

# When Regimes Fall Their Statues Fall With Them: The birth, life and death of Lenin in the Republic Square of Yerevan, Armenia

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This thesis examines the complex process of memory making and unmaking during Armenia's early, mid and post-transition periods as a Soviet republic. By positioning the statue of Vladimir Lenin, which once stood at the central square of its capital city, as a focal element of the discourse, this thesis uses the analysis of the bodily interplay between the statue and its viewers to narrate the transitional conditions of each time period. Drawing on multidisciplinary references and archival materials, it identifies key themes that define the main transitional reconfigurations in the three stages of the statue's lifespan in the center: birth, life and death. By discussing alterations of semiotics, perceptions and emotions, this thesis argues that the statue is not a passive object subject to transformation, but rather a pivotal player in the process of the transformation that in turn plays an important role in the construction and deconstruction of the collective memory.

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Keywords: collective memory, statue, monument, performative memory, Armenia.

## Introduction

A close-up view of a head being severed from a body floats hanging from a crane. A gathered crowd, as though collectively holding their breath, erupts into cheers, applause and whistles as the head is lowered onto the bottom level of a podium. A man carrying the head down aggressively slaps it his action charged by the exhilarated reaction of the crowd. Close-up views of crowd members' faces follows, some prideful and joyous, others relieved or even somber. Cheers are amplified by the melodic honking of passing cars as the crane lifts the headless body and carefully lays it on a truck. Hostile maltreatment of the fallen cadaver ensues through hitting, kicking and spitting before being driven around in between the crowd. The scene ends with the echoed thudding of coins thrown onto the corpse as the crowd bids farewell to the deceased.

As a 9-year-old child, I was horrified by what I had witnessed. I shifted my gaze from the TV screen of my childhood living room towards my mother to get reassurance from her. "This is in the Republic Square in Yerevan. It was when Armenia became an independent

country,” she said in a casual tone. Compared to my mother who is a native Armenian, growing up in the diaspora I was exposed to my cultural identity through school, extracurricular activities, entertainment outlets and the ever-so-often visits to my grandparents’ in Armenia. Having visited the Republic Square multiple times beforehand, my mother’s statement caused even more confusion as I had never been aware of the intense event that had occurred there.

The event described above followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Armenia was part of one of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union from 1922 and was later established as the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. The body described is the statue of Vladimir Lenin, the founding head of government of the Soviet Union, that for decades stood in Lenin Square in Yerevan, marking the new city center of the Armenian SSR. As a pillar of revolutionary communist ideology, it played a central role in activating the square. By hosting crowds for public activities, gatherings, and ceremonial events, it became a spatial reference point for collective memory within the city. In 1991, the nation's independence from the USSR was proclaimed through the public beheading and takedown of the statue, an act of detachment from the group ideology it represented. No traces of the statue’s existence remain in the square, now renamed as the Republic Square. Reflecting on the thoughts I had while watching the event unfold on screen, through this paper I want to investigate how a monument could provoke such aggression, whether its presence and absence altered the city, and its role in the development of people’s collective memory, identity and belongingness.

In her book *Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, anthropologist Katherine Verdery describes statues as not only symbolic of the specific person depicted but also as the body of that person. For her, statues provide temporal alterations to their lives, transporting them into a realm of timelessness by freezing their bodily decay. Through the process of being cast, they transcend the limitations of terrestrial life and attain a status of immortality.<sup>1</sup> By placing them within a spatial setting, they gain access to the lives of the populous by becoming what sociologist G r me Truc calls in *Memory of Places and Places of Memory* as spatial reference points of memory.<sup>2</sup> In his article *Between Memory and History*, historian Pierre Nora refers to such vessels of collective memory as ‘lieux de memoire.’ For him, they are not resultant of spontaneity, but instead of fabricated curation of archives of specific historical narratives.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4-13.

<sup>2</sup> G r me Truc, "Memory of Places and Places of Memory: For a Halbwachsian Socio-Ethnography of Collective Memory," *International Social Science Journal* (2011): 148.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de M moire," *Representations* 26, no. 26 (1989): 12.

Therefore, they become instruments used by entities in power for political mobilization. Around such monuments, public events are orchestrated to promote what political scientist Caterina Preda calls performative memory practices that, in turn, ensure interactions between the bodies of the statues and the bodies of the viewers.<sup>4</sup> However, Nora argues that for monuments to persist, their meanings have to metamorphose as the lives of their viewers change over time.<sup>5</sup> As direct embodiments of symbolic thought, often times statues lose their relevance as they are unable to adapt alongside political transformations. Consequently, these resurrected bodies become targets to be overcome by the viewers to achieve states of normalcy.<sup>6</sup>

I aim to uncover the complex interplay between the bodies of the viewers and the body of the statue in the process of memory making and unmaking within the central square of Yerevan. As a means to attain a comprehensive understanding of both parties, I analyze several writings on the context from varied fields of study including history,<sup>7</sup> education,<sup>8</sup> cultural studies,<sup>9</sup> anthropology,<sup>10</sup> policy,<sup>11</sup> geography,<sup>12</sup> architecture<sup>13</sup> and urban planning.<sup>14</sup> My analysis utilizes these diverse perspectives to identify key themes that have been overlooked by examining them separately. Moreover, all but one<sup>15</sup> of these references provide only snapshots into the era of study as opposed to a holistic timeline of the transformations. Although the studies discuss the statue of Lenin as a chapter of the transformation of the city, they fail to recognize it as a pivotal player in the process.

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<sup>4</sup> Caterina Preda, "'Living Statues' and Nonuments as 'Performative Monument Events' in Post-Socialist South-Eastern Europe," *Nationalities Papers* 1, no. 19 (2022): 4.

<sup>5</sup> Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," 19.

<sup>6</sup> Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Maike Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (2015): 9-31.

<sup>8</sup> Iveta Silova, Zsuzsa Millei, Ketevan Chachkhiani, Garine Palandjian, and Mariia Vitruk, "Post Socialist Transformations in Comparative International Education: Monuments, Movements, and Metamorphoses," *Bloomsbury Academic* (2021): 1-18.

<sup>9</sup> Hrach Bayadyan, "Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation," in *Representations on the Margins of Europe: Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States*, ed. Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba, (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2007), 198-212.

<sup>10</sup> Levon H. Abrahamian, "The Secret Police as a Secret Society: Fear and Faith in the USSR," *Russian Social Science Review* 35, no. 3 (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia, 1920-1936: A Study of Planned Cultural Transformation* (Redwood: Stanford University, 1955).

<sup>12</sup> Diana K Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era: Urban Symbolism and Narratives of the Nation in the Landscape of Armenia's Capital*, (Miami: ProQuest ETD Collection for FIU, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Tigran Harutyunyan, *Architectural Guide Yerevan*, (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Sarhat Petrosyan, "The Transformation of Yerevan's Urban Landscape After Independence," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 87, (2016): 2-4.

<sup>15</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era: Urban Symbolism and Narratives of the Nation in the Landscape of Armenia's Capital*.

Contrarily, I argue that the statue of Lenin is key to uncovering the spatial, temporal and societal reconfigurations that occurred during Armenia's early, mid and post-transition period as a Soviet republic. Through analyzing the movements of bodies, I will narrate the complex conditions of each period through the statue of Lenin as he arrives, lives and dies in the square.

Accordingly, the first section, titled 'Birth,' focuses on how the statue and its surroundings were staged to represent the revival era of the newly established Armenian SSR. The second section, 'Life,' presents an overview of the methods used by the Soviet regime to infiltrate the bodily presence of Lenin into the habitudes of the people. Its role starts from a conductor of public performances enacted by the bodies of the people in the collective setting of the square to a controller of their everyday movements and thoughts in their individual lives. Finally, the third section, 'Death,' documents the symbolic significance of the movements of the statue during the spontaneous burial rituals performed by the people as it is intentionally erased from the square as an ideology of a rejected past.

Each section is prefaced by a descriptive narration of events from the statue's point of view that serves to underscore its importance within the broader historical and cultural context. Giving the statue thoughts and feelings helps to humanize it as a living embodiment of meaning beyond a mere inanimate urban decoration. This method helps the readers to consider the ways in which the people around it associated it with the real Lenin and to understand its role as a provocative force of passions and emotions.

In the absence of the physical presence of the statue in the square, I rely on archival material such as images, footage, news articles, drawings and maps to trace back its existence. Recognizing that archival materials are often mediated by biases and perspectives of their creators, I incorporate this factor as a part of my analysis to reveal notions of staging and artificiality of narratives. Furthermore, I draw on the insights I gained through a structured written interview with the National Gallery of Armenia and an informal interview with my mother to verify the accuracy of my findings.

## **Birth**

*Abruptly brushed by the unveiling of the fabric across my face, an intense light behind my closed eyelids tempted me to awaken and bask its radiance. The light transformed into blurry shapes of pink shades against the backdrop of the blue of the sky. As my vision slowly began to clear, they sharpened into intricate facades with*

*ornate details. I was at the center of this marvelous panorama mirrored on both of my sides. My gaze was then drawn to the bustling city below as cars and busses rushed circling around the paved oval at the center of the scene and as people passed by going about their daily lives some looked up at me with marveling eyes. I had a moment of revelation, I had just come to life!*

On November 29, 1940, the statue of Vladimir Lenin was inaugurated at the central square of Yerevan.<sup>16</sup> After 16 years since the finalization of Alexander Tamanian's master plan of Yerevan, the urban planner's vision of the square was fulfilled with the erection of the statue.

The collapse of the Transcaucasian Commissariat of the Russian Empire resulted in the establishment of the first Republic of Armenia in 1918. After years under foreign rule, Yerevan was proclaimed to be the new capital that was to personify the hopes and aspirations of the newly independent nation aiding its revival from the traumatic events of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>17</sup> In 1919, Alexander Tamanian was commissioned to develop a new master plan for the city. Tamanian, an architect and urban planner who trained under Beaux-Art education and who worked in St. Petersburg for the Russian Empire, approached the project with a palimpsest principle. He overlaid the existing gridded tsarist road and water networks set by the 1837 masterplan of provincial engineer A. Stotsky (Fig. 1) with a radial belt of greenery according to the ideals of an English garden city.<sup>18</sup> Beyond the breathing public gardens is a circular boulevard that confines the plan into a 150,000 capacity circular city that opens up at an orientation towards Mount Ararat, a natural feature that was no longer within Armenian territorial boundaries serving as a symbol for unified Armenianness over the history of their bloodshed (Fig. 2).

Tamanian's proposal was completed in 1924 while Soviet authority was established in Armenia. Although the political regime had changed, the previous republic's anti-Tsarist stance was aligned with that of the Bolshevik government. Thus the latter invited Tamanian back from his three-year immigration to Tabriz, Persia to complete his new master plan.<sup>19</sup> Through the construction of the new city, selective historical narratives were imposed by the erasure of the past Tsarist image of the city, ultimately forcing the population to adopt the same position. Under the same consensus of selective narration, with the aim of gradually redirecting nationalist aspirations of the republics away from political objectives, the 1923 policy was put

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<sup>16</sup> “Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն,” Media Max, accessed March 13, 2023, <https://mediamax.am/am/news/yerevan-XX-century/6339/>.

<sup>17</sup> Harutyunyan, *Architectural Guide Yerevan*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Harutyunyan, *Architectural Guide Yerevan*, 21-32.

<sup>19</sup> Harutyunyan, *Architectural Guide Yerevan*, 25.

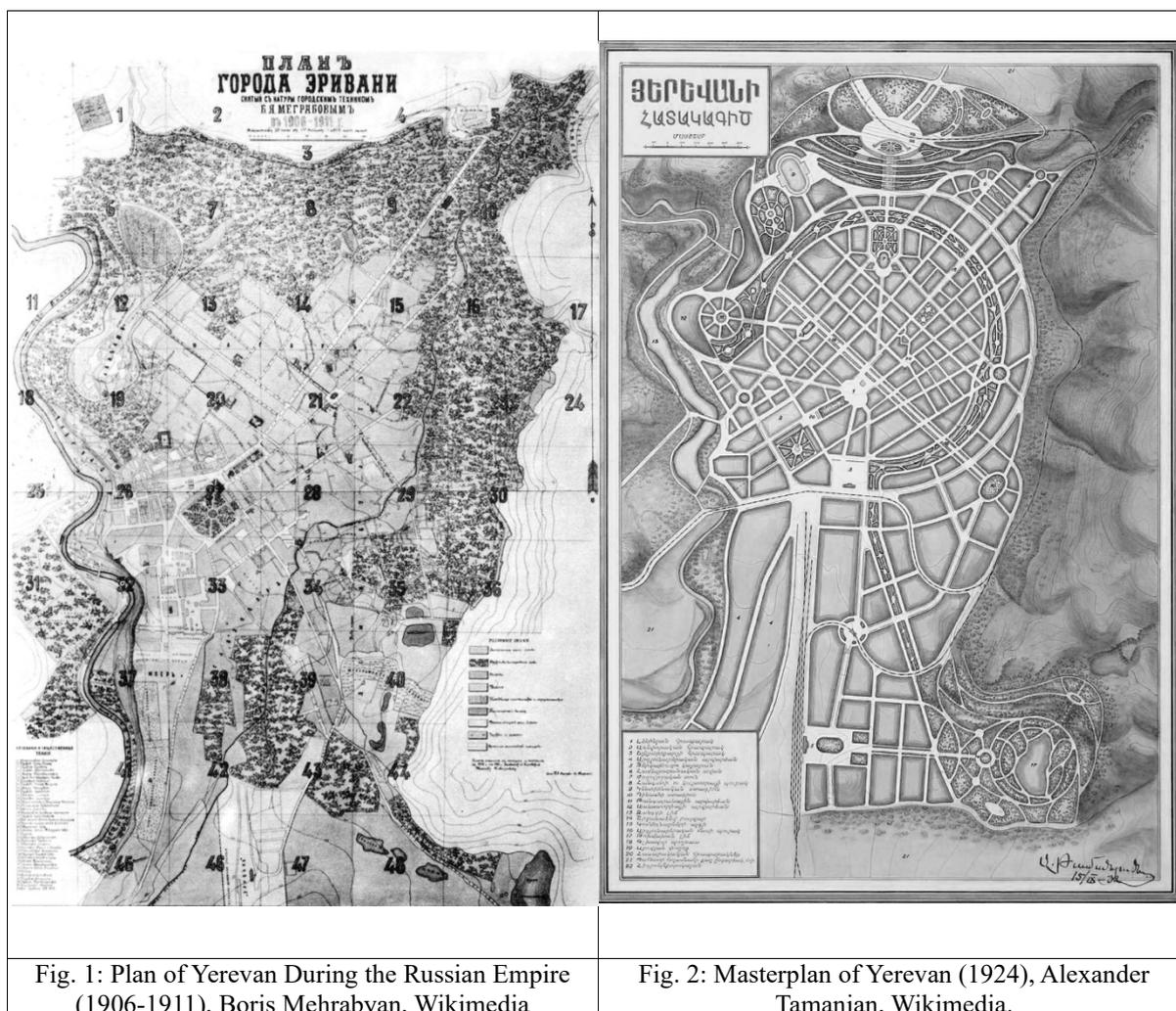


Fig. 1: Plan of Yerevan During the Russian Empire (1906-1911), Boris Mehrabyan, Wikimedia

Fig. 2: Masterplan of Yerevan (1924), Alexander Tamanian, Wikimedia.

in place by the Communist Party.<sup>20</sup> This policy was “oriented towards art embracing a nationalist guise and socialist content” the scope of which also affected architecture. Under this concept and derivative of his architectural background, Tamanian developed a stylistic attitude that incorporated classical architectural features with Armenian traditional motifs to fill the blocks of the new gridded city, all of which were constructed with local pink tuff stones mined from the highlands of Armenia.<sup>21</sup> The style highlighted regional identity whilst not defying the “allowable” forms policy of the Party.<sup>22</sup> It was adopted by generations of architects that followed making it synonymous with national architecture later to be named after the architect as Tamanianesque architecture.<sup>23</sup>

A space that truly embodies Tamanianesque architecture is the square at the heart of the city, a main civic space that was a major component of this master plan. Arterial roads from the square connect it to all parts of Yerevan a centralized scheme that is true to ideologies of garden cities. These roads converge at an ovular central intersection creating a junction reserved for automobile traffic, a feature that glorifies progress and rapid modernization. In order to legitimize its presence in the republics, the Bolshevik government heavily instrumentalized monuments of socialist heroes and symbols within similar public settings to promote visions of Soviet distinctiveness, in turn linking different geographies under shared common values.<sup>24</sup> These monuments act as spatial reference points within urban spaces effectively involving them in the social sphere of the city. As nodal anchors of memory they ultimately shape principles of belongingness.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Yerevan, the plan to place the statue of Vladimir Lenin, a genuine leader worthy of central status of worship among all other socialist heroes,<sup>26</sup> was a driving force that shaped Tamanian’s plan. The statue was to be raised south of the junction in the central square that was to be named after him as the Lenin Square emphasizing his dominance over the urban landscape. Lenin’s statue with the intrinsic values it carries was to anchor the city and the minds of its residents by becoming the representative image and brand of the revival. Despite his death in 1924, with statues like that of Yerevan, Lenin would

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<sup>20</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era: Urban Symbolism and Narratives of the Nation in the Landscape of Armenia's Capital*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Petrosyan, "The Transformation of Yerevan’s Urban Landscape After Independence," 2.

<sup>22</sup> Harutyunyan, *Architectural Guide Yerevan*, 29-32.

<sup>23</sup> Petrosyan, "The Transformation of Yerevan’s Urban Landscape After Independence," 2.

<sup>24</sup> Robert S Nelson and Margaret Rose Olin, *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4; Preda, "'Living Statues' and Nonuments as 'Performative Monument Events,'" 5.

<sup>25</sup> Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico, "The Meanings of Monuments and Memorials: Toward a Semiotic Approach," *International Journal of Semiotics* 2, no. 1 (2016): 37.

<sup>26</sup> Silova, Millei, Chachkhiani, Palandjian, and Vitrukh, "Post Socialist Transformations in Comparative International Education: Monuments, Movements, and Metamorphoses," 4.

rise back to life defying the laws of nature, his immortality reaffirmed by his preserved remains.<sup>27</sup>

The installation of the statue was a result of a USSR-wide competition held in 1938 under the execution of Mark Grigoryan, the new architect in chief of Yerevan assigned after the death of Alexander Tamanian.<sup>28</sup> People's Artist of the USSR Sergey Merkurov, a sculptor of Greco-Armenian descent, won the commission of the monument, and architects Natalia Paremuzova and Levon Vardanov from Tbilisi won the commission for the pedestal.<sup>29</sup>

Memory scholars Bellantani and Panico argue that creators inscribe meanings into monuments through the use of semiotic cues to further sacralize their image. Consequently, the discourse on monumentality turns into an iconoclastic interpretation. The image then could be studied at the material level which involves the analysis of its shapes, materials and topological distribution, and at the symbolic level which involves the analysis of its contents.<sup>30</sup> With a typical classical approach, the proportions of all the elements in the Lenin Square determined the overall height of the installation to be 18 meters (Fig. 3). Merkurov opted to make the 7-meter-high statue out of wrought copper instead of bronze as required by the competition. The material, besides being structurally more suitable for a statue of such height, is also a traditional Armenian material. Similar to his other works of this size, Merkurov sculpted the statue in two different parts.<sup>31</sup> The head was made separate from the body to ensure great detailing. Elevating the monument to this height ensured its grandiosity as it forced the viewer into an intangible visual relationship (Fig. 4). The statue became an element to be looked up to with admiration. Though the material use and size suggested static, heavy and opaque characteristics, Merkurov portrayed Lenin in motion. Dressed in his ordinary workday suit, the figure is frozen in a forward stride looking forward at the National Gallery of Armenia on the opposite side of the square. In his hand is a rolled-up document of what could be presumed to be a Pravda newspaper, the official party paper that was used to shape public opinion and spread Communist ideology. The statue with its confident stride leads the way for the community toward its revival (Fig. 5).

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<sup>27</sup> Alice Underwood, "Why Lenin's Corpse Lives On In Putin's Russia," Wilson Center, accessed March 13, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/why-lenins-corpse-lives-putins-russia>.

<sup>28</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> "Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն," Media Max.

<sup>30</sup> Bellentani and Panico, "The Meanings of Monuments and Memorials: Toward a Semiotic Approach," 36.

<sup>31</sup> "Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն," Media Max.

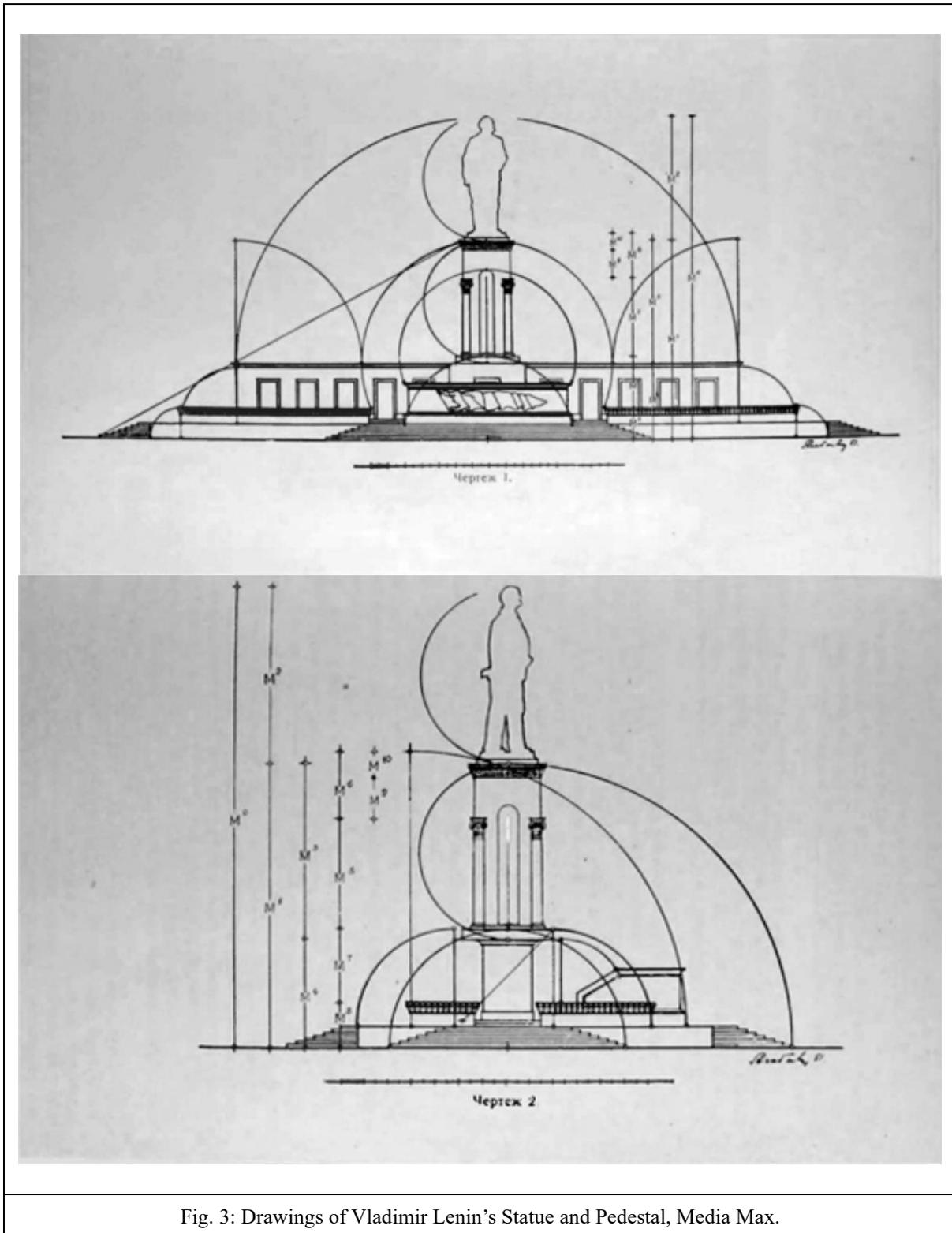


Fig. 3: Drawings of Vladimir Lenin's Statue and Pedestal, Media Max.

The pedestal's incorporation of the Tamanianesque style made it a visually cohesive architectonic piece that not only serves as a transitional element that holds up a socialist statue but also performs functionally as a tribune and a podium to host important socialist figures during celebratory events.<sup>32</sup> The pedestal was a reflection of the multiplicity of identities of the city that had also manifested in the conscious symbolic vocabulary of iconography such as the ornate decoration of the khachkar of Gosh (Fig. 6) on the two outer copper doors that lead to the tribunes and the symbol of the Red Banner beneath Lenin (Fig. 7).

What surrounds the monument in the square is also representative of this multiplicity. In the 1971 tourist map titled *Yerevan City Guide*, all significantly important places are drawn in small perspective views around their actual locations. The buildings listed around the square are: Museum of Literature and Art (54) and History Museum of Armenia (55), now named National Gallery of Armenia, at the middle north of the square which housed Armenian cultural archives; Soviet Armenian Government House (2) at the top east, State Committee for Construction of the Council of Ministers (6) at the top west, Vladimir I. Lenin monument (101) at the middle south all representatives of socialist rule; Post Office and Central Telegraph (151) at the bottom right and Hotel Armenia (14) at the bottom left representative of the Armenian SSR's connection to the world (Fig 8).

Similarly, the arterial streets that extend from the square are named after important figures and events of various significances: Hoktemberyan Street named after the Great October Socialist Revolution that led to the founding of the Soviet Union; Stepan Shahumian an Armenian Bolshevik politician that was the leader of the Baku Commune; Khachatur Abovian a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Armenian writer; Mikael Nalbandian a Russian-Armenian writer and revolutionary democrat (Fig. 8).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն,” Media Max.

<sup>33</sup> Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia," 16.



Fig. 4: Front View of Vladimir Lenin's Statue and Pedestal, The Abovyan Group.



Fig. 5: Close Up of Vladimir Lenin's Statue and Pedestal, The Abovyan Group.

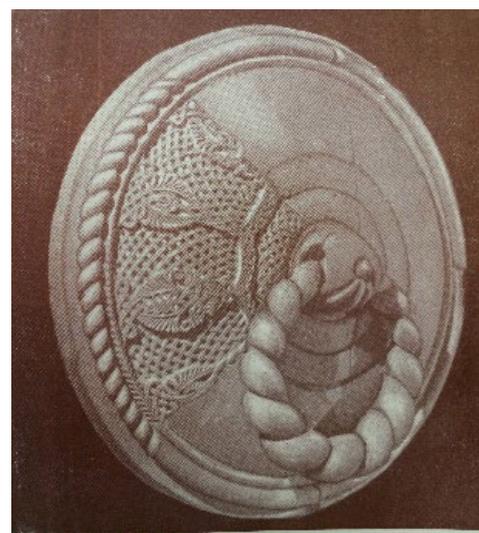


Fig. 6: "Ornamental Handle," The Abovyan Group.



Fig. 7: "The Red Banner, on the Pedestal Directly Beneath Lenin," The Abovyan Group.

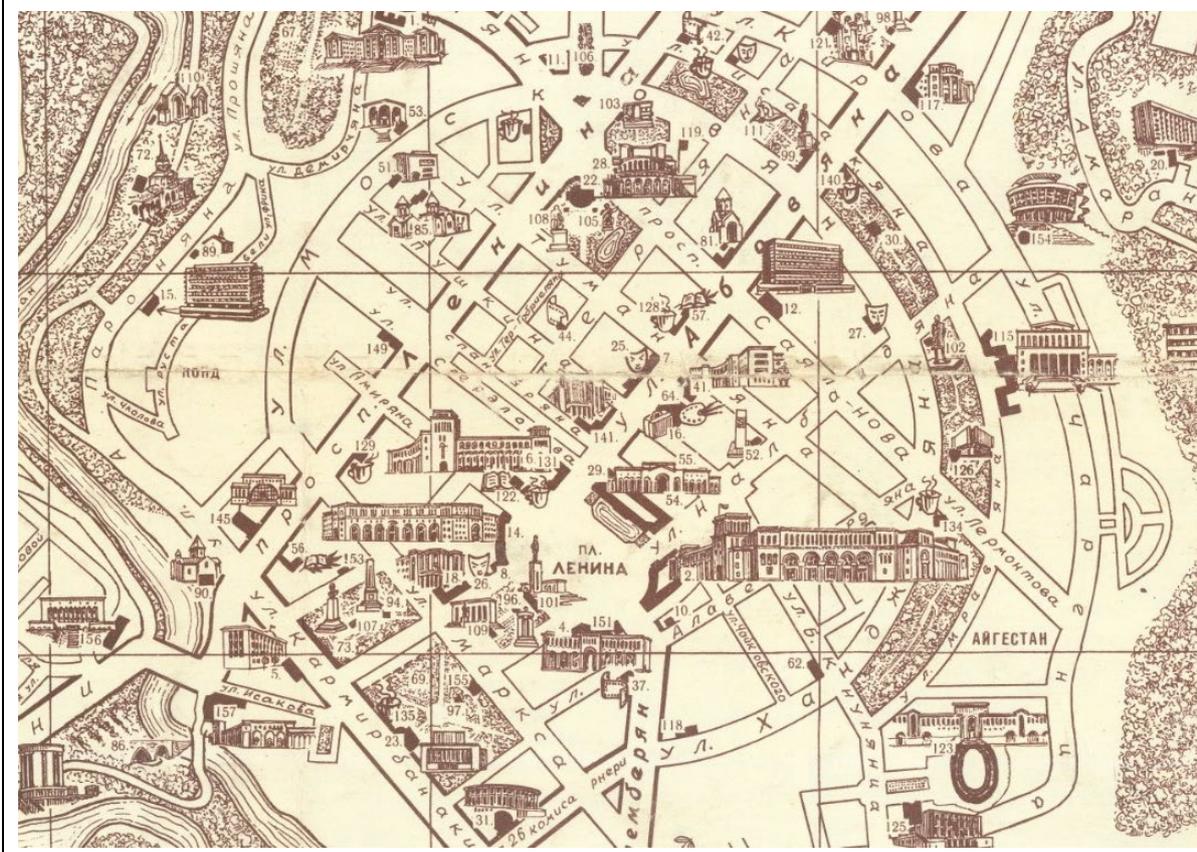
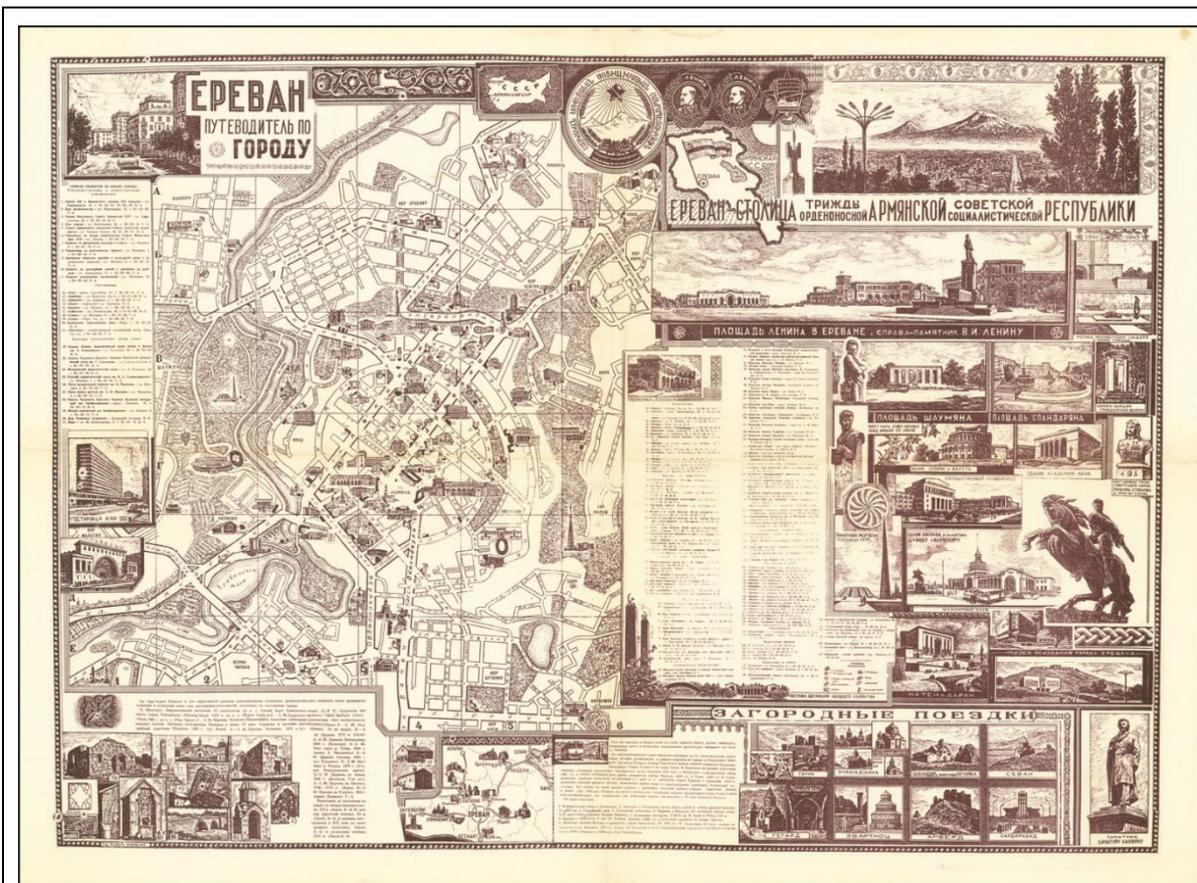


Fig. 8: Grigor Yeremovich, 1971, "Yerevan City Guide (Ереван путеводитель по городу)," Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

## Life

*The atmosphere intensified as parades of people holding red flags and banners fluttering in the wind entered the square. The formations of people lined up in what seemed to be their assigned spots oriented towards me. The crowd sang and chanted in unison filling the atmosphere with electricity. The phrases “You are always with us, We are proud of you, We are victorious because of you!” rang into my ears and sparked my excitement. The crowd went silent when the clock hit 10 o’clock. Soviet Armenia’s communist party members and governmental leaders ascended onto my podium. Through them, I have been given the ability to speak!*

Every year, on the occasions of the 1<sup>st</sup> of May (Worker’s Day), 9<sup>th</sup> of May (Victory Day) and 7<sup>th</sup> of November (Day of the October Revolution) crowds gathered at Lenin Square to spectate or participate in celebratory events. Lenin’s statue played an essential role in conducting these performances as the monument’s podium hosted important communist and governmental members towards which the performances were oriented.<sup>34</sup>

Under Soviet Rule, the 1930s saw a shift in position from the propagation of pluralistic identities of the national republics to the emergence of a modernized socialist identity infused through a universal and standardized system of education, public organizations and propaganda.<sup>35</sup> The idiom ‘high culture’ was coined to represent a statewide cultural norm that opposed the ‘exotic cultures’ of the republics. The role of the latter was marginalized to the boundaries of the touristic industry.<sup>36</sup> As seen in the 1971 *Yerevan City Guide* map, which was intended to be given to tourists of other republics upon their arrival to the Armenian SSR. The sections of the document display graphic bands of Armenian motifs that frame and decorate whereas their contents are written in Russian (Fig. 8), the unified language resultant of the cultural-linguistic russification campaign implemented in all parts of the Soviet Union. Through this campaign, the language primarily used in the Armenian government, party, industrial companies and educational institutions became Russian.<sup>37</sup> Though scholars and writers were permitted to use the Armenian language as a form of expression, they were pressured to abide by the constraints of socialist themes rather than dwelling on the national glories of the past. Any direct expressions of Armenian national identity were limited to Armenian folk culture through dance, music and art.<sup>38</sup> The campaign even impacted the Armenian language in which Russian vocabulary was introduced to

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<sup>34</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 156-157.

<sup>35</sup> Bayadyan, "Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation," 203.

<sup>36</sup> Bayadyan, "Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation," 209.

<sup>37</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia, 1920-1936: A Study of Planned Cultural Transformation*, 399.

replace already existing alternative indigenous words.<sup>39</sup> Literacy was used as a tool to spread and legitimize the new regime. By making education available to every child, students had early exposure to the virtues of socialist consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

Another strategy used by the regime to unify the people was urbanization. By creating public spaces available for the masses, collectivism in successfully implemented.<sup>41</sup> In such public spaces, commemorative celebrations of select socialist historical events and the abandonment of those that are national narrate collective interactions and determine collective belongingness. Political scientist Caterina Preda argues that bodily performance reinforces collective memory.<sup>42</sup> Through encouraging the masses to participate, such annually held occasions are incorporated into their lives as customary social practices.

Archival images taken from Lenin Square in Yerevan recount the rituals of the annual performative celebrations that were imposed and later adopted as social behavior. The facades that frame the square in the background of the images transformed with anticipation for these events (Fig. 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23). They are seen embellished differently depending on the event and the prevailing figures of the party during their respective periods. Automobile traffic in the square was controlled by blockades on the streets that extend from the roundabout.<sup>43</sup> These wide streets were instead utilized by parades of military personnel and their armored vehicles showcasing their prowess (Fig. 9, 10). Other participants include floats representing diverse types of factories accompanied by their workers (Fig. 11) and floats representing educational institutions followed by faculty members and students (Fig. 12). However, the most active were the younger generations of the community, all dressed in matching formal attire (Fig. 13, 14, 15), uniforms of their respective sports teams (Fig. 16) or matching dance costumes (Fig. 17, 18), holding balloons, flowers, flags, images of Soviet figures and other accessories selected to decorate the event of the day. Even spectating civilians became participants by holding up banners and flags, which I assume, were given to

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<sup>39</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia, 1920-1936: A Study of Planned Cultural Transformation*, 407.

<sup>40</sup> Silova, Millei, Chachkhiani, Palandjian, and Vitrukh, "Post Socialist Transformations in Comparative International Education: Monuments, Movements, and Metamorphoses," 4.

<sup>41</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia, 1920-1936: A Study of Planned Cultural Transformation*, 430.

<sup>42</sup> Preda, "'Living Statues' and Nonuments as 'Performative Monument Events' in Post-Socialist South-Eastern Europe," 4.

<sup>43</sup> "Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն," Media Max.



Fig. 9: Soldiers Entering the May 1<sup>st</sup> Parade (1960), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 10: Missile Launcher (1984), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 11: A Cannery Participates in the Parade (1984), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 12: Educational Reform – Towards Life! (1984), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 13: Komsomols Holding Flags in Parade (1972), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 14: Strength and Beauty Parade (1970), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 15: Pioneers Playing Instruments in Parade (1971), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 16: Gymnastics Sports Team Performing in Parade (1978), Hin Yerevan



Fig. 17: Armenian Folks Dance in Parade (1983), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 18: Dance Performance in Parade (1987), Hin Yerevan.

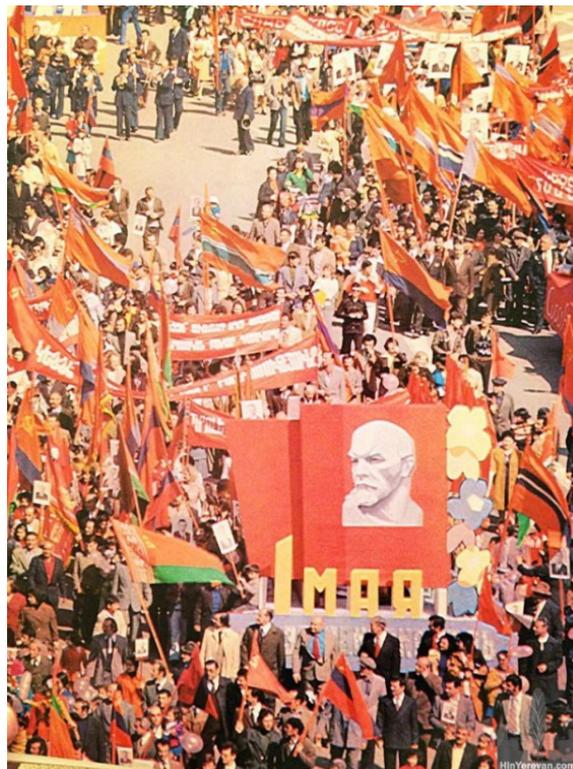


Fig. 19: Civilians Holding Banners and Flags in May 1<sup>st</sup> Parade (1984), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 20: Float for Space Race in Parade (1959), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 21: Leaders of the Republic Entering the Square in Chaika cars (1961), Hin Yerevan.

them based on the consistency of their typography, materials and colors (Fig. 19). These participants were rather performers as they carried out the artificial rituals choreographed for them.

Other notable types of performance pieces were those dedicated to the projects of the regime (Fig. 20). Ambitious and unprecedented initiatives such as the space race were used to consolidate the shaping of the unified Soviet Identity. Feelings of patriotism were sparked with the desires of the people to self-identify with the Union's great achievements.<sup>44</sup>

The parades were always choreographed around the arrival of the leaders of the republic who entered the square at 9:50 A.M. in Chaika cars (Fig. 21). With one minute before 10:00 A.M., they ascended onto the podium of Lenin's monument with the order of their rankings.<sup>45</sup> The statue not only oriented the behaviors of the performers towards the notable guests it hosts (Fig. 22), but also positioned the guests around its symbolic cues (Fig. 23):

The members of the bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia and the candidates for membership, the deputies of the President of the Council of Ministers of the Armenian SSR and the Deputy President of the Supreme Council stood in the central podium. On the left podium stood the party workers, the heads of departments of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia and their deputies, the secretaries of the Yerevan City Committee of the party, as well as the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Republic, veterans of the party. The right chair, which was under Lenin's right hand, was intended for Soviet, that is, government employees, members of the government, heads of government departments and other friends.<sup>46</sup>

How the attendees of these events acted around Lenin's bodily presence was determined by the creator who, in this case, is not the sculptor Sergey Merkurov, but the regime that commissioned him to embed it with a specific set of ideologies. The values and meanings that were to be commemorated were envisaged at the point of its birth. However, political social scientist Sarah Gensburger argues that "commemoration is always amended

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<sup>44</sup> Bayadyan, "Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation," 205.

<sup>45</sup> "Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն," Media Max.

<sup>46</sup> "Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն," Media Max.



Fig. 22: Crowd Oriented Towards Lenin's Monument During May 1<sup>st</sup> Parade (1974), Hin Yerevan.



Fig. 23: Leaders of the Republic Standing in Their Assigned Positions on the Podium of Lenin's Monument During May 1<sup>st</sup> Parade (1981), Hin Yerevan.

and above all appropriated by those who experience it into the present.”<sup>47</sup> Insinuating that despite statues’ static and permanent intrinsic qualities, their values and meanings are rather dynamic and temporary. Scholars Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico establish a relationship between three functions of monuments that suggest how this change might occur over time. They claim that the behaviors of the users around them depend on their knowledge of the values the monuments represent, their positive or negative perception of these values and the emotional response elicited from these perceptions.<sup>48</sup> A change in one of these functions suggests a change in behaviors. This process of renegotiation is personal, detached from the implied collective, which results in the multiplicity of responses towards the same monuments, some attributing them to positive memories while others to uncomfortable ones.<sup>49</sup>

Lenin’s bodily presence also entered into the everyday lives of the people. My mother recalls being admitted to the Little Octobristst youth organization, which was a typical transitional level all school students aged 7 in the Union went through. She remembers being given a ruby-colored five-pointed star pin with the image of a young Lenin at its center. As she grew older, she transitioned into the later levels of the youth organizations, being given a pin of an adolescent Lenin at the age of 9 as a Pioneer, and an adult Lenin at the age of 14 as a Komsomol. The last level of this early Soviet indoctrination was becoming a member of the Communist Party at the age of 28, an opportunity given to only those you are most outstanding or devout.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, portraits of Lenin were displayed in the home of the people through pictures, postcards, medals and decoration pieces.<sup>51</sup>

Soviet Armenians of later generations such as my mother were born into the Soviet ‘high culture.’ By that time, the Bolshevik Party had successfully purged older generations of intellectuals that posed probable threats of opposition. Censorship of all art forms of the cultural system was implemented on works that diverged from the set norms, works of pre-Soviets and those of the Armenians in the diaspora.<sup>52</sup> In the Architecture realm, Armenian

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah Gensburger, “The paradox of (de)commemoration: do people really care about statues?,” accessed March 13, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/the-paradox-of-de-commemoration-do-people-really-care-about-statues-141807>.

<sup>48</sup> Bellentani and Panico, "The Meanings of Monuments and Memorials: Toward a Semiotic Approach," 35.

<sup>49</sup> Bellentani and Panico, "The Meanings of Monuments and Memorials: Toward a Semiotic Approach," 34.

<sup>50</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia, 1920-1936: A Study of Planned Cultural Transformation*, 233.

<sup>51</sup> Silova, Millei, Chachkhiani, Palandjian, and Vitruk, "Post Socialist Transformations in Comparative International Education: Monuments, Movements, and Metamorphoses," 4.

<sup>52</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia, 1920-1936: A Study of Planned Cultural Transformation*, 405.

Constructivists of futuristic opinions were oppressed as the Classical Tamanianesque style was the one approved by the Bolshevik party. Constructivists were either forced to adapt to the standards of the authorities or deported to camps.<sup>53</sup> Resultant of such drastic measures, the Armenian Identity that developed in the Armenian SSR became inseparable from the Soviet 'high culture'. During that time, what was considered to be Armenianness broke into two definitions each developing separately on different tracks: the Sovietized Armenian identity in the Armenian SSR and the post-Genocide Armenian identity in the diaspora.

Another tactic of imposing control within the Union was through the KGB, an institution composed of a network of secret informants. Their role was to become the eyes and ears of the system monitoring people's activities and conversations to ensure the system does not get threatened. The KGB was notorious for harsh punishments such as imprisonment and even execution, the threat of which terrorized the lives of the population. As the identities of these informants were kept secret, people developed paranoid distrust amongst each other which in turn impaired the party's intents of collectivism.<sup>54</sup>

The illegal demonstrations of April 24, 1965 are considered the first sign of national unrest.<sup>55</sup> The day marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Commemorating this national event was considered a threat to unified Sovietism as it reinforced the Armenian national identity. Moreover, it went against the Union's allyship with Turkey, the descendants of the Ottoman Turks that committed the Genocide. The demonstrations started at Lenin Square. The choice of location was a bold statement against the all-knowing and threatening bearer of the ideology, Lenin himself. The act displayed a transformed perception of Lenin's statue from the host of the people to their silencer. One of the protesters even pointed to the statue and accused it for the lack of fulfillment of their request attributing the statue to the ideologies it embodies. Instead of holding slogans and portraits of the great Soviets, the protestors held images of genocide victims, Mount Ararat, and the number 50 (Fig. 24).<sup>56</sup> Historian Maïke Lehmann views the crowd's decision of location as a continuation of the habitudes of the Soviet society as the statue remained an anchor point for collective activity.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Harutyunyan, *Architectural Guide Yerevan*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Abrahamian, "The Secret Police as a Secret Society: Fear and Faith in the USSR," 86-87.

<sup>55</sup> Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia," 13.

<sup>56</sup> Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia," 15.

<sup>57</sup> Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia," 13-14.



Fig. 24: Demonstrations of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in Lenin Square (1965), Hin Yerevan.

## Death

*A sense of terror washed over me as the rope around my neck started to tighten. I was facing a mob cheering for my execution. As my head was severed from my body, I was plunged into a world of darkness and silence. I could no longer hear the conversations of the people passing by or the hum of the traffic in the background. I could no longer see the colors and textures of the square that had grown to be a place of familiarity. I was vulnerable, alone with my thoughts and fears, helpless in the hands of those that had control over me. In this world of sensory deprivation, my sense of touch was all I could rely on. With a sudden jolt, my body was lifted from my pedestal and then laid on a vibrating flat surface. I was on a moving vehicle driving in circles, being struck by objects from all directions, tortured by the feeling of disorientation. The vehicle later stopped and I was placed in a new location away from harm. I could no longer feel the force of the wind of the open space in my former position of glory, I was instead laying on the cold ground trapped within a confined space, cut off from the outside world, a place that is now a mystery, changing over time in my absence...*

On April 13, 1991, at 17:00, as organized by the Yerevan City Council, Lenin's statue was dismantled. After fifty years of standing as a symbol at the center of the city, it was relocated to the courtyard of the National Gallery of Armenia, 250 m away from its original location, where it lays to rest to this day.<sup>58</sup>

The last of the USSR holiday marches held at Lenin Square was in 1988, the year that marked the start of the mass rallies of the Karabagh Movement in Armenia. An upheaval of pro-independence and autonomy demands that was part of a broader wave of similar movements all across the Soviet Union.<sup>59</sup> The party's long-term repression and abuse through provocation had eroded its perception amongst the people, consequently shifting with it their evaluation of the Soviet symbols inseminated within their lives. The most performative resistance of such symbols were conducted against monuments of the god-like soviet figures of the party that, by the time of the collapse of the regime, had been ingrained with diabolical meanings. This initiated the craze of desecrating them all over the Soviet Union as a manifestation of the political shift.<sup>60</sup>

In February of 1991, pro-independence protesters of Yerevan poured paint on Lenin's statue and destroyed the two outer copper doors with an explosive device. This act

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<sup>58</sup> “Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն,” Media Max.

<sup>59</sup> Levon H Abrahamian, "Civil Society Born in the Square: the Karabagh Movement in Perspective," in *The Making of Nagorno-Karabagh: From Secession to Republic*, ed. Levon Chorbajian, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 116-134.

<sup>60</sup> Abrahamian, "The Secret Police as a Secret Society: Fear and Faith in the USSR," 86.

demonstrated their revocation of the top-down governing system and demand for control over the narrative of the square, the city and the newly declared Independent Armenia (Fig. 25).<sup>61</sup>

In response to the protests, the Yerevan City Council, by majority vote, decided to dismantle the statue on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April of the same year. The decision was part of a wider de-communization movement in Armenia that involved the new government's withdrawal of the figurative reminders of the past narratives from media, textbooks, institutions and public spaces, a strategy that resembled the Bolshevik party's imposed detachment of national identities.<sup>62</sup> The statue falling as a main victim of the de-commemorative efforts corroborates its inseparable association with the real Lenin and his correlative ideology. It was as though the toppling of the statue was to enact the overthrowing of Lenin himself, challenging the notion of his immortality thus reducing him to a mortal figure, a corpse of a dead past that, like any other historical figure, is questioned and reevaluated.

The announcement of the planned removal became a festive invitation for Armenians to witness the embodiment of the redirection of identity. The organized de-commemoration in turn became an act of commemoration with the involvement of the people.<sup>63</sup> Crowds gathered at the Lenin Square with a sense of ambivalence, some enthusiastic while others were fearful of what the future holds (Fig. 26, 27). Due to technical reasons, similar to how the statue was constructed, it was deconstructed in two parts. The head was severed from the body first, a scene that filled some with uneasiness, as recounted by anthropologist and historian Levon H. Abrahamian, associating it with the beheading of a real person (Fig. 28, 29). Cheers amplified as the body was later lifted and loaded onto the back of a tow truck (Fig. 30, 31).<sup>64</sup> In this supine position, the statue was no longer an element that was to be admired from below, but instead was brought down to the eye level of the people transforming it from an intangible figure to an accessible one. Some crowd members used this opportunity to seek vengeance for the hardships they faced under the regime by engaging in varied forms of hostility against the statue (Fig. 32), one even attempting to urinate over it. The aggression continued as crowd members threw stones (Fig. 33) at the statue as the tow truck drove it around the

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<sup>61</sup> “Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն,” Media Max.

<sup>62</sup> Silova, Millei, Chachkhiani, Palandjian, and Vitruk, "Post Socialist Transformations in Comparative International Education: Monuments, Movements, and Metamorphoses," 6.

<sup>63</sup> Gensburger, "The paradox of (de)commemoration: do people really care about statues?," The Conversation.

<sup>64</sup> “Լենինի արձան՝ (ան)կենդանի պատմություն,” Media Max.



Fig. 25: Pro-independence Rally (1991), Photolur.



Fig. 26: Gathered Crowd at Lenin's Dismantlement (1991), Photolur.



Fig. 27: Gathered Crowd at Lenin's Dismantlement (1991), Photolur.



Fig. 28: The Head Lifted from the Body (1991), Ani Armenian Research Center.



Fig. 29: The Head Lowered onto the Podium (1991), Ani Armenian Research Center.



Fig. 30: The Body Lifted from the Podium (1991), Photolur.



Fig. 31: The Body on the Truck (1991), Photolur.



Fig. 32: Men Hitting and Spitting (1991), Artem Mirza Avakyan.



Fig. 33: Crowd Throwing Stones and Coins (1991), Artem Mirza Avakyan.

square for three times (Fig. 34). Those who were unable to find stones, threw coins instead, transforming the aggression into an act of celebration.<sup>65</sup>

The envisaged collective celebrations that once were held in the square in front of Lenin's statue, had birthed over time the tradition of driving newlywed couples around the roundabout for three times for good luck (Fig. 35, 36).<sup>66</sup> The repetition of this tradition with the statue instead on the moving vehicle was reflective of the behaviors of people in what geographer Nigel Thrift theorizes as 'place space'. He claims that apart from its physical existence, a place holds particular naturalized rhythms of being.<sup>67</sup> Despite the physical alteration of the square that now is missing its centralizing force, the repetition of a positive memory cue released the square from the constraints of the negative evaluations of the statue. The active participation of the crowd in the demotion of the status of Lenin within the square and thus their collective identity exemplified performative activism, exercising their newly gained democratic rights.

The spontaneously driven burial ritual for the fallen corpse of Lenin ended as the tow truck approach the inglorious courtyard of the National Art Gallery of Armenia, the statue's new destination in which it rests to this day (Fig. 37).<sup>68</sup> For years the statue stood mid-motion on its pedestal facing the gallery as if walking towards its ultimate fate. Lost in the square's battle of supremacy, Lenin's body lays motionless in a supine position within the confinement of the walls of the courtyard, isolated from the outside world it once dominated. With no protective enclosure above, it remains exposed to environmental conditions, gradually weathering over time. The decision to allocate the statue in a museum setting that is staged to be viewed and studied within the context of the past becomes a deliberate method to ensure its break from the present. As confirmed by the gallery, the courtyard is not included in its excursion, but access to view the corpse is permitted upon special request. This makes the statue under the absolute custodianship of a national force, now controlling the community's identify-defining artifacts.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the head is stored separate from the body in an undisclosed warehouse (Fig. 38). One cannot help but wonder whether the courtyard is a

<sup>65</sup> “Լենինի արձան` (ան)կենդանի պատմություն,” Media Max.

<sup>66</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 157.

<sup>67</sup> Nigel Thrift, "Space: The Fundamental Stuff of Geography," In *Key Concepts in Geography*, ed. Sarah L Holloway, Stephen P Rice and Gill Valentine (London: SAGE Publications, 2003), 102-103.

<sup>68</sup> “Լենինի արձան` (ան)կենդանի պատմություն,” Media Max.

<sup>69</sup> Nelson and Olin, *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, 174.



Fig. 34: The Truck Driving the Body in Circles (1991), Photolur.



Fig. 35: Wedding Ritual (1988), Carl de Keyzer/Magnum.



Fig. 36: Wedding Ritual (1988), Carl de Keyzer/Magnum.

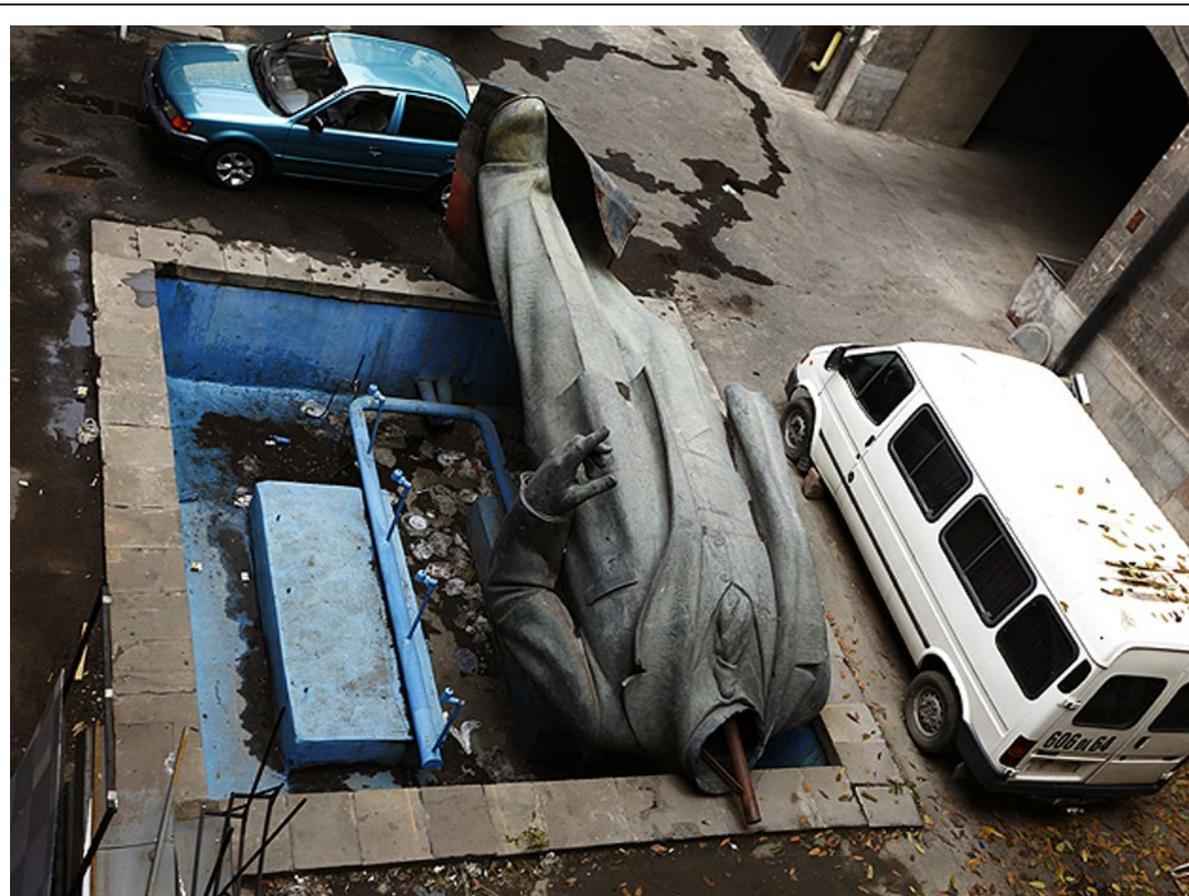


Fig. 37: The Body on the Floor of the National Art Gallery of Armenia's Courtyard (2012), Media Max.



Fig. 38: The Head Stored in an Undisclosed Warehouse (2012), Mariam Loretsyan/Mediamax.

permanent resting place for the corpse or a mortuary, temporarily storing its parts to later be reassembled to restore it to its former glory.

After Lenin's removal, the empty space above the pedestal became a central subject for debate (Fig. 39). Despite various proposals, the choice of a symbol that was to replace Lenin and encompass post-Soviet Armenianness was unsuccessful.<sup>70</sup> By that time, the definition had been complexified by the involvement of the Armenians of the diaspora in the development of the post-Soviet Armenia. Following its detachment from the unified Soviet state, members of the diaspora became Armenia's main facilitators of connections to the rest of the world.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, Armenianness was to incorporate both identities that developed on two separate tracks, isolated from one another, during the Soviet era.

The difficulty in reaching a consensus eventually led to the government's decision to remove the pedestal. Contrary to the dismantlement of the statue, plans for removing the pedestal were met with controversy. While the extremist public was in favor of its permanent destruction as a reminder of the totalitarian past, many condemned the government's decision, advocating for the pedestal's cultural significance as an Armenian architectural artifact. Eventually, the pedestal was disassembled on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, 1996. All of its parts were numbered and then stored away.<sup>72</sup> Interventions such as a 24 m high cross in 2001, and an advertisement screen from 2004 till 2006 temporarily filled the empty site of the monument, both objects contradicting the values of the previous occupant of the site.<sup>73</sup>

To this day, the site remains empty. At the center, a flowerbed marks the location of where Lenin once stood before his exile, a scene that resembles chalk marks that outline murdered victims in crime scenes (Fig. 40). This discreet gesture blends in with its surroundings and goes unnoticed, especially by those who have not lived through the statue's lifespan. Additionally, the absence of a plaque to relay the historical events adds to the obscurity of the site. This can be attributed to the nation's desire to uproot all traces that would hinder their process of transformation, a method that historian G r me Truc calls obliteration of memory.<sup>74</sup> Since memories are framed by spatial anchor points, their removal

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<sup>70</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 160.

<sup>71</sup> Petrosyan, "The Transformation of Yerevan's Urban Landscape After Independence," 4.

<sup>72</sup> Tigran Liloyan, "Երևանում շարունակվում է պատվանդանի սպանման աշխատանքները, որի վրա մինչև 1991 թվականը կանգնած էր Լենինի արձանը," ITAR-TASS News, August 5, 1996.

<sup>73</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 158.

<sup>74</sup> Truc, "Memory of Places and Places of Memory: For a Halbwachsian Socio-Ethnography of Collective Memory," 153.



Fig. 39: Empty Pedestal (1991), Photolur.

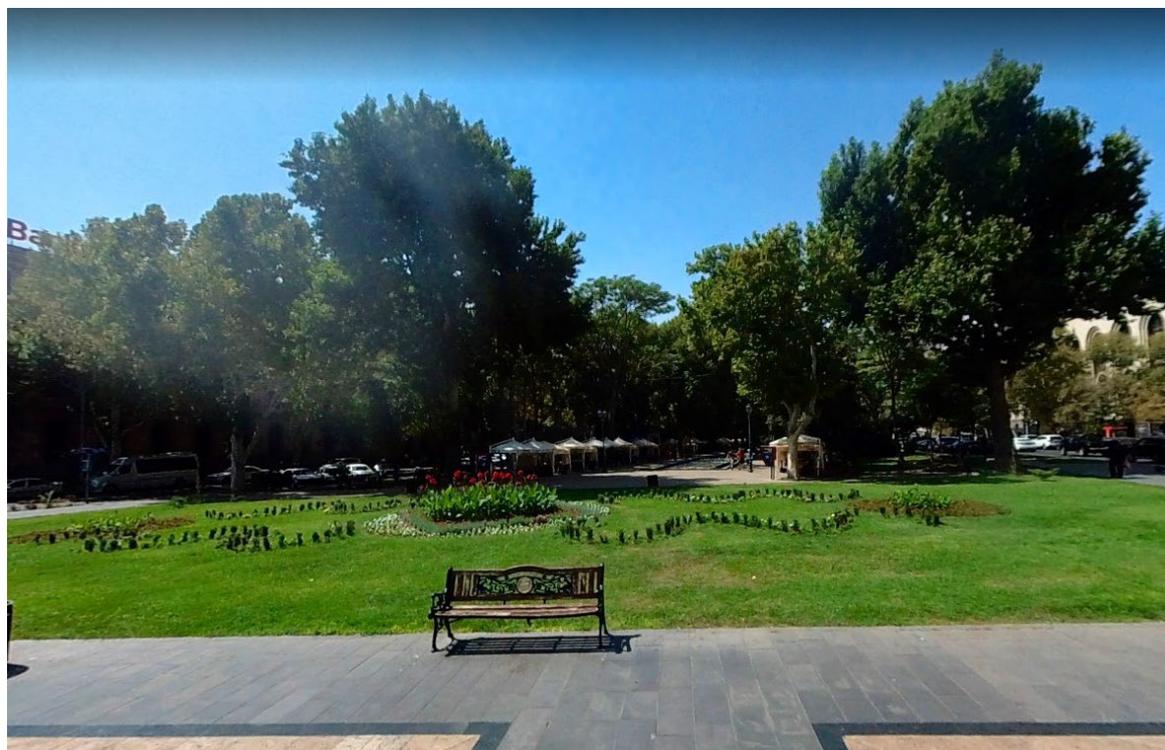


Fig. 40: Current State of the Location of Lenin's Monument (2022), Google Maps

consequently transfigures the localized memories.<sup>75</sup> Those that witnessed and thus participated in the forceful removal, return to the crime scene with a sense of amnesia – adopted over time in the absence of the memory cue.

The liminal spaces around the fallen figure are what transcribe the development of the contemporary Armenian identity beyond its disappearance. The square that once bore the victim's name has since been renamed as Republic Square. Its focal point has shifted to the Singing Fountains – located in front of the National Gallery – that garners touristic interest with its impressive synchronous water show embedded with lights and hologram projections after its upgrade in 2007.<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the previous node, the neutral symbolism of the Singing Fountains creates an inclusive atmosphere that caters to varied forms of activities to be conducted by diverse groups of people. The square continues to serve as a collective space where several marches, civic ceremonies, concerts and protests are hosted (Fig. 41, 42, 43).

The manipulation of narratives through the alteration of the built environment continued beyond the borders of the square. Several streets previously named after important Soviet figures and events were renamed after ones that served the new government's agenda of reviving the Armenian national identity. An example of which was Hoktemberyan Street which was later given the name Tigran Mets, after a notorious king in Armenian history known for major victories in conquering neighboring territories. With an attempt to return to national roots, the heavy promotion of Tamanianesque architecture was used as justification for demolitions which amassed by 2016 forty demolished monuments in total. A notable project resultant of this effort was the urban development of the Northern Avenue, a project that was part of Tamanian's original plan but never implemented during the Soviet era. To reduce costs, prefabricated concrete construction techniques were used instead of Tamanian's signature local stones. The latter was applied as a decorative façade covering instead.<sup>77</sup> The Northern Avenue (Fig. 44) and many urban projects alike were constructed to represent the "new face of Yerevan," one that was to attract foreign investors and tourists. With their countless consumer spaces, they became signifiers of Armenia's entrance into the capitalist globalized regime.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Truc, "Memory of Places and Places of Memory: For a Halbwichsian Socio-Ethnography of Collective Memory," 148.

<sup>76</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 161.

<sup>77</sup> Petrosyan, "The Transformation of Yerevan's Urban Landscape After Independence," 3.

<sup>78</sup> Ter-Ghazaryan, *Re-Imagining Yerevan in the Post-Soviet Era*, 177-178.



Fig. 41: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence from the Soviet Union (2021), Masis Post.



Fig. 42: System of a Down Concert (2015), Tigran Kkhbelyan.



Fig. 43: Velvet Revolution (2018), Asbarez.



Fig. 44: Northern Avenue (2010), Wikimedia.

## Conclusion

Through performative bodily practices involving the statue of Lenin, spatial, temporal and societal reconfigurations were executed during Armenia's transitional periods as a Soviet republic. These performative strategies were instrumental in the curation of memorialization or de-memorialization carried out by its creators during the initial stages of its presence and by its viewers during the later stages that led to its absence.

Prior to the commencement of these performances, various techniques of staging were used. The investigation of the visual cues employed by the creators of the statue exposed strategies used to ensure an effective setup of the atmosphere within the square that was reflective of the regime's values. The stage was designed to represent the Armenian SSR's new start as part of a unified umbrella. In this scheme, the statue became a central point of engagement that linked the local context to the wider geopolitical landscape of the Soviet Union. Just like a theatrical performance that depends on a predetermined script to capture the theme and message of the performance, the statue and square were used to redirect temporal references from people's historical past to make way for a focused unified vision of the new future. At that time, the alterations were largely accepted by the Armenian people as they were enthusiastic about the party's promises following years of great hardships.

The execution of these performances was not limited to professional actors but rather extended to the general public. As a means to warrant the statue's involvement in the habitudes of the people, collective bodily participation in selective commemorative events was encouraged by the Soviet government. The participants were to continuously practice in order to perfect the responsibility endowed upon them by the great force of power. At the time, people all around the Armenian SSR tuned in through the only two local broadcasting channels to view the corresponding year's planned event. A successful performance ensured a successful transfer of the regime's vision onto the audience, which in turn created a sense of pride and solidarity amongst the participants.

Lenin's statue, though a physically static and prominent director of these performances, became symbolic of dynamic meanings as the regime evolved throughout the years. As a silent monument, the words of the ideology that had morphed after the death of the real Lenin were spoken through him in these events. The more Lenin's image and thus the ideology infiltrated the lives of the people, the more he was feared, thus people's perceptions of the statue shifted in the then-oppressive political climate.

The main set prop was then torn down by the hands of its viewers as the meanings and values it carried were then considered irrelevant. The act of removing became a physical manifestation of performative resistance and rejection. All traces of it were removed to avoid a possible hindrance to the people's process of development after the collapse of the regime. All other parts that formed the backdrop of the performances remained and were appropriated by the cast actors, rewriting the script for their future.

The statue thus lives on only in the archival material produced during these performances. The deliberate disconnection from this era of Armenian history has therefore led to the lack of knowledge of the statue amongst the new generations of Armenians, especially those in the diaspora, including myself.

Erecting and tearing down monuments is not specific to the post-socialist context of Yerevan. As political orders change, monuments are often reevaluated, leading to similar performative scenes that have repeated throughout history in many parts of the world. Examples of other fallen victims include the statues of Joseph Stalin, Cecil Rhodes, Enver Hoxha, Ferdinand Marcos, Muammar Gaddafi, Hosni Mubarak, Saddam Hussein, Hafez al Assad, among others. Truc's concept of 'dual referentiality' suggests that the documentation of such events contributes to the portfolio of similar precedents, ultimately building up the act as an iconological one.<sup>79</sup> These events are then intrinsically performed as a proven method of imposing political transitions and overcoming historical injustices, transcending beyond their immediate significance.

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<sup>79</sup> G r me Truc, "March 11 as a New September 11," *Open Edition Journal* (2011) 6-7.

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