OCCULT COMMUNISM:
CULTURE, SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY IN LATE SOCIALIST BULGARIA

BY

VENETA T. IVANOVA

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Maria N. Todorova, Chair
Professor Diane P. Koenker
Associate Professor Zsuzsa Gille
Associate Professor Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi
Professor Peter Fritzsche

Abstract

“Occult Communism” explores the unlikely infusion of state-sponsored spiritualism into the materialist ideology of Bulgarian late communism. In the 1970s, Minister of Culture Lyudmila Zhivkova initiated grandiose state programs to inject the “occult” into Bulgaria’s national culture, art, science and even political philosophy. Inspired by her Eastern religious beliefs, she sought to ‘breed’ a nation of “all-round and harmoniously developed individuals,” devoted to spiritual self-perfection, who would ultimately “work, live and create according to the laws of beauty.” My project focuses on how Zhivkova translated her religio-philosophical worldview into state policies. I examine three realms of what I have termed “occult communism:” Zhivkova’s domestic and international cultural initiatives; occult religiosity and the mystical movement known as the White Brotherhood; and occult science as embodied by the Scientific Institute of Suggestology. I contend that as quixotic as Zhivkova’s vision was, her policies contributed to the liberalization of art and culture in a period that has long been associated exclusively with stagnation and decay. In so doing, my work questions the failure of utopianism in late socialism and demonstrates that impulses to attach "a human face” to the communist project endured even after the Prague Spring of 1968. Occult Communism” demonstrates that late communism was far less monolithic and dull than typically imagined while challenging our understanding of the relationship between communism, spirituality, and science in the global 1970s and 1980s.

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Introduction

From 15 to 25 August 1979, the world's first International Children's Assembly "Banner of Peace" took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, under the aegis of UNESCO and its General Director Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow. This was the grandest international initiative worldwide to celebrate the UNESCO-proclaimed International Year of the Child, where more than 2500 children from 77 countries congregated in Sofia to partake of an opulently staged global festival of children's art, music and literature. In front of a bursting audience including the multi-ethnic young artist-creators ("the future of the planet"), the political and cultural elite of socialist Bulgaria, and the international dignitaries from the Assembly's Organizing Committee,[1] Lyudmila Zhivkova, Bulgaria's minister of art and culture, Politburo member and the daughter of communist party leader Todor Zhivkov, delivered her opening speech:

> Dear children, citizens of our planet […] May the calling power of Beauty, Truth and Wisdom join your hearts in the name of cooperation and the common future of mankind […] May the fiery breath of life always ennoble your thoughts and aspirations, may art be pure and bright, may consciousness envelope the limits of the Cosmos. The blessed paths of art will unlock in front of you the doors of new unknown worlds, thousands of blazing stars will unveil their secrets… There will glow the vibration of electrons filling the vast expanse of iridescent spheres with their harmony and rhythm. The art to create and to perfect, to cut out the crystals of the new and with an open spirit to welcome the effulgent purposefulness – this is the path of the artist, illuminating the steps of evolution."[2]

It is not clear what the addressees of this exalted speech – children of up to 14 years of age – made of phrases like "effulgent purposefulness," "vibration of the electrons," "consciousness" or "iridescent spheres." In fact, it is not clear what anyone uninitiated in

[1] Besides Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the Organizing Committee included the president of the Académie Goncourt Hervé Bazin, world famous composer Leonard Bernstein, conductor Herbert von Karayan, Soviet writer Sergei Mikhalkov, Greek poet Giannis Ritsos, Swedish writer Artur Lundkvist, Italian children's writer Gianni Rodari, and French writer Pierre Gamara.
[2] Lyudmila Zhivkova, *Asambleia "Zname na mira,"* kn.1. (Sofia: izdatelstvo "Otechestvo," 1982), 461-463.

Zhivkova's occultism made of it.[3] What is clear is that the entire 15-minute speech focused on the centrality of art and culture to the betterment of the individual, society and humanity and was thoroughly deprived of any reference Marxist-Leninist ideology or language.

In retrospect, this speech can be viewed as a public apotheosis of the religio-philosophical system Minister of Culture Lyudmila Zhivkova adamantly adhered to: the occult-mystical movement known as agni yoga or the Living Ethic.[4] The "Banner of Peace" Assembly itself was the culmination Zhivkova's late socialist large-scale endeavor to translate her religio-philosophical worldview into state policy. At the helm of a super-ministry combining culture, art, education, science, publishing, public radio and television, and international cultural relations, Zhivkova aspired to forge a nation of "all-round and harmoniously developed individuals," devoted to spiritual self-perfection, who would ultimately "work, live and create according to the laws of beauty." This dissertation untangles the conditions – local, regional, and global – that allowed occultism[5] to flourish under communism[6]. With this goal in mind, I first read Zhivkova's

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[3] Literary critic Boris Delchev noted the speech in his diary, sarcastically referring to it as "a jewel of Bulgarian speech – something unique and unheard of, which has to be carved on a marble plaque and exhibited at the entrance of the Committee of Culture." In the entry from 26 August 1979 he also wrote that in the writers' circles people were convinced "that the daughter of the first man is recruited by the Indian religious sects." Boris Delchev, *Dnevnik,* (Sofia: Narodna Kultura, 1994), 359-360.

[4] Agni Yoga, alternatively known as the Living Ethic, is a religio-philosophical teaching, transmitted by Nicholas Roerich and Helena Roerich in the early 1920s. Helena Roerich wrote the foundational corpus of what became known as Agni Yoga, claiming to channel Master Morya, one of the spiritual gurus, first brought forth by founder of theosophy Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891). The teaching, as an offshoot of theosophy, combines different aspects: philosophy, cosmogony, ethics, religion, as well as a practical guide to living.

[5] Throughout this dissertation I use the term I use the term "occultism" in its broadest meaning as the study of "hidden wisdom" and a deeper spiritual reality that extends beyond pure reason, the senses and the physical sciences, which could be presumably accessed by a gifted few. In this sense, my use is consistent with the concise definition Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic have provided: "Broadly speaking, what distinguishes occultism as a branch of human activity is an orientation towards hidden aspects of reality, those that are held to be commonly inaccessible to ordinary senses; an activity that simultaneously shares a certain similarity with both science and religion but cannot be reduced to either of them." Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic, eds., *Occultism in a Global Perspective: Approaches to New Religion* (Acumen Publishing, 2014).

[6] While cognizant of the existing historiographical (as well as political) debates whether one should speak about a "socialist" or "communist" system to refer to the Soviet and post-WWII Eastern European regimes, for the purposes of this study, I use the terms "state socialist," "communist" and occasionally "socialist" (and respectively "state socialism" and "communism") interchangeably in order to avoid constant repetition of the most accurate but somewhat inelegant "state socialist." Unless I specify explicitly that I refer to nineteenth-century socialism, all of the

occult communism against the broader canvas of the explosion of scientific, popular and political interest in the occult, the mystical, and the paranormal in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from the 1960s onwards. I then inscribe it in the larger context of the historical relationship between occultism and socialism, by tracing the theoretical and concrete entanglements between these two late-ninetieth century cultural configurations over the longue durée. The questions at the heart of this project are: How are we to explain such a *prima facie* incongruous lapse into state-sponsored spiritualism in a milieu dominated by materialism as a philosophy and way of life? What did Zhivkova's foray into occultism mean for late communist political culture, understandings of modernity, science, and spirituality, and sense of national culture? Was this a *sui generis* Bulgarian phenomenon that can be dismissed as an insignificant aberration? Or alternatively, can it be useful in shedding light on late communism in a larger comparative context? Ultimately, what can the uncovered affinities between socialism and occultism tell us about the socialist modern?

At the most basic level, my project reveals how the infusion of Bulgaria's cultural politics with Zhivkova's idiosyncratic occultism informed and transformed Bulgarian late communism. I examine three realms of what I have termed "occult communism": Zhivkova's grandiose domestic and international cultural initiatives; occult religiosity and the White Brotherhood; and occult science as embodied by the Institute of Suggestology. I contend that as quixotic as Zhivkova's vision was, her policies contributed to the liberalization of the cultural sphere, to intellectuals' active participation in the formulation, experimentation and implementation of

above terms are used value-free and non-pejoratively to refer to the political and economic systems of the Soviet Union and post-WWII Eastern Europe. For the *longue durée* history of the semantic peregrinations of the concepts of "socialism" and "communism" see Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuutgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997). See also Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Maria Todorova, "Shared or Contested Heritage? Commemorating Socialism and Communism in Europe," keynote address at International conference *Sites of Memory of Socialism and Communism in Europe,* Schloss Münchenwiler, September 3-6, 2015.

cultural policy, and to minimizing party influence over culture. Zheni Kalinova has aptly encapsulated the unintended consequences of Zhivkova's politics via the paradox that "it was precisely when culture distanced itself from party guardianship that it was elevated as a state and party priority."[7]

My dissertation contributes to the nascent literature on late socialism. The period in-between the Prague Spring (or Khrushchev's ouster in 1964) and Mikhail Gorbachev's ascendancy is commonly known as period of "stagnation," "normalization" "the nothingness of the 1970s and 1980s," starkly contrasting both with the preceding "thaw" (resulting from Khrushchev's relative cultural liberalism and partial de-Stalinization) and with Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika. With no political manifestos, mass demonstrations, or revolutions, late socialism as an object of study is dismissed as dull, stagnant, without events.[8] This notion was reinforced by the first wave of literature on the 1970s and 1980s which focused almost exclusively on dissent, human right and civil society. The standard interpretation, which became hegemonic in the first two decades of post-socialism, was that if the official/censored sources were unreliable, then the unofficial/uncensored ones—such as underground *samizdat* literature and dissidents' political manifestos—were the genuine ones, the authentic windows into everyday struggles during late socialism. Recently, the stagnation paradigm has been robustly critiqued—both explicitly and implicitly. As anthropologist of the Soviet Union Alexei Yurchak pointed out in his magisterial study of late socialism, the term "stagnation" as applied to Brezhnev's rule, emerged only retrospectively, during the time of Gorbachev's reforms, after

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[7] Evgeniia Kalinova, *Bŭlgarskata kultura i politicheskiiat imperative 1944-1989* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2001), 506.
[8] This is also reflected in the dearth of social or cultural histories of this period. Two influential studies that operate within the stagnation paradigm are: Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Christopher Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

Brezhnev's period had ended and the socialist system was undergoing its rapid transformation.[9] Yurchak's multi-layered reconstruction of the ethical and aesthetic complexities of late socialist life, as well as the creative, imaginative, ambivalent and often paradoxical cultural forms that it took, tell the story of a "Brezhnevite" stagnation that was anything but still. Challenging the binaries of socialism (such as "official" vs "unofficial" or "censored" vs "uncensored" culture), Yurchak authoritatively demonstrated the inadequacy of the "state vs society" paradigm to account for the fact that many of the common cultural phenomena in late socialism that were permitted, tolerated or encouraged within the realm of the officially censored were nevertheless quite distinct from the ideological texts of the Party. The bourgeoning literature on late socialist consumption and everyday life, too, has contributed to exploding the binaries of official versus unofficial, citizens versus party authorities, east versus west.[10] Most recently Maria Todorova has gone even further in deconstructing the dichotomy between Western liberal public sphere and civil society, and the presumed lack thereof in Eastern Europe. Through a close reading of an energetic public controversy which in the 1970s and 1980s involved archeologists, historians, architects, the authorities, and one of Bulgaria's most popular writers over the presumed remains of Bulgaria's ultimate national hero Vassil Levski, Todorova demonstrated that socialist authorities were responding to grassroots pressure, similar to "normal" democratic societies. Ultimately, she argues in favor of an *embryonic public sphere* and *nascent civil society* in Bulgaria, and by extension in Eastern Europe, under late socialism: "As long as they were not

[9] Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[10] Paulina Bren, "Weekend Getaways: The *Chata,* the *Tramp,* and the Politics of Private Life in Post-1968 Czechoslovakia David Crowley and Susan Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc.* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002); Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds. *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Patrick Patterson, *Bought and Sold*: *Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Cornell University Press, 2011). Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2004).

seen as directly challenging the existing political superstructure (either ideologically or personally), some kind of civil society and public debate were tolerated and even encouraged from the 1960s on."[11] My study joins the recently emerging literature in questioning both the state vs society and the stagnation paradigm.[12] Instead of looking at dissidents and the state-versus-society paradigm, I document the curious phenomenon whereby a late socialist regime, in affinity with a segment of its intelligentsia, conducted vigorous cultural and spiritual policies in a country that was perceived as the Soviet Union's most pliant satellite. Rather than seeing late socialism as an era of cultural conservatism and partial re-Stalinizaion, my work reveals that Bulgarian society during the 1970s and '80s was culturally, intellectually, spiritually and artistically dynamic.

My study has important implications for how the relationship between socialism and utopia is thought about. The prevalent paradigm in both Western and Eastern European historiography is that that with the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and especially of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the intelligentsia across Eastern Europe forwent any hopes of "socialism with a human face." The most popular historian of postwar Europe Tony Judt articulated this view most graphically and (melo) dramatically:

> The illusion that Communism was reformable, that Stalinism had been a wrong turning, a mistake that still could be corrected….that illusion was crushed under the tanks of August 21st 1968 and it never recovered…Communism in Eastern Europe staggered on, sustained by an unlikely alliance of foreign loans and Russian bayonets: the rotting carcass was finally carried away in 1989. But the soul of communism had died twenty years before: in Prague, in August 1968.[13]

[11] Maria Todorova, ""A Socialist Public Sphere?",*The Bones of Contention: The Living Archive of Vasil Levski and The Making of Bulgaria's National Hero* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009).
[12] A recent study of Soviet mass media and cultural production has challenged the "Stalin," "thaw," "stagnation," "perestroika" borderlines by taking the postwar years of Soviet history as a single period and by emphasizing technology and culture as long-term trends "across the postwar decades." Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).
[13] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Groups), 447.

That sentiment was reflected in the more nuanced renditions of Western Marxists for whom also, to quote Theodore Adorno, "the idea of utopia has actually disappeared completely from the conception of socialism."[14] In Eastern European historiography, too, the main view prevails that in the aftermath of the crushing of Prague Spring in 1968, any ideas of reform socialism were abandoned and intellectuals were resigned to the "normalizing" policies of the regime (with the exception of famous dissidents). The formula "intervention put an end to liberalization and brought about normalization, the undoing of liberalization" was applied to the entire region. According to this view, the crushing of the Prague Spring delineated the bounds of reform for East Europeans for two more decades before Mikhail Gorbachev initiated an audacious reformist course from 1985. Even the most recent very fine cultural history of Czechoslovakia reproduced this interpretation uncritically and generalized it to the entire region. Paulina Bren in her otherwise excellent study of the particular Czechoslovak context defined normalization as "a political culture shared by citizens of the Eastern Bloc during these last two decades of communism when political idealism had taken such a pounding that the experience of everyday life was referred to officially as 'real socialism,' to differentiate it from the hopes of the past and fantasies of the future."[15] Telling the story of Zhivkova's attempt to ennoble socialism via art and esotericism, my work questions the presumed bankruptcy of utopianism in socialism and demonstrates that utopian impulses to attach "a human face" to the communist project endured even after the Prague Spring of 1968.

In addition, my dissertation offers crucial insights into the relationship between religion

[14] Theodore Adorno, "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodore W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing," (1964) in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature,* translated by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988).

[15] Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague* Spring(Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010.

and communism. The historiography on religion in Eastern Europe has for too long ossified around the themes of the politics of religion and church-state relations. The bulk of the scholarship addresses the uneasy and often fraught co-habitation between organized religion and communist states, usually with an eye toward documenting political repression, the development of an alternative civil society and/or the roots of resistance, reform and revolt.[16] The more nuanced studies somewhat complicate this picture by qualifying that the multi-faceted nature of church-state relations oscillated between mutual confrontation, accommodation and dialogue.[17] The absolutely prevalent interpretation is that communism produced a spiritual vacuum while the end of communism engendered a post-communist spiritual revival. This is encapsulated in the title of one of the most often cited comparative studies on the politics of religion in Eastern Europe and Russia: *Nihil Obstat,* meaning "Nothing Stands in the Way." While this phrase was used by the Catholic diocesan censor to mark a book with no moral or doctrinal errors that is fit for publication, Sabrina Pamet employed *Nihil Obstat* as the title of her study to impress that "with the collapse of communist monopoly…literally *nothing stands* in the way of new religious movements."[18] The subject matter of the repression paradigm has at the moment shifted from organized religion to alternative religiosities and new religious movements. The standard refrain is that due to official control of religion, alternative religiosities flourished underground as unofficial socio-cultural alternatives. Access to alternative spiritual and esoteric practices in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union operated in parallel with the official culture as a form of

[16] On church-state relations see, John Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (New York, 1994); Lucian Leuștean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-1965* (London, 2009). David Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests: Religious-based Activism and Its Challenge to State Power in Socialist Slovakia and East Germany* (Budapest, 2013).
[17] Sabrina Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham, 1998).
[18] Ramet, *Nihil Obstat,* p. 3.

resistance to socialist regimes and ideology.[19]

A number of recent studies has shifted away from the repression of religious practice, choosing to focus instead on religion's resilience under state socialism. Some scholars arrived to religion's endurance via studying the ineffectiveness of state-sponsored atheism and secularizing campaigns ,[20] while others pointed to communist administrations' efforts to substitute some secular ersatz-spirituality for religiosity.[21] The most sophisticated works of this ilk have successfully moved the discussion beyond the religion-atheism binary, revealing the interconnectedness of the religious and the secular. Rather than viewing the post-socialist surge of religion as an outcome of the regime's failure, Catherine Wanner, for example, explored the ways in which the promotion of atheism itself fueled religious change.[22] Sonja Luerhmann's anthropological study of the Volga region shows how socialist atheist educators successfully translated their know-how to new roles as post-socialist religious leaders. Rather than presenting this phenomenon as a supersession of the secular by the religious, Luerhmann proposes a Weberian elective affinity or "a constant back-and-forth between the dynamics of secularization and theologization."[23] The most recent collected volume on state secularism

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[19] The upcoming 2016 European Association for Social Anthropologists in Milan just announced a call for papers for a cutting-edge panel "Alternative Religiosities in the Communist East-Central Europe and Russia: Formations, Resistances and Manifestations." https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/107702/alternative-religiosities-communist-east-central-europe-and . Last Accessed on 02 February 2016.

[20] On atheism, see Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); William B. Husband, "*Godless Communists": Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (DeKalb, IL, 2000); David E. Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge, MA, 1975); Dimitry V. Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies* (New York, 1987).

[21] On attempts to substitute religion with socialist spirituality, see Christel Lane's *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society: The Soviet Case* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, "'A Sacred Space Never Remains Empty:'Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971" (PhD Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2010)

[22] Catherine Wanner, ed. *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[23] Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011, 16. For a most recent critique of the religion/atheism binary see also Miriam Dobson, "The Social Scientist Meets the 'Believer': Discussions of God, the Afterlife and Communism in the Mid-1960s," *Slavic Review,* Vol. 74, No. 1 (Spring 2015); Zsuzsanna Magdo, "The Socialist Sacred: Atheism, Religion,

and lived religion in the Soviet Union definitively makes the point that religious practice and the state's secularizing efforts were "mutually constituting and shaped the ongoing possibilities for individual and collective self-definition throughout the Soviet period."[24]

These richly-researched works have been tremendously valuable in extending our understanding of the interplay between socialism, religion and secularism. My work joins them in that effort, with two important revisions. First, I do not subscribe to the one-sided view that during late socialist stagnation both organized religion and non-confessional religiosities were "firmly considered by the thinking public as an alternative value system that could uncompromisingly stand up to official ideology and slogan, the untenability of which became more and more obvious."[25] Documenting empirically the explosion of popular, political and scientific interest in the occult, the mystical, the spiritual, and the paranormal shows that far from being a *kontrapunkt* to official ideology or a form of dissent, sometimes political theologies emanated from the very top of socialist political or scientific establishments. Secondly, and more importantly, unlike all these authors, who take the notion of a "post-socialist religious revival" as axiomatic, I question its utility altogether. Speaking about a "post-socialist religious renaissance" reproduces uncritically the self-legitimation narrative that new (and old) religious movements have employed in the marketplace of post-socialist religious space. That there was a palpable outburst of religion and spirituality after the end of state socialism is hardly contestable. But the hailed "religious renaissance" was neither as "sudden," nor as "staggering," or "surprising" as most scholars have claimed. My work suggests that the key to both post-socialist resurgence of

and Mass Culture in Communist Romania, 1948-1989" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015)

[24] Catherine Wanner, ed. *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine,* 12.

[25] Victor Yelensky, "The Revival before the Revival: Popular and Institutionalized Religion in Ukraine on the Eve of the Collapse of Communism." In Catherine Wanner, ed. *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*, 308.

religion and to cultural liberalization (of which it was a part) should be sought and found in late socialism. In other words, the preconditions for both glasnost and perestroika and the so-called religious revival were laid in the cultural climate of late socialism -- the complexity, contentiousness and experimentation of the 1970s -- coming on the heels of the fulcrum cultural shifts of the 1960s.

Ultimately, my dissertation problematizes the sorely understudied historical relationship between socialism (both in its pre-étatist and étatist iterations) and occultism. There is surprisingly little literature on this relationship even though the association between socialists, anarchists, spiritualists, and theosophists was commonplace at the end of the nineteenth century from Victorian London, to Paris, to imperial Russia, to places as "peripheral" as post-Ottoman Bulgaria – as this dissertation demonstrates. Frank Podmore, a founding member of the Society for Psychical Research, observed as early as 1902 that "there appears to be some natural affinity between Socialism of a certain type and Spiritualism."[26] My project charts this affinity and shows its "naturalness"– both theoretical and it terms of historical entanglements, using the example of twentieth-century Bulgaria. In one of the scanty articles engaging this relationship, Matthew Beaumont has convincingly demonstrated "the dialectics of socialism and occultism at the fin de siècle," arguing that in the last decades of the nineteenth century, an intersection of the languages of socialism and theosophy occurred in the utopian discourse thriving on the bohemian margins of the British middle classes.[27] As anthropologist Andrei Znamenski revealed in his pioneering monograph *Red Shambhala: Magic, Prophecy, and Geopolitics in the Heart of Asia,* from the very birth of state socialism, early Soviet Russia saw a proliferation of occult-inspired social experiments, alternative communes and informal clubs. In the 1920s, for instance,

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[26] Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism,* Vol. 1, London: Methuen & Co, 1902.
[27] Matthew Beaumont, "Socialism and Occultism at the 'Fin de Siècle': Elective Affinities. In *Victorian Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 217-232.

Gleb Bokii–the chief Bolshevik cryptographer, master of codes, ciphers, and electronic surveillance –and his friend Alexander Barchenko, an occult writer from St. Petersburg, explored Kabala, Sufi wisdom, Kalachakra, shamanism and other esoteric traditions, simultaneously preparing an expedition to Tibet to search for the legendary Shambhala.[28] From Nicholas Roerich's original plans to theoretically fuse Tibetan Buddhism and Marxism, to the early Bolshevik political flirt with Tibethan Buddhism in the 1920s in an effort to win Inner Asia over to the communist cause, communism and esotericism were not mutually exclusive. Historian Mikhail Agursky has gone so far as to argue that even socialist realism itself had occult sources. In his article "An Occult Source of Socialist Realism" Agursky provocatively suggested that Maxim Gorky incorporated neurologist and psychologist Vladimir Bekhterev's 'thought transfer' research and made it the core of socialist realism, elevating it to the sacral status of official ideology : "Gorky's theory of Socialist Realism can be considered a quasi-occult and politicized application of ideas of thought transference and hypnotic suggestion pioneered by Bekhterev and other early twentieth-century Russian scientists.[29] My study aims to add to the extreme paucity of studies of the communism occultism nexus. While historians of communism have traditionally underemphasized its enmeshment with the occultist movement, and scholars of alternative religiosity have seen esoteric movements as counterculture or dissent, my dissertation points to the convergence between the two, while simultaneously empirically charting their concrete entanglements in the course of the twentieth century Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. Telling the story of Zhivkova's attempt to revamp Bulgarian late communism via occultism alongside the twentieth-century trajectory of Dŭnov's White Brotherhood demonstrates first that

[28] See Andrei Znamenski, *Red Shambhala: Magic, Prophecy, and Geopolitics in the Heart of Asia* (Wheaton, IL/Chennai, India: Quest Books Theosophical Publishing House, 2011).
[29] Michael Agursky, "An Occult Source of Socialist Realism: Gorky and Theories of Thought Transference," in: B.G. Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 263.

the ideological amalgam of spiritualism and socialism is not necessarily contradictory. Rather than viewing occultism and communism as incompatible, my work points to the theoretical affinities between the two: the preoccupation with the "new age," "new culture," "the new man" and his consciousness; the gaze towards a future state; their cosmopolitan and internationalist aspirations; a communitarian vision; the call for abolition of private property; the vanguardist pretention to be at the crust at historical change; the legitimation with science; a holistic view of the world and life; the foregrounding of all-round and harmonious development; and the reaction against a competitive, individualist and exploitative system. Secondly, I contend that this confluence was not confined to the distinctly turn-of-the-century malady: "the inchoate quest for meaning amid the confusion of modern life."[30] Not only did endure well into late socialism, arguably it reached its apogee in the late1970s and 1980s when Zhivkova's implemented occultism as state policy.

My dissertation also contributes to Bulgarian historiography. When it comes to the literature in Bulgarian, the most proliferated genre of writing about Lyudmila Zhivkova is the memoir. After the end of state socialism, a number of former communist functionaries and people who had worked with Lydmila Zhivkova in some capacity (including her bodyguard) rushed to furnish a memoir complete with thriller-like hypothesis of her mysterious premature death at the age of 39.[31] This mythologized death and the possibility that she could have been

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[30] Matthew Beaumont, "Socialism and Occultism at the 'Fin de Siècle': Elective Affinities. In *Victorian Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 2010), 223.

[31] Zhivkova died at age 39 in the midst of the lavishly prepared international celebrations to commemorate the "Thirteenth century anniversary from the founding of the Bulgarian state"—another of her large-scale initiatives. She was found dead in the bathtub by the maid. The official announcement stated that she died at 2 a.m. on 21 July 1981 as a result of "a sudden cerebral hemorrhage and subsequent heavy and irreversible disorders of the respiration and blood circulation." Her premature demise and the contested circumstances of her death gave rise to endless speculations about the cause of her death continuing unabated up until today and contributed to creating a myth around her. The major versions in circulation are four: that her death was the result of an illness (the official version); that it was an accident where she (tranquilizers- and sleeping pills- induced) slipped, fell and drowned in the bathtub; that she was murdered by the KGB because her cultural politics became inconvenient for Moscow (a

next in line to Zhivkov have led many to speculate that she was murdered by the KGB, rumors that have fed public interest in recollections about her life. These recollections, bordering on hagiography, present an idealized image of Lyudmila as a woman who expanded the cultural horizons of the country, resisted Soviet influence and consolidated Bulgaria's cultural and national idiosyncrasy, echoing the idealized image that dominated the public sphere following her death in 1981.[32]

As exuberant as Lyudmila Zhivkova's post-1990 presence in sensationalist journalistic accounts and the memoir literature has been, she figures less prominently in the scholarly literature. There is no monograph to this day dedicated to her cultural politics in neither Bulgarian nor English. There are two biographical sketches written by historians. Iliana Marcheva describes Zhivkova as a unique phenomenon in Bulgarian cultural history that approximates the notion of enlightened absolutism.[33] Historian Mikhail Gruev's article traces Zhivkova's biography in relation to her occultism, arguing that Zhivkova underwent different

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slightly different rendition is that she was killed by her Bulgarian opponents); and that she committed suicide. I tend to agree with historian Evgenia Kalinova that the disappointments in her associates (in 1980 some of her closest friends were involved in a major embezzlement scandal, found guilty of corruption charges and handed jail sentences), "coupled with her intense and stressful work tempos and her fanatical adherence to extreme asceticism in eating, derived from the way she understood the balance between material and spiritual, inevitably lead to extreme fatigue and exhaustion of her physical and psychological energy." (in Kalinova, Evgenia. *Bŭlgarskata kultura i politicheskiiat imperativ 1944-1989.* Sofia: Paradigma, 2011, 329). There was a spontaneous public outpouring of grief at her death as huge crowds assembled at her funeral. Historian Richard Crampton observed that "Zhivkova was probably more mourned at her death than any public figure since King Boris."

[32] See Aleksandrov, Emil. *Az rabotikh s Lyudmila Zhivkova* (Sofia, 1991); Chakurov, Kostadin. *Vtoriya Etazh,* (Sofia: Biblioteka "Plamuk", 1990); Gerasimov, Bogomil. *Diplomatsiia v zonata na kaktusa* (Sofia: Khristo Botev, 2008); Todor Zhivkov, *Memoari* (Sofia: IK "Trud i pravo," 1997); Lyubomir Levchev, *Ti si sledvashtiiat! Roman ot spomeni.*(Sofia: Ea, 1998); Levchev, *Panikhida za mŭrtvoto vreme* (Sofia: Enthusiast, 2011). Dimitŭr Murdzhiev, *Taka gi vidiah* (Sofia, 1992); Elit Nikolov, *Dŭshteriata na nadezhdite.* (Sofia: Propeler, 2008); Pavel Pisarev, *Podir izgubenoto vreme: Spomeni.* (Sofia: Zhanet 45, 2011); Bogomil Rainov, *Lyudmila: Mechti i dela* (Sofia: IK "Kameia," 2008);Valentin Sidorov, *Lyudmila i Vanga*. (Sofia: Izadatelstvo "Reporter," 1998). For a negative appraisal of her legacy as in an attempt to reject the communist past altogether see Nikola Georgiev, *Nova kniga za bŭlgarskiia narod* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhriski", 1991). 7-49.

[33] Marcheva, Iliiana. "Prosveteniiat absolyutizŭm," in Valeri Kolev et.al, *Bŭlgarskidŭrzhavnitsi 1944-1989.*(Sofia: Skorpio, 2005).

phases of esoteric interests until her vision fully crystalized.[34] Ivan Elenkov's monograph on the organization, management and institutional structure of culture under socialism treats Zhivkova's period at some length but it is of limited utility since it focuses narrowly on the institutionalization and bureaucratization of culture.[35] To this day by far the most valuable account of Zhivkova's cultural policy in Bulgarian is Evgenia Kalinova's finely researched recent monograph on Bulgarian culture vis-a-vis the political imperative for the entire socialist period, which puts Zhivkova's tenure in the larger context of Bulgarian politics. In comparison with the preceding and succeeding periods, Zhivkova's tenure is positively assessed as a period of cultural relaxation, toleration and amelioration of the "political imperative."[36] My dissertation contributes to Bulgarian historiography by reading cultural politics in late socialist Bulgaria not only against the broader Eastern European canvas, but also against the global contingencies that made Zhivkova's occult communism possible.

What are some of those contingencies that enabled a dry party program "for the building of mature socialism," with its new postulate for all-round and harmonious development, to take such an unexpected religious turning in Bulgaria?[37] From the Bulgarian vantage point, the 1970s were a decade of economic, social and political stability. By the end of the 1960s Bulgarian party leader Todor Zhivkov had fully consolidated his power and established what in Bulgarian historiography is known as Zhivkov's "one-person rule," not without ample economic and political support from the Soviet Union, guaranteed by his especially cordial relations with Leonid Brezhnev. In the East European context, the 1960s saw what Roumiana Mikhalkova

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[34] Mikhail Gruev, "Lyudmila Zhivkova—pŭtiatkŭm Agni Yoga," in Evgenia Kalinova et.al. eds., *Prelomni vremena:yubileensbornik v chest na 65-godishninata na professor Lyubomir Ognianov,* 796-816.

[35] Ivan Elenkov, *Kulturniiat front: Bŭlgarskata kultura prez epohata na komunizma – politichesko upravlenie, ideologicheski osnovaniya, institutsionalni rezhimi.* (Sofia: IIBM, 2008).

[36] Kalinova, Evgenia. *Bŭlgarskata kultura i politicheskiiat imperative 1944-1989.* 1.

[37] The program was adopted at the Tenth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party (20-25 April 1971). For details see Chapter Two.

termed “the creation of a global communicative space”[38] when both socialist and capitalist societies, to quote Diane Koenker and Anne Gorsuch “willingly and confidently engaged one another and the world outside, creating contact zones of mutual learning and emulation as well as conflict.”[39]

Even more acutely than the 1960s, cultural, scientific and artistic exchange intensified exponentially with the signing on 1 August 1975 of the Helsinki Final Act – the major diplomatic agreement aiming to reduce tension between the Soviet and Western blocs.[40] The long-awaited all-European conference gave a tremendous impetus to socialist states like Bulgaria to pursue ambitious and vibrant international cultural politics. Zhivkova – as well as many of the protagonists of this dissertation – would constantly refer to the Helsinki Final Act and the pressing need to take full advantage of all the available venues for “assisting the processes of rapprochement, and mutual acquaintance between the peoples.” All the programs and projects initiated by the Committee of Culture had as a major objective the cooperation with international institutes and specialists, and co-organization of programs, events and conferences. The exaltedness with which the Helsinki Accords were met in Eastern Europe can be felt from Todor Zhivkov’s tone when he addressed the Central Committee of the BCP. In his outline of the strategy for Bulgaria’s foreign policy in the 1970s, the European détente took center stage:

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[38] Rumiana Miteva-Mikhalkova, “Bîlgarskiiat proekt za modernizatsiia na obshtestvoto. Transnatsionalni aspekti v bîlgarskata kulturna politika pri Lyudmila Zhivkova.” (Smolian: 2008, 6011).

[39] Diane P. Koenker and Anne E. Gorsuch, eds., *The Socialists Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World,* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 16.

[40] The Helsinki Final Act (also known as the Helsinki Accords) constituted an effort to reduce tension between the Soviet and Western blocs by securing their common acceptance of the post-World War II status quo in Europe. The accords were signed by all the countries of Europe (except Albania, which became a signatory in September 1991) and by the United States and Canada. The agreement recognized the inviolability of the post-World War II frontiers in Europe and pledged the 35 signatory nations to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and to cooperate in economic, scientific, humanitarian, and other areas.

> The thing is, in Europe – the territory most densely populated on earth, where the most powerful economic and military potential is concentrated; where the most influential culture and science are located; where many different nations, states and ethnicities exist;[…] on whose territory many great empires were born and many states withered; Europe—which in our time became the locus of two especially savage internecine wars – on this territory, communists, the socialist bloc in Europe – propose to establish a different Europe: a Europe that wants to affirm once and for all the inviolability of all existing borders and states; a Europe that wants for countries not to threaten each other, not to interfere in each other's internal affairs, but to respect each other's independence; a Europe that will not use or threat to use force in international relations, a Europe which wants to truncate the weapons on its territory and in the world; a Europe that wants to establish cooperation among countries: normal economic relations, and exchange of cultural, scientific and artistic values.[41]

Helsinki gave Zhivkova the framework and the main direction for Bulgarian cultural politics in the 1970s, encapsulated by the Committee of Culture's motto: "The creative works of an individual or a society – provided that they are progressive, humane, and of high artistic value – are entitled to a long-term and widespread presence in the spiritual life of all humankind."[42] To Zhivkova and the Bulgarian cultural elite, Helsinki meant that a small and unimportant state like Bulgaria could aspire to "contribute as an equal partner to world cultural, artistic and scientific progress," and conversely to participate in cultural exchange outside of the borders of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON.

Importantly for our story, the 1960s and 1970s marked a period of amelioration of atheist propaganda and reversal of some of its excesses across the Eastern bloc (with the exception of Romania) and even attempts to incorporate spirituality within scientific atheism.[43] In Western Europe, the 1970s saw Christian–Marxist dialogue on the nature of 'true humanism' following the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) at the same time that 'political theology' embodying a

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[41] TsDA, F. 1B, Op. 58, a.e. 57, 64-65.
[42] TsDA, F. 405, Op. 10, a.e. 272.
[43] For late socialist atheists' attempts to develop a "positive atheism," a set of beliefs and practices imbued with spirituality see Zsuzsanna Magdo, "The Socialist Sacred: Atheism, Religion and Culture in Communist Romania, 1948-1989" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign, forthcoming 2015); Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, "'A Sacred Space Never Remains Empty:'Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971" (PhD Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2010);

synthesis between Protestant theology and various strands of revisionist Marxism also developed in Germany, for instance. So, this is the juncture at which Zhivkova came to the helm of Bulgaria's culture, art, science, education, and international cultural relations and imbued the party postulate for harmonious development with unexpectedly religious content. Sociologist of world religions Jose Casanova has employed the term "deprivatization of religion" to describe the global phenomenon since the 1970s when "religion went public" and religious traditions globally were "refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity and of secularism had reserved for them."[44] In addition this is the time astrology, prophesies, omens, clairvoyance, alternative medicine, and paranormal phenomena captured the popular imagination across the region. As my chapter on suggestology and parapsychology shows, intense research and scientific experiments in suggestology, parapsychology, telepathy, telekinesis, which had started in the 1960s, too, peaked in the 1970s, both East and West. Popular interest in psychic and occult phenomena in the 1960s and 1970s helped create a general climate of belief in and curiosity about occult and paranormal phenomena globally. In that sense, Zhivkova's occult communism is contemporaneous with New Age movement in the West, which spread through the occult and metaphysical religious communities in the 1970s and ʾ80s. Ultimately I see Zhivkova's occult communism, the revived popularity of Peter Dŭnov's White Brotherhood, Dr. Lozanov' suggestology, Vanga's prophesies, the attractiveness of eastern teachings and Roerich, of alternative medics like Peter Dimkov in Bulgaria as embodiments of the crisis of the modernist rationalist paradigm globally. On the one hand my Bulgarian case study could enrich the literature on modernity by illuminating the unexpected forms this crisis took in a communist context. On the other hand, it will help re-evaluate local assessments by

[44] José Casanova. *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

showing that placed within the global historical moment, Zhivkova might not be so idiosyncratic and eccentric after all.

Structure and Sources

To complete this study I examined a wide variety of materials, including official documents from a number of Bulgarian archives, Lyudmila Zhivkova's writings and speeches, her personal fond, and publications in the Bulgarian press. Exploring the Foreign and Commonwealth Office archive at the United Kingdom's National Archives enabled me to add a new dimension of analysis to my dissertation: the perception of Zhivkova's policies and of cultural, educational and scientific developments in Bulgaria in the West. I read the official archives against multiple private sources including memoirs, diaries, and the oral interviews that I conducted with some of Zhivkova's closest associates, as well as critics. I supplement these with visual evidence—monuments, and architecture. A vast number of my sources are virtually untapped by both Western and Bulgarian scholars. The archives of the White Brotherhood, of the Research Institute of Suggestology; Zhivkova's personal archive; and monumental and architectural representations of Zhivkova's occult communism are all uncharted territory for historians of Bulgarian communism, who for the most part have focused on political, social, economic and institutional history.

Chapter One reconstructs Zhivkova's theoretical and conceptual apparatus: her idiosyncratic understanding of the concepts of "culture," "art," "spirituality," "all-round and harmoniously developed personalities," "synthesis," "aesthetic education," and "the law of the spiral." It traces the concrete religious and philosophical influences on Zhivkova's ideas and policies, arguing that Zhivkova's religio-philosophical worldview cannot be decoupled from the assessment of her cultural politics. It also highlights the distinctiveness of her spiritual utopian politics; given her roles as Zhivkov's daughter, as a Politburo member, and as a hyperactive minister of a super-ministry, Zhivkova had unlimited resources at her disposal to implement these policies nation-wide.

Chapter Two narrates Zhivkova's aesthetic utopianism in praxis—the policy embodiments and the outcomes of her effort to create *all-round harmoniously developed individuals*. I explore the extensive state programs that aimed to realize Zhivkova's aesthetico-spiritual utopia: the Long-Term National Program for Aesthetic Education, the National Program for Harmonious Development of Man, and the International Children's Assembly "Banner of Peace" under the patronage of UNESCO. It situates Zhivkova's aesthetic utopianism as an attempt to re-forge the "new socialist man" via spirituality and high culture. As quixotic as Zhivkova's policies were, they ultimately resulted in liberalization of the cultural sphere, intellectuals' active participation in cultural policy and gradual abandonment of socialism realism in art.

Chapter Three investigates the Bulgarian Institute of Suggestology. The latter was created in order to "conduct scientific studies in the psychology and physiology of suggestion;" to experiment with parapsychology, improvised games, and education through suggestion and creative work; and to "conduct scientific experiments to explore and explain clairvoyance and telepathy." Using the vast archive of the Institute, I focus on experiments conducted with "the modern world's first government-sponsored prophetess" Vanga, who became a scientific collaborator in her own right. Situated in the broader contexts of communist parapsychology, the Cold War, and the global resurgence of occultism in the 1960s, this chapter analyzes the issues raised by suggestology, telepathy and psychotronics for the socio-political and cultural spheres in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Chapter Four focuses on religiosity. Here the main actor is the White Brotherhood–an interwar Bulgarian theosophical teaching which at the same time was the only occult-mystical movement in the Eastern Bloc to be officially recognized as a "religious community" under communism. As such, it was inscribed in the general religious policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Using archival documents from the Directory of Religious Creeds in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I trace its entire twentieth-century trajectory, demonstrating that occultism not only survived state socialism but actually flourished under it, especially from the late-1960s onwards, both in comparison with the movement's pre-socialist history and with the genuinely restrictive atmosphere of the 1950s.

Chapter One

Occult Communism in Theory:
Lyudmila Zhivkova's *Weltanschauung* from Private Creed to State Policy

The assessments of Lyudmila Zhivkova and her cultural politics—whether benign, eulogizing, derisive, or outright condemnatory—seem to agree at least on one point: that she was the most eccentric political figure not only in communist Bulgaria, but also in the Eastern bloc. The distinguished historian of Eastern Europe Richard Crampton has depicted her as "arguably the most extraordinary personality in the leading circles of any post-Stalinist East European state."[45] "Enigmatic," "fascinating," "unorthodox," "controversial" and "idiosyncratic" are staple epithets abundant in any portrayal of "the Zhivkova phenomenon" by Eastern and Western observers alike. Bulgarian intellectuals who worked under her at the Committee of Culture all point to her exceptionality as a harbinger of new thinking, permissiveness and pro-Western attitudes, who stood out in the dogmatic context of state socialism as an "anomaly,"[46] a "strange bird in the socialist cage,"[47] as an anti-Marxist or even anti-communist. Western observers would give her high marks for her intelligence, energy, organizational ability, and intensity. Even assessments that are not supposed to be laudatory, such as *Radio Free Europe*'s, make a nod to her exceptionality: "At any rate, it cannot be denied that she possesses a strong character and a pronounced and unique personality."[48] In a 1980 article emblematically entitled "Bulgaria Submits to Energetic Guidance from a Woman," *The Times* succinctly captured the source of Zhivkova's idiosyncrasy:

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[45] R. J. Crampton, *The Balkans: Since the Second World War* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 174.
[46] Bogomil Rainov, *Lyudmila: mechti i dela* (Sofia: Kameia, 2003), 174-175.
[47] Pavel Pisarev, *Podir izgubenoto vreme: spomeni* (Sofia: Zhanet 45), 2011.
[48] Yordan Kerov, "Lyudmila Zhivkova-Fragments of a Portrait," RAD Background Report, *Radio Free Europe* 10/27/1980.

> Miss Zhivkova, a slim, intense woman with dark hair pulled back tightly over her head, is one of the more enigmatic personalities in Eastern Europe, combining the practical and theoretical in an unusual blend. On the practical side, she has opened up Bulgaria to outside culture, including much more from the West, and has re-vamped the education system... At the same time, she has thrown herself into the pursuit of the 'new socialist man,' an abstract ideal that appears to combine oriental mysticism, European philosophy and Marxist doctrine in a mixture that even her admirers find puzzling.[49]

Western diplomats showed equal fascination for the President's daughter. In an otherwise very terse reference booklet *Leading Personalities in Bulgaria in 1980* (with each individual entry composed of a few lines at most), distributed by the British Embassy in Bulgaria to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London, the entry on Zhivkova runs a full page. It is unexpectedly circumstantial, noting her habits and even philosophico-religious beliefs:

> Small of stature, neat and expensively dressed. She is intellectual, committed and ambitious: and holds strong (though not necessarily coherent) views on art, culture and ideology. She is prone to regale visitors with long lectures on topics like 'the public-state system of cultural management' or 'aesthetic education.' She has an occasional twinkle, but is usually very serious. In private she is apt to speculate on quasi-religious subjects, an interest arousen by her involvement in a serious car accident in 1973. She is interested in yoga and transcendentalism.[50]

The preoccupation with Zhivkova's persona in the diplomatic circles evidently extended to minutiae such as her eating habits, as her consumption of desserts prompted the British ambassador to send a telegram to the FCO in 1979, containing no other information than:

> At the recent EEC Heads of Mission meeting, the FRG Ambassador said that feeding Liudmilla Zhivkova had caused problems on her visit to Germany. She is vegetarian and will eat only salads (no eggs nor vinegar or other alcohol-based dressing). She drinks

[49] "Bulgaria Submits to Energetic Guidance from a Woman," *The Times* (London, England), 11 Nov 1980, Issue 60773, p.6.
[50] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), FCO 28/4091, p. 7.

> only tea and a little milk. On the other hand, she eats desserts of all kinds in large quantities (further evidence of Transcendentalism?!)"[51]

What are the sources and manifestations of Zhivkova's posited "anomaly"? What constitutes her atypicality in the context of late socialist Bulgaria and Eastern Europe? Was she so atypical, after all? In pursuit of these central questions, the chapter will open with a biographical sketch that narrates Zhivkova's educational, professional, political, and intellectual trajectories. Special attention will be paid to her spiritual formation, as I see her religiosity as the cornerstone both of her cultural theory and praxis. To this end, the chapter ultimately offers a reconstruction of her theoretical and conceptual apparatus: her particular understanding of the concepts of "culture," "art," "spirituality," "beauty," "all-round and harmoniously developed personalities" [*vsestranno i kharmonicno razviti licnosti*], "aesthetic education," "synthesis," "evolution," "the law of the spiral" etc., which were not only a staple of her vocabulary, but were also embodied in her concrete policies, initiatives, as well as material culture—such as monuments and architecture.

Academic, Intellectual, Political and Spiritual Trajectories

The daughter of Bulgaria's long-time party leader and head of state appeared to be initially drawn to pursuing an academic career. She majored in history at Sofia University in 1966, followed by successive specializations in Moscow and St. Antony's College, Oxford (1969-1970), where she collected materials for her doctoral thesis on Anglo-Turkish relations 1933–1939. She defended her dissertation in history in 1971 at Sofia University (which was subsequently published as a monograph in both Bulgaria and England) and became a research fellow at the Institute for Balkan Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Following the

[51] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), FCO 28/3750.

death of her mother in the same year, however, she was propelled on the fast track to an illustrious political career, launched rather inconspicuously—with an appointment as First Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. Only a month later, though, in December 1971 she was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Art and Culture (CAC), the de facto Ministry of Culture. This was the first indication that she was being groomed to replace CAC Chairman, poet Pavel Matev, followed in 1973 by her appointment as First Deputy Chairman of the CAC, a new position created especially for her.

In parallel with her incipient scholarly and political careers, Bulgaria's first lady started hosting weekly Friday soirees at her apartment, where she would invite prominent members of the intelligentsia–writers, artists, journalists, actors, university professors, and poets.[52] Though these get-togethers were subsequently discontinued (most likely for political reasons),[53] the participants attracted the hostess's attention and most of them were eventually spring-boarded to prestigious executive appointments in the administration of art, culture, and education. These trendy soirees have been the subject of much discussion (as well as derision). Some of the regulars have waxed poetic about the presumed permissiveness of these "unforgettable Friday meetings," as a forum for exchange of creative ideas, amidst unguarded even daring (implying politically) "free talk" (*volnodumstvo).* According to one of Zhivkova's closest associates, poet Lyubomir Levchev, "This home, simple and cozy, yet full of art, would gather together over a

[52] The high-profile guests included history professors like Alexander Fol, Ivan Venedikov and Nikolai Genchev; artists like Dechko Uzunov and Svetlin Rusev; writers like Bogomil Rainov, Lyubomir Levchev, journalist Pavel Pisarev. They were referred to as "the Zhivkova circle."

[53] In his recollections Chakŭrov (a political adviser to first Todor Zhivkov and then to Lyudmila Zhivkova) claims that the Fridays were discontinued because a high-ranking State Security (*DS*) official found a way to discretely notify Todor Zhivkov that some of the participants at the get-togethers routinely voiced "revisionist" and "anti-Soviet" ideas. Chakŭrov, Kostadin. *Vtoriiat etazh,* 153. Bogomil Rainov, in spite of his sarcastic and unflattering assessment of "the Fridays," confirmed that opinions critical of party methods were routinely voiced both directly and in a more circumspect manner.

cup of tea or coffee the most mature and prominent Bulgarian artists, abreast with very young, yet completely unknown, but inflamed with creative enthusiasm 'knights of hope. '"[54] According to him "the scientific term" for these "inventions of Lyudmila's" would be "brain attacks"–a field where different, sometimes conflicting views would be voiced and debated, which Zhivkova could then "soberly" assess and synthesize in her policy plans for the future. Emil Aleksandrov, another regular attendee, employed a historical simile, comparing Zhivkova's Friday get-togethers to Madame Tallien's salon evenings during Thermidor, which simultaneously served Todor Zhivkov's interests, who via his daughter indirectly used them as a venue for surveying and lobbying the intelligentsia.[55] Somewhat less loftily, others have derided these meetings as the "the five o'clock of the red bourgeoisie," a carte blanche towards career advancement, or an incubator for "hatching" the third generation of Bulgaria's communist elite. Bogomil Rainov, a prominent writer, art critic, professor of aesthetics, and eventually Zhivkova's spiritual guru, dismissed them as torturously dull pretentious affairs where "men and women of both sexes would drink, smoke and aspire to impress each other with remarks posing as witticisms."[56] Rather than being a precursor of her future interests in the spheres of arts and culture —as argued retrospectively by most of her protégés—according to Rainov, Zhivkova used these get-togethers to shop around for her professional plans, while still looking for her true vocation. Based on a close reading of her writings and speeches from her first years as a public figure,[57] it is safe to conclude with Rainov that at the time "having at her disposal the unique

[54] Lyubomir Levchev, "Lyudmila Zhivkova ili plamŭkŭt na vŭrkha," in: *Mislete za men kato za ogŭn* (Sofia: 1982)
[55] Emil Aleksandrov, "Zhivkov si pravi intelektualno lobi chrez Lyudmila," *24 chasa,* 25 September 1997.
[56] Rainov, *Lyudmila*, 17.
[57] Her few public speeches from the short period she became deputy-minister of CAC in 1971 until 1973 abound in nondescript Marxist-Leninist clichés, do not deviate from the party line in the cultural sphere and focus exclusively on internal bureaucratic issues such as the 'the public-state system of cultural management.' There are no traces whatsoever of her future grandiose domestic and international cultural policies and initiatives.

privilege of selecting her own workplace, she appeared to still have difficulties making her pick."[58]

Anecdotally, rumors were circulating that during some of the get-togethers spiritist séances were taking place, where initiated in occultism intellectuals, would invoke spirits – their reincarnations from previous lives. Kostadin Chakîrov, who overall assesses Zhivkova's tenure as a time of "hopefulness," modernization, innovation and unprecedented care for culture, alludes to spiritist séances taking place in Zhivkova's close circle where the spirits of Alexander of Macedon, Christ, Ekaterina or Napoleon were presumably invoked by their flesh-and-blood reincarnations. During these sessions, which Chakîrov characterizes as grotesque, intellectuals whom he fails to mention, "wanted to find themselves in the ne next, higher 'karmic cycles' until they merge with 'the absolute spirit' and 'harmony', i.e. with God."[59] Pavel Pisarev also mentions the invocation of spirits in passing in the context of discussing surveillance on Zhivkova by the Soviet intelligence. In his memoir, Pisarev relates an incident when Naiden Petrov from the Sixth Department of State Security went to see him, asking him to arrange for the employment of a Russian choir singer in the People's Opera. When Pavel Pisarev refused the request since there had to be an open competition for the spot, Naiden Petrov told him that she was a protégé of a Russian general and that if Pisarev would not hire her there might be consequences, adding: "Thank goodness that you do not go with Sasho Fol and Lyudmila to call spirits on Dondukov St." Pisarev immediately notified Zhivkova, who at first laughed "but when she heard about the spirits that they were calling in the apartment on Dondukov, she blushed …asked me to write the name of Naiden Petrov on a piece of paper and left her office immediately." From Zhivkova's reaction – and Naiden Petrov's subsequent

[58] Ibid., 24.
[59] Kostadin Chakŭrov, *Vtoriiat etazh* (Sofia: Izdatelska komaniia K&M, 1990), 171.

removal from his post, Pisarev concluded "It seems they must have indeed been calling spirits."[60]

Zhivkova's advancement in the state and party hierarchy was put on hold after she suffered a serious car crash on 12 November 1973 en route to Sofia airport, where she was expected to see her father off on his official visit to Poland. This almost fatal accident constituted a watershed not only in her personal story, worldview, way of living, and public persona, but also in how she perceived her role in Bulgarian and even world politics. The accident and her rigorous adoption of the belief system, tenets, and rules of living of Agni Yoga or Living Ethic,[61] are not unrelated. She barely survived the crash (with a severe skull fracture, broken pelvis and internal bleeding); as her husband Ivan Slavkov described it "Lyudmila was for a long time in a coma. Zhivkov was much distraught by the crash because Lydmila was on the edge."[62] Her vision was also badly impaired and she related to Russian poet and occult fellow-traveler Valentin Sidorov that in order not to completely lose her eyesight, she had to practice special yoga exercises for eyes over the course of months, which required "colossal concentration of will and patience."[63] Her pragmatic and orthodox Marxist political adviser Kostadin Chakŭrov also bears witness that "after the car accident she engaged in procedures of self-healing. This is how she familiarized herself with Indian and Tibethan teachings. Slowly, but surely a wave of negation of social life swelled in her. She isolated herself. She decided to prove to the world that she must overcome the body and the material, that only the spirit and ideas are

[60] Pisarev, 311.
[61] Agni Yoga, alternatively known as the Living Ethic, is a religio-philosophical teaching, transmitted by Nicholas Roerich and Helena Roerich in the early 1920s. Helena Roerich wrote the foundational corpus of what became known as Agni Yoga, claiming to channel Master Morya, one of the spiritual gurus, first brought forth by founder of theosophy Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891). The teaching, as an offshoot of theosophy, combines different aspects: philosophy, cosmogony, ethics, religion, as well as a practical guide to living.
[62] Ivan Slavkov, *Bateto, t.2* (Sofia: IK "Trud," 2010), 235.
[63] Valentin Sidorov, *Lyudmila i Vanga* (Sofia: Izadatelstvo "Reporter", 1998), 9.

eternal. Thus around 1975 her strong attraction to asceticism began, bordering on self-torture."[64] Husband Ivan Slavkov likewise relates that after the car accident she "engaged in studies of the functioning of the brain, of the harmoniously developed personality, of these teachings about meditation—in essence about the breaking from the material and directing towards the spiritual."[65] Her close associate Emil Aleksandrov attributes to the accident not only her attraction to occultism but also to a whole cluster of interests – in "history of the arts, especially of fine arts, in the philosophy of India and some Eastern philosophical systems, religions and their historical role. She immersed herself in yogism, unorthodox healing methods, soothsaying and half-forgotten teachings and practices."[66] Writer and aesthetician Bogomil Rainov, her initiator in Agni Yoga, naturally casts the accident in religious light as the transformative moment, which led to revelation:

> As if under the blaze of a lightning, she suddenly saw her life in a new light…In the illumination of the Revelation she grasped the meaning and made her choice. From this point onwards begins the new timekeeping (*letobroene)* of her short life–seven years, during which she tried with extraordinary energy and perseverance to implement some of the ideas of the Teaching, in spite of the resistance of the sclerotic party bureaucracy.[67]

Bogomil Rainov was a major formative influence on Zhivkova. A member of the pre-war intellectual elite, art historian and professor of aesthetics, subsequently also a popular spy novel writer, member of the CC of the BCP, and longtime deputy-chairperson of the Union of Bulgarian Painters, Bogomil Rainov was also the son of renowned Bulgarian theosophist, writer, and painter, academician Nikolay Rainov.[68] As a pioneering theosophist in interwar Bulgaria,

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[64] Chakŭrov, *Vtoriiat etazh,* 154.
[65]Slavkov, *Bateto, t.2.,*236.
[66] Emil Aleksandrov, *Az rabotikh s Lyudmila Zhivkova* (Sofia: 1991,) 19.
[67] Rainov, *Lyudmila,* 56-57.
[68]A prominent interwar intellectual with eclectic research interests and oeuvre. He first graduated from the Seminary, went on to pursue a degree in philosophy at Sofia University and then enrolled and graduated from the

Rainov Father owned a rich library of occult literature (which included the books of Agni Yoga), that he translated into Bulgarian, and eventually bequeathed to his son. Bogomil Rainov is unanimously cited by all of Zhivkova's associates and close friends as her "teacher," "spiritual guru," *éminence grise*, "someone who exerted enormous influence on her," or alternatively (depending on how sympathetic they were to said beliefs) as "obscurantist," "the one who muddles her head with Eastern philosophies" or even a "demonic personality." As Rainov had a predilection for anonymity in his communications with Zhivkova,[69] she would visit him at his apartment, where they would reportedly engage in lengthy four-five hour conversations well into the night.[70] Kostadin Chakŭrov relates in his recollections that after her talks with Rainov from 1973 onwards, Lyudmila Zhivkova would "receive the books of the Indian mahatmas and the great gurus" and that "She spoke of mahatma Morya,[71] of Helena Blavatsky and of Nicholas Roerich as her teachers."[72] Alexander Lilov, a very close friend and supporter of Zhivkova' s who in the 1970s was second in the party hierarchy after Todor Zhivkov , too, unequivocally conceded that Nikolay Rainov:

> played a big part in Mila's development, he was a sincere friend of hers and to an extent, her teacher, who introduced her to this teaching, including to Roerich. On top of that Bogomil was an extraordinarily learned expert on Roerich's work…I believe that Mila's… enthusiasm for Roerich, her will to adhere to that teaching is part of her spiritual

Art Academy. He was a prolific writer in a wide variety of genres ranging from poetry, fiction, children's fairy tales, to philosophical treatises, and ethnographic studies; a painter; philosopher; and professor in art history and aesthetics. At the end of the 1920s Nikolai Rainov and a number of his friends established the first theosophical lodge in Bulgaria, *Orpheus*, which functioned as a circle for the discussion, distribution and translation of occult knowledge. The theosophical lodge dealt with "compilation and publication of series of lectures for people, determined to take the path of self-perfection, as well with the translation and popularization of Helena Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*." Bogomil Rainov, *Tainoto uchenie* (Sofia: Khristo Botev), 2003.

[69] Elit Nikolov, *Dŭshteriata na nadezhdite* (Sofia: Propeler, 2008), 20.

[70] Rainov, *Lyudmila;* Chakŭrov, *Vtoriiat etazh,* Sofia, 1999; Dimitŭr Murdzhiev, *Taka gividiakh* (Sofia: 1992).

[71] One of the three most important "Masters of the Ancient Wisdom" (or mahatmas) within modern Theosophical beliefs Helena Blavatsky claimed to have been contacted by. According to theosophical beliefs the mahatmas represent a spiritual hierarchy composed of individuals who have finished their round of earthly reincarnations and have evolved to the spiritual planes, from which they guide the affairs of humanity.

[72] Chakŭrov, *Vtoriiat etazh,* 154.

> development, and at the same time it corresponded with her views on culture, the world, society. Lyudmila used to study a lot of eastern literature, she used to explore Roerich and Blavatsky's legacy. She was seriously engaged, she had a very good library of eastern thought and this is what she studied and read deeply and attentively.[73]

Elit Nikolov, another of Zhivkova's close associates, is skeptical in portraying the Zhivkova-Rainov connection in terms of student-teacher relationship. As Bogomil Rainov was and remains a highly controversial (and one should add amply detested) figure in Bulgaria's recent history (mostly for his position as the uncontested authority and unofficial censor in the arts and literature, for his lethal sarcasm and relentlessly polemical edge), opinions about him in the public sphere have been highly polarized both during socialism and post-1989. It is worth quoting Elit Nikolov's assessment in full here, as it one of the most balanced portrayals in circulation:

> She [Zhivkova] obtained from him the information she needed on Eastern spirituality. He, for his part, satisfied his vainglory of a hidden influential person in cultural affairs via noiseless professional and intellectual interactions with her. He combined his political orthodoxy with ideas alien to Marxist ideology, which he impressed, or tried to impress, upon her. A talent with a well-established public 'trademark,' certain literary abilities, and an impressive, almost boundless erudition in the realm of art, this writer of ours loved to moralize, including with his readers…It is not clear to what extent he really was or saw himself as a teacher in his talks with her. The one thing that I know is that in her conversations with him, she [Zhivkova] apparently felt as an individual with a mission and a calling, that is one that does not bear instruction.[74]

In his biographical memoir *Lyudmila—Dreams and Deeds,* Bogomil Rainov himself categorically denied that he was Lyudmila's teacher in her spiritual journey but admitted to first

[73](forthcoming) Dobrev, Dobrin. *Lyudmila—kulturniiat vek na Bŭlgariia.* Interview with Alexander Lilov. The above quote is the answer to a directly posed question whether it was Nikolay Roerich who provoked her interest in Agni Yoga, published on the facebook page of *Palitra* magazine https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D0%A1%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%9F%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0/113554052015027?v=app_2309869772
[74] Nikolov, *Dŭshteriata na nadezhdite,* 21.

introducing her to Agni Yoga via his father's library and to systematizing and clarifying the literature for her. According to his own testimony, when he first met Zhivkova in 1971 at an official function, she expressed an interest in occultism, but her acquaintance with the theories of esotericism was "utterly vague, not to say non-existent."[75] This is how he describes his role:

> One of the idiosyncrasies of the Teaching, in which Lyudmila was increasingly immersing herself [i.e. Agni Yoga or the Living Ethic], is that it has never been systematized in the neat form of a manual. The series inherited from my father were valuable insofar as they conveyed directly the words of the Teacher [i.e. Mahatma Morya]. These were not, however, a course of lectures. They were disparate dictums, elucidations of various problems."[76] Because grasping the tenets of the teaching required preliminary preparation, Bogomil Rainov's self-avowed role was that of a "supplier of occult literature," a "guide in occult terminology," and "an assistant in our talks.[77]

Following Zhivkova's recovery from the accident and subsequent embrace of the tenets of Agni Yoga, she returned to the political arena in 1975, when she was "elected" as Chairperson of CAC (and a member of the Council of Ministers). In 1976 at the XIth BCP Congress she became a full member of the Central Committee without the customary practice of preceding candidate membership, and three years later she added Politburo membership to her posts. In the same year, the education and science sectors were added to the purview of the CAC. To put it in a different way, in a remarkably short period of time she became a member of the BCP at the age of 25, deputy minister of culture at 29, minister of culture at 33, a member of the Central Committee of the BCP at 34, and a member of the Politburo at 37. Due to a series of institutional maneuvers aiming to aid her meteoric rise through the ranks, at the tender age (by communist standards) of 38, Zhivkova was a minister of superminstry (having extraordinary powers over Bulgaria's culture, art, education, science, publishing, public television and radio, and

[75] Rainov, *Lyudmila,* 16.
[76] Ibid., 39.
[77] Ibid.

international cultural relations), a full member of Politburo, and for practical purposes the second most powerful person in Bulgaria.

Zhivkova's precipitate rise to the highest echelons of power doubtless owed much to her status of being Todor Zhivkov's daughter, a fact she resented as she was extremely ambitious to "prove her qualities and skills" as a stateswoman and scholar in her own right. (Her personal drama is best encapsulated in a comment to her associates: "My heaviest burden is that I am a Zhivkova…If I do something good, it is not acknowledged, but it is said that I can, because I am a Zhivkova. If I do something bad – again the same thing, because I am Zhivkova."[78]) It should be mentioned that even though some of Lydmila Zhivkova's idiosyncrasies caused tension in the relationship between father and daughter (most obviously Zhivkova's philosophico-religious worldview; the bypassing of the scriptures of official ideology and the rules within the Eastern bloc; her costly cultural initiatives; and her relentless push to have some of her closest circle in the highest echelons of political power), Zhivkov's support for his daughter was unconditional.

The obvious nepotism notwithstanding, Zhivkova, with her educational background, specializations and administrative skills, was a typical representative of the second generation of communist cadres who had had no direct experience of the pre-1944 system.While up until the 1960s the "class approach" was decisive in recruitment of party cadres (i.e. recruitment from appropriate working class/communist background with the inevitable discrimination against pre-war "bourgeois" elites), in the 1970s expertise and know-how became the preponderant

[78] Lyudmila Zhivkova qtd. in Evgeniia Kalinova, *Bŭlgarskata kultura i politicheskiiat imperative 1944-1989,* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2001), 379.

criterion.[79] This gave rise to a new generation of elites (like Alexander Lilov, Andrei Lukanov, Petîr Mladenov, and the majority of Zhivkova's deputies at the Committee of Culture) held advanced university degrees and specializations, spoke foreign languages and traveled widely. In addition, this generational change was also reflected in the attitude towards Marxism-Leninism: for the last generation living under "really existing socialism," Marxism was emptied of content, a taxidermic remnant preserved in congress and plenum speeches which had nothing to do with the lofty ideals of the first generation of builders of socialism. Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has aptly described this change in meanings toward replicated official discourse under late socialism as a "heteronymous shift," from the Greek term "heteronym" -- a word of the same spelling. i.e. written representation, but of different and unrelated meaning.[80]

Besides the generational change and the new role of experts, the course of Zhivkova's cultural politics was enabled by both local and international contingencies. Unlike the 1960s which were punctured by tensions and internal and international crises, the 1970s were relatively speaking a period of stability and security. Internally, Todor Zhivkov had fully consolidated his power after a failed coup known as the Gorunia conspiracy in 1965.[81] By the end of the decade Todor Zhivkov managed to establish what in Bulgarian historiography is known as "the one-

[79] Vasil Prodanov, "Lyudmila Zhivkova v konteksta na kulturnite i ideologicheski promeni v Bîlgariia prez 70-te godini. In Iskra Baeva, ed. *Kulturnoto otvariane na Bîlgariia kîm sveta* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sveti Kliment Okhridski"), 31.
[80] Aleksei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006,) 481-482.
[81] The conspiracy was with anti-Khrushchev and anti-destalinization orientation and it came in the wake of the sharp turn in Bugarian-Chinese relations, following the Sino-Soviet split. In terms of foreign policy, the conspirators were pro China and pro Albania. The conspiracy involved about 100 mid-level party and military personnel and was masterminded: Tsolo Krîstev from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former partisan commander Ivan Todorov-Gorunia, member of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party and general Tsviatko Anev, Sofia's military commandant. Their plan, easily detected by the Ministry of Internal Affairs' special forces, was to seize the building where a meeting of the CC of the BCP was to take place and to force the CC to vote Zhivkov's resignation. Only the 8 main conspirators were arrested and given prison sentence but in a populist display of generosity on the occasion of 25 years from the communist takeover, all of them are released from prison in 1969 and given administrative posts. Iskra Baeva, *Todor Zhivkov* (Sofia: Kama, 2006).

person rule" (*ednolichno upravlenie*) and his cordial relations with Leonid Brezhev had secured unequivocal economic and political Soviet support. There was also a tangible amelioration of atheist propaganda in the 1960s but especially the 1970s.[82] The international climate of East-West détente further emboldened Zhivkova's cultural policy, following the signing of the Helsinki Accords in August 1975 at the conclusion of the first Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.[83]

Internationally the end of the 1960s coincided with a global explosion of social unrest and calls for social change embodied by Paris events and the hippie movement in the US and Western Europe from 1968. Emblematically for the Eastern Bloc, this was also contemporaneous with the Prague Spring in the socialist bloc (and with the International Festival of Youth and Students in Sofia in the Bulgarian context). Zhivkova thus entered public life in the context of the ambivalent post-1968 atmosphere when the authorities attempted to counter some of the potentially deleterious deficiencies of the socialist system. This attempt is tentatively formulated as the regime's liberalizing impulses in Bulgarain historiography, which concretely translated into heightened interest in publishing Western literature, relative toleration of less dogmatic newspapers and magazines; the rehabilitation of "bourgeois" (i.e. pre-1945) writers, including ones that were tried by the People's Court like Fani Popova-Mutafova and Khristo Brîtsizov. [84] In the artistic realm, this liberalizing trend found expression in exhibitions by modernist painters;

[82] Ambassador Cloake explained this religious tolerance in the context of "the authorities' nationalist drive for cultural and historical identity." He also speculated that it might have to do with Zhivkova's influence: "Some say this is because Lyudmilla Zhivkova, the Presiden'ts daughter and "Minister" of culture, was converted to transcendentalism while on a visit to India last year – she certainly shows interest in it, and has for some years displayed a private interest in speculation on philosophical and spiritual matters." The National Archives of the UK (TNA), FCO28/3759 Religion in Bulgaria 1980, p. 21.
[83] The Helsinki Accords were primarily an effort to reduce tension between the Soviet and Western blocs by securing their common acceptance of the post-World War II status quo in Europe and pledging cooperation in economic, scientific, humanitarian, and other areas.
[84] Nikolai Poppetrov, "Drugara predstava. Belezhki za retseptsiiata na lichnostta i deloto na Lyudmila Zhivkova v istorichesko vreme." In Iskra Baeva, ed. *Kulturnoto otvariane na Bîlgariia kîm sveta.* Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sveti Kliment Okhridski," 2013. 153

expansion of the thematic and geographical scope of translated literature and the influx of foreign (including Western) films. Furthermore, there was a tangible amelioration of atheist propaganda in the 1960s and 1970s Todor Zhivkov's 1970 visit to Japan and the ensuing cultural shock coming from the exposure to the technologically advanced "Japanese civilization" also triggered economic modernization tendencies. It is at this juncture of relative political relaxation, cultural opening up, modernizing impulses, and general change in the Zeitgeist that Zhivkova came at the helm of Bulgaria's cultural policy, art, science and education.

Zhivkova's Weltanschauung/Theory of Culture

Emboldened by her secure position in the state and party apparatus, her access to unlimited state resources, but also the international climate of détente, Zhivkova began in the mid-1970s to relentlessly propagate her unorthodox views on the centrality of culture, spirituality and aesthetics in perfecting the individual and society, as well as international relations. The "perfection of man and society, according to the laws of beauty, the "all-round harmonious development," "the awakening of the individual's latent creative powers" and the "elevation" and "expansion of human consciousness" became not only the centerpieces of all her rhetoric, but the purpose of her cultural politics both domestically and internationally. Consequently, a new quasi-ideology came into fashion in communist Bulgaria, characterized by a specific idiom of expression–an eclectic weaving together of Eastern religious thought, parapsychology and Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. As the Russian poet Valentin Sidorov once remarked: "in Bulgaria a paradoxical situation was created: it paid off if you passed as an occultist, if you shone on occasion with a quote not by Marx and Lenin, but by Roerich and Blavatsky."[85]

[85] Sidorov, *Lyudmila i Vanga*, 20.

Reconstructing Zhivkova's theory of culture from her myriad scattered speeches, writings and pronouncements can be a daunting undertaking for the scholar unacquainted with her belief system. At the most basic level, the concepts are abstract and far-flung, the language is nebulous and repetitive, and the logical connections between abstruse elaborations and concrete tasks are frequently impenetrable. In addition, while a lot of her speeches and writings were published both *antemortem* and posthumously, no systematic exposition of her thought has been attempted. While her idiosyncratic vocabulary was adopted in official parlance and concepts such as "all-round and harmoniously developed personalities," "aesthetic education," and "awakening the nation's creative powers" were in wide circulation, they were rarely imbued with the meanings Zhivkova imparted to them.

Besides linguistic and conceptual mystification, the problem of codifying Zhivkova's *Weltanschauung* is compounded by the fact that for her, as a follower of Agni Yoga, cultural and educational theory (as well as praxis) were inextricably intertwined with cosmogony, philosophy, ethics and religion. Moreover, due to her public position as a high-ranking member of Politburo and government; and daughter of party leader and head of state, the topic of her esoteric peregrinations was officially taboo during communism. As such, prior to publication, her advisers frequently "sanitized" her speeches by expunging any direct references to occultism, and by imparting at least a thin veneer of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. Both Kostadŭn Chakŭrov and Elit Nikolov testify in their memoirs that re-casting Zhivkova's ideas in Marxist-Leninist language was part of their professional duties. Regarding Zhivkova's attitude towards Marxism-Leninism, the post-1989 assessments of the people who worked with her overwhelmingly question the sincerity of her Marxism. According to Stoian Mikhailov, the Central Committee's Secretary for Ideology, she was not a Marxist. Bogomil Rainov claims in his recollections that she described socialism as a "dead political theory"[86] while for Bogomil Gerasimov she was often a critic of socialist reality and of the party.[87] Kostadŭn Chakŭrov similarly attributes to her the statement that "the party is a funeral procession of people who drag themselves after the hearse of a dead political teaching."[88] For Elit Nikolov and Alexander Lilov, however, Zhivkova was not a Marxist but her innovative practices in the cultural realm were not a counterpoint to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's credo."[89] My findings—which will be elaborated in Chapter Two where I discuss Zhivkova's occult communism in praxis—show not only that Zhivkova was not an opponent to Marxism in essence, and that her utopian impulses were not directed towards supplanting the socialist order, but also that Marxism and occultism are not as incompatible as they appear at first glance. Interestingly, the taboo around Zhivkova's belief system was not exploded after 1989, as the majority of her friends and associates[90] for the most part did not engage her occultism at all in their recollections (whether deliberately or simply due to unfamiliarity with the doctrines). If they did, they emphatically relegated it to the private sphere, conceding that her religiosity influenced her private and public conduct, but denying that her "personal beliefs" determined cultural politics.

Consequently, in order to abstract Zhivkova's theoretical thought, I had to extrapolate her belief system from hundreds of (not always lucid) speeches, pronouncements, her scholarly texts, transcripts of meetings, plenums and congresses. In addition, I read them against the writings of

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[86] Rainov, *Lyudmila*.
[87] Bogomil Gerasimov, *Diplomatsiia v zonata na kaktusa* (Sofia: Khristo Botev, 2008, 363).
[88] Chakŭrov, *Vtoriiat etazh,* 157.
[89] For an extensive discussion on the compatibility between Marxism and occultism, see Chapter Two.
[90] With the notable exception of two memoirs by BogomilRainov and Valentin Sidorov (Russian poet and an adherent to the Agni Yoga). Rainov, Bogomil. *Lyudmila: mechti i dela.* Sofia: Kameia, 2003. Sidorov, Valentin. *Lyudmila i Vanga*, Sofia: Izadatelstvo "Reporter", 1998. Two articles by historians who treat Zhivkova's religious beliefs to some extent are Iliiana Marcheva, "Prosveteniiat absolyutizŭm," in Valeri Kolev et.al, *Bŭlgarski dŭrzhavnitsi 1944*-1989 (Sofia: Skorpio, 2005); Mikhail Gruev, "Lyudmila Zhivkova—pŭtiat kŭm Agni Yoga," in Evgenia Kalinova et.al. eds., *Prelomni vremena:yubileen sbornik v chest na 65-godishninata na profesor Lyubomir Ognianov,* 796-816.

the (even less translucent) thinkers she venerated and emulated, most notably Nicholas and Helena Roerich[91] and Helena Blavatsky[92]. I pay special attention to the transcripts of the weekly meetings of the Presidium of the Committee of Culture, typically attended by 15 to 20 of Zhivkova's closest associates, all of whom were notable members of the intelligentsia and distinguished experts in their respective fields. Assured and animated among her closest associates, Zhivkova frequently regaled them with lengthy impassioned forays into occultist

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[91] Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947) -- Émigré Russian painter, poet, writer, explorer, archeologist, Theosophist and founder of the Agni Yoga Society. In 1893 he matriculated simultaneously from the University of St. Petersburg (where he obtained a law degree) and the Academy of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (where he studied drawing and painting). Initially, he established himself as a painter of scenes from Slavic prehistory. From 1906 to 1910, he was director of the School for Encouragement of Fine Arts, Russia, president of the Museum of Russian Arts, and first president of Mir Iskusstva. He also joined the Moscow Art Theatre Diagilev Ballet, famously producing the designs for Prince Igor (1909) and The Rite of Spring (1913), the libretto of which he co-wrote with Igor Stravinsky. After the Russian Revolution, he and his wife Helena Roerich emigrated to the United States under the auspices of the Art Institute of Chicago. In New York, he established himself as a mystic sage, while Helena Roerich became a channel for Master Morya, one of the spiritual gurus first brought forth by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891). Helena Roerich's channelled materials became the foundational corpus of what became known as Agni Yoga, an offshoot of theosophy. Influenced by the theosophical writings of Helena Blavatsky, the co-founder of Theosophy, and by Rudolf Steiner, founder of Anthroposophy, the Roerichs established a number of institutions with the aim of bringing humanity together through culture, art and education. In the 1920s, allegedly upon a call from his spiritual master Mahatma Morya, Roerich visited India, then together with his family completed a mammoth trek through Ladakh, Chinese Turkestan, the Altai Mountains, the Gobi Desert, and Tibet. Ostensibly leading an American archaeological, ethnographic, and artistic expedition, the Roerichs also secretly visited Moscow, and the true purpose of their journey remains a matter of speculation. He aimed to establish a Budhist-Communist theocracy in Tibet, Mongolia, and the Altai, posing as a reincarnation of the fifth Dalai Lama, who allegedly came to cleanse Tibetan Buddhism from modern evils. Georgi Chicherin, a People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, famously described Roerich as "a half-Communist and a half-Buddhist." Eventually, Roerich established a research facility in the Himalayan village of Naggar, India, and lobbied for the passage of an international treaty to protect art in times of war (which became known as the Roerich Pact or the Banner of Peace). This effort gained him two nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1934–1935, Roerich traveled to Manchuria and Mongolia on an expedition sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with the aim of collecting seeds of plants that prevented the destruction of fertile layers of soil. Eventually, the Roerichs remained in India, supporting the freedom movement there and befriending its leaders, such as poet Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru. When Roerich died in 1947, Nehru, the new leader of independent India, delivered his eulogy.

[92] One of the most influential occult thinkers of the nineteenth century, Blavatsky left behind conflicting images of adventuress, author, mystic, guru, occultist, and charlatan. In 1875 she founded the Theosophical Society in New York with the aid of Col. Henry Steel Olcott and William Q. Judge. The Theosophical Society professed to expound the esoteric tradition of Buddhism and aimed at forming a universal brotherhood; studying and making known the ancient religions, philosophies, and sciences; investigating the laws of nature; and developing the divine powers latent in man. It was claimed to be directed by secret Mahatmas, or Masters of Wisdom. In order to gain converts to Theosophy, Blavatsky felt obliged to appear to perform miracles, which were subsequently proven to be fraudulent. Her magnum opus, The *Secret Doctrine*, which she claimed to have been written in a supernormal condition, became the foundational text of Theosophy, which itself is the fountainhead of modern Western esotericism. *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*. Gordon J. Melton, ed.Vol. 1. 5th ed. (Detroit: Gale Group, 2001).

thought, exuding the sense of mission of an initiated adept.[93] Obscurantist, irrational and baffling as her ideas might *prima facie* appear, they make sense if put in the context of the religious sources of their inspiration.

A systematization of Zhivkova's cultural theory can be challenging from the very beginning—her understanding of the concept of "culture." Deviating from any standard Marxist-Leninist definitions, Lyudmila Zhivkova incessantly impressed in her speeches the need to understand "culture" in a much broader and all-encompassing sense as "the veneration of beauty and light,"[94] "the aspiration towards light, development, progress, evolution"[95]… "towards the unfolding of human consciousness, so that the latter can increasingly encompass and subjugate the laws that govern the universe"… "towards elevation to a higher and higher stage of existence."[96] During the meetings of the Presidium of the Committee for Culture, she frequently chastises her deputies for failing to grasp the very essence of what "culture" signifies and relentlessly urges them to understand it as one comprehensive concept which incorporates the "evolution of the whole universe and of natural phenomena," together with "the all-round formation and development of the human being as a phenomenon," as well as "the manifestation of the eternal essence that is inherent in man and is constantly in the process of evolving."[97] Since culture is the main factor in the formation and evolution of the individual, society, nation and the universe, it "penetrates all spheres of life."

Similarly, aesthetics does not pertain simply to the realm of arts, in general, and to the faculties of art appreciation, in particular. Zhivkova frequently bemoans the fact that even the

[93] For their part, some of her first deputies were initiated adherents to her belief system (like artist Svetlin Rusev and poet Lyubomir Levchev), others were sympathizers just to her permissive cultural politics, and still others were mostly interested in career advancement and Zhivkova's sponsorship.
[94] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 114, p. 24
[95] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 86, p.14-15
[96] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 90
[97] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 78, p. 4.

officials of the Committee of Culture have difficulties overcoming the "traditional attitude towards aesthetics" as pertaining to the arts. In her understanding, aesthetics is "the science of the development of the senses," which are "the organs of consciousness."[98] Therefore, aesthetics is not the cultivation of musical, artistic and cultural sensitivities but the expansion of one's consciousness via "perfecting the senses and organs that could help one perceive the beautiful in life," so that through continuous self-perfection "one can become creator himself."[99] In a different pronouncement, she clarifies that by consciousness she means not just physical consciousness but also "emotional, psychic and mental consciousness," which cannot be based solely on the intellect, as taught by the traditional school disciplines. The goal of aesthetics thus is two-fold: first, to transform one into an "an all-round and harmoniously developed personality" through harmonizing one's physical, spiritual, emotional, mental and psychic aspects and bringing them into equilibrium. Second, aesthetics is at the same time to bring harmony and beauty to interpersonal, as well as international relations. On one level then, aesthetics is "the science," which "employing scientific methods" develops perception and the individual's capacity "to reflect the environment using his/her spiritual energies." Simultaneously, because aesthetics aims at the perfection of the individual, society, and humanity, it is inherently ethical in nature. This is why Zhivkova sees "the problem of the moral-ethical foundation " as one of the most fundamental principles of aesthetics. "Take all world religions and philosophical teachings"—she instructs her collaborators, "they all begin from the moral-ethical foundation."[100] Ethics and aesthetics are intertwined as "everything in the

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[98] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 108, 16.See also TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 113; Lyudmila Zhivkova, *S aprilsko vdŭhnovenie v borbata za mir isotsializŭm, za edinstvo, tvorchestvo, krasota* (Sofia: Partizdat**,** 1982), 120-126.
[99] Ibid.,
[100] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 1, p. 6

individual must be beautiful– morality, feelings, thought, actions and aspirations."[101]

Moral-ethical edification for Zhivkova had openly religious connotations. Spirituality (*dukhovnost*), "spiritual development," "spiritual renewal," "spiritual powers," "spiritual processes," "the spiritual sphere," "spiritual needs," "the spiritual component," "the spiritual forces and energies of the nation" are among the most frequently appearing concepts in her speeches. So preponderant is spirituality, that in a complete reversal of dialectical materialism, for Zhivkova it is consciousness that determines life and the spiritual that determines the material: "How can you doubt that when we talk about awakening of man's spiritual and creative forces, and about elevating the level of his mental activity, this is not going to reflect on his biology and physiology?"[102] The emphasis on consciousness and spirituality for her was not incompatible with materialism. Indeed, during a discussion of the program for the celebration of 110-year-anniversary of Lenin's birth, Zhivkova openly reprimanded the authors of the program for presenting idealism in an unflattering light. "I am against this"–she objected and subsequently urged the authors of the material to revise that part: "We don't know so many secrets of nature that according to me it is truly ignorant to make distinctions between idealism and materialism. They are not divided by a Chinese wall, this is uninterrupted evolution we are talking about, constant different aspects in the development of matter, consciousness and the movement of various cosmic fields…But this is terminology that has yet to be explicated by science, so that the ignorance of the masses can be overcome, including the ignorance of a good deal of our scientists."[103]

As central as spirituality is, it not opposed to science. On the contrary, because of the

[101] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 124, p. 8-9
[102] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 1, p.6
[103] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 114, p. 23

"mutually conditioned interdependence between man as a microcosm and nature or universe as a macrocosm," Zhivkova's vision of education necessitates the synthesis of spirituality and science. This formulation seems innocuous enough to be a staple of her officially published texts and appears in multiple variations: "the interconnectedness between the processes that take place within human consciousness and the processes in nature and the universe,"[104] "or the relationship between the emanation of man and his/her energy and the cosmic emanation and energy."[105] It is in front of her close associates, however, that this theme receives undisguised occultist elaborations. On one occasion she explained to them that all changes in outer space are directly reflected upon life on earth–not only upon "the movement of earth's strata, upon precipitation, and the formation and development of human life," but also "upon the way people think and upon the formation of new psychic and physical structures of man."[106] On a different occasion, she spoke of the link between the energy balance of man and cosmic energy balance: "Please, do bear in mind that the more energy sources are depleted on earth, the more this energy—which the majority of people have not used, they will increasingly discover within themselves."[107] Insisting on these interconnections as "universal laws," Zhivkova frequently invoked "the new vistas" opening up in front of "modern science," posing the question of the need to integrate the sciences and to study the interdisciplinary connections between cosmobiology, biochemistry, astrobiology and astrophysics.[108]

Since questions about the origin and evolution of the Universe are not only at the core of Zhivkova's *Weltanschauung* but have a direct bearing on her cultural politics, a brief foray into cosmogony is inescapable. Zhivkova's speeches are replete with words and phrases such as

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[104] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 93, p.17
[105] TsDA, F. 405, op. 9, a.e. 231
[106] TsDA, F. 405, op. 9, a.e. 207
[107] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 93, 17.
[108] TsDA, F. 405, op. 9, a.e. 231; TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 93; TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 214

“evolution,” “the universe,” “the cosmos,” “infinity,” the “infinite spiral-like development of the universe,” “the eternal motion of the Cosmos,” "development according to the laws of the spiral" “the millennial history and evolution of nature and life on the Planet,” “cosmic perturbations/emanations/vibrations, “the "vibrations of the electrons” “the fire-breathing vibrations of the Cosmic rays,” the "sonorous vibration of the seven-stage harmony of the Eternal," etc. To an observer unseasoned in occultist thought it might seem prima facie perplexing what cosmology (the evolution of the universe) and history (the evolution of humankind) have to do with the particular tasks of Bulgarian cultural politics in the 1970s, but in Zhivkova’s worldview all these were inextricably bound up. The “cosmic approach to studying reality” that she admired in her idols, or as she called them “titans of the spirit” (Nicholas Roerich, Leondardo da Vinci, RabindranathTagore, Mikhail Lomonosov, and Einstein, among others[109]) became the standard that she rigorously applied not only to her scholarly writings, but to the activities of the Committee of Culture, and to every single program and initiative that came out of it during Zhivkova’s tenure as Chairperson.

Disentangling the connections between the universe, the spiral-like development, the expansion of consciousness, the harmonious development of the individual and how all these relate to Bulgaria’s domestic and international cultural politics, requires first and foremost grasping the “universal laws of evolution.” We start from the fundamental premise that the problem of human evolution is bound with the problem of the evolution of nature, of human

[109]These “titans of the spirit” or “cosmic personalities” were at the core of a large-scale National Program for the Harmonious Development of Man. The goal of the program was the popularization of the life and work of world examples of “all-round and harmoniously developed personalities.” Each year was to be dedicated to “an exemplary individual creative personality who contributed to civilization” (each year was a successive “phase” in the long-term program). Through various nation-wide initiatives—exhibitions, lectures, seminars, public readings, commemorations--the Bulgarian nation was supposed to become acquainted with the polymaths’ achievements in all the fields of their activity. The program was launched in 1978 with the Nicolas Roerich phase, followed by the Leonardo da Vinci phase in 1979, with the year of Lenin coming only third in 1980. For details, see Chapter Two.

society and above all, of the universe.[110] Because life "was born not on Earth but in the universe," the "evolution of humankind, of nature, of society and everything that surrounds us on earth" is but a stage of life in the Universe.[111] Evolution is "infinite, without beginning and without an end" and it takes place according to the "infinite spiral circle of development" or the "most fundamental law of constant creation." Here is how Zhivkova illuminated this process to her associates:

> We all know from experience that everything is in the process of constant development and transformation, which always strives in a spiral-like manner for the ideal geometrical shape – the circle. When we speak about development and evolution, we must know, that everything changes over a millionth of a second, whether we are aware of this or not. That is why we must aspire towards larger and larger synthesis, which will unite all the preceding elements in this ideal circular shape, which contains within itself all the elements of stagist development.[112]

Synthesis (as adapted from Agni Yoga) is thus the method to achieve expansion of consciousness and elevation to a higher stage in the spiral of development. One way synthesis was vigorously applied to all cultural projects, initiatives and events, was what Zhivkova called "the triunine formula past-present-future." Because the past, present, and future in her worldview "co-exist in the time-space continuum,"[113] she saw them as "a unitary process." Looking for the continuities between history and the present from the perspective of the future was the goal of every initiative in the cultural sphere because that was the only way to elevate the evolution of the nation to "yet higher and higher spiral circles of development." Since the aspirations were grand, Bulgarian cultural politics could not be but ambitious. Hyper-ambitious

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[110] TsDA, F. 288B, Op.1, a.e. 86, 18.
[111] TsDA, F. 288B, Op.1, a.e. 86
[112] TsDA, F. 288B, Op.1, a.e. 90, p. 5-6.
[113] TsDA, F. 288B, Op.1, a.e. 116, 5.

and demanding, Zhivkova also set extremely high standards for all her employees, while trying hard to imbue them with her own work ethic, enthusiasm and urgent sense of mission:

> Everything that we undertake in the field of culture is directed towards the development of our nation forward, towards the future...towards climbing up to a higher level of evolution**.** Which means, there must be creative tension [in our work], and not contentment; we must constantly look for new forms, new methods, new tools for the manifestations of our cultural politics. Every contentment is death! Better to make mistakes than stay passive and be content.[114]

During one of the meetings of the Presidium of the Committee of Culture, in the course of discussing the concrete program for the commemoration of the "1300-Year Anniversary from the creation of the Bulgarian state," Zhivkova parenthetically explained to her deputies how the law of the spiral works "scientifically" and how it applies to the exigencies of Bulgarian cultural politics:

> Do you know what law is in effect in the spiral-like circles of development? The aspiration, the creative beginning, climbs up as high as the highest ideal, which could be attained at that respective stage of development. If this creative beginning or force, however, shot upwards like an explosion, it would destroy everything already formed around it. To avoid this destruction, the law of gravity comes into effect. It is precisely these two laws that form the spiral-like circles of action, the stages and levels of development. Of course not everything which constitutes our aspiration will be practically realized…,there is a middle ground, or the balance that we get between the lowest and the highest stage. So the higher our aspirations and quests when we are organizing our cultural events, the higher the middle ground will be.[115]

Speaking of maximally high aspirations, it should be pointed out that aesthetic education through high culture was not reserved for the spiritual perfection of the Bulgarian nation only. Rather, the scope of aesthetic education had global, or to use Zhivkova's favorite term "planetary" aspirations, which were to be pursued by Bulgaria's international cultural policy.

[114] TsDA, F. 288B, Op.1, a.e. 90, 6.
[115] Ibid., 15.

Zhivkova believed that the vehement popularization of Bulgarian art and culture abroad[116] would make Bulgaria a global "pioneer" in "showing the world that culture and art are the most important factors for unfolding the creative potentials of individual." As she explained, besides the propagation and display of Bulgarian cultural artifacts, Bulgarian cultural events abroad "should have as a major goal also the harmonious development of the people who interact with Bulgarian culture abroad. The aesthetic program and aesthetic education is not a patent and prerogative of the Bulgarian people. Our country will fulfill its international duty by contributing with its own culture towards the harmonious development of other cultures.[117]" Finally, in addition to being linked to the national program of aesthetic education of the Bulgarian youth and nation, in particular, and global aesthetic education, in general, the significance of culture and aesthetics was directly linked to the peaceful coexistence of nations, mutual recognition, and international cooperation. In this relation, another significant premise in Zhivkova's conceptual apparatus is what she calls the "synthesis of cultures and civilizations." According to this view, the interaction between cultures and civilizations has always existed and it has had its historical stages during which the center of this "universal evolutionary process of cultural synthesis" shifts geographically. This is how she illuminated the synthesis of cultures in both theory and praxis:

> If a nation wants to evolve and reach a more advanced stage, it needs to understand the centrifugal and centripetal forces. The centrifugal forces are the forces that affect the so-called expansion and contraction. The centrifugal forces emanate from a center sideways,

[116] Admittedly, the 1970s witnessed a fervent promotion of Bulgarian cultural and artistic artifacts both within the socialist bloc and in the West. For example, the high profile exhibition "Thracian Art within the Bulgarian Lands," which at the time garnered widespread international acclaim, was shown in thirty countries, among them France, Austria, the United Kingdom, the United States, Mexico, Japan, Germany, India, and others. These exhibitions and cultural events were typically accompanied by a high-level visit from Zhivkova for the event opening. More exhibitions such as "One Thousand Years of Bulgarian Icons: 9th to19thCenturies" and "Bulgarian Manuscripts: 10th to 18th Centuries" traveled around the world and put Bulgaria on the cultural map of Europe.

[117] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 17, p. 4.

> and in the process of this expansion sideways, a national culture spills over new spheres and has points of contact with the best accomplishments of other cultures and civilizations. In this process of expansion of the centrifugal forces, we have the expansion of culture and its supplementation and enrichment with new elements and achievements. When this process reaches a certain level of expansion, the so-called assimilation process begins. This means that whatever is close to the national culture and traditions, is assimilated by them and these assimilation processes determine the new elements of the culture. Then the reverse process starts: the centripetal forces in the national assimilation process begin to contract things, to harmonize them. The more active the assimilation process, the higher the level of evolution of every individual, because this is also the process of personal evolution. These are universal laws common to all humankind.[118]

All these overtures in cosmology, philosophy and science, lead us to the essence of Zhivkova's cultural and educational theory: that culture and art can no longer be perceived as separate spheres, but must be integrated, together with science, religion and education in order to realize Zhivkova's ultimate pet project, of which she was an adamant proponent, that of "aesthetic education" (*esteticheskо vŭzpitanie*). To recap, the goal of aesthetic education is to the unfold the creative powers of every individual (which are latent and innate) and to direct these innate capabilities into definite channels of expression, to provide the methods of perfecting the mind and expanding the individual consciousness, so that ultimately individuals can reach all-round and harmonious development. She did not hesitate to impress these cultural imperatives in front of the most prominent party cadres of the time. At the July 1979 Plenum of the Central Committee of the BCP she defined all-round and harmonious development as "the voluntary and conscious, consistent with nature and purposeful, complex and integral development of all parts of the human organism, successive and stage-by-stage development of all sides and elements of the structure of his/her consciousness."[119] In practice, that meant that from a very early age children must be taught (in stages) "how to uncover and organize their faculties, how to

[118] TsDA, F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 90, 10-12.
[119] Zhivkova, Lyudmila. *S aprilskovdŭhnovenie v borbata za mir I sotsializŭm, zaedinstvo, tvorchestvo, krasota.*Sofia: Partizdat**,** 1982, 204.Speech at the Plenum of CC of BCP, 17 July 1979.

purposefully direct their mental-emotional and psychic lives, how consciously to integrate them around the loftiest purpose and ideal in life." The desired outcome would be that:

> the encounter with beauty will become a necessity…The self-perfecting individual, who will pursue his purpose unswervingly in the name of Beauty and Truth, will overcome the inevitable obstacles of development, will organize and transform into a monolithic totality the separate elements of consciousness and knowledge, will consciously sacrifice the best of what (s)he owns in the name of universal progress, in the name of the common good. In this infinite process of development, every worker will become a creator who will consciously give his creative contribution towards the transformation of reality according to the laws of beauty.[120]

Because the standard educational system is for Zhivkova "anachronistic and conservative," Bulgarian artists were "crippled": for example, painters "are talented but they understand neither music, nor literature, nor theater." The new type of "integral training" Zhivkova fervently advocated, in contrast, would ensure that the new persons of the future (and not just artists) "will be people who can write music, sing, play ballet, draw. Because art is synthetic, it is integral."[121] The architect of the future, for example, will not be just an architect: he will be a creator, who will have the integral knowledge "of a sculptor and architect, engineer and poet, and above all of a person with preserved aesthetics and spirituality."[122] In one of her speeches the term she used for this new society of the future was "integral, synthesized communism."[123]

The incomprehension with which the synthesized communism of the future was met even among some of the artists, is aptly encapsulated in a comment by sculptor Dimitŭr Ostoich during one of the plenums of the Committee of Culture. Oblivious to both the nuanced theoretical complexities Zhivkova imparted to aesthetic education, and to the integral

[120] Zhivkova, *S aprilskovdŭhnovenie…*, 168.
[121] TsDA, F. 405, op. 9, a.e. 118, p.79-80.
[122] TsDA, F. 405, op. 9, a.e. 118, p. 40.
[123] TsDA, F. 405, op. 9, a.e. 140

interconnections between its various components, he bluntly stated:

> These documents talk about the all-round and harmonious development of the individual…of multi-faceted and versatile development. It is high time someone sat down and clarified the terms, so that we can see what tasks we are actually setting. What is the model of the all-round personality? Can you develop me all around – including musically, when I have no ear for music?...To set such abstract, unattainable goals and to tie the problematic of education to an unattainable, abstract, unspecified slogan would be wrong.[124]

Zhivkova's political adviser Kostadin Chakŭrov echoed similar thoughts in his post-1989 recollections of his first impressions of Lyudmila Zhivkova's unusual and hyper-ambitious working style. In 1975, having freshly transferred to the Committee of Culture from the Central Committee of the BCP under the recommendation of Todor Zhivkov, and being himself an orthodox Marxist, he at first found it difficult to adapt to Zhivkova's demands and management style. This is how he describes his first months at the Committee of Culture:

> I was torn in a reality which was full of contradictions, tension and absurdities. Whatever document or information I would prepare, she [Zhivkova] would always add to it her large-scale ideas. I was tormented by the fact that she cared very little for the economy, for the party, for social policy. Work was stressful, with unexpected mood swings, with contradictory instructions, frequently completely detached from real processes in the country. She elevated cultural phenomena on a pedestal and was not interested in looking at how they related to other social spheres; or in understanding that the economy and politics inevitably influence cultural life.[125]

While Minister of Culture and Politburo member Zhivkova's theory of culture might garble any cultural historian of communism (or indeed any culturologist) with its complexity

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[124] TsDA, F. 404, op. 10, a.e. 276, p.54-55. It should be noted that this speech was delivered at the 1983 Plenum of the Committee of Culture, that is two years after Zhivkova's untimely death and it cannot be verified whether Ostoich's frustration was directly addressed to Zhivkova's policy, though he is clearly mocking her signature formulations. Even though his polemical speech nicely contrasts with the compliant speeches of the other speakers, it should be emphasized that explicit criticism towards Zhivkova's cultural course was very seldom publically expressed during her tenure as minister of culture and indeed until 1989.
[125] Chakŭrov, *Vtoriiat etazh,* 152.

(and perplexity), to fellow travelers the conceptual apparatus is instantly recognizable. Indeed this eclectic weaving together of insights from philosophy, religion, art, science, and parapsychology into some sort of a coherent Weltanschauung is a signature of all strands of modern occultism.[126] In Zhivkova's case, having passed through several stages of dabbling in the occult prior to the car accident,[127] since 1974 she was an ardent devotee of Nicholas and Helena Roerich's Agni Yoga. She adapted her understanding of culture from Nicholas Roerich, who had defined culture as deriving from "Ur," which in many Eastern languages (he had given examples with the Hebraic, Phrygian and Armenian roots of the word) meant light of fire.[128] From the spiritual definition of culture as "the reverence of Light,"[129] with Beauty and Knowledge as its foundations,[130] to culture as the synthesis of science, art, philosophy, and religion,[131] to the all-around man developed on all the planes of life, Zhivkova spoke and wrote the language of Agni Yoga. Her notion of aesthetic education is also traceable to Roerich's theory of education (derived from Eastern philosophy), which was predicated on the

[126] For a magisterial overview of the history of modern Western occultism, see James Webb's pioneering studies *The Occult Underground* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1974) and *The Occult Establishment* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1976).

[127] Such as her interest in Peter Dŭnov's interwar esoteric-mystical movement White Brotherhood (to which Chapter Four is dedicated) or her close friendship with Vanga, the local-clairvoyant-turned-international-star, whom Zhivkova, as well as many party functionaries, members of the intelligentsia, and foreign diplomats and politicians, consulted on a regular basis and who was an object of study at the Institute of Suggestology (for details, see Chapter Three)

[128] Nicholas Roerich, *Fiery Stronghold.* Edem., *Realm of Light*

[129] Nicholas Roerich, *Fiery Stronghold,* 337. To highlight the centrality of spirituality to his definition of culture Roerich explicitly made a distinction between culture and civilization: "Up to now many people consider it fit to replace the word 'culture' by 'civilization,' forgetting completely that the very Latin root *Cult* has a very deep spiritual significance, whereas civilization has as its root a civic social structure of life. It seems quite clear that every country passes through certain social steps, viz., civilization, which in its highest synthesis forms the eternal and indestructible conception of culture. As we see from many examples, civilization may perish, may be altogether annihilated, but culture creates its great heritage upon indestructible spiritual tablets, which sustain the future generation." Roerich, *Fiery Stronghold, 45-46.*

[130] "Culture is the emulation of highest Bliss, of highest Beauty, of highest knowledge. After ignorance we reach civilization; then gradually we acquire education, then comes intelligence; then follows refinement and the synthesis opens the gates to high culture." Nicholas Roerich, *Himavat,* 292.

[131] "Religion and science must not differ in their essences…Science cannot destroy the concept of the divinity of Fire, just as religion cannot hinder the fine analyses, employed by science…All great discoveries for the benefit of mankind will not come from huge laboratories, but will be made by the spirit of the scientists who possess synthesis."Agni Yoga (Helena Roerich), *Fiery World*, III, 60.

"release of latent soul forces, the unfoldment of the soul characteristics of the child, the expansion of his consciousness" [132] so that he/she can ultimately acquire "the viewpoint of a universal observer."

While her *Weltanschauung* is genealogically traceable to Agni Yoga, Zhivkova was not just a blind follower of the teaching. A close reading of her language (e.g. the use of parables and metaphors from Bulgarian history and custom, for example) and of her ever more frequent forays into esoteric elaborations, reveals that Zhivkova perceived herself as theoretically elaborating and enriching the teaching. Principally, she saw her biggest contribution in finding novel and original forms to adapt Agni Yoga to Bulgarian socio-political and cultural realities.

Thus, "fascinating" and "unorthodox" as Zhivkova has been claimed to be by both her admirers and Western observers, a detailed reconstruction of her *Weltanschauung* indicates that her heralded "anomaly" derives from her injection of spirituality into Bulgarian cultural life. This chapter offered a glimpse into Zhivkova's worldview, arguing that Zhivkova's religiosity both permeated her theoretical apparatus and defined the priorities of Bulgaria's cultural policy. The obverse side of her indeed staggering activity in the cultural realm from 1974 onwards (and especially the period 1979-1981), was Zhivkova's immersion in Agni Yoga, and her adamantine sense of mission (in the religious sense of the word) to weave it into the fabric of Bulgarian society by winning over to her cause first her close collaborators,[133] then the intelligentsia, and

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[132] "The seat of the soul, or consciousness, is the center of the universal circle, and its development or expansion takes place from the center towards the circumference, from the inside, outward." In Garabed Paelian, *Nicholas Roerich* (Agoura CA: The Aquarian Educational Group, 1974, 86).

[133] There are numerous examples in Zhivkova's personal Fond where she proselytizes with missionary zeal, openly inviting her associates to "grasp the essence of things." To provide one example from the 31 March 1981 meeting of the Presidium of CC: "I have to tell you that the potential is tremendous, but the fruit is not ripe yet. As you know, the universal mother or matter has this universal law that before the fruit is born, conception must be a secret process, so that this new creation is not destroyed prematurely. You must know this. The sages say that no architect reveals his plan to the builders in advance, because through some ignorant self-initiative, they can distort the original blueprint. Do bear these things in mind! I speak to you as people whom I would like to stimulate to think and ponder these things. You have to realize that these are universal laws. Whoever can see them, pozhalusta, look

then “the nation” as a whole. Since every single initiative, project, and program in the cultural-artistic realm was both derived from her *Weltanschauung* and imbued with occult meanings, symbolism and goals, Zhivkova’s religio-philosophical worldview cannot be decoupled from the assessment of her cultural politics. As her spiritual guru bluntly put it, “it would be absurd to contemplate her life,”—and here I would add her legacy in general-- “without having a proper understanding of her credo.” [134]

Rather than her purported pro-Westernness, anti-Sovietism or anti-communism (as argued in the memoir literature bordering on hagiography), I see the distinctiveness of her spiritual utopian politics in that, given her roles as Zhivkov’s daughter, as a Politburo member, and as a hyperactive minister of a super-ministry, Zhivkova had virtually unlimited resources at her disposal to try to implement her spiritual-aesthetico utopia at the state level. At the same time—as the next chapter on the specific policies and their outcomes will show--although many of her utopian visions verged on the grotesque, her policies contributed to a certain liberalization of the cultural sphere, and to intellectuals’ active participation in the formulation and management of cultural policy.

at them. The more your augment the faculty of introspection, observation and the manifestation of the processes (visible and invisible), of analysis, of synthesis etc., the more things will become visible to you.” F. 288B, op.1, a.e. 138, 19. Or another example from the 16 April 1981 meeting: “Don’t forget that our country gave birth to the “Banner of Peace” Assembly and thus Bulgaria must become the world center of cultures and civilizations. What are you thinking—that these concepts—beauty, harmony perfection—are just empty words? That we just talk about them but we’ll keep living the old way? No! Whoever wants to work, pozhalusta, let him perfect himself, purify himself, grow, aspire towards light. Culture is *ur* – light; the reverence of light and the aspiration towards it. You will get to understand what culture means. Everyone who doesn’t know, must understand and direct himself towards it.” . 288B, op.1, a.e. 140, 27.

[134] Rainov, *Lyudmila,* 10.

Chapter Two

Occult Communism in Praxis: Aesthetics, Spirituality and Utopia

> The problem of utopias…is not only the margin between the unrealized and the impossible but also the margin between fiction, in a positive sense, and fancy, in a pathological sense. The utopian structure cheats our categorization of the difference between the sane and insane. It contests their clear-cut distinction.
>
> Paul Ricoeur[135]

In the opening words of his last book *The Aesthetic Dimension,* first published in German in 1977, Herbert Marcuse felt the need to justify his concern with aesthetics in a situation "where the miserable reality can be changed only through radical political praxis." He conceded to the gap between real and ideal inherent in art: "It would be senseless to deny the element of despair inherent in this concern: a retreat into a world of fiction where existing conditions are changed and overcome only in the realm of the imagination."[136] But rather than relegating aesthetics to a mere substitute for politics in a period of despair, he aimed to rescue the radical transformative nature of art. As he put it in a 1979 lecture: "art can enter, as regulative idea, the political struggle to change the world."[137] His entire work saw aesthetics and politics as intertwined, with art (the realm of the imagination) as an oblique route to real change.

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[135] Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia,* ed. By George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 302.
[136] Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 1.
[137] Herbert Marcuse, 'Irvine March 5, 1979' (lecture notes), cited in Douglas Kellner, "Introduction: Marcuse, Art, and Liberation," in Marcuse, *Art and Liberation*: *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Vol. 4* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 69

At the exact same time when Western Marxists were taking a polemical stance against the problematic interpretation of the function of art by orthodox Marxists (i.e. the notion that only proletarian art could be progressive), in Marxist-Leninist Bulgaria, Lyudmila Zhivkova, a top ranking communist politician, took aesthetics and art -- and she had neither proletarian art nor socialist realism in mind -- not as an oblique, but as a direct route to a reimagining of reality under late socialism. Inspired by her Eastern religious beliefs, she sought to forge a nation of "all-round and harmoniously developed individuals," devoted to spiritual self-perfection, who would ultimately "work, live and create according to the laws of beauty." While Chapter One pieced together Zhivkova's way of seeing and imagining the future, Chapter Two will demonstrate that her *Weltanschauung* was translated into a large-scale aesthetic-spiritual utopia, which posited art, culture, aesthetics and spirituality not only as a core state priority in Bulgarian politics, but also as a way to revamp the entire communist project. I use the term "utopia" both in Leszek Kolakowski's narrow definition as the conviction that "a definitive and unsurpassable condition is attainable that can be arrived at by human efforts"[138] and in conjunction with Ernst Bloch's important reinterpretation of utopia as a feature of reality itself and as having a place in the now of the moment. This chapter thus tells the story of Zhivkova's aesthetic utopianism in praxis—the policy embodiments and the outcomes of her efforts to create *all-round harmoniously developed individuals* in three "large-scale long-term, complex" programs: aesthetic education, the National Program for Harmonious Development of Man, and the International Children's Assembly "Banner of Peace" under the patronage of UNESCO. The main question the chapter will seek to answer is: What did Zhivkova's idiosyncratic attempt to

[138] Leszek Kolakowski, "The Death of Utopia Reconsidered." In: Kolakowski L (ed.) *Modernity on Endless Trial*. (Chicago: University Press, Chicago, 1991), 132.

forge the “new socialist man” via spirituality and high culture mean for Bulgaria’s cultural politics, political culture, and sense of national culture during late socialism?

Nationwide Aesthetic Education: “The spiritual baggage with which we will book a place in tomorrow’s communist society”[139]

The national program for aesthetic education was ideologically and theoretically grounded in the program adopted at the Tenth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party (20-25 April 1971) which stipulated as a dual goal the simultaneous development of the material infrastructure of “mature socialism”[140] and the “cultural and spiritual uplift and perfection of the individual and society.” Because the new man of mature socialism was developing in the context of the scientific-technological revolution, the rational component had undue preponderance. This posed the “question for the all-round and harmonious development of the individual” and for “the right equilibrium between man’s rational and emotional sides” as a most fundamental social problem.[141] To the “brute aggression of technology… pollution, and the destruction of the spiritual essence of the human personality,” the Bulgarian Communist Party was to counterpoise the leading role of culture and spirituality.[142] The ideologues vowed that standardization and homogenization (which unfortunately did not bypass Bulgarian society, too) were not to rule the

[139] Artist Svetlin Rusev in F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 43, p. 6
[140] “Mature socialism” (also encountered as “developed socialism,” “developed socialist society,” or “actually existing socialism”) was the second stage in the transition from socialism to communism. The term was introduced by Khrushchev at the XXII CPSU Congress but it was Brezhnev who popularized it in his 1967 speech on the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution and made it an official component of Soviet ideology at the XXIV CPSU Congress of 1971. The notion was introduced because in 197, the planned economic indicators were unfulfilled and the final goal of “completing the construction of socialism and building communism” (set in 1962) remained remote (while simultaneously consumerism was booming in the West). The ideological formula was an attempt to salvage the party ideologues from the embarrassment of unfulfilled party promises and prognoses and to lower popular expectations for staggering economic accomplishments. At the same time, the communist parties across Eastern Europe tried to make the reality of mature socialism more palatable by creating the conditions for limited consumption and foregrounding “care for the human being” as a primary concern. Mature socialism was presumably attained in the USSR in the early 1960s and in certain countries of Easter Europe by the mid-1970s.
[141] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 93, p. 13.
[142] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 48, p. 6.

day, but to be subjugated, so as to overcome Goethe's apprehensions that "technology in unison with tastelessness, is the enemy of art."[143] This was also the central preoccupation of the Third Congress of Bulgarian Culture in 1979, which defined as strategic national goal the development and unfolding of every individual's creative powers and faculties in an effort to attain all-round and harmonious development of the individual and society.[144] The increased leisure time and cultural and aesthetic literacy of the masses would usher in a new flourishing of both professional and amateur art, high-brow and popular culture for "the more society approaches communism, the more the artist will awaken in every single individual, both as connoisseur and creator of beauty."[145] As General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov laconically put it at the Eight Congress of the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union: "The road to communism is the road to beauty."[146] Another senior government member echoed the same sentiment in declaring that "it is only natural for mature socialist society, which radically solved the question of bread for everyone, to also radically solve the question of beauty for everyone."[147] Just as "the utopian predecessors of Marxism, like Tommaso Campanella, Thomas Moore, Charles Fourier, and Etienne Cabet pondered a just, humane and harmonious society and sun cities," and Renaissance architects such as Leonardo da Vinci and Filarete designed the ideal city, so too would Bulgaria develop a society of all-round and harmonious personalities, pledged the ideologues of aesthetic education.[148] And beauty was not only a formidable force for the uplifting of the individual but it was also a powerful lever for the elimination of the differences

[143] Milcho Germanov in Ibid., 13.
[144] F. 405, Op. 10, a.e. 272, p. 11.
[145] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 93, 13.
[146] 405, Op. 9, a.e. 43, 95.
[147] Todor Stoianov, Chairperson of the Committee for Radio and Television at the Council of Ministers. F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 43, 38.
[148] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 48, p. 6.

between the city and the countryside, manual and mental labor, "for the liquidation of alienation, and technicization" and for the construction of a unified socialist nation."[149] Ultimately, the program would signal a new attitude toward the socialist personality, who was no longer to be viewed simply as an object of influence and education, but as an "active subject" who has "an actively creative attitude" towards the process of aesthetic education.[150]

Lyudmila Zhivkova welcomed the new ideological formula, emanating from the Soviet Union, that the stage of mature socialism ushered in deep qualitative transformations. In her distinct interpretation, the most important qualitative change occurred in the forming of the consciousness of the new socialist personality. This qualitative change in human consciousness had to be gradually translated into qualitative changes in the methods and operations of every single ministry and institution in Bulgaria. It also necessitated the launching of a novel program for aesthetic education, aspiring to awaken the latent creative powers of every individual so that every child and every student can become "a producer of material, cultural and spiritual goods." That meant that the entire educational system had to be radically transformed. As she clarified to Bulgaria's leading experts in the sphere of education, culture, art and science during a joint session of the Committee of Culture and the Ministry of Education, the program for aesthetic education had two cardinal aspects. On the one hand, the foremost task was to create the necessary external conditions for the forming of the new personality. On the other hand, Bulgarian cultural and educational policy had to stimulate the internal processes and impulses which trigger in socialist individuals the drive for self-perfection, which was a very individual

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[149] Ibid.
[150] F. 405, Op. 10, a.e. 272, p. 12.

process."[151] This move away from the collective to the individual (in all her speeches and texts Zhivkova foregrounded the role of the "individuality" and "personality") constituted a shift in how the new socialist personality was envisioned. Zhivkova, for instance, lamented the state of the outdated Bulgarian school: "I observe my daughter – the independent work is reduced to a minimum at school. On the contrary, the school has to increasingly be transformed into a smithy where individuals should be formed on the basis of each person's autonomous work and self-development of his/her personality."[152] It was incumbent upon the institution of the school to forge this change toward individualism while the new role of the teachers would be only to provide guidance and work individually with each student from a very early age: "If we do not transform our educational system according to this principle – namely the individual work with each student from a very early age, we will not solve the problems of our society."[153]

In addition, because aesthetic education encompassed all spheres of human activity, it had to be organically embedded within every single subject at school, not just the ones pertaining to the so-called aesthetic cycle (music, art, and literature). Zhivkova lamented that subjects like logic and psychology, for instance, not only came very late in the educational process but were also studied in the abstract. According to her, special practical textbooks had to be compiled so that abstract thinking could be coupled with practical applications, such as exercises and techniques for developing thinking, or for forming the psychological world of adolescents, so that they could acquire independence, life experience, and maturity from an early age. And this had to be done in all disciplines, not just psychology or logic. Another urgent measure that had to

[151] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 125, p. 39.
[152] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 125, p. 47.
[153] Ibid.

be adopted in the reorganization of Bulgaria's education was to put "fundamental human science" (*fundamentalnoto chovekoznanie)* at the very core of the educational process which would serve to integrate all the disciplines (history, history of culture, of art, of philosophy etc.)[154]

That the thorough revamping of the Bulgarian school emerged as a pressing national priority was also necessitated by disquieting social and cultural tendencies among the youth. A sociological survey conducted by the Committee for Youth and Sport in 1973 presented results that did not bode well for the cultural-aesthetic foundation of mature socialism. 60.61 per cent of the interviewed youngsters declared that they did not read fiction at all, while out of the ones who did, the overwhelming majority (68%) preferred crime and adventure genres. The classics came in second with 38,31 per cent and poetry engaged the attention of less than twenty per cent of the reading youth. To the question "If you were offered a ticket for one of the following concerts, which one would you prefer?," 71.97% of the young respondents prioritized popular music (overwhelmingly Italian and English), 8.33 picked Bulgarian folk music while symphony orchestras or choral music were the preferred choice for just 2,67 and 0, 47 %, respectively. More alarmingly yet, more than half of the respondents (60%) never attended an art exhibition.[155]

When it came to the aesthetics-deprived educational system, according to data from the ministry of Education, Bulgarian first-graders in the early 1970s would spend a meager 10 hours per week studying Bulgarian language and literature, 2 hours of music, 1 hour of fine arts, as

[154] While the term *chovekoznenie* could be interpreted loosely as the study of the human being or humanities, this is most likely a reference to Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophy.
[155] Data presented by Simeon Ignatov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union, F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 43, 30.

contrasted with the relatively high 5 hours of mathematics.[156] This was hardly auspicious for the all-round and harmoniously developed personality of mature socialism. One solution proposed to quantitatively enhance subjects from the aesthetic cycle, was to introduce "semi-boarding school all-day instruction system" (by the mid-1970s this system encompassed 40% of pre-high school students). The extension of the school day would give students from first to eight grade the opportunity to daily engage in activities fundamental to their spiritual and aesthetic formation and growth. With the standard half-day educational system, there were 82 hours total from first to eight grade dedicated to aesthetic education. Minister of Education Nencho Stanev argued that the introduction of the all-day semi-boarding school system would create a reserve of an additional 40 hours per week to be dedicated exclusively to aesthetic disciplines.[157]

All these concerns were the subject of deliberation at a special plenum of the Committee of Culture in 1976, dedicated to the problems of aesthetic education. More than five hundred artists, writers, poets, architects, composers, musicians, psychologists, educators, teachers and translators were invited from all over Bulgaria to give their opinions and recommendations for the program. The flaws of the current system were openly discussed. Bogomil Rainov, for instance, lambasted the educational system for the preponderance of mathematics in the curriculum, the privileging of grammar over fiction, and the emphasis on memorization even in the arts classes. Rather than rote learning or the acquisition of technical skills, the ability to "analyze, experience and evaluate art" and to understand the language of art should be at the core of aesthetic education.[158] Some of the speeches by delegates at the Congress had a distinctly

[156] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 43, 54.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 21

spiritual and mystical ring. Painter Svetlin Rusev (also a deputy minister of the Committee of Culture and one of Zhivkova's closest associates) envisioned the program metaphysically as shaping the spiritual life of the nation: "whoever is in touch with the artistic realm has reached different worlds, he/she differently partakes of the public, social and economic relations according to the laws of beauty, which affect not only aesthetics but the tenderest strings of human morality and ethics. Two verses are capable of healing the sick, the shattering power of a color- or sound- filled space is capable of bridging deep divides and of bringing the individual into contact with realms and categories of a higher order that few have attained."[159] A national culture in his opinion is not measured just in terms of its cybernetic machines, but also in terms of its spiritually elevated personalities. A harmonious society needed "all the spiritual components."[160]

The National Experimental School for Talented Children in Gorna Banya and the Cultural-Educational Complex

The practical execution of the "historic national movement for aesthetic education" was launched a few months after the Plenum, when a decree by the Council of Ministers stipulated the establishment of an experimental boarding school from 1st through 11th grade, with a nursery and kindergarten attached to it in Gorna Banya, on the outskirts of Sofia.[161] The National Experimental School in Gorna Banya (NES) was envisioned as a "major national methodological training center" and a "big spiritual laboratory" which would "integrate all the sciences – biology, chemistry, physics, physiology, astronomy, pedagogy, philosophy, psychology, all the

[159] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 43, p. 10.
[160] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 43, 10-11.
[161] Reshenie No 198 ot 19.11.1976 za sîzdavaneto kîm KIK na Edinno sredno politekhnichesko uchilishte-internat s eksperimentalna tsel. F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 17.

arts and all forms of aesthetic education."[162] Unlike traditional art schools in Bulgaria, this modern experimental center would not prepare specialists in the different types of art, but would experiment with the uses of culture and the arts for the forming and perfection of the individual. For the 7th 5-year plan (1976-1980), 10 million Bulgarian leva from the state budget were allocated for the construction of the experimental school which Zhivkova ultimately envisioned not only as the prototype of the school of the future in socialist Bulgaria but also as one of the leading laboratories in the world experimenting with the problems of aesthetic education. As Zhivkova would continuously stress:

> Our country has already set such an ambitious goal with respect to aesthetic education which has been elevated to the level of party and state policy, that Bulgaria is in this respect an uncontested leader. Nowhere in the world do you have such monumental national undertaking as creating the preconditions and real opportunities for the realization of a national program for the aesthetic education of children.[163]

The Experimental School offered instruction in all the standard disciplines but the arts played a vital role as students were expected to "unfold all their talents" and "cultivate aesthetic sensitivities and taste."[164] In addition to all the arts being added to the standard curriculum, students were to "develop all their senses and motor functions," to "communicate with nature", learn foreign languages, and as they progress to more advanced classes, to "develop their analytical, systematizing and creative thinking."[165] The core principles behind the NES were instruction in all sciences and disciplines together with "integrated education in all the arts," all-day instruction, and "intensification of learning based on the latest Bulgarian and worldwide

[162] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 50, p. 1.; F. 288B., Op. 1, a.e. 76.
[163] Ibid., 3-5.
[164] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 205, p. 12-13.
[165] Ibid.

developments in the spheres of education, pedagogy, psychology, and medicine." The teachers' report at the end of the Experimental School's pilot year states that due to Chairperson Zhivkova's "extra special attentions and care" (i.e. Zhivkova's regular attendance of the weekly meetings of the NES administration), the NES administration had the opportunity to properly grasp the long-term goals of the school and receive guidance on how to implement the core principles of the program for aesthetic education.[166] In accordance with the guidelines, education in the arts at NES was not pursued as an end in itself but was a powerful factor in the unfolding of the latent creative potential in each individual student. Art instruction was utilized to develop students' abilities in critical and creative thinking, "to create the preconditions for high moral and aesthetic criteria" and to lead to "the degree of intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, and physical development characteristic of the all-round and harmoniously developed individual of tomorrow's socialist society."

The main educational method at the NES was suggestopedia, hailed as a revolution in Bulgarian and world pedagogy. Suggestopedia, initially applied to foreign languages instruction, was a pedagogical method for activating the "untapped reserves, powers and abilities of the human mind and memory" via the "scientific use of suggestion." It was developed by psychiatrist Dr. Georgi Lozanov, director of Bulgarian National Scientific Center of Suggestology.[167] The instructor's conduct, the use of different artistic media, the structure of the lesson, the physical environment, and the use of yoga relaxation techniques all combined to produce "an atmosphere of spontaneous trust, inner peace, relaxation, enhanced motivation, appropriate state of mind and joy from learning." All means of suggestion – authority,

[166] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 205.
[167] The Institute of Suggestology is the subject of Chapter Three

complexity, intonation, music, etc. – were scientifically selected and organized in a way as to achieve the tension-free memorization and creative assimilation of a considerable volume of data without student tension (according to Lozanov four to five times the standard load of material prescribed by the Ministry of Education.) Unlike hypnosis, students taught by the suggestopedic method were at all times in a waking, fully conscious state. The method of suggestopaedia was used at NES to cover large volume of material in fewer hours, to incorporate the material from higher grades, but also to highlight the interdisciplinary connections between the various disciplines in an effort "to expand students' horizons." The results from the NES experiments were carefully recorded and analyzed in line with the main long-term goal of introducing suggestology into the entire national educational system.

In the first year of its existence (1976-1977) the school lacked the infrastructure to operate in full capacity and was launched modestly with just 40 students. For the 1977-1978 there were 83 students plus 55 kindergarten attendees. The selection process was entrusted to an admissions committee comprising the management of NES, pedagogists, psychologists, doctors, and researchers from the Institute of Suggestology. The members of the admissions committee were to assess the applications, conduct meetings and conversations with each prospective candidate to assess his/her "acquired knowledge," "physical condition," as well as "psychological, emotional and intellectual development," so as to ultimately make their recommendations for candidates whose level is "above average for their age." The admissions procedure also included questionnaires to parents to facilitate "a more thorough and deeper assessment of each candidate." Each candidate thus had a file with complete documentation of his/her medical and psychological examinations, which were regularly updated throughout the year and also yearly in the course of the educational process. According to the report, extra special care was taken to institute a fair and equitable admissions process and to specifically avoid “any form of intercession and unscrupulousness.”[168] The fact that Zhivkova herself on several occasions impressed the point that the goal was not to create an elite school selecting either the most talented children or ones from a certain social background, suggests that intercessions and use of connections were a persistent problem.[169] While children for the nursery and kindergarten were in principle to be chosen based on fair and equitable criteria, for the primary and secondary education level only the children who had already “proven themselves as talents” in the different arts would be offered a place. Students who did not pass the detailed examinations at the end of the school year and did not show sufficient progress were, states the report, “sent back to the schools they came from.”

Students at the NES attended classes from 8am to 5pm. Until noon they covered the standard national curriculum prescribed centrally by the Ministry of Education (which itself was also under the umbrella of CAC and Zhivkova’s purview). After lunch and following the noon break (for first and second graders a mandatory nap, for fifth and sixth graders, a walk in the park), students engaged in artistic education – music, ballet and drawing classes, as well as English and Russian.[170] To offset the heavy study load, time was allotted daily for play outdoors or in specially equipped playrooms. In line with the Institute of Suggestology’s directives, students also spent three Saturdays a month in the Vitosha Mountains and one Saturday a month in establishments related to the needs of the curriculum, such as museums, art galleries, symphony orchestras etc.

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[168] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 205, p 17-19.
[169] She raised this issue at the meetings of Presidium of the Committee of Art and Culture that had to do with the operations of the Experimental School. See F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 50.
[170] Ibid., 21.

A major methodological component featuring in instruction in all subjects at all levels was the use of "game forms of instruction" and creative play. Didactic, psychological and artistic media were combined in order to create "a psychological atmosphere for absorbing the new material with a feeling of joy and relaxation."[171] For instance younger students could be taught via the use of music, fairy tales, and legends, while older students had to stage big art performances relevant to the theme of the lesson. Music thematically tied with the lesson was played at the beginning and the end of each class, and whenever possible used as a background for the lesson to create a "pleasant emotional atmosphere and optimistic feeling" and interest in the class activities.

On top of "innovative and progressive instruction methods," the NES also prided itself on a new understanding of the role of the teacher. In addition to obtaining rigorous, continuous and multi-disciplinary training in suggestology, the arts, aesthetics, psychiatry, psychotherapy, psycho-hygiene, and physiology," the teachers at the Experimental School were expected and trained to "act like actors, sing like singers, and cure through instruction like doctors and psychotherapists."[172] The successful implementation of this complex interdisciplinary pedagogical approach required that the teacher-suggestopedist be in possession of the requisite psychological attributes – they had to be "suggestive, artistic and adaptive."[173] At the same time they were expected to treat students not as subordinates but with the "necessary respect due younger collaborators" since both student and teacher pursued the same goal of constant self-

[171] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 205, p. 21.
[172] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 11, p. 133.
[173] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 11, p. 2.

perfection, “for both the class is a space for conversation and creativity,” and thus “both students and teachers exude the confidence of artists-creators.”[174]

For the purpose of scientifically monitoring the development of the experiment and quantifying the progress of individual students over time, a special laboratory was created at NES. Its main objective was to measure the level of psychic development of the children, to record their individual characteristics, and then to trace the changes in psychic development in the course of the academic year.[175] Using “modern psycho-physiological equipment” and “a variety of testing methods,” specialists at the lab measured students’ “mental performance, the speed, strength and balance of the neural processes; the type of nervous system, memory, concentration, attention span, logical and creative thinking, and their perception of time and space.” These tests were conducted both at the beginning and at the end of the school year. The students’ individual psychic characteristics, their type of nervous system, and the “scientific data regarding their psychic development” were made available to the teachers “to assist them in their personalized approach to students and in the preparation of their psychological profiles.”[176]

The main report specifically cites Zhivkova’s understanding of aesthetics as the raison d'être behind the existence of the lab (See Chapter One). In accordance with Zhivkova’s definition of aesthetics as the science for the development and perfection of the senses, the lab “set as a goal to scientifically study the abilities of children and students and to contribute to their development.”[177] Because one of the major goals of aesthetic education was awakening of children’s latent creative powers, the laboratory also tested the creative thinking and imagination

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[174] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 205.
[175] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 244, p. 18.
[176] Ibid.,
[177] Ibid., 19.

of all students.[178] In order to clarify the “psycho-physiological basis of aesthetic education,” the lab specialists also examined the “brain bioelectric activity of the students’ two brain hemispheres” and recorded how it changed during reading, writing, subtraction, logical thinking, painting, listening to different musical works. Simultaneously, the changes in students’ emotional state were recorded.[179]

While the results from the conducted tests showed that “overall the psychic development of the children for the academic 1978-1979 was good,” they were not entirely satisfactory. With the exception of third and partially fifth grade, the examinations established that there was widespread reduction in mental performance after the morning classes, with heightened excitability as the first stage of fatigue. The principal of the school Ivancheva raised the issue during one of the discussions at the Presidium of the Committee of Culture, which she was invited to attend:

> It seems to me that we mechanically deal with the issue that all children, irrespective of their age, should come at 8am and leave at 5pm, without us taking into account that they spend all day nailed to their desks, that these children live in a closed, restricted circle. Children need to meet with people outside…perhaps we should consider that the smaller children from first and second grade cannot have such a heavy study load, but need more free time for games, excursions, walks.[180]

[178] For instance, students from fifth, sixth and seventh grade were assigned problems that demanded creative solutions, such as coming up with as many uses for a pencil as possible. The creativity test results were satisfactory to the lab specialists as some individual students came up with “more than twenty uses for a pencil” and collectively students pointed to more than 80 uses for a pencil, some of them “rather original.” TsDA, F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 244.
[179] Based on the results from these exams, scientist delivered papers on the topics of anatomy and physiology of the brain, psycho-pshysiological foundation of the aesthetic education, type of nervous system and individual approach to teaching, the gifted students and their psycho-physiological characteristics, didactic games and the development of the senses.
[180] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 205, p. 49

She also dismissed the practice of incorporating material from the higher classes as purposeless and an *idée fixe.* In a thinly veiled criticism of Georgi Lozanov she expressed concern about the tyranny of suggestopedia as teachers were expected to adhere to the pedagogical method “in an absolutely pure form,” without “the slightest deviation whatsoever.” She protested the teachers’ inability to take any initiative, or have any say in the experiments, lamenting their status of “common enforcers,” rather than the loftily envisioned “artist-creators.”[181]

The Experimental School for Talented Children was the first building block of an educational-cultural complex, which would integrate education, the sciences, the artistic-cultural, and the spiritual spheres. The second link in the complex was the National Gymnasium for Ancient Languages and Cultures (NGDEK), which was launched on 10 October 1977 for the purpose of preparing specialists in Latin, ancient Greek, old Bulgarian and Sanskrit[182] languages and cultures.[183] However the gymnasium would not prepare just specialists, “say in Iranian, ancient Greek, Byzantine or Indian civilizations;” rather the emphasis was on the comparative and interdisciplinary study of these cultures. Zhivkova explained that since Bulgaria has always been a geographical and cultural bridge between Asia and Europe, the purpose of the school for ancient languages and civilizations was to establish Bulgaria “as a big cultural and spiritual center that will try again to establish the contact between Eastern and Western cultures.”[184] To complete the educational-cultural complex, a third link was envisioned : “an integral scientific

[181] Ibid., p. 45
[182] Zhivkova saw India as “the only nation which has kept the key to all philosophical and religious teachings from ancient times” and Sanskrit as the source of all modern languages. F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 77, p. 9.
[183] 99 students were admitted for the first year of NGDEK’s operation (62 female, 27 male; 73 from Sofia, 26 from the rest of the country) on the basis of their scores from 2 exams: written in Bulgarian and oral in Russian. F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 206.
[184] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 77, p. 2.

center for all the exact and natural sciences" which would serve as a laboratory integrating all scientific disciplines, including the humanities and whose objects of inquiry would be the problems of outer space, nature, the human being and human society.[185]

These three educational clusters, once established, would be connected "in an open system," wherein specialists and students from one center could work at another, they would teach and at the same time educate and develop themselves. Zhivkova saw these three centers as future world methodological centers for the preparation and perfection of individuals "who will carry the seeds of holistic development, elevated consciousness, and a new attitude towards life," and who will in turn spread these virtues among a larger circle of people.[186]

The Complex Long-Term Program for the Harmonious Development of the Individual

In parallel with the founding of the NES and NGDEK, an even more ambitious initiative was launched to realize the strategic national goal of aesthetic education: the "colossal and deeply humanist" Complex Program for the Harmonious Development of the Individual. The brainchild of Lyudmila Zhivkova, the program was developed and executed by teams of experts at the Committee of Culture, in consultation with the most prominent members of the artistic-cultural intelligentsia. The program was put into effect with decision No 266 of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, issued on 23 March 1978. Its main objective was to execute a system of "conscious, purposeful, and carefully thought out" activities on a mass scale "that would demonstrate and amplify the centrality of art and culture to the all-round and harmonious development of the individual and society." The program was designed

[185] Ibid., p. 5.
[186] Ibid., 6.

to be implemented in stages in the course of 15-20 years. Each stage would last a year and would have its patron – a "bright spiritual representative of all humankind."[187] In order to qualify as a patron, the selected personality had to be not only an all-round and harmoniously developed individual, but also a propeller of "important historical processes in the evolution of humankind," and a proponent of timeless, universal values. In addition, his work had to speak to the broadest possible audiences, to lend itself to rich multi-layered interpretations, and to be relevant to contemporary problems. Taken as a whole, the list had to be chronologically and geographically diverse so as to enable the program to treat not just the patron himself, but also his entire epoch and culture, as well as the lives and works of other personalities connected with the patron.[188] The list of patrons was an eclectic concoction, which included Nicholas Roerich, Leonardo da Vinci, Lenin, Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher, Albert Einstein, Rabindranath Tagore, Mikhail Lomonosov, Evtimii of Tarnovo, Avicenna, Goethe, and Jan Amos Komenský. Each stage was intended to gradually build the long-term program as a unified organism by deepening, making concrete and summarizing the results accomplished in the preceding stage.

During each stage, a multiplicity of nation-wide and international events—exhibitions, lectures, seminars, public readings, festivals, conferences – would acquaint the Bulgarian public with the selected polymath's achievements in all areas of his oeuvre. This was intended to unleash a spontaneous grassroots movement for aesthetic education encompassing all segments of the population, but especially the youth, and to instill a new attitude towards the arts. It was also meant to stimulate the production of syncretic cultural, scientific and artistic works of a radically new kind, based on a synthesis between the various arts on the one hand, and between

[187] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 97, p. 14-15.
[188] F. 405, Op. 10, a.e. 272, p. 17.

art, culture, science and spirituality, on the other. The aspiration was no less radical than "transforming the consciousness" of the entire Bulgarian nation and transcending the prevalent outdated conception of a "limited and narrowly specialized" individual.[189] As Zhivkova put it: "The goal is not just to show the essence of Roerich's or Leonardo's or Alberti's all-round and harmonious development. The goal is for us, as their followers, to be like them, for us to develop the same faculties, to be part of the same processes. The ultimate goal is this to be the ideal and aspiration of the contemporary Bulgarian."[190]At the same time, the program pursued not only domestic but also foreign policy goals. First it was to highlight the premium Bulgaria put on culture and art in the context of détente and the "struggle for peace, and social and cultural progress," following the Helsinki Final Act and the Belgrade Conference. Since the execution of the program relied heavily on relations with foreign cultural institutions, it would also facilitate the processes of cultural cooperation and exchange in the spirit of Helsinki. Secondly, it aimed to lead to the establishment and popularization of a National Center for Art and Culture, which would become a world center for elevating the role of the arts and culture in the pursuit of a better society. And thirdly, it would create a complex international laboratory for the scientific study of the problem of the all-round and harmonious development of the individual and society.[191]

The Big Bang Start: The Roerich Stage

The program was inaugurated in 1978 with Russian "painter, poet, thinker, explorer, philosopher and fighter for peace" Nikolay Roerich. Due to the mystical orientation of his work,

[189] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 213, 6.
[190] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 77, p. 81.
[191] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 192, p. 6-7.

the inaugural patron was not embraced with alacrity by the representatives of the "Art and Culture" Sector at the Central Committee of the BCP, who recommended that the program's concept be rethought and re-developed so as to align the "all-round and harmoniously developed personality" more closely with "the ideal of the communist personality."[192] Lenin and Georgi Dimitrov were explicitly brought-up as more suitable paragons of all-round and harmonious development. Zhivkova however was unyielding in her choice of Nikolay Roerich as the pilot patron, as she relentlessly justified his work both aesthetically and ideologically. First, his multi-sphere activity left an indelible mark in the history of world civilization, while his work as explorer, archeologist and scholar thematically linked art and culture with science in the quest for harmonious development. Secondly, the Roerich Pact for the protection of cultural objects in times of war, which was ratified by a large number of states before the outbreak of WWII, naturally threw a bridge towards contemporary problems such as cultural cooperation, peace and international exchange of cultural artefacts. In addition, Roerich's activities in India and Central Asia could serve as an opportunity to revamp the role of culture in these regions, linking it to the struggle for peace in those areas. Finally, the Master Institute of United Arts, founded by Roerich in 1929 in New York, was "the pioneering attempt in the twentieth century for the creation and institutionalization of a center for the synthesis of all the arts."[193] This kind of aesthetic synthesis was pursued by other nations such as France, the United States, and Iran. An emphasis on such monumental cultural ambassador like Roerich, the official justification pointed out, could remind all European nations to participate vigorously in the exchange of cultural and artistic values and artifacts.

[192] TsDA, F. 1B, Op. 69, a.e. 2706.
[193] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 192, 10-11.

In preparations for the program's Roerich stage, Zhivkova maintained cordial relations with Nikolay Roerich's son, painter and architect Sviatoslav Roerich and his wife, Indian movie star Devika Rani. She visited the Roerichs in India both as the head of official cultural delegation in 1977 and again in December 1978 as their private guest to discuss how to co-operate in the popularization of Nikolay Roerich's oeuvre.[194] These "extraordinarily great friends of Bulgaria" organized a number of "meetings at the highest possible levels" for Zhivkova and a heavily attended press conference."[195] The Roerich Stage was launched with extended coverage of the polymath's life and work in Bulgarian mass media, the translation of his literary works, poetry and diaries into Bulgarian, and the release of Bogomil Rainov's monograph "Nikolay Roerich."

This was followed by an international symposium, attended by the preeminent Soviet and international experts on Roerich's work. The big culmination was the exhibition of the artist's original paintings on loan from foreign galleries and Sviatoslav Roerich's private collection, which was opened by Sviatoslav Roerich and Devika Rani in person. Since Nikolay Roerich was relatively little known to the Bulgaria public (with the exception of a handful of art specialists or followers of agni yoga), much of the organizers' efforts went towards popularizing his works. Indeed the plethora of newspaper articles and radio and TV programs accompanying the exhibition were effective in creating an unprecedented demand—more than 1000 visitors daily viewed the exhibition.[196] Moreover, on 6 May 1978 an official ceremony took place in the aula of Veliko Tîrnovo University, where Sviatoslav Roerich was awarded *honoris causa* of Veliko Tîrnovo University, coinciding with photography exhibition on the painter's life and work. The

[194] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 87, p. 12.
[195] Ibid.,
[196] F. 405, Op. 10, a.e. 231, p. 43.

exhibition's opening was attended by 1500 visitors, while the total number of visitors was 18 892 in Tîrnovo only, before the exhibition traveled to other Bulgarian cities such as Ruse, Gabrovo, Varna, Burgas and Plovdiv.[197]

The Roerich Stage of the Program for Harmonious Developments unfolded also on the international stage. In May and June 1978, a number of cultural events took place in Haus Wittgenstein in Vienna,[198] including an exhibition of original works by Nicholas and Sviatoslav Roerich, followed by a series of talks, discussions and concerts. A photo exhibition of Roerich's work and a film about his life traveled to Ghana, Damascus, Delhi, Warsaw, Algiers, Lisbon, Bratislava, Prague, Budapest and New York (where the director of the Roerich Museum gave a talk and subsequently requested copies of the materials on display in Bulgaria to incorporate into the permanent collection on display at the Roerich Museum).[199] All of these activities lead to the passing of a number of UNESCO resolutions authored by Bulgaria: for the aesthetic education and harmonious development of the personality, for the preservation of cultural heritages, and for the development of the Roerich Pact "Banner of Peace." The organizers' report cites these resolutions "as one of the greatest foreign policy successes of Bulgaria's international cultural activity in the framework of UNESCO."[200]

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[197] Ibid.

[198] In 1975 the Bulgarian state purchased Haus Wittgenstein, a townhouse (since 1971 a national monument of culture in Austria) designed in 1926-1928 by architect Paul Engelmann and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, commissioned by Wittgenstein's sister Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein. After the purchase, Haus Wittgenstein became a Bulgarian cultural institute, the cultural extension of the Bulgarian embassy in Austria. The architecture of the building was the embodiment of Wittgenstein's philosophical ideas. The interior was entirely designed by Wittgenstein.

[199] Ibid., 44.

[200] Ibid., 55

The Leonardo da Vinci Stage

While the effect sought by the program's "big bang start" to trigger "an avalanche-like multiplication and amplification" was somewhat dampened by Roerich's relative obscurity, the 1979 patron, the widely popular Leonardo da Vinci, provided more fertile ground for sowing the seeds of the new consciousness. It should be noted that by the time the Leonardo stage was in development, the meetings of the Presidium of Committee of Culture were no longer rigidly official affairs. Rather, they were organized as informal conversations (in Zhivkova's phrase "creative laboratories"[201]) where Zhivkova, her team from the Committee of Culture, and the interdisciplinary working group of leading experts on da Vinci exchanged ideas, recommendations and proposals.[202] The da Vinci Stage expert group was headed by historian Alexander Fol and mathematician Milcho Germanov and its diverse members included painter and art critic Maximilian Kirov, art specialist Ivan Marazov, archeologist Stefan Peikov, writer, translator, literary critic and medical doctor Dr. Svetozar Zlatarov, poet and translator Dragomir Petrov and engineer Alexander Vîlchev. The group conducted truly impressive investigative, analytical, logistical and organizational work in preparation for the program. It compiled a comprehensive database with information on Leonardo da Vinci's works – paintings, drawing, sculptures – together with the addresses where they were currently on display, and the contact information of all the foreign institutes and experts specializing in da Vinci's work (which were subsequently contacted for assistance). Based on that research, the expert group initiated the process of requesting Da Vinci's most famous works for display in Bulgaria, including *La Gioconda* from the Louvre. It extensively studied the foreign scholarly and popular literature on

[201] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 97, p.103
[202] The stenograms from the weekly meetings of this group are all more a hundred pages each.

Leondardo da Vinci and the Renaissance, created a database with photographs of all his works and organized a series of scholarly discussions and round tables to brainstorm ideas for the plan-program. All the books and articles on Leonardo's oeuvre, published since the nineteenth century in Bulgaria and abroad were catalogued and the national library started the acquisition of the recently published foreign literature. Simultaneously, a tremendous translation and publishing effort was under way. Even books on Leonardo's fantastical plans were translated and leading Bulgarian art specialists and historians were commissioned to write monographs and articles on various aspects of the Florentine's output. One author was even dispatched on a one-month business trip to Italy to tour all the sites that inspired da Vinci's masterpieces while collecting materials for his book, and a team from the Bulgarian National Television followed him for the last fortnight of his trip to shoot a documentary. The official plan-program produced by the working group was also remarkably thorough and multi-layered. Its conceptual part outlined the general philosophical and cultural-historical parameters of the da Vinci Stage, justified theoretically and aesthetically the choice of Leonardo, synthesized the key ideas and accomplishments of Renaissance art and culture; pointed to the connections between the pre-Renaissance cultural and intellectual contexts of mediaeval Bulgaria and the cultural-artistic phenomena of Renaissance, while at the same time highlighting da Vinci's contemporary relevance and timeliness.

While there was no trace of the occult inspirations behind the program in the final document, the transcripts from the "creative laboratories" that led up to it reveal that the genesis, content and meanings of the program for harmonious development of the personality were all motivated by and imbued with Zhivkova's esoteric beliefs.[203] To her all the abstract formulations – which were difficult to grasp for the non-initiated – had very concrete meanings, derived from timeless and universal values. Even though she held a PhD in history, Zhivkova continuously warned against straightjacketing the interpretation of da Vinci's work and the Renaissance within their historical epoch. To her Roerich, da Vinci, Einstein et al. were not simply representatives of their time period, but enlightening figures who appeared at certain stages of the evolutionary process of humankind to "give the perspectives and guidance for the future, not for their present."[204] These "universal personalities" moved the evolution of humankind forward and revealed the potentialities of man, as well as the meaning of human existence. Because socio-historical and cultural processes should be looked at "simultaneously, in parallel and synthetically," the factors and preconditions that led to the Renaissance should be related to the contemporary phenomena of the contemporary renaissance.

The meanings and aspirations of Zhivkova's initiatives remained incomprehensible to some of the less metaphysically inclined members of the expert group. Ana Trichkova for example, expressed skepticism: "I think that the first question that comes to mind is why we should be the ones to popularize Leonardo da Vinci abroad. Why does Bulgaria undertake this, and not Italy or other countries which are more directly related to Leonardo and have a much larger archive?"[205] Zhivkova repeatedly explained that the main goal was not to popularize Roerich, da Vinci or Einstein's encyclopedic erudition or aestheticism (this was just one aspect

[203] It should be noted that Zhivkova's most explicitly mystical speeches (especially the ones from the da Vinci stage onwards) were not preserved at the Committee of Culture archive (it is a matter of speculation whether they were "sanitized"). A copy was kept, however, in her personal fond, which is still uncatalogued and unprocessed.
[204] Lyudmila Zhivkova in F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 93, p. 74-80.
[205] Lyudmila Zhivkova in F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 93, p. 44.

of it). Rather it was the synchronicity between creativity, artistic development, exploration, scientific discoveries, and technology at the core of their individual consciousness that was to be propagated.[206] Their realization in a multiplicity of spheres occurred because the creative beginning in its essence is unified, interrelated, synthetic and simultaneous. Leonardo da Vinci's scientific and engineering discoveries were inextricably bound-up with his activity as a painter, poet, philosopher, thinker, inventor, and explorer.[207] Zhivkova's response to skeptics like Trichkova was that even though Leonardo was among the most famous individuals of all times, he was in fact very little known. To drive her point home, she ventured into an analysis of the *Mona Lisa*, which was imbued with religious symbols, references to occultism, and deeply metaphysical, spiritual and wholly un-Marxist language. It is worth citing it in full as it encapsulates her conception of the long-term program, the connections that had to be made between the different stages of the program and the different patrons, the goals of aesthetic education and the contemporary existential urgency:

> The plan-program states that the image of Mona Lisa is the symbol of feminine beauty. Correct. Mona Lisa *is* the symbol of feminine beauty, but what is feminine beauty? How many of the people interacting with Leonardo's work, including art specialists, have looked at Mona Lisa as representing the symbol of the deep secret, which is the feminine origin of nature. The symbol and the deep secret of Mona Lisa is the great "feminine principle," which is the conceiving principle in nature, in the Universe, in the entire phenomenal reality, that is. This is not ordinary physical beauty. This is the eternal mother-nature, who is always pregnant, and who carries within herself the secret – the secret of conception, of birth, of development.[208]

[206] Ibid., 63
[207] Ibid., 67.
[208] Ibid., 70.

For those of her associates who still had any doubts about the interconnectedness of processes, and were not sure how the eclectic stages could be unified in one organism, Zhivkova readily drew the connections with the preceding Roerich Stage:

> If you throw a bridge towards the Roerich Stage of the program, you will see that Roerich has a remarkable work of art, the so-called *Mother of the World* (*Mater' Mira)* who covers her face. This, too is a symbol of the universal feminine origin. This is a Madonna covered by e veil who conceals her eyes and hides the conception of the new in secret, so that it cannot be destroyed by the negative forces of destruction. There is no conception that is uncovered, be it from a purely physiological or from symbological point of view. Every conception of the new is hidden, and this is the symbol of the *Mona Lisa*, of *Mater' Mira*…This is the essence of evolution: evolution as the uncovering of nature, of the natural laws, of movement and development in the phenomenal universe. How many individuals and specialists, I am asking, not only at home but worldwide, have reached the essence of these great symbols?[209]

In the course of clarifying the links and interrelations, Zhivkova went as far as to openly defend theocentrism in another explanatory tangent on the essence of the Renaissance:

> The plan-program correctly points out that the Renaissance witnesses a return to anthropocentrism. However, this is not a complete break from theocentrism because that would mean that Renaissance humanists have viewed -- or that we would view -- the evolution of man in isolation from the evolution of nature (which is incorrect). The essence of the Renaissance process, as well as of mediaeval scholasticism, is that it restored this balance between anthropocentrism and theocentrism.[210]

In Zhivkova's vision, it was questions such as the laws of nature and evolution, the relationship between man and nature and between the individual and the universe that were the unifying clusters around da Vinci, Roerich, Einstein, Lomonosov, Constantine the Philosopher, "and even to a certain extent Lenin." These were the problems, therefore, that the program

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[209] Ibid., 71-72
[210] Ibid.,

should aspire to bring to the attention of the Bulgarian public. On the one hand, connecting these issues to the quests of contemporary science (like cosmobiology, astrophysics, astronomy) would shed light on a number of historical, social and cultural processes. On the other hand, the communion of the Bulgarian nation with the achievements of the renowned polymaths would awaken the dynamic creativity and drive for self-perfection of every individual so as to eventually lead to the harmonious society of synthesized communism. The utopian future of synthesized communism would be composed of individuals like the patrons: "Imagine if there would be ten Leonardos among us, or a hundred, or one thousand. This nation, it will be singing, it will be dancing, it will be in permanent euphoria. Where are they? We don't have them, or if we do, they are very few. The problems are myriad and, that is why we need to look at the processes from complex and multi-perspectival points of view."[211]

In addition to promulgating of the balance of anthropo- and theo-centrism, Zhivkova openly discussed religious symbols and the essence of religion. At one of the "creative laboratories" on the da Vinci program, she invited Bulgarian art specialists and historians to "ponder the following fact: why is it the case that everywhere in Leonardo's compositions the main compositional structure is the cross?" There were a number of universal religious symbols (like the cross or the removal from the cross) that all great ancient teachings, religions and philosophies shared in common because they "represented the universal consciousness" or "the union with transcendence," with the "infinity of evolution." She clarified that when she spoke of religion she did not refer to dogmatic institutions but to "the foundation which gave birth to every big religious teaching, the essence in the name of which Buddha, or Christ or the great

[211] Ibid., 77.

religious reformers and symbolists had appeared and built upon, because every religious symbol carries in its essence its own cosmogony."[212]

In practice, a multiplicity of initiatives – exhibitions, competitions, conferences, lectures, literary programs, films, plays, concerts, books and albums -- were organized in 1979 nationwide to socialize the Bulgarian public with Leonardo da Vinci's far-reaching contributions to all spheres of art, science and technology in an effort "to highlight the globality of his artistic interests" and his explorations of the relationship between the micro- and macro- cosmos, and the unison between nature and the spiritual, the emotional and intellectual components of the individual. Amidst the myriad events, however, there were four "key culminations," that were envisioned – in gradation -- to convey the theoretical, cultural-historical, moral-ethical and aesthetic parameters of the da Vinci Stage in practice. On 26 November 1979, an exhibition with Leonardo da Vinci's original works – paintings, drawings and manuscripts – including a copy of the *Mona Lisa* dating from 1520 on loan from the Louvre, was opened in the crypt of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia. This was accompanied by an international exhibition "Humanism in Eastern Orthodoxy and the Italian Renaissance," comprising works of art, objects of the applied arts, material culture, and mechanical objects. The exhibition was scheduled to coincide with an international scholarly conference of the same topic (both of them overlapping with the da Vinci exhibition). The two "Humanism in Eastern Orthodoxy and the Italian Renaissance" "culminations" analyzed and juxtaposed the different paths of development of the two types of civilization within the same slice of historical time. To the background of this socio-cultural context it foregrounded "for the first time before the Bulgarian nation and the world

[212] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 97, 50-51.

scholarly community" the role of Bulgarian civilization as a "unifying link" between East and West.[213] When the initiatives were being discussed among the working group, it was decided that extra special care should be taken by Bulgarian scholars to compile the exhibition with "utmost humility" ("not to convey the sentiment that East wants to stab West") but simply to show the cultural and artistic interactions between East and West and Bulgaria's aspiration to renew this exchange.[214] At the same time the conference tried to expand the scope beyond the Renaissance processes and "to throw a bridge toward the current trends and the quests of the contemporary individual" while highlighting the universal humanist ideal irrespective of time period or place. While da Vinci's exhibition and the "Renaissance East and West" exhibition and conference were to "raise the consciousness" of the entire nation, the final fourth culmination exclusively targeted Bulgaria's youth: a national competition (to round off as an exhibition) for scientific-technological discoveries based on Leonardo's drawings. The contest-exhibition involved the Komsomol so as to give youth the opportunity to design some of Leonardo's original projects, to show the historical trajectory of his ideas while at the same time providing the impetus for novel scientific and technological inventions and projects.[215]

<u>The Vladimil Ilych Lenin Stage</u>

In the Long-Term Complex Program for Harmonious Development of Man, it was only the third stage in 1980 that was allotted to a socialist harmonious personality: Vladimil Ilych Lenin. The program was to promote Lenin's contribution towards "the epochal event of the first socialist revolution," the establishment of the first socialist state and their impact on the

[213] F. 405, Op. 10, a.e. 231
[214] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 97, 62.
[215] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 97, p.37-39.

contemporary revolutionary process. The focus of the program was on the individual vis-à-vis social change and the betterment of society. The second moment that the program would problematize was the question of Lenin and peace, and Zhivkova insisted that the concept of peace be enriched to include "not only the elimination of war as a means for resolving national interests" but also the question of "building, renewal, transformation of the individual and of reality, the perfection of social development."[216] His monumental contributions to world history notwithstanding, Zhivkova did not consider the significance of Lenin as universal and asked the organizers of the program to be more precise in the document, especially when they refer to Lenin, as "an embodiment of the communist ideal for all-round individual." "According to me this is an exaggeration," Zhivkova objected. Unlike da Vinci, who as a universal personality should not be confined within the Renaissance, Lenin had to be conceptualized within the boundaries of his time period so as "for us not to ascribe to him characteristics and qualities he could have not formed, unfolded and manifested at that stage." Zhivkova invoked "the laws of revolution" to justify Lenin's less all-embracing accomplishments: "No avatar – that is the Sanskrit term for 'messiah,' 'carrier of revolutionary, epochal, renewing ideas and actions -- can outstride the boundaries of the epoch or reach transcendence because the unfolding of his potentialities takes place in an environment of resistance."[217] Lenin thus could be seen as a "carrier of the tendency for multilateral and comprehensive development," maybe even as "genius of the twentieth century," but he was a far cry from the great philosophers and religious regenerators. It is worth quoting Zhivkova's interpretation of Lenin's deeds in full for it certainly diverges from what she considered the "ossified, museum-like understanding of Lenin":

[216] F.288B, Op. 1, a.e. 112, 11.
[217] Ibid., 20.

> [The document here states that] ‘it is difficult to point to another example in the entire human history, where the creative deeds of one person have had such an impact on human development.’ Comrades, this is not true…Such great philosophers and religious regenerators like Buddha, like Christ initiated whole epochs and civilizations which have existed in the course of millennia. It is not a coincidence that these tremendous thinkers and philosophers are called religious reformers. Not to mention such personalities as Adi Shankara and other monumental epochal individuals. And apropos, just 110 years separate us from the personality and deeds of Lenin, so we cannot be so absolute since his work only now begins to receive its historical assessment.[218]

She also dismissed the “the totality of Lenin’s consciousness which determines his uniqueness,” as incorrect statement. For Zhivkova Lenin doubtless had a complex approach to solving social problems, a very broad consciousness and an integral monolithic thinking. But in his multilateral and integral approach to social events, he reached better results as a “practitioner-revolutionary,” and not as a theoretician (where he did not reach the highest level of synthesis). The historical task of the program thus, was to “enliven and resurrect the image of Lenin but as a real, tangible paragon.” While Zhivkova stressed that this is in no way an attempt to underestimate or belittle the theoretical and practical accomplishments of Lenin, it is clear that in her pantheon of universal titans of the spirit, Lenin held a lower status.[219]

Zhivkova’s aesthetic utopianism, while emanating from the Committee of Culture, was not to be practiced just top-down. Cultural policy had to be democratized to consult and involve ordinary citizens. In addition to intellectuals’ and experts’ participation, consultation and creative contributions, the average citizen, too, could partake in the forging of the all-round and harmonious development. In 1980 a unit was created within the Committee of Culture’s Information Center, initially staffed by 4 employees who would change on rotation basis. The

[218] Ibid. 20-21.
[219] Ibid., 22-32.

unit was tasked with "daily admitting and hearing out citizens who come with different proposals related to the problems of art, culture, aesthetic education and the individual's all-round harmonious development. All the letters, collective proposals, reports, and petitions were read, analyzed and systematized. On the basis of this data the unit prepared reports to the management of the Committee of Culture, which was to discuss and decide which proposals should be realized, when and within which program.[220]

"Unity, Creativity, Beauty": The International Children's Assembly Banner of Peace

By the mid-1970, Zhivkova's aesthetic utopianism was growing ever more ardent to encompass not just Bulgaria's youth but children globally. When on 21 December 1976 Resolution 31/169 of the UN's General Assembly declared 1979 as the International Year of the Child, Zhivkova capitalized on the opportunity to export her vision onto a world stage. On 6 June 1978 she proposed her idea before the Presidium of the Committee of Culture for Bulgaria to become the organizer and host of a "big national event connected with the unfolding of the creative potential of children, which would extend into an international initiative."[221] This initiative would constitute a plea for peace, cooperation, and mutual understanding by creating the atmosphere for people to think about beauty, harmony and constant progress. The event envisioned peace not just in terms of the elimination of war and disarmament (which certainly were necessary conditions) but also as establishing the preconditions for people "to develop according to the laws of beauty," "to constantly unfold and perfect their faculties," "to develop

[220] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 120, 23-24.
[221] Evgeniia Kalinova, *Bŭlgarskata kultura i politicheskiiat imperativ 1944-1989* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2001), 318.

harmoniously and to live in harmony with the entire universe."[222] This is how the idea for the International "Banner of Peace" Assembly was conceived, which aimed to "demonstrate and enhance the huge impact of art and culture on the harmonious development of the child" while translating into practice the idea of "bringing nations together through bringing children together for the purpose of artistic and cultural expression."[223] The Banner of Peace Assembly was directed towards the "internationalization of the national program for aesthetic education."[224]

The choice of the Assembly's name was not arbitrary – it was derived from, and intended to renew, Nicholas Roerich's "Banner of Peace," – the Roerich Pact for the preservation of cultural objects in times of war. The symbol and the motto were chosen as "a broad platform to demonstrate loud and clear the need to initiate children to our ideas for a peaceful world, where all human beings have not only the right to existence, but also the right to creativity and to harmonious development."[225] Every single aspect of the Assembly – from its motto, to its logo, the emblems, name, colors, the events themselves, to its material embodiment in the Banner of Peace monument – was imbued with symbolism and spiritual-aesthetic messages. Even the word "banner," Zhivkova explained before an international audience at the UN General Assembly, symbolized humanity's reaching a certain stage of development when a new road had to be taken and the banner served to mark the boundaries and future directions of human accomplishments. Banners were raised by heroes who sacrificed themselves in the name of the common good and humanism.[226]

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[222] F. 288B., Op. 1, a.e. 80,
[223] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 211, 7.
[224] Ibid.,
[225] Ibid., 8.
[226] Zhivkova in F288B, Op. 1, a.e. 115, 12-13.

Even before the concept fully crystallized, Zhivkova was categorical that this would not be a bureaucratic initiative; hence it was not to be placed under the auspices of the Pioneer organization. The Assembly was not going to be a one-time event limited to one nation-state, it was to grow into an international movement. It was to capitalize on “the invisible sources of the creative spiritual atmosphere these events would produce,” “to sow new seeds in the consciousness of millions of people” “for creative development, and evolution in the name of beauty and harmony.”[227] The meaning of the event was to use art “to direct and guide children from a very early age towards a much deeper, much more meaningful life.”[228] All relevant specialists, experts, and pedagogists in Bulgaria had to “mobilize all their energies to take their hugely responsible role in the establishment and development of the processes of Bulgarian culture.”[229] Zhivkova pleaded that bureaucratic and administrative inertia, low work and civic duty be overcome in this pioneering world-significant initiative: “Let us learn how to think ahead, what the results from our current efforts will be in 10, in 20 years from now, let us dream for the future, let us fight for it to come more quickly. It is only when each one of us approaches the event with full personal engagement and responsibility that the results will come.”[230]

The massive organizational effort started right away in November 1978 when a letter-appeal “by the children of Bulgaria” addressed “to the Children of the World,” together with a packet of materials on the Assembly’s goals and conditions for participation, were sent out to all international organizations that had to do with the Year of the Child, to all big international and national centers and institutes that dealt with children’s art, and to all world-famous authorities

[227] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 218, 34-35.
[228] F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 80, p. 1.
[229] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 218.
[230] Ibid., p. 37.

on children’s development, art, and education.[231] A second letter on behalf of Bulgarian specialists working on the problems of evolution, art, creativity, children’s development, and pedagogy, invited their foreign colleagues to participate in an accompanying International Symposium “The Child, Creativity and Evolution.”[232] Simultaneously, Lyudmila Zhivkova wrote letters to world famous intellectuals, artists, and directors of international institutions to invite them to join the Assembly’s Organizing Committee. Among the dignitaries who accepted Zhivkova’s invitation were UNESCO’s General Director Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the president of the Académie Goncourt Hervé Bazin, world famous composer Leonard Bernstein, conductor Herbert von Karayan, Soviet writer Sergei Mikhalkov, Greek poet Giannis Ritsos, Swedish writer Artur Lundkvist, Italian children’s writer Gianni Rodari, French writer Pierre Gamara, and Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, among others. In November 1978 in the XX Session of UNESCO’s General Conference, UNESCO’s General Director Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow announced that UNESCO would assume co-patronage of the International Children’s Assembly “Banner of Peace.”

The Assembly was a “complex initiative” with myriad events that started at the local level, expanded regionally, continuously broadening the scope “on the principle of the rolling snowball” to reach the national level and culminate with the International Children’s Assembly “Banner of Peace.” The multiplicity of initiatives at the local, regional, national and international level coalesced under the motto, “Unity, Creativity, Beauty.” The motto reflected the main purpose of integrating the creative quests of the children of the planet around the ideals of peace, creativity, harmony and perfection. The Assembly’s execution began with festivals of children’s

[231] Zhivkova, Lyudmila. Informatsionen byuletin “Zname na mira,” kn.1, 1979
[232] Ibid.,

art at the local and regional level. This was followed by the national stage, which constituted simultaneously a national review of the talented and gifted children and an opportunity to stimulate the creative impulse in every child and offer them a platform for expression. All children and adolescents from 5 to 18 years of age (divided into three age groups) could participate by sending unlimited number of works of art in any genre, with the only requirement that they relate to the theme. A national committee then reviewed all the received works of art and selected 1326 of them to be displayed in Sofia at the major national children's exhibition "This World is Mine Too." There was a cluster of accompanying exhibitions, such as "My World in 2000" (in Burgas), "The Child and Sports," "The Child and the City," and "Bulgaria in the Eyes of Other Countries." The intention– via the Assembly's comprehensiveness and non-competitive character to secure "mass and democratic participation" -- was realized as 300 000 children joined in local festivals, 46 000 were involved in regional festivals, and 5 000 participated at the national level.[233]

The culmination of the year-long initiative was the concluding international phase of the Assembly, which took place 15-25 August 1979 and constituted the largest and most ambitious worldwide initiative to mark the Year of the Child, under the patronage of UNESCO and its General Secretary Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow. 1100 children from across Bulgaria and 1321 children from 77 countries congregated in Sofia to partake of the global festival of children's art. While initially (in accordance with the confirmed invitations) 2,500 foreign guests were expected to arrive in Sofia for the final international phase of the assembly, the actual number of foreign visitors, including the young artists and their supervisors, and the international dignitaries from

[233] Children were most active in the sphere of the fine arts, as 75% of the participants offered drawings, while only 15% participated with literary works and 10% with musical works. F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 262.

the organizing committee, exceeded 4500.[234]

A cluster of four central events was to draw the attention and participation of both the young artists, and the Bulgarian cultural-artistic and scholarly community. The centerpiece was the international exhibition of children's art "Unity, Creativity, Beauty," which exhibited 6000 works sent to the Assembly by children who wished to participate from "all four corners of the world."[235] The big exhibition took place at the National Gallery and was described as a veritable "miniature of Earth -- from the remote Japan and Australia, through the mountains and plains of Asia and Europe, all the way to Latin America -- absorbed and reflected in the wonderful world of children's art."[236] The collected works of art by children were subsequently catalogued, permanently archived and stored. The most impressive children's masterpieces were selected to be shown to a world audience -- through a number of publications, reproductions, photo albums, as well as a high-profile traveling exhibition, accompanied by Zhivkova, which toured the world.[237]

In addition to young painters, young writers, too, had a platform for expression: the international festival of children's literature. Even though young writers were not as numerous, or prolific as young painters, children from 47 countries were represented with poems, fairy tales, short stories and essays on a variety of topics of ranging from peace, friendship among

[234] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 262, p. 6-7.
[235] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 262, p. 11. The report concludes that several countries stand out in terms of having traditions of high aesthetic quality of children's works of art: the Balkan states, the countries from Latin America, Japan, India, the USSR, the People's Republic of Poland, France, the German-speaking countries, Italy, Spain, Mexico. Impressive were the collections of Mexico, Guinea, Greece, USA, Czechoslovakia, Belgium and India's rich collection. The countries singled out as providing great children's works also consistent with the motto "Unity, Creativity Beauty" were Japan, USSR, Czechoslovakia, GDR, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Australia, Turkey, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Less impressive were the works from Algeria and the Arab nations.
[236] Ibid., 14.
[237] Ibid., 66.

peoples, equality, nature, the animal world, to the "the theme of revolution" (the latter being the preferred topic by children from the newly liberated African and Asian states, the report states). The young poets read their works on the main stage of the Ivan Vazov National Theater, which was transformed into a "veritable poetic globe," followed by a meeting-conversation with renowned Bulgarian and world writers such as the president of the Italian Writers' Syndicate Aldo de Jaco, Gianni Rodari, Pierre Gamara, Sergey Mikhalkov, and Faiz A. Faiz.

The third big event was the International Festival of Children's Music and Composition, which even though it was not internationally as diverse (mostly children from the Balkans participated, with a heavy Bulgarian presence) nevertheless attracted a lot of attention.[238] While the young performers – violinists, cellists, pianists, *gadulka* players, and diaphonic singers – dazzled the Assembly's international guests with their breath-taking performances and attracted the interest of foreign pedagogists, musical composition was, to the regret of the organizers, insufficiently represented. This was one of the avowed aims for the next Assembly – to fully engage and illuminate "this most unexplored field – children's composing" in effort to defend "children's right to break away from reproducing the musical thoughts of others (no matter how brilliant they happen to be) and to improvise their own phrases and intonations and compose their own melodies and songs."[239] Surprisingly, the one tangential event that was not part of the core trio (art, literature, and music), an international exhibition of children's photography, generated heightened interest from both children and adults. This prompted the organizers to propose photography as a genre in its own right in the next Assembly as photo-art "proved

[238] 110 musical works from 14 foreign countries and 167 from Bulgarian children were received by the International Assembly's literary and music committees. F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 262, p.21. 150 literary works from representatives of 47 countries were read the poetry reading.
[239] Ibid., 20.

extremely popular among children."[240] The final fourth culmination accompanying the children-related festivals and events was the international scholarly symposium on the topic of "The Child, Creativity and Evolution.

The special committee tasked with evaluating and systematizing the results from the first International Assembly "Banner of Peace" assessed the event as a "supreme success," not only the biggest media event in Bulgarian history[241] but also the one with the biggest international coverage and accolades. After the event was over, a Bulgarian delegation, led by Zhivkova presented the Assembly's results and ideas at the 34th Session of the UN General Assembly where the Assembly was recognized as a "unique phenomenon" and as "a global program for the harmonious development of the individual."[242]

Given the lack of previous organizational experience to lean on, the committee's report commended the Assembly as "exceptionally well-organized" and coordinated on all levels (including logistics such as the reception and dispatch of guests at the airport, transportation, housing, food, health care, translation services, sightseeing tours, etc.) It also pointed to the weaknesses that had to be taken into account for the future editions of the Assembly. One area that needed improvement was the convoluted organizational-administrative structure which led to overlaps or to disproportionate overburdening of some units. Also, the analysis found that in some cases the rules for participation were disregarded and disproportionately large groups arrived (Syria—100 people, Hungary – 108 people, GDR – 71, Poland – 68, Czechoslovakia 66,

[240] Ibid., 16.
[241] Indeed 90 accredited international journalists covered the last two weeks of August from leading international news agency, with Zhivkova giving numerous interviews and press conferences in the foreign press. At the same time, some of the major organizers were sent to give press conferences in Moscow, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Mexico city, Havana, Vienna, Copenhagen, Belgrade, Athens and Ankara.
[242] Ibid. 63.

USA and Japan – 36 each, while only 15 children arrived from the USSR). Another problem was the overbooking of the children's schedule, which severely limited their free time.[243]

All the data and reports of the individual organizational units and committees were compiled, systematized and analyzed. Bulgaria's leading psychologists, pedagogists, sociologists, art specialists and members from the Committee of Culture prepared detailed analysis of all the results to serve as a foundation for the improvement of the Assembly's next edition. On the basis of those findings, a permanent "Banner of Peace" Center was established which was responsible for initiating research programs based on the findings from the analysis , and for launching systematic and multi-disciplinary studies to combine the methods and insights of sociology, psychology, pedagogy and art.

The lofty ideals of the "Banner of Peace Assembly" were not only embedded in the myriad initiatives dedicated to the Year of the Child but were also symbolically embodied in a massive monument composition which was unveiled for the Assembly's official closing on August 25, 1979, at the foot of Vitosha Mountain, east of Sofia. The creative team responsible for the design and construction of the imposing symbolism-laden composition included prominent Bulgarian specialists: sculptors Krum Damianov and Mikhail Benchev, architects Blagoi Atanasov and Georgi Genchev and engineer Anton Maleev. The monument was erected in record 30 days by the shock workers' brigade of hero of socialist labor Nikola Pavlov.

The assembly's motto "Unity, Creativity, Beauty" was symbolically represented by three thematic and structural elements: the sphere (symbolizing the Cosmos, life, eternity and their harmony and unity); the spiral (representing motion, evolution, cyclicity, the eternal evolution of

[243] Ibid., 53-55.

life, and spiritual and cultural continuity) and the bell (symbolizing the joy of creation, the eternity of spirituality; the striving for higher realms; and peace.)[244] Those three structural elements (the sphere, the spiral and the bell) individually or in various combinations, sought to impress rich conceptual and emotional meanings pointing to harmony, strength and eternity.

The silhouette of the Bells Monument was made of four vertical 37-meter high concrete pylons, pointing towards the four cardinal directions, and a spiral composition of two semi-circles, constructed at different levels. The 4 pylons, were shaped by two vertical walls, which met at a right angle, and held the monument's concrete centerpiece. The strict geometrical composition was meant to be "softened by the spatial sphere inscribed within them," where seven bells of seven different tonalities were mounted in a spiral, symbolizing the continents. Apart from their symbolical meanings, the seven bells also served as accompanying musical instruments to the main musical instrument -- 18 "singing" bells installed at the foot of the pylons.

The vertical accent of the monument was surrounded by the second spiral composition, comprising two semi-rings where the "bells of the nations" were installed "as if in a nest." Each UN member state sent a bell and eventually 98 were mounted, some extremely valuable (i.e. Nepal donated an XI[th] century bell from the Pashupatinath Temple). Each bell representing the nations was equidistant from the central vertical body, symbolizing the equality among people and nations.

Besides the symbolic meanings, the monument was also meant to visually represent the integration of the arts (architecture, the plastic arts and music), as well as to embody the new

[244] Ivan Ivanov, Iskra Zakharieva, Georgi Tsachev and Dimitîr Aleksiev (eds.) *Monument "Zname na mira."* (Sofia: Mezhdunarodna fondatsiia "Lyudmila Zhivkova," 1988), 6-7.

attitude towards the arts that was the final destination of aesthetic education. At the same time the synthesis between traditional symbolic elements (the sphere, spiral, the bell) and modern plastic forms was supposed to give "monumental-material expression to man's inherent aspiration towards unity, creativity and beauty" and to serve as a "chapel of peace," that brings into focus the "the pathos of the times and preserves for future generations the idea of harmony."[245]

The utopian-futuristic message behind the Bells Monument was conveyed not just aesthetically and symbolically but also literally. At the day of the monument's unveiling, the Assembly's organizers planted deep underneath the monument's foundation a capsule containing a silver roll with a message from the children of 1979 to the children of the future, which was to be unearthed and read in 2000. The monumental composition was surrounded by the "International Park of Peace," where more than 70 000 plants sent by different nation-states were planted. The Bells Monument was envisioned as the "spiritual center of Bulgaria" and eventually of a world Banner of Peace movement. The committee that assessed the first Assembly stated in its report that the objective was to put forth a proposal to UNESCO to grant "The Bells" status as a world cultural monument, "a planetary symbol of unity, peace and beauty, bringing humankind together."[246]

Zhivkova's exorbitant and frequently unattainable policies were received with ambivalence by the public. On the one hand, the conspicuous foregrounding of Bulgaria's "ancient cultural heritage" and the country's valuable contributions to the "European and world cultural repository" struck a responsive chord with nationalism steadily on the rise since the

[245] Ibid., 10-11.
[246] F. 405, Op. 9, a.e. 262, p. 70.

1960s. Nationalist sentiments, among the populace at large but especially among the intelligentsia, escalated in the 1970s. After all the early 1970s was the time when historians articulated the so-called "triunine theory of Bulgarian ethnogenesis" (Thracian, Protobulgarian, and Slavic), which postulated the untenable assertion that the Bulgarian nationality had assumed its final shape and (tri-) unity by the ninth century.[247] The theory was officially embraced, quickly entered history textbooks and became hegemonic. It also coincided with the fervent exploration of Thracian history, which was institutionalized with the establishment of the Institute of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. It was not a coincidence that the director of the Institute, historian Alexander Fol, was also the architect behind the opulent national program "1300 Years of Bulgaria," organized and executed in grand style by the Committee of Culture in 1981. In addition to the emphasis on Bulgarian cultural idiosyncrasy, the intelligentsia cherished Zhivkova's unprecedentedly lavish sponsorship of the arts and culture, the relaxation of the cultural sphere and the cultural exchange with the West. That Bulgarian cultural policy was formulated by intellectuals and experts at the Committee of Culture as opposed to party bureaucrats, paid the creative-artistic intelligentsia handsome dividends.

On the other hand, many resented Zhivkova for her precipitate rise to the summits of power, for her costly and extravagantly prepared initiatives, and for her esoteric peregrinations (seen anywhere on a scale from incomprehensible, to mystical, to "messianic frenzies,"[248] to "manic.") Other negative assessments (voiced privately due to her rank) ranged from nationalism

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[247] Maria Todorova, "The Course of Discourses of Bulgarian Nationalism", in Peter Sugar, ed., *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: The American University Press), 95

[248] See Maria Todorova, "The Course of Discourses of Bulgarian Nationalism"

and anti-Soviet sentiment (among the “old guard” of party elites) to megalomania or worse, schizophrenia. Todor Zhivkov himself, who was a lot more pragmatic and mostly preoccupied with Bulgaria’s economic course and the need for technological modernization, hardly understood the driving motivations behind many of his daughter’s undertakings. So how was it possible for Zhivkova to initiate her large-scale occult-inspired aesthetico-spiritual utopia?

Even though Todor Zhivkov not always approved of his daughter’s ideas, her cultural policies dovetailed well with the political imperatives of the regime. For many from Zhivkova’s generation who did not have any direct experience of the pre-1945 period, the ideals of Marxism had lost their allure (if they had any in the first place) or original meanings. While the language of Marxism-Leninism was still deployed in congress speeches, party rhetoric, or official documents, it was for the most part emptied of content. To account for this process in which the form of ideological representation was replicated but its meaning was lost during late socialism, anthropologist of the Soviet Union Alexei Yurchak ingeniously proposed the concept of "heteronymous shift" (from the Greek term "heteronym" -- a word of the same spelling/written representation but different and unrelated meaning than another word.)[249] Bulgarian historian Nikolai Genchev described the phenomenon in less theoretical terms and somewhat exaggeratedly in his memories but the general sentiment was the same:

> No matter how hard the communist regime tried to retain its influence among the people, the paid apologists and the armed hangmen were no longer enough…Honestly, in the last two decades of the regime I had not met a single person in Bulgaria who sincerely believed in communism. Some wisecrackers intimate that even Todor Zhivkov is an anti-communist but he has no choice, otherwise he will have to go back to selling sprat fish

[249] Alexei Yurchak, “Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Jul., 2003), 482.

(*tsatsa)* on Clementina Avenue, but he doesn't feel like working and on top of that his business partner died.[250]

What came to fill the ideological void for youth was Western-style consumerism and the acquisition of material goods. By the 1960s consumption had become a major symbolic battleground on which the political and ideological clash of capitalism and communism was fought with consumer goods increasingly mobilized as weapons in the Cold War. By the 1970s, however, state socialism had not succeeded in winning the economic contest with capitalism, the standard of living was not constantly improving as promised, "consumer socialism" did not satisfy the material needs of the population as successfully as Western commodities, and the coveted communism was ever more remote. In this context when the term "communism" vanished altogether, substituted by the humbler "mature socialism" or the even less aspirational "developed socialist society," Zhivkova's (sincere) emphasis on spirituality, aesthetics and consumption of culture (as opposed to commodities), proved politically expedient. For the Zhivkov administration, it proved a convenient shield against unfavorable comparisons.

In addition, Zhivkova's relentless promotion of Bulgarian (or produced within the territory of present-day Bulgaria) cultural and artistic artifacts in Western Europe, the USA, Canada and the Balkan capitalist states, were seen as healthily promoting Bulgaria's self-esteem and international reputation. The unanimous international acclaim won for the high-profile world tours of the exhibitions of Thracian art, mediaeval icons, mediaeval Bulgarian manuscripts, Bulgarian ethnography, and contemporary art strengthened Todor Zhivkov's positions both domestically and in terms of foreign policy. It also ameliorated the international image of

[250] Nikolay Genchev, *Izbrani proizvedeniia*. T.5: Spomeni (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005), p. 342.

Bulgaria as the Soviet Union's most pliant ally encapsulated in ironic references to Bulgaria as "the sixteenth republic." Moreover, for Zhivkov, his daughter's novel cultural paradigms were useful in modernizing the ossified ideology of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

Finally, Lyudmila Zhivkova's positions among the intelligentsia allowed Todor Zhivkov to establish a close symbiosis in Bulgaria between the Party and the intelligentsia, which did not exist in some of the other Eastern European states. In Bulgarian historiography this idiosyncratic party-intelligentsia symbiosis is known as Todor Zhivkov's "flirt with the intelligentsia." In practical terms it meant that if intellectuals kept "the rules of the game" and supported the policies of the regime, they were allowed creative freedom and toleration, direct ideological attacks against individual artists were becoming infrequent, and adherence to socialist realism would not be zealously policed.[251]

Post-Mortem

Lyudmila Zhivkova passed away prematurely at the pinnacle of her political career and popularity in 1981.[252] Within a few years after her death most of her large-scale programs and

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[251] For the relationship between Zhivkov and the intelligentsia see Evgenia Kalinova's magisterial study of the relationship between culture and the political imperative throughout the entire socialist period, *Bŭlgarskata kultura i politicheskiiat imperativ 1944-1989* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2011).

[252] Zhivkova died at age 39 in the midst of the lavishly prepared international celebrations to commemorate the "Thirteenth century anniversary from the founding of the Bulgarian state"—another of her large-scale initiatives. She was found dead in the bathtub by the maid. The official announcement stated that she died at 2 a.m. on 21 July 1981 as a result of "a sudden cerebral hemorrhage and subsequent heavy and irreversible disorders of the respiration and blood circulation." Her premature demise and the contested circumstances of her death gave rise to endless speculations about the cause of her death continuing unabated up until today and contributed to creating a myth around her. The major versions in circulation are four: that her death was the result of an illness (the official version); that it was an accident where she (tranquilizers- and sleeping pills- induced) slipped, fell and drowned in the bathtub; that she was murdered by the KGB because her cultural politics became inconvenient for Moscow (a slightly different rendition is that she was killed by her Bulgarian opponents); and that she committed suicide. I tend to agree with historian Evgenia Kalinova that the disappointments in her associates (in 1980 some of her closest friends were involved in a major embezzlement scandal, found guilty of corruption charges and handed jail sentences), "coupled with her intense and stressful work tempos and her fanatical adherence to extreme asceticism in

ideas were gradually abandoned. Besides Zhivkova's material legacy (most prominently the National Palace of Culture, the National Museum of History, the National Gallery of Foreign Art and a number of monumental compositions) few traces of Zhivkova's aesthetico-spiritual utopianism remained. After the five initial stages of the program for the harmonious development organized under Zhivkova's tenure (Nicholas Roerich, Leonardo da Vinci, Lenin, Constantine the Philosopher and Albert Einstein), two more stages were completed before the program was dropped altogether: Karl Marx (1983) and Friedrich Engels (1984). Both of these stages were organized a lot more modestly and the program was emptied of the meanings and goals Zhivkova envisioned. Rather than abstract notions of all-round and harmonious development, the program had very concrete political and ideological messages. In the context of "the second Cold War" post-1979, the organizers did not want any lofty ambiguities and stated the goal clearly: "The program is implemented in a period of the increasing ideological role and function of culture in the conditions of acutely intensifying ideological and political struggle." [253] The Banner of Peace initiative enjoyed greater longevity as three more assemblies took place in 1982, 1985 and 1988 but again on a much lower scale. Similarly, the content and message shifted and the banner of unity, creativity, beauty and harmony became the "banner of the planet, dashing towards the communist aesthetics of its socio-political future."[254] It had acquired a distinctly anti-Reagan ring. When in 1984 Minister of Education Prof. Alexander Fol -- Zhivkova's former history professor, a formative influence on her esoteric worldview, who

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eating, derived from the way she understood the balance between material and spiritual, inevitably lead to extreme fatigue and exhaustion of her physical and psychological energy." (in Evgenia Kalinova, *Bŭlgarskata kultura i politicheskiiat imperativ 1944-1989,* Sofia: Paradigma, 2011, 329). There was a spontaneous public outpouring of grief at her death as huge crowds assembled at her funeral. Historian Richard Crampton observed that "Zhivkova was probably more mourned at her death than any public figure since King Boris."

[253] F. 405, Op. 10, a.e. 296, p. 8.

[254] Alexander Fol, F. 288B, a.e. 115, p. 34. 24 December 1984.

remained one of her closest friends and who was known for his antipathy to Marxism-- discussed the 1986 Banner of Peace Assembly, his language is poignantly and propagandistically ideological: "To the sinister anti-communist crusade, launched by Raegan, the Banner of Peace assembly counterpoises the bright ideal for the peaceful world community of children, which will always be stronger than automatic systems of mass murder, because the participants in this community are proponents of a higher credo, that is hope and beauty."[255] By the mid-1980s, the times had changed, the second cold war was in full swing -- and so was the deepening economic crisis in Bulgaria. The intelligentsia's expanded freedom and the liberalization of the cultural sphere were curtailed, as cultural policy was yet again defined by the political imperative and formulated by the highest party organs.

Out of the few legacies that outlived Zhivkova, even fewer outlived the socialist regime. After the end of state socialism, the Bells Monuments and the Children's park that were envisioned as Bulgaria's spiritual center were left to decay and a number of the valuable bells were destroyed or stolen. Here is a depiction of the Banner of Peace monument two decades after its days of initial grandeur: "Desolation, weeds, withered bushes and long-silent bells. More than 20 years passed but there is no trace from the spiritual center. For now, if I can believe my eyes and talks in the neighborhood, this is only a center of decay, of beggars, drug addicts and prostitutes from the nearby highway; a garbage lot and ruin of the unfulfilled dreams."[256]From Zhivkova's initiatives covered in this chapter, only the experimental school for talented children and the gymnasium for ancient languages and cultures continued to operate after Zhivkova's demise, and (especially the NDEK) to provide consistently high quality education to its students.

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[255] Ibid.,
[256] Rainov, *Lyudmila,* 181.

Both of the schools survived the end of socialism and exist in different modifications to the present day as elite and highly competitive high schools (The Experimental School became the Italian Lyceum in 1991.)

Conclusions

This chapter posits that Lyudmila Zhivkova sought to reimagine "mature socialism" and transform the ideal of all-round and harmonious individual and society into a plausible future. That is, she *practiced* a radical aesthetic utopianism imbued with fanatical optimism that art, culture, and spirituality would illuminate the way toward what she called "synthesized, integrated communism." The wholesale revamping of Bulgarian education, culture and art, the long-term national programs for aesthetic education and harmonious development of man, and the Banner of Peace Assembly were all concrete expressions of this utopian impulse. Many of her projects were exceedingly ambitious, extravagant, and chimerical. Zhivkova herself was well-aware that there were skeptical assessments not only of her visions for a radically aesthetic futurity but also of her sanity. In the opening quote to this chapter Paul Ricoeur defined utopia as being on the margin between the realizable and the impossible and on the margin between sane (if fictional) and the insane (the pathological). Albeit less eloquently than Ricoeur, Zhivkova, too understood this inherent tension in utopia between the plausible and the crazy:

> … there are opinions circulating in the public sphere that my pronouncements are schizophrenic. Of course this does not perturb me in the slightest. Let there be assessments like that. But once we prove ourselves individually, and collectively—as a nation—before the world, then we shall no longer be derided as dreamers, star-gazers, and altruists. We dream because we aspire towards the future, and at the same time we

> know how to work hard. We know the power of labor, we know the power of will, of discipline and responsibility.[257]

As quixotic as Zhivkova's aesthetic utopianism was, during her tenure cultural policy was generated, debated, formulated and implemented by intellectuals, artists and specialists at the Committee of Culture, and not by the party organs. In terms of cultural and educational policy being a heavily-funded state priority, it would not be an exaggeration to say that what a Bulgarian historian derogatively referred to as "lyudmilism,"[258] was in fact a distinct period in Bulgaria's twentieth century history and after. In addition, her vigorous promotion and sponsorship of art and culture in the international climate of détente contributed to a tangible cultural exchange with "capitalist countries." Prior to Zhivkova's coming to power there was virtually no Western interest in Bulgaria, mostly due to Bulgaria's unwavering pro-Soviet orientation. As historian Iskra Baeva has pointed out, Zhivkova's accomplishment is not only the introduction of Western art to Bulgaria (which had been occurring sporadically since the 1960s) but also the popularization of Bulgarian cultural or artistic artefacts (or those produced within the boundaries of present-day Bulgaria) in the West. Finally, her emphasis on "universal" and "timeless" (as opposed to communist) values, reduced the primacy of socialist realism and the "party-class approach" to producing and consuming works of art, and contributed towards a liberalization of the cultural and artistic sphere. Even the premier anti-communist source *Radio Free Europe* acknowledged Zhivkova's liberalizing impact : "Zhivkova's close relations with the artistic community proved to be beneficial for both sides. Today Bulgarian artists are allowed to

[257] Lydmila Zhivkova during a meeting of the Presidium of the Committee of Culture. F. 288B, op. 1, a.e. 142, 8-9.
[258] Ivan Elenkov, *Kulturniiat front: Bŭlgarskata kultura prez epohata na komunizma – politichesko upravlenie, ideologicheski osnovaniia, institutsionalni rezhimi* (Sofia: IIBM, 2008).

carry out the boldest experiments, and modern Bulgarian fine arts can be qualified as avant-garde, in the Western sense of the term."[259]

While it was occultism (and not Marxism) that provided Zhivkova with the framework in which she could link ontology, aesthetics and utopia, her esotericism was not antithetical to state socialism. In other words, it was not a utopia that, to use Mannheim's phrase, had a "claim to shatter" the existing order. Rather than viewing her occult cultural politics as incompatible with communism (or in the exaggerated assessments of her associates as anti-Soviet, anti-Marxist and anti-communist), I situate her religio-spiritual utopia as an attempt to ennoble the communist project via occultism. Her occult communism is ultimately a manifestation of the pursuit of the ideal of the "new socialist man," even if the "socialist" was subsumed under the "new man" of occultism.

The attempt to revamp communism via esotericism is not a phenomenon specific to late socialist Bulgaria. From the very birth of communism as the étatist interpretation of Marxism, the 1920s Soviet Russia saw a proliferation of occult-inspired social experiments, alternative communes and informal clubs. In the 1920s, Gleb Bokii–the chief Bolshevik cryptographer, master of codes, ciphers, and electronic surveillance –and his friend Alexander Barchenko, an occult writer from St. Petersburg, explored Kabala, Sufi wisdom, Kalachakra, shamanism and other esoteric traditions, simultaneously preparing an expedition to Tibet to search for the legendary Shambhala.[260] From Nicholas Roerich's original plans to theoretically fuse Tibetan Buddhism and Marxism, to the early Bolshevik political flirt with Tibethan Buddhism in the

[259] Yordan Kerov, "Lyudmila Zhivkova-Fragments of a Portrait," RAD Background Report, *Radio Free Europe* 10/27/1980.
[260] See Andrei Znamenski, *Red Shambhala: Magic, Prophecy, and Geopolitics in the Heart of Asia* (Wheaton, IL/Chennai, India: Quest Books Theosophical Publishing House, 2011).

1920s in an effort to win Inner Asia over to the communist cause, communism and esotericism were not mutually exclusive. Historian Mikhail Agursky has argued that even socialist realism itself had occult sources as Maxim Gorky incorporated Vladimir Bekhterev's 'thought transfer' research and made it the core of socialist realism, elevating it to the sacral status of official ideology. [261] Like the early short-lived Soviet utopias, Zhivkova's attempt to inject Bulgarian communism with occultism was a social engineering project aiming at creating a community of well-rounded individuals who would live in harmony, perfecting their minds and bodies. At the same time, Zhivkova's spiritual utopian politics was distinctive: given her roles as Zhivkov's daughter, as a Politburo member, and as a hyperactive minister of a super-ministry, she had virtually unlimited resources and venues at her disposal to attempt to realize her aesthetico-spiritual utopia at the national level. Although some of Zhivkova's idea's verged on the absurd, her aesthetic utopianism was, ultimately attempt to attach a "human face" to the communist project. In practical terms, her policies contributed to a certain liberalization of the cultural sphere, to intellectuals' active participation in the formulation and management of cultural policy, and to the gradual abandonment of socialist realism in art.

[261] Michael Agursky, "An Occult Source of Socialist Realism: Gorky and Theories of Thought Transference," in: B.G. Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

Chapter Three

From Occultism to Science: Suggestology and Parapsychology under Communism

In 1959, the French magazine *Constellation* published a feature called "Thought Transmission–Weapon of War," alleging that telepathy experiments had been conducted aboard the world's first nuclear-powered submarine *Nautilus* during her trans-polar voyage.

[262] This was followed in February 1960, by a detailed treatment by Gerald Messadié in *Science et vie*, which reported that a rigidly-controlled sixteen-day telepathy experiment took place aboard *Nautilus* on 25 July 1959 deep under the Arctic pack ice under the alleged directorship of Colonel William H. Bowers, director of the Biological Department of the US Air Force research institute.[263] Onboard *Nautilus*, in his own private cabin the "receiver" (a US navy lieutenant) took down his "visual impressions" of Zener cards, telepathically transmitted by the "sender," (a researcher at the Parapsychology Laboratory Duke University) who was for the duration of the experiment located at the Westinghouse Laboratory, at Friendship, Maryland (i.e. the distance between "sender" and "receiver" was 2000km). According to the French reports, twice a day the submarine's captain would visit the 'receiver' in his cabin, and collect a piece of paper with combinations of five symbols (cross, star, circle, square and three waves), both of them would put their signatures on the document and seal the pieces of paper, then stamp the dates.[264] After the experiment was over, the "receiver" was flown into Friendship to meet the director of the experiment, where he handed Colonel Bowers the envelope with the dated sheets

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[262] *Constellation*, "La transmission de pensée, arme de Guerre" (JB), n°140, décembre 1959.
[263] Messadié, G., " *Science et Vie*, n° 509, February 1960.
[264] "Novaia nauka—bioeletronika: vyderzhki iz statei, opublikovannykh frantsuzskimi nauchno-populiarnymi zhurnalami "S'ians ie vi" i "Konstelias'on." *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p. 18.

of paper. The experiment was heralded a remarkable success as 7 out of 10 times the "receiver" on *Nautilus* had recorded the exact same combination of symbols transmitted by "the sender" from Westinghouse Laboratory. The purported staggering results were interpreted to mean that telepathy could convey messages through pack ice, sea water and the steel hull of a submarine. [265]

These two French reports, their veracity never ascertained, were nonetheless taken seriously in the Soviet Union and started a chain of events that resulted in a vigorous resurgence of parapsychological research in the Soviet Union and across Eastern Europe. The Soviet popular science journal *Znanie-Sila (Knowledge is Power)* posed the question urgently "Shall this announcement be given any scientific consideration and if yes, what kind of work are Soviet scientists conducting in this sphere?" In search for answers, *Znanie-Sila* asked a number of Soviet scholars to give their expert pronouncements on the subject in a series of articles, in addition to dispatching a science correspondent to Leningrad to cover a number of meetings, where a different team of eminent scientists from a variety of fields reported their experimental findings on the matter. Both the reporter's account of the meetings and the scientists' pronouncements were published in the December 1960 issue of *Znanie-Sila,*[266] ultimately positing a "new era in the history of science."[267]

While in the previous decade, the profession of "parapsychologist" was nonexistent in Eastern Europe, by the mid-1960s parapsychology was epistemically consolidated as

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[265] According to the French media, President Eisenhower had received a report from the Rand Corporation in Los Angeles recommending that telepathy experiments be conducted for the express purpose of communicating with submarines beneath the Arctic ice, where they were otherwise uncontactable.
[266] "Chto dumaiut ob etom sovetskie uchenye: Peredacha Mysli: Vozmozha li ona?", *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p. 18-23.
[267] Ibid., p. 18

"bioelectronics" or "bioenergetics" (in the Soviet Union), "suggestology" (in Bulgaria) or "psychotronics" (in Czechoslovakia), and a number of laboratories and specialized scientific centers submitting telepathy to scientific analysis mushroomed most prominently in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. By 1967 the socialist state of Bulgaria boasted a national Scientific Research Institute of Suggestology, as well as the first clairvoyant in the world to be put on a state payroll. By the mid-1970s Bulgaria was experimenting with a new national educational system devised by the Institute, poised to merge the sciences with the artistic-cultural, and spiritual spheres, while the Institute, whose locus of inquiry was a hitherto nonexistent science ("suggestology"), became the paradigmatic example of an epistemic success story internationally. This chapter will explore the following paradox: How could such non-materialist realms as psychical research and thought transference be enthusiastically pursued within an ideological system based on materialism? [268] How could such elusive fields of enquiry as suggestology and parapsychology enjoy soaring epistemic authority, institutional backing, lavish state resources, political support, and tremendous and unabated popular interest? What can a historical analysis of the scientific pursuit of psychical and paranormal phenomena tell us about late socialist societies in Eastern Europe? More broadly, what can it tell us about the relationship between communism (materialism) and psychical research (long presumed to be the domain of mysticism, occultism and spiritualism) over the *longue durée*? Extending the level of analysis beyond late socialism and the socialist world, what were the social, cultural, and (geo) political

[268] The 1967 Soviet Encyclopedia of Philosophy defined materialism as "a scientific trend in philosophy, which solves the fundamental question of philosophy in favor of the primacy of matter, nature, life, the physical, and the objective and considers consciousness, and thought as a property of matter, as opposed to idealism, which takes as a foundation the spirit, the idea, consciousness, thinking, the mental, the subjective. "Materializm," *Filosofkaia entsiklopediia.* T.3. Moskva: Nauchnyi sovet izdatel'stva "Sovetskaia entsiklopediia" Institut Filosofii Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1067, p. 343.

conjunctions that led to a global revival of psi research and occultism that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s?

In search for answers to these questions, this chapter will focus on the curious trajectory of Bulgaria's National Research Institute of Suggestology. The second part of the chapter will trace the historical relationship between communism and psychical research in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Because the communism/parapsychology nexus did not occur in a vacuum but from the 1960s meshed with global processes (as one of the protagonists put it parapsychology had become "an international problem"), the last section will expand the scope even further to introduce the Cold War dimension and look at how a perceived "psi race" played out into the scientific standing of fields such as suggestology and parapsychology.

Bulgaria's National Scientific Research Institute of Suggestology (SRIS)

On 1 October 1966 a Council of Ministers decree stipulated the establishment of a "scientific group in suggestology," financed by the state budget, to be staffed by 26 specialists for the year 1966 for the purpose of engaging in "scientific studies in the psychology and physiology of suggestion," "developing the method of suggestopedia" and conducting experiments in parapsychology.[269] Further to the ministerial decision, three sections were founded and furnished with labs and state-of-the art equipment: in the psychology of suggestion; in physiology of suggestion; and in parapsychology.[270] The locus of inquiry of the first two labs

[269] TsDA, F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 1, p. 2.
[270] TsDA, F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 2, p. 15.

was "suggestology," a term coined by psychiatrist Dr. Georgi Lozanov[271] to denote the newly minted "science of suggestion," which he claimed to have founded, elaborated and systematized. The parapsychology lab was tasked with monitoring, analyzing and experimenting with the faculties of the highly popular seeress Vanga in a laboratory environment, in an effort to scientifically explain and substantiate the phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition. The Scientific Group's over-ambitious and enterprising director indefatigably petitioned the Ministry of National Education and the Committee for Science and Technological Progress to elevate the "scientific group" to the much more prestigious and authoritative status of "scientific research institute." Because neither a "scientific group" nor "scientific center" could attract scientists with PhDs, or highly qualified research fellows and teachers, the suggestologists' ambition was to be promoted to the status of "national institute." The need for change of status, they argued was not so much a matter of prestige, authority and legitimacy, but the only way to solve the entity's pressing organizational and personnel issues. The suggestologists made their case incessantly and with vigor and eventually the Committee for Science and Technological Progress issued a written assurance that the scientific group would expand into a scientific research center, whose scientific council would be granted the right to

[271] Georgi Lozanov (1926-2012) held a doctorate in medicine, with specializations in psychiatry and neurology, and later in physiology of the brain (which was the subject of his first PhD). Simultaneously with attending medical school, he acquired a second degree in pedagogy and psychology at Sofia University. At the same time he started practicing stringent self-development through Yoga (which would become a lifelong interest) and became interested in parapsychology. He sought to defend a second PhD in suggestology (the science he claimed to have invented) at Sofia University, which due to the "negative attitudes of some academic circles at Sofia University" failed to pass the vetting of the Presidium of the Higher Attestation Committee (VAK) at the Ministry of Education. VAK, however, granted Lozanov permission to defend his dissertation in the Soviet Union, which he accomplished in 1971 (F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 11, 64). He is the pioneer of parapsychology in Bulgaria, and the founder of the Research Institute of Suggestology (operational from 1966 until 1991) and its director from 1966 until 1984.

confer doctoral degrees and appoint research fellows.[272] The initial "scientific group" was elevated a notch into a "scientific center" in the year of its birth but it took a few more years for Lozanov to draw attention to the pedagogical application of suggestology at the "highest levels of government." Following several meetings between Dr. Lozanov and General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov, and deliberations in Politburo and the Council of Ministers, in 1971 the green light was given to expand the scientific group into a national institute for "comprehensive, coordinated, multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary study of the problems of suggestology."[273] The National Scientific Research Institute of Suggestology (SRIS) became an entity in 1971, and a pioneering one at that: "the world first scientific institute dedicated exclusively to the scientific study of suggestion." [274]

The Parapsychology Lab: Nationalization and Scientification of the "Bulgarian Oracle"

The Parapsychology Laboratory at SRIS was launched with the express purpose of examining seeress Vanga's[275] capacities using the most up-to-date and sophisticated electronic

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[272] TsDA, F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 2; TsDA, F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 2

[273] TsDA, F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 2, 18.

[274] F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 2, p. 16-17.

[275] Vanga (Evangelia) Pandeva Gushterova was born in 1911 in the Ottoman town of Strumica, which was incorporated into Serbia in 1913, presently part of the Republic of Macedonia. Following the death of her mother, Vanga's family moved to her father's native village, where at the age of thirteen she was "struck by a whirlwind" (carried by a windstorm into an empty field). At the age of sixteen she lost her sight completely, an event which is widely believed to have marked the beginning of her visions. Her first publicly recognized acts of clairvoyance concerned and coincided with the outbreak of World War II. Rumors of Vanga's premonitions attracted people from all over Macedonia, at the time territory under Bulgarian administration. She was consulted by soldiers of the Bulgarian occupation forces and married one, following him to the town of Petrich in 1942. In 1943 she received a visit from the Bulgarian king Boris III, whose death she reportedly predicted (he died suddenly of heart failure the same year), in addition to the coming of the "Reds" to power. In June 1948, political relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were severed and the Bulgarian-Yugoslav border was closed, obstructing access of both sides to the border town of Petrich. Moreover, the Communist Party and police closed Vanga's practice but the measure proved ineffective as visitors kept flocking to consult her and she could not control her visions and spontaneous readings of her visitors' past and future. Obviously, there is continuity in that politicians from the pre-communist period, communist and post-communist period consulted Vanga but this chapter is mostly concerned with the

equipment in order to "study the energy fields around Vanga during precognition and the relation of prophesy to other forms of ESP." The official laboratory studies and experiments were launched on 22 February 1967. It should be noted that by the mid-1960s Vanga's prophetic practice had been already partially institutionalized under the umbrella of the municipality of Petrich. The municipality had already organized her activities and instituted a system of advance registration for Vanga's services. It had introduced a fee for "consultations,"[276] and was taking care to ensure orderly and disciplined queuing in compliance with the pre-drawn waiting list. Up until that point the "consultations" with the famous clairvoyant were taking place at her abode in the remote village of Rupite built by the municipality of Petrich, which offered Vanga financial support in exchange of retaining part of her income. Local and regional state and party employees had priority and could obtain access to Vanga within a day, while ordinary citizens from all over Bulgaria had to wait months before their name could be inscribed in the huge waiting lists. In February1967, the next step in the institutionalization of the seeress's practice took place. A letter signed by the Minister of Education was sent to the relevant regional authorities in Blagoevgrad, notifying them that in order to create "the suitable conditions for observation and study of Vanga's psychic faculties" by the Suggestology Center, the unrestricted access of visitors to Vanga's house would be prohibited. Henceforth she was "hired to work at the [Suggestology] Center as an object of experiments," a technical assistant was attached to her

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transformation of Vanga's status that took place in late socialism and turned the local clairvoyant into a national institution.

[276] For the 9-month period 1 January-30 September 1968, for instance, the People's Municipal Council of Petrich reported proceeds in the amount of 44,560 Bulgarian leva coming from Vanga's practice. F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 15. For foreigners the cost of consultation with Vanga was around $30. For Bulgarians, the fee was around 10 leva (at the time approximately $5) or the equivalent of at least a day's wages.

to collect and process data in Petrich, and she had to physically report to the Institute in Sofia three times a month for laboratory experiments.[277]

Restricting access to the hugely popular seeress, however, proved difficult to implement. Neither the efforts of the neighborhood police officer to disperse the bursting crowds, nor measures such as publishing an official announcement in the press, sending representatives of the Center to Petrich, or putting a sign in front of Vanga's house, had any effect. The Suggestology Center had no other recourse left but to address the director of Blagoevgrad Regional branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the urgent plea to allow for "the establishment of a permanent police post" in front of Vanga's house to ensure normal conditions for scientific study. The untenable situation in front of Vanga's home was not conducive to scientific experiments, argued Dr. Lozanov in his letter of request: "Every day huge crowds accumulate, a great number of people come from Yugoslavia and wait for days in front of her door. It is extremely noisy and tense, there is the constant danger of accidents, it is not possible to work in these conditions."[278] Urgent measures needed to be taken immediately because the tension in front of Vanga's door "disrupts the normal manifestation of her psychic abilities, which soon could disappear."[279] The appeal for a permanent police post to guard the orderly performance of experiments (and thus ensure the preservation of the prophetess's faculties) was granted and the relationship between the prophetess, science and the state started to acquire more definite contours.

[277] F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 2, 22
[278] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e.27, p. 99.
[279] Ibid.,

The government-sponsored Parapsychology lab engaged in "biological, physiological and medical study of the seeress' brain in a laboratory setting," and highly sophisticated imported electronic equipment was employed to simulate and monitor brain functions which were assumed to be active in the process of prophesying. Complete medical documentation on Vanga was compiled daily (in both Petrich and Sofia) over the period of two years in an effort to explore questions such as: "Why does Vanga have good and bad clairvoyance days? Are there medical factors involved in her obtaining accurate prophesies of the future? Do biological fields around her body affect precognition and clairvoyance? Does her brain function differently from other people's brains? What of her psychological makeup?"[280] Secondly, there was also a statistical and sociological component to SRIS's work. The researchers carefully documented, recorded and monitored over time all the visitats to Vanga. First, visitors were interviewed and tape-recorded immediately after their visit. Then they received questionnaires from the Institute several months after their visit which they were requested to fill in and mail back. The questionnaire asked respondents to answer as specifically and accurately as possible questions such as: "Did Vanga guess any facts about you which she had no other way of knowing?" "What exactly did she guess?" (here specific options were given like dates, names, events, illnesses etc)? "What was she not able to guess?" "Did she make any predictions that came true?" and "Did she predict anything that had not taken place yet?"[281] Simultaneously, information on the educational and social background of Vanga's clientele was also compiled. Institute's archive contains thousands of questionnaires answered by visitors in the period 1967-1974. The data

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[280] Georgi Lozanov, quoted in Ostrander, Sheila, and Lynn Schroeder. *Psychic Discoveries behind the Iron Curtain,* New York: Bantam Books, 1970, 283.
[281] F. 904, Op. 2, a.e. 293 (Interviews with Vanga's visitors)

from the interviews and questionnaires was then recorded and statistically processed for the purpose of statistically analyzing telepathy and clairvoyance. At the same time, it was also analyzed sociologically in an effort to gather background information on the ever-increasing popularity of the prophetess, and on the social makeup of Vanga's clientele.[282] The conclusion the researchers reached was that "Vanga's visitors come from all walks of life, including the intelligentsia and the youth."[283]

The processes of the "nationalization" of the seeress's practice (i.e. the state management of her telepathic and clairvoyant resources), and the institutionalization of her connection with science, took place in parallel with ever-increasing popular demand. In the mid-1960s visiting the blind seer from Petrich was a fashionable activity among the literary-artistic intelligentsia nationwide. From 1968 onwards diplomats and commercial representatives from Eastern and Western Europe, and Latin America would flock to visit Vanga in Rupite on a regular basis. At the beginning of the 1970s the interest in the clairvoyant from Petrich was piqued even further as a result of her very close spiritual bond and friendship with Minister of Culture, Politburo member and the daughter of party leader Lyudmila Zhivkova.[284] Even though in the extensive memoir literature this relationship is unanimously described as a deeply personal and completely apolitical one, a new type of political integration of Vanga undoubtedly occurred in parallel. In

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[282] For the period November 1976-June 1968 , for instance, 1342 visitors were interviewed and taped immediately after their visit and 1260 (or 93,90% of the respondents) recorded in the questionnaires that Vanga "guessed everything." An additional 1852 respondents filled out and returned questionnaires which were sent out to them several months after their visit with only 16,9 % responding negatively to Vanga's guessing. The document states that 30% of the visitors had a university degree, while 78.44% were under 50 years old. The conclusion the researchers reached was that "the data indicate that Vanga's visitors come from all walks of life, including the intelligentsia and the youth." F. 904, Op. 2, a.e. 379.
[283] Ibid.,
[284] Galina Vŭlchinova, *Balkanski iasnovidki i Prorochitsi ot XX v.* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski, 2006), 49-40.

the 1970s the visits to Rupite became a ritual part of high level official delegation visits. By the mid-1970s the local clairvoyant has become a veritable national institution (literally and figuratively). Anthropologist Galia Valchinova has argued that by the 1980s visiting Vanga for advice had become a social phenomenon, a fashionable trend and a social status marker involving a sophisticated patron-client relationship.[285] By this point the waiting lists were assembled a year in advance and it became virtually impossible for an ordinary person to consult Vanga without connections (*vrîzki),* while privileged access to her increased drastically. In case a consultation could not be procured, Vanga would use lumps of sugar that had been touched by a petitioner, enabling those who had access to Vanga to consult the seer on behalf of others.

Moreover, as Valchinova has pointed out, in the last years of state socialism, publicly parading one's personal friendship with Vanga, be it in memoirs or interviews, became a "strategy of personal valorization" employed by the intellectual elite. Proclaiming to be a close "friend" of Vanga's bore the stamp of cultural sophistication and spirituality, but also of implicit opposition to the officially imposed materialism. [286] A paradoxical situation thus emerged in Bulgaria where the blind seer from Petrich was coopted simultaneously by the state, by science and medicine, and by intellectuals who subsequently claimed retrospective "dissidence" through association with Vanga.

The Center's expansion and Vanga's affiliation with it indicate that by the mid-1960s precognition and clairvoyance were considered ripe fields for scientific enquiry and parapsychology was openly sanctioned, sponsored and coopted by the government. As

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[285] Valtchinova, Galia. "State Management of the Seer Vanga"*,* in: Berglund, Bruce R. and Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe* (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2010), 253-254.
[286] Ibid.

Lozanov himself proudly boasted in an interview: “Our support is from the highest levels of government. The highest. The government has given us excellent conditions for our work. We never have to worry about money here. We can go ahead on any project, in any area of the paranormal. Vanga is the first clairvoyant in the world to be put on the state payroll and our government has created good conditions for researching precognition.”[287] The late 1960s, when the Center of Suggestology created an institutional framework around Vanga at the national level, linking her with science and turning her into a state-employed psychic—thus constituted a crucial moment in the parallel processes of scientification and nationalization of Vanga. The discourse on Vanga acquired both scientific articulation and elaboration, and distinctly medical ring to it (the “going to Vanga” became “consultations” or “visitations”) as the “the Vanga phenomenon” slid out of the purview of superstition and popular religiosity. From the 1960s onwards, it was instead inscribed within the modern (and modernizing) framework of parapsychology as Vanga became simultaneously a subject and object of scientific enquiry. Her soothsaying gift (*dar)* became telepathic capacity in need of explanation and experimentation under the rubric parapsychological phenomenon. [288]

The “Suggestopedia Revolution”: The Science of Suggestion in Medicine, Pedagogy and Education

While the Institute’s Parapsychology lab foregrounded clairvoyance and telepathy as accredited fields of scientific enquiry, the two Suggestology laboratories claimed the scientific study of suggestion as their *raison d'être*. Their main objective was to develop methods for

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[287] Georgi Lozanov, quoted in Ostrander, Sheila, and Lynn Scroeder. *Psychic Discoveries behind the Iron Curtain,* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 280-281.
[288] For a detailed treatment of the switch from religious to medical understanding of Vanga see Galina Vŭlchinova, *Balkanski iasnovidki i rorochitsi ot XX v.*, 2006

harnessing the “reserves of the unconscious” for practical applications in medicine, psychiatry, anesthesia and pedagogy. Lozanov contended that in its “pre-suggestology period,” (that is before he “discovered” the “science of suggestion”) suggestion had been employed unwittingly and intuitively by some doctors and teachers. In contrast, Lozanov’s intention was to study suggestion consciously and purposefully as a new “purely psychological experiment for enhancing the capacity of memory in learning.”[289] This research agenda resulted in the accidental discovery of the pedagogical potential of suggestion. Introducing suggestology into pedagogy produced “Bulgaria’s path-breaking invention”: suggestopaedia (simultaneously an experimental method in suggestology and a new direction in pedagogy).[290] As related in Chapter Two, the suggestopedic method, initially applied to foreign languages instruction, reportedly constituted an “effortless and fatigue-free” method for harnessing and making use of psychic activity, and for activating the “untapped reserves, powers and abilities of the human mind and memory.”[291] Ultimately, because of its purported staggering results, the system was meant to be introduced at all levels of education (including higher education) nationwide, which would significantly “improve and disencumber the absorption of the curriculum by students.” Lozanov incessantly made the point that the effect of embedding the system into the very fabric of the Bulgarian education system would be multi-dimensional – “pedagogical, psycho-hygienic and economical.”[292] The *sine qua non* of suggestopedia in foreign language instruction was teaching four to five times the standard load of material prescribed by the Ministry of Education, all of which guaranteed to be stress- and fatigue-free.

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[289] Lozanov, Georgi. *Sugestologiia i sugestopediia.* Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1971
[290] Ibid.,
[291] F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 33, p.10.
[292] F. 904, Op.1, a.e. 11, p.1

The social and economic advantages in adapting the system to the Bulgarian educational system would be numerous and far-reaching, the Institute of Suggestology argued. First, the time saved by the suggostopedic method would allow educators to pay more attention to the "physical, aesthetic and ethical" education, essential for building an all-round and harmoniously developed young generation. [293] At the same time, because students would absorb the curriculum much faster, academic acceleration would enable individuals "to unfold their talents and faculties and be of service to society from a much earlier age."[294]

In 1974, the Institute boasted six classrooms for its foreign languages classes to accommodate six courses with a total capacity of 75 students. Each of the classrooms was furnished with thirteen "comfortable armchairs, equipped with a movable writing pad" and one low table for the instructor. Two high-quality loudspeakers for stereo broadcasts, one TV set and two microphones were installed in each classroom to help create "pleasant, cozy and suggestive ambiance." There was also a teachers' room and a hi-tech control room, equipped with microphones, switchboard establishing a two-way connection with the classrooms, tape recorders, turntable, and a small TV studio with TV camera and monitors for recording live broadcasts of the classes.[295]

Suggestology: Legitimation and Quest for Recognition

The protagonists of suggestology, and especially its "founding father" Lozanov, were quick to claim epistemic authority for the newfangled science. That entailed first partitioning it from nonscience: mysticism, occultism, superstition, and religion. Unlike these forms of

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[293] Ibid.,
[294] Ibid., p. 77.
[295] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 33, p. 8.

spiritism, suggestology boasted a markedly atheistic approach ("even the Atheism Center will soon knock on our door because they will need us;" or "we cannot eradicate the Vanga myth but we shall attempt to explain it."[296]) Its avowed mission was "fighting superstition," "liquidating mysticism" "overcoming the impenetrable jungles of centuries-old prejudices and misconceptions," even "vanquishing the conservatism within science itself" (for scientists, too, unfortunately were frequently "slaves to dogmas.") It studied phenomena, elucidated and substantiated problems in a laboratory setting scientifically, objectively, "soberly" and with sophisticated electronic, physiological and medical equipment. It was only via laboratory studies, suggestologists argued, that the phenomena of precognition, telepathy and clairvoyance, would receive their materialist scientific explanation. Ultimately, the new science's object of enquiry was the human brain – with the main objective to "raise the productivity of mental labor" by tapping into the "un-activated brain reserves" (that is the 96% of the brain's capacity). To quote Lozanov's rationale for the scientific legitimacy of suggestology: Why should we deny, that it is possible that some human brains are more sensitive to certain material waves than our current devices? There are fish that exchange information through electro- magnetic waves. There is no mysticism here, no magic…Thought transfer is not a question of supernormal mystical forces, it's not about whether we believe in spirits or mediums. We either have the development of a new sense or a new organ or we are dealing with an atavistic throwback from the past. There are many unknown things about this material world; rather than denying them, we should allow for

[296] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 2, p. 103.

scientific study and experiments. This is what will facilitate progress. Whereas denial can lull us and lead to unpleasant surprises in the future."[297]

For all his crusades against spiritualism, however, Lozanov paradoxically invoked the accomplishments of "various occult-mystical and religious schools and movements from antiquity till the present day," to make his case. The yogis, he pointed out in his monograph, were successful in tapping into the unused brain capacities as they needed "hyper-memory" to preserve for the generations popular traditions "in those conditions of no written culture and low levels of development of science and technology."[298]

Interestingly, following its enunciation, suggestology was not subjected to the fierce credibility contests befitting a fledgling claimant of epistemic standing. There was a debate on its alleged scientificity but it was waged on the pages of Bulgarian daily *Vechernite Novini* (*Evening News*) and not in a publication remotely associated with science. Unlike the early contestation of parapsychology's standing in the Soviet Union (to be discussed in the next subsection), the voices raised against suggestology came from philosophy, pedagogy and psychology, while no practitioners of the natural or physical sciences took part. In addition, the attacks were directed mostly against the contender's theoretical and ideological foundations: suggestology was characterized variously as "advertisement of dubious methods," "terminological speculation," "the injection of spiritism and occultism into pedagogy," "delusion and lie," "Freudianism," or "fantasies about inserting information directly into the subconscious." These were hardly epistemological or methodological qualms. One of the most vocal opponents, philosopher Nacho Gergov, dismissed suggestology (and its theoretical

[297] Georgi Lozanov, *Sugestologiia i sugestopediia.* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1971), 15.
[298] Ibid., 15.

foundation parapsychology) as the "mystification of real psychic phenomena in the spirit of occultism and the theoretical pseudoscientific claims of yogism (not to be confused with its useful system of physical exercises)."[299] For Lilian Ganchev (himself an "engineering psychologist" specializing in "the problems of the relationship between man and the machine") the proponents of telepathy were "homebred enthusiasts," "reactionaries" and "ideological saboteurs," while telepathy, on a par with spiritism and occultism, was magic.[300] In their turn suggestologists were quick to dismiss these criticisms as manifestations of dogmatism, bigotry, and attempts to stifle innovation. Against this background of backwardness, they valorized themselves as pioneers of innovation and progress, expanding the reductive boundaries that had been constricting the scientific landscape. As one of the ardent advocates of suggestology put it: "How can one talk about ideological diversion, conducted by a state institute? The new is under attack, the dogmatic wants to stifle it. Pedagogy is horribly backward…The Party speaks of innovation, rationalization, but look at what obstacles are placed in the way of innovation, in an extremely anti-social manner at that."[301] Georgi Lozanov himself tersely declined to participate in the exchange on the epistemic standing of suggestology on the pages of *Vehernite novini* on the grounds that this was "not a scientific dispute."[302] His adherence to the rules of scientific discourse however, did not preclude him from offering a counter-jab that was equally non- scientific and politically motivated, addressed directly to the editor-in-chief of the Otechestven Front Press – a state press which had just published a book on telepathy with Ganchev's critical

[299] Lilian Ganchev,. "Nauka li e sugestologiiata?" *Vecherni novini.* Issue 6164, 27 July 1971, 4.
[300] Lilian Ganchev,. "Nauka li e sugestologiiata?" *Vecherni novini.* Issue 6164, 27 July 1971
and Ganchev, Lilian in the Introduction to Vladimir Lîvov, *Telepatiia bez maska,* Sofia: Otechestven front, 1969.
[301] Prof. Khristo Vasilev, a pedagogist at the National Institute of Pedagogy F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 2, p. 37.
[302] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 20.

introduction. In a lengthy letter to the Press's editor-in-chief Lozanov characterized Ganchev's attack as a direct threat, and even took the liberty to openly make an analogy with the suppression of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. Ironically referring to Ganchev as "more Catholic than the Pope," Lozanov quipped: "What does Ganchev mean by ideological diversion? Is this not an open threat? What kind of approach and polemic is this? It was supererogations of this kind that facilitated the Czech events."[303] It is clear that Lozanov did not enter into polemics to haggle over and fix his newly-minted science's epistemic authority. Rather, he exuded the confidence of an individual with impeccable scientific credentials, international prestige, but also political backing. How was it possible that within less than a decade from the establishment of the Institute of Suggestology, which started as an inconspicuous "scientific group," Georgi Lozanov enjoyed ever soaring esteem, cascading influence, and abundant material resources (in terms of hard currency, state-of –the-art equipment but also highly qualified specialists)? To answer this question first we need to trace the unlikely fate of the Institute and its inventions in the first decade of its existence.

Suggestology Goes International

The establishment of the SRIS generated a lot of attention from the outset (ranging from ardent enthusiasm to curiosity to skepticism) but even the skeptics among the Bulgarian scientific community agreed that an institute probing into the questions of precognition or telepathy should be allowed to exist. (This was part of a general trend across Eastern Europe, which also spilled over to the West, as we shall see in the next subsection.)

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[303] The letter to the editor-in-chief at the Otechestven Front Press, where Lozanov protests the publication by the press of Vladimir Lîvov's critical book "Telepathy without Mask" is contained in the Institute's correspondence archive F. 904, Op. 1, a.e.28, p. 8.

A number of scholars and scientists from a host of disciplines volunteered their expertise to help develop the problems of suggestology from an interdisciplinary perspective. The goal was to establish a supra- institutional council of eminent experts – engineers, phycisists, philologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists to help develop “the complex multi-perspective study of the problems of suggestology.”[304] From the very first year of its birth, the Institute was inundated with letters from a number of Soviet medical doctors, psychiatrists, physiologists and pedagogists, requesting to visit the Institute in order to familiarize themselves with its work. In response to the mounting international interest, Lozanov kept writing to the Ministry of Education to demand clarification of the conditions under which the Suggestology Center was to receive foreign visitors. The Ministry responded positively and in 1968 granted foreign specialists, including from Western countries, official permission for free access to the Institute. Subsequently, the first Suggestology center abroad was established in the German Democratic Republic in September 1968, and there was an official request from India’s Committee for Higher Education for the launching of a suggestopedic center in Delhi, under the management of the SRIS.[305] The following year Lozanov signed a contract with UNESCO for writing a book on suggestology and traveled to the US to popularize the Institute and its discoveries and to deliver a report at UNESCO. At the same time, the suggestopedic system received high assessments from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and an extensive positive review appeared in *Pravda* in 1969, while Mosfilm produced a film about suggestology and

[304] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 2 , p.22.
[305] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 2

suggestopedia.[306] In 1974 following official talks, Soviet Minister of Education Prokofiev requested the experimentation with and implementation of suggestopedia in Moscow.[307]

A new phase in the internationalization of suggestology and suggestopedia took place when the "budding science" proliferated in the West via Canada. In October 1972 a six-person official delegation from the Public Service Commission of Canada arrived in Sofia on an extended visit. The delegation, headed by Mr. G. G. Duclos, director General of the Bureau of Staff Development and Training of Commission was tasked with a peculiar mission. The Public Service Commission of Canada faced the enormous task of trying to turn the Canadian Civil Service into a completely bilingual (English/French speaking) body. The Canadian government had concluded that the new Bulgarian teaching method might well offer a shortcut towards achieving this end and sent Mr. Duclos together with French-Canadian language specialists and psychologists on a lengthy visit to Bulgaria to study the suggestopedic method so it could be adapted in Canada. While the official delegation's presence had uncharacteristically not been given publicity in Bulgaria, the British ambassador to Bulgaria met with the delegation, and sent several reports back to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. In his initial report, Ambassador David Timms described his first encounter with the Canadian delegation, not hiding his dismay and incredulity:

> When I first met Mr. Duclos and his colleagues, I thought I was being conned. Their style of dress is colourful and their appearance hirsute, and when Mr. Duclos informed me without batting an eyelid that he and his delegation had come to study a revolutionary new Bulgarian teaching technique known as "suggestology," which appeared to be akin

[306] "Mozhno li za mesiats izuchit' iazyk?" *Pravda.* 27 July 1969., p. 6.
[307] F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 4

> to hypnotism and even telepathy, I was inclined to remember an urgent appointment elsewhere. However, the members of the delegation have official Bulgarian visas in their Canadian passports and I am personally satisfied now about their bona fides, though I would be interested in any comments Ottawa might have.[308]

Upon further contact with the Canadian delegation, Ambassador Timms again wrote to London sharing the details he learned from Mr. Duclos and reporting that "it is quite clear that the Canadians had been impressed by what they have seen and are going to recommend that the method be used for language teaching for government officials in Canada."[309] The members of the Canadian delegation, on their part, were equally dismayed that Mr. Timms had no familiarity with the revolutionary method which was "well-known and widely discussed in North America."[310] Indeed, from the Bulgarian side, special attention was paid to the deal with the Canadian government. As Lozanov reported to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, "it must be taken into special consideration that the whole Western world, and especially the USA, who do not have access to our Institute, have directed their attention to Canada, where Public Service serves as our window display."[311] Indeed the shop window must have showcased the Bulgarian teaching miracle with sufficient dazzle because by 1974 both the US and Switzerland had signed a contract with Bulgaria's state enterprise "Technology" for purchasing the license for suggestopedia and for establishing an international corporation for its distribution worldwide.[312] By the mid-1970s (less than 10 years from its inception) Bulgaria's SRIS had exported suggestopedia (via specialized departments, centers or laboratories) to the USSR, Hungary, Canada, India, Colombia, Cuba,

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308 UK National Archives, FCO 28/1829, p. 7.
309 Ibid.
310 Ibid.
311 TsDA, F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 7, p. 90
312 TsDA, F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 4.

Austria, Switzerland and the USA. In his report to the Central Committee, Lozanov stressed that the Institute now was facing the "tremendous responsibility" associated with "preserving the supremacy of our country in the realm of suggestology and suggestopedia."[313]

While no one had heard either of suggestology or suggestopedia ten years before, by the mid-1970s not only had the modest scientific group expanded into an Institute with international prestige and branches, but Lozanov was recognized as a "hero of scientific labor," whose work "calculated economically brings colossal capital to our socialist government."[314] At the same time, experiments to integrate education, the sciences, the artistic-cultural, and the spiritual spheres were in full swing at the National Experimental School, with suggestopedia groomed to take over as the main instructional method in Bulgarian schools. And all of this was happening in spite of lack of convincing solid evidence that suggestopedia produced the staggering results it claimed.[315] How are we to explain the meteoric success of the nascent science and its avowed inventions and innovations in the materialist world of a Marxist-Leninist state?

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[313] Ibid.

[314] This characterization belongs to Academician Sava Ganovski, an orthodox "old guard" Marxist, one of the leading Marxist philosophers in Bulgaria in the 1930s, a resistance fighter during WWII who held a number of high-ranking political posts under socialism, such as minister of culture, minister of science, education and culture, deputy-chairperson of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. At the time when he made this statement, congratulating Lozanov "from all his heart" for his "unyielding selflessness and heroism," Academician Sava Ganovski was the Chairperson of the National Assembly (a post he held from 1965-1971). F. 904, Op. 1, a.e. 2 , p. 105.

[315] Having conducted multiple interviews with people who attended Lozanov's foreign language courses, I have yet to encounter a person who learned a foreign language in two months with no homework and also with feelings of relaxation in spite of the heavy load of vocabulary covered daily. In addition, Ambassador Timm's account reports all three teachers from the Canadian official delegation commented on the exhausting nature of the course at SRIS, but attributed it to the need to cover a lot of ground in a relatively short time and to the difficulties of living in Bulgaria, rather than to the method itself. UK National Archives, FCO 28/1829, p.7. Typically, people who took the courses had to acquire languages promptly either because of pending business trips abroad, or as a precondition for academic or career advancement so they might have had stronger motivation in being attentive and absorbing the material at a faster rate.

Obviously Zhivkova's patronage and protection was an important factor in overcoming opposition to SRIS and securing funds for the scientific experiments, but it was not sufficient to explain SRIS's soaring popularity domestically and internationally in the late-1960s and throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It also cannot explain why the Institute continued to expand after Zhivkova's premature death in 1981, why Lozanov remained its director until 1985 and the Institute itself ceased to exist as an entity only with the end of state socialism. To better understand the conditions which allowed for its flourishing under late socialism, one must go beyond the local contingencies.

"Not Parapsychology But Biological Electronics:" ESP and Communist Science

The dazzling epistemic, popular and international success of suggestology and the budding scientific-research institute that claimed it as its *raison d'être* might seem prima facie extraordinary. But given the fact that intense scientific inquiry into psychical phenomena under communism was not a particularity limited either to Bulgaria, or to late socialism, an explanation of what made this possible in 1970s socialist Bulgaria will have to look beyond the local contingencies of the moment. It would require first inscribing the 1970s into the narrative of the historical relationship between communism and the scientific study of psychic phenomenon, while at the same time offering a brief overview of the history of the parapsychology's establishment as a science.[316] This section will thus outline the history of the

[316] According to *The Journal of Parapsychology,* the term 'parapsychology' designates 'the branch of science that deals with *psi* communication, i.e. behavioral or personal exchanges with the environment, which are extrasensorimotor – not dependent on the senses and muscles.' *Psi* is defined as "a general term to identify a person's extrasensorimotor communication with the environment' Psi includes extrasensory perception (ESP) and TK (telekinesis). ESP is understood as "experience of, or response to, a target object, state, event or influence without sensory contact.' ESP includes telepathy (mind to mind communication without normal channels of communication), clairvoyance (extrasensory contact with the material world), and precognition (the knowledge of

relationship between communism and parapsychology, focusing on two key moments: the late 1950s and early 1960 when psychical research underwent a bona fide renaissance across Eastern Europe; and the West and a sort of internationalization of parapsychology occurred.

Before piecing together the history of psychical research under communism, a brief parenthesis on parapsychology's claims to scientific respectability and acculturation is necessary. The "scientific turn" in the study of paranormal phenomena could be traced back to the founding in 1882 of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in London. The creation of this society, inspired by the unprecedented interest some leading nineteenth-century scientists took in spiritualism and psychic phenomena,[317] marked the beginning of a more or less systematic study of parapsychological phenomena. The intention was to establish a permanent institutional base for an area of inquiry that had hitherto been pursued either too informally or too sporadically to offer any meaningful contribution to science.[318] Historians of science Seymor Mauskopf and Michael McVaugh have convincingly demonstrated that parapsychology made its first sustained bid for acceptance by, and incorporation into, mainstream science in the period 1915-1940.

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future events that cannot be inferred with present knowledge). The other component of psi (TK,aka PK for psychokinesis) is 'the extramotor aspect of psi: a direct (i.e. mental but nonmuscular) influence exerted by the subject on an external physical process, condition, or object.'

[317] The examples of leading scientists dabbling in spiritualism and occultism are myriad but the work of three in particular was very influential in providing the impetus for the birth of the SPR. Robert Hare, an important chemist from the University of Pennsylvania, attended spiritualist séances and began an investigation of table-tilting in 1853. In 1865, Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-founder with Darwin of the theory of evolution through natural selection, also embarked on studying spiritualistic phenomena. His research made him a fervent believer in the reality of the paranormal and for the remaining almost half century of his life he relentlessly explored and defended the reality of spiritualistic phenomena. Similarly in 1869, the discoverer of thallium and the inventor of the cathode ray tube Sir William Crookes, also started intensely exploring the paranormal, concluding that at a psychic force was at work in the spiritualistic séances. Ray Hyman, "Parapsychology" in: Neil J. Smelser, Paul B. Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences,* Amsterdam, New York, 2001, p. 11031

[318] Brandy M. Brower, *Unruly Spirits: The Science of Psychic Phenomena in Modern France*. (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

During this quarter century, psychical research was transformed from what had been a rather disorganized amateur activity, mixing spiritualism and mediumism with attempts at experimentation, into a more coherently structured professional and research enterprise. At the same time, it began to gain if not exactly acceptance, at least a degree of toleration from psychologists and other scientists.[319] The work of pioneer American parapsychologist J. B. Rhine (1895-1980) at Duke University was an important factor in this transformation. In the 1930s J. Rhine adopted and popularized the late-nineteenth century German term *Parapsychologie* to replace the earlier phrase "psychical research," in an effort to signal a shift to new methodology, emphasis and object of inquiry.[320] While psychical research encompassed a broad array of observations of spiritualistic phenomena, visions, prophetic dreams, spirit materializations, haunted houses, table rapping, among others, Rhine's "Parapsychology" eschewed these subjects, shifting to controlled laboratory experiments using normal individuals as subjects.[321] This shift heralded parapsychology's bid to seek recognition as an accepted experimental science dedicated to submitting psychic or paranormal phenomena to scientific analysis. While J. B. Rhine's activity was important for the enunciation of parapsychology as an aspiring science, research on psychical phenomena

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[319] Seymor H Mauskopf,. and Michael R. McVaugh, *The Elusive Science: Origins of Experimental Psychical Research* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1980.
[320] In terms of method, J. B. Rhine, together with his wife Louisa, elaborated a new methodology based on card guessing experiments in the late 1920s at Duke University. The program of research that Rhine dubbed parapsychology established the basic procedures for this newly emerging discipline for the period 1930-1970, when the ESP (Zener) cards were utilized in experiments in telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition.
[321] Ray Hyman, "Parapsychology" in: Neil J. Smelser, Paul B. Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam, New York, 2001, 11031).

had already turned international and experimental work was being conducted in Britain, France, Germany, and Switzeralnd.[322]

Similar to their late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British, German, French, and American counterparts, scientists in Russia, too, were up-to-date with parapsychological research and experimentation. The 1967 Soviet Encyclopedia of Philosophy dates the first Russian work on parapsychology to I. R. Tarkhanov's publication *Vnushenie, gipnotizm i chetenie mysli (Suggestion, Hypnosis and Mind Reading)*[323] as early as 1905. In 1907 neurophysiologist V. M. Bekhterev founded (and for years thereafter) headed the Psychoneurological Institute, where he avidly studied telepathy, suggestion and thought transmission. The Soviet Encyclopedia moreover credits Bekhterev as "a Russian scientist who shed light on the problem of thought transference in the context of his study of the role of suggestion in medicine and social life" and as "one of the pioneers of the active study of parapsychological phenomena."[324] The October Revolution did not interrupt the activity of Bekhterev's pioneering group. Instead, the emphasis of his research was switched over to reflexology and his Institute in Petrograd received a new name, the State Reflexology Institute for the Study of the Brain. Because Bekhterev's ultimate quest was for a unifying science that would encompass all the aspects of human behavior,[325] as well as the universe, reflexology merged physiology and physiological psychology with biology,

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322 Early internationally renowned practitioners (also not foreign to the academic establishment) included Henri Bergson and Pierre Janet in France, Frederic William Henry Myers in England, William James in America, Theodore Flournoy in Switzerland, Cesare Lombroso in Italy, V. M. Bekhterev and Naum Kotik in Russia*,* Albert von Schrenck-Notzing in Germany.
323 "Parapsikhologiia." *Filosofkaia entsiklopediia.* T.4. Moskva: Nauchnyi sovet izdatel'stva "Sovetskaia entsiklopediia" (Institut Filosofii Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1967), 212.
324 Ibid.
325 Since he was interested in the human being holistically (as "a body structure," as a "network of neural and behavioral processes," and as "a healthy and troubled personality")

physics, and astronomy.[326] The Reflexology Institute underwent a series of segregations, mergers, and reorganizations around 1921, while Bekhterev continued to accumulate a number of important positions: he became the first president of the State Psychoneurological Academy, the Honorary Rector of the State Institute of Medical Science, a professor of the State Institute of Medical Science, and a professor at the Medical Faculty of the University of Leningrad.[327] This kind of research persisted after Bekhterev's death and well into the 1930s.[328] It was only after 1937 that further scientific experiments in the field of parapsychology were officially forbidden and any attempt to study paranormal phenomena ran the risk of being interpreted as a deliberate attempt to undermine the doctrines of materialism.

This caesura in official studies of psi phenomena lasted until the mid-1950s when one of Bekhterev's disciples, psycho-physiologist Prof. Leonid Leonidovich Vasiliev (whom a contemporary referred to as "a closeted parapsychologist during Stalin's years,") laid the ideological groundwork for psychic studies in the Soviet Union.[329] The triggering event for

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[326] According to Bekhterev, matter had been shown to be a fiction; energy was the universal substance, whether expressed in solar fire, animal metabolism or human thought. Reflexology for Bekhterev thus stretched to encompass the entire universe**.** For a good summary of his beliefs, see Michael Agursky*, "An Occult Source of Socialist Realism: Gorky and Theories of Thought Transference,"* in: B.G. Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).
[327]Nikolai Khokhlov, "The Relationship of Parapsychology to Communism," in Rhine, J. B. and Robert Brier, *Parapsychology Today* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1968).
[328] According to L. Vasiliev's public lecture quoted in *Znanie-Sila:* "When I was still a young man, I joined Vladimir Bekhterev's laboratory and worked with Academician Pyotr Lazarev. Both these men were keen on experimentation in the field of telepathy and infected their staff with their enthusiasm. In the 1930s, after Bekhterev's death, I organized a team of scientists at the Bekhterev Brain Institute and with them started comprehensive series of telepathic experiments." Gleb Anfilov, "Vozmozhna li peredacha mysli?" *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p. 20. In addition to Bekhterev and Vassiliev, two other scientists who studied the area of parapsychology in the 1930s were A. G. Ivanov-Smolensky and B. B. Kazhinsky.
[329] In 1959 Vasiliev published a monograph *Mysterious Phenomena of the Human Psyche*. The huge interest in this volume led to another publication *Experiments in Mental Suggestion*, followed in 1963 by a new revised and enlarged hard-bound edition of *Mysterious Phenomena.* Shortly after the publication of *Mysterious Phenomena* ,

Vasiliev's open promulgation of parapsychology (both among the general public and the scientific community) was the sensationalist story dubbed the *Nautilus* Affair on the alleged series of successful telepathic experiments conducted aboard the American submarine *Nautilus.* As the opening to this chapter related, the article in the French magazine *Science et Vie* was taken extremely seriously in the Soviet Union. Since this moment was of particular significance for the revival of psychic research in the 1960s, and at the same time marked its official crossing into the scientific mainstream, special attention will be paid to this initial exchange in the Soviet press.

In an effort to examine the status of the field in the Soviet Union, the *Znanie-Sila* editors asked a number of prominent Soviet scientists to offer their expert assessments on the subject of "thought transference." At the same time, a correspondent was sent to cover a series of meetings in Leningrad, where a different team of scientists reported their findings. The original French article translated into Russian, the reporter's account of the meetings, together with the scientists' pronouncements were all published in the December 1960 issue of *Znanie-Sila.*[330] As the correspondent related, the first of a series of discussion meetings on the subject of telepathy took place in June 1960 at Leningrad University Department of Physiology as part of a routine seminar of physiologists and biophysicists, chaired by Professor Leonid Vasiliev, a corresponding member of the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Department's Head. The second meeting took place on 15 June 1960 at the auditorium of the Leningrad Scientists' Club. The auditorium was "packed with biologists, physicists, radio engineers and experts in

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Vasiliev was able to establish a full-fledged parapsychology lab at the University of Leningrad, which was also officially so labeled in the Soviet Union.
[330] *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12.

automation, cybernetics and communications" for Vasiliev's lecture *Concerning the Electromagnetic Radiation of the Brain.*[331] In his lecture Vasiliev ventured that even if the stories about the Nautilus experiment were not entirely trustworthy, "the facts themselves" were in agreement with the findings of Soviet experiments in telepathy Vasiliev partook of in the 1930s at the Bekhterev Brain Institute. He discussed the sequence of the experiments and findings, produced floor plans of the laboratory, and cited tabulated results and mathematical calculations to argue his case. Even though "the existence of telepathy had been strikingly demonstrated" during the experiments, the findings were at the time prevented from reaching the general public, their publication permitted only a quarter century later so as "to let the 'court of science' judge them."[332] The lecture created quite a stir, in the words of the correspondent : "Some members of the audience expressed admiration, others puzzlement, still others skepticism. But one thing was clear—no one was indifferent."[333]

The statements of the scientists consulted by the *Znanie-Sila* editors similarly ranged on a spectrum from hailing telepathy as a new science ("bioelectronics"), to advocating more experiments so as to definitively verify or disprove it, to denying its existence altogether. The majority of scientists (whether pro or contra) gravitated around the consensus that in the context of the then current state of science, the palpability of telepathy or the need to study it could not be categorically denied. To ascertain whether the phenomenon had any scientific basis, laboratory experiments and theoretical (dis) proof were needed. On the pages of the popular science monthly there are only two openly hostile pieces, and only one of them (by D. A.

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[331] Gleb Anfilov, *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p. 20
[332] Vasiliev, Leonid. Quoted in Gleb Anfilov, "Vozmozhna li peredacha mysli?" *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p. 20.
[333] Ibid.,

Biriukov, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Medical Sciences and Director of the Institute for Experimental Medicine) vaguely addressed issues of epistemology and methodology. Overall Biriukov concluded that even though telepathy (what he defined as "the *belief* that thought transference is possible") is championed under a new scientific garb as "parapsychology" or "biological electronics," it is completely devoid of scientific credibility.[334] Attacking the main premise of advocates of parapsychology (i.e. that it is based on the rhythmic variations in the bioelectrical potential of the brain), he argued that electromagnetic potentials could in no way transmit the content of mental activity because thought is related to language and "there is no such thing as wordless thinking." Secondly, the electromagnetic potentials of the brain could not radiate at distance outside the head. For Biriukov, the much talked about thought transference "experiments" (quotation marks his), were a matter of chance coincidences, rather than realities, and the only basis for parapsychology was belief in it, or faith. In the other antagonistic piece, titled "Biologocal Electronics Does Not Exist", L.P. Kraizmer (M. Sc. Tech.) attacked parapsychology from the standpoint of materialism, asserting that no possible material carriers of information (fields, waves, particles, etc.) were known that would enable pairs of individuals to act directly as "transmitter" and "receiver" on the two ends of a sort of "parapsychical communication channel."[335] Debunking telepathy from the positions of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, Kraizmer closes with the knee-jerk denunciation of parapsychology as idealistic mysticism: "What I would like to say to the parapsychologists is this: 'First prove that the phenomenon you describe really does exist, then start hunting for explanations. So far your

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[334] D. A. Biriukov, "Thought Transference Impossible," *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p. 21
[335] Ibid., 16.

inventions and theories are hard to distinguish from idealistic mysticism.'"[336] All the other contributors are either avid advocates of the new science (referred to variously as bioelectronics, biocommunication or bioenergetics) or call for the need to illuminate and substantiate the problem scientifically, or at the very least accede that telepathy cannot be summarily shrugged off and that "all pertinent facts must be collected and accurately classified."[337] In search of telepathy's underlying principle, argue the contributors, multiple experiments need to be conducted "on a strictly scientific basis," scientists from different disciplines must band together, merge their respective areas of expertise, and subject the results to scrutiny and criticism. While the proponents of parapsychology disagreed on the causes of parapsychological phenomena,[338] they were unequivocal that telepathy existed, that it would lend itself to experimental and theoretical proof, and that it should consolidate itself "in the legitimate world of science." The centerpiece of the rubric was L. L. Vasiliev's article "Biological Radio Communication: Echo from the Past." Citing evidence of certain animals' "natural means for biological radio communication," and the manifestation of telepathic faculties in people with psychological or neurotic disorders, Vasiliev argued for a biological interpretation of parapsychical phenomena (which subsequently became one of the leading theories of telepathy in the communist world). His conclusion was that telepathic faculties, rather than being a progressive evolutionary trait, were a form of retrogression inherited from man's zoological ancestors, "a sort of atavistic throwback to which certain neurologically or psychically disturbed or defective individuals

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[336] L.P. Kraizmer, *Znanie-Sila*, 17.
[337] M. N. Livanov. "An Open Problem." *Znanie-Sila*, p. 15.
[338] Some explained successful telepathic experiments as resulting from conditioned reflexes (I. Kliatskin), others ventured that mental radiation was the basis for "thought transference," still others speculated on the possibility of a hitherto unknown to science physical field, produced by the brain which is "entirely logical and naturally materialistic" (P. I. Guliaeyev). Finally L. Vasiliev made a biological/evolutionary argument for the nature of telepathy, arguing that it was an atavistic throwback to a less evolved past.

degenerate."[339] The editors singled out Vasiliev's theory as "most interesting" and concluded the rubric with a plea for parapsychology to become a fully-fledged science:

> The question then arises, is it worthwhile to continue such a line of investigation, disputation and refutation of outmoded explanations and search for new ones? Obviously it is. But such work must be done along strictly scientific lines, starting from materialist positions and discarding everything that is false or sensational. Any light shed on psychological and psychical processes taking place in the human organism–processes which we do not yet fully understand–helps give us a deeper understanding of living matter and of its supreme creation , which is man.[340]

Not only was research in psychical phenomena continued with renewed vigor but by 1965 the new science (and terminology) had gained enough traction that the Department of Bioinformation of the Scientific and Technical Society of Radio Engineering and Telecommunications was established at the Popov Institute in Moscow. Its *raison d'être* was to study the physical, biological, and philosophical aspects of bioinformation and to acquaint the Soviet scientific community with biocommunications research conducted outside the Soviet Union.[341] While in 1960 the foremost champion of "the science of the future" L. Vasiliev lamented that 'bioelectronics' was not yet respected in the scientific world and was "still being argued about,"[342] by the mid-1960s parapsychology's epistemic standing was solidifying.

In 1965, for instance, the influential Soviet journal of scientific atheism *Nauka i Religiia* (*Science and Religion)* published articles by scientists L.L.Vasiliev and P. I. Bulia that attempted to substantiate the reality of telepathy by analyzing experimental results. They urged the need to study these phenomena scientifically with the methodological and technological

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[339] L. L. Vasiliev, "Biologicheskaia radiosviaz' – otgolosok proshlogo," *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p.22.
[340] Ibid., 21.
[341] I. Velinov, "Recent Soviet Experiments in Telepathic Communication," *Foreign Science Bulletin,* vol 4. Nov.8, 1968, p. 13.
[342] L. L. Vasiliev, "Biologicheskaia radiosviaz' – otgolosok proshlogo," *Znanie-Sila,* December 1960, no 12, p.22.

arsenal of the modern sciences. The previous year the journal had also published excerpts from famous psychic and clairvoyant Wolf Messing's memoir *About Myself*. The public interest was tremendous, the editors proclaimed they were deluged with letters from very diverse segments of the population – professors, students, engineers, workers, farmers—"who either declared their avid interest in the subject of telepathy, in Wolf Messing, or related instances of telepathic powers or pleaded for the need for studying the phenomena."

The unremitting popular interest in the topic caused *Nauka i religiia* to dedicate a special issue on current telepathy research in the Soviet Union in 1966. Under the rubric "Telepathy: Pro and Contra" (*Telepatiia: protiv ili za)* a 30-page discussion took place as some of the most prominent Soviet scientists of the time discussed parapsychology, the overwhelming majority favorably (with two exceptions). Luminaries such as Dr. Nikolai Semionov (a Nobel prizewinner in chemistry and Vice President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR), Academicians Dr. M. Leontovich, Dr. A. Mints, and Dr. P.V. Rebinder, a leading physical chemist, all spoke of telepathy as a really existing phenomenon and issued impassioned pleas for the urgent need for more investigation, experiments and state resources. The *Znanie-sila* editors were well aware that "thought transference" and scientific atheism could be deemed irreconcilable but they had no qualms publicly engaging with the criticisms:

> There were people who advised us against giving the limelight to such a dubious, elusive to science problem: 'The calling of an atheistic journal' – they argued – 'should be to expose the religious worldview and to fight superstition and mysticism with the force of science. And how can a conversation on telepathy help the fight against religion? Quite on the contrary, all these paranormal problems are reminiscent of spiritism and other such devilry. Were this a science, there would be a clear opinion on the subject…'[343]

[343] "Razgovor prodolzhaetsia," *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 32.

Pace the remonstrations of telepathy's foes, the editors were emphatic that such a public conversation was useful. While conceding that science had not yet definitively solved the question whether "transmission of mental images via unknown organs, senses and means of communication" existed, the public discussion of telepathy was necessary precisely in order "to expose the speculations of mysticism and religion" so that the attention of the scientific community could be directed to "the interesting workings of the human brain."

The discussion opens with a piece by notable astrophysicist Dr. F. Siegel who heralded parapsychology as the "science of the future." So that the science of the future could be firmly placed "in the service of humankind," Siegel urged for organized scientific studies of telepathy, fruitful and creative professional exchanges, or "in short a state/government (*gosudarstvennyi podkhod*) approach to this important cause."[344] Otherwise, he warned, "again the time shall come when we will belatedly lament having to 'catch up with abroad.'"[345]

While in the late 1950s and early 1960s it was mostly biologists and psychologists lending legitimacy to parapsychology, by the mid-1960s physicists, chemists and mathematicians, too repeatedly joined the choir demanding scientific experiments and government resources dedicated to the investigation of parapsychological phenomena. There are three articles and an interview by eminent physicists in the *Nauka i religiia* telepathy special, three of them avidly favorable and only one contra. E. Parnov attempted to prove that even telepathy's most vulnerable principles "not only do not contradict but can be explained from the standpoint of physics."[346] Academician P. A. Rebinder, a leading Soviet physical chemist, also

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[344] F. Siegel. "Telepatiia – Nauka budushego." *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 34.
[345] Ibid.,
[346] E. Parnov, "Neitrino? A pochemu by i net?" *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 48

contributed a piece in which he related fondly his encounter with Wolf Messing, and declared the existence of telepathic abilities in people “an undisputed fact” which proved the formidable natural abilities of “the highest of matter—the brain.” In addition, there is an interview with M. S. Smirnov, a candidate in physical and mathematical sciences. To the interviewer’s question whether modern physics and telepathy are compatible, Smirnov answered:

> I believe that physics is changing. Indeed in physics, in each of the last four centuries some of the fundamental and ‘firmly established’ principles have been changing. This seems likely to continue in the future. True, if what most contemporary parapsychologists are claiming turns out to be true, then the changes will be very major ones. But please let us stop arguing over foreign experiments. Let’s embark on our own. [347]

Out of 14 contributions, only two are “contra,” D. Biurukov (a familiar protagonist from the 1960 debate) and Alexander Isaakovich Kitaigorodsky, a physicist-crystallographer and a doctor of the physical-mathematical sciences. Both critiques come from within the materialist standpoint, contending that due to its idealist essence, telepathy can never be acknowledged as a scientific theory. Another common criticism was that no material nature could be ascribed to thought or images transfer from one person to another. Kitaigorodsky also attacked the “pseudo-scientific terminology," tracing it back to the late nineteenth century when the Society for Psychical Research in London and “a certain category of admirers of all sorts of devilry” (*chertovshini*) self-consciously strived to delineate themselves from occultism, theosophy and metapsychology.”[348]

The disparity between the voices “pro” and “contra,” the space dedicated to the discussion and the tone of the editorial all suggest that the journal openly endorsed research

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[347] M. S. Smirnov, “Ia dumaiu, fizika izmenitsia, *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 51.
[348] A. I. Kitaigorosky. “Teper’ eto nazovaetsia parapsikhologiei…”. *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 40.

into parapsychological phenomena. Several points emerge from the lengthy discussion in *Nauka i religiia* that signal a broad consensus among scientists from an array of disciplines. First, by the mid-1960s the prevalent belief was that telepathy was a "really existing" phenomenon and the most urgent task for scientists from across disciplines was to band together, and pool their expertise with the goal of elucidating its psychological, physiological and physical nature, and discovering its practical applications. Secondly, there was a broad agreement that parapsychology was a legitimate science which did not run counter to materialism. Some of the scientists linked its subject matter so sensory perception ("especially fine-tuned known senses"), others related it to bionics, biological communication and biological information, still others to cybernetics, electronics and neuro-physiolgy. The consensual assumption among scientists (even among the psi-skeptics) was that phenomena such as suggestion, telepathy, precognition, and telekinesis occurred according to specific psychological and physiological laws which could be "discovered," "worked out," and eventually "theoretically substantiated." Since the accepted Marxist-Leninist understanding of materialism included the laws of scientific occurrences, if psychic events were discovered to operate according to laws of behavior, they would naturally be considered "material." In their arguments, scientists engaging in parapsychological research pointed that after decades of research, "orthodox science" still lacked a satisfactory neurophysiological explanation of memory, nor was there any appropriate model for explaining how raw data impinging on man's sensoria were transformed into a conscious experience. They would also frequently cite the dematerialized character of contemporary physics, a science filled with such bizarre components as advance potential (waves of electrons perceived before they are generated), tunneling effects (electrons penetrating barriers which, by the laws of probability, should be impenetrable), and tachyons (hypothetical particles traveling faster than light, and thus implying the possibility of a backward flow of time). In a nutshell, the prevalent understanding was that "hard" science no longer offered a secure rationale for the denial of the possibility of any noncausal event.

Third, there was by the 1960s a shift to linking parapsychological phenomena to the functions of the nervous system and the brain (most prominently the physiology of the brain). Edward Naumov encapsulated this shift in his definition of parapsychology as the branch of physiology and psychology of the nervous system that studied the potentialities and hidden reserves of the human psyche.[349] The subject of parapsychology now emerged as "the little studied functions of the brain, method of transmission, reception and processing of information coming from the environment or from other living beings."[350] Since it was a science of the brain and the psyche, it was therefore in the broadest sense "a science of the nature of man" that greatly affected his sensitivity, intimate and fine processes, both conscious and unconscious.[351] The study of parapsychology was of utmost urgency as "it would expand our understanding of the senses, the boundaries and diapason of human perception" and would provide the clue to how to perfect, train, regulate, and impact psycho-physiological states. In the realization of these possibilities, "the flexibility and dynamic plasticity of the nervous system play an enormous role."[352]

Fourth, the scientific exchanges reveal that by the mid-1960s not only had favorable conditions emerged for systematic large-scale government-bankrolled study of

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[349] E. Naumov. "Rezervy mozga." *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 54.
[350] Ibid.,
[351] Ibid.,
[352] Ibid., 55.

parapsychology, but also that considerable degree of openness was permitted (if not encouraged) in discussing this realm. In the same issue of the official scientific atheism journal, for instance, psychic Wolf Messing (whose memoir the journal had published the previous year) not only openly admits that the main task of his world tours and performances was "to impress upon people's minds the existence of telepathic phenomena" but publicly pleaded with the scientific community to study his telepathic abilities and conduct laboratory experiments with him.[353] Moreover, the editorial was unambiguous in its plea for scientific and interdisciplinary study of parapsychology and urged collaboration across disciplines, investment in technology, and above all government support: "What is needed for discovering the essence of parapsychological phenomena are rigorous scientific experiments, laboratories, state-of-the art technology and equipment, andteams of highly qualified scientists. What is also needed are facts, their analysis, people possessing telepathic faculties."[354] To this end the editorial of the journal of atheism ends with the following appeal to its readership: "if you know people who experienced phenomena similar to telepathic transmission, if you yourself have experienced auguries, clairvoyance and such like – write to us with your address and assist scientists in uncovering the mysterious phenomena of the human psyche."[355]

Finally, it could be safely asserted that by the mid-1960 the credibility contest was resolved in favor of parapsychological phenomena. So firmly were they ensconced in science that there was no need to make the case for parapsychology per se as a separate branch of science or a discipline in its own right (as was the case in the West). Rather, the study of "biocommunications" or "biological information" (both used for telepathy) occurred within

[353] Wolf Messing, "Ia za opyty s bol'shoi bukvy," *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 38.
[354] *Nauka i religiia,* No 3, March 1966, p. 33.
[355] Ibid.

mainstream sciences such as physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics and articles about the phenomena appeared in traditional scientific journals.

That parapsycholgy had by the mid-1960s become a legitimate field of enquiry attracting scientists from an array of fields (physics, biology, chemistry, neuroscience), that its subject matter was not deemed incongruous with materialism and that it enjoyed an unusual degree of permissiveness is further confirmed by the fact that a special entry on parapsychology appeared almost simultaneously in the *Soviet Philosophical Encyclopedia.* The entry offers an overview of the contemporary state of positive experiments in this "field of knowledge," highlighting three main trends:

1. Readiness to acknowledge parapsychological phenomena as really existing (*real'no sushtesvuiushimi*), but not subjectable to scientific study via contemporary scientific methods.
2. Attempts to isolate from the whole range of parapsychological phenomena only the ones that can be scientifically analyzed or at least hypothetically explained within the framework of modern natural sciences.
3. Classification of parapsychological phenomena under not yet fully studied physical processes.[356]

Out of these three trends, only the latter gets attention and examples were offered for parapsychological experiments conducted from the position of modern physics and radiophysics (such as the work of Polish scientist S. Mancharski). In the entry's conclusion, the link with the sciences is again firmly drawn : "Over the last years parapsychology started employing the methods of biophysics, electro-physiology, radio electronics and others." The

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[356] "Parapsikhologiia." *Filosofkaia entsiklopediia.* T.4. Moskva: Nauchnyi sovet izdatel'stva "Sovetskaia entsiklopediia" Institut Filosofii Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1067, p. 214.

entry ends by explicitly exonerating parapsychology from the potential accusation that it is contrary to dialectical materialism. While the authors of the entry admit to the controversies enveloping the field of parapsychology, in the closing paragraph they state that it will hardly be correct to categorize it as hostile to philosophical materialism simply on the ground that parapsychology "assumes the existence of yet unknown forms of sensitivities and therefore of the possibility for expanding cognitive faculties, which is, in the final analysis, according to the representatives of the natural sciences current in parapsychology, rooted in the sphere of sensory knowledge."[357]

These intense discussions in newspapers and magazines, urging the significance of studying the faculties of sensory organs, of the brain and of the central nervous system from an interdisciplinary scientific standpoint were reflected also in scientific symposia and conferences. For instance, the First International Conference on Parapsychology took place in 1967 in Moscow; the First International Symposium on the Problems of Suggestology in Sofia in 1971[358] and the First International Conference of Psychotronic Research in Prague in 1974.[359] In Czechoslovakia, the Czechoslovak Coordination Committee for Research in Telepathy, Telegnosis and Psychokinesis launched an ESP Lecture Program at the People's University of Prague with both Eastern and Western scientists from as speakers and published

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357 Ibid.,

358 The First International Symposium on the Problems of Suggestology in Sofia had participants from Bulgaria, GDR, Romania, USSR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Canada, USA, France and the Netherlands (out of 105 applicants, 7 were rejected.) TsDA, F. 904, Op. 1., a.e. 12.

359 Delegates of the First International Conference on Psychotronics in Prague included professors of physics and psychology, doctors of medicine and psychiatry, and parapsychologists. Subjects discussed included dowsing (water-witching and location of hidden objects), radionics, telepathy, Kirlian aura, out-of-the body travel, and bio-electric energy fields. "Psychotronics." *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*. Ed. J. Gordon Melton. 5th ed. Vol. 2. Detroit: Gale Group, 2001. 1261. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 27 Jan. 2015.

the “first-in-the-world international anthology of scientific papers on psi by both Communist and Western researchers.”[360]

Parenthetically, it should be mentioned that simultaneously with developments in the Soviet Union (where parapsychological research acquired scientific legitimacy and continued to be vibrant) , and Bulgaria (where the level and depth of institutionalization and integration of parapsycholocal phenomena at the national level were exceptional), in Czechoslovakia, too, wide-ranging psychical research was taking place in an array of fields from “psychotronics” to “reincarnation research” to “astrological birth control.” In 1967 Dr. Zdenek Rejdak formed and headed Czechoslovakia’s most active parapsychology center: the Coordination Group of Psychotronic Research[361] followed in 1968 by the founding of the Astra Research Center for Planned Parenthood at Nitra. The latter was a scientific center headed by Dr. Eugen Jonas that claimed to have invented a revolutionary birth control method, combining psychiatry, computational and statistical analysis, medical birth data of women, with calculations of astronomy and astrology (what the Astra Center researchers called “cosmograms.)” [362] The panorama of psychic research conducted in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, together with the array of publications, symposia and conferences on issues pertaining to parapsychology, suggestology and psychotronics indicate that socialist governments in

[360] Zdenek Rejdak, *Proceeds from the Symposium of Psychotronics* (Prague, Czechoslovakia, September 25th, 1970).
[361] “Psychotronics” was the Czech variant of parapsychology, which was presumably based on a new type of energy scientists in Czechoslovakia claimed to have discovered (“psychotronic” energy) which was believed to basis of telepathy, PK, clairvoyance, healing, and any paranormal phenomenon where there is no physical or biophysical explanation. Wilczewski, Janusz, Zbigniew Szczerba, and Barbara Szbicka, eds. *Materialy z Konferencji Parapsychologow '94.* Warsaw: Polskie Towarzystwo Psychotroniczne, 1994.
[362] Based on the scientific method pioneered by Eugen Jonas, The Astra Center of Czechoslovakia claimed it found a way to ensure safe, reliable birth control without pills, contraceptives or operations; ensure fertility; help prevent miscarriages in women with a history of miscarriages; eliminating “birth defects and mental retardation” and evn allow parents to select the sex of their child. Eugen Jonas, *New Dimensions in Birth-Control: Cosmobiological Birth Control.* (Washington DC: ESPress Inc., 1975).

Eastern Europe tolerated a certain freedom of enquiry and public debate in the realm of psychical research as early as the mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Tracing the history of parapsychology under communism shows that there was a continuity in the scientific study of psychic phenomena starting from fin-de-siècle Russia, uninterrupted by the October Revolution, and extending over the early Soviet period. Following a caesura in the 1940s and early1950s, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw a veritable renaissance of research in parapsychology across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Moreover, as is evident from the discussions in *Znanie-Sila* and *Nauka i religiia*, ESP research in the 1950s underwent a brief bout of what sociologists of science have termed boundary-work, i.e. the discursive ascription of selected qualities to scientists, scientific methods, and scientific claims for the purpose of "drawing a rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative residual non-science."[363] By the mid-1960 in Eastern Europe parapsychological phenomena, acquired fittingly scientific taxonomy ("biocommunications," "biological information," "bioenergetics," "psycho-physiology," "suggestology", "psychotronics"), were incorporated within mainstream sciences (such as physics, biology, chemistry, physiology, mathematics, and medicine) and articles about the phenomena appeared in traditional scientific journals. By the 1970s, when the nascent science of suggestology made its bid for a rightful place among the sciences, there was no need for a credibility contest as the consensus over the need to submit the phenomena of suggestion, clairvoyance and telepathy to scientific analysis had been firmly established.

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[363] Thomas F. Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line.* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 4-5.

The Psi Race

In the 1970s, however, public access to ESP research in the Soviet Union was closed (although as we saw, this was not the case in Bulgaria) and reports started proliferating in the Western press that the Soviet authorities "brought a heavy hand down on news coverage of ESP research in Russia."[364] This perceived shift constitutes another curious twist in the tenacious and increasingly intertwined history of psychical research, which as we saw by this point had secured an epistemic seal of approval in Eastern Europe. It should be mentioned, apropos, that as of December 1969 parapsychology was recognized as a legitimate field of science and scientific research in the US, as well, as was signaled by the acceptance of the Parapsychological Association by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) after three previous rejections.[365] In the 1950s, it was reports about purported telepathy experiments conducted with the American submarine *Nautilus* that spurred intense research in ESP phenomena in Eastern Europe. Ironically, in the 1970s, it was reports that the official attitude towards parapsychology in the Soviet Union may have shifted that in turn attracted heightened attention in Western popular media, specialized journals, and among policy-makers.[366] The anxiety about developments in ESP research in Eastern

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[364] Two events received a lot of publicity in the West. In 1974, it was announced that Eduard Naumov, a foremost ESP researcher in the Soviet Union and a relentless propagator of parapsychology as an "international problem" with many academic connections abroad , had been sentenced to two years of hard labor on charges of extracting personal profit from his lectures and maintaining "free, personal contacts with foreign scholars. " Secondly, in 1977 Russian security police detained for questioning *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Robert C. Toth, who had attempted to interview Soviet ESP researchers. Henry Gris and William Dick, *The New Soviet Psychic Discoveries,* (Englewood Clift's Prentice Hall, 1978), 286-287; R. A. McConnell, "Parapsycholpgy in the USSR," *Journal of Parapsychology* (39:2), June 1976, pp. 129-134: Milan Ryzl, *Parapsychology: A Scientific Approach.*
[365] "Parapsychology," in Gordon J. Melton, ed. *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology,* 5th ed., p. 1182.
[366] As military historian Roger Beaumont, at the time a professor of history at Texas A&M university commented, the uncertainty raised questions like: Did the Soviets move their ESP research into their first-line scientific research establishment to conceal the scope of defense-related ESP research in the Soviet Union? Or to heighten Western anxiety? Did they fear that the West, too might be active in this area—or even ahead. Roger A. Beaumont, "C^{nth} ?:

Europe, the uncertainty regarding the motives behind such research, and the closing of public access to ESP research in the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, prompted lengthy discussions by specialists in the US on the potential strategic and military advantages to be gained in "harnessing ESP."[367] The discourse on parapsychology shifted West-ward and no longer revolved around its ontology or epistemology (which presumably had been affirmed, although individual skeptical voices remained) but switched to its strategic potential. Cold War considerations for the military potential of ESP, some of which stemmed from what military historian Roger Beaumont called the "search for jamming-free modes of communication,"[368] marked a new period in the history of parapsychological research, perhaps the apogee of its epistemic prestige, international standing and popularity among the public.

That there was an uneasiness in the US with the disproportionate interest in parapsychological research in Eastern Europe transpires from a book-length classified report the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) prepared in 1972, with the aim of evaluating Eastern European research into "revolutionary methods of influencing human behavior" and

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On the Strategic Potential of ESP." *SIGNAL: Journal of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association*, Vol. 36, Issue 5, Jan 1982, 42.

[367] Some specialized publications include: John D. LaMothe, "Control Offensive Behavior – USSR." *Defense Intelligence Agency Classified Report ST-CS-01-169-72,* July 1972 (Declassified 1990). lngo Swann. "The Threat of Possible Psychic Techniques in Future Conflicts. *Procudings of the 17th Annual U.S. Army Operations Research Symposium,* 6-9 November 1978, Fort Lee, VA (DDC!IIAD B 036704); also see Dennis M. Ross, "Hypnosis as a Tool of Military Intelligence." *Military Intelligence* (4:3), July-September 1978, pp. 34-37; and John B. Alexander, "The New Mental Battlefield: 'Beam Me UP, Spack,' *"Miliiary Review* (LY:I2), Decemer 1980. pp. 47-54. Dr. Roger A. Beaumont, "C^{nth}?: On the Strategic Potential of ESP." *SIGNAL: Journal of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association*, Vol. 36, Issue 5, Jan 1982.

[368] Roger A. Beaumont, "C^{nth}?: On the Strategic Potential of ESP." *SIGNAL: Journal of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association*, Vol. 36, Issue 5, Jan 1982, 39.

"its military implications in controlled offensive behavior."[369] The scope of the report, covering the period 1874-1972, was Soviet and East European research on "human vulnerability as it applies to methods of influencing or altering human behavior."[370] The report, as the very title "Control Offensive Behavior – USSR" indicates, was intended "as an aid in the development of countermeasures for the protection of US or allied personnel." Based on extensive information compiled from an array of sources: intelligence reports, scientific, medical and military journals, magazines, news items, conferences and monographs, the report offered an overview of parapsychological research in Eastern Europe.[371] It is worth quoting Capitan John D. LaMothe's conclusion in full:

> The Soviet Union is well aware of the benefits and applications of parapsychology research. The term parapsychology denotes a multi-disciplinary field consisting of the sciences of bionics, biophysics, psychotronics, psychology, physisology and neuropsychiatryMany scientists, US and Soviet , feel that parapsychology can be harnessed to create conditions where one can alter or manipulate the minds of others. The major impetus behind the Soviet drive to harness the possible capabilities of telepathic communication, telekinetics, and bionics are said to come from the Soviet military and the KGB. Today, it is reported that the USSR has 20 or more centers for the study of parapsychological phenomena, with an annual budget estimated at 21 million dollars. Parapsychological research in the USSR began in the 1920s and has continued to the present. *Based on their "head start" and financial support, it could be concluded that Soviet knowledge in this filed is superior to that of the US.*[372] [emphasis mine]

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[369] The report was authored by Capitan John D. LaMothe, Medical Intelligence Office, Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army. John D. LaMothe, "Control Offensive Behavior – USSR." *Defense Intelligence Agency Classified Report ST-CS-01-169-72,* July 1972, iii.
[370] Ibid., xi.
[371] Parapsychology was defined as "a multi-disciplinary field consisting of the sciences of bionics, biophysics, psychotronics, psychology, physisology and neuropsychiatry."
[372] Ibid.,

In an attempt to counterbalance Soviet supremacy in military utilization of ESP, the Stanford Research Institute launched research on "remote viewing"[373] the very same year in order to determine whether such phenomena might have any utility for intelligence collection. Until 1995, much of that research, conducted under the auspices first of the CIA and later of the Defense Intelligence Agency was classified.[374] The work was declassified in 1995 and evaluated by a panel consisting of statistician Jessica Utts, and psychologist Ray Hyman. Hyman and Utts disagreed about the scientificity of remote viewing, with Utts concluding that the evidence unambiguously supported the existence of psi, while Hyman asserted that the scientific claim had not been ascertained.[375]

In the 1970s, thus, anxieties about the disproportionate attention socialist governments were paying to ESP research and the prevalence of political and strategic considerations about its alleged military potential, prompted vigorous parapsychological research in the US and Western Europe. In both East and West, by the 1970s the field of parapsychological research enjoyed scientific authority and legitimacy, institutional and political support, hefty investment, and popularity and prestige.

The pioneering cultural histories of psychical research (whether occultism, mesmerism or parapsychology) have interpreted these phenomena as symptomatic of "flight from reason"

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[373] Remote viewing is the term denoting the practice of seeking to gain information of distant and unseen places, persons, or events, using ESP The practice of seeking to obtain information of distant and unseen places, persons, or events, using ESP

[374] Ray Hyman, "Parapsychology" in: Neil J. Smelser, Paul B. Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences,* Amsterdam, New York, 2001, p. 11033.

[375] Ibid.,

or "crisis of consciousness."[376] Most recently, the tendency has been for cultural historians to view parapsychology–or occultism and mesmerism, depending on the chronological scope– as tools dealing with and creating 'the modern,' as manifestation of deeper historical processes through which marginalized individuals come to terms with or help shape modernity.[377] From a different interpretative angle, historians of science have opted to focus on these fields of inquiry from the prism of credibility contests, disciplinary formation, and professionalization. In that sense, a number of historians of science saw psychical research and parapsychology as the necessary "others" in the epistemological and methodological contests that consolidated modern scientific disciplines, simultaneously encroaching on and democratizing them (in the apt phrase of Michael Gordin, "If you want to know what science is or has been, show me the contemporary pseudoscience."[378]). While many of these studies focus on the important role psychical research played in demarcating scientific orthodoxy without addressing their ontology or epistemology, a number of these works also engage with the content of these

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[376] For the interpretation that modern occultism emerged as a reaction to the a crisis of consciousness during the nineteenth century engendered by rationalism and materialism, and resulting in a "flight from reason" see James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1976). For excellent works that utilize the 'crisis of faith' paradigm see A. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: Chicago University Press). J. Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); F. M. Turner. *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); R. L. Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[377] Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Brower, M. Brandy. *Unruly Spirits: The Science of Psychic Phenomena in Modern France*. (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010). Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). Henrik Bogdan, Gordan Djurdjevic, eds. *Occultism in Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2014).

[378] Michael D. Gordin. *The Pseudoscience Wars: Immanuel Velikovsky and the Birth of the Modern Fringe,* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

contested disciplines in an effort to explain their appeal among both the scientific community and general publics.[379]

Rather than viewing suggestology and parapsychology as part and parcel of socialist modernity or from the perspective of discipline formation and professionalization of socialist science, I have chosen instead to focus on their epistemic trajectory as an entryway to probe into late socialist societies in Eastern Europe, to historicize the relationship between communism and parapsychology, and to illuminate the contingencies that led to a global revival of parapsychology (and by extension also of occultism and occult religion) in the 1960s and 1970s. To this end, I have bracketed ontological, epistemological and methodological questions pertaining to these fields of enquiry and have consciously avoided the use of such terms as 'pseudo-science;' 'heterodoxy;' or 'fringe,' 'marginal,' 'unorthodox,' or most recently 'border' science.[380] In doing so I join historians of science who have argued that these ascriptive terms lack any meaningful content, and yet perform active demarcation work, separating off certain doctrines from those deemed to be science proper."[381] This chapter thus

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[379] For example, beginning in the late 1970s, sociologists of science, including Harry Collins, Trevor Pinch and Roy Wallis, investigated a number of historical and contemporary examples of pseudo-science in an effort to probe into what distinguished science from non-science. Even though their studies of the paranormal started off as inquiries into the demarcation problem, their findings revealed that demarcation was a much more fluid and dynamic process than classic demarcation criteria (such as falsification and repeatability) allowed for.

[380] A selection of sophisticated works that use some of these frameworks include Harry Collins, and Trevor Pinch. *Frames of Meaning: The Social Construction of Extraordinary Science*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982). Seymor H. Mauskopf, *The Reception of Unconventional Science.*(AAAS Selected Symposium, 25. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press); Roy Wallis, *On the Margins of Science: The Social Construction of Rejected Knowledge.* (University of Keele, 1979). The most recent study that utilizes 'border science' is Heather Wolffram, *The Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870-1939.* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2009). For an uncritical use of "pseudoscience" see the books by Terence Hines, such as *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003).

[381] See Michael D. Gordin. *The Pseudoscience Wars: Immanuel Velikovsky and the Birth of the Modern Fringe,* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). Alison Winter. *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998). Brandy M. Brower. *Unruly Spirits: The Science of Psychic Phenomena in Modern France*. (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

offers neither an apology, nor condemnation of suggestology and parapsychology, but rather, consistent with sociologists of scientific knowledge, has focused on the contextualization of scientific practices. In that sense, my work is consistent with sociologists of knowledge who have over the last decades demonstrated that the socio-historical context is a permanent feature of scientific practices, that scientific research is a process which cannot occur outside any social organization, and that science bears the fingerprint of sociopolitical pressures, just like politics and art. As philosopher Martin Heidegger aptly put it in his famous essay *Science and Reflection*, "as part of culture we count science, together with its cultivation and organization. . . Science is no more a cultural activity of man than is art."[382] In that sense of science, I treat suggestology and parapsychology as equally 'worthy' of scientific standing (though like all science, no claimants of any special epistemic standing) simply because as this chapter has demonstrated, from the 1960s local and global contingencies meshed to propel them out of the realm of occultism and spiritualism and into science proper. My findings do resonate with the epistemic relativism of sociologists of scientific knowledge like Bourdieu, Shapin, and Lakatos whose work has consistently demonstrated that any knowledge claims are rooted in a particular time and culture, even as they conceal their selectivity, history, and contingency.[383] As sociologist Thoman Gyerin has pointed out, the borders of science at any given historical

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[382] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* translated and with an introduction by William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 155-6.

[383] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Specificity of Scientific Fields and the Social Conditions for the Progress of Reason" *Social Science Information*, 14:19, 1975, 19-47. Steven Shapin, "Discipline and Bounding: The History and Sociology of Science as Seen through the Externalist-Internalist Debate," 1991. Lakatos, Imre and A. Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

moment are dependent upon who is struggling for credibility, what is at stake, in front of which audience this contest occurs, and in which institutional arena.[384]

Conclusion

As a first layer of analysis, this chapter traced the trajectory of Bulgaria's Institute of Suggestology not only to illuminate the local contingencies that led to suggestology's standing in Bulgaria but more importantly to explore late socialism in Eastern Europe. That late socialist Bulgaria boasted a national Scientific Research Institute of Suggestology, a psychic employed by the state as a subject and object of scientific enquiry, and an educational system aspiring to merge the sciences, the artistic-cultural, and the spiritual spheres, indicates that Marxist-Leninist definition materialism was re-defined to incorporate not only the paranormal but also interest in spiritual matters. Indeed, the intense interest the general public, the scientific establishment (and in the Bulgarian case key figures from the political and intellectual elite) took in paranormal phenomena occurred in the context of a heightened preoccupation with spirituality, an upsurge of a search for the mysterious, for a cosmic world beyond the senses, beyond materialism. In addition, as the heated public exchanges among scientists (whether exonerating or debunking parapsychology) both in Bulgaria and the Soviet Union attest, the field of parapsychology enjoyed a considerable degree of open-mindedness, permissiveness and openness to public debate. As a second layer of analysis, this chapter extended the scope beyond late socialism and used the lens of parapsychological research to probe into the relationship between communism (materialism) and psychical research (long presumed to be the domain of mysticism) over the

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[384] Thomas F. Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 10-11.

entire communist period. Tracing the history of the communism/parapsychology nexus reveals that there was a continuity in the scientific study of psychic phenomena starting from fin-de-siècle Russia, uninterrupted by the October Revolution, extending over the early Soviet period (with a caesura in the 1940s and early1950s), with the late 1950s and early 1960s witnessing a veritable resurgence of psi research across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This revival led to the consolidation and entrenchment of parapsychology, which paved the road for its internationalization in the 1970s. Psychical research not only survived and endured, but also flourished under communism.

Finally, beyond looking at the local and regional contexts, the chapter has tried to explore the global contingencies that led to the epistemic 'evolution' of psychical research from occultism, spiritualism and mysticism, to parapsychology, to "biological electronics," "bioenergetics," or "biocommunications." To that end the last section has argued that, after its "initiation period" (1915-1940) when parapsychology and psychical research made their first sustained bids for acknowledgment by mainstream science both in Western and Eastern Europe, there were two key moments in the epistemic trajectory of the field: of its consolidation and entrenchment, and of its internationalization. The first occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when a vigorous resurgence in psi research took place, paradoxically in Eastern Europe, spurred by reports in the French press on an alleged series of telepathic experiments conducted aboard the American submarine *Nautilus*. By the end of the1960s parapsychology in the East and West alike was consolidated as legitimate science. The second moment of significance occurred in the 1970s when anxieties about the disproportionate attention socialist governments were paying to ESP research and the latter's alleged strategic potential in its turn spurred similar research in the West. While until the 1950s parapsychology was, in the words of historian of science Heather Wollfram, a “border science” stuck between occultism and science, by the end of the 1960s, it enjoyed not only epistemic standing and prestige, but also institutional entrenchment, as well as government backing. The international academic exchange among researchers facilitated by the climate of détente, together with Cold War considerations about the strategic potential of ESP ensured parapsychology’s emergence as (in the words of Edward Naumov) “an international problem.”

That the scientific establishment of parapsychological research happened so rapidly suggests that psychical research in the 1960s fell on attuned, and even sympathetic ears. Popular interest in psychic and occult phenomena in the 1960s and 1970s helped create a general climate of belief in and curiosity about occult and paranormal phenomena. Could the widespread openness to paranormal and occult phenomena that led to intense popular and scholarly interest in psi phenomena in Eastern Europe, to the burgeoning of the New Age movement, and to the acceptance of the Parapsychological Association into the American Association of the Advancement of Science, be suggestive of a larger crisis of the modernist rationalist paradigm globally? This will be the question Chapter Four will explore by focusing on religiosity under late socialism.

Chapter Four

Peter Dŭnov's White Brotherhood:
Occultism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Bulgaria

The 1970s and 1980s vitality of socialist culture carried over into the religious/spiritual realm. As this dissertation argues, the 1970s was a pivotal decade for the liberalization of culture – and by extension of religious practice. From the mid-1960 onwards, there was not only amelioration of atheist propaganda almost everywhere in Eastern Europe, but correction of some of its most egregious excesses, in addition to tangible relaxation towards religious practice.

[385] Moreover, in parallel with the surge of scientific, popular and official interest in the paranormal and parapsychological, late socialism in Eastern Europe saw the sprouting of all manner of occult and esoteric circles and groups, creating a favorable environment for non-confessional forms of mysticism to thrive, at the same time that conventional religiosity also visibly expanded. This created a curious amalgam of traditional religions, popular religiosities and political theologies, in other words an array of attempts to re-moralize and re-spiritualize individuals, as we have seen with Zhivkova's occult-mystical utopianianism, sometimes emanating from the very summits of the communist political establishment.

In addition to a vibrant and far-reaching cultural and educational politics based on occultism, an international Scientific Research Institute of Suggestology, a national pedagogy

[385] Official changes towards religion were signaled immediately after Khruschev's resignation. In January 1965, the Presidium of USSR Supreme Soviet issued a decree titled "On some factual violations of socialist legality in relation to believers' which served as a legal basis for the freeing of imprisoned clergymen." The administrative and legal changes affecting religion became enshrined in Article 53 of the 1977 Constitution, which guaranteed freedom of consciousness and of religious confession. On history of shifts in policy towards religion see John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). For the Bulgarian equivalent report, written by Chairperson of the Committee for Religious Confessions to Politburo of CC of BCP in 1965, see Zhivko Lefterov, *BKP i bialoto bratstvo: Religioznata politika na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiia i Bialoto bratstvo (1944-1989)* (Phd Dissertation, New Bulgaria University, Sofia, 2012), 238.

centered on the unconscious, and a national clairvoyant on a state payroll, 1970s Bulgaria also boasted an increasingly emboldened homegrown occult-mystical movement with universal aspirations and an international following. This syncretic movement, blending Christianity, occultism and theosophy, and the mediaeval Bulgarian Christian dualist Bogomil sect, is known as the Universal White Brotherhood (*Vsemirnoto Bialo Bratsvo)*. It was founded by Bulgarian mystic, preacher, theologian, phrenologist and composer Peter Dŭnov at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of twentieth century. It was the first nonconventional movement of Bulgarian origin which by its teaching and practice claimed an independent place in the development of the "new religiousness" as early as the 1900s; and it survived three regimes: pre-socialist, socialist and post-socialist.[386] Presently, the movement and its founder enjoy tremendous popularity in Bulgaria with Peter Dŭnov considered the most published Bulgarian author to this day.[387] In a national campaign with impressive popular participation "The Greatest Bulgarians of All Time," organized by the Bulgarian National Television in 2006-2007, Peter Dŭnov came in second out of 2710 prospective "great Bulgarians," surpassed only by the near-saint national hero Vassil Levski.

The current exuberance of the White Brotherhood is attributed to the sudden post-1989 resurgence of religion, which bottlenecked under repressive communism, exploded with the collapse of state monopoly over private worldview. The first goal of this chapter is to deconstruct the post-1989 legitimating narrative of the White Brotherhood that it was the fall of the "godless obscurantist totalitarian dictatorship" that brought about the resurrection of a once flourishing

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386 Violina Atanasova, "The Social Adaptation of the White Brotherhood (Mid-40s – Late 60s of the 20th Century)", *Bulgarian Historical Review,* 2001, № 1-2, 158.
387 Nick Petrov http://www.drew.edu/theological/2012/01/05/drews-global-heritage-history-of-international-students-at-drew-theological-school/#bulgaria

movement.[388] While the White Brotherhood is currently in vogue, a closer scrutiny of the historical record over its entire twentieth-century trajectory, reveals that occultism not only survived state socialism but actually flourished under it, especially from the late-1960s onwards, both in comparison with the movement's pre-socialist history and with the genuinely restrictive atmosphere of the 1950s. In that sense, the post-socialist religious revival was neither as sudden, nor as surprising as scholars of post-socialist religiosity would have us believe. Looking at the prehistory of the postsocialist, this chapter demonstrates that the key to the heralded post-1989 religious renaissance is to be sought and found not in 1990, but in late communism – the 1970s and early 1980s, coming on the heels of the cultural shifts of the 1960s.

The second aim of this chapter is related to the first. Usually the religious revival paradigm goes hand in hand with its explanatory pair: religiosity as resistance. In this reading, both traditional religiosity and alternative spiritual and esoteric practices operated in parallel with the official culture as an alternative moral universe, in direct opposition with communist ideology. Using one such non-traditional spiritual practice – occultism – and tracing its theoretical and practical entanglements with communism over the entire twentieth century, this chapter argues that alternative religiosity does not automatically suggest a socio-cultural *kontrapunkt* to communism. Rather than seeing the relationship between occultism and communism as one of antagonism, this chapter reveals that there was an active confluence between the two (with the exception of the late 1950s and early 1960s) – both in practical terms and ideologically. To trace this relationship, the chapter will open with a biographical sketch that narrates Dŭnov's educational, intellectual, and spiritual trajectories, the birth and spread of the

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[388] The phrase belongs to Orthodox theologian and White Brotherhood sympathizer Konstantin Zlatev. Konstantin Zlatev, *Lichnostta i uchenieto na Peter Dŭnov: Bogoslovski analiz,* (Sofia: Veren, 1994), 5.

White Brotherhood movement, and its affinities and entanglements with socialism – both in its pre-etatist and state socialist iterations.

The Founding Father: Intellectual and Spiritual Trajectories

Peter Dŭnov, also known by his spiritual name Beinsa Douno,[389] was a Bulgarian mystic and preacher, the founder of the spiritual movement White Brotherhood, syncretizing a number of religious traditions: Christianity, occultism, and the mediaeval religious movement Bogomilism. His followers attribute to him the supernatural powers of clairvoyance and healing.[390] They venerate him simultaneously as a religious reformer on a genealogical continuum with Hermes, Orpheus, Zarathustra, Vaivasvata Manu*,* Lao-Tze, Krishna, Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ and others[391]; and as a modern scientist -- a "genius scholar, sage, philosopher, sociologist, medical doctor and theologian."[392] By all accounts (not just of his sympathizers but also of his critics from the Orthodox clerical establishment, as well as the *Bulgarian Encyclopedia* of 1936), he was an inspired and captivating preacher and a gifted fiddler and composer.[393] He was born in 1864 in the Ottoman village of Khadŭrdzha (now Nikolaevka) around the port city Varna, in present-day Bulgaria. He was brought up in an intensely religious environment: his father, Konstantin Dŭnovski, was an Orthodox priest, a representative of the Bulgarian National Revival and active agitator for the establishment of an autocephalous Bulgarian church within the Ottoman Empire. Though his father was an Orthodox preacher, Peter Dŭnov grew up under the influence of the Methodist Church, whose missionaries

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389 His followers call him The Teacher or The Master and usually prefer to refer to him his spiritual name Beinsa Douno, under which he signed his musical compositions.
390 N. G. Danchov' and Iv. T. Danchov'. *Bŭlgarska entsiklopediia* (Sofia: Knigoizdatelstvo St. Atanasov, 1936), 396.
391 Ibid, 184.
392 This description was included in the official White Brotherhood address to the XIth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1976. AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 13, a.e. 141, 1.
393 N. G. Danchov' and Iv. T. Danchov'. *Bŭlgarska entsiklopediia* (Sofia: Knigoizdatelstvo St. Atanasov, 1936), 396.

from the Episcopal Church in New York, settled in the city of Shoumen in 1857.[394] In 1886, Dŭnov graduated from the newly-established Seminary at the American Methodist School in Svishtov in the recently autonomous Bulgarian state, excelling in theological disciplines and music. Upon his graduation he worked for a year as a school teacher in Hotantsa village by Rousse and in 1888 was sent to continue his education in the United State on a full scholarship provided by the protestant mission in Bulgaria. He spent a total of seven years in the United States, first as a seminarian at the Drew Theological School in Madison and then as a student of theology and medicine at Boston University. He graduated Boston University's Divinity School in 1893, followed by a two-year specialization in medicine, which granted him a certificate to practice as a doctor.

The US period played an important role in Dŭnov's spiritual formation as it afforded him exposure to the fashionable ideological and spiritual currents of the day. It was in the US that he absorbed intuitionism, modern Spiritism, phenomenology, and idealism in all its forms.[395] This period also coincided with the apogee of theosophy with the Theosophical Society founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and American colonel Henry Olcott, whose work Dŭnov also read.[396] Theologian Konstantin Zlatev asserts that it was at this point that Dŭnov "severed his mental and spiritual connection to Orthodoxy," for he realized Protestant theology and practice were closer to his worldview. At the same time he did not espouse any particular formal denomination.[397] In a similar vein, though he had connections with occultists and theosophists, as acknowledged by his biographers, Dŭnov did not become a member of any of these societies.

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[394] Grazhina Shvat-Gŭlŭbova (Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa), *Haeresis Bulgarica v bŭlgarskoto kulturno sŭznanie na XIX i XX vek,* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 2010), 147.
[395] Konstantin Zlatev, 11.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Zlatev, 12.

Having received first-class training as a pastor, upon his return to Bulgaria in 1895, Dŭnov was successively courted by the Methodist Church, the Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Theosophical Society, but he declined all offers for official appointment. Instead, he spent the years 1895-1900 in solitude, and focused on writing his two foundational texts: *Science and Education* (1896), where he formulated the main tenets and practical methods of what would become his teaching; as well as *Seven Discourses with the Holy Spirit* (1900) – a text of mystical-occult reflections.[398] In 1901 he traversed most Bulgarian cities and towns, conducting phrenological studies and giving lectures on the topics of phrenology, palmistry, vegetarianism and living according to the laws of nature. The objective of these tours was to "study the psycho-physical portrait of Bulgarians in order to correctly build the foundations for the future spiritual uplift of the nation."[399] Upon completion of the phrenological studies, according to the Bulgarian Encyclopedia of 1936, Dŭnov dedicated himself to purely spiritual work: sermons, lectures and life according to his beliefs. From 1914 his sermons and lectures were all taken down in shorthand, transcribed and edited for publication. He gave around 7500 lectures in the subsequent 30 years, two thirds of these appearing in a series of some 150 volumes in Bulgarian.

The official history of the White Brotherhood cites 6 April 1900 as the birthday of the movement when Peter Dŭnov invited his first three disciples (Penyu Kirov from Burgas, Todor Stoimenov from Pazardzhik, and Dr. Georgi Markovich from Sliven) to a meeting in Varna, which took the form of hiking, conversations and prayers.[400] This in retrospect is cited as the foundational meeting of the White Brotherhood, followed by the second and third meetings in 1901 and 1902 in Bourgas, and a fourth one in 1904 in Varna. The yearly meeting was

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[398] Peter Dŭnov, *Naukata i vŭzpitanieto,* (Varna: K. Nikolov Publishing House, 1896); Peter Dŭnov, *Sedem razgovora sŭs Svetia Dukh,* 1900.
[399] Zlatev, 14.
[400] Atanas Slavov. *Izgrevŭt,* (Sofia: 2010); Zlatev, 14.

institutionalized as a “brotherly summit” (*bratski sŭbor*) and became a regular annual practice of the movement, thriving until the present day (with a decade-long caesura in the late 1950s-60s).

The institutionalization of the summits as an organizational form constitutes an important phase in the history of the movement as it marks the introduction of communal life into the tenets of the gradually evolving teaching. The summit was essentially a summer camp where Dŭnov’s disciples lived, prayed, hiked, exercised, played music and dined communally, listening to lectures by their teacher. Each participant would leave the summit with a notebook, full of guidance, directions, prayers, days for fasting, and physical and spiritual exercises which he/she is supposed to observe until next year’s summit.[401] While Dŭnov had in the meantime made Sofia the nucleus of his activities, the early summits would take place in the capital of the Bulgarian medieval kingdom Veliko Tarnovo until 1926 when following Dŭnov’s arrest, they also move to Sofia to the Izgrev (*Sunrise*) as of 1926.

The Makings of a Movement: The Sunrise, Occult Schools, Paneurhythmy

What transformed a heterogonous motley of Tolstoians, anarchists, theosophists, spiritists and socialists, congregating around a relatively obscure spiritual leader, into arguably the largest non-political ideological current in interwar Bulgaria, was Dŭnov’s launching of his occult schools in the early 1920s and the founding of *Izgreva* (*The Sunrise*) settlement. An influx of university students from Sofia University and from the Conservatory assisted in these initiatives, which both boosted the prestige and attractiveness of the newly-minted movement and guaranteed a wider circulation of Dŭnov’s ideas. Some of these early enthusiasts were physicist-cum-writer Georgi Tomalevski who after the communist takeover became Chairperson of

[401] Georgi Gŭlov, *Petŭr Dŭnov,* (Sofia: IK “Svetovete,”); Tomalevski, G. *Uchiteliat Beinsa Duno,* (Sofia: 1997, 29).

Higher Education and Cultural Institutes; philosophers Georgi Radev, Dr. Metodi Konstantinov and Boian Boev,[402] and natural scientist Boris Nikolov.[403]

The umbrella that brought together the various theoretical currents among the followers was provided by the two Occult Schools, inaugurated in the early 1920s: the Youth Special Occult School and General Occult Course. The purpose of these formations was to introduce both a new spiritual environment and the practical application component (i.e. instructions and exercises), with a view to mobilizing the energies of young people. As the founder elaborated, "the occult school is not for solace of the people, but it is a school for studying the great and immutable laws of Being, of the manifestations of God, wherein our lives develop proportionately and harmoniously."[404] Classes took place between the fall and spring equinoxes twice a week, opening with a lecture and assignments by Dŭnov at 5am sharp, followed by sun salutations, gymnastic exercises and *paneurhythmy* – the system of physical and breathing exercises combining music, motion, speech, meditation and the impact of the natural environment.[405] During the months of July and August, the Occult School set a summer camp on the Rila mountains in the region of the Seven Rila Lakes – one of the most magnificent sites of natural beauty in Bulgaria and the most visited tourist attraction to this day, featuring seven glacial lakes, located one above the other and connected by small streams, forming tiny waterfalls and cascades.

While the occult schools provided the theoretical and practical core of the emerging movement, the establishment of the Brotherhood Center in the early 1920s gave it a

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[402] Boian Boev (1883-1963) studied philosophy in Germany, subsequently became student of founder of anthroposophy Rudolf Steiner, and by the end of the decade became Dŭnov's personal secretary and one of his most respeceted original disciples, a member of the Brotherly Council until his death in 1963.
[403] Zlatev, 26.
[404] Dŭnov, Petŭr. *Izgrev i zalez,* Sofia, 1922.
[405] Zlatev, 27-28.

headquarters. What became the *Izgrev (Sunrise)* settlement sprawled gradually on the outskirts of Sofia upon empty fields, where sympathizers of the movement had started congregating for sun salutations prior to the First World War. By 1926 construction was sufficiently advanced for the annual summit to take place on the settlement. Two years later a small salon with a room for Peter Dŭnov was added and he permanently moved to the Sunrise which henceforth became the public face of the movement, together with the Rila summer summits. It was on the *Izgrev* that Dŭnov developed what he called *paneurhythmy* (i.e. supreme cosmic rhythm) – a system of physical, breathing and meditative exercises, performed at sunrise in the open to live musical accompaniment by fiddles. Essentially, it is a circle dance, symbolizing the sun, based on Bulgarian folklore, and conceived to integrate music, poetry, movement, geometry, form, thought and nature in a harmonious unity, performed to music composed by Dŭnov.[406]

The gradual emergence of the Sunrise settlement provided the basis for a social experiment based on a communitarian vision, which became one of the most important components of the teaching from the 1930s onwards. It was predicated on the idea of experimenting with communal living, shared labor for the common good and individual self-perfection. The founder conceived it as a "school of brotherly comradeship, where an individual can overcome and conquer his low nature and awaken the soul of God in himself for future work."[407] By 1928 the Sunrise had expanded into communal orchards, corn and sunflower fields, and a vegetable garden, supplying the produce for the communal meals. The lectures (delivered three times a week by Dŭnov), concerts and communal meals were free and open to the public, and were attended not only by fellow travelers but also by the poor, the bohemia and the interwar intelligentsia. In a recollection, published during late communism in the main literary newspaper

[406] Gŭlov, *Petŭr Dŭnov,* 63.
[407] "Za bratskoto sdruzhavane," *Zhitno zŭrno,* Issue 4, 1924, p. 236-248.

in Bulgaria, theater specialist Prof. Gocho Gochev painted the *Izgrev* as a mecca, and Dŭnov and his followers as "Christ-like messiahs," saving impoverished theater and film workers from death by starvation, amidst the acute economic crisis in the aftermath of WWI.[408] Gruesomely describing the mass phenomenon of profound desperation, Gochev reminisced about his immediate circle:

> I knew actors, who after they had run into debt, fell into a state of Hamsun's protagonist from the novel *Hunger.* But this outburst of pride was a transient state because high literature with its superhumans is one thing, but ruthless life circumstances, another. Indebted […] humiliated … impoverished […] seeing no way out whatsoever…and in these critical days crept who knows from what human depths the life-saving news: 'Danovists give out free lunch meals for the poor every day.'[409]

It was the social content of the surging movement that both boosted its popularity and signaled the Brotherhood's aspiration to play a role in public life in interwar Bulgaria. According to historian Zhivko Lefterov, with the establishment of the Izgrev, the movement "started to acquire permanent presence in the public life of the country, turning it into the most important occult-mystical teaching."[410] While the new spiritual movement made no significant impact before the First World War, in the interwar period it established itself as one of the non-political movements in Bulgaria with the largest and most diverse following. By the mid-1930s the White Brotherhood had gained an estimated following between 40 000 and 200 000 members in Bulgaria, attracting members from various social classes and professions: lawyers, philosophers, scientists, writers, high school teachers, and officers from the royal corps.[411] It appealed to both urban dwellers and peasants and attracted sympathizers from within different confessions:

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[408] Gocho Gochev, "De da ida." *Literaturen front,* Jan 20, 1977, God. XXXIII, broi 3, p.6
[409] Ibid.,
[410] Zhivko Lefterov, *BKP i bialoto bratstvo: Religioznata politika na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiia i Bialoto bratstvo (1944-1989)*. Phd Dissertation, New Bulgaria University, Sofia, 2012, 35.
[411] Pavlov, Todor. *Istoriia na filosofskata misŭl v Bŭlgariia,* Vol. 3, Sofia: 1976, 197

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Protestants of different stripes, spiritists, anarchists, Tolstoians and communists.[412] At the same time, it had started attracting eminent members of the Bulgarian elite: from politicians like the personal adviser of King Boris III Lyubomir Lulchev; to famous painters like Boris Georgiev, who painted portraits of Peter Dŭnov, Albert Einstein, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi. Among its sympathizers were state officials, actors, playwrights, teachers, writers like Mara Belcheva, Georgi Tomalevski and Georgi Radev; popular healer Peter Dimkov and medical doctors Dr. Georgi Mirkovic and Mikhail Stoitsev; philosophers Dr. Metodi Konstantinov, Boian Bonev, Angel Tomov. At the same time it started attracting international attention; for instance more than 300 participants from France joined the summer summit at the beginning of the 1940s.[413] It also spread to Japan, the United States, Switzerland, Finland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Spain.[414] By the mid-1930s the White Brotherhood was a sufficiently established movement to warrant two separate entries, "Peter Dŭnov" and "The White Brotherhood" in the short one-volume *Encyclopedia of Bulgaria* (1936), where the teaching was described as "popular-scientific occultism," founded by "an inspired and captivating preacher" championing a "new spiritual culture, which aims to recreate and renew the various nations and humankind for a loftier life on earth and to explain the secret laws that govern the invisible world."[415]

As its membership and popularity grew, popularizing the tenets of the teaching became a most pressing concern. Dŭnov's homiletic oeuvre (exceeding 7500 texts), taken in shorthand by his disciples as early as 1914, was transcribed, prepared for publication, and translated into French,

[412] Vatralski, Stoian. *Koi i kakvi sa belite bratia/dŭnovisti,* Plovdiv, 1926.
[413] Mitev, Kamen. "Iato beli ptitsi," *Iztok-Iztok,* 1995, Issue 16/17, 44.
[414] N. G. Danchov' and Iv. T. Danchov'. *Bŭlgarska entsiklopediia.* Sofia: Knigoizdatelstvo St. Atanasov', 1936, 396 and 184.
[415] N. G. Danchov' and Iv. T. Danchov'. *Bŭlgarska entsiklopediia.* Sofia: Knigoizdatelstvo St. Atanasov', 1936, p. 396; p.184.

English, German, Russian, Serbian, Croatian, Swedish, Estonian, Italian and Czech.[416] At the same time a number of journals emerged, of which *Zhitno Zŭrno* (*A Grain of Wheat*) was the most prominent. At the beginning of 1930s for the first time a member of the White Brotherhood, P. G. Pamporov, a philosophy professor at Sofia University and a member of the Cè Institute for the Propaganda of Esperanto at the Hague, toured across Europe to popularize Dŭnov's ideas. In 1930 he traveled around Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden as an organizer of Esperanto courses. In parallel he gave lectures on the teaching of the White Brotherhood in Bulgaria. An article in the *Manchester Guardian* featured a talk by Papmporov on peace movements in Bulgaria where he talked about the White Brotherhood as an influential body of pacifists carrying out the ideals of enacting communal life as lived by the earliest Christians.[417]

In 1937 one of Dŭnov's closest disciples, Michael Ivanov, subsequently to adopt the spiritual name Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov[418] and to become a major figure of Western Esotericism, established in France, Switzerland and Belgium the most important center outside of Bulgaria with the aim of popularizing the ideas of Peter Dŭnov. By 1960 the branch in France had attracted a following of 10,000, and developed an impressive infrastructure: its own publishing houses, and vacation villages in the Alps and the French Riviera. Bulgarian Ambassador in France

[416] Zlatev, 33.
[417] "Tolstoyans in Bulgaria: Professor on Present-Day Movements," *The Manchester Guardian,* 04 Oct. 1930, 15.
[418] Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (Mihail Ivanov) (January 31, 1900 - December 25, 1986) -- Bulgarian philosopher, pedagogue, alchemist, mystic, and astrologer, one of the most prominent figures of Western esotericism in 20th-century Europe, founder of the Universal White Brotherhood and Prosveta Publishing, both in France and Switzerland. From 1917 he was a disciple of Peter Dŭnov, who sent him to France in 1937 to popularize and spread the teachings of what would become the Universal White Brotherhood. In 1959, Ivanov traveled to India where he met the famous Indian guru Neem Karoli Baba who gave him the spiritual name Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov. According to the encyclopedia *Religions of the World,* "After that time [the trip to India], he began to think of himself and allow himself to be addressed as 'master.' Previously he had considered himself merely another of Dŭnov's students." (In J. Gordon Melton; Martin Baumann*, Religions of the World, Second Edition: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices,* p. 59) Because of his attempts to update and elaborate the original teachings of Dŭnov, his activities in France are not entirely approved by the White Brotherhood in Bulgaria but unofficial contacts between the two branches were maintained.

Vladimir Topencharov visited the camp on the Riviera several times in the mid-1960s, reporting to the director of the Committee of Religious Confessions that the members of the movement were predominantly intellectuals (university professors, scientists, doctors, artists, etc.) and marveling at the fact that the French sympathizers of the White Brotherhood sang their songs in Bulgarian and gave their children Bulgarian names.[419]

Essentially, the burgeoning movement had entered a new phase. While in the 1910s and 1920s it was a religious-philosophical teaching with an introspective-contemplative orientation, in the 1930s and 1940s, it aspired to play an active role in public life. Especially in the context of steadily increasing chances of a new world conflict, the Brotherhood took concrete steps and positions on the most pressing problems of contemporary life. It also actively cooperated with the peace, vegetarian, teetotaling and Esperanto movements.

Worldview

While during the first decade of the twentieth century, Peter Dŭnov's teaching was one among many competing ideological currents, by the beginning of the 1930s, it had turned into a fully-fledged Christian esoteric movement of considerable standing, whose distinct features were its occult-mystical orientation and the emphasis on practical application.[420] Since it was from the beginning conceived by its founder as "a teaching without dogma and without form," that privileged praxis, it did not have a systematized religio-philosophical worldview. Nevertheless, since any discussion of its affinities with socialism would be impossible without engaging the

[419] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 11, a.e. 223, 1-4.

[420] The adherents of the White Brotherhood use the term "teaching" (*uchenie)* to refer to Peter Dŭnov's theoretical (religio-philosophical) doctrine, and the term "movement" *(dvizhenie)* to refer to both the applied aspect of the theoretical doctrine and to the Brotherhood's worldwide community of followers. They argue that the term "sect" (*sekta*), widely applied both by the movement's critics and the media, is a misnomer since the White Brotherhood was never part of the official Christian Orthodox church and therefore could not have separated from it so as to deserve the designation "sect."

movement's philosophico-ideological content, a brief foray into its belief system would be inevitable.

Blending theosophy and Christianity, the newly-formed movement aimed to champion a new spiritual culture, which would both "remake and renew all the nations of the world for a loftier life on earth," and at the same time reveal to each individual the secret laws that govern the invisible world. Genealogically it belongs to the recognizably late-nineteenth century species of movement, which embraced an optimistic viewpoint of the evolutionary change of humankind's historical epochs and the possibility to achieve radical change of the personality with the coming of every new epoch.[421] Ideologically, it envisioned a comprehensive model of radical (though not revolutionary) change and the coming of "a new age,"[422] "new consciousness," or "new order," elaborated by Dŭnov as early 1922:

> In today's era of individualism, individuals and nations are too cut off from each other. Each lives for their own sake. Pursuing their own interests and goals. Today, individuals, society and nations are all under enormous pressure. They are in great tension, in difficult conditions, which they cannot overcome and bring into equilibrium. This is why they sink into big contradictions and deadlock, hopelessness. This goes to show that a new stream must be infused in individual, in social, and in international life. And this stream has flowed into life and is in correct relation to the whole. This is the new awareness. This is the sun that rises in human consciousness. Now humankind is at the curve between two cultures, between two eras. A new era is dawning, when all erroneous ideas with which people have so far lived, will be transformed. With the new awareness, a man would see that his well-being is the well-being of everyone. The new consciousness, will bring about a radical transformation in the whole order of life.[423]

[421] Atanasova, "The Social Adaptation of the White Brotherhood, 159.
[422] "The new age is coming! The magnificent in the world is coming! The consciousness of people will awaken, a new order will be instituted. In the souls of everyone something new will be deposited – a new stream, a new aspiration. Nations will unite. Then weapons will turn into ploughs. Earth will turn into paradise." Peter Dŭnov in AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 14, a.e. 303, 9-10
[423] Peter Dŭnov, "Noviiat den," In AMVR, F. 10, Op. 14, a.e. 303, 11.

Besides the promotion of a moral-ethical worldview and way of life according to the teachings of Dŭnov, it had a well-elaborated social program that called for repudiation of individualism and private property, openly criticized social organization under capitalism, sought social impact over Bulgarian society at large (as opposed to life in isolation) and advocated communal values and collective life. While its social program and communitarian vision were modeled on early Christianity, the teaching's name, goals, and philosophy of history were derived from theosophy.

Dŭnov's White Brotherhood is premised on the core theosophical notion that the world is governed by invisible adepts, comprising the Great Universal White Brotherhood – the humankind's presumed governing body.[424] All religious reformers and founders of religion were supplied by the Brotherhood, who periodically send their messengers with the mission of helping the cultural, philosophical, artistic and spiritual progress of humankind.[425] Based on this theosophical understanding, both theosophy and Dŭnov's teaching (and as we saw in Chapters One and Two, Lyudmila Zhivkova) shared three basic goals:

1. the attainment of universal brotherhood among people on earth without regard to race, nation, gender, religion, class and social standing.

2. the comprehensive study of all religions, mythologies, and philosophical systems, arts and sciences both West and East.

3. the study of occult (hidden) laws in nature and the Cosmos and the awakening of the latent powers and faculties of the individual and their use for the benefit and well-being of the entire humankind.[426]

[424] These adepts are believed to inhabit a variety of places (Shambhala, the Gobi desert, the Himalayas, Lebanon, among others) and communicate with each other telepathically.
[425] Some of these representatives include Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana, Plato, Apostle Paul, Paolo Veronese, Christian Rosenkreuz¸Count of Saint Germain , Francis Bacon, Thomas Vogan, Chandragupta, and Elena Blavatsky. Needless to say Peter Dŭnov considered himself one of those messengers. In N. G. Danchov' and Iv. T. Danchov'. "White Brotherhood" in *Bŭlgarska entsiklopediia.* Sofia: Knigoizdatelstvo St. Atanasov', 1936, 184.
[426] From Konstantin Zlatev, *Lichnostta i uchenieto na Peter Dŭnov: Bogoslovski analiz,* Sofia: Veren, 1994, 11-12.

Similarly, Dŭnov's conception of world history was also derived from theosophy. According to theosophical beliefs, humankind has reached its present level of evolution passing successively through stages of lower races and civilizations. Each world historical period saw the advent of six successive races. At the beginning of the twentieth century, humankind was allegedly in the period of the fifth race, at the dawn of the emergence of the conditions for the transition to the sixth race. With the advent of the sixth race humanity would be perfected physically and spiritually and a new sense would be developed in man: clairvoyance.[427] Peter Dŭnov assigned to Slavdom, in general, and to Bulgaria, in particular the mission of championing of the "new race." According to his multiple lectures, Slavs are carriers of the "new culture" of "brotherhood, equality and liberty," on which presumably "all nations of the world will draw."[428] In that sense one of the movement's missions was to enhance the world role of Bulgaria and Slavdom through the popularization of this new "culture of the sixth race."

How could an insignificant occult-mystical teaching with no dogma or organization in less than two decades become arguably the most attractive spiritual current in interwar Bulgaria? Most of the interwar observers who tried to explain the extraordinary interwar appeal of Peter Dŭnov and his teaching have pointed to the cataclysmic social and economic consequences of the First World War and the ensuing profound moral crisis and crisis of national identity. Dŭnov's followers, on the contrary, have stressed the internal merits of the movement that made it irresistible: its emphasis on the practical application, its reconciliation of science and belief, as

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[427] Pavlov, Todor. *Istoriia na filosofskata misŭl v Bŭlgariia,* Vol. 3, Sofia: 1976, 199-200.

[428] Peter Dŭnov, "Da vŭzlyubim Gospoda," delivered on 6 April 1919, p. 76. In Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive (MVnR), F. 10, Op. 14, a.e. 303, 1. The entire quote from his lecture is as follows: "Do not fear that which will befall you. The future of the Bulgarian nation, with some exceptions, is bright. The future of the Slavs is bright. They carry culture no one suspects. All nations will draw on this culture. It shall be the culture of brotherhood, equality and liberty. In the name of this culture all nations will be united so that the big nations will protect the small nations. That is why I plead with all men, women and children to fight for the idea, which will bring brotherhood, equality and liberty among peoples.

well as Dŭnov's charisma and supernatural abilities. Critics pointed to a combination of external and internal factors. Interwar Orthodox theologian Dr. Archimandrite Evtimii, for instance, singled out two paramount characteristics for the movement's popularity. First, unlike the Orthodox Church, Dŭnov's teaching did not put strict prohibitions on human weakness; and second, Dŭnov's promise for religious science and rational faith responded to popular demand for reconciliation between the two.[429] That this was the case could be glimpsed from the explosion of publications treating the relationship between religion and science in interwar Bulgaria. Moreover, lectures and talks which directly or indirectly analyzed the problem of the soul and religion from the standpoint of science and philosophy were massively attended, mostly by young audiences.[430] Observes attributed these phenomena to the need of the modern religious person to explain his/her faith.

Several auto-biographical narratives written by some of Dŭnov's more distinguished followers in response to enquiries from the Ministry of Religious Confessions lend credibility to this interpretation. Chemical engineer and inventor Dimitŭr Vladimirov Kochev (b. 1912), who graduated with an engineering degree from the University of Graz in Austria, and who at the time of writing the bio (1969) was director of a research group at the Institute for Electrotechnical Industry, started his short bio with his educational and professional achievements. He stressed the fact that he never engaged in any kind of political activity – "neither before, nor after 1944," but that he has always had a positive attitude towards the ideals of socialism. Having grown up in a religious environment in an evangelical family, he has maintained contact with the Protestant Church and helped a few pastors in their "spiritual-

[429] Dr. Archim. Evtimii, *Pisma protiv dŭnovizma,* Sofia: 1923, 15.
[430] Mitev, Kamen. "Iato beli ptitsi," *Iztok-Iztok,* 1995, Issue 16/17, 41-42.

enlightening work and in their administrative functions."[431] Here is how he described his motivation for joining the White Brotherhood: "My interest in science, philosophy and religion lead me to the ideology of the White Brotherhood, where I found the most successful, modern, original and profound interpretation of the teaching of Christ."[432] Mathematician Todor Simeonov Simeonov, who graduated Sofia University with a degree in mathematics, and became a teacher pointed not only to the originality and progressiveness of Dŭnov's teaching, but to its complementarity with communism. Prior to 1944, as a teacher "known for his left ideas," he was "fired as a closeted communist and banned from any state employment," so in 1941 he left for Bratislava, where he also obtained a degree in mechanical engineering.[433] By the same token, physicist, essayist and novelist Georgi Tomalevski (b. 1897), who immediately after the communist takeover became Director of Higher education and Cultural Institutes at the Ministry of People's Education, also unambiguously lauded the modernity of the movement: "In the White Brotherhood society and the doctrine of the Teacher I found answers to a number of questions about life, evolution and the meaning of the individual, as well as society. This teaching is nothing other than Christian doctrine developed and adapted to modernity and everyday life."[434]

Beyond the aftermath of the WWI as a breeding ground for mysticism, and the internal merits of the movement, one of the very few scholarly treatments of the movement also firmly positioned its emergence in the context of modernity and its attendant markers: the changing perceptions of the social role and political status of the Orthodox Church following liberation from Ottoman role, combined with economic modernization, social stratification, the spread of

[431] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 11, a.e. 920, 1, 11.04.1969
[432] Ibid.,
[433] Ibid., 2.
[434] Ibid.,

literacy and education, the mass appeal of science, and secularization.[435] Kamen Mitev sees the emergence of late nineteenth century Bulgarian theosophists, Tolstoians, spiritists and Danovists as signaling the partial integration of the Bulgarian cultural elite into European modernity via cosmopolitan and universal philosophical-ethical systems. He sees these movements simultaneously as aspects of intercultural communication and as expressions of the clash between the universalist and the traditionalist orientations within Bulgarian society. Up until the First World War these movements had insignificant following but after the war there was a mass and formidable surge of mysticism, occultism and utopian social experiments -- with the Universal White Brotherhood crystallizing as the gravitational center of these social processes. Mitev argues that after the First World War European modernity penetrated Bulgarian culture with its intellectual climate of the need for a pan-European cultural synthesis and a global socio-economic symbiosis.[436] Ultimately, he situates Dŭnov's movement as an avant-garde modern utopia on the basis of its insistence on the social experiment, the gaze towards a future state, its holistic view of the world and life, and its internal coherence as an organized system. It is "the utopia of human self-realization (wherein via mystical revelation or with other means one 'remembers' one's forgotten identity, re-learns how to commune with nature, renews his/her contact with the universe."[437] This utopia is based on expansion of consciousness, recovery of individual richness, quest for synthesis of sciences, holistic and harmonious approach to human conduct and life, all-round-development, creativity, high moral-ethical standards, and an orientation towards man's cosmic mission. In that sense, Mitev sees it as an alternative cultural

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[435] Mitev, Kamen. "Iato beli ptitsi," *Iztok-Iztok,* 1995, Issue 16/17, 41-49.
[436] Ibid.,
[437] Ibid., 49.

model, an ideological *kontrapunkt* to the catastrophic post-WWI reality and all-pervading sense of profound moral crisis.[438]

Polish literary historian of Bulgaria Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa also sees the White Brotherhood in the context of modernity but in the opposite direction: as a reaction against it. In her assessment Dŭnov's movement is an interesting attempt for new re-enchantment of the world, intended simultaneously to raise the prestige of 'the self', and of local history and tradition, discredited in the process of modernization.[439]

Violina Atanasova similarly has highlighted the utopian component and ascribes the enduring and ever increasing popularity of the White Brotherhood to the compatibility of Peter Dŭnov's movement with the proliferation since the late nineteenth century "under the sign of the utopian mystic-religious ideas of movements for a 'new thought,' a 'new age' and a 'new culture' in world development, for the formation of the 'new personality' and the 'new race' in the course of human evolution."[440] Together with these authors, I see the utopian and social content, the communitarian vision, the future orientation towards a 'new age,' 'new culture,' and 'the new person,' the emphasis on collective values, the supra-national and cosmopolitan orientation, the insistence of holistic approach to life (or a totality), and most importantly, the reaction against social injustice of life under a competitive, individualist and exploitative system as crucial for the spread of Dŭnov's ideas. But I will go further to argue that occultism shared these concerns with Marxism. While both historians of communism and scholars of occultism have for the most part ignored this apparently incongruous interrelationship, the second part of this chapter will empirically document the affinities between the two. Moreover, it will show that

[438] Ibid.,

[439] Grazhina Shvat-Gŭlŭbova (Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa), *Haeresis Bulgarica v bŭlgarskoto kulturno sŭznanie na XIX i XX vek,* Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 2010, 147.

[440] Violina Atanasova, "The Social Adaptation of the White Brotherhood (Mid-40s – Late 60s of the 20th Century)", *Bulgarian Historical Review,* 2001, № 1-2. 158-183.

confluence between these nineteenth-century cultural configurations was not confined to the late nineteenth century, but carried over well into the twentieth century, to reach a second lease on life under late socialism after the initial apogee during the interwar period. Contrary to the post-1989 claims of supporters of the White Brotherhood, the relationship between the White Brotherhood and communism was not that of antagonism or reluctant cohabitation– with the exception of the late-1950s and early 1960s – but that of convergence.

Occultism and Communism: Elective Affinities

The affinity between the Bulgarian occult-mystical movement and communism dates back to the very birth of the White Brotherhood at the beginning of the twentieth century but intensified perceptibly in the immediate post-WWI climate. In his numerous lectures and sermons Peter Dŭnov publicly preached the need to eradicate the old social order, called for the repudiation of private property and openly endorsed socialist, communist and anarchist ideals. He admonished against private property, which he deemed the root cause of all crimes and wars and systematically elaborated a communitarian vision.[441] As early as 1919 (that is two and a half decades before the communist takeovers in Eastern Europe), Dŭnov would repeatedly extol bolshevism as "the whip of God's hand," "a religion of labor," "an idea that came from the adepts," and even "a divine idea."[442] A recurring metaphor that emerges in his talks is the Bolsheviks as "God's tax-collectors," sent to "gather from the rich that which over 2000 years they had not paid for."[443] Alternately, the Bolsheviks are likened to skilled surgeons who know

[441] "Remove all property from our land, since it is the cause of all arguments and wars. The only property a person owns is his/her body." Peter Dŭnov, "Sila i zhivot," 116.
[442] "I view bolshevism ideologically and call it a religion of labor. If they do not give up their ideas, the Bolsheviks will do good deeds in the world…we should not resist their ideas" "Da vŭzlyubish Gospoda," Delivered on 6 April 1919, p. 88.
[443] Ibid., 76.

how to use the knife to "cut only the diseased part and to help with the healing,"[444] or to farmers who must "thoroughly plough and uproot everything they find on the land" so as to sow a new crop.[445] Ultimately, the Bolsheviks are depicted as rebellious sons overthrowing the despotism of their tyrannical father and teaching him how to govern benignly:

> You fear the Bolsheviks. There is nothing to fear, they are children of the monarchists. You are cultivating these children for 8000 years. The son returns from abroad to teach his father a lesson. We also see this in Gogol's novella *Taras Bulba.* Taras Bulba sent his sons off to a foreign land for their education and when they returned, he hurled himself at them to beat them. He wanted to test their strength. When they got the better of him, he was pleased. The Bolsheviks will show their father how to govern. Before the law both the rich and the poor are equal. To each should be given what is needed. Now [the Bolsheviks] are removing the poor man's sack and they are telling the rich they must work. The time has come for poor men to mend the world.[446]

Moreover, for Dŭnov Christians and communists had the same aspirations and objectives, only their methods differed, with Dŭnov stressing non-violent individual evolution over revolution. Even if they had divergent methods, Dŭnov saw communists as "the bearers of the new consciousness," fighters for brotherhood and equality, "making enormous personal sacrifices for the common good." To the objections of some of his followers that communists did not believe in god, Dŭnov responded:

> If someone meets me on the street and robs me and mutilates my leg but believes in God, what use would I and others have for his faith? If someone meets me on the street and does me good, but does not believe in God, he will be more useful than the former, who only has his theory. That who believes and robs and maims me, I will spit on him, but that who does not believe and does not rob me, I will bestow upon him two kisses.[447]

[444] Peter Dŭnov, "Novoto chovechestvo," talk delivered in Veliko Tarnovo, on 19 August 1919.
[445] Peter Dŭnov, "Zhiviiat gospod," Delivered on 31 December 1922.
[446] Peter Dŭnov, "Da vŭzlyubish Gospoda," Delivered on 13 April, 1919, p. 97.
[447] Peter Dŭnov, "Novoto chovechestvo," talk delivered in V. Tarnovo on 19 August 1919,

He repeatedly stressed that it was deeds, and not theory that counted so that even the "most extreme materialists, like communists and socialists, in their practice are bigger idealists than the clergy."[448] While communism figured most prominently in this talks as a much needed regenerative force in the aftermath of the war and the Russian Revolution, Dŭnov urged his followers not to fear any radical movement "that champions freedom and equality" since all of them were "messengers of god." Like in spiritual people, in vegetarians and in scientists, "God's consciousness is awakened [also] in all radical movements, in communists, in anarchists […] Today Christ turns to people with extreme ideas and tells them: come with me. Through you God's kingdom will come to earth."[449] The distinctive characteristic of the New Age that Dŭnov saw dawning on the ruins of WWI, was that "from now onwards humankind acquires collective consciousness," it "has an internal impulse to improve the common good," so that "not only one social class, but all social classes will improve their condition in a rational manner."[450] While the Bolsheviks were showcased as paragons, "the Americans" conversely were singled out for criticism for their materialism, hypocrisy and pursuit of profit:

> And what did the Americans do? They have been sending us a number of missionaries to preach the teaching of Christ, but during the war (1915-1918) they sold the Bulgarians 10 million kilograms of flour for 2 golden Leva per kilogram. Do the Americans think that they act in accordance with Christ's teaching? They missed the opportunity to give a good example. Theirs is not Christianity.[451]

The support Peter Dŭnov and other members of the White Brotherhood lent communists was not just rhetorical and ideological, but also material. When the Bulgarian Communist Party was outlawed from 1924 onwards, following the abortive communist September 1923 Uprising,

[448] Peter Dŭnov, "Zhiviiat gospod," Delivered on 31 December 1922.
[449] Peter Dŭnov, "Prouchvame vi," Delivered on 7 January 1923. In AMVR, F. 10, Op. 14, a.e. 303, 9.
[450] Peter Dŭnov, "Novoto chovechestvo," 19 August 1919, 14.
[451] Ibid., 24.

its members were forced to operate underground. During the two decades of illegality, Peter Dŭnov's followers provided secret lodgings to communists in hiding, hid the party's archival documents, and housed communist printing presses on The Sunrise settlement.[452] When the Bulgarian Communist Party organized an underground resistance movement following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union (unlike other Balkan states not against a foreign occupier, but against the government, which was allied with the Axis powers), partisans frequently sought shelter on the *Izgrev*.[453]

Among the distinguished communist cadres who not only found a place of safety at the Brotherhood but had a long-term association with Peter Dŭnov, was Georgi Dimitrov, the international hero of the Reichstag fire trial of the early 1930s, general secretary of the Comintern, and Bulgaria's future first communist leader following the communist takeover.[454] Before Dŭnov moved to *Izgrev*, he shared a twin-house with Dimitrov for over two decades on 66 Opŭlchenska St. in Sofia's proletarian neighborhood Yuchbunar.[455] (Parenthetically, it

[452] AMB AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 7, a.e. 9, poreden 77, 7.
[453] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 7, a.e. 9, 7. ; AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 14, a.e. 300.
[454] Georgi Dimitrov (b. 06/30/1882 in Kovachevtsi, Kingdom of Bulgaria – d. 07/02/1949 in Moscow, USSSR) – Bulgarian politician, the first chairperson of the Bulgarian Communist Party and General Secretary of the Comintern (1935-1943), 32nd Prime Minister of Bulgaria (1946-1949). In 1932 Georgi Dimitrov was appointed Secretary General of the World Committee Against War and Fascism, replacing Willi Münzenberg. In 1933 he burst onto the international scene as one of the Comintern operatives in Berlin arrested for alleged complicity in setting the Reichstag on fire. During the Leipzig trial, Dimitrov's spirited self-defense and the accusations he directed at his prosecutors turned him into an overnight international celebrity. In his autobiography, eminent historian Eric Hobsbawm cited Dimitrov as one of his—and by extension British socialists'-- heroes: "We had our heroes and models – Georgi Dimitrov, in the Reichstag fire trial of 1933 who stood up alone in the Nazi court, defying Hermann Göring and defending the good name of communism and, incidentally, of the small but proud Bulgarian nation to which he belonged." In Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life.* New York and London: The New York Press, 2002, 141. After Dimitrov's death in 1949, a mausoleum was erected in the center of Sofia for the record 6 days, and Dimitrov's mummified body was deposited there. The Bulgarian Communist Party proclaimed him "leader and teacher of the Bulgarian nation." In 1990 the mummy was taken out of the mausoleum and buried in the Central Sofia Cemetery, and the mausoleum was blown up on 27 August 1999. As Maria Todorova has humorously quipped, "The demolition had taken seven days, longer than it took to build." Maria Todorova, "Blowing Up the Past: The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as *Lieu de Memoire.*" In Maria Todorova, ed., *Remembering Communism,* New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010, 430.
[455] To solve the acute housing crisis, the Sofia municipality started allotting plots in the working class neighborhood Yuchbunar. Georgi Dimitrov's mother Parashkeva Doseva built a twin house on one of those plots, together with her sister, who later sold her half of the building. Peter Dŭnov was to become a tenant of the family that bought the

should be mentioned that Dŭnov and Dimitrov also shared both a religious upbringing, and the protestant connection since Dimitrov's mother Parashkeva Doseva was an evangelical.) In their future interactions with the Ministry of Religious Confessions, Dŭnov's disciples would repeatedly make the argument that "Comrade Dimitrov and Teacher Dŭnov were close friends, they never had an ideological argument, they always discussed questions from the socio-political life of the country and they completely trusted each other."[456] According to eyewitness reports, Dŭnov personally hid Dimitrov, together with the archive of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and facilitated his escape, when in 1923 the police was rounding up Opŭlchenska 66 to arrest him.[457]

Besides Dimitrov, other subsequently eminent party functionaries that found shelter with Danovists include Georgi Dimirov's sister Elena Chervenkova and his brother Todor Dimitrov; Nikola Kofardzhiev, Tsola Dragoicheva, Orlin Vasilev, Todor Pavlov, and even Todor Zhivkov. One of Dŭnov's first and closest disciples related a recollection when she personally witnessed how during one of the police raids on Georgi Dimitrov's house (who at the time was in exile in Austria) , Dimitrov's sister Elena went through the dormer to the shared attic and then to Dŭnov's lodging: "I was with the Teacher and when we heard some noise as if someone were walking above our heads, the Teacher smiled, put his finger on my mouth and said 'Shhhh.' He immediately saw me off. Then he called sister Vasilka and asked her to dress [Elena] up as a sister of ours in white garments and white kerchief and to take her out, which she did."[458]

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sister's half. Iskra Tsenkova, "Po sledite naa cherveniia vozhd," *Tema,* http://www.temanews.com/index.php?p=tema&iid=223&aid=5553

456 AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 13, a.e. 141, 3.

457 AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 14, a.e 300, 5.

458 Maria Todorova (not to be confused with historian of Eastern Europe by the same name), "Evangelskata metodistka misiia i protestantsko uchilishte v Svishtov," *Izgrevŭt na Bialoto Bratstvo pee i sviri, uchi i zhivee.* T. 5, Sofia: Bibl. "Zhiten klas," 1996, 532-534.

Similarly, in a 1948 letter to the Committee of Religious Confessions, the post-Dŭnov Chairperson of the White Brotherhood and one of the three original disciples Todor Stoimenov, attached a commemorative feature article for Georgi Dimitrov's brother, Todor Dimitrov, entitled "A Precious Memory for A Beautiful Soul." In his letter Stoimenov dwelled on the persecutions against Danovists prior to 1944, whom the government at the time categorized as "white communists, destroyers of the system, even more dangerous than the red communists," and highlighted that the Sunrise settlement had always been "a place of relief for all the persecuted." Stoimenov proudly boasted the support he rendered Todor Dimitrov "whom I have hid at the risk of my own life as an ideological fellow-traveler."[459]

The assistance rendered by Dŭnov's followers to illegal communists is well-documented also in the communist memoir literature published during the socialist period. In her memoir *Victory: The Call of Duty*, Tsola Dragoicheva, a prominent member of an illegal armed wing of the Communist party since the 1920s, twice sentenced to death before 1944, subsequently to become the first female member of a cabinet in Bulgarian history, relates that after the assault on the Central Committee, the *Izgrev* settlement of the Danovists was among the safest lodgings where the "illegals" conducted their secret meetings and conferences.[460]

Long-term general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov went even further in his memoirs and not only related the assistance he received by Dŭnov's adherents as an underground resistance fighter, but also expressed his admiration for them as all-round individuals. By his own account he spent over two months at the apartments of a couple of Danovist families on the *Izgrev,* and evidently he thoroughly enjoyed it:

> I used the apartment of a politically discharged teacher, who had built himself a small

[459] TsDA, F. 165, Op. 3, a.e. 116, 12-13.
[460] Tsola Dragoicheva, *Pobedata: Povelia na dŭlga,* kn. 3, Sofia: Partizdat, 1979, p.41.

> house in the region of the brotherhood (present-day neighborhood "The Sunrise"). Danovists would frequently get together in those two families for long conversations. What impressed me was that they were all-round individuals – they discussed music and history, art and literature. There was a wide range of topics and interests. It was very pleasant for me to be in contact with them. But I had to leave the apartment and their company because one young female Danovist, maybe due to personal attraction, would come every morning to wake me up so that we would salute the sun together. You are probably familiar with their theory that they charge themselves from the sun. This naturally flattered me but as an illegal I had to be extremely cautious, someone could recognize me. So I moved elsewhere.[461]

Peter Dŭnov's demise almost directly coincided with the advent of state socialism in Bulgaria. When he passed away on 27 December 1944, four months after the establishment of a Popular Front government, White Brotherhood elders appealed directly to General Secretary of the BCP Georgi Dimitrov to facilitate permission for his burial, citing Dimtrov's "close acquaintance with the Teacher from the time they were immediate neighbors on Opŭlchenska Street."[462] Ante mortem, Dŭnov had expressed the wish to be buried on the *Izgrev* underneath a particular vine but according to Bulgarian law, the only permissible burial ground was the cemetery. Exceptions were only granted in the case of senior church dignitaries, whose remains could be lain in churchyards. To appeal for an exception, brotherhood elders Todor Stoimenov and Boian Boev sent a telegram to Moscow directly to Georgi Dimitrov. Dimitrov responded promptly, granting permission for Dŭnov to be buried on the Sunrise and forwarding his recommendation to the Council of Ministers. Following his injunction, Bulgaria's minister of internal affairs Anton Yugov issued an official note on 30 December 1944: "I grant permission that Peter Dŭnov be buried according to the wishes of his friends on the Sunrise settlement."[463] This official note will play an important role in the future of the White Brotherhood and would

[461] Zhivkov, Todor. *Memoari.* Sofia: IK "Trud i parvo," 2006, 480.
[462] Doinov, Nikolay. *I ochite mi vidiakha izgreva. Stranitsi iz istoriiata na bialoto bratstvo. Spomeni.* Sofia: 1999, 254. Cited in Lefterov, 89.
[463] AMVnR, Op. 6, 88, 2-2-7, p. 18.

prove crucial for the preservation of Dŭnov's grave on its original plot (currently the only material trace from the formerly thriving Danovist settlement on the *Izgrev*), in spite of several attempts to relocate it.

Contrary to the post-1989 self-legitimating narrative of the White Brotherhood, which claims that only Peter Dŭnov's death on 27 December 1944 saved him from an imminent arrest by the newly established communist regime, Dŭnov and his followers were most intensely subjected to censure, persecution and government surveillance in the interwar period. [464] His unwavering insistence on Bulgaria's neutrality during the First World War, his statements in favor of a new social and political order, and his public endorsement of radicals of all stripes in his talks led to his detention and police interrogation in 1917, and again in 1937. Dŭnov had to provide written evidence for his activities, his talks were prohibited, and he was interned in Varna the same year, where he remained until the end of the First World War. In addition to simultaneous public censure by the Orthodox Church establishment, Dŭnov's occult-mystical teaching was also habitually vilified in press. In the 1920s and 1930s, myriad publications called for the movement's ban, mocking its adherents, discrediting their way of life and calling into question's Dŭnov's sanity.[465] In the interwar period Dŭnov was arrested more than once, the first arrest dating from 29 August 1925 in Veliko Tarnovo on the pretext that the Danovist summit took place without official permission by the authorities when the country was in a state of

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[464] Another variation, widespread among his followers, is that Dŭnov died in the cells of the people's militia. There is no evidence either for a pending arrest or for his death at the police department, besides the claims of a small number of Dŭnov's adherents. The three doctors who diagnosed Dŭnov and bore witness to his death gave declarations in 1997, upon inquiry from the Brotherhood, giving the same diagnosis – bronchopneumonia, and testifying that Dŭnov spent the the last days before his death in his room on the *Izgrev,* and not in the police. The statements were published in *Izgrevŭt na Bialoto bratsvo. Pee I sviri, uchi I zhivee,* Vol. 2, Sofia, 1995. 329-331.

[465] See *Fakel,* No 6, 30 March 1924; *Svobodna rech* No 1038, 25 August 1927; *Zora,* No 2737, 18 August 1928; *Praznichni vesti,* No 128, 21 August 1928; *Vecherna burgazka poshta,* No 223, 27 Dec 1928; TsDA, F. 1909k, Op. 2, a.e. 335, 17-19. Cited in Atanasova, *The Social Adaptation of the White Brotherhood,* 162.

martial law.[466] The support Dŭnov rendered communists, anarchists and agrarianists, ensured regular police raids on the Sunrise from the mid-1920s onwards, and in 1928 a ban on the yearly summit there.[467] Dŭnov's interrogation protocol from his first arrest is preserved in the archive and it contains valuable information on how he perceived his movement at the time. In a composed yet confident tone, Dŭnov declared in writing that he stood for "peace, mutual understanding, brotherhood and mutual help for the common good" and that his teaching a priori excludes any form of violence. In line with the pacificist slant of the movement, he recommended full compliance with the authorities and state laws and stressed that he did not engage in politics. Everyone was free to join or leave his movement at any point and – Dŭnov emphasized – he helped everyone with "advice, guidance and rational healing methods according their desire," selflessly, without ulterior motifs, and free of charge. Discarding any accusations or complaints against his activities as "unfounded and untrue," he confidently concluded that "My teaching, elaborated in more than six volumes, and my life, which is open to anyone and could be verified each minute, do not need defense."[468] Ultimately, the teaching's goal was to provide "physical health, moral purity and spiritual growth to all followers, whose lives are universally recognized as paragons for emulation." The protocol ends with the terse statement "I have nothing more to say."[469]

The White Brotherhood in the 1940s and 1950s

Following Dŭnov's death, the White Brotherhood was placed under new conditions. After 9 September 1944, contrary to the post-1989 claims of White Brotherhood members, the occult-

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[466] Georgi Gŭlov, *Petŭr Dŭnov,* Sofia: IK "Svetovete," Tomalevski, G. *Uchiteliat Beinsa Duno,* Sofia: 1997, 29.
[467] Zhivko Lefterov, *Religiozna politika na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiia i bialoto bratstvo (1944-1989)* (PhD diss., New Bulgarian University, 2012), p. 46.
[468] AMVR, ob. 23605, p. 1-2.
[469] Ibid.,

mystical movement was neither persecuted, nor banned. On the contrary, for the first time in its four-decade history it became a legally recognized “religious community” in accordance with the Constitution and the Law for Religious Confessions.[470] In the 1940s the Brotherhood continued its activities and communal life, and according to the Brotherhood’s official website fifty volumes of lectures and talks by Dŭnov were published in the period 1944-1949.[471] It declared loyalty to the new socialist government and its domestic and foreign policy and in 1948 in turn received an official document issued by Ministry of Foreign Affairs (to which was attached the new state agency dealing with religions with the rank of a ministry, the Directory of Religious Confessions) stating that “the society ‘White Brotherhood’ is recognized as a religious community and enjoys the rights of free activity” in accordance with article 78 from the Law on Religious Confession under the newly adopted Dimitrov Constitution.[472]

It was not until the late 1950s that the new social, administrative and legal arrangements under the socialist government started to affect the Brotherhood’s life. In line with BCP’s ideological program for the complete reorganization of the state and the accelerated construction of socialism, on 15 April 1948 a new law was proclaimed in Bulgaria: the Law on Expropriation of Big Urban Real Estate (*Zakon za otchuzhdavane na edrata gradska pokrita nedvizhima sobstvenost, ZOEGPNS*.)[473] From the day the law was promulgated, every family that owned more than one real estate or building plot had one month to declare all their property and choose which one item to keep. The remaining real estate would be expropriated as state property and managed by the respective Municipal People’s Council. Exemptions from the Expropriation Law were extended to public organizations, non-profit legal entities, and cooperatives. The

[470] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 13, a.e. 141, 2.
[471] http://www.beinsadouno.org/bg/node/1158
[472] Certificate with incoming No 27/526-40-V of 5 June 1948 in AMVnR, Op. 6, por. No 205, l.4, p.6.
[473] *Dŭrzhaven vestnik*, Issue 87, 15 April 1948.

ZOEGPNS would have a major effect on the White Brotherhood, whose property -- the prayer house, the brotherly canteen, the meadow for performing the paneurhythmy, and the communal garden and orchard – was considered private from the point of view of the new law. This was due to the fact that from the 1920s onwards all the property deeds pertaining to the White Brotherhood were registered under figureheads, personally handpicked by Dŭnov, since, because the movement had not been officially registered, it could own no property. All the figurehead owners of White Brotherhood real estate complied with the one month term and submitted declarations explaining that they were only nominal owners of the property in question.[474] Nevertheless the procedure for the expropriation was put into effect since the declarations were not considered valid by the law. In response, the White Brotherhood Council corresponded with the Directory of Religious Confessions and pleaded for resolution of the problems deriving from ZOEGPNS. In particular, they submitted an appeal that the Directory issue them a certificate stating that the White Brotherhood was a religious community. The Brotherhood intended to use this certificate to make the case that it was a public organization and as such would constitute and exception to the Expropriation Law.[475]

There was an intense correspondence between the six-member Brotherly Council, elected for life as the governing body of the organization by the general membership following Dŭnov's death, and the Commission for Religious Confessions. The communication produced a favorable outcome for the Brotherhood and the Ministry issued the coveted certificate: "On the basis of Article 78 from the Constitution and the letter from the Brotherly Council of the White Brotherhood Society dated 3 June 1948 (Incoming No 27526-40-V from 5 June 1948) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs certifies that the White Brotherhood society is recognized as a

[474] Summarized from AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 9, a.e. 1147
[475] AMVnR, Op. 4, papka 11, prepiska 177, p. 11-13.

religious community and enjoys the right of free activity as stipulated in the aforementioned Article of the Constitution. The present certificate is issued to the Brotherly Council of the community so that it can be used it wherever needed."[476]

The official recognition of the interwar occult-mystical movement as a "religious community" was of tremendous importance for the Brotherhood. Not only did it inscribe the Brotherhood into the general religious policy of the BCP, it also allowed it to maintain regular official relations with the state and to successfully defend its rights in a series of attempted encroachments by various state institutions. However, it did not manage to ensure the originally intended goal – namely to reverse the process of expropriation of the *Izgrev* property. In spite of the favorable assessment of the Commission for Religious Confessions, and the insistent letters-expositions of the Brotherhood to all relevant state institutions, the ZOEGPNS made no provision for recognition of the contra-letter declarations of the nominal owners as valid and thus the contested real estate was still considered private.

Eventually, the sites of importance for the brotherhood – the prayer house (salon) and canteen, Peter Dŭnov's grave and the meadow for prayer and paneurhythmy, were partially turned into state property. Two thirds from the 1500 m^2 Prayer House plot were expropriated. The site housing Dŭnov's grave was 7500 m^2 , out of which 1/3 (or 2500 m^2) was turned into state property. The meadow for prayer and exercises encompassed a total of 10 decares, divided into three estates, owned by Todor Stoimenov, Boian Boev and Nacho Kupenkovski. One of the estates was expropriated in its entirety, one in half, and the third one – since Kupenkovski declared it as his sole real estate – was left intact. Ultimately, even though the Brotherhood could not secure reversal of the expropriation law, it still managed to retain half of its land (5 decares). This allowed the movement to continue to use the meadow for prayer and for performing

476 AMVnR, Op. 6, papka 7, poreden 205, p. 4.

gymnastic exercises. [477]

Moreover, in spite of the partial nationalization of the Brotherhood estate, the Commission of Religious Confessions, in recognition of the situation on the ground, formally acknowledged the real estate as belonging to the community. In this respect, it even interceded on behalf of the Brotherhood so it could continue to maintain and manage these sites, on the condition that rent would be paid for the expropriated two thirds from the Prayer House. In addition, the Commission issued a temporary ban on Dŭnov's gravesite prohibiting its inclusion in any urban planning or regulation projects. Contrary to the Brotherhood's current narrative that the socialist state aimed to abolish the resilient movement, a careful examination of the archival record shows that in the early socialist period state institutions dealing with religion displayed toleration and willingness to help the community resolve its issues by, rather than repression. Overall, the Commission of Religious Confessions had a flexible approach to the movement in handling most of its appeals. For instance, in 1953 the land on the *Izgrev*, encompassing both the prayer house and the meadow for paneurhythmy, was included in a construction project envisioning a forest engineering school. The prompt reaction of protest and correspondence by the Council of the White Brotherhood prompted the Commission on Religious Confessions to intervene favorably on behalf of the Brotherhood, preventing the building project from taking place.[478] At the end of 1954 another claim was laid on the *Izgrev* when the Executive Committee of Sofia Municipal People's Council addressed the Commission requesting an inspection of the Brotherhood's use of the land on *Izgrev*. Making the argument that the land was not used with sufficient frequency to guarantee its management by the White Brotherhood, the municipal council demanded the sequestering of *Izgrev* for the purpose of building a military barracks to

[477] AMVnR, Op. 6, poreden 88, prepiska 2-2-7, 19-21.
[478] AMVnR, Op. 5, poreden 120, prepiska 2-2-7, p. 1.

house a special militia unit guarding the Rila-Sofia water supply. After conducting the requisite inspection, the chairperson of the Committee of Religions M. Kyuchukov sent his assessment to the municipal council: “The building on 9 Izgrev St. houses the central prayer house of the religious community ‘White Brotherhood’; For this reason we deem it inexpedient that the building be seized for barracks to be used by the militia unit guarding the water-conduit Rila-Sofia.”[479] By the mid-1950s the White Brotherhood would write two more successful appeals, this time addressed directly to prime minister Vŭlko Chervenkov, first precluding the building of chalet on the Second Rila Lake on terrain used and maintained by the Brotherhood but more importantly, exempting the land of Peter Dŭnov’s gravesite from being included in any urban planning or building projects. We will see that the Committee will also actively contribute to the preservation of Dŭnov’s grave in the 1970s and would generally oppose harsh and hasty measures with respect to the Brotherhood undertaken by other state institutions. The Brotherhood thus managed to forestall several building projects on its land until the project for the construction of a television center prevailed in the 1960s.[480]

The White Brotherhood survived not only the communist takeover, retaining both its headquarters and its religious practices, but also the most trying period in its history, the period between 1957 and 1964, when its very existence was at stake. This turbulent period witnessed a confluence of negative developments for the brotherhood, triggered by a split in its governing body and the movement as a whole, with one faction (around member of Brotherly Council and treasurer Nikola Antov) writing a report to the Commission on Religious Confessions about the financial irregularities and lack of accountability and transparency of the Brotherhood

[479] Ibid., papka 3, Op. 5, poreden 200, p 1-2.
[480] Atanasova, 167.

Chairperson Boris Nikolov.[481] In the first 15 years of its existence in the socialist period, the White Brotherhood was wrecked by internal divisions as to what direction collective life is to take. Historian Violina Atanasova has pointed to internal rivalries among the more distinguished members of the Brotherhood for closer access to Peter Dŭnov and suggested "that they were the object of envy of the other disciples."[482] There is evidence also of personal and economic self-interest which were exacerbated when the material status of the Brotherhood worsened. Having sifted through enormous archival documentation pertaining to the case, Atanasova summarized the reasons for the split:

> … the absence of opportunities for public expression obviously did not correspond to the ambitions of part of the leadership of the group, especially of those who were not satisfied only with the practical application of P. Dŭnov's teaching but claimed the role of propagandists and spreaders of his heritage and strove to rise in the hierarchy of the movement. Here in my view rested the main reason for the spit of the Sofia leadership into two groupings whose struggle had an effect also on the life of the Brotherhood in the country and to a large extent reflected on its links abroad.[483]

This confidential report by one member of the Brotherly Council accusing other members of hiding assets and engaging in unlawful behavior triggered a chain of unfavorable events: a

[481] After the passing of the first Chairperson of the White Brotherhood Todor Stoimenov in 1952, Boris Nikolov was elected as his successor. On 14 May 1957, Nikola Antov – a member of the Brotherhood governing body and chairperson of the Brotherhood's Financial Council wrote a confidential report to the Chairperson of the Commission on Religious Confessions M. Kyuchukov, detailing alleged embezzlement and hiding of the Brotherhood's real assets. He offered detailed information on the assets of the Brotherhood for the twelve years following Peter Dŭnov's death, claiming that the Brotherhood never declared its real assets in the amount of 10 million leva in cash, bank accounts and bonds, about 600 000 leva in silver and between 3-5 kilograms of gold. Antov made the accusations that these assets were not declared and were moreover hidden by the accountant and Boris Nikolov "and to this day the Brotherly Council does not know who possesses the gold." He ultimately accused Nikolov and Panaiotov in financial and accounting abuses and for keeping incomplete records. The Committee for Religious Faiths forwarded the report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and on 5 July 1957 Boris Nikolov was visited by representatives of State Security who requested the gold and other precious assets for inspection. After Nikolov took the assets out of a hiding pace in a cement block on Vitosha Mountain, made to look like a rock, he was given a receipt that the assets will be temporarily held at the police as undeclared assets, but at this point he was not arrested.

[482] Violina Atanasova, "The Social Adaptation of the White Brotherhood (Mid-40s – Late 60s of the 20th Century)", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 2001, № 1-2, p.170.

[483] Ibid.,

thorough financial audit by the Ministry of Finance, the full nationalization of the Brotherhood's real estate, the trial of the organization's chairperson Boris Nikolov and its chief accountant Zhecho Panaiotov and their subsequent arrests, and the abovementioned split. The comprehensive financial audit of 1958 concluded that the White Brotherhood failed to declare the real state of its assets and estates, that it generated revenue circumventing the law, that it conducted unlawful economic activity (such as selling the copyright for Dŭnov's literature directly to a French publisher) and most importantly, that it owed the state retroactive unpaid taxes in the amount of 772 661 leva.[484]

In parallel with the financial audit, searches on the homes at *Izgrev* were conducted and Dŭnov's literature, lectures and songs was confiscated, together with the Brotherhood archive. The Council of Ministers tried to somewhat soften the administrative measures by assuring the Brotherhood that they were initiated on the strength of a "lawful ordinance that does not apply to and does not affect the religious convictions of the believers."[485] In 1959 Boris Nikolov and Zecho Panaiotov were taken to court, fined, and sentenced to 12 years and 8 years in prison, respectively, but they served only a few years of their sentences since they were pardoned on the strength of a general amnesty in 1962.

Even though it was the internal split within the Brotherhood that precipitated the punitive actions, they came in the context of, and were exacerbated by, the general political climate of the late 1950s – mid- 1960s – the period under state socialism of genuine restrictions on religion, the peak of atheist propaganda and most far-reaching aspiration to control religion (such as the intrusive requirement for a new round of registration and inventarization of all clergy and prayer premises in 1962). Even amidst the height of heavy-handedness towards religious practice, the

[484] AMVnR, papka 11, Op. 7, poreden 164, 1.
[485] AMVnR, papka 9, Op. 7, poreden 77, prepiska 2-2-7, 17.

Council of Ministers' confidential instructions to the Commission entitled "Concerning the Registration of the protestant sects and the religious community "White Brotherhood" stipulated that "The approach to the sects should be careful and tactful."[486]

The White Brotherhood Under Late Socialism

As this dissertation argues, the 1970s was a pivotal decade for the liberalization of culture -- and by extension of religious practice, in general. From the mid-1960 onwards, there was not only amelioration of atheist propaganda everywhere in Eastern Europe, but correction of some of its worst excesses – such the liberation of imprisoned clergymen and laymen, in addition to tangible relaxation towards religious practice.

What was the state of religious practice in Bulgaria from the mid-1960 onwards? On the eve of the new decade, the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria had about 2000 priests, 3800 churches and chapels, 120 monasteries and two educational establishments: an ecclesiastical seminary and an ecclesiastical academy with a total enrollment of 200-250 people. About 1300 of the churches and monasteries were declared monuments of culture for their architectural and historical value.[487] The Church had its own publishing house, its own official organ, *Church Gazette* (*Tsŭrkoven vestnik*) and a monthly magazine on religion and philosophy called *Spiritual Culture* (*Dukhovna kultura*). Moreover, it had its own bookshops, its specialized organization for building churches, monasteries and chapels, its own rest homes and small industrial enterprises.[488] According to a lengthy report by a British sociologist of religion, a professor at the LSE, dozens of theologians and hundreds of clergymen would give lectures and sermons every week to assemblies of believers. Other religious denominations in Bulgaria included the Roman

[486] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 10, a.e. 1109, p. 2.
[487] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 13, a.e. 257.
[488] *BTA*, 08.29 GMT 20 February 1969

Catholics of the Western Rite, with 30 churches, a bishop and 46 priests; Roman Catholics of the Eastern Rite, with 25 parishes, 17 churches, an Apostolic exarch, a Vicar-Bishop and 21 priests; Armenian Gregorians with 12 churches and 10 priests; Protestants (United Evangelical Churches, Methodists, Baptists, Pentacostans and Adventists), having a total of 1555 churches ; and Muslims with 1,300 mosques and 560 *hodjas.*[489]

On the loosening of the atmosphere in the 1960s valuable information can be extracted from a study of religious practice in Bulgaria conducted by Dr. David A. Martin, a professor of sociology at the London School of Economics who visited Bulgaria from 1-16 April 1967 within the cultural exchange program, in order to gather first-hand information about the character of religious practice in Bulgaria. He singled out Bulgaria as the ideal place to study religion for "in no other Eastern European country is there such exact data on the facts about religious change."[490] The scholar combined sociological data from the Religious Census of 1962 together with informal conversations he conducted "in the street, in a tavern or over a meal by employing a mixture of French and German."[491] In his 50-page final report to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, he praises the Bulgarian Committee for Cultural Relations for its "full cooperation" and for allowing him "first-class linguistic assistance." On the lax attitude of the officials to whom he was attached, he reports: "I was free to wander, and wander I did. So my impressions derive from these random sallies into this or that group and the comments which I quote are mostly derived from such unofficial meetings. If I encountered an eccentric opinion, I immediately repeated this opinion to other people to see how they reacted."[492] In conducting his investigation, Dr. Martin marveled that "the cooperation of the Bulgarian authorities was as

[489] This is a 1969 report, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 28/1843, "Religion in Bulgaria."
[490] Ibid.,
[491] National Archives of the United Kingdom, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 28/1843
[492] National Archives of the United Kingdom, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 28/1843, "Religion in Bulgaria."

benevolent and surprising as it was complete."[493] In his report, he compares favorably the mid-1960s vis-à-vis the repressive policies of the early 1950s, when some religious leaders and functionaries, particularly protestants and Catholics, were tried and imprisoned on charges of espionage. While these early punitive measures weakened the religious bodies for the more informal business of surviving ideological pressure against religion, Dr. Martin's informants all assured him that this aspect of policy had disappeared. Pointing to the overall repressive political climate of the early 1950s, he aptly observed "it would hardly be fair to see these activities as directed primarily against religion as such: after all many good communists were persecuted as well."[494] He visited as many churches as he could in different cities, villages, neighborhoods and status groups in order to obtain information about the social character of Orthodox church-goers. Besides overwhelming feminine preponderance in the Orthodox churches and higher turnout in villages as opposed to cities, Dr. Martin observed very scanty attendance by young people, with the exception of the major Easter feast. Even the youth who attended, the sociologist commented, "stand in a service bemused and curious, neither kneeling nor crossing themselves. None of the young people I saw in church prostrated themselves: they simply lighted a candle, kissed the icon of Christ or the Virgin Mary and crossed themselves."[495] Overall, Dr. Martin's conclusion is that religious decline (vis-à-vis organized religion) has been steadily taking place in Bulgaria but there are signs that "may indicate that religion remains below the surface like a damp patch suggesting the existence of a spring." While this spring did not translate into the flocking of new believers to established churches, there was a perceptible switch towards a more personal spiritual quest, which could explain why a movement like the White Brotherhood found itself on the rise again in the 1970s. One of Dr. Martin's respondents, a young female university

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[493] Ibid.,
[494] Ibid., p. 3 from report (pages are unnumbered in the folder).
[495] Ibid.,

student in Sofia, encapsulated this quest, when queried why she attended church: “My father was a partisan [during WWII] but he doesn’t object to my coming [to church]. I don’t know whether God is real or not, but I come here to light a candle, to think, be alone and listen to the music.”[496] The emphasis on individual forms of spirituality as opposed to organized religion is encapsulated also in Minister of Culture Lyudmila Zhivkova’s concept for a National Spiritual Center of Bulgaria – one of her myriad projects -- which she envisioned “not as a widely accessible place, where everyone can come, pay, buy a souvenir, speak loudly, entertain themselves.” Rather, “the very concept of a spiritual center has to predispose one to deeper introspection,” it should be a very simple temple, where one would go contemplate, mostly in an empty interior, that would inspire “worship, reverence, quietude, and gratitude.”[497]

These shifts in popular religiosity away from organized religion were registered and discussed by Bulgarian sociologists from the “Historical Materialism” Section at the Institute of Philosophy of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, who in October-December 1962 conducted impressive sociological research on religiousness in Bulgaria. Analyzing the data collected from more than 40,000 respondents surveyed, Nikolai Mizov spoke about the changing character of religiosity: “The religious consciousness, psyche, morality and everyday life of believers today are significantly different in comparison with the same in the past in Bulgaria or the vis-à-vis the believers in capitalist countries.”[498] The study found that the vast majority of Bulgarian population (76.2 %) generally did not visit worship services on holidays. Out of the worshippers who did visit religious services, only 4,8% did so on a regular basis, while four times as many were classified as “semi-believers” (*poluviarvashti*), “partially convinced of the ‘existence’ of

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[496] Ibid.,
[497] TsDA, F. 288B, Op. 1, a.e. 78, 3.
[498] Nikolai Mizov, “Otnosno protsesa na preodoliavaneto na religiiata v Bŭlgariia,” *Filosofska misŭl:mesechno spisanie na Bŭlgarskoto Filosofsko Druzhestvo, Edinnia tsentŭr za filosofiia i sotsiologiia i Instituta po filosofiia “Akad. Todor Pavlov,”* No 6, Nov.-Dec. 1963, p. 30-43, p. 30.

God."[499] The preponderance of partial believers ultimately indicated for the sociologists (with regret) not so much the withering away of religion in its core essence ("the belief in the existence of supernatural powers") but the shifting nature of religiosity away from organized religion and the church. Another finding, which the sociologists found striking, was that alienation from official religion had already been evident before 1944. Rather than ascribing dissociation from the church to exposure to Marxist education and the indomitable work of atheist enlighteners, the study found that a substantial section of parents were already not merely irreligious but anti-religious prior to 1944.[500] Religious belief was powerful only amongst the generation which were at the time of the survey (1962) grandparents, who could exercise little influence over the young.

Against this general background of religious practice, what was the situation of the White Brotherhood, in particular, during late socialism? From the vantage point of Chairperson of the Committee of Religious Confessions M. Kyuchukov, this is what the Brotherhood looked like on the eve of the 1970s:

> Followers of "the teacher" Dŭnov exist almost in the entire country. There are groups of 5-50 people in the following bigger cities: Sofia, Rousse, Varna, Bourgas, Stara and Nova Zagora, Tŭrnovo, Vidin, Gabrovo, Pleven, Pazardzhik, Kazanlŭk, Khaskovo, Shoumen, Gorna Oriakhovitsa, Svishtov, Panagyurishte, Dimitrovgrad. There are such groups in some of the bigger villages, too: Lyubimets, Krepost, Krŭn, Stratsin, Sŭedinenie, etc. Most of these groups are not registered and exist in a position of tolerance on behalf of state organs. A few people : Lyuba and Draga Mikhailovi, Vŭzkresen Anastasov, Zhelyu Tonev, Georgi Iordanov, Dr. Stefan Kadiev and Kiril Mikhailov point themselves as Central Management. This management is not registered and also lives in a state of toleration. Our Commission maintains unofficial but regular contacts with them.[501]

Boian Bonev, Peter Dŭnov's former personal secretary, who was a lifelong member of the Brotherly Council and hugely respected within the community, also described this favorable

[499] Ibid., 31.
[500] Ibdi.,
[501] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 9, delo 39, prepiska 1167, p.17.

atmosphere in 1969-1970: “The Brotherhoods across Bulgaria are well, wherever they have salons and they meet. They are free, they read lectures, they sing, they get together during holidays, etc. Such places for the time being are Varna, Bourgas, Aitos, Rousse, Nova Zagora, Topolitsa Village.”[502]

In this atmosphere of relaxation, official permission was also given for the reinstatement of the traditional yearly brotherly summits on Rila Mountains in the early 1970s, which continued to convene in Rila and on Aitos throughout the ‘70s and ’80.

Lydmila Zhivkova’s affinity and support for Dŭnov’s occult-mystical movement, certainly was a factor in its increasing vitality and even semi-official recognition from the 1970s onwards. Her close friend and deputy at the Ministry of Culture Emil Aleksandrov relates in his memoirs that Zhivkova regularly read the Danovist publications from the interwar period, such as *Brotherhood* (*Bratsvo*) and *A Grain of Wheat* (*Zhitno zŭrno*), and that she maintained contacts with White Brotherhood members, like Nikola Nonev, Mikhail Ivanov, Peter Dimkov, and Vaklush Tolev (who in the post-socialist context formed his own religious movement, based on Dŭnov’s precepts, known as the “Path to Wisdom Society.”) According to Aleksandrov, Zhivkova was careful not to make official her sympathies but she asked all her deputies to meet with members of various spiritual movements, like sympathizers of the White Brotherhood, theosophists or yogists and to lend them all the assistance they could.[503] In addition, it was on Zhivkova’s insistence and via her personal network that invitations for official visits to Bulgaria were extended by the Committee of Culture to Mikhail Ivanov, the leader of the French branch of the movement, and to the preeminent French Catholic philosopher and theologian Jean

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502 *Izgrevŭt na Bialoto bratstvo*..Vol. 15, 184.
503 Emil Aleksandrov, *Kultutnoto ni otkrivane kŭm sveta. Memoari i sŭvremennost,* Sofia: 1995. 31-32

Guitton, both of whom visited Bulgaria in 1981.[504] Similarly, it was due to Lyudmila Zhivkova's endorsement, that alternative healer and prominent Danovist Peter Dimkov became hugely popular in the late socialist period both through his written works and through the freely permitted practice of his alternative methods of natural healing. According to the testimonies of her close circle of friends, it was healer Dimkov's methods that Zhivkova employed to fully recover her health and heal the multiple scars from the near-fatal car crush of 1973. Most likely this is the reason why Todor Zhivkov sent a letter-appeal to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party to intercede for the publishing of Peter Dimkov's magnum opus *Bulgarian Popular Medicine. Natural Healing and Living in Conformity with the Laws of Nature*. In his letter he urged action to ensure speedy and smooth publication:

> If we leave the publishing of this book to be decided only by the respective competent organs (the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of People's Health), for understandable reasons the manuscript will continue to gather dust on the desks of reviewers, editors and publishers…I believe that the Administrative Section of the CC of the BCP must take initiative and responsibility for the publishing of the book and to make sure that the respective organs publish Comrade Peter Ivanov's Dimkov's work *Treasury of Bulgarian Medicine* without any procrastination.[505]

Due to Zhivkov's letter, the first edition of this work promptly came out of production in three volumes between 1977 and 1979.

Another confirmation of Zhivkova's support for Dŭnov's adherents comes from Prof. Doino Doinov, a historian who was director of the Institute for Cultural-Historical Legacy during Zhivkova's tenure. In an interview he related that while he was still the director of the Archeological Museum, Zhivkova called a meeting to discuss her intention to intercede for the

[504] Emil Aleksandrov talks about the bureaucratic and political hurdles that had to be overcome in order to bring these visits to fruition, for which Zhivkova's decisiveness was crucial. In Emil Aleksandrov, *Az rabotikh s Lyudmila Zhivkova,* Sofia: 1991, 27-28.
[505] Todor Zhivkov, *Izbrani sŭchineniia,* T. 22. March-December 1974, Sofia: 1976, 332-333.

freeing of some Danovists who were in prison. She had assigned General Peter Stoianov the task to work with State Security to resolve this issue, while Professors Doino Doinev and Alexander Fol were asked to find said Danovists employment within the purview of their respective institutions. According to Prof. Doinov's testimony, Zhivkova succeeded in freeing all of them – around 20 "very honorable people," and Fol and Doinov subsequently found them employment in galleries and museums and used their influence to have their confiscated property returned."[506]

This story is also corroborated by Todor Zhivkov who reports in his memoir that during one of the habitual meetings of the general secretaries of the communist parties in Crimea, Leonid Brezhnev raised the question of Lyudmila Zhivkova's contacts with the White Brotherhood and expressed his disapproval on account of her intercession. According to Zhivkov's narrative this occurrence took place in a climate of increasing anxiety in Moscow over Lyudmila Zhivkova's views, which "starkly differed from the officially accepted ones" and amidst "general disapproval of her contacts with capitalist countries." Brezhnev informed Todor Zhivkov that he had a report that Zhivkova supported a sect that "had nothing to do with our ideology," to which Zhivkov purportedly responded:

> Comrade Brezhnev, Danovism, also known as the White Brotherhood, was born in Bulgaria and subsequently spread to Western Europe and the United States. At the moment it has sincere followers in the West. Danovism is a theosophical teaching that aims to synthesize the wisdom of all religions so as to penetrate that which is mystical for religion – the Cosmos, nature and God, creation and creator. The Danovists have a special cult for the sun, which is not religious at all. This brotherhood harms no one in Bulgaria and even the Holy Synod does not fight it. I have no information that Lyudmila Zhivkova gave any political or other support to the Danovists but I assume she might have had contacts with them, I'll investigate.[507]

[506] "Lyudmila Zhivkov izvadi ot zatvora nevinni dŭnovisti." Interview with Doino Doinov, conducted by Valentina Petkova. *Trud.* 24 July 2009. http://www.trud.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=187071
[507] Zhivkov, Todor. *Memoari.* Sofia: IK "Trud i parvo," 2006, 480.

Upon his return to Bulgaria Zhivkov claims to have informed his daughter about the reports of the Soviet secret service and the fact that Brezhnev personally raised the issue. According to his testimony "Lyudmila calmly responded that the brotherhood had a legal right to exist. She had held meetings with them and a few members of the brotherhood were part of some cultural committees and a delegation met with her to appeal for building a monument to Peter Dŭnov, which she did not support since 'there were no conditions at the moment for building such a monument.'"[508] While this is Zhivkov's personal recollection and as such cannot be categorically verified or dismissed, there is an archival document that lends plausibility to this account. In a letter to the Committee on Religions from 1981, one of the leaders of the White Brotherhood, Voskresen Ivanov Atanasov acknowledges a response by the Committee of Culture that a formal decision (No 1208; dated 5 August 1976) was taken which recognized of Techer Dŭnov's gravesite as a memory site of national significance "but at the moment no monument could be built due to their numerousness in the country."[509]

In this general climate of administrative and legal changes favorably affecting religion, but also in the Bulgarian case of active support for all manner of spiritual and religious movements from "the very top," the embattled Brotherhood, which barely survived the 1950s, splitting into two, staged an impressive comeback during late socialism. Contrary to the currently circulating official Brotherhood narrative of a repressed dissenting movement resurrected only after 1989, the historical record shows a movement increasingly emboldened from the late 1960s onwards. The first sign of this resurgence came in 1968, when the Council of Ministers passed a decision to allocate the *Izgrev* terrain formerly belonging to the White Brotherhood for the building of the

[508] Ibid.,
[509] AVMnR, F. 10, Op. 14, a.e. 300, 3. Atanasov in his letter says that the Brotherhood thanked the Committee of Culture cordially for the recognition of the site and also responded that no monument was needed since Peter Dŭnov expressly asked to have no memorial plate built on his grave.

Japanese and Soviet embassies in Sofia. Since the Soviet embassy was to encompass the park where Dŭnov's grave was located, the grave had to be transferred elsewhere. When the news reached the Sofia branch of Brotherhood – in the general climate of relaxation, the Committee of Religious Confessions was tasked with seeking the consent of the community – a momentous correspondence was instantly initiated with the news travelling to all the branches of the movement across Bulgaria. This produced a vigorous, decisive and coordinated protest, and in the February and March of 1969 all involved state institutions were inundated with indignant protest letters and appeals, coming from Brotherhood branches from the entire country, each of them signed by hundreds of signatories, and most often personally addressed to "Comrade Todor Zhivkov, First Secretary of the CC of the BCP and Chairperson of the Council of Ministers." All of them in different words are categorical that no member can in way give consent for the relocation of Dŭnov's grave, since they all deem the site sacred, therefore their "most cherished and sublime rights of citizens of a constitutional state" were infringed upon: "For all of us this site is holy and we are in our right to declare that we do not give consent for the relocation of the grave of our beloved Teacher. It must remain where it is currently located with the permission of the leader of the Bulgarian nation – Comrade Georgi Dimitrov."[510] They all recounted the history of the movement, emphasized the close affinities between communism and the movement, the friendship between Dŭnov and Dimitrov and the fact that express permission was granted by Prime Minister Dimitrov for the burial site. The tone of all these letters is confident and unwavering, constantly reminding that the Brotherhood members are everywhere famous for being honest, conscientious, humble, industrious, disciplined and law-abiding citizens "in full compliance with the current socialist government." Not only were Dŭnov's adherents exemplary citizens, they also set the example for highly ethical conduct: all

[510] AMVnR, Op. 11, a.e. 922.

members were vegetarians, teetotalers, nonsmokers, pacifists, stewards of nature, and the pioneers of responsible, ecological tourism. One appeal claims that Dŭnov's ideology "which is based on high ethics is not only famous in the entire world and served for the spiritual elevation of individual followers but it also led to the "fortification of the moral foundations of the People's government."[511] Another letter, in an almost moralizing tone calls on Todor Zhivkov to remember that by saving Georgi Dimitrov "from capture and elimination," it was Peter Dŭnov who "enabled Dimitrov to become a hero of the Leipzig trial and one of the supreme leaders of the internationalist communist movement."[512] While the "the students of the White Brotherhood" reiterate that they "categorically oppose such a barbaric encroachment like exhuming the bones of a sage and a person holy to us," they also go beyond Dŭnov's sacral status and claim him as a philosopher, scholar and sage of world historical significance, "known to luminaries from around the world like Tolstoy, Gandhi, Gorky, Rabindranath Tagore, Romen Rolan, Einstein and others."[513] Parallels are frequently drawn between Dŭnov "the great genius Bulgarian sage and philosopher-reformer in the sphere of spiritual re-education of the Bulgaria and humankind" and Leo Tolstoy, and calls are made for Bulgarian authorities to follow the example of the Soviet Union and publically articulate the correct attitude towards Dŭnov and his deeds.[514] The letters never fail to mention the changing circumstances of religious relaxation and adroitly draw on both domestic and international developments, most often the Helsinki Final Act of OSCE "which led to peace for the entire world," but also foreign policy:

> Comrade Zhivkov, we are aware of your democratic attitude towards all religious, confessional and spiritual communities in the country. We greeted with joy your speech about your friendly visit to brotherly India, whose policy is fraternal and friendly

[511] AMVnR, Op. 11, a.e. 922, 1.
[512] AMVnR, Op. 11, a.e. 922, 2.
[513] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 13, a.e. 141, 3.
[514] AMVnR, Op. 10, a.e. 1444.

> cooperation with all nations, and your paying your respects to the graves of Mahatma Gandi, Nehru and others.[515]

This wave of protests initiated by the White Brotherhood was actively and resolutely backed up by the Committee of Religious Confessions. With the cooperation of the Committee, in 1974 the Brotherhood received written assurances that the gravesite would remain under its care in perpetuity, albeit as a park within the Sofia Municipal People's Council. The Committee also sent a notification to Sofia Municipal People's Council clarifying the status of the plot, while also recommending that the Brotherhood's demands for "permission for a building, materials and an outhouse" at the gravesite are met:

> The Committee at the Ministry of External Affairs on religious questions informs you that Peter Dŭnov's grave and the two-decare plot in its vicinity is stipulated as a site of special designation, cherished by the religious community "White Brotherhood." The permission for Peter Dŭnov's burial on this site on the *Izgrev* was granted by the Minister of Internal Affairs on 30 December 1944. The religious community "White Brotherhood is registered at the Committee at the Ministry of External Affairs on 14 December 1951, in accordance with Article 16 of the Law on Religious Confessions. The Committee reckons that the permission sought by the Brotherhood for construction, materials and an outhouse is justified and should be granted.[516]

In the meantime, amidst the gravesite controversy, in 1973 the Committee of Religious Confessions also overruled an order by the Ministry of Forestry, which weeks before the scheduled yearly summit on the Seven Rila Lakes issued a prohibition under the pretext that such a high concentration of people (300-500) would pollute the environment. With the prompt and firm support of the Committee, which insisted on the legality of the summit and the possible

[515] AMVnR, Op. 11, a.e. 922.
[516] Ibid., 2.

scandal that might erupt in cancelling it while it was in preparation, the prohibition of the Ministry of Forestry was overridden and the camp took place as scheduled.[517]

As for Peter Dŭnov's grave, the Brotherhood supplied the site with electricity and water, erected a fence, and built an outhouse, as per the permit granted by the Municipality Council. In spite of this, pressure was once again put on the Committee of Religious Confessions to secure the sequestering of the plot for the use of the Japanese embassy, this time. On 18 January 1975 the director of Ministry of Foreign Affairs' "Fifth Section" asked for a resolution of the issue of the grave's relocation, attaching the note verbale the Japanese ambassador addressed to the deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Lyuben Petrov. The answer from the Committee on Religious Confessions was prompt, categorical and unambiguously backing up the White Brotherhood:

> The Committee on Church Questions asserts that if such a promise [for the relocation of Dŭnov's grave] was indeed given [to the Japanese mission]… this was done due to ignorance. Such an act would be equivalent to the closing down of a recognized religious organization and would deprive several thousand Bulgarian citizens of their basic right, guaranteed by the Constitution (article 53). This pronouncement of the Committee is coordinated with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Comrade Mladenov.[518]

The coordinated protest was resolved in favor of the Brotherhood and Dŭnov's grave and the splendidly maintained park-garden-orchard surrounding it remain in the original spot to this day. The victory palpably bolstered both the movement's confidence and its public presence. When only a year later the community faced another imminent encroachment – this time by the Bulgarian Tourist Union, it not only successfully fought against it, but used the incident as a pretext to require the resolution of all outstanding problems the community was facing. The immediate issue this time was a decision taken by the Central Governing Body of the Bulgarian Tourist Union to dismantle a fountain-source, hand-crafted by Peter Dŭnov and his first disciples

[517] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 12, a.e. 986, 2.
[518] AMVnR, Op. 12, a.e. 1445, 6.

in 1930 at a spring by the second lake of the Seven Rila Lakes. The fountain-source has been utilized by thousands of Dŭnov's supporters during their summer camps in the course of fifty years, and is revered as one of the few remaining material legacies bequeathed directly by Dŭnov and the founding members. Even though it was in constant use by regular tourists as the sole drinking fountain in the area, the Tourist Union had issues with its aesthetic, moral and ideological content, branding it religious propaganda. The Brotherhood members proudly elaborated on both the form and the spiritual content and symbolism of the source-fountain, explaining that the spout was formed by two marble hands "That Give," symbolizing love for all-giving nature, "which bestows most generously the most precious in life, together with bread – namely water, without which no life can sprout on earth." They dwell on the quality of the clean mountain water, containing radioactive and "electromagnetic energy from the rocks and the earth strata." They describe the occult figures and symbols, explaining that, rather than being religious agitation, these "astronomical ideas" serve for "the awakening of positive character traits in the individual" and his desire to do good deeds. The signatories of the appeal remind the Committee's director that these were the very principles adopted at the 11th Congress of the BCP "for the building of the new man with an elevated spirituality, beauty and aesthetics, and for the formation of harmoniously developed individuals." They even proudly displayed the "loftily ethical" and good character-building text Peter Dŭnov carved at the big rock next to the fountain, capitalizing all the words in the letter, lest the Director would miss its profound content: "Dear traveler, whoever you may be, remember how here on earth everything is transient and how all that remains eternally is your pursuit of happiness and its inevitable price – the voluntary sacrifice for the love of God."[519]

[519] The entire section is summarized from the correspondence in AMVnR, Op. 10, a.e. 1444.

The tone of the petition is audacious and righteous, at points even moralizing. From the very beginning the members of the brotherhood deplore the decision of Bulgarian Tourist Union as "anti-socialist, borderline chauvinist," ideologically motivated, and at variance with the interests of the Bulgarian nation, humanity as a whole, and tourists, in particular. The four-single-spaced-page document not only details the historical contributions of Peter Dŭnov and the White Brotherhood towards the "elevation of the spiritual level of the Bulgarian nation," but for the first time publicly defends the Brotherhood's religious ideas in an almost preaching tone, while elaborating on the spiritual worldview. A special section goes so far as to not only point to the convergences between the movement and communism, but also the differences, implying that the Brotherhood is the next step after revolution:

> The ideas of the Brotherhood, just like those of the Bogomils, do not contradict the ideas of communism, except in the methods and the means in certain aspects. REVOLUTION unclogs the jams in the development of nations, purifies from personal and state egotism that causes exploitation of man by man, but SOCIALISM AND BROTHERHOOD provides conditions for creative-artistic growth of society and humankind as a whole.[520]

The assertiveness permeating the letter culminates in the last two paragraphs, where Dŭnov's followers not only urge the Committee to decide favorably for the preservation of the source-fountain but to "order and to do everything necessary" that it be "recognized as a cultural and actual scientific monument." It ultimately calls on the Chairperson's "enlightened opinion and conviction in the truthfulness of their exposition to cooperate for securing the public rehabilitation of Peter Dŭnov as a great Bulgarian philosopher, "whose teachings are based on modern scientific foundations."[521]

[520] Ibid. 4.
[521] Ibid.,

By the mid-1970s the leadership of the White Brotherhood felt sufficiently empowered to go beyond its interactions with the state institution dealing with religious matters in seeking to redress its concerns. In February 1976, the Brotherly Council, chaired by the sisters Draga and Lyuba Mikhailova, sent an extensive "statement-appeal" to the Presidium of the 11th Congress of the BCP and Todor Zhivkov, regarding the "taking into the consideration and resolving some problematic issues for the religious community White Brotherhood."[522] The statement is indeed a tour-de-force of argumentation -- five single-spaced pages long, well-structured, and -articulated, coherent, and written in clear, specific and emotionless prose, obviously aspiring towards an objective presentation of historical facts. It opens with endorsement of the "historic Helsinki Final Act," and current socialist and international politics for peaceful coexistence among nations, aiming at the unity and brotherhood of progressive nations around the world. It then recounts the contribution of the members of the Brotherhood towards realizing the socialist ideals of the scientific, aesthetic and spiritual uplift of the nation, and the Brotherhood's dedicated participation in the building of the new man and society. The standard overview of the history of the movement comes next– its establishment and consolidation, the exemplary communal life on the *Izgrev*, the biography and main ideas of Peter Dŭnov. Special attention is paid to the persecutions before 1944 (with appendixes attached testifying to arrests and interrogations), and the post-1944 recognition of the Brotherhood as a religious community. Following a section on the profile and exemplary worldview of the followers (living in conformity with the laws of nature, vegetarianism, abstinence from drinking, spiritual and physical self-perfection), comes an analysis of the scientific basis of the teaching as "a creative scientific path for personal evolution," adding for emphasis "Today, in *Scientific Life* magazine (book 4/1975) Prof. M.D. Staikov confirms the same principles in his article 'The Role of the

[522] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 13, a.e. 141.

Subjective Factor in Works of Science.' While scientific, it was also **"**an original Bulgarian spiritual teaching-school based on the basic conceptual principles of Christ: of love, wisdom and truth (respectively the heart, brain and will of man)."

Only after this lengthy five-page exposition with proper references to a variety of sources and appendices attached to substantiate its claims not just on moral-ethical grounds but also scientifically, does the statement-appeal move on to the appeal part. Essentially, the governing council of the religious community White Brotherhood pleads "with the Delegates of the 11th Party Congress, the CC of the BCP and the government of the Republic of Bulgaria, headed by Comrade Todor Zhivkov to take all these factors into consideration and in the resolution of the following problems":

1. We make an appeal for the Teacher's current gravesite to be preserved on the *Izgrev* and to be managed by the Brotherhood as a cult site. We also make an appeal that the gravesite, in accordance with the respective regulations, be declared historic monument of culture of a worthy progressive Bulgarian and outstanding cultural activist for the evolution of the Bulgarian nation and humankind.

2. To grant the White Brotherhood the right of legal entity for the entire country by approving its statute, which would specify its future organizational, material and financial statutes.

3. As a moral compensation for the expropriated brotherhood property we appeal to you to issue a decision that the state provide the White Brotherhood with a salon for its needs in Sofia.

4. To confirm the right of the White Brotherhood throughout the country to summer camp on Rila mountains at the Seven lakes, which was selected as most appropriate climactically by the Teacher as early as 1929, since when the Brotherhood uses it yearly.[523]

The CC of the BCP forwarded statement-appeal sent to Committee on Church Questions stating that "In accordance with the decision taken by the Congress, we request that you execute a most

[523] Ibid.,

careful investigation of the demands posed in the appeal," and requesting prompt reporting of the results of the investigation back to the CC.

Simultaneously with the assistance sought at the highest level of government, the White Brotherhood deemed the time ripe to press on the issue of public recognition and official (re) assessment of the movement. To this end, it addressed another request to the Chairperson of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAN), to ask for BAN's cooperation in its capacity of "supreme conveyors of the truthful scientific thought" for its objective and independent assessment by a panel of scholars to pronounce their "just opinion" on "the scientific basis of the teaching-school /*uchenieto-shkola*/ whose ethical aim is forging the human into spiritual-moral being." Confirmation of the scientific basis of the teaching-school, was in the Brotherhood's estimation, not only crucial for the future life of the Brotherhood, but also vital "for the good of the Bulgarian nation."[524] While BAN immediately forwarded the appeal to the Committee of Religious Confessions "for information and execution" since "the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences does not deal with such questions,"[525] there were certainly gestures towards official recognition. This is evident for example from the entry on "Danovism" in the 1976 encyclopedia *Short History of Bulgarian Philosophical Thought,* where the movement is not only not criticized but is positively assessed.[526] This is all the more baffling since the editor of the encyclopedia was no other than old guard partisan, communist, lifelong Politburo member, and Bulgaria's foremost Marxist theoretician, Academician Todor Pavlov (b. 1890)– unanimously reviled by late socialist intelligentsia as the bulwark of dogmatic Marxism-Leninism. It is worthwhile to quote the opening sentence to the entry: "Over half a century in Bulgaria thrives an idiosyncratic mystical

[524] AMVnR, F. 10, Op. 13, a.e. 141, 7.
[525] Ibid., 8.
[526] Todor Pavlov. *Istoriia na filosofskata misŭl v Bŭlgariia,* Vol. 3, Sofia: BAN, 1976.

movement, which calls itself "white brotherhood" and whose critics and the people call "danovism" – according to the family name of its founder, Peter Dŭnov. This movement is an original Bulgarian theosophical teaching."[527] The entry is very detailed, it outlines Dŭnov's biography and trajectory in a non-judgmental manner and even casts him in a positive light: "In his practical work, Peter Dŭnov displays the passion of the poet and the knowledge of the psychologist. He is excellently acquainted with the huge psychological impact of the rising sun, awakening nature, etc.") The history of the movement, its interwar popularity, the worldview, the links with theosophy are analyzed at some length. The article pays detailed attention to both "the practical enlightenment-educational work" Dŭnov carried out, and to his "philosophico-religious worldview." Dŭnov's ultimate goal is described as "aspiring to cultivate a spiritual environment, an occult movement, directed towards the attainment of a "higher, more rational living," by way of "inner self-perfection and re-education of the individual."[528]

In the 1970s the White Brotherhood was sufficiently emboldened and revamped to successfully challenge its critics publicly, defend its legal rights, seek recognition by the scientific community and even insist on an official pronouncement by the authorities on the merits of its founder and teaching as a genius of world-historical significance. Moreover, the parole of imprisoned Danosvists and their employment in the public sector, the publication of the works of its noted practitioners, Michael Ivanov's visit in Bulgaria in 1981, the preservation of Dŭnov's grave and its designation as a national historic monument of culture, the appearance of positive evaluations of the movement both in the Bulgarian press and in the memoirs of prominent communist functionaries, the movement's recognition in works by BAN as an "idyosincratic Bulgarian philosophical-theological teaching" or "specific Bulgarian theosophical

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[527] Ibid., 159.
[528] Ibid.,

teaching" provide ample evidence for the visibility of the White Brotherhood from the late 1960s onwards. The movement not only became a fashionable philosophical teaching among the artistic intelligentsia, but also acquired a new positive image, which legitimated it in popular consciousness. Even historian Zhivko Lefterov, who wrote a dissertation on the White Brotherhood under "totalitarian communism" thoroughly and unapologetically in the spirit of the totalitarian paradigm, with the aim to document repressions, accedes that in the 1970s, what he called "a partial official rehabilitation of the White Brotherhood" took place and that it acquired a positive public image.[529] In that sense, the White Brotherhood underwent a second 'revival' (following its peak in the 1930s) not post-1989, but in the 1970s. Tracing the Brotherhood's history in the twentieth century reveals that prior to the communist takeover of 1944, occultism and communism were ideological allies, and it was under the newly established socialist state that the Brotherhood first acquired recognition as a "religious community," rather than a heresy and a sect, as it was referred to in the 1920s and 1930s. For most of its socialist existence (with the exception of the late 1950s and early 1960 when it underwent a fiscal revision and nationalization of its property) the White Brotherhood engaged in relations with the Committee for Religious Faiths and on multiple occasions successfully defended itself against encroachments from other state institution, with the active support of the state institution dealing with religions. Rather than post-1989 revival, this chapter documented a gradual liberalization in attitudes towards the Brotherhood and religions more broadly since the late-1960s but peaking in particular in the 1970s and early 1980s when the Brotherhood enjoyed prestige among the intelligentsia, bolstered confidence, resolution of some of its demands, and even partial official

[529] Zhivko Lefterov, *BKP i bialoto bratstvo: Religioznata politika na Bŭlgarskata komunisticheska partiia i Bialoto bratstvo (1944-1989)*. Phd Dissertation, New Bulgaria University, Sofia, 2012, 253-270.

recognition as an “idiosyncratic Bulgarian philosophical-theological teaching” and original Bulgarian theosophical movement.

Conclusion

Thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev, the period from Khrushchev's overthrow in 1964 to Leonid Brezhnev's passing in 1982 has been perpetually en-graved in popular (as well as scholarly) consciousness as the period of stagnation. Dismissed as the "murky thereafter" following the exciting sixties, a decade "wedged in between the rambunctious sixties and the dramatic eighties,"

[530] the 1970s have been given the short shrift by historians. As historian of Soviet Union Stephen Lovell has observed, the period in question "lacks powerful advocates who might turn the tide of underappreciation."[531] When available, historical scholarship on late socialism has rarely questioned the period's bad publicity. Even one of the most recent historical studies dedicated exclusively to late socialist culture – important and pioneering in its own right for countering the glaring absence of scholarship on late communism – has been methodologically preoccupied with "how to write about the later period of communism, about stagnation, and about the nothingness of the 1970s and 1980s."[532]

This dissertation constitutes one such effort to turn the tide of underappreciation and rescue the allegedly grey and unheroic long 1970s from the "enormous condescension of posterity," to borrow E. P. Thomson's illustrious phrase. Through a temporally deep and multi-layered cultural history of late socialism that uses the occult as a prism, I contend that far from being stagnant, monolithic and dull, from the mid-1960s onwards, late socialist culture exhibited remarkable edginess, vitality, experimentation, and contentiousness, which was retained

[530] The phrase belongs to historian of Soviet Union Stephen Lovell in "In Search of an Ending: Seventeen Moments and the Seventies," in Diane P. Koenker and Anne E. Gorsuch, eds., *The Socialists Sixties,* 304.
[531] Ibid.
[532] Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV,* 6.

andeven intensified throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s. On one level this dissertation told the story of what I have termed "occult communism" – a playful reference to late socialist Bulgaria when party leader's daughter Lyudmila Zhivkova assumed extraordinary powers over culture, art, education, science, publishing, public television and radio, and international cultural relations; and unexpectedly made occultism the core of her cultural politics. This project has demonstrated that in the 1970s Zhivkova not only relentlessly proselytized at home and abroad her unorthodox views on the centrality of spirituality, art and culture in perfecting society, the individual and international relations, but also translated her religo-spiritual worldview into state policies. I have argued that Zhivkova's occult communism constituted a late socialist attempt to ennoble the communist project via esotericism and high culture; that she practiced a sort of spiritual-aesthetic utopianism, imbued with the fanatical belief that art, culture, and spirituality would illuminate the way toward the bright shining future of what "synthesized communism." The wholesale revamping of Bulgarian education and culture, the long-term national programs for aesthetic education and harmonious development of man, and the Banner of Peace Assembly were all concrete manifestations of her variant of "socialism with a human face."

Granted, a number of Zhivkova's fiscally imprudent projects did not correspond to the realistic capabilities or international standing of a state like Bulgaria, and were understandably (given their bizarre content) met with incomprehension by the Bulgarian public. Some bordered on the absurd and the phantasmagorical: for example, Zhivkova's unwavering determination to turn Bulgaria into the premier global spiritual center-laboratory for synthesis of world civilizations, cultures and religions, or her conviction that through initiated adepts aesthetic education and all-round development would emanate from Bulgaria outward to contribute to the cultural and spiritual uplift of "the entire humankind." Zhivkova's dubious inspirations and aspirations notwithstanding, her overall cultural politics had important intended and unintended consequences. First of all, initiatives like the national program for aesthetic education expanded and diversified late socialist culture by visibly and permanently acculturating the Bulgarian public to some of highest achievements of world art – both "Western," but also global (India, Japan, Mexico and Iran figured most prominently). The exposure to foreign art and culture had been occurring sporadically since the 1960s, but under Zhivkova's tenure it was institutionalized – the National Gallery for Foreign Art, one of Zhivkova's long-term legacies in existence to this day, is just one example. Secondly, her policies created institutional openings where cultural and educational policy were generated, contested, formulated and implemented by intellectuals, scientists, writers, historians, theater, radio and film specialists, and artists – that is by the cultural, artistic and scientific elite – and not by the Central Committee. From Zhivkova's core working team of skilled professionals at the Committee of Culture, to the myriad interdisciplinary working groups of specialists working on each program, to the close cooperation between institutes, cultural and educational institutions and the creative-artistic unions, to the democratized plenums and congresses of culture, the younger generation of educated, talented and well-trained experts and artists participated energetically in the cultural processes. In that sense, in spite of the dubious sources of Zhivkova's inspirations, it would not be an exaggeration to say that late socialist Bulgaria saw unprecedented cultural relaxation, permissiveness and experimentation.

Magnifying the scope of analysis beyond Bulgaria, I next situated Zhivkova's occult communism against the broader canvass of the late socialist upsurge of interest in the occult, paranormal and the parapsychological across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. From the

1960s onwards, a number of laboratories and institutes submitting telepathy and telekinesis to scientific analysis mushroomed from Bulgaria to the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia to Yugoslavia. Newly-minted sciences (for they were considered as such) like suggestology, parapsychology and bioelectronics enjoyed soaring epistemic authority, institutional backing, lavish state resources, political support, and tremendous and unabated popular interest. Tracing the historical relationship between communism and parapsychology demonstrated not only that parapsycholgy had by the mid-1960s become a legitimate field of enquiry attracting scientists from an array of mainstream disciplines (like physics, biology, chemistry, neuroscience, mathematics, psychology), but that Marxist-Leninist definition of materialism was malleable enough to incorporate not only the paranormal but also interest in transcendental matters. Ultimately, the historical study of the scientific acculturation of suggestology and parapsychology yet again demonstrated that there was a remarkable degree of permissiveness, openness and contentiousness in discussing these elusive fields. On the pages of scientific, popular science and even the official journals of scientific atheism, experts, scientists, journal editors, correspondents, psychics, and ordinary citizens freely discussed and debated the new sciences' content, method, future frontiers and applications, and even their relationship to materialism. In the realm of the parapsychological and the paranormal, too, the conclusion resonates strongly with Todorova's insistence that from the 1960s onwards an embryonic public sphere and a nascent civil society were firmly in existence in Eastern Europe, insofar as the issues at stake did not directly threaten the existence of socialist regimes.

The loosening and permissiveness of the cultural sphere crept into the realm of socialist spirituality. As this dissertation has shown, since the late 1960s atheist propaganda subsided and was even partially reversed, while palpable toleration of religious practice allowed for both non-confessional mysticism and conventional religiosity to expand. As Victor Yelensky has argued with Soviet Ukraine in mind, popular religiosity "not only persisted but expressed itself in an increasingly active and visible manner."[533] Studying evangelical communities in Ukraine and the Soviet Union, Catherine Wanner reached a similar conclusion: that they not only survived, but thrived during the Soviet period.[534] Tracing the story of a late nineteenth century occult-mystical religious movement over the course of three political regimes, I argued that, following its meteoric success in the post-WWI climate of profound moral crisis, and its subsequent petering out after state socialism offered a real political alternative after WWII, the White Brotherhood underwent a veritable revival in the 1970s. During late socialism this curious (and since the interwar period marginal) spiritual movement was sufficiently emboldened to successfully challenge its critics, defend its legal rights, publicly discuss and advocate its religious worldview, seek recognition by the scientific community, and even urge the Politburo to issue an official pronouncement on the merits of its founder as a genius of world-historical significance. Far from being repressed, it was in vogue in some circles of the artistic intelligentsia, acquired a certain prestige among the population and received semi-recognition in official encyclopedias as a distinctly Bulgarian philosophical-theological teaching. In that sense this dissertation has insisted that we cannot understand the postsocialist proliferation of religion and spirituality without looking at its prehistory: the revival of the 1970s, spearheaded by the cultural and social transformations of the 1960s.

The cultural transformations I have detailed naturally have their social preconditions. By the end of the 1960s, states across Eastern Europe had become more urbanized and

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533 Victor Yelensky, "The Revival before the Revival: Popular and Institutionalized Religion in Ukraine on the Eve of the Collapse of Communism." In Wanner, ed. *State Secularism and Lived Religion.*, 312-313.

534 Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007

industrialized with better educated populations that enjoyed higher standard of living and more leisure time in comparison with the first half of the twentieth century. It was during this period that the principle of an owned, if small apartment and the idea of a “style of life” became a reality for the majority of families. Following the mass housing construction drives of the 1950s–60s, socialist citizens now began to develop a taste for furnishing and beautifying their homes and for following fashion. By the 1960s Western-style consumerism and the acquisition of simultaneously real and symbolic material goods– appliances, clothing, footwear, furniture, decorative items, cosmetics and consumer goods -- became an obsession, for consumers and authorities alike. Socialist states, like their capitalist counterparts, had entered mass society – a society of mass communications, technology, and most importantly television. It was no coincidence that the 1970s saw the emergence of the momentous rock culture (as well as other musical subcultures), which were so ubiquitous that some of their representatives even left the “underground” to enter public space and won official recognition (the example of one of the foremost pan-Eastern European celebrities, Russian singer-songwriter, guitarist, poet, and actor Vladimir Visotsky is the most glamorous.)

From the Bulgarian vantage point, in particular, the 1970s were economically and socially stable, bolstered by the “special relationship” between Todor Zhivkov and Leonid Brezhnev, which guaranteed Soviet finance, technology, know-how, raw materials and above all energy at more than 50% below market prices for the Bulgarian rapid industrialization effort. To British ambassador John Cloake the “special relationship” was epitomized by what Todor Zhivkov jokingly said to British Secretary of State for Trade Edmund Dell in 1978: "The Soviet Union is a Bulgarian colony – an assured and cheap source of necessary raw materials, a captive market for our manufactured exports."[535] On the eve of the 1970s, industry accounted for over 55% of the national income of a formerly overwhelmingly agricultural economy, with a further 45% growth envisaged in the 1976-1981 Five Year Plan.[536] As noted continuously in the reports by the British and American diplomatic missions, the quality and distribution of consumer goods was steadily improving and the regime "manifested genuine concern for the ordinary Bulgarian citizen a number of ways – from the provision of more consumer goods in the shops to more opportunities in the press for expressions of personal opinion."[537] The newspapers were making more space available for letters of criticism and the authorities were taking actions regarding the complaints. As outgoing British Ambassador noted in his valedictory report in 1980**:** "Day by day the press, especially the Party newspaper, has – thank Heavens – relieved the dreadful monotony of most of its coverage with articles showing too clearly the persistence despite obstacles of a spirit of private enterprise, of criticism, of – it is really the only word – bolshiness."[538] While to Ambassador Cloake Bulgaria was certainly no democracy in the Western sense, he could discern "genuine democratic processes within the system, and particularly within the Party" and seldom use of blatant repression. His overall impression following his years of service was "of a relaxed country, peaceable and friendly, grumbling (as who does not? – but with more cause than most) at shortages, price rises, bureaucratic incompetence, but without serious, let alone organized, dissidence."[539] This assessment seems to be corroborated by incoming American Ambassador Jack Perry, who upon his arrival to assume office in 1979, not only described Bulgaria as "relaxed" and "un-repressed" but even compared it

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535 UK National Archives, FCO 28/3732.

536 While there was much talk about the need to expand light industry to increase the supply of consumer goods to the population, throughout the 1970s priority was still given to heavy industry and producer goods, electronic industry, the electric power industry, the chemical industry and to machine building and ferrous metallurgy.

537 UK National Archives, FCO 28/3732.

538 UKNA, FCO 28/4093 – Bulgaria Internal Situation 1980, 6, p.3..

539 Ibid.,

favorably to Czechoslovakia, Russia and Greece. Here is what he wrote in his first report:

> Bulgaria after three weeks in residence strikes me as just as much Balkan as communist. Compared to Prague, where I served from 1974 to 1976, it is un-tragic, un-repressed and unoccupied. Compared to Russia, with which I have been dealing more or less continuously since 1951, it is relaxed and blessed with good humor. While Sofia has none of the faded grandeur of Prague, it is livelier and greener, and the food and clothing indicate an acceptable standard of living. Old East European hands know that to go from Moscow to Helsinki or from Prague to Munich is to go from one glum world to another, brighter one, but our first trip to Northern Greece left us with the feeling that Bulgaria is not too far behind its Balkan neighbors, and in some respects may be ahead of some of them.[540]

Finally, beyond the contributions to Eastern European history, my dissertation has broader relevance for audiences interested in state socialism, the history of occultism, or their interplay. Telling the story of Zhivkova's attempt to revamp Bulgarian late communism via occultism alongside the twentieth-century trajectory of the White Brotherhood has allowed me to explore the shifting interrelationship between communism and occultism: ranging from mutual attraction during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, to active confluence following the First World War, to coexistence following the Second World War, going as far as fusion – with Zhivkova's amalgam of the two. Rather than viewing occultism and communism as incongruous, my dissertation points to the theoretical affinities and historical entanglements between the two. First, for both early socialism and occultism, the eradication of the "old" order was a prerequisite for the building of a "new culture" or a "new society", typically based on the abolition of private property, some form of collectivism, and a communitarian vision. In their early iterations, thus, both socialism and occultism reacted against the social injustice of life under a competitive, individualist and exploitative system at the end of the nineteenth century, optimistically gazing towards a future state-to-come. Both

[540] FCO 28/3732

were predicated on the utopian concept of a “universal brotherhood” and as such shared a supra-national, cosmopolitan orientation, while situatin themselves within a transnational movement and networks of knowledge. Peter Deunov’s pleas for “outgrowing national borders and egotism” is echoed in the precepts of Marxist internationalism. It only needs to be added that the democratic fraternity of the future could solely be brought about by the meritocratic elite of the present. In that sense socialists and occultists imagined themselves at the forefront of fundamental historical change.

As self-appointed vanguardists, they were equally preoccupied with the building of both the “new man,” and his/her consciousness, of which all-round and harmonious development was a crucial component. It is no wonder that Deunov’s followers saw his teaching and the principles adopted at the 11th Party Congress as exact equivalents: “the building of the new man with an elevated spirituality, beauty and aesthetics,” and the formation of harmoniously developed individuals. In addition, they also share a holistic view of the world, and an insistence on its internal coherence as an organized system. The Marxian “totality” can equally be applied to Deunov’s teaching and Zhivkova’s cultural policy, while “synthesis” is a crucial component of the conceptual and methodological apparatus of both occultists and communists. Philosophy of history is another point of intersection: both movements interpreted history as an evolutionary process (whether humanity is seen as progressing through successive stages of lower races or successive modes of production) and for both the alternative future they dreamed of was inevitable. Ultimately, at the core of the elective affinity between communism and occultism I see the utopian component: the vision of a radically different futurity, exhibiting a strong social conscience, which is both materializable and inevitable. As this dissertation shows that affinity was not a distinctively turn-of-the-century phenomenon, but carried over well into the twentieth century, reaching its apogee in the 1970s and 1980s.

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