ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: "IN IT WE SHOULD SEE OUR OWN REVOLUTION MOVING FORWARD, RISING UP": SOCIALIST REALISM, NATIONAL SUBJECTHOOD, AND THE CHRONOTOPE OF ALBANIAN HISTORY IN THE VLORA INDEPENDENCE MONUMENT

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November 28, 1972 saw the inauguration of one of communist Albania's largest and most significant works of public sculpture, the seventeen-meter tall bronze Vlora Independence Monument. The work, created by Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Muntas Dhrami, represented an unparalleled attempt to visualize both the geographical and historical unity of the Albanian people, assisting in the cohesion of a modern national identity created and reinforced by the communist government. This paper argues that the Independence Monument, as an exemplar of Albanian communist art, represented not the propagandistic *revision* of national history—as is often claimed of socialist realism—but rather the establishment of a spatial and temporal ground from which its viewers could come to understand themselves as possessing a shared national heritage and participating in the common construction of a uniquely Albanian socialism.

"IN IT WE SHOULD SEE OUR OWN REVOLUTION MOVING FORWARD, RISING UP": SOCIALIST REALISM, NATIONAL SUBJECTHOOD, AND THE CHRONOTOPE OF ALBANIAN HISTORY IN THE VLORA INDEPENDENCE MONUMENT

by

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A Note on Names and Translation

In keeping with the most common practice, when transcribing Albanian place names into English I have used the definite form when the name is feminine (i.e. Vlora, rather than Vlorë) and the indefinite form when the name is masculine (i.e. Përmet, rather than Përmeti). I have used the Albanian spelling for Kosova, rather than Kosovo or Kosov@.

In the cases of two artists (Dhrami and Paskali), several spellings exist. I have consistently used "Muntas Dhrami" (as opposed to "Mumtas," "Mumtaz," or "Muntaz") and Odhise Paskali (as opposed to "Odise"). Throughout, I will refer to İsmail Kemal Vlora as he is most commonly known to Albanians today, by the name Ismail Qemali. He is also known (in Turkish) as İsmail Kemal Bey and (in Albanian) as Ismail Qemal Bej Vlora.

All translations from Albanian are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Disclaimer

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I. Introduction

On August 9, 2013, an article appeared in the Albanian newspaper *Mapo*,[1] with the title "Enver Hoxha: The True Originator of the Independence Monument in Vlora." The article's subheading proclaimed, "For the first time, the letter written by Enver Hoxha to sculptors Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Muntas Dhrami, describing how the Independence Monument should be realized, has been uncovered. The dictator intervened to overshadow the figure of Ismail Qemali and falsify history."[2] What followed was a brief contextualization, a notation that the exchange could be found in Albania's Central State Archive, and the text of two letters—an open letter from Hoxha to the sculptors and their response (dated June 26 and July 10, 1969, respectively). This was not, by any means, 'the first time' the letter had been discovered: it had been published—together with the response by the sculptors—on the front page of the newspaper *Drita*[3] on July 13, 1969,[4] subsequently collected in a volume of the dictator's writings on literature and art,[5] and cited in numerous articles and conference papers during Albania's communist period. Furthermore, the dictator's 'intervention' in the creative process was by no means as clear as the subheading might have indicated. These inaccuracies are not the point, however.

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[1] The name of the newspaper, 'Mapo,' is a shortening of *magazina populllore* [popular store]. The term was used to describe supermarkets in communist Albania.

[2] Aida Tuci, "Enver Hoxha, Ideatori i Vërtetë i Monumentit të Pavarësisë në Vlorë," *Mapo*, August 9, 2013.

[3] The name of the newspaper means 'The Light.' *Drita* was originally the name of one of the first publications in the Albanian language, initially published in 1884 in Istanbul by Petro Poga. *Drita* contained literary and educational pieces, often authored by figures who would later become key members of the Albanian National Awakening (such as the Frashëri brothers). The publication drifted in and out of print through the first part of the twentieth century. Eventually, following World War II, it became the official weekly publication of the Albanian Union of Writers and Artists. See Aleks Buda, et al., *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar, Vëllimi i Dytë: Rilindja Kombëtare, Vitet 30 të Shek. XIX - 1912* (Tirana: Toena, 2002), 249-250.

[4] Enver Hoxha, "Në Gurrën e Pashtershme e Jetëdhënëse të Krijimtarisë së Popullit, Do të Gjejmë Atë Frymëzim të Madh për të Realizuar Vepra të Bukura e Madhështore për Popullin Tonë," *Drita*, July 13, 1969. See Appendix 1 for my translation of Hoxha's letter.

[5] Enver Hoxha, *Mbi Letërsinë dhe Artin* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1977), 297.

Despite its misleading character, the *Mapo* article is nonetheless invaluable, for it brings to light a complex network of anxieties about how to engage the cultural and historical legacy of communist Albania.

The *Mapo* article appeared less than a year after the hundredth anniversary of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire (on November 28, 2012), an anniversary that had included extravagant festivities in the southern port city of Vlora, where national independence had first been declared in 1912.[6] The center of these festivities had been Flag Square [*Sheshi i Flamurit*], Vlora's central plaza, a public space dominated by the massive bronze Independence Monument [*Monumenti i Pavarësisë*] (see figures 1-24). The work depicts Ismail Qemali, the Ottoman statesman who headed the assembly that first announced Albania's independence, flanked by a collection of warriors from different regions of the Albanian nation; and a figure representing an intellectual from the period of the National Awakening. Rising behind this group is a towering boulder, atop which stands the massive figure of the flag-bearer, holding aloft the streaming flag of the Albanian nation, with its double-headed eagle. The monument, erected in 1972, has long been a source of national pride—both for the decisive moment it depicts and for its aesthetic qualities—and a touristic landmark. The article in *Mapo* reveals, however, the uneasy undercurrents associated with the monument and its embodiment of history. What secrets wait to be revealed from Albania's communist past? How much of the cultural and intellectual production of the period can—or must—be ultimately attributed to Enver Hoxha, who ruled the People's Socialist Republic of Albania from 1946 until his death in 1985? If Hoxha was engaged in the falsification of history, how can contemporary Albanians recover a true history, untainted by the

[6] For maps of Albania, see figures 50-52.

dictatorship's influence?[7] What did works of art created in the socialist realist style—the official style of Hoxha's communist state—*mean* in their context, and can their visual language still express this meaning? Furthermore, does engaging these works somehow involve a complicity in the very systems of power and terror that Hoxha used to consolidate and maintain his regime?

If these questions suggest the weight of the ongoing challenge that faces the Albanian people in engaging the communist period, they also pose a number of significant questions for the history of twentieth-century art more broadly. Namely, what is the significance of socialist realism, and how can it be understood in a way that is both philosophically and aesthetically nuanced? How does totalitarian art[8]—that unsettling *Other* of twentieth-century Modernism—relate to and participate in the genesis of historical narratives within modernity? How do the monuments of socialist realism take up discourses of space and time, and how do they transform them in the construction of history? What might we learn from approaching socialist realism not through its central point of dissemination—the former Soviet Union—but through its more peripheral (though certainly no less vigorous) manifestations, in places like communist Albania?

The purpose of this essay is to examine the Vlora Independence Monument in order to understand both the spatial and the temporal dynamics of socialist realist monument-building in Albania during the latter half of the period of communist control. More specifically, it attempts to reconstruct the *kind* of history (and historical experience)

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[7] It is of course questionable whether any such 'true' history could ever be recovered; in fact, as I hope to show below, the attempt to recover such a history is particularly misguided in the context of Albanian socialist realist art. The *Mapo* article, however, holds on to the possibility of just such a recovery.

[8] In this introduction I use a number of terms—'socialist realism' and 'totalitarian art' being two of the most obvious—which immediately demand further qualification. In subsequent sections, I will expand upon both the complications surrounding these terms and their applicability to communist Albanian culture. This is not to say that I will remove all ambiguity from these concepts, but simply that I hope to shed light upon what is at stake in their use in this particular context.

the monument envisions through both an engagement with the visual aspects of the work and attention to the ways in which it was inscribed into official discourse at the time. I argue that the Independence Monument embodies a particular image of the coalescence of historical time coupled with the conceptualized unity of a particular geographic space. Both the monument's formal aspects and its explicit historical and iconographic references allowed it to stand as an exemplary bridge between the intangible epic past, the instantaneity of the miraculous moment (of independence, of revolution), and the futural dynamism of the 'building of socialism.' The monument both reflects this reality and participates in its development; it represents not (or at least, not merely) the replacement of one version of history by another, but part of the emergence of something that might be called 'history.'[9] Thus, the monument's didactic purpose can be seen as both a propagandistic tool aimed to ease the Albanian populace's indoctrination into a new, explicitly nationalist, historical paradigm, and—more importantly, I would argue—as the envisioned coming-to-be of national history in the context of socialism. Analyzing this history can help us to understand the ways in which the doctrine of socialist realism intertwines with certain aspects of the experience of modernity, particularly in terms of the emergence of national statehood (an event which for many, including Albania, did not occur until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century).

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[9] That is to say that the work thrives upon a certain forgetfulness, of the kind Nietzsche describes in "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." The monument does not so much attempt to depict the actual events of the past as to show its viewers what of the past is worthy of their understanding and emulation. It establishes a certain horizon and provides the continuity with the past that allows viewers to understand their own actions in a 'historical context.' In short, the monument establishes a history in the service of life—specifically in the service of the communist 'New Life.' As I will argue below, confronting the Vlora Independence Monument necessitates some of this very forgetfulness; to grasp all that the monument represents means setting aside the urge to interpret it as mere propaganda (as a distortion of facts about the past) and instead reading it as the exemplar of a particular set of collective ideals and actions, which are meant to found the collective identity of a nation. See Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingworth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 63, 68-69.

My analysis of the Independence Monument will proceed from a consideration of the regional sociopolitical changes that were taking place during the late 1960s and early 1970s as well as the relation of the work to certain other monuments of similar scale or conceptual significance executed in this period in Albania. I am concerned primarily with interpreting the monument in light of the official discourse of the communist regime, by which I mean contemporary newspaper and journal articles written by artists and art critics, conference proceedings, and the published writings of Enver Hoxha. This focus is intended to illuminate the monument in a very specific (though neither static nor homogenous) context, the aesthetic model developed and refined both by the Albanian communist elite and by the numerous members of the Albanian Union of Writers and Artists.[10] Furthermore, my examination will center not on the genesis of the work, but rather on how it was established as an exemplar of Albanian socialist monumentality.

There are two significant challenges faced by any sustained engagement with socialist realism at the level of either formal analysis or theory. The first concerns the fact that socialist realism has proven impervious—in many instances—to straightforward formal interpretation, since its 'outer' characteristics cannot fully account for its immanent meaning, apparent only in its specific totalitarian context.[11] The second challenge involves the accusation sometimes leveled (and in the case of Albanian historiography,

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[10] Such a focus of course leaves aside many potentially fertile paths of study, including both the examination of those official documents which were *not* made public at the time of monument's conception and inauguration and of more private, *un*official responses to and interpretations of the monument (the existence of which can certainly be posited, even if their content cannot be known). The practical limitations on research account for my focus, to a certain extent. However, this narrow attention is also meant to leave the monument itself—not to mention the entire aesthetic mobilization of socialist realism in Albania and in Eastern Europe—open to further interpretation. My study, though not the first to examine this material, approaches the subject with the intention of suggesting new avenues for investigation at both the theoretical and the practical level.

[11] I will expand upon this difficulty—and its relation to the unique conditions of the Albanian experience—below, but for a brief description of the challenges totalitarian art poses for art history, see Boris Groys, "The Art of Totality," in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, eds. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 99, 121.

often leveled) at socialist realism, namely that its rhetoric is ultimately no more than disorganized propaganda fabricated to conceal the regressive terrorist processes used to maintain Hoxha's position of power. Taken together, these two conceptions have advanced a position which sees socialist realism as having little depth (i.e. it can be easily interpreted from its outward appearances, which conform universally and unproblematically to imposed schematics of representation) and theoretically unsophisticated (i.e. its 'theory' can be reduced to little more than a language of totalizing repression, which cannot be expected to yield a consistent or illuminating model of understanding). It is my contention that both of these (pre)conceptions fail to grasp how socialist realism *worked,* at least in the case of the Vlora Independence Monument and communist Albania. Instead, I argue that a much more theoretically subtle approach must be developed to understand exactly *how* monumental sculpture achieved its allegedly universal and readily legible meaning within the context of socialist realism, an approach that both eschews comparisons between the image of socialism and an objectively perceived 'reality,' and considers the temporal aspects of socialist totalitarianism in relation to the advent of modernity.

My analysis will proceed in the following manner: first, I will offer a detailed formal description of the Vlora Independence Monument. Having elaborated the monument's visual characteristics, I will then summarize the pertinent history that shaped the sociopolitical and cultural situation of communist Albania, focusing on the relationship between political developments and the genesis of key national myths. Then, I will proceed to a consideration of the relevant scholarship focusing upon socialist realism and totalitarian art, in an attempt to develop a hermeneutic framework for the

interpretation of socialist realism as it manifested in Albania. These historical and theoretical discussions will lay the ground for an interpretation of the monument itself, with special attention paid to the way that it presents an incarnation of the historical space and time of the Albanian nation. Finally, I will conclude by considering the monument's role in relation to the communist project of building a national(ist) history and creating the possibility of a national (socialist) subject, suggesting several implications for the study of socialist realism (especially in its diverse, peripheral forms) in the framework of modernity.

II. The Vlora Independence Monument

The Vlora Independence Monument—the work of sculptors Kristaq Rama, Muntas Dhrami, and Shaban Hadëri—was inaugurated on November 20, 1972, a full decade after the competition for the monument was first announced in 1962 (see figures 1-24).[12] The inauguration coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the declaration of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire, and the importance accorded to this event was evident in the work: the Independence Monument was undoubtedly the largest and most complex work of public sculpture to have been produced in the country up to that point.[13] Standing approximately seventeen meters high, it faces east and slightly northwards, looking out over Flag Square in the direction of the hill where Vlora's Cemetery of the Martyrs [*Varrezat e Dëshmorëve*] is located (figures 1-2, 46). Just north of the monument, in a wooded area, is the grave of Ismail Qemali, the statesman who presided at the declaration of national independence and served as Albania's first prime minister. Passing before the monument is Ismail Qemali Boulevard, which stretches south to Independence Square [*Sheshi i Pavarësisë*], located near the National Independence Museum (which resides in the house where the declaration of independence was first signed and where Qemali and Luigj Gurakuqi raised the Albanian flag). The monument is located on a rectangular raised stone platform (designed by architects Koço Çomi and Sokrat Mosko[14]), with flights of steps leading up to the

[12] Kujtim Buza, "Vepra të Skulpturës Sonë Monumentale," *Nëntori* 4 (April 1984): 29

[13] Indeed, it is arguable that the statue remains the most imposing monument created during the communist period in Albania. There were certainly other monuments created on a similar scale (such as the *Mother Albania* monument, inaugurated in 1972, which will be discussed below), and memorial ensembles which displayed a more elaborate synthesis between architectural elements and sculpture. However, the Independence Monument remains notable both for the number of figures depicted in the round and for its sheer scale.

[14] The architects for the Independence Monument are rarely mentioned, but one instance in which they are can be found is Kristaq Rama, "Arritje dhe Perspektiva të Skulpturës Sonë Monmentale: Raport i

platform on the west and south sides, and on the northeast corner (figure 22). The bronze sculpture itself rests on an irregular rectilinear patch of grass close to the west side of the platform.

The base of the monument is in the form of a giant boulder thrusting up from the earth and resolving into two distinct levels: a lower shelf where a group of six figures are aligned in a semicircle along the eastern side of the monument and a single rising pillar, atop which stands the massive figure of the flag-bearer (figures 3-4,7-8). The monument's lack of a distinct base of stone or cement—the fact that the boulder rises directly from the grass—serves to accent its connection to the earth itself (a connection which will be of some importance below). At the same time, the fact that the work is made entirely of bronze contributes to its monolithic quality, uniting the figures with the stone upon which they stand.[15] While the back side of the boulder tapers away (albeit quite sharply), dissolving into a series of irregular facets, the front (east-facing) side of both the lower register and the pillar crystallize into virtually sheer surfaces; the front areas of the lower register of the base become entirely flat and geometric, losing all resemblance to stone. This flatness effects a sharp division between the viewer, who—standing directly before the work—is confronted by an implacable steeply inclining surface and must look up to see the feet of the six figures looming above. The front of the pillar is marked by slightly more variation in its surface, but its outward-leaning face serves primarily as a blank slate from which the year '1912' stands out in stark relief.

Mbajtur nga Shoku Kristaq Rama," *Nëntori* 1 (January 1978): 13. They are also named in Ksenofon Dilo's catalogue *Monumentet: Skëndebeu, Pavarësia, Katër Heroinat* (Tirana: Gallery of Arts, 1988).

[15] This monolithic sense of unity resulting from the use of bronze for both sculptural base and figures was noted in a 1973 article by sculptor Odhise Paskali. See "Monumenti i Pavarësisë," *Drita*, April 29, 1973.

The central figure of the group is Ismail Qemali, the 'old man of Vlora' [*plaku i Vlorës*] (figures 8-9). He wears a suit, his tie tucked into a vest, and a long coat extending below his knees. He strides purposely forward, his right foot extending just over the lip of the sheer front face of the base; his right arm also swings forward, the right hand clenched in a fist, while his left arm hangs motionless at his side. His face is stern: his balding brow appears furrowed and the droop of his mustache lends him an unyielding air. His body is rigid, and there is little evidence of a shift in weight—indeed, it is more the position of his right arm than the comportment of his body that suggests that he is moving forward. The surfaces of Qemali's clothes are rendered with little variation in relief, and his figure takes on something of the flat verticality of the pillar that rises behind him. His gaze is aimed directly forward, heightening the perceived distance between him and the viewer (since their gazes never meet).

Behind and slightly above Qemali, just to his left, is the figure of an intellectual from the time of the Albanian National Awakening [*rilindës*] (figures 18-19). Only his upper body is visible: he too wears a suit and jacket, and with his left hand he clutches a book to his chest. His bearded features bear a striking resemblance to those of Naim Frashëri, the Ottoman official (from a village near Përmet, Albania) who—together with his brothers Abdyl and Sami—is known for his contributions to the construction of Albanian national identity. (The clearest resemblance to a sculpture of Naim extant at the time is to Odhise Paskali's *Bust of Naim Frashëri*, 1950; see figure 43.) The presence of the *rilindës* lends Qemali's movement a particular weight: it is not simply a political step forward, the achievement of statehood, but also an intellectual achievement, the

realization of the struggle waged by Albanian arts and letters in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

To Qemali's left and right are four figures (two to each side) representing warriors from various regions of Albania.[16] On his immediate right is a figure who may be either a Kosovar or a resident of the mountainous regions of northern Albania (a *malësor* or Gheg) and further to the right, a *myzeqar* (a resident of the region of southwest-central Albania once known as Myzeqeja, around present-day Fier and Lushnja).[17] The *malësor* stands on the same level of the sculptural base as Qemali; his body is angled backwards, but he too (like all the figures on the monument) stares directly ahead. His chiseled cheekbones and mustache, together with the skullcap [*kësula*] just visible beneath the cloth draped over his head and shoulders, mark him as a northerner. He wears a vest with short sleeves [*xhamadan*], tight-fitting trousers [*tirq*], and a woolen cloak draped over his shoulders.[18] His right hand grasps a rifle while his left holds a revolver thrust into a sash around his waist. The *myzeqar* stands on an outcropping that places him slightly above the level of the *malësor* (making him more visible when the monument is viewed

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[16] My reading of the four flanking figures as representing four *distinct* regions in Albania is based on article written by sculptor Hektor Dule (a frequent collaborator with Rama, Hadëri, and Dhrami) which appeared in *Drita* the month following the monument's inauguration. It is also possible, given the degree to which the figures and their costumes have been generalized, to interpret the figures in a slightly less specific way. The figure of the *malësor* is instantly recognizable as a resident of Kosova or northern Albania. The two flanking figures to Qemali's left are certainly from the southern part of the country, and it is possible that no greater specificity is implied. The figure on Qemali's far right (behind the *malësor*) is by far the least distinct—although given Dule's friendship with the sculptors and his knowledge of the monument's creation, it seems unlikely that the identification of this figure as a *myzeqar* is entirely concocted. See Hektor Dule, "Një Vepër nga më të Fuqishmet në Skulpturën Tonë," *Drita,* December 3, 1972.

[17] The reading of the *myzeqar* is the most questionable, since he wears what appears to be a dolman [*dollomaja*]—a long shirt or jacket, extending below the knees, worn over a skirt—and Turkish trousers [*brekushe*], traditional clothes that were not confined to use in Myzeqeja. See figure 51 for a map outlining ethnographic subregions of southern Albania (including Myzeqeja, Toskëria, and Labëria).

[18] For an extensive, though by no means exhaustive, illustrated inventory of traditional Albanian dress, see Dhimitër Mborja and Rrok Zoizi, *Popular Art in Albania: Costumes, Textiles, Clothing, Works on Metal and Wood, and Houses* (Tirana: State University of Tirana, 1959).

frontally). He wears a long jacket, which extends below his knees, and a cartridge belt around his waist. His left hand holds the barrel of a rifle while his right is raised directly upward, palm open, in a gesture at once ecstatic and contrived. If the *malësor* appears relaxed—his shoulders back and his chest thrust forward boldly—the figure of the *myzeqar* shares something of the stiffness evident in Qemali. His raised arm, however, serves to reinforce the verticality of the pillar of rock, even as his elevated position leads the viewer's eye down and to the center, back to Qemali.

The two flanking figures to Qemali's left are a *lab* (a resident of Labëria, a region in the south of Albania stretching between present-day Vlora south to Saranda and east to the Vjosa river) and a Tosk (a resident of Toskëria, a historical region in southeastern Albania, east of Myzeqeja and Labëria and south of the Shkumbin River).[19] The *lab* stands with his right foot on the platform occupied by Qemali and his left foot on a lower level, his rifle planted vertically with the butt adjacent to his right foot. He wears a short, cylindrical white felt cap. Draped over his shoulders is the long, heavy woolen cloak [*bërruc*] worn by shepherds in the south, and he wears a shepherd's pointed shoes.[20] Though he stands stalwart like the other figures on the lower register of the monument, the forward thrust of his right knee juxtaposed against the rigid line of his left leg reinforces the directness of the *lab*'s gaze and posture. To his right, and standing entirely on an incline that gradually rises up to the level of the *lab*'s left foot, is the Tosk. His hair, unlike that of the other Albanians, is neck-length, and he wears the skirt [*fustanella*] that was once common in many regions of Albania. His right hands holds the handle of a

[19] The term 'Tosk' is also used as the name for the southern dialect of Albanian. The other major dialect is 'Gheg' (spoken in the north and in Kosova, and by Albanians living in Macedonia and Montenegro).

[20] The *bërruc* was also used in conflicts such as the Vlora War to aid in crossing patches of barbed wire. See Ago Agaj, *Lufta e Vlorës: Tregim i një Pjesëmarrësi* (Tirana: Toena, 2002), 226.

revolver thrust into his cartridge belt, and his left grasps the barrel of a rifle held over his shoulder. The swirls of his *fustanella*, coupled with his stance and the angled line of his rifle, bring the eye sweeping upward again to Qemali, the unifying point of this ensemble.

The overall effect of the lower register of figures is both to create a dramatic diagonal flow (from the raised hand of the *myzeqar* to the angled rifle of the Tosk, or vice versa) and to establish two distinct movements (down from the *myzeqar*, up from the Tosk) that coalesce in the forward step of Ismail Qemali. This forward motion, however, is ultimately sacrificed for an emphasis on verticality. (In fact, from a distance the viewer has much greater difficulty reading Qemali's step forward. The principle thrust of the lower register instead appears to derive from his upright posture, the *rilindës* standing a level above him, and the stiffly raised arm of the *myzeqar*.) The pillar-boulder carries this rising movement aloft to where the flag-bearer stands atop it. From the front, the sheerness of the stone face accomplishes this elevating motion, while from the sides the incline of successive stone shelves upon which the figures are placed implies a more gradual upward transition. The top of the pillar is itself inclined, taking the form of a wave that arcs from the front face backwards and then levels off, leaving a space for the flag-bearer to brace himself.

The flag-bearer, like the *lab* and the Tosk, stands with his right leg forward and bent at the knee, planted on a higher level than his left. Unlike the two figures below, however, the flag-bearer nearly lunges forward: the angle of his knee is aggressive, and his left leg curves back sharply, accented by the swirling wave of his cloak, which blows over his right shoulder in an unseen wind. He grasps the flagpole to his chest with both

hands, allowing his head to appear fully in profile while the flag—adorned with the double-headed eagle of Albania—ripples out behind him, blending with the folds of his cloak. In fact, his figure is fully legible only in profile: seen from the front (especially from below, where his form is unclear to a viewer standing directly before the monument) he acts only to extend the upward-directedness of the boulder, but from the side his forward motion is also apparent, his gaze directed outward. The flag-bearer, unlike most of the figures in the group below, seems to have almost no distinguishing characteristics. His face is youthful, but his garb lacks the specific historical and ethnographic references found amongst the Albanians who accompany Qemali. This generic quality suggests—taken together with the overall composition of the monument—that he represents the unity of the figures below, embodying the coalescence of their action and its product.

Just as Qemali emerges as the synthesis of the Albanians surrounding him, the warriors of the various regions and the *rilindës*, so the flag-bearer is the vertical transformation of that synthesis, of the unity that emerges in Qemali's step forward. The parallelism between the flag-bearer and Qemali is reinforced by the fact that the flag-bearer's right foot also protrudes forward, over the edge of the cliff upon which he stands. This also serves to emphasize the sheerness of the edge that Qemali ventures to step over: both figures stand on the brink of an abyss, both step forward in a radical transformation, both synthesize a decisive moment. The flag-bearer, both standing resolutely and lunging boldly forward, stares unflinchingly into the future. In him, two movements of history find their resolution: they come into being in him. The flag-bearer, then, even as he stands for a particular moment in the history of the Albanian people—their emergence as

a nation—is also the everyman of socialism, the 'New Man' who builds the future and goes forth to meet it. He is not only the Albania of 1912, not even merely the Albania of 1972. He is the whole future of the Albanian past imagined as the emergence of socialism's 'New Life.'[21]

At this point I wish to draw attention to a facet of the monument that I have intentionally, up until now, attempted to avoid: its adherence, stylistically, to the socialist realist paradigm. It is, of course, undeniable that this adherence is not only evident in the work, but also crucial to any interpretation of it.[22] The aggressive dynamism created by the contrast between horizontal and vertical movement (present in shape of the boulder-base of the work, the poses of the figures, the lines of their rifles, the flag flowing in the wind); the emphasis on at once ecstatic and artificial gesture; the sharp legibility of profile; the massive, masculine physique of the figures (their bulky hands clenched in fists, their chests thrust forward); the distant gazes; the abrupt separation between the viewer and the monument—all of these aspects place the sculpture in a specific aesthetic

[21] In this sense, the monument is an ideal illustration of Igor Golomstock's assertion that, in totalitarianism, all history becomes "merely the prehistory" of the totalitarian state, an essentially nationalist prehistory. I will return to Golomstock's point below, but for now I wish to suggest that, while his analysis of the totalitarian style is illuminating, there is more at work in the Independence Monument than simply the appropriation of one moment in history to serve 'the building of socialism.' For Golomstock's discussion of history as depicted by totalitarian painting, see *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, trans. Robert Chandler (New York: Overlook, 2011), 235-244.

[22] This is to say, I have avoided speaking of the monument in terms of its overtly socialist realist character in an effort to emphasize potential meanings that derive from its specific—as opposed to schematic—aspects. This is tacitly to reject—in a move I will make more clear below—one of the general assertions of Golomstock's book, and instead to assume, as Mikke Bolt Rasmussen argues, that it is "impossible to equate style and ideology." See Rasmussen, "Approaching Totalitarianism and Totalitarian Art," in *Totalitarian Art and Modernity*, ed. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jacob Wamberg (Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2010), 125. As I have noted, there is something both compelling and unsatisfying about Golomstock's visual categorizations—something which, I will argue below, has to do with the simultaneously formal and conceptual demands of socialist realism (at least as it appears in the Albanian context).

tradition that was adopted (in many countries in Eastern Europe) to express the reality of socialism.

While the flag-bearer is certainly the most generic of the figures in the monument, even those which make up the lower grouping—despite their distinct costumes and physiognomy—are characterized by a tendency towards universality. This tendency also stems from their material unity—mentioned above—with the great boulder that forms the base of the monument. There is little difference in the slightly rough treatment of the surface of the figures (both clothes and exposed flesh) and the surface of the stone. (The smooth surface of the date '1912' makes it stand out all the more against the uniform texture of the rest of the sculpture.) It is not only the surface texture of the figures that unites them with the boulder. The folds of their cloaks, the angles of their faces, the curves of their muscles—these features have been simplified so that they resemble as much planes of cloven stone as skin and fabric. Indeed, the tendency towards unity in the monument balances against an almost Cubist tendency towards fracture: the isolated lines of the rifles and the starkly faceted forms of the Albanians and the rock they stand upon suggest multiplicity and dispersion.[23] Thus, the movement of harmonization—stemming from the unity of surface, of color, and of material; from the connection to the earth; and from the figures' shared convergent motion—is made all the more powerful through the act of bringing together the divergent angles, planes, and curves which distinguish the individual elements of the sculpture. That is, the effacement of detail, which leads the

[23] The relationship with Cubism has been noted by Muntas Dhrami himself, who says that his early artistic production (executed in the Repin Academy in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg) exhibited a similar stylistic affinity. Dhrami explains that, following the completion of the Independence Monument, all three of the sculptors were—as a reward for their work—sent abroad to France for a short trip. There, they observed numerous Cubist works and further developed their interest in the style (an interest which they were not able to pursue upon returning to Albania). Muntas Dhrami, interview by author, digital recording, August 9, 2013.

myriad surfaces of the work to appear facet-like, also facilitates their reconciliation with the monolithic character of the monument as whole.

The Vlora Independence Monument, then, evidences a certain kind of synthesis, both in terms of its formal compositional elements and in terms of the ethnographic and historical references used by the three sculptors. These references allow the work to hover between—or, more accurately, to bridge the gap between—the commemoration of a precise historical event (the declaration of national independence) and the historical weight of the present moment (the ongoing construction of socialism in 1970s Albania). It also seizes upon the notion of the radical break—the step forward off the brink—and transforms it into an aggregative process: the forward motion is also an up-building. While these themes have become visible through a visual engagement with the monument, the precise nature of the transformation occurring in the monument remains unclear because the work is more than merely the sum of its formal and symbolic content. To understand the work more fully, we must examine its context—not only because the context will help us comprehend the genesis of the work's particular composition and legible historical references, but because the context is something the work itself is in the process of creating. It acts, both conceptually and phenomenologically, on time and space, or rather, it effects a history as the function of a certain evolution in time and space. To grasp this action, I will consider the work in light of its reverberations in the discourse of its time. First, however, a general historical overview of Albania leading up to and during the period under consideration is warranted. Subsequently, before addressing the more specific theoretical and artistic context of socialist realism in Albania, I will discuss a number of different methodological approaches that have

attempted to understand both socialist realism (or 'totalitarian art') and the communist period in Eastern Europe. Following these discussions, I will return to the monument and reconsider how we might characterize the relationship between history and the work of art in 1970s Albania.

III. A Brief History of the Albanian Nation and Albania in the 1960s and 70s

The history of the Albanian people and Albanian nation in the first half of the twentieth century is a turbulent one, the story of a state emerging from the crumbling Ottoman Empire, with shifting boundaries and leadership, plagued by occupation and divided by internal differences in culture. The traditional narrative of Albania's birth as a modern nation begins in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the Albanian National Awakening [*Rilindja Kombëtare*, the national renaissance], a far-reaching and diverse movement which contributed greatly to the linguistic, literary, and political development of the Albanian people—not to mention laying some of the very foundations *for* a shared ethnogeographic identity. A rather romantic—not to say optimistically nationalist—view of history sees the culmination of the National Awakening in the 1912 declaration of national independence, the victory of a hard-fought but continuous struggle by united politicians and intellectuals on behalf of the Albanian people and in the name of a unified (if uncertain) Albanian identity. In fact, as Isa Blumi has compellingly argued, many of the most prominent figures of the period (including Naim and Abdyl Frashëri, and Ismail Qemali) identified as Ottomans or else in purely regional terms, and their cultural efforts reflected practical—and shifting—political alliances which cannot be comfortably subsumed under the rhetoric of national consciousness, no matter how nascent.[24] Nonetheless, it is certainly the case that the cultural production of those authors—and artists—associated with the National

[24] Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 95-124. Albania's road to independence was also not merely the territory of intellectuals and statesmen; it was also shaped and hastened by external diplomatic action and conflict, and armed rebellions within Albania and Kosova. See Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 65-69.

Awakening would subsequently become part of a pantheon of thinkers whose works would serve as references for the modern Albanian search for a shared worldview.

The nation established in 1912 was internally divided in many ways. Differences in language and culture divided the north [*Gegënia*] from the south [*Toskëria*],[25] and the Albanian population generally belonged to four different religious groups: Bektashi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics.[26] The first leader of this nation was Ismail Qemali, but—given the fact that the Great Powers would not lend their approval to his government until the issue of Albania's borders had been resolved, he was able to accomplish little in terms of creating stability. Qemali was succeeded by Prince Wilhelm of Wied, a German installed by the Great Powers (following the practice in Greece), but he left Albania shortly after the beginning of World War I. Albania was slated to be divided between Italy and Greece for political purposes, and again lacked a government until the Congress of Lushnja in January of 1920.[27] Kosova was ultimately given over to Yugoslavian control by the Entente Powers, and Albania—in a political and social condition little better than it had been in before the war—was placed under Italian supervision.[28]

The period from 1920 till 1924 was characterized by internal political intrigues and unrest which saw the rise of two central figures: Bishop Fan Noli, a Roman Catholic

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[25] As noted above, the two regions speak different dialects of Albanian, Gheg in the north and Tosk in the south (with further regional differences within each dialect).

[26] There was also a minority population affiliated with Jewish congregations. In general, those in *Toskëria* were Bektashi (or affiliated with other Sufi orders), Orthodox, or Sunni, while the central and northern parts of the country were Sunni or (in *Gegënia*) Catholic. One of the major cultural differences between the two regions, a difference which had been reinforced during Ottoman times, related to the tribal social structure which dominated the north, where loyalties at the level of local community and family [*fis*] made centralized control (during Ottoman times and after) difficult to impose. See Blumi, 20-29.

[27] Vickers, 82-83, 86, 94-95. One lasting impact that the Congress of Lushnja had was the fact that it established Tirana as the capital city of Albania. For a period, Vlora emerged as the center of governmental operations, but Ahmet Zog returned the central government to Tirana when he took power in 1924.

[28] Ibid., 96, 100.

southern intellectual who had lived and travelled abroad extensively, and Amhet Zog, a Muslim landowner from the northern region of Mat who had become influential in politics during the Congress of Lushnja. In June of 1924, Fan Noli took power at the head of a democratic government, having marshaled a significant following in the south of the country, especially in Vlora. This government moved to implement sweeping (and westernizing) reforms, and Noli proclaimed his support of the peasantry in opposition to Muslim landowning classes.[29] Noli's time in power was short-lived, however, and Zog—with backing from Belgrade and having purchased the support of many of the northern Albanian chieftains, with whom he had experience because of his origin in Mat—wrested power in December of 1924.[30]

Once Zog had situated himself in power, he moved towards an increasingly authoritarian state. This first took a republican form, with Zog as president, and then—in 1928, with the support of Mussolini and Italy—a monarchical form with, 'Zog I, King of the Albanians' at its head.[31] Zog's rule had a significant influence on subsequent Albanian history, especially in the field of nationalism (for the very notion of 'the Albanians' as a united people over whom a king might be said to rule was certainly not firmly established at the outset of his ascendancy to power). His monarchy derived a great deal of metaphorical and symbolic authority from comparisons with Skanderbeg, the fifteenth-century warrior who had also risen to power in the region of Mat, and who had united the northern tribes in resistance against the Turks.[32] Zog adopted Skanderbeg's helmet as a

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[29] Robert C. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State: Albania's Experiment with Democracy, 1920-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 55-60.

[30] Bernd J. Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984), 70-75.

[31] Ibid., 122-126.

[32] Bernd J. Fischer, "King Zog, Albania's Interwar Dictator," in *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of Southeast Europe,* ed. Bernd J. Fischer (London: Hurst & Co., 2007), 38-39.

symbol for the nation, effectively reinscribing the act of tribal unification onto the Albanian people, helping to solidify not just the Albanian state but also its still-developing consciousness as a *nation*.[33]

The Italians soon realized that they would not attain control of Albania while King Zog ruled, and in 1939 they invaded the country, forcing him to flee.[34] At first, Italian control in Albania was met with some support: the Italians set in motion policies for social and economic development, and encouraged irredentism in the case of Kosova (now under Yugoslavian control) and Çamëria (a region in the north of Greece with a large Albanian population).[35] Resistance to the Italians grew, however, and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia sent representatives to organize partisan mobilization in Albania. In Tirana, in 1941, the Albanian Communist Party (ACP) was founded.[36] The person elected to lead the ACP was Enver Hoxha, a Muslim from the southern city of Gjirokastra. Having studied abroad in France, Hoxha was uncannily adept at politics, and quickly established the direction of the ACP—he adapted the Yugoslavian partisan slogan "death to fascism, liberty to the people" ["*vdekje fashizmit, liri popullit*" in Albanian] and established a model of democratic centralism based on Marxist-Leninist precepts.[37] Part of the strategy for resistance, conceived at the Conference of Peza, involved the creation of the National Liberation Movement [*Lëvizja Nacionalçlirimtare*], with Hoxha at its head, which consisted of guerilla bands dispersed throughout the

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Albania's flag, with its black double-headed eagle, echoed the coat of arms of Skanderbeg's family, the Kastriots.

[33] Ibid., 48.

[34] Ibid., 46.

[35] Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War 1939-1945* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999), 62-88.

[36] Ibid., 123. The degree of Yugoslavian influence over the initial development of the Albanian Communist Party remains uncertain and, needless to say, highly controversial.

[37] Ibid., 125.

country, working with aid from the peasantry.[38] The collapse of Mussolini's regime led to the German invasion of Albania in 1943. Like the Italians, they too attempted to gain the favor of the people with promises of extending Albania's borders (in particular, to bring about unity with Kosova). However, armed resistance and more political intrigues eventually led the Germans to withdraw. Hoxha did not let the withdrawal proceed without event, and launched a final attack on German-controlled Tirana. The Battle of Tirana ended with the liberation of the city in November of 1944. With this event, the conclusion of the 'National Liberation War' [*Lufta Nacionalçlirimtare*, the term used by the communists to refer to World War II in general], Hoxha took his place not only as the leader of the Albanian resistance but also as the liberator of the country's capital.[39]

In 1945, Hoxha was democratically elected (as a candidate of the Democratic Front, the new moniker of the National Liberation Front).[40] He moved quickly to consolidate his power, establishing a dictatorship that would intensify in strength for decades. Hoxha abandoned his initial alliance with Yugoslavia, switching his primary allegiance to Stalin after meeting with him in 1947 and four more times in the ensuing four years.[41] Hoxha admired Stalin and emulated his political and cultural policies with particular zeal. For a time, Albania remained firmly allied with the Soviet Union, receiving—among other things—economic support for development, which included a

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[38] Ibid., 131.

[39] Of course, Hoxha's role in the victory was by no means as heroic as he would subsequently claim. Nonetheless, the perception of Hoxha as mythic liberator was to serve him well in his rise to power. See M. J. Alex Standish, "Enver Hoxha's Role in the Development of Socialist Albanian Myths," in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 116-120.

[40] Vickers, 164.

[41] Ibid., 171.

vast project to industrialize and electrify the country.[42] Hoxha's enthusiastic Stalinism would eventually place him in conflict with the Soviet Union, however. Following Stalin's death, relations between the countries began to deteriorate and the two states broke with each other following a speech given by Hoxha in Moscow in November of 1961, in which he accused Khrushchev of anti-Marxist revisionism.[43] Following the break with the Soviet Union, Albania allied itself with the Chinese People's Republic, which stepped in to provide support for the country's Third Five-Year Plan (1961-65). China did not merely provide financial support, however—it also encouraged Hoxha to move towards developing an economy that did not rely on foreign support. Over the course of the next decade and a half, this would result in Albania achieving virtual self-sufficiency in its economy.[44]

The 1960s and 70s were, then, a period of immense transition for Albanian society. These changes were evident not just in the country's industrialization and foreign relations but also in its culture. In the period from 1966 to 1969, Hoxha developed his own cultural revolution, modeled to some degree on that of Mao.[45] The policies of this

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[42] Ibid., 173-176. It should be noted that the Soviet Union, especially in the years after Stalin's death, did not fully support Albania's industrialization: for the Soviets, Albania was more convenient as a producer of agricultural goods. Hoxha would later emphasize the heroism of his own role in 'standing up' to post-Stalin Moscow on the issue of Albania's industrial development and economic autonomy.

[43] James S. O'Donnell, *A Coming of Age: Albania Under Enver Hoxha* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1999), 58. This event—Hoxha's confrontation with Khrushchev and defense of Albanian autonomy—played a major part in the novel *The Great Winter* by Ismail Kadare. See Kadare, *Dimri i Madh* (Tirana: Naim Frashëri, 1977).

[44] This self-sufficiency did not, of course, signal dramatic advancements in technology or quality of living. It did, however, mark a significant transformation for a country that, prior to the 1960s, had received much of its foreign commerce from the Soviet Union. It also produced the social and economic conditions that paved the way for Albania's break with China as well in the late 1970s. At this point, Albania's isolation became virtually total: it remained—'surrounded by the imperial-revisionist blockade,' as the official propaganda described it—the last shining beacon of 'true' Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideals until Hoxha's death. See O'Donnell, 65, 84.

[45] Arshi Pipa, *Albanian Stalinism* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1990), 65. While the structure and rhetoric of the Albanian cultural revolution were similar in many ways to those used in China, the Albanian situation was significantly different and used different terminology in an attempt to make its own cultural revolution appear less as a copy of China's and more as a natural continuation of policies

period were laid out in the Fifth Congress of the Albanian Party of Labor, which outlined "the further revolutionization of the life of the country."[46] This 'further revolutionization' would manifest itself in many ways. These years witnessed an intensification of Hoxha's anti-religious policies—especially vis-à-vis the Catholic tribes in the north of Albania, whose loyalty to family presented as much of a challenge to centralized control for the communists as it had to previous regimes.[47] The year 1966 saw the inauguration of the Palace of Culture in Tirana, home to the Opera and the National Library.[48] At the same time, the number and nature of newspapers in the country began to increase, with local publications overseen by regional Party committees beginning publication.[49] It was also the final years of this decade that saw the publication of the first volumes of Enver Hoxha's collected works—a set of writings that would eventually stretch to seventy volumes and would become the single most important reference point for all published criticism and analysis.[50]

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which had been ongoing in Albania for the previous twenty years. See Peter Prifti, *Socialist Albania Since 1944: Domestic and Foreign Developments* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 143-149.

[46] Hoxha, *Mbi Letërsinë dhe Artin*, 241.

[47] Vickers, 197. In some sense, the struggle against religion and other cultural institutions such as localized canons of law (like that of Lekë Dukagjini, the paradigmatic example of a northern honor code) reinscribed the division between *Toskëria* and *Gegënia*: Hoxha was from the south and his attempts to industrialize Albania and increase production were by far more successful in southern and central Albania. The north spoke a different dialect, and also possessed a rich literary tradition of its own. This difference was partially overcome by the standardization of 'literary Albanian' (based on the Tosk dialect) during this period (in fact, in the very same month that the Independence Monument was inaugurated), as well as through the appropriation of certain elements crucial to the history and culture of the north. For issues related to the standardization of Albania during communism, see Arshi Pipa, *The Politics of Language in Socialist Albania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989).

[48] Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e Shqipërisë, Vëllimi i Katërt (1944-1975),* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1983), 473.

[49] Artan Fuga, *Monolog: Mediat dhe Propaganda Totalitare* (Tirana: Dudaj, 2010), 59.

[50] Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e Shqipërisë, Vëllimi i Katërt*, 362. As Ardian Vehbiu has noted, the practice of citing Hoxha eventually (d)evovled to an absurd excess in the latter years of his regime (aided by the breadth and number of the dictator's published writings), to the point that theses and dissertations on the most diverse topics inevitably began by acknowledging that 'Comrade Enver' had already indicated the findings within. As Vehbiu writes, this resulted in introductory statements such as "Comrade Enver has said that Albania's subsoil is rich in

The increasing control of the Party—and Hoxha as the intellectual spirit of the Party and the nation—over matters of culture as well as economy required that Albania's intellectuals—especially writers and artists—be brought firmly under the sway of the Party. The Albanian Union of Writers and Artists—formed in 1957 when the Writers' and Artists' Unions merged—represented the official (and by this time sole) organization devoted to the literary and visual arts, and during this period its members devoted themselves exclusively to the production of socialist realist art in response to the needs of the Party and the nation.[51] In the field of literature, this resulted in an increased number of works elaborating the development of political consciousness in the peasants of Albania, often in the context of industrial projects or the creation of tracts of arable land.[52] In the visual arts, this meant a heightened politicization of art, often evidenced by the themes of conferences, competitions, and exhibitions sponsored by the Albanian Union of Writers

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minerals." See Vehbiu, *Shqipja Totalitare: Tipare të Ligjërimit Publik në Shqipërinë e Viteve 1945-1990* (Tirana: Çabej, 2007), 71.

It is also important to note that the communist period saw tremendous advances in education and literacy—meaning that both literary and scholarly works published by the regime could actually be consumed by most average Albanians. The country's first university (the Enver Hoxha University of Tirana) was founded in 1957, and the Central Committee of the Party made primary school education a principal part of its plan for the country's development. This education was, of course, highly ideological (in some textbooks, Hoxha was given credit for discovering gravity) but it was also a significant development over the state of public education in Zog's time, and created a public able to engage with the abundance of written material produced by the regime. See O'Donnell, 111-117.

[51] Robert Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1995), 540, 708. It is worth quoting a short passage from Hoxha's report at the Fifth Party Congress, to give an idea of the goals which literature and art were intended to support: "Our socialist art and culture must base themselves firmly upon our ancestral homeland, upon our miraculous people; they must spring forth from the people and be fully in their service, be clear and understandable to them but not in the least 'banal and without ideas.' The Party supports artistic and cultural production in which deeply ideological content and expansive, popular inspiration are brought into harmony with an elevated artistic form: [artistic and cultural production] that touches the feelings and hearts of the people, and inspires and motivates them to do great things." See Hoxha, *Mbi Letërsinë dhe Artin*, 255.

[52] Elsie, *Albanian Literature*, 534-537.

and Artists and relating to various anniversaries (of the People's Army, of liberation from fascism, of the founding of the Party, and so forth).[53]

Albania's cultural revolution (and the development of socialist realism as a style, in connection with it) did not evolve in Albania in precisely the same way as it did in other countries—or rather, it did not evolve in strict accordance with the Marxist-Leninist model. As Bernd Fischer has noted, Hoxha's model for Albania's development in some ways inverted "Lenin's ideal of national form and socialist content" by instead promoting a socio-cultural agenda that was "socialist [in] form with a nationalist content."[54] This nationalist content, like the 'further revolutionization' of 'socialist form,' manifested itself in various ways. On the one hand, it resulted in a siege mentality: the early 1970s saw the collective training and militarization of the Albanian people, in order that they might defend their homeland. This emphasis on military training was accompanied by the process of 'bunkerization,' the construction (beginning in the late 1960s) of hundreds of thousands of concrete domed bunkers throughout the Albanian landscape—intended for use to defend the country against the surrounding 'imperial-revisionist blockade.'[55] In the realm of culture, on the other hand, Hoxha's nationalist approach to Stalinism sought both to develop a sense of unity through the study and elaboration of folk practices and to foster continuity by both establishing and—when necessary—re-interpreting a set of historical heroes whose actions were seen to be crucial in establishing the possibility of a

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[53] Prifti, 116. These politicized activities, of course, represent not merely the increasingly governmental influence on the course Albanian arts were taking, but also an increase in the *amount* of cultural activity which was taking place—including the construction of monuments, as we will see below.

[54] Bernd J. Fischer, "Enver Hoxha and the Stalinist Dictatorship in Albania," in *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of Southeast Europe*, ed. Bernd J. Fischer (London: Hurst, 2007), 251. The 'nationalist' content of Hoxha's Albania demands some explanation, since nationalism can take many forms. Some of these clarifications will be made here, but others will, I hope, emerge below, during the course of the discussion of discussion of the Vlora Independence Monument.

[55] Pipa, *Albanian Stalinism*, 71. Many of the bunkers still dot the Albanian countryside: they are perhaps the most visible remnants of Hoxha's regime.

shared (trans-)national identity.[56] The government took great care in the preservation of certain historic sites and in the cataloguing of popular folklore, dances, and songs. Festivals, commemorating both recent and ancient persons and events, offered venues for practitioners of folk dancing and music to perform, strengthening the perceived richness and diversity of Albanian tradition.[57] Synchronous with this reinforcement of folk practices was the elaboration of the heroes and great events of the nation's past, long before the building of socialism had begun. More specifically, certain parts of Albania's history were imagined as integral to the foundations of socialism. Such was the treatment of authors of the National Awakening period. Communist intellectuals interpreted their works not simply as containing the essence of national class consciousness, but also as having recognized and advocated a unified ethno-cultural identity that transcended one of the most significant historic differences among the Albanians: religion. Pashko Vasa's famous line of poetry, "The religion of Albanians is Albanianism" ["*Feja e Shqiptarit âsht Shqiptaria*"], became essential to the (conveniently atheist) tradition of the Albanian people.[58] Thus, although certain cultural figures who were too strongly associated with the church had to be removed from the historical canon, many of those whose works or

[56] I say 'transnational' to indicate the difficulties that were faced—and still are faced—in communist times by the fact that Kosova, a region with a largely Albanian population, fell outside Albania's state boundaries (to say nothing of populations in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Greece). One of the primary—in fact defining—features of Albanian nationalism was (and is) its emphasis on the shared history of a people united by language, customs, and worldview—no matter what state they might inhabit.

[57] Prifti, 113-117.

[58] See, for example, Dritëro Agolli's reading of several classic poems from the *rilindja* period, in *Arti dhe Koha: Artikuj Kritikë* (Tirana: Naim Frashëri, 1980), 15-23. The poem was originally written sometime in the late 1870s or early 1880s, around the time that the League of Prizren was established.

attitudes could be seen as advancing ethno-cultural unanimity were celebrated even if their ideas bore no link to Marxist-Leninist readings of history or society.[59]

In the visual arts, Albania's particular variety of socialist realism was inflected with a heightened sense of the importance of the past—while there were certainly innumerable paintings and sculptures devoted to the contemporary workers of socialism (the 'New Men and Women' living the 'New Life'[60]), there were at least as many (if not more) works of art devoted to purely historical subjects. In some ways, the full trajectory of Albanian socialist realism can be seen as a continuation of developments in Albanian art (chiefly painting) during the period of National Awakening. This was certainly how the Party interpreted the country's artistic history, and it is true that artists under communism took up many of the themes of the National Awakening painters—the Albanian landscape, Skanderbeg, genre scenes and the depiction of traditional costume.[61] However, even the nationalistic content of art from the *rilindja* period came, to a certain degree, from the very emphasis attributed to it as part of a tradition perceived as culminating in socialist realism. In other words, the meaning of Albanian art history as a whole took on a nationalistic character and art's engagement with history became nationalist at the same time that it was becoming socialist.[62]

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[59] At a certain point, of course, after Albania had severed all ties and remained the only 'true' socialist country, the distinction was no longer necessary: the convergence of what was 'truly Albanian' and what was 'truly socialist' was complete.

[60] These works, as one might expect, inevitably focused on the *Albanian* builders of socialism, although artists also created works depicting, for example, Chinese workers, in the period before Albania's total isolation.

[61] For an overview of Albanian art from the period of the National Awakening, see Ferid Hudhri, *Arti i Rilindjes Shqiptare* (Tirana: Onufri, 2000).

[62] The emphasis on continuity between the artists of the National Awakening and socialist realism also allowed the influence of Russian socialist realism to be almost completely elided. It is true that many of the artists who produced some of the earliest works of 'socialist realist' art in Albania had studied in Italian academies (where the majority of the National Awakening painters received their training)—artists such as Odhise Paskali, Andrea Mano, Kristina Koljaka, Abdurrahim Buza, and Foto Stamo. (See Ylli Drishti and Leon Çika, *Artistë Shqiptarë në Akademitë Italiane/Artisti Albanesi nelle Accademie Italiane*

This nationalistic quality was perhaps nowhere more visible than in monumental sculpture. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the erection of numerous monumental sculptures and memorials, ranging in subject from the hero Skanderbeg to the Vlora War of 1920 to those killed in World War II (the "martyrs of the nation" [*dëshmorët e kombit*]). In a country that had possessed only four public monuments prior to the mid 1940s, this period represented a tremendous transformation of public space.[63] By 1973, there were "around five hundred memorials [*lapidarë*], over three hundred memorial plaques, one hundred forty busts, and twenty-eight monuments" placed throughout cities, villages, and the Albanian landscape.[64] It was into this context—a virtual overflowing of history—that the Independence Monument in Vlora entered in 1972. Almost immediately (and even, as we shall see, before it was inaugurated) the work became an important touchstone for discussions of socialist realist art in communist Albania. Before discussing how the work functioned in relation to discourses of history, nationalism, and socialism, however, I wish to consider the ways in which socialist realism in general has been approached by scholars and theorists, and to sketch a preliminary hermeneutic framework that will inform my own reading the Independence Monument.

(Tirana: Galeria Kombëtare e Arteve, 2005), 27-29, 88-91, 126-129, 72-75, 98-101.) One might of course question the degree to which these artists' works conformed to the stylistic or thematic confines of 'socialist realism,' but this question misses the point that Albanian socialist realism almost effortlessly integrated into its purview any works which revealed a 'national character.' If a work expressed this 'national character,' then it could be seen as celebrating the struggle of the Albanian people, and thus also as enshrining contemporary Albania as the bastion of socialist ideals in Europe.

[63] The four monuments were: the sculpture of Çerçiz Topulli in Gjirokastra, the sculpture of Themistokli Gërmenji and the sculpture of the National Fighter [*Luftëtar Kombëtar*] in Korça, and the sculpture of the Flag-bearer [*Flamurtar*] at Ismail Qemali's grave in Vlora (see figures 40-42, 26-27). All were inaugurated during the year 1937 and all were the work of sculptor Odhise Paskali, who was part of the milieu of late-National Awakening artists and who went on to create several key works of Albanian socialist realism. See Hudhri, 87-114.

[64] Kujtim Buza, Kleanthi Dedi, and Dhimitraq Trebicka, *Përmendore të Heroizmit Shqiptar* (Tirana: Shtëpia Qëndrore e Ushtrisë Popullore, 1973), 6. One is of course wise to question the accuracy of statistics published during the communist period, but even if we imagine that the numbers are vastly inflated, the number of works erected to commemorate Albania's history (largely in the context of war) is staggering.

IV. Approaches to Socialist Realism

As Katerina Clark has noted, there is not one 'socialist realism' (just as there is not one modernism), but rather a plethora of socialist realisms.[65] However, the majority of scholarship on the style (or, we might say, movement[66]) has been focused upon its manifestations in the former Soviet Union, and upon socialist realism as a literary phenomenon. This attention is certainly warranted, given the centrality of Stalinism in defining the goals and parameters of socialist realism, and given the importance of literature in defining Stalinist aesthetics, but this focus has nonetheless resulted in socialist realism in the visual arts being, at best, poorly known.[67] The present study aims to correct this limited understanding by—as noted above—approaching socialist realism from the periphery, from its national manifestation in communist Albania, as a way of shedding light both on the movement's diversity and its unifying presuppositions. My goal is to develop a specific (though partial[68]) model of socialist realism's function in

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[65] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2000), 3.

[66] The distinction I mean to draw attention to is that between treating socialist realism as simply one way of making art amongst others which were adopted in this period and treating it as a strategy adopted by a particular group (in this case, the Albanian Communist Party) to achieve specific ideological goals.

[67] This assertion is not meant to discredit the numerous attempts made to approach the body of art (and literature) that falls under the descriptor "socialist realism." Rather, it draws attention to the degree to which the art produced by both twentieth-century socialist states, and totalitarian states (for the two are not fully equivalent) has been neglected in the common discourse on twentieth-century art in general. Inroads into the diversity of socialist realist practice continue to be made, and some of these studies will be relevant to the theoretical discussion below. One collection of essays which has attempted to treat both the geographical and conceptual heterogeneity of socialist realism is *Socialist Realism Without Shores,* ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

[68] The limited nature of the model I intend to develop stems primarily from the fact that I will be dealing only in the most tangential way with literature, painting, and small-scale sculpture (to say nothing of architecture, film, and theater) produced in Albania during this period. My focus on monumental sculpture in part aims to fill a gap in current scholarship on socialist realism, which, as noted, has focused predominately on literature (and painting in the visual arts). While I hope that the theoretical model developed will be applicable to some degree to socialist realism in general, different media undeniably played different roles in the socialist state and these differences are key to understanding the movement in its full diversity.

Albania, situated in relation to certain other models that have been developed in the extant historiography on socialist realism.

There are four central models for a hermeneutics of socialist realism that I wish to discuss here: (1) that offered by Boris Groys in *The Total Art of Stalinism*; (2) that offered by the Evgeny Dobrenko and developed most fully in *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*; (3) the critique of these two models put forward by Petre Petrov in "The Industry of Truing"; and (4) the overarching analysis presented by Igor Golomstock in *Totalitarian Art*.[69] The first two models focus on the interpretation of Stalinist culture and the role played by socialist realism within that culture, paying particular attention to the aesthetic characteristics of the Soviet state. Both, however, have a particularly troubled relationship to the interpretation of the Stalinist 'reality,' and Petrov's article seeks to diagnose this problematic reading and to offer an alternative way of understanding 'reality' as it is manifested in the context of socialist realism. Finally, Golomstock offers a far-reaching typology not of socialist realism, but of what he calls 'totalitarian art' as a whole. While one might question Golomstock's general argument—that all art produced in totalitarian circumstances has and will ultimately follow the same essential schema—his study is invaluable in that it seeks not only to engage with a wide variety of media but also to explain *what totalitarian art looks like and why*. None of these interpretive models deals specifically with the Albanian communist state, but the projects of Groys, Dobrenko, and Golomstock have all served—in recent scholarship—as

[69] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (New York: Verso, 2011); Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Petre Petrov, "The Industry of Truing: Socialist Realism, Reality, Realization," *Slavic Review* 70:4 (Winter 2011): 873-892; and Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, trans. Robert Chandler (New York: Overlook, 2011).

paradigms for approaching the culture and ideology of Hoxha's Albania. Furthermore, their approaches find particular parallels with recent studies on media and public discourse in communist Albania. I will assess these parallels below, but I first wish to offer a summary of the four thinkers mentioned above and consider how their efforts might contribute to a theory of Albanian socialist realist monumental sculpture.

Boris Groys' *The Total Art of Stalinism* (together with permutations of the ideas therein, published in various articles and book chapters) has long been a controversial touchstone of scholarship on socialist realism. In it, Groys argues that socialist realism in Stalinist Russia was in fact an extension of the avant-garde project, the transformation of reality into art (or rather the treatment of reality itself as artistic "material" susceptible to transformation by the will to power).[70] The avant-garde in Russia "aspired to the political realization of its projects on a practical level, [and] formulated a specific type of aesthetico-political discourse in which each decision bearing on the artistic construction of the work of art is interpreted as a political decision and, conversely, each political decision is interpreted in terms of its aesthetic consequences."[71] This convergence of art and politics provided the blueprint for the worldview of socialist realism, which saw reality in just these terms, according to Groys: as in the avant-garde, mimesis as a strategy was to disappear, replaced by a self-sufficient totality. In socialist realism, however, the Russian elite replaced the figure of the artist with that of the "military and political leader"—ultimately embodied in the figure of the dictator, Stalin.[72]

For Groys, Stalin becomes the prototype of a new constructivist artist, and socialist realism—as a radicalized avant-garde—both works upon the whole of the

[70] Groys, *Total Art*, 7.
[71] Ibid., 21.
[72] Ibid., 28.

world's cultural heritage and makes this heritage "new" in the "posthistorical reality" of socialism.[73] In this new era, a new kind of mimesis can emerge: a 'realism' which "focus[es] on the hidden essence of things rather than on phenomena." This is an art that divines "that which has not yet come into being but which *should* be created," and this "should" derives from Stalin's will.[74] This will serves as the model for an art that creates the 'New Man'—the socialist hero—and narrates not "worldly events" but "transcendental events and their worldly consequences."[75] Part of what allows for this transcendentalism is the same event which sanctioned the avant-garde, the Nietzschean death of God, which gave rise to the mysticism of the avant-garde and in turn, in Groys' genealogy, to the mystical union of the 'New Men' with their maker, Stalin.[76] Thus, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Stalinism unifies all 'life' under the aegis of the leader, with the aesthetic of socialism as life's only measurement. As a consequence of this, "everyday life coincides with ideology," which is to say that there is no longer any such thing as 'everyday life' in contrast to the total aesthetic existence of Stalinist Russia—it is precisely in the "here and now of the everyday" that Stalin proceeds to build socialism.[77]

Groys' project as a whole is not merely a reevaluation of Stalinist culture: his ultimate goal is also to analyze Russian postmodern (or, as he terms it, postutopian) art and its playful appropriation of the Stalinist myth.[78] This aspect of his project need not concern us here, but it is nonetheless telling that his book has, as one of its ultimate goals,

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[73] Ibid., 40, 49.

[74] Ibid., 51-53, my emphasis. It is socialist realism's focus on "the hidden essence" which makes a visual analysis of its art so difficult.

[75] Ibid., 63.

[76] Ibid., 69.

[77] Ibid., 87, 114, 119. This building puts to use the non-mimetic "machines" of the avant-garde, and in doing so it fully realizes the avant-garde project (and fully grasps the implications of Deleuze and Guattari's "desire machines," according to Groys.)

[78] Groys adopts the term "postutopian" to differentiate contemporary Russian conceptual art from the antiutopian tendencies in postmodernism. See Groys, *Total Art*, 81.

the justification and theoretical explanation of this more recent artistic movement. In this light, as the spokesperson of postutopianism, Groys' own aestheticization of the Stalinist project and his somewhat questionable treatment of history—in the name of theoretical understanding—might be justified. My interest is not in the historical accuracy of Groys' model, for even if it were quite accurate in it description of the continuity between the Russian avant-garde and socialist realism, its application to the Albanian context would still require the unearthing of an entirely different context. (To begin to imagine the difficulty of transplanting the theory entirely, we need only note that prior to communism's advent in Albania there was nothing that might be called a thoroughgoing artistic 'avant-garde.')

However, there is undoubtedly a strong affinity between the world Groys has imagined for Stalinism and that often imagined for communist Albania. The headline of the article in *Mapo*, with which I begin this essay, says it all: "Enver Hoxha: The True Originator of the Independence Monument in Vlora." The urge to treat everything in communism, including its aesthetic output, as the result of Hoxha in the role of demiurge, maintains a strong appeal, as the *Mapo* article reveals.[79] There is no doubt a certain—limited—truth to this analysis, and the degree of control that Hoxha exercised in Albania must certainly inform any analysis of creative work done during his time in power. For the moment, I simply wish to note the potential applicability of the idea of the state as a total artwork of the military leader/dictator in the context of Hoxha's dictatorship. The

[79] Such a tendency is by no means limited to debates within Albania, where it can have the effect of reinforcing a general feeling of national victimhood. Rather, it can also be found in Western scholarship on Hoxha, where it can verge on the laudatory. A passage from James S. O'Donnell's *A Coming of Age: Albania Under Enver Hoxha*, is illustrative: "Enver Hoxha was a rare individual. …[He] had as his one aim to modernize Albania and rebuild it in his image, according to his whims, as well as to protect its national sovereignty" (241).

difference, however, between treating the *aestheticized state* and an *individual work of art* (albeit one that is, perhaps, indivisible from this total state) as products of Hoxha-as-demiurge raises a question which Groys does not truly answer: what can we say about the concrete production of artworks in the context of art-as-politics-as-art?

This question spurs Evgeny Dobrenko's critique of Groys, presented in *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*.[80] Dobrenko, who has become one of the most prolific and influential writers on the subject of socialist realism, is concerned to go a step beyond Groys: he wishes to explain not simply *that* socialist realism was the aestheticization of reality in Soviet Russia, but to explain the production of socialist realism as "real ideology."[81] For Dobrenko, what Groys fails to understand is the ontology of Stalinist culture: since Groys sees the total work of art as being, ultimately, *for Stalin*, he fails to note that socialist realism works as "*an institution for the production of socialism*."[82] Thus, rather than socialist realism functioning as a metaphor for all of Stalinist culture, Dobrenko argues that it serves a particular purpose in the Stalinist political arena—its aesthetics "de-realize" the world.[83] This de-realization in fact "*produce*[s] *reality by*

[80] Again, I am interested in his critique not in terms of the historical accuracy of Groys' claims, but in terms of the alternate *theory of how socialist realism works* that Dobrenko offers.

[81] Dobrenko, *Political Economy*, 44.

[82] Ibid., 44-45, xii, emphasis in original.

[83] Ibid., 45-46. I will return to Dobrenko's notion of the 'de-realization' of the world below, for it is one of the most problematic elements of his model of socialist realism (since it raises the question of what exactly was there to be 'de-realized' beforehand). For him, the process of de-realization is that by which "empirical reality" is not simply superceded by socialist reality, but in fact ceases to matter *as reality* because aesthetic concerns are the only concerns that matter. See Dobrenko, 46. I should be clear that what Dobrenko means is not that socialist realism's particular aesthetics (in the sense of a certain doctrine of beauty) were the crucial point, but rather that aesthetics in general, in the situation of socialist realism, operated upon the world in a particular way. This of course leaves to the side (as Dobrenko does in his preface) the debate about socialist realism in *artistic* terms to focus upon it in terms of function. Dobrenko does engage with particular works of art, but since his discussion is heavily focused on literature and film, he never quite runs up against the need to explain the appearance of Stalinist visual art.

aestheticizing it"—there is no 'other' reality.[84] This is the 'reality of ideology' in the Stalinist state.[85]

Dobrenko's characterization of Stalinist socialism draws heavily upon theories of capitalist culture. For him, this socialism (produced by socialist realism) is "the spectacle of socialism," in the sense of Debord's "society of the spectacle."[86] Socialist realism is not merely "society's real unreality"[87]—it is an even more heightened form of this condition. The world of real ideology that is created in Stalinism is, for Dobrenko, essentially the equivalent of Baudrillard's "hyperreal," which is "more real than the real itself."[88] The role of socialist realist art, therefore, is not in any way to "represent" reality, but instead to tautologically "replicate" what is—in the new communist era—already *real*.[89] The whole system of Stalinist culture, in Dobrenko's model, is devoted to sustaining this tautological and empty repetition: making the Soviet situation into the beautiful which is also 'our life' in communism. The temporal corollary to this is that the future (that predestined order that history moves inexorably towards) gradually becomes the present. The message of socialist realism is not really the communication of an ideal that the people must strive for, but instead the assertion that in striving for the ideal they already embody it. Socialist realist art materializes the future reality that is already present in the everyday existence of the Soviet citizen. 'Life' comes to be less and less real even as 'socialism' becomes more real, and the perpetuation of this movement is ensured by the

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[84] Ibid., 4, emphasis in original. Therefore, for Dobrenko, as for Groys, one of the most pervasive and incorrect assumptions about socialist realism is that of its alleged mimesis—when in fact the question of 'realism' has nothing to do with reflecting reality. Dobrenko, 260.

[85] Dobrenko's affinities with Slavoj Žižek on this point should be noted. Indeed, Dobrenko later marshals Žižek's characterization of the non-signifying referent in his discussion of the "'product' of socialist realist production." See Dobrenko, 19, 255-256.

[86] Ibid., 35.

[87] Debord, 13.

[88] Dobrenko, 21.

[89] Ibid., 23.

fact that socialist realism is constantly producing the image of the production of socialism.

Both Groys and Dobrenko, then, conceive of the world of Stalinism (and its image in socialist realism) as a kind of omnipresent dream world in which dreams are no longer a space apart from reality but instead constitute it. The possibility that Hoxha's Albania also represents just such a dreamworld or totalized simulacrum has been suggested by Ani Kokobobo,[90] in her analysis of Albanian author Ismail Kadare's novel *The Palace of Dreams* (1981).[91] Kadare's novel concerns the experiences of one Mark-Alem, who becomes employed in the Tabir Saraj, a vast and Kafkaesque bureaucratic palace devoted to interpreting the dreams of the citizens of the fictional United Ottoman States in search of 'Master Dreams,' which are presented to the sultan to guide his decisions. The work has long been assumed to comment, at least in part, upon the paranoia, terror, and bureaucratic opacity of Albania during the years of Hoxha's dictatorship, although Kokobobo notes that it is also a meditation on the state of socialism and totalitarianism in general.[92] In either case, what characterizes the world of Kadare's novel is the dissolution of the barrier between dreams and 'reality'—the power of dreams to interpret reality loses any connection to actual events, and yet at the same time, through the mechanizations of the totalitarian state, it gains complete influence over them.[93] As a commentary on communist Albania, Kokobobo argues that the book imagines Hoxha's project of modernization as no more than the construction of a particularly vital dream—a hyperreal dream—fed by propaganda and architectural

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[90] Ani Kokobobo, "Bureaucracy of Dreams: Surrealist Socialism and Surrealist Awakening in Ismail Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*," *Slavic Review* 70:3 (Fall 2011): 524-544.

[91] Ismail Kadare, *Pallati i Ëndrrave* (Tirana: Onufri, 1999).

[92] Kokobobo, 528.

[93] Ibid., 535.

transformation of the country's landscape. As she puts it, "The gleaming happiness of industrial achievement and agricultural plenty described by Hoxha was a mirage, a virtual reality at odds with real conditions in the country."[94] Kokobobo's analysis, which marshals both Dobrenko and Groys, would seem to indicate that communist Albania is indeed an exemplary instance of aesthetics replacing reality.

Herein lies the problem—not the historical one, but the theoretical one.[95] She, as many others have done, ultimately treats socialist realism in Albania (here by proxy, since she mentions only "crude physical displays of ideology") as 'a virtual reality at odds with real conditions.'[96] This raises precisely the question suggested by Petre Petrov in his critique of the principle trend in scholarship on socialist realism (including Dobrenko and Groys): by what standard does one assert that the "real conditions" in the country (be it Russia or Albania) are *more real* than socialist realism, which purports *to be the real*?[97] The question is not whether or not an analysis of the (poverty-stricken, violent, oppressive) conditions that prevailed in, for example, communist Albania is important—it surely is. The question Petrov raises concerns the appropriateness of reading socialist realism as, once again, a failure of mimesis—as a system of art that did not show *what*

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[94] Ibid., 537.

[95] Again, I want to refrain at this point from entering into an extended debate about whether or not Kokobobo's application of Dobrenko and Groys to Albania is *historically* sound.

[96] Kokobobo, 537-538. The scholarship which aims to distinguish between the 'unreality' of Hoxhaist propaganda and the 'real' conditions of communist Albania is vast, and I will note only a few key works here. Arshi Pipa's *Albanian Stalinism*, which has served as a touchstone of English-speaking scholarship on Albania, is a vitriolic (though thoroughly studied) condemnation of any number of the hypocrisies and illusions perpetrated by Hoxha's government. More recently, Visar Zhiti's *Panteoni i Nëndheshëm* draws attentions to those writers, artists, playwrights, and other cultural producers who were condemned by Hoxha's state. Finally, the title of Fatos Lubonja's article "Between the Glory of a Virtual World and the Misery of a Real World" is perhaps the simplest and best summation of the interpretive approach taken in this scholarly trend. See Arshi Pipa, *Albanian Stalinism* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1990); Visar Zhiti, *Panteoni i Nëndheshëm*, ose *Letërsia e Dënuar* (Tirana: OMSCA, 2010); and Fatos Lubonja, "Between the Glory of a Virtual World and the Misery of a Real World," in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002): 91-103.

[97] Petrov, 874-875.

was real. Petrov argues that even Groys and Dobrenko, both of whom set out from the premise that (essentially) concern with the 'real' conditions in Stalinist society misses the point that the aesthetic of socialist realism *was* the real, still fall back on a model that presumes there was a kind of 'real' reality there before socialist realism arrived to 'replace' (Dobrenko) or 'reshape' (Groys) this reality.[98] While it is possible that Petrov overstates his critique when facing Groys and Dobrenko—one could certainly grant that the instances in which either author seems to rely on a 'deeper' reality merely represent poor choices of words[99]—his criticism is still an important one, and the theory he develops from it is compelling.

Petrov's essential point is that reality (the reality of socialism) is not something external to socialist realism, and thus it is not to be acted upon by it.[100] This is to say that, in the theoretical model of Stalinist socialist realism, there is *first* the "coming-to-be of socialism," which happens despite any subjective participation (on the part of artists, demiurges, heroes, and so forth) and *only from that coming-to-be* can there be anything like an 'objective' reality. "Reality" is not something that is objectively experienced—a thing that exists—but is instead "that which *makes present.*"[101] The subject (the individual, the artist) in socialism, then, does not understand something in a certain way and thus transform it into (the hyperreality of) socialist reality, but instead understands

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[98] Ibid., 876.

[99] Others, for example, have interpreted Groys as unwilling to really undertake a critique of the 'reality' of the Soviet myth. Thomas Lahusen, for example, seems to expect Groys to perform just this kind of a critique when he refers to him as essentially the same kind of "mythograph" as the postutopian artists he champions. Lahusen is correct, but part of what seems to underlie his dissatisfaction with Groys is the assumption that 'revealing the true content' of socialist realism is what is necessary. In fact, what Groys (or if not he, at least Petrov) shows is that this project is not as helpful or as clear as it might seem. See Lahusen, "Socialist Realism in Search of Shores: Some Historical Remarks on the 'Historically Open Aesthetic System of the Truthful Representation of Life,'" in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997): 22-23.

[100] Petrov, 877.

[101] Ibid., 880.

something because socialism is bringing reality into being. Petrov's philosophical guide here is the later Heidegger, and his model for understanding socialist reality/ism is Heidegger's shift from human being to Being proper as a subject of investigation.[102] He argues that socialism, as it is found in Stalinism, approaches reality the way in which Heidegger approached Being: as "coming-to-presence" or "truing." In socialism, socialism's coming-to-be 'clears' (to use Heidegger's terms) a world for citizens of the socialist state to experience: it opens up the possibility of subjective experience. Thus, the notion that the 'surrealism' or 'hyperrealism' of Stalinism derives from its engagement with 'transcendental' or 'ideal' events (as Groys argues) is inaccurate, since Stalinist culture does not consist of such (Kantian) 'ideas' being "materialized."[103] Socialist realism, as art that participates in the reality of the coming-to-be of socialism, does not *re*-present socialist reality; there is no mediation.[104] Rather, socialist realism is the position taken from within the happening of socialism, the position in which one opens oneself to that happening. From this position, there is not a prior reality or idea that competes at any level with the 'reality' of socialism—socialist realism can never be 'at odds with real conditions in the country,' as Kokobobo puts it.[105]

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[102] While Petrov's dependence on Heidegger for theoretical support might seem historically dubious, Heidegger is certainly no more ill-suited to the task than Baudrillard. Petrov's argument for Heidegger's relevance comes not, however, from the parallel between National Socialism and Stalinism (as two totalitarian regimes), but from the fact that Heidegger, like the Soviets, was experiencing the kind of ontological struggle characteristic of *modernity* in general (Ibid., 885). While Petrov clearly takes this line to avoid historical nitpicking about the differences between National Socialism and Stalinism, I would argue that in fact, the distinction is unnecessary (as if 'modernity' as an ontological condition were more specific than totalitarianism). In any case, I agree that both Heidegger's characterization of Being and the socialist (realist) relation to reality *are* part of 'modernity'—broadly construed. The value in understanding socialist realism comes precisely from its status as a different kind of response to modernity than that found, say, in Modern art.

[103] Ibid., 884.

[104] Ibid., 888. Here he is essentially in line with Dobrenko, despite his insinuation to the contrary.

[105] The argument that Stalinism unites all contradictions, such as those between 'socialism' and 'real conditions in the country,' is certainly not new: one version of it is offered by Groys in "The Art of Totality," 112-113. For Groys, however (and from a historically sensible point of view), the resolution of

In a sense, Petrov's critique must be seen as frustrating and, from a historical point of view, not entirely helpful. After all, it either marginalizes or simply cannot address certain questions that are undeniably germane to an understanding of socialist realism in any context—namely: What is the philosophical genealogy of socialist realism? How was socialist realist art deployed strategically to support particular political or economic configurations? What occurs at the schism between the image of oppression (say, the Gulag, or the purges) and the image of the building of socialism? However, what Petrov *does* offer—and the reason I introduce his critique—is an ontologically compelling description of the action of the socialist realist artist which does not rely on *imagining this art as a representation contrasted to an already given reality*.[106] Furthermore, and most importantly, it gives us a model that does not need to imagine the 'socialist subject'—in the role of either the artist or the viewer—as something fully formed prior to the coming-to-be of socialism in the work of art.

I wish to be clear: the chronological trajectory I have traced from Groys to Dobrenko to Petrov is not meant to be teleological. I introduce these three thinkers not because, in the end, one is right and the others are wrong. Rather, as I said at the outset, I wish to situate my interpretation of the Independence Monument in relation to the different hermeneutical approaches offered by these authors (and by Golomstock, whose

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contradiction in Stalinism comes from Hegelian dialectics: *all* contradictions are present and accounted for (hence the 'totality'), and therefore there is no ground to privilege *one* point of view (that is, to say that 'in reality' conditions were terrible in socialism). Petrov's argument instead goes that socialism recognizes no contradictions because it is *ontologically prior* to any such contradiction between 'real' situations.

[106] Whether or not it pervades all of Dobrenko's argument, this shortcoming still characterizes his criticism of Groys. Dobrenko (44-45) argues that Groys misses the fact that socialist realism was strategic (a machine for producing socialism where none existed)—but he still presupposes that someone created and used this aesthetic machine: the politicians. And this is ultimately not that far removed from Groys' argument about the political leader as artist: both presume that there is a pre-existing subject able to *impose* the vision of aesthetics on the world, which is to say this subject has a prior understanding of 'reality.' For Petrov, it does not matter if one is a demiurge or an industrial worker: one is not a *subject* before the happening of socialism.

analysis is of a different nature). This is not simply a matter of determining to what degree the Stalinist context can be transferred to Albania. It is, instead, a matter of determining the *different ways* in which the monument *means* and *has a meaning*.[107] Certainly the monument, from one point of view (and not just from a point of view: from the evidence of historical documents) is Hoxha's imposition of a particular view of reality onto the Albanian people and their history. From another point of view, it quite definitely embodies a kind of hyperreal mirage, whose function is to make socialism *real*, while de-realizing alternatives.[108] Finally, it is also the case that the reality embodied by the monument is the ground for having an experience of oneself as a subject engaged the building of Albanian socialism. (It is also, and this will become quite important below, in some ways the ground for having an experience of oneself *as Albanian*.) In the monument, and the discourse surrounding it, these different ways of understanding socialist realism and its 'reality' intersect in different ways—ways that I will try to illuminate in the discussion below.

Before proceeding to this discussion, however, I wish to examine one final model for interpreting socialist realism that is presented by Igor Golomstock in *Totalitarian Art*. As his title implies, he does not aim to understand the art of any particular nation or region, nor even such a narrow category as the 'style' of socialist realism. Instead, his project is to illuminate art that is 'totalitarian' in character: art whose aesthetics was born out of the needs, ideologies, and structures of those regimes.[109] Golomstock uses Lewis Mumford's concept of the "megamachine"—that invisible and omnipresent organizational

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[107] The two, of course, are not always equivalent.

[108] This is Dobrenko's position, described above.

[109] Golomstock, xv. His examples, as the full title of the book suggest, are the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and the People's Republic of China; the newest addition of the book contains a brief postscript adding the example of art produced in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

framework which mobilizes every individual in a particular, given role in order to fulfill the functions of the state—to characterize totalitarianism, arguing that in this "system art performs the function of transforming the raw material of dry ideology into the fuel of images and myths intended for general consumption."[110] He asserts that there is a particular historical genealogy shared by all totalitarian states vis-à-vis the establishment of art as "an ideological weapon" and the subsequent selection of a single style of art—and simultaneously the rejection and persecution of all others—to represent the state's ideology.[111] He then proceeds, with a wealth of artworks (paintings, sculpture, and architectural works) to construct a sweeping typology of 'totalitarian art,' complete with hierarchies of thematic content (from images of the leader, historical depictions, and battle images down to genre scenes and landscapes), demonstrating the striking similarities between works produced in the regimes discussed.

I introduce Golomstock's project for several reasons. It has, of course, many limitations: the scale of the endeavor curtails the level of nuance, and its rhetoric is essentializing. Golomstock's focus on comparing the art of certain regimes leaves him both unable to explain similarities to art produced in non-totalitarian states, and unable to provide an explanation for variations in totalitarian art.[112] The project is ultimately invaluable, however, because it makes an effort (as mentioned above) to engage with the visual aspect of particular artworks.[113] Furthermore, a number of analyses focusing on Albania's communist period have also taken its approach—using 'totalitarianism' as their central explanatory principle. Suzana Varvarica Kuka—the author of a series of

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[110] Ibid., xii.
[111] Ibid., xiii.
[112] Rasmussen, 125.
[113] One may of course disagree with Golomstock's interpretations of *why* the works look the way they do, but his attention to similarities in content is welcome.

monographs on Albanian sculptors—uses Golomstock's appropriation of the 'megamachine' as a reference point for understanding how socialist realism functioned in Albania.[114] Studies like Ardian Vehbiu's consideration of public discourse in communist Albania,[115] and Artan Fuga's analysis of the Albanian media,[116] both frame their investigations in terms of the totalitarian qualities of Albanian society under Hoxha (and in the five-year period following his death, during which Albania remained communist).[117] To some degree, I wish to use Golomstock's approach as a foil—that is, I wish to attend more to regional specificity and less to overarching similarities of style. However, it should be kept in mind that the art of communist Albania does to some degree conform to a schema, and that schema is not simply that of an international socialist realism. It is a schema present in the art of many countries and regions, and represents a certain kind of response to the shifting social and economic conditions that are often considered part of 'modernity.'[118]

I now wish to return to the Independence Monument, keeping in mind both the broader Albanian sociopolitical context at the time of its creation and the methodological models for understanding socialist realism outlined here, and flesh out the immediate circumstances and discourses surrounding the work. First, however, there is an important distinction to be made in relation to the approaches I have been discussing. Groys,

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[114] Suzana Varvarica Kuka, *Andrea Mano: 1919-2000* (Tirana: Ilar, 2009), 129.

[115] Ardian Vehbiu, *Shqipja Totalitare: Tipare të Ligjërimit Publik në Shqipërinë e Viteve 1945-1990* (Tirana: Çabej, 2007).

[116] Artan Fuga, *Monolog: Mediat dhe Propaganda Totalitare* (Tirana: Dudaj, 2010).

[117] This is not to say that they are engaged in the same sort of wide-ranging categorizational project that Golomstock is, but simply that their frame of reference for comparing conditions in Albania with those in other countries relies in part on the notion that structural characteristics of art, discourse, and the media are shared between Albania and other totalitarian states. The characterization of communist Albania as 'totalitarian' has its difficulties, of course—as Fuga notes (13-14).

[118] Here I am implicitly taking the line of thinkers like Hannah Arendt, for whom the experience of totalitarianism is one of the key moral and existential components of any full definition of modernity.

Dobrenko, and Petrov are all interested in the relationship between socialist realism and 'reality' (however this term might be construed). In one way or another, this leads them to focus on the radical 'nowness' of Stalinist culture; as Groys writes, "everything is new in the new posthistorical reality."[119] When we consider works of public sculpture such as the Independence Monument, however, we must ask: what is the relationship between 'reality' and 'history' in such instances? While it is true (and this will become clear in the contemporary commentary on the work's significance) that communist Albania represented the realization of the 'New Life,' it is also the case that this revolutionary stage was accompanied by a sustained engagement with the past of the country and its people. Thus, while communist Albania may have been 'posthistorical' in certain senses, it was also undeniably (and unsurprisingly) engaged in the delineation of its own history.[120] Some of this history was recent, some was ancient, but in either case its implications were applied to both the past and the future of the Albanian people. Just as we must take care with the term 'reality,' however, so we must take care with the idea of 'history.' Here again, the article from *Mapo* embodies the dangers, and I return to its subheading: "For the first time, the letter written by Enver Hoxha to sculptors Kristaq

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[119] Groys, *Total Art*, 49. Golomstock offers a different, though analogous, characterization of this 'newness' in his interpretation of totalitarian art: "history in each of the totalitarian countries was considered to have begun with the coming to power of their respective totalitarian party, or perhaps with the beginning of its struggle for power" (xxviii). In Albania it was not so much a matter of beginning history with the Communist Party's rise to power as of extending the 'beginnings' of the Albanian people's fight for independence from foreign powers back in time and envisioning the communist period as the culmination of an ancient struggle. As Fatos Lubonja notes, "The glorious past had at least four major moments: the Illyrian battles, the time of Skanderbeg, the Albanian renaissance [the National Awakening], and the partisan war. Each of these events has its heroes who became the principle characters in literary and artistic works created" during communism (95).

[120] This new approach to the past was both sanctified and necessitated by Marxist-Leninist(-Hoxhaist) doctrine. The official line, given in numerous publications and conference papers, essentially went thus: it is not so much a matter of discovering new facts about history, but of using the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Hoxha to understand the events and phenomena of history in the correct way. See, for example, the introductions to the four volumes comprising the *Historia e Shqipërisë* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1984), produced by the Academy of Sciences of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania.

Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Muntas Dhrami, describing how the Independence Monument should be realized, has been uncovered. The dictator intervened to overshadow the figure of Ismail Qemali and falsify history." The temptation is strong to try to see through the veil cast over Albanian history by the communist period, to uncover the dictator's machinations and to reveal a 'true' history that was falsified. This is precisely *not* the way in which we should view history as it emerges in works like the Independence Monument. Just as there is no reality behind the simulacrum, before the coming-to-be of socialism, so there is no 'deeper' history behind the historical project of Hoxha's regime. This is not to say that earlier nationalist projects had not begun to give shape to a national history—such earlier projects served precisely as the 'raw material' from which Albanian history could be created under communism (from one point of view). Rather, I mean that the Independence Monument does not represent a materialization of already-present history (falsified or otherwise): it establishes the conditions in which the people of communist Albania could understand such a materialized history.

V. Albanian History Coming-to-Be

> *When you stand before this monument, it seems to you as if it has been there for an eternity. Both the ancient and the new history of our people have given birth to it.*
> —Ksenofon Dilo, 1988[121]

The Vlora Independence Monument began to take shape in the imaginary of communist Albania long before it was inaugurated in Flag Square in the center of Vlora, and this foreshadowing of its material existence was by no means a merely incidental anticipatory mood surrounding the commemoration of such a major event in national history. Rather, the discussion of the monument prior to its completion not only set the tone for the appropriate reception of the work's meaning at the moment when it would appear, but it also formed a part of the work's less tangible interaction with the conceptualization of Albanian culture and history. When plans to erect the monument were first announced at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, just prior to the fiftieth anniversary of independence in 1962, its construction was only one of several official policies aiming to commemorate independence and link that event with the National Liberation War (as Albanian communist discourse called World War II) and those who had fought in it. In addition to the creation of the Independence Monument, Vlora was to receive the title of "Hero-City," for both its role in the declaration of national independence and its role in the struggles against occupying forces; Ismail Qemali and other historic figures were to be honored as "Heroes of the People;" medals "for patriotic action" were to be distributed to those who had made a significant contribution—"with weapon or with pen"—to national stability; and further medals and

[121] *Monumentet: Skëndebeu, Pavarësia, Katër Heroinat*.

honors were to be given to those who had assisted in the fight "for national independence, freedom, and advancement."[122]

The trio of sculptors—Kristaq Rama, Muntas Dhrami, and Shaban Hadëri—who were selected to create the Independence Monument were among the most well-known and prolific artists working in communist Albania (figure 25). Rama was from the central coastal city of Durrës, while Dhrami and Hadëri were from the southern cities of Gjirokastra and Delvina, respectively. All three studied first in the Jordan Misja artistic lyceum in Tirana and later (as was common for artists in Albania during the 1950s and 60s, prior to the break with the Soviet Union) in the Ilya Repin Leningrad Institute in St. Petersburg.[123] Upon returning to Albania, Rama worked first as an inspector for the Ministry of Art and Culture, then as Director of the National Gallery of the Arts (in 1960), and later as a director in the Ministry of Art and Culture (in 1966).[124] Hadëri and Dhrami both returned from Russia to work as professors of sculpture in the Institute of the Arts in Tirana. The three artists became the favored sculptors of the regime and realized several collaborative monumental works during the 1960s and 70s, including the Monument to 1920 near Vlora (1970, figure 39), the *Mother Albania* Monument in the

[122] Enver Hoxha, "Populli Shqiptar Sot Lufton, Punon, dhe Jeton i Lumtur në Dritën e Partisë," in *Vepra: Vëllimi 49: Maj 1972-Dhjetor 1972* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1986), 4-5. The meeting of the Political Bureau where these policies were announced took place on November 26, 1962, and they were published in the newspaper *Zëri i Popullit* the following day.

[123] Hadëri, the oldest of the three sculptors, was a partisan in the National Liberation Army during World War II. He attended the Jordan Misja lyceum from 1947 to 1950 and then served for two years as the first director of Albania's National Gallery of the Arts. Subsequently he studied at the Ilya Repin Institute until 1958, when he returned to Albania. Rama was in the lyceum at the same time and finished in 1951; he studied in Leningrad from 1954-1960. Dhrami, the youngest of the three, studied at the lyceum from 1952 to 1957 and then in Leningrad from 1957 to 1961. See Ylli Drishti, Suzana Varvarica Kuka, and Rudina Memaga, *Monografi: me Artistë Shqiptarë të Shekullit XX* (Tirana: Galeria Kombëtare e Arteve, 1999), 76-77, 92-93, 106-107.

[124] Ibid., 76-77.

Martyrs' Cemetery in Tirana (1971, figures 28-36), the Independence Monument in Vlora (1972), and the relief on the prime ministry building (1974).[125]

The collaborative aspect of monument-building in communist Albania served both a practical and an ideological function. Indeed, many of the major monuments produced in the country were the work of multiple sculptors (to say nothing of the collaboration with architects in designing the environments for the installation of the sculptures), including the equestrian Skanderbeg statue in the main square of Tirana (the work of Odhise Paskali, Janaq Paço, and Andrea Mano, 1968, figure 44) and the *Four Heroines of Mirdita* (the work of Andrea Mano, Perikli Çuli, Fuat Dushku, and Dhimo Gogollari, 1971, figures 37-38). The collaborative nature of these works allowed younger sculptors to work with older, more experienced ones, and it was often the case that multiple sculptors were necessary to complete the works in time for the established inauguration dates.[126] The collective character of the creative process was also seen as vital for the development of artists as individuals in the building of socialism. Collaboration modeled the collective discussion of artworks, which was considered to unlock their full aesthetic-didactic potential, and it was through this exchange of both experience and ideas that individual artistic styles were able "to crystallize."[127] As we shall see, however, the Vlora Independence Monument was to evolve not only as a collaboration between the three sculptors tasked with its completion, but also quite explicitly with Enver Hoxha himself.

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[125] The Monument to 1920 and the relief on the prime ministry building were collaborations between the three sculptors mentioned and sculptor Hektor Dule.

[126] Kuka, *Andrea Mano*, 123, 127-128.

[127] Kristaq Rama, "Arritje dhe Perspektiva të Skulpturës Sonë Monumentale." 19-20.

The first significant foreshadowing of the monument came seven years after it was first announced, in July of 1969, when the newspaper *Drita*—the weekly periodical of the Albanian Union of Writers and Artists—published the exchange of letters between Enver Hoxha and the three sculptors.[128] This exchange not only revealed elements of the genesis of the monument, it also clearly and publicly established the official meanings of the work well before it was completed. It is, of course, possible to read this exchange as a straightforward imposition of the dictator's will upon the creative process, an intervention that Rama, Dhrami, and Hadëri either did not care or did not dare to contravene.[129] It is certainly true—as it will become clear in the analysis of the exchange below—that a great number of Hoxha's 'friendly observations' were taken to heart by the sculptors, and appear in the finished form of the monument.[130] Furthermore, the response of the sculptors indicates the weight given to the dictator's (and the Central Committee's) authority in the meaning and appearance of the monument. However, to treat the

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[128] See Hoxha, "Në Gurrën e Pashtershme," and Kristaq Rama, Muntas Dhrami, and Shaban Hadëri, "I Dashur Shoku Enver," *Drita*, July 13, 1969. See Appendix 1 for a translation of Hoxha's letter, and Appendix 2 for a translation of the response.

[129] An even more extreme analysis, one similar to that offered by the article in *Mapo* would read Hoxha's intervention as an active distortion of both the sculptors' initial plans for the realization of the monument and the historical 'reality' of the declaration of Albanian independence. While there are many reasons I wish to avoid such a straightforward reading, one is that Muntas Dhrami—at this time the sole surviving member of the trio of sculptors—has insisted that the 'friendly suggestions' Hoxha offered were indeed just that: suggestions, which he intended the sculptors to consider but not necessarily to implement exactly as he envisioned. Such claims must of course be taken with a certain degree of skepticism, but they do cast doubt on how 'absolute' Hoxha's authority was in the matter. Muntas Dhrami, interview by author, digital recording, August 9, 2013.

[130] Part of the difficulty in tracing the genesis of the design stems from the lack of documentation of earlier stages of the work. One photo, published in Ksenofon Dilo's 1988 catalogue *Monumentet: Skëndebeu, Pavarësia, Katër Heroinat*, shows the three sculptors discussing a large clay model of the monument (see figure 25). Here, there appear to be fewer figures—the northern Albanian is on the far left, Qemali is central, and what appears to be the figure of the *lab* is on the right—and the figures are situated much higher up the boulder than they are in the final version. Presumably, this image shows the monument prior to the revisions Hoxha suggested, since a) the figure of the *rilindës* is not apparent, b) at least two of the figures are wearing the *fustanella* that Hoxha suggested against (see Appendix 1), and c) the top of the monument is quite narrow and (though not visible in the photo) would seem to contain only the raised flag, not the figure of the flag-bearer. (Both Hoxha and the sculptors make reference only to the flag, never to the figure of a flag-bearer, in their exchange, and one might conclude, especially given the overall shape of the maquette in the photo, that the initial model was topped only by a planted flag.)

exchange as simply the exercise of Hoxha's will, the shaping of art and history in accordance with his desires and vision (that is, to follow Groys and treat Hoxha as a heightened form of the avant-garde artist creating the totality of the Albanian communist state), misses the way in which the image of the dictator himself also emerges in a new way *out of* his intervention. In other words, Hoxha as dictator, as a particular construct, does not simply act upon (or distort) culture: he takes shape *because of his intervention in it*, and in this way the monument plays a 'historical' role that is not limited to its depiction of past events—nor even to the bridge it established between the past and the present.[131]

Enver Hoxha's letter, written following his visit to the studio of the three sculptors, offers "friendly advice and observations" related to the monument's goals and appearance, observations that clarify and expand upon comments made during his earlier visit.[132] Hoxha makes three things clear in the letter. First, he insists that the work should present not merely the events surrounding the declaration of independence, but the entire history of the Albanian people's struggle against "centuries-long enslavement and every impediment" to national unity. Second, he emphasizes that this synthesis should be embodied in an image of ceaseless and violent forward motion: "The whole ensemble of the monument should be on the attack, so that the figures that make it up are not in static positions. … [I]ndependence must be protected, the war must be continued, the revolution must rise." Finally, as a result of these two elements, he writes that the monument should present a clear connection between the moment of independence and the ongoing project of Albanian socialism: "In it we would see our own revolution

[131] I will return to this point in more detail below, since a discussion of both the exchange of letters and the subsequent citation of this exchange will make it clearer how the event of the monument's creation produced not just a vision of Albanian national history, but also an image of Hoxha as a part of that history.

[132] The letter is dated June 6, 1969, and the visit presumably occurred during the preceding month.

moving forward, rising up. The people's imagination should see, in the work you will create, that which [they] realized in the glorious National Liberation War, that which [they are] realizing today in the building of socialism."[133]

The insistence that the work suggest not merely the struggle leading up to November 28, 1912, but *all* of the Albanian people's numerous "glorious battles against occupiers," adds a temporal element to the already present spatial synthesis evidenced by the presence of warriors dressed in the costumes of both northern and southern Albania. Hoxha writes that the work should also bring to mind both the Vlora War of 1920 and the National Liberation War (World War II), but that the implied reference to these struggles need not be depicted literally—with actual motifs from these periods—and could instead be suggested in the work's composition. Thus, the achievement of independence itself is treated as analogous to these other conflicts at the level of its form: the image of "the steely unity of [the Albanian] people" illustrates no single moment, but rather a long series of events, each the embodiment—the materialization—of a historically specific national and ethnic character. In a certain way, the precise moment chosen—the declaration of independence—is immaterial to the expression of the eternal struggle that Hoxha sees as the essence of Albanian history.[134] Any moment stands for all moments, and the Independence Monument is meant to evoke this simultaneity of history, the equivalence of every event in the coming-to-be of socialist and national consciousness.

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[133] All quotations in this paragraph, and the subsequent two, are from Hoxha, "Në Gurrën e Pashtershme."

[134] Thus, Hoxha sees the Independence Monument, to some degree, in the terms Groys sees as characteristic of the Stalinist *Gesamtkunstwerk*: it is meant to reveal "the hidden essence of things"—the truth of Albanian history as a war against occupying forces—"rather than [focusing on] phenomena." See Groys, *Total Art*, 51.

This equivalence of historical events, however, does not reduce history a static moment of repetition: instead, Hoxha wishes the monument to embody a history *constantly in motion*. History "mov[es] forward, ris[es] up." It comes-into-being as a dynamism that brings together the plethora of its individual manifestations (the moments of struggle, of overcoming) in their *momentum*. This movement is not a gradual accretion of significance, but rather a "forward charge." The repetition is that of a sudden disjunction, an acceleration that nonetheless brings with it both the preceding and the subsequent transformation of (a specifically national) reality. History always gestures at something beyond, at "other, even more important goals" that have yet to be attained. The movement towards these goals establishes the present as an event of its own, sharing the character of the past's struggles and staging their emergence *as history*. This past needs to be defended, just as national sovereignty and the principles of socialism need to be defended, and this defense is the ongoing task of both war and culture ("the battle of the pen," which Hoxha attributes to the thinkers of the National Awakening). It is also the task of the present in relation to the past: just as the struggle for independence has a specific geographical correlate (the territory formed by a united northern and southern Albania), so it has a specific temporal correlate (the present as the dynamic synthesis of all past moments that embody national unity).

Rama, Dhrami, and Hadëri's letter of response, dated July 10, 1969, evidences the sculptors' acceptance of the majority of Hoxha's proposed visual changes (such as the treatment of Ismail Qemali so that his presence does not eclipse "the role of the masses in the popular struggle for independence" and the addition of the figure of the *rilindës*).[135]

[135] Quotations in this and the susequent paragraph are from Rama, Dhrami, and Hadëri, "I Dashur Shoku Enver."

Similarly, it indicates their acceptance of Hoxha's interpretation of the monument's purpose. Like Hoxha, they emphasize that the forward movement of history should express itself in the work; the monument should show "the idea that the people have always pushed forward through the downpour, that their victories are the result of an unbroken chain of wars, that the revolution never stops, and is always on the march, on the rise." They also embrace the idea that the monument should *suggest* particular events and personages, rather than attempting to explicitly represent them. Like Hoxha, they see this non-specificity—the monument's embodiment of general, exemplary principles through the evocation of an actual historical moment—as an important element of the work's significance both in the present and for future generations.

If the response of the sculptors does not greatly deepen the potential interpretations of the work itself beyond what Hoxha had suggested in his letter, it does still broaden our understanding of the relationship between the dictator's intervention and those possible interpretations. That is, the relationship taken up by the sculptors vis-à-vis Hoxha's authority tells us more about the staging of the monument's meaning than might be gleaned from simply gauging the degree to which they accept the dictator's 'friendly observations.' Out of the sculptors' response, an image of Hoxha as mediator of culture emerges: his teachings inspire, they "open new horizons" for the sculptors and "enrich [their] Marxist-Leninist aesthetic understanding." Stimulated by Hoxha's encouragement, the sculptors vow, in their letter, to acquaint themselves with Albanian folklore and literature—they acknowledge that only out of this proximity can they truly understand and convey the Albanian people's "immense spirit, … strength without end, [and] unrelenting energy directed towards freedom and victory".

One might certainly regard the sculptors' letter as no more than pragmatic subservience, as the response demanded by any artists hoping to remain in the regime's good favor. However, such an evaluation ignores the transformation that was underway in the dictator's own public image. As noted above, these were the years in which the first volume of Hoxha's collected works saw publication in Albania—and thus, a period in which his status as theoretician of Marxism-Leninism (evidenced by citation of his written ideas) achieved a new and elevated status.[136] It was also the period in which Hoxha, like King Zog before him, began to associate himself with the Albanian national hero Skanderbeg—above all through the erection of the Skanderbeg Monument in the main square of Tirana, a work that replaced the statue of Stalin that had previously occupied this privileged space (see figure 44).[137] In short, this was a period in which Hoxha's dictatorship evolved significantly to encompass not only his role as military leader (however embellished or concocted) in the National Liberation War but also as the unifier of the Albanian nation in the present by analogy with the ancient past. [138] Thus, the 'history'—a term which we have yet to satisfactorily define, and which I will discuss at greater length below—of the Albanian nation began to deepen at the same time that the role of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' began to undergo a significant transformation (or, to use the terms in vogue with the regime at the time, a 'further revolutionization').

Viewed in this way, the exchange of letters—and with it, to a certain extent, the entire project of the construction of the Independence Monument—becomes nothing more than a particularly useful element of propagandistic discourse. The public nature of

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[136] For more about the citation of Hoxha's works in these and subsequent years, see Vehbiu, 70-74.

[137] See Maks Velo, *Skulpturë Heroizmi Nudo* (Unpublished Study, 2004), 22-23, and Lubonja, 95-98.

[138] See Standish, "Enver Hoxha's Role," 120-123.

the exchange allows for its citation in numerous future contexts; indeed, it is illuminating to consider Hoxha's intervention in the genesis of the work and its meaning *only as fodder for future citation*.[139] The letter becomes the exemplary intercession on the part of the regime, evidence of the dictator's interest in the arts and his aesthetic authority as a thoughtful and cultured patron. In fact, one could say that nowhere else was Hoxha ever so publicly specific or so comprehensive in his engagement with the visual arts.[140] The importance of this engagement was perpetuated in numerous future references to Hoxha's letter. (The sculptors' response was mentioned far less often.) In fact, nine years later, Kristaq Rama—delivering the keynote speech at the Union of Writers and Artists' plenum on monumental sculpture—noted that "the letter that comrade Enver wrote to the sculptors of the [Independence] monument had special importance not simply for the successful realization of that work, but for our [Albanian] art in general."[141]

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[139] Considered in this light, the monument and the perpetual necessity for its interpretation using the hermeneutic structure provided by Hoxha and the documents of the Party conform to Dobrenko's description of Stalinist culture, wherein "the product itself ceases to be self-sufficient [and] the process of producing it becom[es] self-sufficient instead" (xviii). In the case of the Independence Monument, however, the process of the production of meaning, though it might be said to approach self-sufficiency, nonetheless both depends upon and ultimately draws attention to the material manifestation (the monument itself) of productive-aesthetic forces. Still (as I will discuss further below) it may be accurate to say that the Albanian socialist subject—the worker, the artist, the Party official, and so forth—is not self-sufficient as a product of Hoxhaist culture. Instead, such a subject comes into being in relation to works like the monument, but what is emphasized is *a process* (the need to encounter and interpret such works) that produces the ground for a historically- and nationally-conditioned socialist subject.

[140] This is most certainly not to imply that Hoxha did not engage with the visual arts on numerous other occasions: the more than five hundred pages of articles, letters, and speeches gathered in his *Mbi Letërsinë dhe Artin* [*On Literature and Art*] evidence a prodigious body of material on the topic, not to mention numerous other tangential discussions to be found in the seventy volumes of Hoxha's collected works that would eventually be published. His letter to the sculptors represents one of very few occasions, however, on which Hoxha discusses specific details and meanings in a work of art. This specificity made it exemplary, and this exemplary character, in turn, made it (one assumes) unnecessary for him to repeat this specific type of public intervention. It was enough for critics and artists to refer to the case of the Independence Monument, as they often did, in order to show both the dictator's vested interest in the Albanian arts and what was required of the arts by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

[141] "Arritje dhe Perspektiva të Skulpturës Sonë Monumentale," 15. Hoxha's letter to the sculptors was also mentioned in numerous other subsequent texts, including Hektor Dule's article in the December 3, 1972 issue of *Drita*; Kujtim Buza, Kleanthi Dedi, and Dhimitraq Trebicka's *Përmendore të Heroizmit Shqiptar*; Buza's "Vepra të Skulpturës Sonë Monumentale," *Nëntori* 4 (April 1984); Razi Brahimi's *Artet*

It is interesting to note that Rama essentially effaces himself from the exchange: not only does he not mention the letter penned in response, but he also eschews the use of the first person, discussing the work of the trio of sculptors as if he had not been involved. It is perhaps most clearly in this kind of discourse that Hoxha appears as the kind of lone avant-garde artist Groys envisions: his intervention in culture is so totalizing that it brushes aside even those who work to materialize the products of that culture. They are, at best, reduced to mere receptacles for his wisdom; at worst they disappear entirely: the audience for the dictator's wisdom no longer needs to exist in the manner of a subject that engages with and applies the meaning he advocates for revolutionary nationalist art. Instead, this audience's existence becomes essentially superfluous: there is no need for subsequent response or interpretation precisely because even that response has been first formed by the dictator. I am inclined however, to follow Dobrenko's critique of Groys: the audience of Hoxha's exhortations (both the sculptors and subsequent viewers of the monument) *does* matter, precisely because in this sense the work becomes collaborative (and so realizes both its full didactic and aesthetic potential as a manifestation of shared historical experience). This collective aspect is evident in the work itself where Ismail Qemali strides forward, but does so only as the culmination of the struggles of the warriors and the *rilindës* who surround him.[142]

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dhe Zhvillimi i Tyre në RPSSh (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1981); and Ksenofon Dilo's *Monuments: Skanderbeg, Independence, The Four Mirdita Heroines*.

[142] The implication of the article in *Mapo* is that this image of Qemali in fact represents a denigration of his role, so that Hoxha could preserve for himself (through analogy with Skanderbeg) the role of creator of the Albanian nation. It may certainly be the case that there is something of this type of strategy at work, but it ignores the fact the Albanian people were also meant to be seen as playing a role in the construction of socialism. Insofar as the monument creates an analogy between the moment of independence and the communist present, it also creates an analogy between Qemali and Hoxha, an analogy that does not fully allow the dictator to eclipse the prior figure. For more on the analogy between Qemali and Hoxha, see Blumi, xv-xvi.

According to Rama, the most important element of Hoxha's letter was its instructions on the correct interpretation of "historical themes"—"even the facts of history, even folklore …require explanation from a specific position" and the correct position is that given by Hoxha and by the documents of the Party.[143] The Independence Monument, insofar as it materializes history, is not simply given a ready-made meaning that is significant to Hoxha alone. Its existence at the same time creates the need for renewed interpretation and thus it in turn creates the need for the form-giving authority of the dictator.[144] This cyclical relationship—between the meaning of the work that is so clearly and authoritatively given beforehand and the coming-to-be of that meaning out of the encounter with the work—is in a sense paradigmatic of socialist realism in general. At the very least, we may say (given the fact that the Independence Monument held 'a special importance for Albanian art in general') that it is paradigmatic of Albania's particular form of nationalist-inflected socialist realism.

Thus, it behooves us to consider more closely the ways in which the discussion of the monument thus far relates to the models of socialist realism offered by Dobrenko and Petrov (as described above).[145] There is a sense in which the prefiguration of the monument by the exchange of letters—an exchange that presents the correct (re)presentation of Albanian history as the function of a monument that does not yet exist—recalls Dobrenko's invocation of Baudrillard's simulacrum. This similarity is more compelling if we consider the discourse surrounding the work as its most fundamental

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[143] Ibid., 15.

[144] This is one sense in which the monument is characterized by perpetual motion, "the forward charge to arrive at other, even more important goals" (Hoxha, "Në Gurrën e Pashtershme"). The dynamism of the present, of the building of socialism, will always provide a new viewpoint from which the work must be interpreted, even if the interpretation—that given by the dictator and the documents of the Party—will remain paradoxically the same, that given *before* the work materializes.

[145] The relationship to Groys' model of Stalinist art and culture is, I hope, already clear.

aspect: then the history of the Albanian people, that history which is meant to surge up and return in the contemporary building of socialism is "never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference."[146] However, this understanding of the monument, and the history it is tasked with embodying, is decidedly less convincing if we consider the monument's physical presence. After all, the Independence Monument *did* materialize; it did not remain merely an ideal object of a purely simulacral—or transcendental—character, even if it also never lost this vital aspect.[147] Furthermore, its materiality—the enduring ability to actually *encounter* the monument—allowed for the development and perpetuation of Hoxha's personality cult. It also presents the conditions for an *encounter with* and an *understanding of* Albanian identity in relation to history.

The Independence Monument, considered as a *reality*, is perhaps better grasped by Petrov's definition of socialist realism. In calling the work a 'reality,' I am not suggesting that the work is 'real' in contrast to the 'unreality' of an interpretive discourse that evolved out of the exchange between Hoxha and the sculptors; this would be to adopt a position more or less in line with Dobrenko (albeit with a different idea of what the 'reality' is). Rather, in line with Petrov, I want to accept the reality of the monument's history as ontologically prior to issues surrounding its unreal (or hyperreal) character. Phenomenologically, the monument becomes a site for historical understanding—simulacral or otherwise—when one encounters it. As Muntas Dhrami explained in a discussion shortly before the 1976 plenum devoted to the issue of monumental sculpture,

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[146] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.

[147] Thus, we cannot say that "the territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it" (Ibid., 1). The territory—the monument, and with it national history—may not precede the map, but it *does* survive it. The relationship between the monument and 'territory' will become more clear below.

"[monumental works] create an active aesthetic interaction between the working masses and the space in which they are placed. …Standing before them we stop to think, we take oaths, we pass by, we rest."[148] Interestingly, there is one activity that Dhrami neglects to mention, one we might expect in such a characterization of our interaction with monuments. He omits the building of socialism from his list, and thus suggests that when we pause before these monuments, we are *not* engaged in constructing the 'New Life.'

While it would be a mistake to read too much into Dhrami's simple statement, I believe it is significant that he omits precisely that process that would seem most essential to the correct understanding of a work like the Vlora Independence Monument. The viewer's engagement with the monument is in fact *not* meant to be mediated by the total absorption in the building of socialism; such an encounter would truly be *a mediation*. Instead, it is the *historical* aspect of the work that characterizes the viewer's encounter with the monument.[149] Obviously, the building of socialism is not to be imagined as something ahistorical: it is without a doubt a wholly historical process. Rather, the space opened up by the monument is the space that allows the viewer to understand the reality of the New Life as a project which is *already underway*, to understand the building of socialism *as something historical*. In this sense, the Vlora Independence Monument embodies Petrov's Heideggerian understanding of socialism and socialist realism: it opens up the "clearing" (to use Heidegger's term) in which one realizes the all-encompassing presence and ontological priority of the socialist project. As

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[148] "Vendosja në Hapësirë dhe Përmasat Kanë Shumë Rëndësi," *Nëntori* 4 (April 1976): 23.

[149] Here I wish to stress the significance—which still remains to be explored in the painting, literature, theater, architecture, and music of the Albanian communist period, and indeed to be further explored in the context of its sculpture—of the deeply *historical* character of Albanian socialist realism. It is not at all accidental, I think, that so much of the art produced during the communist period served to deepen and extend a plethora of historical narratives—to the point that images of the 'New Life' served to develop this history *and by no means the reverse* (as Golomstock argues is the case with totalitarian art). Unfortunately a full elucidation of these themes is beyond the scope of my current essay.

Heidegger writes, "art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history."[150] Before the monument, one thinks, one takes an oath, one passes by, one rests: that is to say, one is presented with the possibility of becoming a subject engaged in the unceasing war for freedom, in the perpetual building of the New Life. Furthermore, the subject that the viewer can become is not simply the subject of a universal socialism. The monument opens the space of a *national* history. It makes possible being-historical as a specifically national condition.[151]

Just what is this national condition, however? We can, I think, be even more specific in elucidating the chronotope of Albanian socialist realism by returning to the phenomenological encounter with the monument and re-examining its legible symbolic and iconographic content, its style, and its structure in light of both the visual description of the monument offered at the outset and the exchange of letters between Hoxha and the sculptors. Sculptor Odhise Paskali gave one such description of the encounter with the monument in his article in the April 29, 1973 issue of *Drita*. Paskali writes,

> When you travel to Vlora and enter Flag Square, you immediately find yourself before that which came to pass in history: the Independence Monument. Your first impression is that you stand before …the living heritage that the people and its Party has erected for the future of Albania. You approach it and walk round it in order to fully grasp this complex which rises into the sky and rests its wide base upon the earth of the hero-city [*qytet-hero*]. …Before it [across the plaza] are the graves of the martyrs of the National Liberation War: [the two are] a pair, through which the pulse of the life of the people, which creates history, can be felt.[152]

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[150] Martin Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 75.

[151] Here we might also read Heidegger, leaving ourselves open to the full implications of the relationship between his thought and National Socialism: "History means here not a sequence in time of events of whatever sort, however important. History is the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment" (74). There is perhaps no better way of describing what the Vlora Independence Monument does as a work of art.

[152] Paskali, "Monumenti i Pavarësisë."

Two salient points emerge from Paskali's description of the monument: the first is the work's essential connection with the earth of the city, and the second (which is closely connected to the first) is its relationship to the nation's dead. I now wish to examine these two aspects of the work in turn.

I have noted above the way in which the Independence Monument rises not from a stone or concrete slab, but directly from a patch of grass in the center of a broader elevated platform. This creates the impression that the monolithic boulder upon which the figures stand is rooted in the earth itself, jutting up like the sheer mountains of Llogaraja, south of Vlora. The monument is certainly inseparable from its urban context—it is from the event in the city of Vlora, the declaration of independence and the raising of the Albanian flag, that it draws much of its comprehensibility and impact. At the same time, the identity of the city of Vlora develops out of the presence of the monument.[153] This was indeed the case with many of the monuments erected under communism in Albania: they became "symbols of their cities, without which one could not imagine those cities."[154] And yet, the monument seems to witness the incursion of the surrounding natural landscape—specifically, the stony permanence of the Albanian mountains and their association with Skanderbeg's victories against the Turks in the rugged north—into the urban context.[155] Considered in this light, the monument embodies a particular image of Albania's modernity, a synthesis of urban development and a harsh natural landscape.

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[153] Given the restrictions on civilian travel, especially in the later years of the communist period, this association between cities and their monuments would not necessarily have been based upon the actual encounter with the monuments, but perhaps more often upon photographs or television transmissions.

[154] Introduction, *Nëntori* 1 (January 1978): 8.

[155] In contrast to the Independence Monument, yet also complementary to it, one might consider Rama, Dhrami, Hadëri, and Dule's Monument to 1920, in the Koçi Pass south of Vlora, near Llogaraja (see figure 39). The work prominently features the charge of Selam Musa (the fighter who was the subject of the poem that Hoxha quoted to the sculptors in his letter; see Appendix 1), and it celebrates above all the Albanians as guerilla fighters, accustomed to doing battle in the harsh mountainous terrain that

The significance of the Albanian landscape in this period, and its appearance in the monument, should not be underestimated. Let us recall that it was in these years that Hoxha's project of 'bunkerization' began to heighten. The entire Albanian territory, from the mountainous highlands of the north to the southern coasts, cities and villages alike, became something in need of perpetual potential defense. The massive boulder, jutting up in Vlora's square, serving as the base for the monument, cannot be considered merely from the viewpoint of dramatic effect. It suggests the rocky, heroic geography of Albania as a kind of omnipresent essence, one that not only survives urbanization and industrialization, but serves as a source of its vitality.[156] In fact, artists often conceived the numerous monuments, memorials, and busts constructed throughout communist Albania (marking fallen regiments and heroes, and the sites of decisive battles, most often from World War II) as an extension of the landscape itself, its artificial upbuilding. As Kujtim Buza wrote in 1973, "Wherever one looks in Albania, one sees a landscape [*pejsazh*] of stone, of marble, a landscape of bronze. This is the new landscape of the fatherland."[157] This landscape does not enforce a distinction of the urban from the rural.

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characterizes most of northern and much of southern Albania. This tradition of associating the Albanian warrior with guerilla maneuvers in the mountains also encompassed Skanderbeg—Janaq Paço's 1949 monument to Skanderbeg in Kruja (figure 45) was specifically placed so that the warrior would be seen against the rising mass of the mountain behind him, inseparable from the land itself.

[156] It is certainly true that the trope—often found in socialist realism—of the domination of nature and its transformation to suit human needs appears in many works of Albanian art of the communist period. The bunkers themselves form a part of this paradigm, as do projects like the draining of the swamps on the Myzeqeja plain to produce arable land. However, there nonetheless remains a distinct romantic attachment to the Albanian landscape as an embodiment of the endurance of the Albanian people, of eternity in the context of rapid social change. This latter attitude towards the landscape is, perhaps unsurprisingly, frequently evident in monuments constructed in communist Albania.

[157] Buza, *Përmendore*, 5.

Through works like the Independence Monument, the monolithic bronze face of the 'new landscape of the fatherland,' it instead unites the two.[158]

The navigation of the relationship between the wildness of parts of Albania's rural landscape and its modernizing cities, and the staged synthesis of the two, is not the only unification envisioned by the work. Its geographical synthesis is paired with a social one: the unity of northern and southern Albania, of *Gegënia* and *Toskëria.* The highlands of the north (the *Malësia*, as it is called in Albanian) may already be hinted at symbolically by the rising boulder, but Ghegs, the people of northern Albania (and by extension Kosova) are present in the figure of the *malësor*, while the various southern regions are represented by the other warriors surrounding Qemali. Given the monument's location in a major southern city, however, the work also enacts a selective and highly ideological incorporation of *Gegënia*'s role in the unity of national history (not least by suggesting that the struggles in northern Albania and Kosova prior to November 28, 1912, were directly related to a desire for *national* independence).[159] In other words, the monument serves (which is not to say that it *only* serves) a specifically *southern* narrative, a narrative that embraces northern Albania for its role in achieving a unified national state even as Hoxha's cultural revolution sought to stamp out or marginalize certain religious

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[158] Thus, the pillar, in its singularity as a form, unites the landscape rather than dispersing or dividing it. It stands for the specificity of the earth, rather than its extension. I will return to this point below.

There is an additional aspect of the monument which contributes to the creation of a stable geographic space with which the Albanian nation can then be associated. The monument is, after all, a commemoration of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire. As such, it also takes part in a number of different discourses ranging from orientalist strains in Albanian intellectual history (which run from the National Awakening period through communism and up to the present day) to debates regarding the regional identities which characterized Albania before and immediately after the declaration of independence. Unfortunately, these investigations are beyond the scope of this essay, but they nonetheless bear consideration, since they offer additional angles from which to consider the aspects of national subjecthood that the monument makes possible.

[159] For more on the complexity political and social relations in northern Albania, Kosova, and Montenegro in the period prior to 1912, see Blumi, especially pages 125-150.

and cultural traditions of the region. The monument's imagery appropriates *Gegënia* in order to delimit a particular geographic space as the corollary of the Albanian people, and to assimilate the struggles of the Ghegs into the universal and perpetual national struggle.[160] Thus, to stand before the monument, to understand oneself as a subject in relation to it, *could* mean to understand oneself as Gheg or Tosk. However, this regional identity could emerge only as a result of being swept up in the underlying unity—the 'steely unity'—of the Albanian people, of understanding history as first of all characterized by this unity and geographic specificity, and only secondarily by physical dispersion or cultural diversity.[161]

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[160] A similar process of selective assimilation and rejection or condemnation vis-à-vis the northern regions was occurring at roughly the same time (though it was ongoing through much of the communist period) in Albanian literature and language, to name just a few fields.

It is debatable to what degree the monument can be considered to speak to a northern (Gheg) audience at all; instead, one imagines that it would have functioned primarily to alleviate southern (Tosk) concerns about the integration of *Gegënia*'s people and customs into the southern-inflected communist culture of Hoxha's Albania. In the south (as the sculptors themselves suggest in their letter; see Appendix 2) it would have probably been sufficient to merely *imply* the roles of specific Gheg figures such as Bajram Curri and Isa Boletini through the generic figure of the *malësor*. While photographs of the monument would have been seen by those living in northern Albania, the primary audience of the work in Vlora would have been southerners, and thus associations on the part of this audience with the figure of the *malësor* would have been largely vicarious.

[161] I wish to note—though it cannot be fully elaborated here—that there is another aspect of the kind of subjecthood that the monument seems to make possible. It is certainly significant that all of the figures that make up the work are *male*. However, Hoxha's cultural crusade against religion (especially in the north) was partially conducted in the name of stamping out conservative practices that limited the contributions of women to society. Indeed, many have seen the communist period in Albania as one of emancipation for women (see Prifti, 90-112). Why, then, does the monument feature no women, especially if the socialist woman was considered to be a vital part of the New Life? (One might argue that the *Mother Albania* monument, the work of the same sculptors, inaugurated in the same year, fulfills the need to establish an image of the role of women in relation to Albanian history. That monument will be discussed further, though not with attention to the implications of gender, below.) One explanation would be that the Albanian past did not contain sufficiently iconic female figures, and that only the figure of the flag-bearer is meant to be read as part of the socialist present. This, however, is untrue—Kristaq Rama had received a great deal of notoriety for his bronze bust of Hero of the People Shote Galica, created in 1968 and placed in the northern city of Kukës. Additionally—perhaps the most appropriate comparison—one might cite the *Four Heroines of Mirdita* monument of 1971, located in the main square of the northern city of Rrëshen (see figures 37-38). This work commemorates the deaths of Marta Tarazhi, Prenda Tarazhi, Shkurte Cara, and Mrikë Lokja, four women who were killed for their embrace of communist ideals in violation of the regional canons of northern law (Kuka, *Andrea Mano*, 127). (A comparative study of the *Four Heroines* monument and the Independence Monument, with attention to the ways in which they imagine the relationship of gender roles and Albanian history, would be invaluable. It is, unfortunately, beyond the purview of the current discussion.) Thus, there must be something more complex and significant at work in

Part of the monument's expression of essential unity (both historical and otherwise) is also apparent in its style. This style demands the expression of both socialist ideals[162] and the specificity of national character.[163] This specificity, however, is not to be expressed through an abundance of individual ethnographic details. It is significant that Hoxha, in his letter to the three sculptors, in fact encourages them *not* to pay such close attention to depicting the individual costumes of the warriors from different regions,[164] and that the sculptors in their reply note that they hope the figures will be more *suggestive* than individualized.[165] This universality is evident in the stiffness and stillness of the figures, in their shared muscular physique, in the blunt profiles of their faces. It is also evident in the virtually uniform treatment of surface (noted above), a measured roughness that—along with their material unity—harmonizes the figures with each other and with the base of the monument.[166] Perhaps the best way to understand the

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the absence of women from the Vlora monument. I offer one provisional explanation (and it is only incomplete and provisional): the role of the socialist Albanian woman was tied far more explicitly to *sacrifice* than the Independence Monument (despite its relationship to the martyrs of World War II, which I will discuss below). This explanation is supported by the fact that *Mother Albania* guards the martyrs' cemetery—she is the appropriate figure to represent *death* in terms of national history, while the male figures of the Independence Monument are the appropriate figures to represent *freedom*.

[162] The fact that these ideals seem to remain forever ambiguous if not outright elusive is one of the frustrations of the Western engagement with socialist realism. This ambiguity is succinctly expressed in Stalin's exhortation to Gorky: "Write the truth—that will be socialist realism." Nonetheless, the ambiguity of what it is that makes socialist realism *truly socialist* is part of the movement's distinctive character. See Petrov, 889.

[163] In examining socialist realist style in the context of the Vlora Independence Monument, I want to be clear that the definition of that style that will emerge here is not necessarily identical to that which would emerge in a discussion of Albanian socialist realist painting, or even smaller scale sculpture. The notion of "monumentality" was crucial to the conception of art in communist Albania, although even this idea did not derive purely (or even primarily) from visual characteristics. As sculptor Kristo Krisiko, a frequent collaborator with Muntas Dhrami, put it in the title of his article in the April 1976 issue of *Nëntori*, "It is the idea that makes a work monumental, not its size" (32). Nonetheless, the issue of monumentality—in relation to the creation of monumental sculpture—was crucial to the ideology of communist Albania because it was not merely art that was to be monumental. *Life itself* was meant to embody monumentality. (See for example the collection of short essays and interviews by sculptors in the April 1976 issue of *Nëntori*, gathered under the title "The Monumentality of Life and of Art," pages 15-36.)

[164] See Appendix 1.

[165] See Appendix 2.

[166] This treatment of surface, the presence of an overall roughness suggesting the primal materiality of the work, was certainly not universal in the sculpture of communist Albania, but it was

exemplarity of the monument from a stylistic point of view, however, is to consider the flag-bearer.

As I have noted above, the flag-bearer represents an upward synthesis of the figural group below—he is, as Hektor Dule writes, the figure that most completely conveys the emotional significance of the monument as a whole.[167] On one hand, the flag-bearer is the most dynamic of the figures on the monument (see figure 12). His increased size is paired with an emphasis on diagonal motion in the position of his arms, the stance of his legs, and the flowing folds of his cloak. For all this forward motion, however, he is also firmly rooted, his weight planted, his body grasping the starkly vertical flagpole. The linear pattern of his shirt reinforces this rigidity. The flag-bearer becomes a collection of dynamic lines subordinated to a strict stillness, embodying an underlying tension between his triumphant pose and his impassive face, which stares forward seemingly without emotion. The exaggeration of his pose (like that of the *myzeqar* on the left side of the figural group below), coupled with his stillness, creates what Kujtim Buza (in his description of Albanian socialist realist monumental sculpture) calls "an inner dynamism." That is, the figure evidences "an undying energy which springs forth from the ideas [that the artists have] molded into the material."[168] The style of the monument—its surface and material uniformity, the similar treatment of the figures, the balance between lines of immobility and suggested momentum, the interaction of horizontality and verticality—thus aims to suggest something *interior* to the work, a tension whose significance cannot be fully apprehended from the work's

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common (and shared by works in bronze, plaster, and cement—see for example the *Mother Albania* monument and the Monument to 1920, figures 29 and 39).

[167] Dule, "Një Vepër."

[168] "Tipare Dalluese të Skulpturës Monumentale dhe Probleme të Zhvillimit të Saj." *Nëntori* 1 (January 1978): 57.

appearance. This interiority is not something like an individual psychology; in fact such psychologizing is almost explicitly avoided in all of the figures on the monument except perhaps Qemali (who seems to express a certain resoluteness in the face of his forward step). Rather, it is the possibility that something as intangible as a national character (a character, as Hoxha describes it to the sculptors, of "great force…, bravery, heroism, … of sacrifice [and] intelligence"[169]) could exist in the material of the monument itself, and by extension in the earth of the Albanian nation itself.

If the figure of the flag-bearer best embodies the monumentality of Albanian socialist realist sculpture in its evocation of the tension between dynamic motion and universalized stillness, between the speed of the New Life in the building of socialism and an enduring and undying national character, then it is certainly significant that this figure is the one best seen *from a distance*. I have described above the way in which the front edge of the monument's base imposes a sharp divide between the viewer and the work. Standing directly before the monument, one confronts a sheer bronze surface and must look up to see the figures in the lower group towering overhead, with the flag-bearer scarcely readable atop the boulder. This, coupled with the semicircular arrangement of the group below, both invites one to step back and to move around the work, examining it from all angles. Such an interaction reinforces the importance of profile in the overall composition of the work (as Paskali notes in his description of it).[170] The unity of the monument then becomes a composite of its multiple silhouettes, just as the figure of the flag-bearer becomes clearer when one is further from the work (as for example when standing at the outer edges of the raised platform, or better yet at the level of the plaza

[169] "Në Gurrën e Pashtershme."
[170] "Monumenti i Pavarësisë."

below).[171] Part of the Independence Monument's exemplarity, then, comes from the spatial separation between the work and the viewer (both in terms of scale and in terms of the necessity for circumambulation).[172]

As a vital formal element of the monument itself, this distance between the viewer and the work has a number of consequences. First, it should remind us of Dhrami's description of our interaction with monuments (noted above). To encounter the monument is not to be swept up in the building of Albanian socialism as a historical process. Rather, the monument imposes a space *between* that history and the viewer, and it is out of this space that one can then become a historical (Albanian) subject, can then join the narrative by embracing the spatial specificity of the Albanian nation. Second, it reminds us that across the open space of Flag Square, on a small hill, is Vlora's martyrs' cemetery, where those who died in World War II are buried (see figure 46). The monument is connected (through distance) not simply to the living who walk past it, who stop before it, but also to the dead who are buried in the earth (thus completing the circle between the work, which rises up from the earth of the city, and a return to the land). Finally, this distance from the dead, alongside the association with the past, leads us to consider that aspect of the work which I have suggested is most significant: the temporality that it models.

The relationship between the monument and the martyrs' cemetery suggests an aesthetic and conceptual comparison between the Independence Monument and the *Mother Albania* [*Nëna Shqipëri*] monument, created during the same period by the same

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[171] One such optimal point of view, which gives a view of the flag-bearer in profile, is just to the northwest of the monument, near Ismail Qemali's grave and Odhise Paskali's *Flagbearer* monument (see figures 26-27). The view, is, however, now slightly obscured by the trees surrounding Qemali's grave.

[172] Another aspect of this distance is the explicit rejection of inner psychology in the depiction of the figures; these are not figures with which one 'empathizes'.

three sculptors and inaugurated earlier the same year (on May 5, 1972) in the martyrs' cemetery on the hill overlooking Tirana (see figures 28-36).[173] The two works are similar in a number of ways, and their meaning vis-à-vis those who died in the National Liberation War is significant for both (although understandably more so for *Mother Albania*). The *Mother Albania* monument, a twelve-meter-high figure standing atop a ten-meter pedestal, looking northwest over the capital city, has its own complicated genesis from commission to completion, which need not concern us here. From a compositional standpoint, however, the work shares a number of characteristics with the Independence Monument, similarities that in turn suggest a shared function in relation to the Albanian past.

Like the Independence Monument, and especially like its flag-bearer, *Mother Albania* embodies a tension between horizontal forward motion and direct vertical ascendance: her right arm is held rigidly aloft, grasping a star and a laurel branch while her left is thrust almost straight back, fingers together and palm down (figures 29-31). As do the figures on the Independence Monument, she stares resolutely ahead (figure 30). Her right foot also steps forward (though without the force of Qemali or the flag-bearer—her foot does not breach the lip of the pedestal). *Mother Albania*'s robes flow out behind her in the wind, and in profile it seems that the recognizable silhouette of the figure resolves out of a chaos of waving, surging lines. From behind, the form of her garment is entirely abstract; its folds end abruptly, creating a puzzle of amorphous forms jutting outward to differing degrees (figure 34). The height of the pedestal, which bears the words "Eternal Glory to the Martyrs of the Nation," forces one to view the work from a distance, either from the long stair approaching the work from the west or from amidst

[173] Buza, "Vepra të Skulpturës Sonë," 45.

the graves to the northeast (figures 33 and 35). *Mother Albania* is neither youthful nor aged (though her muscled arms suggest her familiarity with labor), and her face—like that of the flag-bearer, is calm and expressionless.[174]

Unlike the Independence Monument, *Mother Albania* does not so much suggest a surge forward as the crystallization of the past in a single, implacable façade. Whereas the base of the Independence Monument extends forward beyond the pillar atop which the flag-bearer stands, *Mother Albania*'s pedestal is essentially a further continuation of her stoic profile (albeit with a clear distinction between the figure and the pedestal itself). In *Mother Albania*, the form that we witness coalescing, at a distance, is not that of the nation, but of the remembrance of the "twenty-eight thousand [Albanians] who died for the liberation of the fatherland and the victory of the Popular Revolution."[175] In either case, however, the invocation of the dead serves to remind the viewer of the present's indebtedness to the past, of the relationship between the sacrifice of past generations and the enduring dynamism of the socialist present. The Vlora Independence Monument's relationship to the ghosts of the past is certainly less explicit than that of *Mother Albania*, but the aesthetic similarities between the two (and the spatial connection between the monument and the Vlora cemetery) make the association explicit. The monument integrates not only the struggles leading up to the declaration of independence, but also

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[174] *Mother Albania* is also notable in that it is decidedly more *Soviet* in style and composition than many other works produced around the same time (perhaps including the Independence Monument). Its relationship to works like Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* [*Рабо́чий и колхо́зница*] from the 1937 World's Fair and Yevgeny Vuchetich and Nicholai Nikitin's massive *The Motherland Calls* [*Родина-мать зовёт!*] of 1967, to name just a few, is undeniable. It is interesting, however, that *Mother Albania* shares none of the emotional vitality present in these two works (especially in *The Motherland Calls*). Furthermore, while the limbs and clothing of the figures in both of the former works reach and flow outward, *Mother Albania* is essentially a single monolithic mass (with the exception of her raised arm). As such, she does not so much extend herself as resolve into an impenetrable and resolutely unified form.

[175] Buza, "Vepra të Skulpturës Sonë," 46. The number cited by Buza, accurate or not, does not represent only those buried in the Tirana martyrs' cemetery, but rather those buried in all such cemeteries throughout Albania.

the collective dead of the nation, the martyrs of "an unbroken chain of wars."[176] These dead become part of a collective past, and their sacrifice produces a vast stretch of time, an eternity of sacrifice that wells up beneath the present and opens up both the space and the time for the citizens of communist Albania to take their place in the New Life.

The Independence Monument does not just assimilate the dead into a national narrative of sacrifice,[177] it also incorporates the "battle of the pen," the intellectual tradition of the Albanian National Awakening.[178] Hoxha's insistence that the monument should include a reference to the thinkers and writers of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* evidences the attempt to strengthen an analogy between the kind of 'rebirth' of national identity supposed to have occurred in the National Awakening and the sort of subjective identity which the monument was supposed to historicize and actualize as the outcome of an ongoing process. It also represents an attempt, quite analogous to the one taken vis-à-vis *Gegënia*—although in a historical rather than a spatial context—to regulate the accepted interpretation of the National Awakening's intellectuals. The late 1960s in fact saw a shift *away* from Hoxha's earlier unreserved embrace of the National Awakening and towards a more careful and selective incorporation of this period and its ideas.[179] This resulted not so much in a 'falsification' of history (as the *Mapo* article insists) as the generation of a more specific historical continuity, one that admitted the thinkers of the National Awakening only insofar as they were read as patriots advocating for the

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[176] Rama, Dhrami, and Hadëri, "I Dashur Shoku Enver."

[177] The Independence Monument does not, of course, primarily create this narrative. The numerous memorials and monuments placed throughout the Albanian landscape, in martyrs' cemeteries and to commemorate battles, in fact far more directly and successfully accomplished this remembrance. However, it is also clear that the Independence Monument does participate in this particular facet of the construction of a shared national past.

[178] Hoxha, "Në Gurrën e Pashtershme."

[179] For a fuller description of Hoxha's attitude towards the *Rilindja* in the late 1960s, see Fuga, 243-246.

uniqueness of the Albanian people in distinction from other nations.[180] Needless to say, this was not always the case. However, again, what the Independence Monument does is not so much attempt to correct an earlier (mis)understanding of history, but rather to show that history itself *already expressed* only one interpretation of the National Awakening. It is significant that Hoxha did not protest a particular depiction of the *rilindës*—this would have been quite different—but rather *that the figure had not been included*.[181] The necessity was that *everything be included*—the monument is not a revision of a particular version of history but rather (as I have repeatedly argued) the coming-to-be of an inclusive space that would allow for the subsequent (historical) interpretation of events such as the National Awakening *as part of a national history*. Here the Vlora Independence Monument's totalizing aspect becomes most evident: it sets up the 'clearing' in which everything will be revealed as historical, but in which only certain aspects of events will be visible.[182] As such, the work reveals the limitations of attempting to read monuments as an empirical record of history, or even as markers which facilitate the remembrance of events in such a history. Certain aspects of the past will never come to light in such works, precisely because they will never arise in the monument's clearing.

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[180] Ibid., 244.

[181] See Appendix 1.

[182] The monument thus functions in a manner to Dobrenko's reading of Stalinist socialist realism in terms of Foucauldian power: it is a fundamentally *positive* force, one which extends, produces, multiplies, and includes. It does not congeal, but rather stretches itself out, underlying everything (Dobrenko, 17). However, it functions in this capacity not primarily in a spatial sense—since the monument is in fact a monolithic *unity*—but in it temporal sense.

This temporal expansion is described by the Albanian art historian Andon Kuqali in his discussion of monumental sculpture: "The sculptural monuments erected in public squares and other notable locations reveal, in their totality, the history of our nation, though there are still more significant moments, still more significant individuals, to whom monuments have not yet been raised. Our monumental sculpture springs from and reflects our great and revolutionary reality, and in this aspect one finds its great innovation" ("Roli Frymëzues dhe Militant i Skulpturës Monumentale," *Nëntori* 1 (January 1978): 52-53). In other words, Albanian history is fully expressed in existing monuments, but at the same time this history is never fully exhausted: there is always more to be included, and in this sense history is always something *new*.

Mikhail Epstein, discussing Russian socialist realism, writes,

> In attempting to apply the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope to Soviet civilization, one discovers a curious pattern: chronos is consistently displaced and swallowed up by topos. Chronos tends toward zero, toward the suddenness of miracle, toward the instantaneousness of revolutionary or eschatological transformation. Topos, correspondingly, tends towards infinity, striving to encompass an enormous land mass and even the earth itself.[183]

This is both accurate and tellingly inaccurate in describing the chronotope embodied by the Vlora Independence Monument. It is true that the monument seems to express the quintessential "suddenness of miracle"—the year of independence, 1912, stands as a point of convergence around which the entire ensemble is unified. Everything is arrayed on the edge of a forward plunge, the step off the rocky base of the monument. This sheer divide separates the viewer from the work both spatially and temporally, and this certainly places a strong emphasis on the moment of transformation. However, the character of the divide between viewer and monument—that which places the work *before* us rather than *with* us—also recalls Bakhtin's notions of the epic and the absolute past.

For Bakhtin, "the epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolutely distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present."[184] The epic past is an eternal one—it "is always opposed in principle to any *merely transitory* past"—and its contemporary manifestations (in monumental sculpture, for example) always occur not in the service of the future but of "the future memory of a past."[185] This description is in many ways quite

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[183] "Russo-Soviet Topoi," in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 277.

[184] M. M. Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 17.

[185] Ibid., 19.

appropriate to the Independence Monument: here, time is not reduced to an instant, but infinitely deepened, opening up to encompass innumerable moments that then become the history of the Albanian nation. At the same time, the work is also for "future generations."[186] It establishes the way in which future Albanians are meant to understand the past, and more than this, it tells the future that to be an Albanian is to have this past.

However, the Vlora Independence Monument is emphatically *not* 'beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present.' Instead, as I have noted above, encountering the work in fact provides the occasion for continuous re-interpretation and re-evaluation, interpretations and evaluations that in turn require the constant reference to the teachings of the dictator and the documents of the Party.[187] The monument shows not just the epic—here we might substitute the word 'monumental'—past.[188] It also shows the *monumentality of the present*. Neither past nor present is motionless or completed in the way Bakhtin describes the epic past. For all its stillness in the moment—the moment of the raising of the flag, where chronos tends to zero—the monument also reveals an 'inner dynamism.' The rigidity of material contains and expresses a perpetual transformation and momentum that connects the past to the present and future. The Independence Monument is a bridge: it

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[186] Hoxha, "Në Gurrën e Pashtershme."

[187] That is to say, the meaning comes before the monument, and the monument comes before our encounter with it, but we must nonetheless understand the meaning—and with it, ourselves—anew. This results, as I have argued above, in the creation not only of the socialist Albanian subject, but also of the subject of the dictator himself.

[188] Alongside Bakhtin's 'epic past,' we may also see Nietzsche's "monumental history" at work in the Vlora Independence Monument (for in fact the two terms describe a similar phenomenon). Indeed, the 'unbroken chain' of history that the sculptors describe in their response to Hoxha should recall Nietzsche's "chain [that] unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks." This "monumental history" believes "that the summit of … long-ago moment[s] shall be for [those in the present] still living, bright and great" (Nietzsche, 68). The Vlora Independence Monument lets its viewers believe in just such a return of the glory of the past, and it shows them that this glory finds its rightful reincarnation in the present, in the building of Albanian socialism.

allows for a relationship to history, for a repetition of that history, for a subject to emerge in the flow of Albanian history. This is the work's socialist realist function, in Petrov's Heideggerian sense: it tells 'the truth' of Albanian history, and this truth establishes the ground for the nation's present. The present becomes an image of the inexhaustibility of the past, an 'unbroken chain' of momentous events and noble sacrifices that is never complete, for it must always be understood anew, and defended anew. As with Bakhtin's epic past, what 'ought to be' comes before us, but its incompleteness is not unstable. Rather, it is the stability of an assured coalescence through renewal, through constant onward and upward movement.

The monument allows the depth of the epic past into the present, and in doing so it expands chronos towards infinity. What, then, of topos? Does it too expand to infinity, as Epstein argues that it does in Stalinist culture? No, for the uniqueness of the *national* history envisioned by the Independence Monument is precisely that its topos is *not* infinite, but *delimited and specific*. The 'nation' emerges out of a particular union of the land(scape) and the city(scape), of the north and the south. This convergence is visually manifested in the rising boulder that juts up: it is the single, unified ground (in both the literal, physical sense and the philosophical sense) of the nation, rooted visually in the earth of Vlora itself. The coalescence occurring in the monument is, then, the synthesis of vast reaches of time with a unified and distinct space. This coalescence is the clearing of a national history—the monument makes this history through its own aesthetic appearance, through its materialization in Flag Square in Vlora. In this history, the dictator, the heroes of the Albanian past, and the citizens of communist Albania can be brought to light, can be understood in their true significance. Future generations can join

in their struggle, can repeat it, and can take up the project of the building of a particularly Albanian socialism.

VI. Conclusion

The same photograph of the Vlora Independence Monument appears in the final pages of the second volume of two four-volume histories of the Albanian nation and its people, published almost twenty years apart (see figures 47 and 48).[189] Both histories were authored by the Albanian Academy of Science's Institute of History. The first, the *History of Albania*, was compiled in 1983-84 and represented a colossal effort on the part of the communist regime to update the earlier, two-volume *History of Albania* (of approximately twenty years prior),[190] chronicling the narrative of the Albanian nation up to the mid-1970s (the period of the "deepening of the socialist revolution in the conditions of rising imperial-revisionist pressure").[191] The second, the *History of the Albanian People*, represents a contemporary, post-communist revision of the same project begun in the mid-1990s, a revision that is nonetheless based on the structure of the previous endeavor.[192]

In both volumes, the photograph of the monument appears as an illustration of the section devoted to the declaration of national independence; its caption identifies it as the Independence Monument in Vlora, but no information is given regarding the artists, nor the date of its creation and inauguration.[193] In short, the monument is treated not as an object of history, with its own genesis and meaning, but as an image of history itself. In a

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[189] The author of the photograph is not identified. The photograph appears in Academy of Sciences of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, Institute of History, *Historia e Shqipërisë, Vëllimi i Dytë (vitet 30 të shek. XIX-1912)* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1984), 502, and Aleks Buda, et al., *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar, Vëllimi i Dytë,* 515.

[190] Standish, 117.

[191] Academy of Sciences of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, Institute of History, *Historia e Shqipërisë, Vëllimi i Katërt (1944-1975)* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1984), 498.

[192] Buda, et al., 15.

[193] In the former history, the authors also make reference to the monument in the section of the fourth volume describing the development of culture in the early 1970s (Academy of Sciences of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, Institute of History, *Historia e Shqipërisë, Vëllimi i Katërt,* 350). In the latter history, this subsequent description of the actual creation of the *monument* (as opposed to the history it manifests) is completely absent.

way, this use of the Independence Monument is quite appropriate—as a work, it is most significant *not* because it emerges out of a specific network of social and political factors (the regime's patronage, the need to develop a coherent national narrative, the assertion of the dictator's authority over cultural production, and so forth)[194] but because it *is* the history of the Albanian nation and its people emerging as a unified entity.[195]

Let us consider this appearance of the monument in relation to an image of Vlora's Flag Square on the occasion of the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Albanian independence in November of 2012 (figure 49).[196] Here, the monument appears in something like precisely the way Enver Hoxha and the three sculptors envisioned it: it has become "all the more significant for the generations to come,"[197] a locus for Albanian identity that—despite its overt stylistic evocation of the culture of the communist period—nonetheless continues to establish the possibility of a shared national and historical experience. At first glance, the article published in *Mapo* the following year—with which I began this essay—would seem to dispute this shared experience, to introduce an element of *questionability* into the notion of a specifically national Albanian history. Tellingly, however, the article implies not that Albanian history is itself a fiction, a particularly pervasive simulacrum, but rather that the monument presents *a falsified version of that history*. Its critique of the monument thus leaves intact the artifice of a

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[194] It has been the goal of this investigation to illuminate both some of these historical factors *and* to suggest the way in which the monument's meaning is more than simply the sum of these influences and events.

[195] Though certainly attributable to a number of different factors, I think it is deeply significant that the history published under communism is a *History of Albania*, while that published after communism is a *History of the Albanian People*. The fact that the image of the Independence Monument plays the same role in both histories reveals, I would argue, that it works to undergird both histories, to establish the bridge *between* the two—between nation and people.

[196] The event, and the spatial relationship of the monument to the square, the crowds, and the martyrs' cemetery, is perhaps understood much better from video footage of the celebration. See, for example, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfc6RfOrhe8.

[197] Rama, Dhrami, and Hadëri, "I Dashur shoku Enver."

shared Albanian historical narrative—in fact, it strengthens it by implying that somewhere in the communist past, that narrative was simply covered up, and that it still waits to be uncovered in the vast archives of Hoxha's dictatorship. The article wants to believe that somewhere, before the machinations of the Palace of Dreams and its bureaucracy took hold of events, there is a *truth* to Albanian history.

I have attempted to show that this interpretation of the Independence Monument (and by extension, the Albanian history it envisions) is misguided precisely because it fails to understand that the Vlora Independence Monument did not function in this way. Its uniqueness—and its contribution to our understanding of socialist realism's individual manifestations—comes not from the way in which it revised history, but from the way in which it established the ontological priority of a historical narrative. This narrative created the possibility for the people of communist Albania to become subjects engaged in the building of socialism. It allowed the dictator, Enver Hoxha, to emerge as an authority on the culture and the history of Albania. It created both a deep temporal extension of this history and delimited the space in which this history could be understood as uniquely *national*.

I have argued that an adequate engagement with the Vlora Independence Monument requires a new hermeneutic model for the interpretation of socialist realist art, one that frees itself from the predominantly Soviet (and predominantly literary) paradigms that dominate current interpretations of socialist realism. In countries that occupied a peripheral position vis-à-vis Moscow, such as Albania, socialist realism encountered new aesthetic possibilities and helped to shape a new kind of historical consciousness. While this art was indebted stylistically to the model established in

Russia, its meanings were at once more and less universal than those of Soviet socialist realism—more, in that they represented the truly international character of the style as the visual language of global communism, and less, in that they rooted themselves in specific regional circumstances and grew into particular cultural identities. In considering the full aesthetic and conceptual import of such works, we gain a broader understanding of how art comes to terms with the conditions of modernity and creates new perceptions of those conditions.

Like much art created in the twentieth century, Albanian socialist realism struggled to balance and interweave the eternal with the transient, the enduring past with the dynamism of the present. Perhaps nowhere is this struggle, and the full diversity of its effects, more apparent than in monumental sculptures like the Vlora Independence Monument. In such works, one witnesses the emergence of legacies at once new and timeless, and the horizons of a uniquely modern subjecthood take form at a particular nexus of time and space. Standing before the Independence Monument, one encounters not so much the coming-to-be of socialism as the coming-to-be of national history. In its shadow, one can become not merely *homo socialisticus* but also, and more significantly, *homo albanicus*.[198] If the monument is still meaningful today, it is because it suggests that in the eternity of the epic past there is nonetheless a similarly eternal dynamism that echoes that of the contemporary, post-socialist moment—an unbroken continuity of perpetual transformation, the coalescence of a nation.

[198] For a description of the relationship between the two, see Gëzim Qëndro, "What's Your Name, Puppet?" trans. Susanne Watzek, in *Blut und Honig: Zukunft ist am Balkan* (Klosterneuburg : Edition Sammlung Essl, 2003), 76-79.

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