

# MEMENTO PARK AND SKOPJE 2014: TRANSITIONS, MONUMENTS, AND MEMORY

by

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## ABSTRACT

Memento Park in Budapest, Hungary and Skopje 2014 in Skopje, Macedonia are two extensive reorganizations of public art and urban space that speak to the role of monuments as they are used to form cultural identity in the post-Socialist, former Eastern Bloc. Memento Park is a sculpture park on the outskirts of Budapest dating from 1993, where forty-two Socialist-era monuments from disparate locations have been gathered together and arranged into a new composition. Budapest's quick removal of unwanted signs of the Socialist period matches the pace with which monuments were reconsidered in many cities in the region. In an exception to that immediate response, a renovation program called Skopje 2014 has overhauled the appearance of Skopje with more than forty new monuments between 2010 and 2014. A comparison of these sites reveals how monuments can be employed to create cultural memories in societies with uneasy relationships to the recent past.

INDEX WORDS: Memento Park, Skopje 2014, post-Socialist, monument, public art, memory, memorial, transition, Socialism, cultural identity, cultural memory, cultural trauma

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Throughout much of Eastern Europe, the collapse of Socialism was most immediately observable in the landscape: colorful advertisements and neon billboards for Western products that replaced the bland and faded party propaganda, strip malls erected outside urban centers, and construction projects that in many regions still seem to be everywhere. The unfolding landscapes of Eastern Europe do not merely mirror transition, they are themselves important and multilayered symbols of change and continuity. Landscape, in this sense, may be viewed as a social process, reflecting and constituting depictions of rapid change in the apparent stability of place.”<sup>1</sup>

The nonchalance with which people pass monuments in contexts familiar to them suggests that there is nothing so invisible. However, such an observation is markedly less true in post-Socialist countries, where propaganda was once forced onto public squares and streets and, by extension, into the view of citizens whose ideology it sought to shape. In the Eastern Bloc, monuments once honored anonymous workers or soldiers, Lenin or local Socialist leaders. Most of these Communist monuments were demolished or moved after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. The political import of new monuments and the impermanence of this supposedly permanent form make monuments particularly visible, and also particularly complex, in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> Most of the countries in the region experienced a renegotiation

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<sup>1</sup> Daphne Berdahl, “Introduction: An Anthropology of Postsocialism,” *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Daphne Berdahl, Matti Bunzl, and Martha Lampland (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Granted, of course, Central and Eastern Europe is not a hegemonic territory but instead an area of great diversity and long-standing cultural and ethnic divisions in addition to differing national histories. Central and Eastern Europe, abbreviated CEE, is a generic term for the group of countries that usually refers to former communist states in Europe. What CEE (and Hungary and Macedonia) share is a geography of being in between major world powers



of the urban landscape in the early 1990s, immediately after the collapse of the Socialist regimes.<sup>3</sup> This process allowed them to remove works of Communist ideology from public spaces and reclaim their national histories, which had previously been negated in favor of an overarching Communist identity. Within this context, the urban environments of Budapest, Hungary and Skopje, Macedonia exhibit alterations that repudiate the aesthetic evidence of the Socialist past in a manner that is anything but nonchalant.

Memento Park in Budapest and Skopje 2014 in Skopje are two extensive reorganization programs of public art and urban space in the region. Memento Park is a sculpture park on the outskirts of Budapest dating from 1993, where forty-two Socialist-era monuments from disparate locations have been gathered together and arranged into a new composition. Budapest's quick removal of unwanted signs of the Socialist period matched the pace with which monuments were reconsidered in many cities in Central and Eastern Europe. In an exception to that immediate response, over the past four years, a renovation program called Skopje 2014 has overhauled the appearance of the capital of Macedonia. More than forty new monuments have been commissioned and added to the city center since 2010. While these are clearly two very different projects, initiated at different times in different countries that have different relationships to their respective Socialist experiences, both speak to the role of monuments as they are used to form cultural identity in the post-Socialist, former Eastern Bloc.

In my study's first section, I argue that Memento Park is a site where Socialist monuments are arranged to stage collective memory in a radically different way than the way that they were originally intended in order to nullify any continued impact on contemporary

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and a history of totalitarian Communist/Socialist regimes that dominated public life and severed ties to Western Europe while strengthening those with Russia for a recent, fifty-year period of history.

<sup>3</sup> Kliems and Dmitrieva, 31.

society. Reassembled and recontextualized, the arrangement of these monuments forms a new artwork, one that attempts to neutralize the power of the individual sculptures and create a different narrative about national history. In the next section, I examine Skopje 2014 as an urban landscape that, instead of displacing its Socialist past to a peripheral space as Memento Park does, covers it. The building project does so by inventing an alternative past culled from earlier historical eras. It visualizes this alternative past throughout Skopje in monuments that rely on the authority of their diverse forms. Before turning to these case studies, I first address the context of political transition, monuments, and memory that informs my approach to these two sites.

Despite being disconnected by time and place, as well as other qualities that will be discussed, Memento Park and Skopje 2014 provide an effective comparison because few massive reorganization efforts exist that attempt to restructure collective memory and post-Socialist identity on a national level through monuments. Like Memento Park, Muzeon Park of Arts in Moscow and Grutas Park in Lithuania are large open-air groupings of Socialist-era monuments. However, Muzeon Park's seven hundred sculptures are a mixed group of Socialist Realist and Modernist works, some of which were forbidden during the Socialist period, and it lacks an apparent didactic message about the horrors of Communism. The recent creation of the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2011 includes a sculpture courtyard, but is again without a didactic message about the works on view. Grutas Park, colloquially known as Stalin World, seems as much a theme park as a serious attempt to represent history. It sits alone in the woods, so that monuments of Socialism from all over Lithuania, far from their original urban contexts, become relics or props to be laughed at, posed with, or wondered about. While all Eastern Bloc capitals and cities went through renegotiations of the cultural landscape to some degree, even if it were only the removal of red Communist stars from buildings, such concerted,

organized, and sweeping efforts to remake a “Socialist” cityscape are unique to Memento Park and Skopje 2014.

Both projects are large-scale, public, and symbolic gestures by government agencies undertaken in the capital cities of newly independent countries. The Socialist Hungarian People’s Republic was replaced by the Republic of Hungary on October 23, 1989, and the Republic of Macedonia voted for independence from Yugoslavia on September 8, 1991, ceding its former identity as the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. In both instances, the form of government peacefully changed from a socialist state to a capitalist democracy in the wake of the Soviet Union’s dissolution. While the regime change was immediate, these dates mark the beginning of transition rather than its accomplishment. Part of that transition was expressed through the treatment of monuments that Hungary and Macedonia, like other countries in the region, inherited from the former regime. Budapest needed to deal with the many monuments of the previous regime, not least in order to restore the prior symbols of Hungarian national identity that the Socialist government had removed. In Skopje, the architecture of the city center itself came to be associated objectionably with the Socialist regime. Memento Park and Skopje 2014 attempt to use existing and newly commissioned monuments to aid in the formation of national identity through enterprises marked both by authority and ideology—even if to greatly different and differently employed degrees.

The displacement of Socialist Realist monuments in Budapest and the creation of new monuments in Skopje suggest a recognition that monuments not only represent past moments in perpetuity to a public, but also that the public reception of them can shift with time and changing values. In 1903, Alois Riegl noted how “in the modern view, every monument possesses art-value only insofar as it responds to the modern Kunstwollen,” that is, to the spirit and values of

the age.<sup>4</sup> With the fall of Socialism, Hungary and Macedonia were able to reject the prevailing aesthetic of Communism—Socialist Realism—as well as the ideology that resonated within the leftover architecture and monuments. Of course, the idea of change contradicts the premise of the monument itself, as Reigl acknowledges. The monument aspires to permanence: “a monument in its oldest and most original sense is a human creation erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations.”<sup>5</sup> Due to changed values, former Eastern Bloc societies wished to counter exactly this purpose—of keeping the deeds and events of the Socialist era alive—when they began renegotiating the cultural landscape at sites like Memento Park or Skopje’s city center.<sup>6</sup> In this way, Memento Park and Skopje 2014 allude to permanence through monumental form while serving as active sites of change.

Both Memento Park and Skopje 2014 construct memory and identity as qualities that monuments can represent and, in a second simultaneous function, make real by virtue of their existence. Theorists after Reigl have emphasized the active role monuments play in social consciousness, something to which societies of the former Eastern Bloc, accustomed to visual propaganda used by Socialist governments to instill Communist values, are perhaps especially sensitive. There is an ideology implicit to all monuments. The monument reflects the ideology of its makers, while at the same time it acts to create or make real those same ideals. For example, Russian art historian Andrey Zorin has applied cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s method of thick description to interpret socio-political decisions, such as the location of a political

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<sup>4</sup> Alois Reigl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin” (originally published in 1903, translated by Kurt W. Foster and Diane Ghirardo), *Oppositions*, No. 25 (Fall 1982), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Reigl, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Reigl, 38.

party's headquarters or the music played during its festivities, *as* ideology.<sup>7</sup> Geertz exposed the role that ideology plays in the formation of history, and Zorin has added that “art and literature especially acquire the potential to serve as a kind of universal depository of ideological content and as a measure of their practical realization,” referring to how art can also realize such ideological content.<sup>8</sup> This faith in practical realization propelled the organizers of Memento Park and Skopje 2014 to go to unusual lengths in these extensive projects centered on the symbolic potential of monuments.

In creating highly organized and expansive public art projects in the urban space of national capitals, both sites testify to the degree to which the “cultural urban landscape is a system of representation,” as art historians Alfrun Kliems and Marina Dmitrieva discuss in their book on the post-Socialist city.<sup>9</sup> These symbolic projects exploit the representative potential of the monument. Kliems and Dmitrieva discuss how “the collapse of communism left highly ideological landscapes and thousands of icons to be reinterpreted. [...] The process of the rearrangement of icons is facilitated by the politics and practices of reminiscence and oblivion.”<sup>10</sup> Rearranging icons (the term itself suggesting the fixity and veneration with which the image of Lenin, among others, held societies) and destroying monuments is an activity charged with political and social significance. The authors connect this practice of rearranging icons not with history, as customarily has been done with monuments, but with memory. Traditionally, the function of the monument has been understood primarily as historical marker, that is, a representation of a past event, deed, or person. To connect the monument primarily with

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<sup>7</sup> Andrey Zorin, “Ideology, Semiotics, and Clifford Geertz: Some Russian Reflections,” *History and Theory*, No. 40 (February 2001): 57-73.

<sup>8</sup> Zorin, 67, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Alfrun Kliems and Marina Dmitrieva, “Introduction: The Post-Socialist City,” *The Post-Socialist City: Continuity and Change in Urban Space and Imagery*, eds. Alfrun Kliems and Marina Dmitrieva (Berlin: Jovis Verlag GmbH, 2010), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Kliems and Dmitrieva, 17.

memory ties its function more closely to the present by basing it on the collective recollection of a living generation. It also underlines the monument's function of remembrance. Memento Park and Skopje 2014 take this modern reliance on memory and use it to draw on the capacity of monuments to enable society to evoke or obliterate aspects of history.

Austrian art historian Mechtild Widrich relates the loss of faith society felt in the traditional monument to a paradigm shift during the period after the Second World War: from history to memory. The Second World War and the Holocaust, the Cold War and the propaganda of Communist ideology, created seeds of distrust in the monument itself, spawning “a period during which monuments were largely discredited as authoritarian” throughout Europe, a period that we arguably still live in today.<sup>11</sup> History as a narrative of national progress came to seem oversimplified, if not fundamentally flawed. Widrich describes a

shift away from the concept of history and its concomitant, nation, toward a postmodern conception of individual involvement with a history considered fragmentary. The umbrella term that came to stand for these various approaches, sometimes set up as reformed history, sometimes as a direct critique of official history and its national commitments, was memory.<sup>12</sup>

In the burgeoning memory discourse, Pierre Nora notably approached the history of France from this new perspective in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, an edited series begun in 1984 that considered loci of memory, including but in no way limited to monuments, as the foundations of French history.<sup>13</sup> Nora argues for a new necessity in contemporary society of talking about history in conjunction with memory, claiming that “a decisive shift was underway, from an awareness of the self in history to an awareness of the self in memory, the transformation of one model of

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<sup>11</sup> Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Widrich, 168.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France: Les lieux de mémoire*, translated by Mary Trouille; under the direction of Pierre Nora; translation directed by David P. Jordan, three volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001-2010).

nation into another.”<sup>14</sup> For Nora, les lieux de mémoire (realms of memory) better represent current ideas about history. Both Widrich and Nora theorize a shift away from the idea of nation as well as history so that both nation and history join the monument as discredited concepts. And yet, the year 1989 marks the formation of new nation-states in territory formerly controlled by the Soviet Union, including Hungary and Macedonia.

These new nation-states faced fresh collective memories of a Socialist past that each attempted to regulate through recourse to an old-fashioned reliance on monuments. But how does a monument function in relation to memory? German cultural anthropologist Jan Assmann contradicts any assumption that once a society’s opinions are fixed in a cultural object, “then mémoire[sic] is turned into history.”<sup>15</sup> He argues that these objects, be they books, ceremonies, or monuments, retain the structure of memory and emphasizes its changing and malleable nature more than Nora. Assmann distinguishes between collective memory, which exists in the minds of those who experienced something and can be passed on orally to their children, and long-standing cultural memory, which is formed from collective memory. Cultural memory depends on “specialized practice, a kind of ‘cultivation’” around these fixed objects to create the binding character of cultural identity.<sup>16</sup> Memento Park and Skopje 2014 are predicated on the use of monuments to bind society in a revised relationship to its recent past and national identity after a traumatic rupture.

The break with Socialism is often theorized as a societal or cultural trauma for countries in the region. Despite being widely desired, the end of Socialism created a sudden break and many difficult changes. As sociologist Jeffery C. Alexander describes it, “cultural trauma occurs

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<sup>14</sup> Nora, xxi.

<sup>15</sup> Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity” (orig. published 1988, trans. in 1995 by John Czaplicka), *New German Critique*, Issue 65 (April 1995), 128.

<sup>16</sup> Assmann, 131.

when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”<sup>17</sup> Trauma is intimately connected with memory, as victims of trauma are described as repressing the memory of the traumatic event. Because of this repression, visual or linguistic representation is linked to mastery of the trauma in Alexander’s reading, which recalls Freud’s original theory of mastery in his 1914 essay “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through.” Creating a new cultural story that assimilates the trauma event while assigning victimhood and blame is theorized to be a means of working through collective trauma: per Alexander, “this story is, at the same time, a complex and multivalent symbolic process that is contingent, highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing.”<sup>18</sup> To address trauma on a societal level, the often-discussed public monument remains an important opportunity to create representations of a new, more palatable narrative. It was against this fraught background that Budapest had to decide what to do with the Communist statues throughout its city center and that Skopje re-envisioned its identity.

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, Introduction, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander, 12.



## CHAPTER 2

### MEMENTO PARK

On June 29, 1993, the second anniversary of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungarian territory, Memento Park celebrated its grand opening as a public outdoor museum consisting of monuments from Hungary's Socialist period (1949–1989), or, per the tagline of the park's English-language website, "The Biggest Statues of the Cold War."<sup>19</sup> As early as December 5, 1991, only six months after the last Soviet troops left, the Budapest General Assembly, an organization representing the twenty-eight municipal districts of Budapest, decided "on the fate of works of art with political content situated on public spaces of the capital," agreeing that "statues with an unacceptable political content must be removed from the public spaces" and that a "statue park" should be created on unoccupied land in the Budatétény district on the outskirts of the city.<sup>20</sup> Moving the statues from their original locations was necessary because of their now objectionable political ideology and to facilitate the restoration of markers of Hungarian national history that had not been deemed compatible with Communist ideology. The Budapest Art Gallery, which has the responsibility of caring for the public statues in the city, formed a Memorial Committee and asked six local architects for proposals.<sup>21</sup> They received three

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<sup>19</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed February 21, 2015. [www.mementopark.hu](http://www.mementopark.hu).

<sup>20</sup> Mariann Simon, "Memento Park, Budapest," *Kyymypa/Culture*, No. 6. (2014), 77. Accessed February 22, 2015. <http://cultcenter.net/journals/index.php/culture/issue/view/9>.

<sup>21</sup> The Budapest Municipal Council covered only the construction costs and the management was left for the Budatétény district council, which owns the land of the park, which soon leased the institution to a private operation. Simon, 7. The statues themselves were given for the park by the various self-governing districts but remain the property of a state museum and so are on permanent loan to the park. Turai, 5.

proposals. The committee selected the proposal of native architect Ákos Eleőd (b. 1961) for the project in 1991.

In addition to an educational center and gift shop, the realized sculpture park contains forty-two Socialist-era monuments taken from Budapest's city center and placed a forty-minute bus ride away. According to its website, Memento Park is intended as a tourist destination, "artistic action ground," and educational center.<sup>22</sup> Yet, at the most basic level, it was also a solution to the problem of what to do with Budapest's large public artworks that were no longer wanted in their original locations after the transition to democracy. Prominent sites such as Hero's Square, Fővám Square, and Felvonulási Square had Soviet monuments removed, which sometimes in itself restored the square to its desired pre-Communist appearance. Otherwise, former statues (or copies of them) were added to recreate that appearance, or, sometimes, like at Felvonulási Square, a new monument was added. Rather than destroy or discard the Soviet monuments, and the history they embody, the most significant monuments were arranged in this site as an act of remembrance that, as the website strives to make clear using a phrase from architect Akos Eleőd's winning proposal, "is not about Communism, but about the fall of Communism!"<sup>23</sup> There are no public statements about what the Memorial Committee wanted. However, based on meeting notes and individual press statements, Hungarian architect and scholar Mariann Simon thinks that "the main demand was to display the statues in a neutral way."<sup>24</sup> The director of the Budapest Art Gallery, who was on the committee, "stressed that the park was created not to judge the previous regime, neither to present it ironically but to remember it without anger, to keep a memento of a period of forty years."<sup>25</sup> Inevitably, though,

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<sup>22</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed October 10, 2014. [www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception](http://www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception).

<sup>23</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed October 10, 2014. [www.mementopark.hu](http://www.mementopark.hu).

<sup>24</sup> Simon, 77.

<sup>25</sup> Simon, 78.

recontextualizing the Socialist Realist monuments from highly visible locations in the city center to an out-of-the-way lot deemphasizes their significance and, as I will argue, changes their meaning. Now, these monuments exist together as a tourist site, proclaiming Hungary's triumph over Socialism and its associated art style of Socialist Realism by virtue of their relocation. Statues of Lenin and the worker exhort the visitor only to remembrance of the hollowness of promises that never materialized into a Communist utopia.

The park was called the (Budapest) Sculpture Park until 2001, when it was renamed Memento Park. Simon attributes the decision to emphasize the latent concept of memento, already mentioned by the Budapest Art Gallery director, to a 2001 public bid by Eleőd to enhance the park, which brought new attention to its symbolism and led, in part, to some additions in 2006 and 2007.<sup>26</sup> To call this site Memento Park reminds one not only of the tchotchkes on sale in the gift shop, but suggests that the sculptures on view are similarly worthless baubles to be hauled out of the city at whim: of little aesthetic or social value. Yet a memento is also a token of remembrance that we wish to keep, that is valued because it recalls the absent person, place, or time. Memento Park is thus being asked to function as a container not merely for monuments of the Socialist era but for the collective and cultural memories associated with them. Predicated on remembrance, the park offers the visitor a highly specific way of relating to these monuments, attempting to neutralize their affect in an effort to emphasize the site's status as symbolic graveyard of the Socialist era, perhaps an unintended means of working through the collective trauma of the break with Socialism.

When approaching the site, an imposing but plain brick edifice, which houses statues of Lenin, Marx, and Engels on either side of three gates, blocks the view to the sculpture park

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<sup>26</sup> Simon, 83.

beyond (Fig. 1). The visitor quickly realizes that it is merely a façade rather than a building. The outer gates function as the entrance and exit to the sculpture park. The center gate is always closed; its metal doors have the poem “A Sentence about Tyranny” by Gyula Illyés inscribed upon them. The symbolic conception of the architect, available to the visitor on the park’s website, is that this pared-down classical entablature is the “Wall Behind the Scenes,” “behind which there are no buildings, nothing,” implying that the philosophies of Lenin, Marx, and Engels constructed an illusion that masked the reality of the Socialist experience.<sup>27</sup> Behind the theatrical wall, once past the entrance and gift shop, is the sculpture park itself. Roughly the size of a football field but irregularly shaped, the sculpture park is otherwise surrounded by chain-link fences and bushes that delineate the park from the unremarkable land around it. The sparse setting of minimal brick delineation and humble gravel paths contradict the grand scale of most of the sculptures within the park. The poverty of means—brick, grass, and gravel—implies a similar poverty of the Socialist era and experience. The whole forms an odd, barren garden, symmetrically balanced with lawns and looping gravel walking paths that are walled off from an exterior of highway, electrical lines, and a ridge of scattered houses.

Eleőd conceived of the site in an organized and symbolic way, reflected in the planning of six circular paths that radiate from a hub of green grass featuring a large star of red flowers (Fig. 2). Because of this design, the visitor walks in circles through the park, on paths where the sculptures are arranged on the outside of the paths and the inner circle is empty grass (Fig. 3). Rather than grand vistas, there are inward views of empty spaces and oblique views of large sculptures, rarely smaller than life-size and some much larger, like the twenty-six-foot tall *Republic of Councils Monument* (István Kiss, 1969, bronze). At the same time, the monuments

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<sup>27</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed February 21, 2015. [www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception](http://www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception).

are presented as traditional art objects—spaced out to be viewed individually, with perspectives across the lawns or through windows in the brick spatial dividers. A smaller, unadorned length of brick wall, dwarfed by the large statues, has been built at the far end of the park directly across from the “Wall Behind the Scenes” to function, per the official interpretation on the website, as an “end wall – which says once and for all: no further.”<sup>28</sup> Presumably, this statement relates not only to the far boundary of the park, but also to the associations and impact of the sculptures within the park, which are likewise contained. Overall, the myopic, inward design suggests repetition rather than progress, a history narrative by way of entrapment.

Entering the park through the brick façade that Eleőd calls “The Wall Behind the Scenes,” the visitor proceeds from “The Endless Parade of Liberation Monuments” to “The Endless Parade of Personalities of the Workers Movement.”<sup>29</sup> All of these names are Eleőd’s designations. Hardly endless, there are ten in the first group and sixteen in the second group. Eleőd also includes thirteen memorials in the group of “The Unending Promenade of Worker’s Movement Concepts.” Generally speaking, the works on view are large and display representative elements of Socialist Realism. Discreet plaques inform the visitor of the title, artist, and date of the works but do not attempt to explain their significance or former location. Given the exaggeration and pomp of Eleőd’s names, the architect seems to have intended the dilution of the memorials’ impact through repetition. “Endless” and “Unending” suggest ennui rather than awe.

Among the statues to Communist dignitaries such as the ubiquitous Lenin and Hungarian figures like Béla Kun, there are numerous anonymous heroic workers and liberating soldier monuments, including the representative 1947 bronze statue of *Red Army Soldier (Felszabadító*

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<sup>28</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed February 21, 2015. [www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception](http://www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception).

<sup>29</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed October 10, 2014. [www.mementopark.hu](http://www.mementopark.hu).

*szovjet katona*) by Hungarian sculptor Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl (Fig. 4). Portraying many of the conventions of Socialist Realism, this larger-than-life uniformed figure holds aloft a flag, prominently patterned with the Soviet hammer and sickle, while the other hand remains clenched by his side. Socialist Realism, an official style dating from the 1934 First Congress of Soviet Writers, was the Soviet Union's policy of creating literature and art that would abet the creation of a new Communist social order. Strobl's heroic figure is typical of Socialist Realist memorials that use simple, realistic forms to convey legible social messages, often valorizing proletariat figures toiling toward the creation of a Communist future. Across the hero's chest protrudes an old-style machine gun, and the chin and eyes of *Red Army Soldier* are raised to stare out and beyond. The roughly twenty-foot high statue's bearing and weapons exude strength and power, the raised eyes zeal, as was appropriate for a figure meant to invoke the memory of the liberation of Hungary by the Soviet Red Army.

*Red Army Soldier* originally stood as part of a group of works that formed the *Liberation Monument* on Gellért Hill, the highest elevation of Budapest and visible from the city below (Fig. 5). This monument commemorated the defeat of the Axis powers through the intervention of the Red Army, and its inscription originally read: "To the memory of the liberating Soviet heroes [erected by] the grateful Hungarian people [in] 1945," in Hungarian and Russian. At that time, the monument consisted of an allegorical female victory figure, a torch-bearing youth, and a youth killing a dragon in addition to *Red Army Soldier*. The soldier's gaze would have looked south over the far end of the city. Yet, in Hungarian society "liberation" quickly became a euphemism for occupation. *Red Army Soldier* has since been moved to Memento Park while the remainder of the original monument has been given new meaning, its inscription revised after 1989 to read: "To the memory of all those who sacrificed their lives for the independence,

freedom, and prosperity of Hungary.” Although still an imposing twenty-feet tall, today the stature of *Red Army Soldier* is lessened by appearing on the side of one of many inconsequential gravel paths, with a few bushes and the restrooms behind, just as its artillery technology now seems dated. The figure’s impact is further diluted by the numerous similar statues around it; one need merely continue down the path to find a similar memorial to an equally defunct political cause. The changed context at Memento Park signifies how this monument has been repurposed to form a different cultural memory than it did as part of *Liberation Monument*, one of Communist repression overcome.

After more work in the summer of 1993, the park’s current state was largely finished although it did not fulfill all aspects of Eleőd’s proposal.<sup>30</sup> An exception is the addition in 2006 of an enormous pair of bronze boots, called *Stalin’s Boots* (Fig. 6). This late addition is the only work in the park that was not a public memorial created under Socialism. It refers to a 1951 statue of Stalin that was famously destroyed in the failed 1956 Hungarian uprising—only its boots remained. The 26-foot high statue of Stalin on a limestone pedestal originally stood in Stalin Square, a large space used for public speeches, on a podium sixty feet wide, decorated with reliefs of Hungarians welcoming their leader. Eleőd’s artistic recreation places the new boots and brick pedestal on top of a bare concrete platform, made to the scale and weight of the original podium but without embellishment. His liberal interpretation stands by itself across from the “Wall Behind the Scenes.” The inclusion of *Stalin’s Boots* points to how the park overall

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<sup>30</sup> The architect’s original plan has not been fully implemented. For example, Witness Square is intended to be paved over and house a café in the unused barrack across from the education barrack. It is also likely that the dilapidated state of the Square is a result of lack of funds, rather than Eleőd’s intention. In 1995, the manager of the park tried to bring the decay of the statues to the public’s notice in hope for additional government money or support. In 2001, the architect proposed a plan to the new government that would expand the park, largely according to his original plan. In 2006, this proposal was followed in a restricted way with the addition of Stalin’s Boots and the podium they are on.

attempts to incorporate the recent Socialist past into a more desirable narrative, one that includes bravery and revolution instead of domination alone.

Eleőd intended “Witness Square,” the area in front of “The Wall Behind the Scenes” where *Stalin’s Boots* is located, to be separate from the region of “remembrance” further into the statue park behind the Wall.<sup>31</sup> He calls it the “conclusion of the thought process,” that is, his judgment about the historical period represented in the ostensibly neutral area of the park: “the victory of Democracy over Dictatorship.”<sup>32</sup> The addition of *Stalin’s Boots* in “Witness Square” supports the idea that the Socialist monuments of Memento Park now work to show a victory over Socialism, particularly as it references the 1956 Hungarian uprising. However, the message of *Stalin’s Boots* remains unclear to many visitors, especially foreigners. While one cannot help but imagine that these boots belong to some large figure, there is no plaque to explain who they belong to or why they are represented. In fact, there are no written elements available at the site to explain Eleőd’s highly symbolic arrangement of the park, leaving most visitors ignorant of concepts such as “Witness Square,” “The Wall Behind the Scenes,” “The Endless Parade of Liberation Monuments,” etc.

In addition to Eleőd’s unclear phrase “artistic action ground,” Memento Park functions as a tourist destination and educational center. As a tourist destination, it offers for sale many souvenirs of Communism and Socialist Hungary in its gift shop next to the entrance. By the exit, a pale blue Trabant sits outside for photo-ops, next to a sign about Socialist Hungary’s most popular car. In 2007, a new exhibition hall and small movie theater in the form of barracks were added. The appropriately derelict wooden structure displays photographs of Hungary’s failed 1956 revolution and the political changes of 1988-90, a phone booth with a “Communist hotline”

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<sup>31</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed February 21, 2015. [www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception](http://www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception).

<sup>32</sup> Memento Park Website. Accessed February 21, 2015. [www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception](http://www.mementopark.hu/pages/conception).



where one can listen to audio recordings of former party leaders' speeches, and a darkened room where one can view films that were originally used to train government informants on how to spy properly. This education center offers an overview of the political context in which these artworks were made, but also reinforces the message about the Socialist era that *Stalin's Boots* are meant to convey: a victory over the old regime.

The three-fold function of the park (tourist destination, "artistic action ground," and educational center) betrays fundamentally incongruous attitudes toward the meaning of the sculptures since their removal from the streets of Socialist Budapest to the memory park of democratic Hungary. As Hungarian art historian Hedi Turai notes in "Past Unmastered: Hot and Cold Memory in Hungary," the Memorial Committee claimed that "although sculptures in public spaces are always subject to political will, the sculptures themselves are also 'works of art' at the same time, and should be presented in the most objective and neutral way possible."<sup>33</sup> Their position muffles the ideological import of inherently political works of art. After all, Socialist Realist works are distinguished both by their realism and their socially-charged messages, which were intended to shape public consciousness. Furthermore, this neutral attitude is not compatible with the purpose of the park's creation; to display works of public art that had become disagreeable after the regime change is in itself an ideologically charged judgment.

Both Turai and Simon note the contradiction between seriousness and irony which the park, and its visitors, straddle. Simon writes that, because of the addition of the barracks and *Stalin's Boots* around "Witness Square," "the park became a tourist attraction which seems to work like a museum but without the authenticity that we would expect from a professional

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<sup>33</sup> Hedi Turai, "Past Unmastered: Hot and Cold Memory in Hungary," *Third Text*, Vol. 23 Iss. 1 (January 2009), 100.

exhibition.”<sup>34</sup> She concludes that “what we see in the Memento Park is neither an authentic museum nor a neutral collection of some statues from the communist and socialist period but it is rather the monument of the peaceful system change of 1989-1990.”<sup>35</sup> This interpretation of Memento Park itself as a monument to transition is not available to the majority of visitors, who face what Turai describes as “a tension between the intended serious message of the concept and the irony, the laughter that greets the park every day. More exactly, there is a confusion among visitors about how to behave appropriately.”<sup>36</sup> Turai interprets the park’s confusing presentation as symptomatic of the larger question of how to deal with collective memories of Socialism in contemporary Hungarian society, an ambivalence I argue remains unresolved at Memento Park.

The dialogue in scholarship around the use of public art to manage collective memory of societal trauma (as scholars have considered the break with Socialism) is not limited to the post-Socialist condition but occurred earlier and famously with Holocaust memorials.<sup>37</sup> Beyond remembering, Memento Park’s mission “to remember so that it never happens again” moralizes Socialist monuments as a warning against the evils of the past, as Holocaust memorials have done.<sup>38</sup> There are a few problems with this comparison.<sup>39</sup> Memento Park’s function as a tourist site, underlined by the charging of admission, posits the sculptures as something to be gawked at, which Turai points out does not happen at Holocaust sites. The heavy-handed theatrics of the

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<sup>34</sup> Simon, 84.

<sup>35</sup> Simon, 84.

<sup>36</sup> Turai, 101.

<sup>37</sup> For the break with Socialism as societal trauma, see Peter Sztompka, “The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and for the Hungarian context, Edit András, “An Agent Still at Work: The Trauma of Collective Memory of the Socialist Past” in *Springerin* 3, no. 8 (March 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Turai, 100.

<sup>39</sup> I am comparing the intentions and thought around Holocaust memorials and their ability to represent collective memory and trauma to the dialogue around post-Socialist memorials. Disquietingly, the forms and rhetoric of Holocaust sites have been coopted in Central and Eastern Europe to apply the same logic to victims of totalitarian regimes. This highly problematic likening of all Eastern bloc experience to the Jewish one during and after the Second World War is notably seen in the government-sponsored Terror Háza Múzeum/Terror House Museum (2002) in Budapest.

park, which in a sense matches the legibility and social consciousness valued by Socialist Realism, also contribute to the viewer's uncertainty of how to respond in the new context: with levity or gravity. While the photo captions in the education center speak of repression, the visitor is encouraged to take photos lightheartedly with a cute Trabant or pose mockingly with Lenin. As the Memento Park website advertises on its homepage banner: "Removed statues from the streets of Budapest with great photo opportunities of Lenin, soviet Red Army soldiers, and many more communist heroes[sic]."<sup>40</sup> On one hand, the sculptures are treated with respect through their preservation and presentation as autonomous works of art with informational plaques and, on the other, dismissively through the remote, barren site. As Turai describes the relationship of the viewer to the work in this odd environment: "There is a vacuum, and in this vacuum everybody is 'free', that is, at a loss as to how to relate to the Socialist past."<sup>41</sup> The visitor is unsure how to interpret the monuments because the directive implied by an individual sculpture and the one implied by the park overall conflict in terms of their claim on cultural memory.

James Young's notion of the counter-monument, describing a changed attitude to monumentality by artists creating German Holocaust memorials in the 1980s, is apt here.<sup>42</sup> Young discusses the works of artists mistrustful of the traditional forms and purposes of large, state-aggrandizing monuments, who instead grapple with the past through memorials that critically question, abnegate, or remove their own presence. Certainly, Memento Park speaks to removal by having taken these sculptures out of the city center and counters the original Socialist narrative by recontextualizing them. But is Memento Park actually a counter-monument? On the contrary, it embraces and uses the conventions of the monument to form a new, composite

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<sup>40</sup> Memento Park Budapest Website. Accessed February 21, 2015. <http://www.mementopark.hu>.

<sup>41</sup> Turai, 104.

<sup>42</sup> James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today," *Art and The Public Sphere*, edited by J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

monument. It takes earlier sculptures and asks that viewers create new memories from them. Rather than visualizing a void or loss, it reinserts the monuments as neutered presences far from their original urban context, without hierarchy or individual treatment, and their lack of threat speaks to a new victory, of Hungarian society over Communism. The absent, featureless nature of the site is not allowed to speak for itself, as a counter-monument might. Instead, Eleőd's design mediates the experience.

Memento Park is inculcated with ideology that hearkens to the values of the past even while rejecting them. At the same time, Eleőd's highly symbolic composition counters the barrenness of the location in its original state with its own ideology. The emblematic components of Eleőd's composition attempt to protect visitors from just the kind of vacuum that Turai says is still present in the site. They present what James Young calls the "state-sponsored monument's traditional function as self-aggrandizing locus for national memory" with the goal of affirming "the righteousness of a nation's birth" just the same as when the monuments stood in the center of Budapest—it is only the grand narrative about them that has changed.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Young's counter-monument, Eleőd designed Memento Park to embrace the grandeur of monuments and gravity of memorials, rendering all the more extreme their fall from power. Instead of calling the abilities of memorials into question, Memento Park utilizes at least some of the clout of the old traditions.

Emptiness permeates the park. Its design prominently features empty grass circles, where one would expect to see a sculpture placed. The center of the site lacks a focal point and has only a red star-shaped flowerbed to mark it. The park creates a vacuum of meaning because it is removed from the city, and more broadly, from life. Visitors are left facing monuments whose

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<sup>43</sup> Young, 52.

signifiers lack a referent. Individual sculptures, perhaps exhorting a worker to revolution, or commemorating a Hungarian political leader, refer to values and ideologies that have since been rejected. Yet the sculptures remain evocative. Their large presences haunt the vacant space like a ghost town. Although Memento Park arguably removes the element of “threat,” this presentation continues to give the sculptures life, preserving not only a warning but a whisper of the powerful dream of a Communist utopia.

Unintentionally and unavoidably, Memento Park is an ambivalent site, reflecting the attitudes and memories of a society where, although a regime change had happened, a transition was just beginning. The concept of a memento is in itself ambivalent: the object is often small and cheap, yet it is powerful and cherished. A memento recalls to our memory what is absent. The creation of Memento Park thus amplifies these memorials—inherently markers of absence or loss—as signs of death. Problematically though, this symbolic graveyard, situated as more modern graveyards tend to be on the outskirts of the city, is a carefully conceived fiction. Memento Park perpetuates the notion that Socialism itself is dead and can be safely contained within these distant, simple fences while it continues to exist in living memory. The attempt toward neutrality at Memento Park is a culturally sophisticated reaction that avoids the barbarism of destruction or the condemnation of living citizens who favored Socialism. Yet, the conflictually neutral yet didactic message of the park above all else fails to encourage visitors to do real memory work to reconcile their own experience or understanding of Socialism with these public markers. In providing space for an elegy, rather than an active debate about the Socialist era and how the past it is, it reflects the need of a society in transition to bury the recent past.

## CHAPTER 3

### SKOPJE 2014

In marked contrast, consider the recent, dramatic renovations in the capital of the Republic of Macedonia, which declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Since the subsequent turn toward democracy and capitalism, Skopje's city center by the Vardar River, directly abutting its old district of winding cobblestone streets, large markets, and modest skyline, had developed haphazardly. As recently as 2010, an urban renovation program called Skopje 2014 has sought to overhaul the appearance of the capital of Macedonia. Skopje 2014 can surely be seen as a reaction against the Modernist evidence of its Socialist past, as will be discussed. But in addition to erasure, an opposite mode of thought drives Skopje's belated transformation: one of reinvention. Classical forms and references to an antique past provide an alternate historical narrative for the public to adopt and "remember."

To summarize the overall program, the conservative VMRO-DPMNE ruling government announced Skopje 2014 in 2010. In accordance with this initiative, the existing Modernist, "Socialist" cityscape is being given a classical or baroque facelift by the government, which claims that the urban makeover is a means to stimulate commerce and tourism. Its scope is enormous. Between 2010 and 2014, the government has added or renovated bridges, built some twenty new cultural and governmental buildings, and added façades along main streets, as well as pedestrian walkways, parking decks, man-made beaches along the Vardar River, and an as-yet-unbuilt observation wheel like the London Eye. Notably, some forty monuments, such as

statues, pavilions, and fountains, have been added within a one-mile radius of the capital's centrally located Macedonia Square. These monuments make a striking visual addition to the urban landscape and, like Memento Park, have their own ideology. Through them, the Macedonian government is attempting to bring the cultural "memories" to which the new statues refer into the public consciousness. Although heterogeneous, the aesthetic plan overall displays three consistent tasks: to mask "ugly, Communist" architecture,<sup>44</sup> to claim a distinguished Classical heritage, and thus to become a bourgeois, "European" capital.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike Memento Park, where an individual was responsible for the project, Skopje 2014 does not seem to have a single person or team directing the overall vision of this massive makeover of the city center (although in 2012, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski claimed that the project was his idea).<sup>46</sup> Gruevski and Culture Minister Elizabeta Kanceska-Mileska are certainly responsible for many of the decisions. The government first announced the project at a press conference on February 4, 2010 where they showed a CGI video of a Skopje that appeared vastly different than it was then, accompanied by heroic music.<sup>47</sup> It is difficult to assess either the original plan or subsequent decisions because the plan (and its cost) have never been fully disclosed, the pace of the urban renovations has been very fast, and the initial program seems to have changed.<sup>48</sup> If the original plan announced twenty sculptures to be created for the city center,

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<sup>44</sup> Jasna Koteska, "Troubles with History: Skopje 2014," *ARTMargins* Website. Published December 29, 2011. Accessed November 27, 2014. [www.artmargins.com/index.php/2-articles/655-troubles-with-history-skopje-2014](http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/2-articles/655-troubles-with-history-skopje-2014).

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Graan, "Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia," *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 28, iss. 1 (2013), 168.

<sup>46</sup> "PM Gruevski: Yes, Skopje 2014 was my Idea," *Macedonia Online* Website. Published January 7, 2012. Accessed January 13, 2015. <http://macedoniaonline.eu/content/view/20045/45/>.

<sup>47</sup> The music is cited as "Hero's Farewell" by Dan Graham in the "Macedonia Timeless" Promotional Video. Accessed January 25, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iybmt-iLysU>.

<sup>48</sup> In a sidenote to a September 14, 2012 news article, Skopje 2014 was detailed as already changing many times: "Plans changed many times: During the summer the authorities put down markers for ten new monuments in the central area of Skopje. In the last four years the Skopje 2014 plan has changed nine times to accommodate new buildings and monuments. At first the public was not informed of the details and could not have known that the project would include ten or more grandiose buildings, many more monuments and bridges, a panoramic wheel, plus several new facades on existing buildings inspired by styles of Classical Antiquity. With the last modification, the

an article published a year later referred to more than fifty new sculptures.<sup>49</sup> No official numbers are available. The government now admits having spent roughly €200 million (and private estimates of the project's total cost range much higher), which is a large increase from a budget originally estimated, but never disclosed to the public, to be €80 million.<sup>50</sup> Different reasons seem to have caused alterations to the original program. For example, some sculptures memorializing historical figures of Albanian descent were belatedly included in the plans to placate an ethnic Albanian minority in the country who felt their population was being left out of this portrayal of history.<sup>51</sup> Willow trees planted in containers in the middle of the Vardar River were a failure for functional reasons and had to be removed. And although 2014 is over, the building continues. For example, a building contract for the observation wheel, planned to be erected above the Vardar River to the north of Macedonia Square, was signed in August 2014 with a projected construction period of five years.

The “ugly Communist” architecture of Macedonia’s Socialist past was visible as recently as 2009, when Macedonia Square had only a flowerbed in its center (Fig. 7).<sup>52</sup> However, by 2014, this architecture was obscured by a dominating eight-story high monument entitled *Warrior on a Horse* as well as new façades, monuments, and built objects designed to mask that undesirably “Communist” built environment (Fig. 8). Different Macedonian artists have been

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project has gained a new 30-metre-high monument to Mother Teresa, an administrative building, more revamped facades and more willow trees for the Vardar River.” Valentina Stojanchevska and Olivera Nikodinovska, “Secret Contracts Hide Cost of Skopje Makeover,” *Balkan Insight* Website. Published September 14, 2012. Accessed February 24, 2015. [www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/secret-contracts-hide-cost-of-skopje-makeover](http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/secret-contracts-hide-cost-of-skopje-makeover).

<sup>49</sup> Koteska.

<sup>50</sup> Art historian Suzana Milevska in her September 2014 article estimates the cost to be over €500 million. Suzana Milevska, “Ágalma: The “Objet Petit a,” Alexander the Great, and Other Excesses of Skopje 2014,” *e-flux* online journal, no. 57 (September 2014). Accessed October 3, 2014. [www.e-flux.com/journal/agalma-the-objet-petit-a-alexander-the-great-and-other-excesses-of-skopje-2014/](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/agalma-the-objet-petit-a-alexander-the-great-and-other-excesses-of-skopje-2014/)

<sup>51</sup> The lack of minority representation has been another contentious aspect of Skopje 2014. Both Albanian and Muslim populations have complained about not being represented, and tensions such as these have been problematic in Macedonia since the 2001 Albanian insurgency.

<sup>52</sup> Graa, 161.



commissioned for individual monuments, many of whom are not well-known locally or internationally.<sup>53</sup> New additions include a pair of equestrian statues that flank the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Stone Bridge where it meets Macedonia Square. These life-size bronze statues on high marble bases portray 19<sup>th</sup>-century revolutionaries Goce Delčev (1872-1903) and Dame Gruev (1871-1906) on horseback. In front of the Vardar River to the north of the Stone Bridge is one of two large, white marble monoliths in the square. This thirty-foot-high monument represents Byzantine emperor Justinian I (482-565) seated and holding a codex.<sup>54</sup> In front of it, a neoclassical pavilion supported by white columns houses a small statue of an embracing couple on a pedestal, seemingly devoid of historical significance. Marking the places where streets open onto the square are monuments to 20<sup>th</sup>-century lexicographer Dimitrija Čupovski (1878–1940) and politician Metodija Andonov-Čento (1902-1957). *Warrior on a Horse* dwarfs the nearby *Monument to Tsar Samuel*, a thirty-foot tall, seated figure in white marble that resembles that of Justinian I.<sup>55</sup> One can see a triumphal arch of great stature called *Porta Macedonia* located down a pedestrian street.<sup>56</sup> The figurative bronze *Monument to Dimitar Popgeorgiev* (1840-1907), in front of the new National Bank building, portrays another 19<sup>th</sup>-century revolutionary. Next to the river on the south side of the Stone Bridge is a five-figure group statue of the Ottoman-era violent anarchist group, the Boatmen of Thessaloniki. Just beyond, also along the river, a 19<sup>th</sup> century-style carousel for children has been added, featuring lights and music.

This bonanza of new built elements accomplishes the first goal of Skopje 2014: to break with the “ugly Communist” image of the city. Architecture from the 1960s to the 1980s

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<sup>53</sup> “In 2006, the Ministry of Culture announced a public competition, but no international competitor won the bid, and instead the design and execution have been entrusted to local architects and artists, most of them previously unknown to the public.” Koteska.

<sup>54</sup> It was unveiled on June 16, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> It was unveiled on June 28, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> It was unveiled on January 6, 2012.

dominated Skopje's urban landscape. After an earthquake in 1963 destroyed eighty percent of the city, including most of the neoclassical buildings in the central part of Skopje, a reconstruction project, underwritten by the United Nations, was overseen by Japanese architect Kenzō Tange (1913-2005), a Modernist who had planned the restoration of Hiroshima. He and his team created a functional plan of Brutalist and Metabolist buildings for Skopje. The rebuilding team included many renowned architects such as Adolf Cibrowski (best known for his reconstruction of Warsaw after the Second World War), Luigi Piccinato (who worked on the restoration of Rome), and J.H. van den Broek and Bakema (the planners of new Rotterdam).<sup>57</sup> This team created the bare concrete structures that still form much of the urban fabric of Skopje. Brutalism, especially after decades of neglect, can appear unwelcoming rather than futuristic. Supporters of Skopje 2014 think that the project improves “a city blighted by decades of dreary Socialist architecture,” eliding a Modernist architectural style with the ideology of a political system that never fulfilled its promise of a better future society.<sup>58</sup>

Skopje 2014 largely decorates Tange's concrete canvas rather than offering increased function or development. The project's emphasis on adding façades to Socialist-era buildings on main streets rather than structural improvements to the buildings themselves exemplifies this approach.<sup>59</sup> The grand façades redone in either classical or baroque style recall the imposing entrance to Memento Park, which is revealed to be only façade. This approach can also be seen clearly in the new government buildings for the Agency for Electronic Communications, the Finance Police, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the north-east bank of the Vardar River,

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<sup>57</sup> Koteska.

<sup>58</sup> “Skopje 2014: The New Face of Macedonia,” *Balkan Insight* Website. Published on June 7, 2013. Accessed on October 18, 2014. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/gallery/skopje-2014>.

<sup>59</sup> There have been some functional additions like parking decks and new government and cultural buildings. However, as Koteska argues, in large part “the buildings are merely supposed to look better, not be better.” Koteska.

across from the square, where imposing façades belie the buildings' extremely narrow footprint, recalling the decorative use of architecture of the Septizodium (203 AD) in Rome. Clearly, this sweeping and expensive project was deemed worthwhile for symbolic reasons.

Moving the monuments for Memento Park out of the city center was an attempt to remove and rewrite the version of history that they represented, and in effect render them merely statues of artistic and historical interest, neutered of power, rather than memorials which reflected active cultural memories. In contrast, Skopje 2014 attempts to write a myth about the past over the existing version of history by masking earlier architecture and adding new monuments. Memento Park wants its removed monuments to be disarmed while Skopje 2014 wants the added monuments to be powerful and impressive. Memento Park intends to be a graveyard, symbolizing the death of everything that the sculptures were created to remember and evoke. Skopje 2014 intends to create the story of a strong and sophisticated nation by visualizing a glorious past for it.

The heterogeneity of history, style, content, and, arguably, nationality of these elements in Macedonia Square, as well as their prominence and number, create a dense, seemingly incoherent environment. Of course, there are reasons that the Macedonian government wanted to include these divergent historical figures. Some are being used to represent the struggle to define Macedonia as an independent nation. Goce Delčev (1872-1903), Dame Gruev (1871-1906), and Dimitar Popgeorgiev (1840-1907) were 19<sup>th</sup>-century revolutionary organizers in Ottoman-ruled Macedonia and Thrace. They struggled for liberation from Ottoman rule at a time when the difference between Bulgarian and Macedonian national identity was only beginning to be articulated. They, like the Boatmen of Thessaloniki, a group of young men who organized bombings and assassinations from 1900 to 1903 in a call for independence from Ottoman rule,

have traditionally been considered of Bulgarian origin. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, lexicographer Dimitrija Čupovski (1878–1940) helped to define Macedonian as its own language, and Metodija Andonov-Čento (1902-1957) was the first president of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in Yugoslavia. The larger-than-life versions of Justinian I and Tsar Samuel, made visually distinct and paired by their size and use of white marble, connect Macedonia to an older history. The Byzantine emperor Justinian I was born in the Roman town Tauresium, now an important archeological site twelve miles outside of Skopje. Samuel, as the ruler of the First Bulgarian Empire, established his capital from 997 to 1014 at Ohrid, now a city in Macedonia. Placing these figures in Macedonia Square is an act of positioning them in Macedonia's national history. When taken together, they give the impression of a national history stretching back hundreds of years that inevitably led to the current Republic of Macedonia.

The two largest and most important monuments in the square, which, like the monuments to Justinian I and Tsar Samuel, espouse a classical heritage through white marble and classical conventions, are *Warrior on a Horse* and *Porta Macedonia*. Considering *Warrior on a Horse*, the new focal point of Macedonia Square that replaced a modest flowerbed, can help us understand the symbolism of the site overall (Fig. 9). The eight-story tall monument was unveiled on September 8, 2011, to commemorate twenty years of the independence of Macedonia. Sculpted by Valentina Stefanovska, the bronze sculpture of the warrior and horse is forty-eight feet tall on its own, and it is perched atop a thirty-three-foot tall cylindrical column. Three taller marble sections, each separated by a shorter bronze ring, constitute the column's shaft and feature battle reliefs, ostensibly as generic as the unnamed warrior. At the base of the column are eight larger-than-life bronze soldiers with shields and spears. On one hand, there are historical precedents for equestrian statues and triumphal columns. For example, Stefanovska

may have been looking back to Etienne-Maurice Falconet's 1782 statue of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg, who is also portrayed on a rearing horse, and the *Column of Constantine* from 330 AD in Istanbul, whose rings are also stacked parallel to the ground rather than winding up like the *Column of Trajan* (113 AD, Rome). On the other hand, *Warrior on a Horse* embraces its contemporary status. The newness of the materials is apparent, as it gleams like some Jeff Koons bauble on high, especially at night, when the white marble and bronze materials are colored by changing lights to shades of blue, pink, green, and purple (Fig. 10). This shiny conglomeration is encircled by a fountain. Eight bronze lions, each over eight feet tall, surround the pool of the fountain and four of them spray water from their mouths. The fountain periodically spurts water choreographed to be in time with classical music coming from the enormous speakers raised on poles around the square, channeling ancient Rome via Las Vegas.<sup>60</sup>

*Warrior on a Horse* differs from the works in Memento Park, which are authentic—that is, with one exception, they were executed in the Socialist Realist style during the Socialist era in Hungary, something that Skopje 2014's mishmash of historical conventions from past eras and styles arguably cannot claim. Nor does it necessarily attempt to match the style to the historical context of the subject. The authenticity of the Socialist Realist works at Memento Park adds to the museum-like quality of the sculpture park, as does the minimal presentation. In contrast, it is not only the newness of the materials used to create the gigantic heroic warrior, or a certain crudity of design, but also the colored lights and music that accompany the monument that signal that its forms were pulled piecemeal from art history rather than reflecting the period in which

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<sup>60</sup> Although the spectacle and artificiality of the site beg for a post-modern reading, this paper's concern with memory and history in the post-Socialist landscape does not allow me to deal with the complicated reception of modernism and postmodernism in the region, which do not function as periodizing concepts in the same manner as they do in the West.

they were made. Skopje 2014's sculptures do not make adequate pretense to the histories their forms reference.

The classical evocations of this statue are politically motivated, and the choice of subject matter as well as style speaks to the ideology behind the massive urban facelift. The classical has long been associated with democracy in the West, but this monument claims a more specific connection. *Warrior on a Horse*, called "Alexander" by locals, presumably represents Alexander the Great. Macedonia's recent claims to classical culture intend to make a direct link between the world of Alexander the Great and the Macedonia of today. While this reference might seem like ancient history, currently it creates international tensions with neighboring Greece. In 2006, the same political party that sponsored Skopje 2014 renamed the airport "Skopje Alexander the Great Airport" to the infuriation of Greece, which insists that Alexander was a Hellene and that both Macedonia's name and the region's classical history are Greek cultural patrimony.<sup>61</sup> Presumably, Macedonia sought to avoid worsening relations with Greece by giving *Warrior on a Horse* a generic title. Arguments like these and over Macedonia's name—called the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia internationally—have been the reason that Greece blocks the entry of Macedonia into the European Union. The historicizing classical style and references of many of Skopje 2014's monuments assert the claim of Macedonia to this antique heritage.

'Antiquisation' has become a nation-building project.<sup>62</sup>

What might be considered a 19<sup>th</sup>-century project of creating national capitals in Western Europe continued in Central and Southeastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as capitals aspired to be

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<sup>61</sup> Boris Georgievski, "Ghosts of the Past Endanger Macedonia's Future," *Balkan Insight* Website. Published October 27, 2009. Accessed October 12, 2014. [www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/ghosts-of-the-past-endanger-macedonia-s-future](http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/ghosts-of-the-past-endanger-macedonia-s-future).

<sup>62</sup> The classicizing agenda has also been reflected in a larger government plan including revised textbooks and dictionaries. This nation-building project has been perceived as anti-Albanian, anti-Greek, and/or anti-Bulgarian, while at the same time it belatedly mimics both Albania's and Bulgaria's prized 20<sup>th</sup>-century citations of a classical past, Illyrian and Thracian respectively.

‘Little Parises’ or even ‘Little Viennas.’<sup>63</sup> These ‘Little Parises’ aspired to cleanliness and technological efficiency as well as to a ‘European-ness’ suggested by the cosmopolitan elegance of strolling avenues, palatial buildings, and fabulous shop windows. None of this affected Skopje. It only became a capital city in 1945 when Tito declared Macedonia a republic within the federal state of Yugoslavia. While Budapest needed to rid itself of Socialist-era public art in order to recapture its former image as the capital of a nation, Skopje does not have an urban landscape marked with symbols of a Macedonian nation to resurrect. Skopje today seeks what capitals such as Belgrade or Sofia sought a hundred years prior: it seeks to be considered a culturally sophisticated, bourgeois European capital through its embrace of the monumental and a classical past, a ‘Little Paris.’ As Macedonian art historian Jasna Koteska describes, “although consisting of everything historical, from Alexander the Great to Winston Churchill, Skopje 2014 is not here to serve the multiplicity of codes, but one great Code: an old-fashioned pride and dignity of a bourgeois capital of a superstate.”<sup>64</sup> This progress narrative governs the logic of Skopje 2014. In unusual timing, Skopje visually manifests in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the bourgeois ideology of a new, capitalist nation-state.

Visible from Macedonia Square, the white marble triumphal arch *Porta Macedonia*, framed by facing rows of buildings with new façades, occupies the end of pedestrian-only October 11 Street, a date marking the beginning of both the First Balkan War in 1912 and the resistance to Axis occupation in 1942 (Fig. 11).<sup>65</sup> *Porta Macedonia* is sixty-nine feet tall, thus

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<sup>63</sup> Tanja Damljanović Conley and Emily Gunzburger Makaš, “Shaping Central and Southeastern Capital Cities in the Age of Nationalism,” in *Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning Central and Southeast Europe*, eds. Emily Gunzburger Makaš and Tanja Damljanović Conley (New York: Routledge, 2010), 26.

<sup>64</sup> Koteska.

<sup>65</sup> The Greek Foreign Ministry lodged an official complaint to authorities in Macedonia following the inauguration of *Porta Macedonia*. Greece accused Macedonia of failing to cooperate in United Nations-mediated talks aimed at settling a dispute over the Balkan nation’s official name. “Athens complains about Skopje arch,” ekathimerini.com News Site. Published January 12, 2012. Accessed December 2, 2014. [www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_wsit1\\_1\\_12/01/2012\\_422412](http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsit1_1_12/01/2012_422412).

competing in scale with the nearby eighty-one-foot tall *Warrior on a Horse*, and also designed by Valentina Stefanovska. The Macedonian government website states that the purpose of *Porta Macedonia* is “to commemorate the most important jubilee of our country—20 years of independence, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, in honor of the greatest triumph of the Macedonian people in the struggle for freedom and independence.”<sup>66</sup> Typically, monuments memorialize a specific event, person, or sacrifice, but *Porta Macedonia* uses the gravitas of monumental form to command respect while operating by a different kind of logic. This arch recalls the original triumphal arches of the Roman Empire commemorating martial victories and marking processional paths, such as the Arch of Constantine where free-standing sculptures of Dacian captives are placed in the attic comparable to the positioning of the anonymous bronze male and female figures on *Porta Macedonia*.<sup>67</sup> However, the arch in Skopje celebrates the political dissolution of Yugoslavia that made Macedonia its own country instead of a more conventional battle or war. Yet, *Porta Macedonia*’s thirty-some inset marble reliefs feature the heads of ancient warriors and modern young crowds, angels and scholars, and anonymous bronze figures in an invocation of an ongoing, magnificent past (Fig. 12). The monument collects people and events across time and space. Reigl discusses the monument’s “claim to immortality, to an eternal present and an unceasing state of becoming.”<sup>68</sup> Here, the extended time span in the featured historical scenes and the newness of construction suggest that the triumph is equally of the present and future Macedonia as of the past. The takeaway message seems to be a vague but positive promotion of national identity and celebration: Macedonia equals glory.

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<sup>66</sup> *Porta Macedonia* was unveiled a few months late, on January 6, 2012. Website of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. Accessed February 1, 2015. <http://vlada.mk/?q=node/273&language=en-gb>.

<sup>67</sup> The arches are also the same height.

<sup>68</sup> Reigl, 38.



Shallow-relief friezes decorate this petite *Arc de Triomphe* (Jean Chalgrin, 1806, Paris) around a main, centrally located message: “MACEDONIA.” Unlike the Napoleonic monument’s position atop grand boulevards, commanding space and long vistas, *Porta Macedonia* is sandwiched in the middle of facing rows of buildings and where the pedestrian avenue stops to allow for a highway on the other side. Architect and theorist Robert Venturi argues that

the series of triumphal arches in Rome is a prototype of a billboard. ...The architectural ornament, including pilaster, pediments, and coffers, is a kind of bas-relief that makes only a gesture toward architectural form. It is a symbol for the surface. Along with their function as billboards carrying messages, the triumphal arches in the Roman Forum were spatial markers channeling processional paths within a complex urban landscape.<sup>69</sup>

The idea that a triumphal arch functions as a billboard is apt here: *Porta Macedonia* offers a clearly visible surface rather than a marker on an atavistic processional path, especially as it stands at a dead end to a pedestrian avenue on one side and a highway on the other. The monument strives to promote the country of Macedonia like a billboard for a consumer brand. In fact, cultural anthropologist Andrew Graan has argued that Skopje 2014 is primarily an effort to improve Macedonia’s “nation brand” on an international stage.<sup>70</sup>

The idea of national branding is underscored by the function of the arch’s limited interior space, which is occupied by a state-owned souvenir shop. In addition, elevators and stairs provide access to interior galleries and the roof for weddings and other social functions. Monuments—and as Venturi notes triumphal arches in particular—are structures whose architectural form matches their function; all ornament “gestures toward architectural form” in order to memorialize a person or sacrifice. To memorialize is to fix in long-standing cultural

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), 117.

<sup>70</sup> Graan, 162.

memory what will disappear from collective memory after a few generations.<sup>71</sup> Instead, *Porta Macedonia* attempts to instill cultural memories in Macedonian society that never could have been collective memories, given that the very idea of Macedonian national identity emerged only 150 years ago. Thus, even as it works to establish ancient history, this tourist shop disguised as a monument indicates the recent triumph of capitalism and nation-state just as it rejects Socialism. Selling mementos would take away from the gravity of a memorial that mourned lives lost and promoted sacrifice. But such activity is built into *Porta Macedonia* itself, as is its ability to feature as a backdrop for wedding photos. Rather than death and solemnity, commerce and celebrations are meant to be part of this new beginning for Macedonia.

Despite this subversion of the monument's traditional function, in a basic sense, Skopje 2014 and Memento Park, as well, present a conservative approach to history and memorials. These sites still value the monumental. Large, imposing sculptures portray a progressive narrative of history in a representational manner through realistic figurative monuments of warriors and statesmen. The rhetoric of the heroic male is invoked alongside bellicose narratives of victory for their emotional punch, even if it is only a pair of oversized shoes that imply defeat as at Memento Park. The traditional, recognizable forms taken by these monuments make it easier for their new ideology to go unnoticed. Memento Park and Skopje 2014 find the format of the monument convenient for creating lessons about how the past should be remembered, only they do so in a manner that differs from lived experience and the definition of a memorial. Although they contest aspects of the Socialist era, the means they use to achieve their goals share commonalities with it. In both cases, the government handed down an aesthetic history lesson meant to be applicable in the present—not unlike the Socialist governments did some 60 years

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<sup>71</sup> See Jan Assmann's 1988 essay "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" (translated in 1995 by John Czaplicka) in *New German Critique*, Issue 65 (April 1995): 125-133.

prior.<sup>72</sup> In another parallel with Socialist predecessors, the monuments of Memento Park and Skopje 2014 become a way of projecting a positive view of the current government's policies and creating a useful, flattering, and easier version of history to move forward with as a society, as the progress into a happy Communist era once was.

The Hungarian sculpture park can be seen as a negative or passive site, meant to recall safely an unwanted Socialist past in a manner that gestures to absence: absence of the monuments from the city, absence of meaning now that the sculptures lack context, absence from cultural memory now that they are banished. In contrast, Skopje 2014 can be considered a positive or dynamic site, an active construction to create cultural memories in accordance with a new grand narrative about Macedonia in an obtrusive, clearly present way. What aligns these projects beyond their engagement with the Socialist past is that both of them seek to disguise a contrasting reality: Memento Park constructs a new narrative for Hungarian society in which Socialism is dead (and memories of it can be safely contained), and Skopje 2014 conceals the absence of a national history in a new country.

Although celebrating an independent nation that has existed for only twenty-four years, Skopje 2014 presents a unified narrative of national history beginning with 4<sup>th</sup> century BC emperor Alexander the Great and his father, Philip II of Macedon, to whom an alleged but again generically named statue appears across the Stone Bridge from Macedonia Square.<sup>73</sup> It makes strident claims about Macedonia's history through an aesthetic program of monuments that, per the nature of the monument to memorialize, call on society to remember. According to this

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<sup>72</sup> Unlike the Budapest General Assembly's consensus, there was no vote or referendum on whether or how Skopje 2014 should be executed.

<sup>73</sup> I am referring to *Warrior with Accompanying Elements*, a 42-foot statue of a standing man in ancient garb on a pedestal in a smaller fountain than that of *Warrior on a Horse*. Erected on May 22, 2012, the statue is situated at the end of a large, irregular plaza on the North-East end of the Stone Bridge and faces toward Macedonia Square.

program, what should be remembered is not the recent Socialist era that a living generation recalls, but a mythic past. Monuments to this mythic past literally cover the Socialist past. The sweeping size of the project and its disjunction from history make Skopje 2014 unique in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet it exaggerates what occurs on a much smaller scale with monuments to contested versions of history throughout the world, particularly in the post-Socialist region. The conspicuousness of the monuments of Skopje 2014 and their obvious newness show that the government is not concerned with trying to make them look authentic while their sheer number speak to a society's need for a unified narrative of history. What remains to be seen is whether this new narrative will be adopted as a part of Macedonian cultural memory.

Unlike Memento Park, which received largely positive reviews when it opened, Skopje 2014 has polarized residents from the start.<sup>74</sup> A 2010 opinion poll of local residents found that fifty-four percent of those polled did not support Skopje 2014 and forty-six percent did.<sup>75</sup> To those who accept the monuments at face value, Alexander and *Porta Macedonia* are seen as authentic and deeply emotional symbols. To critics of Skopje 2014, this urban renewal looks like nationalist “kitsch.”<sup>76</sup> Residents have described walking through the once familiar city as an uneasy or surreal experience. Macedonian art historian Suzana Milevska describes Skopje 2014 as a “memorial park of ‘false memories,’” referring to the psychological phenomenon of trauma-driven, imagined events that show as real in the person's memory.<sup>77</sup> False memories enable the “collective denial and collective amnesia regarding the Socialist past” to continue, according to

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<sup>74</sup> Simon, 80.

<sup>75</sup> Koteska.

<sup>76</sup> Graan, 163.

<sup>77</sup> Milevska.

Hungarian art historian Edit András.<sup>78</sup> This reaction suggests that the ideology of the monuments diverge too starkly from collective memory to be easily accepted.

The narratives of history offered by Memento Park and Skopje 2014 are empowering but not without serious difficulty. They ignore a real recent past and associated memories in favor of “false memories.” The “trauma” that these false memories replace is the uneasy knowledge that the Socialist past is an ever-present reality in the minds of citizens and in their capitals’ urban fabric. Blocking real memory does not allow society to process the past and move on. Quite the contrary; consider the relevance of the imagery used for these false memories. If Strobl’s *Red Army Soldier* is reduced to a stone buffoon rather than a representation of might, victory, and emancipation, what are Hungarians meant to remember about the Soviet occupation? The past becomes populated with cartoonish enemies. Similarly, “Alexander” appears like an inflated toy soldier atop a triumphal column. How does this antiquated notion of heroism speak to the contemporary condition of Macedonian society—what battle will its citizens be fighting by sword? Admittedly, these are the time-honored conventions of the memorial, but they once spoke to actual events, and here the distance from reality as known by citizens is great, despite the recentness of the monuments’ construction.

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<sup>78</sup> Edit András, “An Agent Still at Work: The Trauma of Collective Memory of the Socialist Past,” March 2008, *Springerin* 3.VIII. [www.springerin.at/dyn/heft\\_text.php?textid=2103&lang=en](http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=2103&lang=en).

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Memento Park and Skopje 2014 are sites rich with meaning, both intentional and unintentional, that represent and impact not only how the collective memory of a nation is supposed to relate to its Socialist past but how it is supposed to form a cultural identity in the present that can move into the future. These two memory-scapes, one a sculpture park set apart from the city and comprised of unwanted Socialist Realist sculptures and the other an urban center newly made historic and decorative with large Classical-style facades and monuments in various styles, are clearly different. However, comparing Memento Park and Skopje 2014 demonstrates that one is the inverse of the other not only in that they have opposite qualities, but in that they are fundamentally similar. They display the ongoing transition of post-Socialist societies and the important, fluctuating role that monuments and memory play in them. More specifically, the impetus for both projects is a negative attitude toward the Socialist past. Both take a constructive approach to history and seek to fashion it to similar ends: a clean break from that recent past. In their unintentional ambiguities and the divergent reactions from viewers, the sites exhibit how challenging a task it is to fashion such a break.

Memento Park and Skopje 2014 challenge the traditions of the monument. Neither focus on monuments honoring specific events or people in collective memory, which by definition monuments eulogize. In fact, both sites capitalize on the traditional respect and emotional cachet of the monument at sites where a certain history is to be either forgotten or newly envisioned.

Both are celebratory of the present at the expense of the recent historical past. Both Memento Park and Skopje 2014 cater to tourism in an overt display of capitalism, which perhaps signifies their distance from the ideals of Communism. Neither is meant ironically or as kitsch, yet both are understood that way by a substantial portion of their local audiences. Rather than considering the sites as completely different, they are more like two faces of the same coin, or a seal and its imprint: the one a solidly projected face, the other a depressed inverse of that face. If one were to make a relief of a coin by imprinting it on soft material, the same shape would appear on the coin face and on its inverse. A similar relationship exists between these two post-Socialist landscapes: they are diametrically opposed, as discussed above, but also reflect each other through positive form and critical absence. Fashioned along similar lines, those of monuments and memory, they are made of the same material: the post-Socialist society's traumatic relationship to its Socialist past.

## FIGURES



Fig. 1

Entrance to Memento Park, Budapest (statues of Lenin, left, and Marx and Engels, right). Photograph my own.

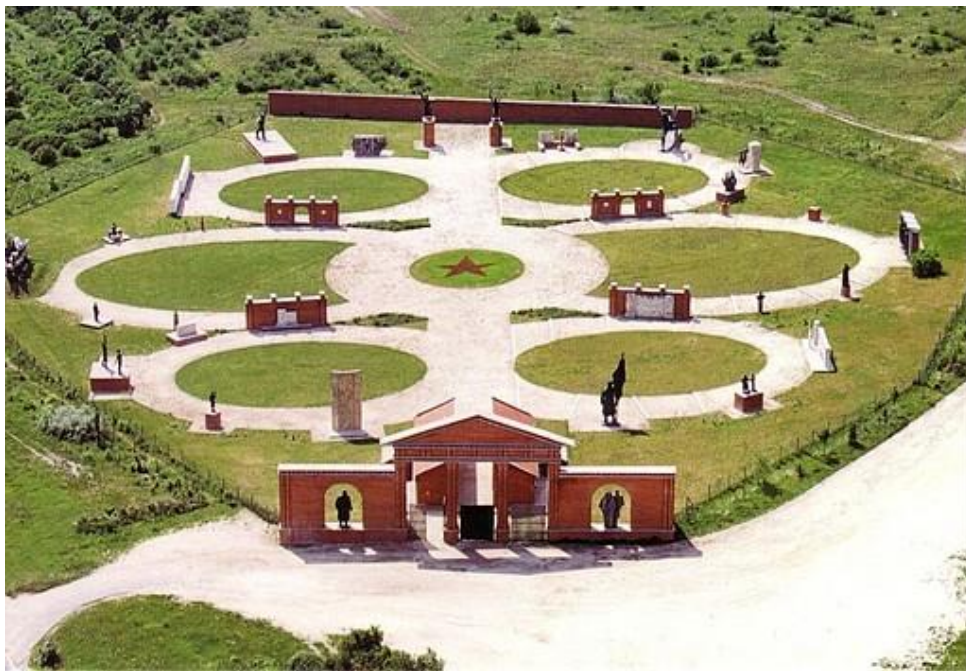


Fig. 2

Memento Park, as seen from above.





Fig. 3

View inside Memento Park. Photograph my own.



Fig. 4

*Red Army Soldier*, Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl, 1947, Memento Park.



Fig. 5

*Liberation Monument, Gellért Hill, Budapest. Amateur photograph taken in 1953, courtesy of Fortepan.*



Fig. 6

*Stalin's Boots, Akos Eleod, 2006, Memento Park. Photograph my own.*



Fig. 7

View of Macedonia Square in Skopje from the Stone Bridge, 2009. Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.



Fig. 8

View of Macedonia Square in Skopje from the Stone Bridge, June 2012. Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.





Fig. 9

*Warrior on a Horse*, Valentina Stefanovska, Macedonia Square. Unveiled on September 8, 2011. Bronze statue 48 feet tall and column 33 feet tall. Total height 81 feet. Photograph my own.



Fig. 10

The fountain of *Warrior on a Horse* at night, Macedonia Square.



Fig. 11

South side of *Porte Macedonia*, Valentina Stefanovska, view from highway toward Macedonia Square. Unveiled on January 6, 2012. 69 feet high.



Fig. 12

Detail of right upper friezes on *Porte Macedonia's* south side.

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