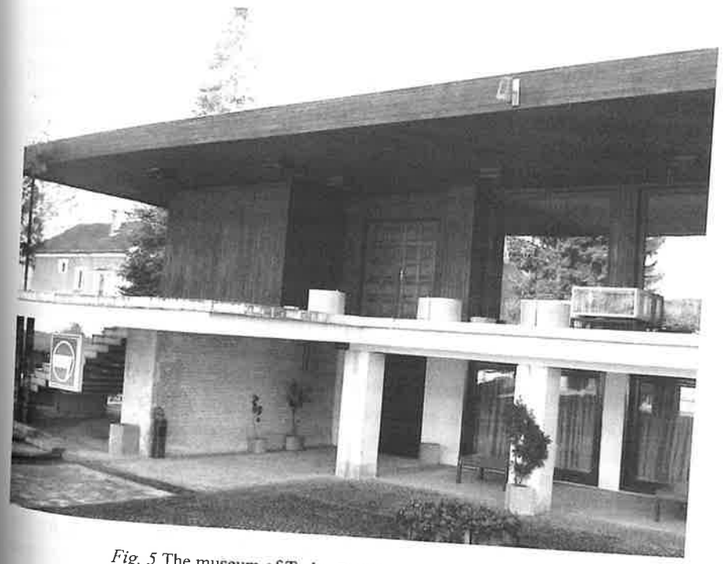

Fig. 5 The museum of Todor Zhivkov in Pravets, side view (photo: Nikolai Vukov, 2007)

The most peculiar aspect of this museum is that, although it was reopened thanks to the initiative of the local community to commemorate the socialist leader, it operates without actual consideration for tourists who might be interested in visiting the site. There is no information about the museum's location or its opening hours—either in tourist brochures or on the internet—and it is by pure chance that a visitor will find it open. After three visits to the place, my own efforts to see the exhibition from inside remained fruitless, since, despite the assurances of neighbors that the museum was officially functioning, the woman entrusted with its maintenance never appeared to unlock the doors. The only way to establish a link with the exhibition is to peer through the museum windows, trying to recreate meanings that might carry a different resonance if observed at closer range. The tourists to the site are certainly not numerous (which explains the lack of care about keeping the exhibition open), but even those who occasionally turn up have to satisfy their curiosity mainly through the glass window.

Although the history of the museum before the political changes cannot be established, given the lack of information about its previous contents, it seems likely that the collection of gifts was not on display, or at least that it could not have formed the core of the exhibition as it stands today. It is more probable that in the whirlpool of transformations that occurred in all the museums after 1989, this one too dropped the biographical account of the leader and of his achievements which certainly constituted the principal display. Zhivkov's gifts were a widely discussed topic in the mid-1990s and, as with similar objects belonging to other communist leaders such as Tito and Ceauşescu, the collection was put on temporary exhibition but later hidden from view. While Tito's collection of gifts was sent as a traveling exhibition to several European capitals, and Ceauşescu's are stored in the National History Museum in Bucharest, Zhivkov's hoard is wrapped in secret. The collection in Pravets is too small to represent the entire amount that the leader received during his three decades in power, but it is very likely that it is at least part of the gift collection that was famous in Zhivkov's lifetime.

As this somewhat sweeping overview has made clear, the case of the Pravets museum deserves attention not so much for the richness of the exhibition, or for the originality of its approach, but for the fact that such a display has been sustained in the general confusion surrounding museum representations of the socialist period. An expression of nostalgia for the days when the town was at the top of the scale of symbolic importance during the socialist era, the reopening of this museum bears overtones of

the local community's affection for the major contributor to its one-time prosperity. The monument to him in the town square, the streets, names and institutions named after him, the obituary on the 8th anniversary of his death—all these create a network of references to an individual whom the community has identified as its special patron. The local enthusiasm for commemoration is not, however, to be found on the nation-wide spectrum, where the general lack of museum representations of the socialist period in Bulgaria raises doubts about the very possibility of narrating the recent past in museum terms. It is an expressive indicator of the "fragmentation of memory politics"[31] after the collapse of Socialism and the strange results of the attempts at new re-compositions. Still standing in a period when the previous approach to historical representation has been demoted from legitimacy, the museum in Pravets embodies a nostalgic move beyond narrative fragmentation and an attempt to bridge the gap that opened up with the end of the socialist regime in the country.

In the context of the institutional and discursive shifts that occurred in museum representations after 1989, the basic lack of a museum to the recent past poses a series of questions related to the ways history is perceived, remembered, forgotten, and permitted or forbidden representation. Is the absence of such a museum due to a conscious policy chosen in Bulgarian society after 1989 that seeks to prevent the development of alternative (and revisionist) approaches to the forty-five years of Socialism, or is it rather the consequence of a deeply nurtured amnesia, after decades of indoctrination? Is it because we lack sufficient empirical and interpretative grounds to set up a coherent museum discourse on the socialist past in "post-socialist" terms; or is it rather because there is no will to recompose the dissolved narratives into new forms and visualizations? Is this lack of a museum to the socialist past due to the "short" temporal distance that prevents the creation of coherent historical narratives, or is it due to the general impossibility of narrating the recent period, at least in the forms that the ideology had appropriated before? Can we speak of a "crisis" in the museum as an institution in the post-socialist context, or is it rather a question of a psychological barrier preventing the embodying of the past in plausible narratives and messages that carry conviction?

Each of those suppositions has been a plausible option at one point or another during the seventeen years since 1989, and each has a certain legitimating potential. However, what I believe is of crucial importance in

[31] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

this lack of a "museumized" experience of the recent past is a general revulsion against museum visualization that results from decades of perceiving museums as inseparable from ideological discourse. In the socialist period, museums served as radicalized forms of the expropriation of the past, where the symbolic defeat of collective memory by historicized visions of the past was systematically completed. Museums not only shaped collective memory within ideological contours, but also replaced the tangible sense of the past by an abstract ideological history, which strove to encompass historical experience and to become its virtual and only embodiment. Instead of creating a palpable connection to what had been before, this resulted in reliance on allegories about ideological postulates and abstract narratives, and in confusion between the actual and the represented, the authentic and the simulacrum.

As a result of these processes in historical representation, the communist museums seemed not to refer to reality, but rather to imaginary realms, which constituted the sense of the real and brought about its systematic exhaustion. An expected repercussion was that the illusion of "eternity" that they created did not merely stop time and forgetting (as the ideology insisted), but also obstructed the enlivening sources of collective memory and worked to disrupt its self-recreational capacity. In them, the ideologically sanctioned and firm representations of history precluded the possibility of its acquiring public and institutionalized "expression," prevented it from finding a way to narratives and visual forms, and kept it beneath the surface of the representable. The dissolution of the link between memory and representation that occurred in the socialist period, not only conditioned the characteristic relationship between truth and persuasion at the time, but also laid the basis of the special status of the "unmemorable"—as memory that is stored, but does not reach representation—in the period after 1989.

The discourses of truth, authenticity and legitimacy have been critical points in all East European countries. However, unlike, for example, the Hungarians, who could use the events of 1956 as a powerful basis for narratives of their history that were different from the socialist mode, and unlike the Romanians who could directly oppose Ceauşescu's regime as they took steps toward rewriting their recent history, the Bulgarians had difficulties trying to find a relatively firm ground from which to approach the past. Testimonies of the regime's crimes did appear[32] and memories of repression

[32] About the communist repression and the victims of the totalitarian regime in Bulgaria see esp. Ekaterina Boncheva (ed.), *Bulgarskijat Gulag: svideteli. Sbornik dokumentalni razkazi za konclagerite v Bulgaria* [The Bulgarian Gulag: Witnesses. Collection of documentary narratives about the concentration camps in Bulgaria] (Sofia, 1991); Stefan Bochev, *Belene. Skazanie za konclagerna Bulgaria* [Belene: An epic narrative about Bulgaria of the concentration camps] (Sofia, 1999); Lilyana Deyanova, *Ochertanijata na mulchanieto: Travmatichni mesta na kolektivnata pamet* [The contours of silence: Traumatic sites of collective memory] (Sofia, 1999); Tzvetan Todorov (ed.), *Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria*, (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1999).

[33] For a detailed investigation about the disparity between the ideology's high dictum and the benefits of everyday life during socialism, see Gerald Creed, *Domesticating Revolution: From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1998).

were vivid enough, but they still could not consolidate around an image of life in socialist Bulgaria as one of "terror." The denial of human rights and the limitations of freedom were accepted as a feature of those times, but the memories of a period when basic living standards were assured for everybody still hover in the air. The notion of the Soviet Union as an "external oppressor" is still impossible to imagine—both because of the widespread, popular and shared discourse of the historical brotherhood between the Bulgarian and the Russian peoples, and because of the awareness of the enormous benefits that Bulgaria reaped as a preferred partner of the Soviet Union in the socialist era. What is more, attempts to identify the "internal oppressor" were also doomed—neither Zhivkov nor anybody from his circle could be fitted into such a role, and even actions such as the forcible renaming of Bulgarian Turks in the 1980s and the terrifying silencing of the news about the Chernobyl catastrophe, are regarded today as politicized issues whose solution should be left to the future.

The memory of the communist camps, the repression and the bids for freedom constitute for many Bulgarians an experience that, introduced as a topic after 1989 but then hidden somewhere in the storehouse of memory, does not reach the realm of explicit public representation. On the contrary, the benefits of everyday life, with all the illusions of well-being that they created, are deeply inscribed in the memories of the witnesses, and in a curious way determine their general approach to the past.[33] It is notable how, whenever they come to the fore (for example in commemorative ceremonies around the so called "anti-totalitarian monuments" to the victims of the regime), the voices describing the crimes of the socialist regime are sharply contested by the protests of those for whom the regime provided "everything necessary." The approach to the socialist period thus appears problematic not so much because of a confessed trauma of the past, but rather because of a manifest trauma of the present, since for

many Bulgarians the problems of the transition period have been much harder to bear than the restrained but "cozy" life that they had before. In itself an expression of nostalgia, it helps to explain the motives behind the initiative of the people of Pravets to reopen the museum of Todor Zhivkov and to commemorate the former Head of State as a major factor in the country's well-being. By reconstituting "worthiness" and establishing personalities and experiences of the socialist period as "unforgettable," this museum is an ironic response to the prevented representation of a past that is still remembered by the majority of the population.

The lack of museum realizations of the recent past in post-socialist Bulgaria may be an indicator of the processes related to "learning how to forget," after decades of instruction in "how to remember." It may be regarded as a reaction of the memory to discard some of the burden that was laid upon it for years and to relax from the obligation to be constantly wakeful. However, it also testifies to a process of keeping certain areas of memory out of representation and replacing them with discourses which are in fact contingent with those that were propagated before. Being an illustration of the difficulty of elaborating new discourses on the recent past, the relegation of the socialist experience to the realm of the "unmemorable" also helps to explain how the museum in post-socialist mode lost its capacity to effect a historical and moral "reanimation" of Bulgarian society, and how it continues to be a form of memory where the past and present are still not in an open dialogue. Between the two poles of the representational field—one the museum in Pravets, the other the dispersed artifacts of the former socialist museums (some of which are still offered for sale on antiquarian stalls)—lies the general lack of a critical and thoughtful approach to this period of Bulgarian history in museum terms. As exemplified by projects such as "I Lived Socialism" and the "Inventory Book," the discussions and visualizations of the recent past occur not in public museums, but exclusively in the media and on the Internet. The sites dedicated to the socialist heritage and the web forums of individual memories about those years have taken over many of the functions that museums once performed as institutions for preserving and representing the past. Their failure to do so with respect to the recent period leaves the field open and ready to be occupied by new methods of sharing and distributing knowledge, which will probably constitute the new ways of "museumizing" the past in the future.

Containing Fascism

History in Post-Communist Baltic Occupation and Genocide Museums[1]

JAMES MARK

Since the collapse of Communism, three major museums dealing with the recent past have been established in the capital cities of the Baltic states. Two of these—the Museum of Occupations (Tallinn, Estonia, established in 2003) and The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (Riga, 1993)—linked the Nazi and Soviet periods together to present a history of continuous national subjugation and suffering at the hands of foreign powers, lasting from 1940 to 1991. The third—the Museum of Genocide Victims (Vilnius, Lithuania, 1992)—dealt solely with the terrors of the communist period, despite being placed in a building with a "double past" of both Soviet and Nazi persecution.[2]

These museums focused on national suffering, terror and occupation. However, it was the terrors of Communism, rather than those of Fascism, which took centre stage. This in part reflected the longer-lasting and more recent nature of communist influence in the region: the Baltic states were incorporated twice into the Soviet Union—in 1940–41, and then between 1944 and 1991; Nazi occupation was restricted to the years 1941–44. However, it also reflected the choices of those who founded these institutions. In the main, these were groups who had suffered under Communism rather than Fascism; the Occupation Museum (Tallinn) was mainly funded by an exile, Dr. Olga Kistler-Ritso, who had fled in the face of Red Army advances in 1944,[3] and is run by Heiki Ahonen, a prominent anti-

[1] I would like to thank both the British Academy for the small research grant which allowed me to carry out the primary research for this article, and the museum curators, directors and press officers who generously gave me interviews and guided tours around their museums and assistance in uncovering material connected with their sites. My thanks also to Meike Wulf for her comments and suggestions

[2] All research at the museums themselves was carried out in the summer of 2005. All information on displays is correct as of this date.

[3] In addition to this, her father was killed by the Soviet regime.