

Trauma or Entertainment?: Inside and Outside *Symposion*

by

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Abstract

My thesis deals with the absence of the *trauma* of the bombing of Serbia that took place in the spring of 1999, and the creation of a *collective memory* of it among the community of the contributors of the journal *Symposion*. More specifically, it explores how the interaction along the lines of the non-acknowledged trauma constitutes a *mnemonic community* of the people from Serbia and Hungary who corresponded with each other during the time of the air strikes. By looking at their e-mails and conducting interviews with some of the members of this community, I argue that the community is linked through emerging shared *narrative patterns* that have the function of normalizing the experience, creating shared cultural frameworks for remembering it. Hence, the internal dynamics of the community, its social position, the shared discourse and the everyday practices of the members of the community contribute together to the creation of a mnemonic community.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

Remembering an event commonly thought to be traumatic, such as the bombing of someone's country, is not expected to happen in positive terms. Having gone back to Serbia from Hungary in June 1999, after the NATO air strikes, what I had been expecting were stories of fear and trauma, but what I got from my friends and acquaintances were recollections of great parties that I was sorry to have missed. I was puzzled when I heard people either not saying anything about the three months of bombing or telling stories about it as if it was a great time of fun, entertainment, drug use, social gatherings and illegal clubbing.

The NATO air strikes on Serbia took place between March 24 and June 9, 1999. It broke out as a result of the interference of the international community to prevent, or rather stop, the “repressions by Serb military and police forces inside the Serbian province of Kosovo” (Andrejevich 2000) of the Kosovo Albanians, after a peaceful resolution was not achieved. The air strikes targeted mostly military and government objects and infrastructures supporting the regime, but some civilian objects were destroyed as well, most importantly bridges in Belgrade and Novi Sad, television broadcasting buildings, but also factories, a hospital, roads and railways etc. The main aim of the bombing was to overthrow Slobodan Milosevic's regime, but the solution turned out to be unsuccessful. The Serbian propagandist media, manipulating and twisting facts, actually claimed victory over the NATO forces after the air raids.

The situation was precarious for the Hungarian minority in Serbia; many of them felt, similarly to the wars between Serbia Bosnia and Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s, that they had

no interest to win but only to lose in the war to which they were being called up. They started fearing for their safety as a result of the xenophobia of radical Serbian nationalists, and at the same time felt betrayed by Hungary's politics. What added to the peculiarity of the situation was that NATO airplanes were using Hungarian airspace as the country became a member of the organization 12 days before the air strikes on Serbia, which in turn meant that de jure Hungary, as a NATO member, was also in war with Yugoslavia. The Hungarian public discourse was extremely divided between those supporting the bomb raids as the last resort of the international community to the growing tensions in Yugoslavia and those opposing it in the name of defending the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, whom many saw as 300,000 citizens being treated as hostages by Serbia.

This is the situation in which Hungarian intellectuals from Serbia found themselves in the spring of 1999, the authors of the journal *Symposion* among others. The particularity of *Symposion* lies in the fact that it is one of the most prestigious literary and social science journals in Serbia, written in Hungarian. Its readership, as well as its editorial board, is mostly young Hungarian intellectuals, who found themselves in a very specific situation during the NATO bombing as writers, as liberal intellectuals and as Hungarians in Serbia. This is why the socio-political context of the bombing is of crucial importance in understanding their narrative patterns when they talk about their experiences of the bombing. This journal has been a controversial one since its founding in 1961. The editorial board and the authors who contributed to it in 1999 were the third generation of editors, probably the "last flaring up of it, (. . .) the last compact editorial staff"¹ (Szerbhorváth 2005:10) which issued the journal with the financial support of the Soros Foundation. In the Serbia of the 1990s this almost automatically marked them as a liberal anti-nationalistic journal, a position that has often been claimed openly by the authors, and which was far from an easy one to take during the NATO

¹ The book is in Hungarian, the translation of the references in this essay is done by the author of this thesis.

air strikes on Serbia. Throughout the entire history of the journal it was often the target of both Serbian and Hungarian intellectuals who did not take the same position as its editors – interestingly enough, mostly Hungarians from Serbia (Szerbhorváth 2005) -- and this was true all the more in the politically turbulent months of the NATO air raids on Serbia.

My attention was caught by an edition of a literature and arts journal *Symposion* (1999/0024-25), which issued the e-mails that the authors wrote to each other during the bombing several months after it. I expected a deeper understanding of the nature of the thoughts and emotions one experiences in this kind of traumatic situations through these texts, but, at least at first sight, it seemed that even these circular e-mails provided only accounts of everyday activities and parties.

Even today, in 2008, most of the personal narrations of the bombing, written or oral, on the surface emphasize the fun and entertainment aspect of it, focus on trivial everyday practices and play down the element of fear, trauma, anxiety and danger. What seems to be happening is either a lack of narratives about the months of the bombing raids, or a unified way of relating to this past event among the people who witnessed it, through a transformation of the potentially traumatic event into a positive experience. However, as some of the editors and authors of the journal are my personal acquaintances, after re-reading their e-mails, talking to them, and to other people who share the experience of what I assumed to be a trauma, I became aware that they, who witnessed it, and I, who did not, do not share the same understanding of trauma and war situation. I felt the need to discover the internal mechanisms that made them react in this specific way that was contrary to the expectations.

1.2. Research problem

It seems obvious that the community of *Symposion* shares the experience of the witnessing the bombing and that trauma can be seen as the element that binds them together, and that creates a shared discourse (Weine 1999). However, the discourse of trauma is strikingly absent in all these narratives. Two questions arise then, what is it that binds this group of people together if they distance themselves from defining their experience as traumatic, and how does the absence of the recognition of trauma create a community of memory.

Even though they do not define their experiences as traumatic, which is a striking difference from other cases discussed in literature on war and trauma (see Caruth 1995; Robben and Suarez 2000; Wine 1999) the memories of the bombing for the group do not allow for much variation, their homogeneity being typical for the community and defining its boundaries. As Schwartz notes, memory is “a system of social attachment and social control, the problematic fit between commemorative genres and historical events, (. . .) the cognitive dynamics of distortion, the link between preservation and distortion of the past” (1996:281). Individuals sharing the same experience about an event and remembering it in a related manner are defined as a ‘mnemonic community’. Its basic definition is that it is a group of people who identify themselves with the memories of the community (Zerubavel 1996). Although I will look at the emergence of the community rather than take its existence for granted, it is still crucial that Zerubavel argues that we remember not as individuals but as members of a community that maintain “mnemonic traditions” through “mnemonic socialization” (Halbwachs 1992). Remembering becomes a means of a shared background and a common identity, and individuals belonging to a mnemonic community recognize the reactions to the trauma of others and orientate their reactions according to them (Ross 2003). The reactions of the mnemonic community are their narratives that I will analyze in my thesis, written ones

during the bombings (e-mails), and oral ones today (interviews). Thus in my research I will explore the narrative strategies create and sustain this mnemonic community.

The literature on narrative analysis of memories (see Bloch 1998; Cappelletto 2003; Skultans 1998) suggests that experiences that are traumatic are normalized, given meaning, order and coherence through narratives. By looking at this case I aim to find out how this particular community of young Hungarian intellectuals in Serbia have collectively understood and reflected upon a particular social event during its taking place, and today, 9 years after it, how this experience is shaped by a common narrative about it, and how it eventually becomes collective.

Therefore, in my research I will explore

1. How the non-acknowledged trauma is represented
2. How the mnemonic community is created.

I argue that for the community I researched the way to express the traumatic experiences of the bombing is through constructing it into a normalized one, thus distancing themselves from it, i.e. taking part in the mnemonic community, accepting the common discourse of entertainment and everyday ‘rituals’ and adjusting to each others’ narratives in order to be able to make meaning of the war experience through a standardized narration of it. The mnemonic community thus emerges out of the interaction between its members, their shared discourse and practices.

On a theoretical level, in my thesis I explore the contradiction between what is suggested in the literature on traumatic experience such as bomb raids, and what the case of the mnemonic

community I studied. My research will explain how historical/political events have an impact on particular individuals' creation of meaning out of their experiences, and how alternative ways of remembering come about outside the culturally accepted national and historical frames, because "private memories, with high degree of significance for the everyday living (. . .) preempt the publicly articulated ones" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994:55). The results of my analysis will lead to an understanding of how an event that that potentially generates trauma is interpreted both individually and collectively through a shared memory of these experiences. They will contribute to the explanation as to how narrative structures shape the collective memory of an event within a mnemonic community.

In the first half of my thesis I will introduce the literature relevant to the discussion on communities, memory, traumatic experience and narrations about it. I will bring together theories and define concepts with respect to my empirical study to explore my main research question, that is how is the trauma, that is not acknowledged as such narrated and given meaning to in the community of the readers and contributors to *Symposion*. Then I will turn explicitly to the empirical case of this community, how the community is constructed, what is its internal dynamics, what are the narrative patterns that serve to normalize the traumatic experience of the bombing and to distance oneself from it, how these re-appear in the memories about those events of the same people, and how these memories are collectively constructed. I will describe and analyze these with the aid of the literature on these theories, but also focus on issues that it does not explain. In the last part, I will sum up my findings that are specific to the case I have researched, and point to issues to which further scholarly attention should be devoted to.

2. Theoretical framework

To solve the puzzle of my research about the absence of the discourse of trauma among the writers, editors and readers of *Symposion*, in this chapter I will bring together the relevant theories and concepts dealing with traumatic war experience, collective memory studies and narrative analysis. In all these theories I will point to notions that can shed light on the question of the emergence of narratives specific to the group I studied that relates to their experience and memories from the time of the bombings.

2.1. Collective memory

To study the memory of the NATO bombing of Serbia is part of the debate of collective memory studies that deals with the shift from individual to collective memory. It can provide insights into how in the case of the group of people around *Symposion* re-appropriates each others' memories in order to come up with an understanding of a situation that can be acceptable in their own frames of reference. Collective memory studies are a problematic field though, especially in relation to societies where the relationship between past and present, official state ideology and personal narratives is ambiguous. This is certainly true for Serbia, where the public discourse about the memories of the bombing in 1999 seems either to be absent or reduced to narratives about entertainment, trivialities and everyday practices.

The relationship between the politics of memory and personal narratives has been the focus of many studies, which follow two lines of thought: one trend of collective memory studies emphasizes politics, national and state discourse 'from above', usually from the nations' point of view (see Halbwachs 1992; Olick and Robbins 1998) while the other focuses on individual narratives and tries to account for experiences 'from below' (see Bloch 1998; Kirmayer 1996;

Skultans 1998). The two approaches, however, complement each other because they mutually affect each other: individuals make meaning of the national discourse, and the national discourse is accepted and transmitted but also altered by individuals. Ashplant, Dawson and Roper (2004) advocate a third approach that is a middle-ground between the previous two, suggesting to take personal narratives as a starting point and to look at how they interrelate with public narratives, and I will follow this path in my research.

Researchers on collective memory in Central-Eastern Europe typically see history as official, institutionalized remembering and the memories of individuals as alternative to this is (Ebenshade 1995). This assumption serves as the explanation of the case of the group around *Symposion* as it shows how the narratives of a small circle of people is seen as an alternative struggle for ‘their’ own memories and commemorating practices. In the face of official manipulation and distortion of history, such as the manipulation with the past in the Serbian media during the bombing, writer’ and intellectuals’ individual memories became the source for, and representation of, national history (Ebenshade 1995). What can be recollected is limited by collective patterns. The past is not a “limitless and plastic symbolic resource” (Appadurai 1981:201) because the set of cultural frames in which remembering can take place is restricted (1981), most often by the ‘official’ mnemonic practices of the state, and occasionally several possible alternatives to it. Individual experiences and experiences of marginal groups, such as minorities or alternative artistic groups, such as *Symposion*, which did not form a coherent political resistant movement. The common discourse that emerges from their correspondence rather had the aim of creating a community of them through interaction and shared narrative patterns.

Hence, studying how the memory of a community becomes collective is useful in the case I researched in order to explain the emergence of the community of memory and its distinct

(narrative) patterns. Halbwachs (1992), in a very Durkheimian functionalist fashion, sees collective memory construction through the eyes of the society: it is formed through socialization, and is molded with the content necessary for the transmission of tradition and the survival and the reproduction of the society. One criticism of Halbwachs's classical theory of collective memory is the way he conceptualizes the process by which individual memories become collective: in a way an aggregate of personal recollections but still something qualitatively different. Gedi and Elam criticize Halbwachs's concept for blurring the distinction between personal and social "until they simply coincide and become two sides of the same coin" (1996:37). Although Bloch criticized Halbwachs for his neglect of the personal, he gives him credit that it is the transmittance of memories that is indeed collective. Skultans writes about a "cultural grammar" of individual memory narratives (1998:19) in the sense that although past experiences are lived through and retold on a personal level, their content is no longer merely a direct reflection of those experiences and the stories of individuals' are similar to each others in that they are built on a common cultural scheme. Olick addresses this still unresolved issue of cultural memory studies as "two cultures of memory" (1999:133), claiming that a more collectivist approach to memory sees it as a collection of social and cultural patterns of remembering, but neglects how these patterns are constituted on a more psychological level, while the more individualistic approaches to social memory disentangle these psychological processes of patterning without addressing how they become collective (1999). Following a multidimensional analysis of collective memory, in my research I explore the elements such as everyday practices and discourse that make the collective memory of a group more than a simple aggregate of their individual memories, and explain how these elements become collective.

Collective memory can be seen as constraining social actors in their creative engagement with their past. A criticism of conceptualizing memory as collective is the passive role it assigns to the individual, failing to consider individual agency. It is related to the common cultural schemes into which individual narratives of the past seem to dissolve. Common discourse leads to repetition, which can eventually result in the wearing out of the particular individual experiences, and their content approaches the others' more and more closely, eventually resulting in a common memory which is not a personal memory any more but rather a stereotype (Hutton 1993), or a myth (Gedi and Elam 1996). Although these authors see this mutual influence of narratives upon one another as a shortcoming of working with the notion of collective memory, I believe that it allows greater insights to my research, because it gives space to the analysis of common experiences through the common narratives and the inherent narrative structure of memory.

2.2. Community: linguistic discourse, interaction and practices

How then to conceptualize the individual's memory within the framework of collective memory? A solution at hand is to perceive individuals as members of "mnemonic communities" (Olick and Robbins 1998) sharing the same experience about an event. I explore the construction of the community of the authors and readers of *Symposion*, and how their narratives about the bombing emerge from their practices of sending e-mails about their daily lives to each other. I see this as determining the background and the general context from which the community emerges and from which it draws its resources into the narratives of the individuals who constitute it.

The first feature I discuss that defines the construction of community emerges from the position of these authors: as already mentioned, being Hungarians in Serbia and editors of a

Hungarian-language journal of literature and social sciences puts them to a certain extent in opposition to the mainstream Serbian society. Bourdieu actually sees this struggle for a relative social position, i.e. the construction of a social world as space “on the bases of differentiation and distribution” (1985:724) necessary for groups to be create their own social world. This specific social world is created by means of the “work of representation” (1985:727), and it takes place both in practice and through verbal expressions, both very characteristic of the group around *Symposion*. It would be an exaggeration to claim that the status of national minorities sets a community apart from the society in which they live and in which they participate in their everyday practices. However, it would also be false not to take into account certain features, the linguistic one being the most obvious, which differentiates the community. It is rather a constant negotiation of positions and legitimizing the group’s own world view. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines a national community in terms of imagination: “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1991:6) Although he talks about nations, his criteria clearly applies in a broader sense to cases of other bounded groups of individuals as well that have their own distinct perceptions of their identities and their own realities within the given community.

An important issue in relation to my empirical study is that the authors of the e-mails are writers and literary intellectuals; therefore their special relation to language puts them in a specific position, too. The conceptualization of the community in terms of imagination and fantasy (Anderson 1991) is a very important marker of group identity for the authors of *Symposion*. In their literary works they have certain distinct patterns of reference to their everyday world that is expressed in a distinct language. Linguistic conventions are at the core of collective memory: “verbal conventions constitute what is at the same time the most

elementary and the most stable framework of collective memory” (Halbwachs 1992:45). The specificity of their narratives is connected to the type of linguistic discourse they use.

Other than the linguistic discourse they use everyday practices are of vital importance, especially of symbolic creativity, i.e. creative engagements such as writing for the purpose of normalizing potentially traumatic experiences. The basic function of symbolic creativity is to produce and reproduce identities through self-recognition and the recognition of others (Willis 1990). Clearly the authors of the e-mails produce their individual identities as recognized by the other individuals, and this reflective process creates a community of them.

The process of re-appropriation shows the two-way process of the construction of the mnemonic community and the practices: shared memories serve as a background for the creation of the community’s identity, while the members of the community reshape their identities by always creating new discursive elements that with time become appropriated by others. The practices of everyday life and the limits of the community are delineated by shared memories and a common way of relating to their past experiences. The common topics, symbols and points of reference in the literary works of these authors, and the experience of the everyday lives during the bombing demonstrates how “group memories do not derive exclusively either from individuals’ contributions or from those of the community at large; they are instead a product of interactions between the two” (Cappelletto 2003:248). This type of discursive interaction can be traced in its very pure form in the circular e-mails where a topic, often a common memory, is brought up by someone, taken up by others and transformed into a different, but also shared, theme.

The e-mails published in *Symposion* emerged out of an already constituted set of resources; however, this background is not created and set once and for all, but rather changes constantly as new rhetoric elements emerge and become appropriated by the community through their interaction. I argue that the community of *Symposion* constitutes what he defines as “pseudo-conversations” (Goffman 1982:132). Yet, even if we do not look into the specificities of virtual communication but for analytical purposes take it as simply one type of interaction, we see the fundamental similarities of all kinds of communication as requiring spontaneous involvement of the participants in the interaction and various techniques of sustaining it (Goffman 1982). For the authors of *Symposion*, these techniques are mostly repetition, appropriation of each others’ (mostly literary) resources and a distinctive discourse. These elements form a shared sense of reality of the members of the community that serve the function of protecting them from alienation (Goffman 1982). By alienation, in their case I mean alienation from the mainstream society because of the value system different from the one of the mainstream society, their different nationality and linguistic background, but also their isolation from the literary community due to the political and physical difficulties of information flow during the bombing.

However, membership in it is not taken for granted: individuals have to negotiate their status of being inside or outside it by accepting the prevailing discourse and narrating about the event according to the common schemes or refusing to participate in it. The set of available memory templates have to fit the cultural values in order to be received (Kirmayer 1996). The audience of the mnemonic community is often the “outsiders”, those people engaging in correspondence who did not witness the bombing because of being abroad. The narratives of the “insiders” can be seen as reactions to what the members of the mnemonic community were expected to experience, feel, think and write, and whether they were willing to position

themselves as they were expected to or not. “Outsiders” in this sense played the role of catalysts in the emergence of the mnemonic community and in bringing its members into interaction. “Insiders” made a choice between accepting the narrative pattern and belonging to the mnemonic community or opted out of it and developed their individual ways of experiencing and narrating.

The community of my research came about in a circular process of information exchange in which the main constituent elements are a common discourse and mutual interaction, both of them specific to this community. The distinct linguistic patterns and interaction are of crucial importance in explaining how the mnemonic community emerged and how it both delineates individual discourses and enables the individual members to bring into it their own resources and let them into circulation. In this process the realities commonly created through the e-mails inevitably reach back to the individual and affect his/her individual background.

2.3. Trauma

Work on trauma, memory and their relation to identity formation (see Weine 1999) suggests that when individuals are faced with traumatic events, they can cause various psychic disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) commonly diagnosed among people having been exposed to war trauma. PTSD could be a possible explanation to the silence or the reconstruction of the narratives of the bombings in Serbia into positive or neutral. While examples suggest masses of soldiers and civilians in some cases diagnosed as suffering from PTSD in the USA after the Vietnam War and in post-war Bosnia, this medical terminology is totally absent in Serbia in relation to the bombing. An explanation of this is that being diagnosed with PTSD entails the acceptance of being traumatized. However, this would not

be in line with the Serbian nation's depiction of itself as proud and spiteful, because Serbian national identity was boosted by the media depicting Serbs as a brave nation that cannot be conquered. The national(istic) discourse prevalent in 1999, propagated by the majority of Serbian politicians and the media is a result of the utopia of a great Serbian state and the Serbs' self-depiction of victims and conquerors at the same time (Pešić 2000).

However, as already stressed, the community that I have been focusing on in my research is made up of mostly Serbian citizens of Hungarian nationality. Their political and ideological views are very much opposed to the discourse of the Serbian nationalistic government of the time. I suggest that the inapplicability of PTSD syndrome is valid for not only nations but for communities as well, including imagined ones (Anderson 1991) that base the feeling of belonging together on shared memories. The self-perception and self-representation of the group lies on the image of opposition to prevailing political ideologies, and involvement in resistance, even though they do not form a political community.

Other than nationality, the 'right' to PTSD also prevents a community from encompassing this medical terminology in its self-representation. After nine years of war and thousands of men going to the fronts, it would not have been socially accepted to claim one was neurologically or psychologically affected by an experience that did not include direct physical violence, life-danger and 'real' war experience. However, this does not mean that the trauma cannot define the community, because "it is the "personal relevance to the traumatic memory, and not personal witness to the trauma" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994:49) that does so, i.e. the meaning given to the trauma and not the trauma itself.

The notion of a 'chosen trauma' is a situation in which social groups are unable to cope with loss and so they do not feel victimized but transform their loss "into powerful cultural narratives which become an integral part of the social identity" (Robben and Suarez 2000:23). I use this concept to describe the nature of the situation in which the correspondents were in: they experienced a trauma, but did not acknowledge it directly, rather transformed it to a common narrative through various strategies. Therefore it is not the trauma that creates the mnemonic community, but its transforming into narratives of entertainment.

One of the most intriguing questions of social memory studies is how narratives of past events become adjusted and standardized, i.e. how to get from individual remembering to cultural memory. The remembering of the bombing of Serbia seems to be either non-existent or based only on a repetition of a depersonalized model narrative without resolving the trauma. The reason for the silence, on the one hand, is that there is no framework to express the meaning of the experience neither for the individual nor for the society. On the other hand, the reason for narrating about the event as one of entertainment or everyday activities lies in the fact that people interpret their experiences according to a pattern that is meaningful for them. Patterns are meaningful, in turn, if they can incorporate experiences that do not disturb our internal order of past experiences (Gedi and Elam, 1996) and a trauma is a "confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" (Caruth 1995). The repetition of a schema instead of 'genuine remembering' blocks the emotions and the trauma from reappearing, "giving rise to the alienation of the self and the recollection" (Cappolletto 2003). This means that entertainment is a way to remember the bombing because it is then constructed as a memory that is not painful or traumatic. It focuses on amusement and everyday practices and so it does not disturb their self-perception and the perception of the social reality they live in. As time goes on, these schemas are

repeated and the individuals' stories about fun and everyday 'rituals' complement and validate each other. There needs to be a consensual understanding of a past event, a shared meaning among the members of the mnemonic community for the memory to be meaningful. This brings us back to the importance of the society that Halbwachs emphasizes: it is the community that remembers, and the existence of the community and the interpretation it gives to an event shapes the individuals' narrative, and through it, the way they remember the experience.

2.4. Narrative memories

Focusing on trauma comes from psychology, and other explanations for the emergence of common memories of a mnemonic community have also been looked for in this field.

Halbwachs conceptualization of collective memory was directly challenged by the psychoanalytical school that claims that all memories are preserved in the human consciousness and can be retrieved by proper triggers (Hutton 1993). Maurice Bloch (1998) criticized Halbwachs on the ground that he did not make a distinction between autobiographical and collective memory but assumed that "autobiographical memory is (. . .) a product of social contact" (1998:117). Bloch argues for a more psychological understanding of memory, in which visual imagery has a great role: we are able to recollect past events, even if we did not witness them personally, stimulated by the visual context, like describing a picture with our "mind's eye" (1998:118). In Bloch's view, the past is ever-changing, just as Halbwachs saw it, but it is more a mental model than a social one in which imageries of the past are stored to be searched, often stimulated by the same emotional trigger in which emotional state they happened. This approach makes it possible to study memories about the bombing through their narratives, i.e. gaining access to the imageries they have of it and how they recreate and distort these imageries when transforming them into linguistic structures.

During the process, gaps in the story are filled in with details forgotten or not lived through with the material gained from others' narratives. This explains how the interaction of the mnemonic community produces a coherent and unified narrative about a common past experience.

However, as psychological approaches focus on the individual consciousness in trying to complement the Durkheimian/Halbwachsian collective model, they end on the other extreme, and can not make any claims about how the individual becomes collective. Speaking about a community in general is not equal to speaking about individuals who make up that community, and this is especially true in case of a memory of a group. One of the basic assumptions that validate the concept of collective memory is that it is more than a sum of individuals' recollections of their experiences (see Halbwachs 1992). To use the terminology from psychology only metaphorically is also dangerous because the metaphorical use of these terms can misrepresent the social process of memory construction as an extension of the individuals' as they come to be a sum of individuals' recollections, which collective memory is not (Kansteiner 2000). Therefore this explanation, or at least the assumption that psychology alone can provide framework for looking at memory construction has to be abandoned.

There is a reason thus for the rehabilitation of the traditional idea of collective memory, at least partly. Already Durkheim's insights into the universal nature of linguistic representation understand language, and consequently the concepts it captures, as collective products of a society: "What it [language] expresses is the manner in which society as a whole represents the facts of experience" (Durkheim 1993:92). It is through talk (or in the case of my research talk and writing) that the "reality of the past" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994) is articulated and

maintained. This focus on language in the transmission of representations, and thus memories, is one of the most fundamental ones with respect to individual agency. Similarly to Durkheim, Halbwachs argues that collective memory is not reconstructed but constructed on the bases of the present through verbal instances. His theory gives us a means of approaching social memory, something abstract and intangible, from the direction of narratives, written and oral, which although are definitely not representations of the event but the reconstructions of it. These narratives offer us a much more direct insight into the memory work, the processes of the construction and reconstruction of it, its distortions and also its power of forming a mnemonic community of those who relate to an experience in a same way, through a common discourse. Written narratives not only heighten the consciousness of the writer but also enhance the processing of experiences by embedding them in time. Even though memory has often little to do with the temporal sequence of events, common narratives generate a strong group sense, and in its electronic form create a specific style that is both similar and different from writing: it is fixed and stable as writing, but it is also characterized by an enhanced and self-conscious spontaneity (Ong 1982).

It is argued by several anthropologists who did case studies on the relationship of memory and narration that not only do experiences naturally influence the narration about them, but so do narratives influence the experiences (see Kirmayer 1996; Cappelletto 2003; Skultans 1998). And “[i]f ‘experience’, moreover, is always embedded in and occurs through narrative frames, then there is no primal, unmediated experience that can be recovered.” (Olick and Robbins 1998:110). A “narrative turn” in identity theory (ibid:122) also emphasizes the role of narrative forms in the process of identity construction. What we do is actually give a narrative structure to our experiences, imposing a chronological order on the events and a causal relationship between them and “bestow[ing] a unity of experience upon the narrated life.”

(Skultans 1998; see also Hutton 1993). It is especially the narrative structure that gives space for agency and creativity of the individual in making sense of one's own experiences because through it the narrator imposes a design on their experience (Skultans 1998), provides it with chronological sequence and causal relationships. This would not be possible without the existence of the interaction between the members of the community who piece together the bits of their personal memories, including those they personally have not experienced but heard from others, and thus form a "web of narrative connections" (Cappelletto 2003:249) that have the function of collectively making meaning out of the trauma of the bombing.

The combination of literature written on the relationship of memory, community, history, trauma and narratives offers a basis for the understanding the dynamics of the readers, writers and editors of *Symposion* and their narratives about the bombing. However, none of these theoretical concepts alone can explain the specificity of the mnemonic community in and around *Symposion*, namely the silence about the bombing and the narratives about trauma and instead of that, as if filling in the 'gaps', the discourse of entertainment, fantasy and humor, and how they become parts of a shared narrative and a collective memory. In the following chapter I will deal with these narrative patterns that do not fit into the established framework, analyzing them one by one, and explaining their emergence as a result of the interaction between the members of the community.

3. Inside and Outside *Symposion*: A case study

3.1. Methodology

My thesis research consists of two connected parts. The first one is a discourse analysis of the emails published in *Symposion*; the second is a series of semi-structured interviews. The results of the two parts complement each other and are checked against each other in order to achieve greater internal reliability and validity.

3.1.1. Discourse analysis

The discourse analysis of 104 e-mails published in the journal is in fact a narrative analysis in the sense that I look at texts that narrate, i.e. tell the story about the experience of a specific event. The e-mails are anonymous, with a list of the correspondents on the back cover of the journal, and I explore the discursive strategies used in them at the level of the community of the correspondents in general. However, some of the interviewees voluntarily pointed out which e-mails they wrote, and in these cases I identify them in my case study as well.

I define discourse as language use, i.e. as a societal phenomenon (Schiffrin 1994). This is a functionalist perspective on discourse (as opposed to a structuralist one), which means that I focus on what are the purposes of the narratives I analyzed: how patterns are put into use in a certain context and how they work as interactional strategies. Narratives have the function of providing coherence and continuity to one's experiences, and have a central role in meaning-creation and communication. My analysis is based on how a certain topic emerges in these e-mails, and if it does not emerge, what topics come up in the 'gaps'. Throughout the discourse analysis I explore the narrators' experiences as made sense of by them, without a clear

hypothesis in the narrow sense of the word but rather facing textual ambiguity and engaging in constant interpretation.

A step-by step process of the discourse analysis corresponds to the categorical-content approach (Lieblich et al. 1998). It is categorical (as opposed to holistic) because it is interested in a phenomenon shared by a group of people; it is content-oriented (as opposed to form-oriented) because through looking at narratives, it explores what happened, why, who participated in the events that are narrated and what was the meaning of the events constructed but the narrators. However, this second approach does not fully hold for my research, as certain formal features, such as style, word choice and register also play a crucial role in my analysis, complementing the content analysis.

The steps of the categorical-content approach to narrative analysis that I used are as follows:

1. Selection of the text. I already had a pre-selected set of texts, i.e. the published e-mails that deal with a specific topic, the bombings.
2. Definition of the content categories. In this phase, I read the texts “as openly as possible (. . .) to define the major content categories that emerge from the reading.” (Lieblich et al. 1998:114). As a result, I came up with a list of categories quite spontaneously, which are the recurrent narrative patterns in the e-mails.
3. Sorting the utterances into categories. In this phase I reread the texts and assigned the recurrent elements into categories, and selected the representative quotes. These emerged from an ongoing interpretive process.
4. Drawing conclusions from the results. Finally I used the contents collected in each category to “formulate the picture of the content universe” (ibid.) of the mnemonic community. This

direction of the interpretation can be defined as emic in the sense that I looked at how particular language units are used to draw conclusions about the function of these units.

It can be observed from the steps described above that the discourse analysis I conducted was a circular process of reading the material, sorting it into categories, rereading and checking.

3.1.2. Interviews

The conclusions drawn from the discourse analysis served as the basis for the interviews. The general aims of the semi-structured interviews were to provide a wider context of my research, and to check and compare the results of the interview analysis with the findings of the discourse analysis. Also, while the discourse analysis dealt with the ways the immediate experience of the bombing is narrated and the mnemonic community is created, through the interview analysis I was also capable of grasping the ‘memory work’ that framed that experience anew in a different perspective than at the time of it, and that contributed to the maintenance of the community and the narrative patterns.

Out of the 47 authors of the e-mails I managed to reach about 20, out of which 15 responded to my request to interview them. Throughout the second half of April and the first part of May 2008 I conducted face-to-face semi-structured, fairly informal interviews with 12 authors of the e-mails that were published, lasting between 30 minutes to an hour, in various places in Serbia and in Hungary. I took notes during the interviews and recorded them as well. I assured my informants of their anonymity in the research, and made sure that they agreed that if I quote them, I refer to them by their initials. Because of physical distance, I could not reach 3 of my informants, to whom I sent my questions via e-mails, to which they responded in the

same manner. Both the interviews and the correspondence were conducted in Hungarian, so I translated the quotes in the analysis part from Hungarian to English.

As one of the main aspects by which narrative patterns can be identified is the place of residence of the informants during the time of the bomb raids (i.e. whether they experienced it directly or corresponded with those who did) and their country of origin (Serbia or Hungary), I had three different sets of questions that I asked, or topics that I brought up during the interview:

1. for those informants who were in Serbia during the air strikes (6 informants)
2. for those who are from Serbia but were in Hungary during that time (5 informants)
3. for those who are originally from Hungary (one of my informants from Romania) and corresponded with people who experienced the bombing (4 informants). One informant from the last category is in a special position because he went to Serbia at the time of the bombing and experienced it as well as wrote about it.

The sample of these lists of questions and topics is provided in the appendix.

This division of the informants to groups is of vital relevance for the definitions and the internal dynamics of the mnemonic community, as well as the patterns of narration used for relating to the experiences of the bombing.

3.2. Internal dynamics and interaction

Although all of the authors of the e-mails I have analyzed are Hungarian by nationality, the fact that they did or did not experience the bombing makes very clear distinctions in their attitudes. One distinction between the community of correspondents is whether they were in Serbia or in Hungary (or other country) during the bombing, i.e. whether they experienced it

or not. However, those who were in Hungary during the air raids can also be divided into two groups by their country of origin: whether they are originally from Serbia, where they have family, friends, and to which they have memories associated, or they are originally from Hungary, and have no very close ties with people or past events in Serbia. In this subchapter, I explore the internal dynamics of the community as delineated by the virtual borderlines of the three groups, and point to narrative patterns that, despite these borderlines, gives coherence to their narratives, even in relation to the past.

The belonging or not belonging to the community is constantly negotiated throughout the e-mails. One of the narrative elements which reveals this dynamic process is the use of personal pronouns: who the “we” and who the “you” (plural) refers to. Even if the e-mails do not contain explicit references to the bombing from the style of the e-mails it can be told whether they were written from Hungary or from Serbia, but the usage of the pronouns did not make the distinction between “us” and “them” that clear. The “insider” vs. “outsider” status depends more on the self-recognition of the writer of the e-mail as the member of the community or not. So while those experiencing the bombing always refer to themselves as “us”, but it is not always clear whether it encompasses those outside Serbia as well or not, some of the “insiders” identify with the group and use “us”, others use “you”, while for some “us” refers to those in Hungary.

3.2.1. “Insiders”, “outsiders” and “in between”

The distinction based on whether someone had a direct experience of the bombing is also the marker of the register of the e-mails. While the “insiders” use various strategies to distance themselves from the situation that is inevitably around them, the e-mails from the “outsiders”, are marked by expressing solidarity, worry and a sense of shame for the general Hungarian

attitude towards the bombing of Serbia. Instances of e-mails with low register and a distancing of oneself from the events and a reply to it are especially common from the first days of the bombing. The author of one of the first e-mails starts with “Ahoj, ahoj, are we scared like shit?”² The humorous greeting and the “we” ambiguously referring to the community of those in Serbia, or to a general impersonal subject suggest a kind of a detachment of the self from the event. Also, the author announces that he will talk about literature, and then goes into explanation of the technicalities of airplanes, which he admits to know from films (not from reality), which suggest the importance of imagination when drawing the boundaries of the community (Anderson 1991). The e-mail goes on with an ironical reference to the bombing, where the author claims that he wishes a bomb to fall on his village, because he heard they cost a lot. It ends with a greeting very typical of the region where many of the other members of the community come from, as if geographically and linguistically marking the area where they come from, thus marking a common topography for the members of the community.

The discourse coming from the other side of the border is of very different style. The tone of these is more elevated, the topics often philosophical, the register higher. One of the first e-mails written from Hungary starts with references to literature, as if the author wanted to avoid the topic at first, but basically the whole e-mail is cautiously circulating around one question that he/she is unable to formulate because his/her “words are too cold.” He/she never explicitly poses the question of how it is to live under siege, which is basically the main question of everyone who did not experience it, the reason why BLo³ went to Serbia during it and why VTi engaged in communication with his acquaintances from Serbia. The author of the above mentioned e-mail answers it without posing it: “I would be very afraid.” SGi

² This and all the other e-mails are in Hungarian, the translation of the quotes I use in the thesis are done by me.

³ I will use the letters “i”, “o” and “b” after the initials of my interviewees referring to “insider”, “outsider” and “in between” respectively.

mentions it with condemn that those from Hungary looked at it from their own perspective, and indeed, GLo explained that he was worried that the crisis would escalate into a world war. The other comment of SGi is that “you had to explain them everything because they didn’t understand anything.” However, VGi sees this natural, ha said that it is understandable they did not comprehend “or they got it differently; after rereading my own e-mails, I myself didn’t understand them,” which illustrates the peculiar state of mind the community was in.

The e-mails of those “in between”, i.e. those from Serbia but living in Hungary at the time of the bombing are a middle ground in this respect as well. Their e-mails are the least easy to identify. For instance one of these is about a dream of its writer, which seem to have nothing to do with the bombing explicitly, but the apocalyptic elements of the dream he shares such as flames, airplanes, escape, a flood, and an end-of-the-world feeling indicate the state of mind dominated by worries, anxiety, and the general occupation with the situation in his home-country. Even though being in a constant state of anxiety about the situation, as RAb says they kept silent about the bombing in their e-mails because those in Serbia “are in enough shit without it already.” He feels very skeptical about the possibility to really help the people in Serbia with words. The issue of being a refugee emerged spontaneously in the interviews. Nine years after the bombing MGb calls himself a refugee, but at the time of it writes ironically about being regarded as such in Hungary. The distancing of oneself from his position is thus characteristic for this group as well, in which their attitude is close to the “insiders.” MGb believes that the distance he had because of being in Hungary during the bombing provided him greater objectivity, the same way as Anne Frank “could tell more about the war from the attic than those who participated in it.” He calls real experience of a war of those who spent it in places which were not bombed into question. RAb also admits, though not as harshly as MGb, that those in the places which were not bombed were in an

easier position, but the claim of SGi that one could never know what will happen and was in a constant state of anxiety counters this. BLo's sentence "The war was in their heads, but they watched it from the coastline" summarizes the controversy of the issue of the validity of war experience.

3.2.2. "Core" vs. "periphery"

Other than the three distinct groups, there is another type of delineation, that between an inner and outer circle. As it became evident from the interviews, almost all of the people exchanged e-mails with VGi, the editor in chief in 1999, who also made the selection of the e-mails to be published. He is claimed to be "one of the biggest e-mailers at that time" (MGb). He also had the habit of forwarding e-mails that he found important or interesting for some reason (BLo), and sending e-mails to many people at once (MGb). VGi played a sort of a moderating and leading role in the entire process of e-mailing to each other during the bombing, and is still a central figure when it comes to memories about those times.

The closeness to the inner circle as opposed to outer ties is of great importance for the demarcation lines within the community. As MGb remembers, there was a core around VGi, which was an open circle of people, but during the bombing, others entered it as well. In a metaphorical way, a line from an e-mail saying that "the door is open, everyone can come in" illustrates this. MGb personally disliked the newcomers, who, he feels, did not move the virtual conversation forward, but they only wrote "affectedly, pathetically and shared empty thoughts" with others. They also pursued literary ambitions, but did not show respect for the then already established writers, i.e. the "core".

The “core” is also geographically bound. Several of them coming from the same village and many others being frequent visitors to it, they often refer to it and have shared memories of it. They entitled it with a fictitious name Dombos⁴, and also given fictitious names to other villages and towns they come from or they know well. In their literary works they built a parallel reality in their language and topics, that have acquired scholarly attention under the name “Dombos discourse”, a “doctrine” that serves to differentiate those authors, and also to relate them to each other by means of the elements of authorship, style, theme and narration⁵ (Papp p. 1999). Even though the “Dombos discourse” is not the creation of the *Symposion* as such, only of several of its contributors, the topics of the e-mails published in the journal can be seen as a specific type of discourse as well. An instance of this is that a greeting specific to the part of Vojvodina where most of the authors, but not all, come from is used as a marker of communal identity. Taking the parallel with Anderson’s conceptualization of (national) communities further, the claim that he makes about maps as one of the most important criteria for a connection of a community to a territory (1991), and taking Bourdieu’s definition of “social topography” (1985:724) at its face value, it is interesting to see that some of the writers from the *Symposion* group have created a virtual map of the underground of the city of Dombos, thus creating the space ‘occupied’ by the community into a virtual space.

This virtual space was then transferable to those too who had never been to Kishegyes, so for instance VTi imagined the village, its inn while reading the e-mails, while never having visited it. GLo remembers a visit to Novi Sad shortly after the bombings, and that the city seemed “virtual, surreal, dream-like.” In the e-mails, there are frequent references to the places, mostly in Kishegyes and Novi Sad, which they all know: cafes and pubs they have frequented the building where the editorial office was situated in Novi Sad, the local pubs and

⁴ The name is based on playing around with the real name of the village in Hungarian, Kishegyes, which can be translated into “Small Mountain”. A small mountain is nothing else but a hill, and this is what Dombos means.

⁵ The article is in Hungarian, the translation of the references is done by me.

the park in Kishegyes. They refer to these places by the name they created for it, as if a code that they all know but are secret places for the people outside the community. They can be seen as marking a common topography in the physical sense of the word, but also a common mental map, a shared set of references and memories. Therefore, the common mental map and the shared markers of memory, as well as the common discourse that relates to them create a mnemonic community around *Symposion*.

3.2.3. Function of the e-mails

The distinctive discourse of the authors is also the result of the fact that the e-mails are both private and public, and on the border between written and oral communication, representing a “secondary orality” that is both formal and spontaneous (Ong 1982). They address the other individuals as already members of the community in a language that is written yet full of rhetoric figures characteristic of oral communication among individuals with strong emotional attachment to each other. In the case of circular electronic communication a dynamic relationship among the correspondents and various narrative strategies such as a specific register and repetition of elements provide a framework for further interaction (Davis 1997). The community of memory and belonging together is also expressed in references of the e-mails to past events, the memories of which the correspondents share. For instance, an author of an e-mail reminds the other “you said that you are not afraid of anything”, as if invoking his/her memories and soothing her/himself that the receiver of the e-mails is not in danger. Invoking a shared past is of great importance not only in the e-mails, but remains so in the interviews as well. For instance BLo mentions that when he visited VGi several years after 1999, they went together again to several of the places they visited during the bombing, like they were making a ritualistic re-tour of the topography of the places that were important for them.

The main function of the e-mails was obviously to give a voice of themselves, to confirm that they are still alive and well. On the other side of the border, encouragement for interaction was constant, as PZo notes “when no e-mails came one day from there, I was on the verge of panicking.” Apart from this very obvious reason for e-mailing, SGi say that he was very conscious of the historicity of the events already while they were happening, and he “wrote the e-mails in a way that they might get to someone later, to create something durable for the next generations, which sometimes goes against the honesty of their character, not in the sense of lying in them but being very self-reflexive, self-ironic, literary, even mannered.” This self-consciously literary character can be seen in other e-mails as well to a greater or lesser extent, and can be attributed to the profession of the authors. MGb sees the e-mails also important from the viewpoint that they “they move forward” with them, which can be understood as a kind of an alternative way of constantly resisting the dominant discourse both in Serbia and in Hungary by the entire community. The third type of answer about the function of the interaction through e-mails is from MTi, but references to it by other contributors can be found in the e-mails as well as the interviews: “It was a kind of a valve, an outlet” of fear, anxiety, “to mask the fear” (PCi), “channeling the fear,” (RAb), something in the place of the trauma that was not recognized as such by those who experienced it. The fourth type of reason is found more in the e-mails than in the interviews, and it is a sense of belonging somewhere in a conflict that is neither theirs nor totally others’, and the community created through interaction, “instead of conversations” (PCi), as Goffman explains the notion of “pseudo-conversations” (1982), a “nice little club” as one of the members refers to it, is actually a belonging to a group where everything is “floating”, when individuals are “alone” and “invisible,” so in fact “their only connection with the outside world” (BLo).

The reaction to each others' e-mails, especially to the constant questions from the outsiders enhanced and shaped the nature of the interaction. Almost all the e-mails coming from abroad end with a phrase such as "do write." Other than worries, however, some of them admit that they were also driven by curiosity to learn about the peculiar situation in which those in Serbia were in. As VTo admits, "It's perverted, but I was curious to know what a war was like." The answers of the "insiders" to the questions and reactions of the "outsiders" often provoke a circular process of questions and answers, such as the one in which almost everyone writes what he/she had been doing when the bombing started. An interesting example of how individual memories become collective is that one of the writers retells how he/she was watching Kusturica's *Underground*⁶ at the time when the bombing started, and PZo claimed in the interview that this film is the metaphor for how she imagined the bombings of Serbia. It then became not only an emblem of the situation in Serbia, the chaos and isolation of the country, but also a common symbol, when after a reference to it the "insiders" also started referring to their lives in the manner war is represented in *Underground*: schizoid, paranoid, disorderly and focused on entertainment and wild parties. Another example of the re-appropriation of each other's phrases is that someone writes that he started reading Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, and his friend from Hungary replies that the he hopes that the war will have been over by the time he finishes, and another e-mail ends with "go search for the lost time".

⁶ A film directed by Emir Kusturica, a metaphor of the Yugoslavian politics and the dissolution of the nation. It takes place in 1991, with an escape of a group of people from the cellar where they have lived since the Second World War, not knowing that that war is over, and they are in the middle of another one (between Serbia and Croatia). Two friends have kept them there in a con, deceiving them one from below, the other from above ground, with the aim to have laborers who produce weapons and enormous profit for their jail-keepers. After breaking free, the main character from the cellar takes revenge at his former best friend and lover for their betrayal by executing them. In a surreal ending, the entire company, from under and above ground, living and dead, take part in a frantic party and float away on a piece of earth of the shape of the former Yugoslavia into the sea.

3.3. Narrative patterns

In this subchapter I will analyze the e-mails and the interviews with respect to the recurrent elements that are used in them in order to represent the trauma that those in Serbia experienced and those outside Serbia wanted to learn about. I will identify these patterns in the written and oral narratives to show how they serve to fill the ‘gaps’ of the unrepresented trauma and how they are used to create a mnemonic community.

3.3.1. “Let’s laugh about it”: Trauma or party?

The word ‘trauma’ never appears in the e-mails, but it came out in the interviews often, and even after nine years of the bombing, those who did not experience it were less hesitant to use it for the situation of those in Serbia than those to whom it refers to. Those who were following the events from Hungary use words such as “fear, stress, suffering” (RAb), “defenselessness” (MAb), “traumatizing, imprisoning” (BLo), “constant fear of death” (PZo), “horror, terror, brutality” (GLo), “hopelessness” (BPb). In general, these words are much stronger than those used by the “insiders”, who, if referring to the event at all, used (and often still do) words that are humorous and express a distancing from the events, most typically the word “party” referring to the bombing, “sex-bombing” (MTi) or “festival”. In the interviews fear is mentioned only twice, once by someone from abroad inquiring if their friends from Serbia are afraid. There is no explicit answer to the question. The same author uses the word ‘fear’ only once, and he describes it as a “blunt resigned fear”, as a general atmosphere of the first days of the bombing. In the interviews I was told by almost all my interviewees from Serbia that they were afraid of being called up rather than the bombing itself. The other reason for worries, mostly of the “outsiders”, but of PCi, too, that “minorities would be used as a living shield in the crisis.”

Entertainment though is a common topic of the e-mails from the insiders. Partying, drinking, smoking marijuana and illegal clubbing take up a substantial part of the activities of the authors of the e-mails and are mentioned often. Several of the interviewees from Serbia mention that those were great times, “and everyone from Serbia will tell you so” (LJi). As it can be read in an e-mail “I won’t let the Americans ruin my Saturday night,” meaning that they will take the best out of the situation and try to enjoy what it can offer. BL, the only interviewee from Hungary who visited Serbia during the bombing, remembers almost exclusively partying and meeting with friends, and the memories of those who spent all two and a half months of the bombing in Serbia are almost always connected to entertainment, which he sees a compensatory activity and a way to “kill time” (BLo). BPb also mentioned his impression that during the bombing there was a “party atmosphere of despair” in Serbia, while VTo sees it a more positive way: “War changes everything; positive processes are started too, that have an activating effect.”

One of the e-mails reads: “I don’t like the bombs but the bombs like us.”⁷ Ironical statements of this kind, such as this are very common in the e-mails, they can be found almost in each and every of them written by people in Serbia. If mentioning the bombing, it is almost always in a humorous way. Many are aware that they are means of keeping the illusion of normalcy and keeping distance from the situation, as if they were not happening to them. At the first time of the bombing one author of an e-mail tells how they were watching the reactions of the people, and concludes that “this nation is strange,” as if he/she did not belong that that nation. As SGi says, “I was trying to keep distance.” However, some are also aware of the fact that “one is deceived by irony. Although he knows that behind the unidentifiable (masked) face there is a fucking big heart beating,” acknowledging the function of irony to be a way of concealing

⁷ Reference to Marilyn Manson’s lyrics: “I don’t like the drugs but the drugs like me” (also the title of the song).

one's emotions and fear. "The horror could be sensed in the form of irony, literature, not as complaints – they didn't even write about the situation" (GLo)

3.3.2. "I am trying to continue my life without disruption": Everyday practices

"All miracles last for three days, we slowly get accustomed to it," as someone writes, "we are slowly getting used to it," "the adrenalin doesn't come from fear any longer; it became a routine," or "from the basement to shelter, from the shelter to the basement, and life goes on." Actually the phrase "we get used to everything" becomes a commonplace of the entire correspondence. Some of the trivial activities described are cleaning the house, working in the garden, watching movies, eating, people write about the whether, and also life-situations that have nothing to do with the bombing such as breaking up (an author writes that NATO is nothing compared to the emotional state in which she found herself). "As we don't have a basement, I am trying to continue my life without disruption," and indeed they keep describing in the e-mails the ways they spend their days rarely referring to the war going on around them. MTi claims that after the first few days a routine was established. BPb claims that his friends from Serbia did not write about the situation but about everyday activities that seem to "create an illusion of normality" (PZo). Towards the end of the 78 days the e-mails about the daily activities of those in Serbia seem "frightening, they held on but they obviously flipped out, even if they did not mention the situation" (GLo). RAb also noted the strangeness of the e-mails from the outside: "weird e-mails from there; they couldn't watch themselves with an outsider's eye."

A considerable amount of the time of those in Serbia was consumed by watching the news on television and surfing for information on the internet. Especially at the beginning of the bombing, many e-mails report constantly following the events from various perspectives, i.e.

various TV channels and different news portals. However, towards the end, some report an “overdose of news,” and write that they do not care any more about what had been bombed and the analysis of the potential further targets and outcomes. Not all think like this, though, for instance PCi and MGb did not ‘burn out’ from the amount of news they were bombarded with, because they both had been planning to become journalist and had always been interested in current events as part of their profession.

However, the perspective on the current events is an ambiguous issue. The political affiliation of these young intellectuals and the general ideology of *Symposion* predisposed them to be supporters of the NATO air strikes, as its aim was to bring down a dictatorial regime of the country they were living in. Theirs is a peculiar case if one takes into account the position of the Hungarian minority within Serbia and the different perspective on certain historical and political issues they have from the Serbian society. In this respect, the circle of young intellectuals of *Symposion* can be seen as a group with an alternative ideology and alternative memories (for instance of the wars between Serbia and Croatia and Serbia and Bosnia) representing the perspective of the Hungarian minority of Serbia in general. Almost all of my interviewees report their enthusiasm for the bombing in the first days, and it is clearly visible in the e-mails too. However after the first “collateral damages” (MGb used this impersonal and distanced phrase for civilian casualties in the interview), many of them clearly turned against the NATO forces, even if they did not take the side of the Serbian propaganda. For those from Serbia, whether they were in the country or abroad during the bombing, it was extremely difficult to take a side in that “schizophrenic situation” (BPb, RAb). RA claims that he “hated both the NATO and Milošević.” His opinion is shared by MAb, who adds that even those who were not, became increasingly patriotic, including himself. VGo thinks that the reason for this is that the NATO propaganda had no validity; its strategy was as absurd as the

strategy of the Serbian police and military. Of those who were in Hungary, only MGb and VTo said they were on the side of the USA, seeing the bombing as the only possible solution, the others, even if not as explicitly as MAb “asked for explanations of the bombing on their Hungarian acquaintances.”

With the borders being closed internet became the most important means of communication. Problems with internet, providers and servers are a common topic. Virtual communication has been characteristic of the community before the bombing too, BLo claims that he learnt how it is to communicate in e-mails from his friends in Serbia, and how to cope with the spontaneity it is characterized by, as opposed to writing letters. The spontaneity of electronic communication is a self-conscious device of internet users, because writing heightens consciousness, while electronic communications creates a “secondary orality” in which the electronic medium reinforces writing but also transforms it by its “self-consciously informal style” (Ong 1982:136).

3.3.3. “As if time stopped”(LJi): Community and time

Apart from meeting friends in pubs, the frequency of social interactions also heightened in the streets, “as if we are locked in a broken elevator for a very long time,” or “as if it [the bombing] would have linked the people” (BPb). PZo believes that there was an enhanced need for communication, and BLo confirms this, retelling that when he was in Serbia, “everyone wanted to talk, everyone was waiting for visitors.” Some e-mails report talking to strangers, even singing with them, about current news, about whether there is electricity, water, but also about issues not related to the situation. BLo claims that his friends from Serbia told him that if there were any animosity between Hungarians and Serbs, these ceased

to exist, as neighbors of different nationalities invited each other's for drinks, knowing that it might be the last pálinka they are drinking (BLo's interpretation), although after the war national conflicts were settled, which was to be expected" (RAb). This is in total opposition of the expectations of the "outsiders" as those "in between," whose major worry was that national conflicts will be enhances in Serbia.

The bombing introduced new ways of measuring time. Not only that in cities people organized their daily activities according to when and where it was the least dangerous to be out, even in smaller places which very not potential targets, hours became unimportant. Activities were also structured in accordance with whether there was electricity and water or not, and the 'normal' time to do certain things became irrelevant. "The world turned upside down, and it became unimportant when something was said or done" (BLo). The new calendar rather followed the patterns of the distinction between days that were long an with nothing much to do, and nights, when there were illegal pubs, friends gathered, watched the bombing and had a greater interaction with each other that during daytime. PCi says for instance that he does not really remember days, nights were much more memorable.

Together with a new way of measuring time, a "new value system" (RAb) came into being, as the "things of life and death got considerable reinterpreted, the structure of their value system changes" (PZo). VG thinks that the reason why it is seen by many as a great period is that "the coordinates of time changed." BLo retells his impressions from his visit Serbia during the bombing as "they knew the dangers, and they wanted to live life in its totality"

The new value system was much more focused on the present and past than on the future. As social actions are embodied in remembering and anticipation of the actors (Aminzade 1992), it is crucial not only to look at the collective remembrance of the community but also at its

orientation towards the future. Making plans is an ambiguous issue in the e-mails. Only one of them mentions plans to write about the bombing in his/her future short stories. There are almost no long-term plans mentioned and not one of the authors wonders about life after the bombing: “What are we going to do and how when all this ends?” “How to behave after the war? Look in the eyes? What to say? What to wear?,” asks another. There are all the more plans about getting together after the war, drinking and remembering together. One author writes about his friend calling him from Hungary. “It was as if he called from the neighborhood, and our conversation was like that as well. What’s up, when are we going to have a beer together.” Another author thinks that awful as it seems, the war is a good excuse for not having plans, motivations or ambitions for the future: “it’s terrible that everything will be normal again.” Actually almost all of the people who experienced the bombing claimed to be unable to think about the future. Many of them were students, for example PCi, who remembers trying to study for his exams, but was unable to concentrate. While not being able to learn or think about the future, LJi claims, it was a period when they had all the time of the world and could enjoy activities that they had no time for before, such as biking, fishing, or just “hanging out” and watching the lights of the bombings from a railway overpass – “it was like a fireworks.”

3.3.4. “I am numb”: Speechlessness inside and outside

The e-mails from the “outsiders” are loaded with worries, solidarity, questions of how they are, what they need, should they do anything for them: “I am worried for the whole company,” “I am trembling from worries because I don’t know anything about you”, and distancing themselves from those Hungarian intellectuals who supported the NATO bombings. “Outsiders” condemn those Hungarian public figures who engage in commenting the events in Serbia, and think that “normal Hungarian people should talk to people from

Serbia and write what they say without commentary.” A common feeling is guilt that that their country participated in the bombing of their friends’ country. A very typical sentence in which this can be read is “We are going, we are bombing. You.” They express their worries that the Serbs would take revenge for the NATO ‘aggression’ on the local Hungarians “in a conflict that you have nothing to do with, but still...”

Generally, “ambivalence” (GLo) and a feeling of loss of words haunt the e-mails, because as an outsider poses the questions, it is not easy to decide “what to write to be neither pathetic nor insensitive?” “Outsiders”, in spite of all the good will, felt that they could not do anything to really help, nor could they really understand the feelings and thoughts of their friends on the other side of the border. BLo feels that it was a major disappointment that he could not write a good report on what he experienced in Serbia, because it could not be described with words. “I often feel that these e-mails are efforts in vain, too,” writes someone from Hungary, because “you see the despair, but you can’t help” (BPb). Some of the many examples for the nonexistence of expressions or ways of communication with those in Serbia are sentences such as “you know it better, I can’t even imagine,” “I don’t know how I would behave in such a situation, I would be afraid for sure,” “I am naïve, I am numb, I am stupid,” “it would be stupid to say anything,” “to love, to be afraid, these are only your rights.”

The authors from the “inside” also often oscillate between daily writing of circular e-mails and complete silence for days, and “some became mute for that period” (BL1i). Some of them report themselves and their friends talking less and less. Generally, when it comes to talking about oneself, it seems to be more difficult than talking about others. In many e-mails, the authors write about their friends in a very objective tone, rather than reporting about

themselves. Together with the objective report of news it is a substitute for revealing one's feelings and thoughts.

3.3.5. "This is a fiction, too": Literary templates and imagination

Given that most of the authors of the e-mails are writers, journalists, students of humanities, writing and reading are important activities in the daily lives of the authors of *Symposion*. They often mention reading out of boredom, "because there is nothing else one can do." The authors they read are telling: Marquez, Borges, Rejtő Jenő (P. Howard). Marquez's and Borges's magical realism is in fact a good analogy of the genre of the e-mails and some other wrings of some of the authors of *Symposion*: the e-mails also seem to take place in an imagined community (Anderson 1991) where there is no clear-cut border between fiction and reality. Several e-mails start with objective facts and finish with fictitious situations, without marking the difference between the two. The humor of P. Howard is also easily reconcilable with this kind of neglect of the differentiation of fiction and facts. As the events and activities are rarely retold chronologically, time is often marked by when one started a book and how long he/she read.

One of the authors also writes a semi-poem with literary allusions to Ginsberg's *Howl*, especially when talking about the members of his generation. Also one of the authors of an e-mails mentions fascination with Marquez as "typical of our generation." This cross-reference also comes natural given the ideas of the circle of friends around *Symposion* and the generational boundary that is drawn around the group, especially if we know that it has been a tradition of *Symposion* to recruit young intellectuals who oppose the ideology of the "representatives of the cultural policy of the state", mostly the professors of the department of Hungarian language and literature at the University of Novi Sad, the editors of the Hungarian

program of the Novi Sad Television and Radio and the Fórum publishing house (SGi). This seems natural, given that a generation is a group of people with not only the same biological age but the same structural location, limited set of experiences, knowledge, and modes of action (Mannheim 1952).

Expressions referring to literature and literary genres are often used to describe the atmosphere of the bombing, which is natural taking account the profession of many of the members of the group. Those who experienced the bombing and those who imagine it from the other side of the border alike refer to it as “surreal, “dream-like” (GLo), “unreal, utopistic” (RAb). VGi said that everything he read at that time “seemed to be about the bombing,” while others refer to specific literary works to compare their memories about it: Camus’s *Plague* illustrating the isolation they were in (MAi), Boccaccio’s *Decameron* conveying the same feeling, Dezső Kosztolányi’s “The End of the World” to describe the atmosphere, or a Hungarian adventure novel, *Tűskevár* by István Fekete, because it is “about adventure, nature, jokes, with a dictatorship going on in the background, but that’s not the most important thing” (LJi).

The participants of the community felt that “maybe it’s not important for a poet how thin the line is between reality and imagination.” In many e-mails there are references to partisan films, and the experience of the Second World War as represented in them demonstrates the oscillation between real experience and fiction, that is typical of the mails from the “insiders.” VGi explicitly claims that “the borders between reality and imagination was blurred,” wondering though how much marijuana contributed to this feeling. Imagination plays a key role for the “outsiders” as well, not only for VTo who tried to map the virtual reality of his acquaintances through their e-mails, but also for BLo, who before going to Vojvodina, had an

almost mythical picture of the region, based on his readings from authors from there such as Géza Csáth and Ottó Tolnai, and the dance theatre of József Nagy, whose performances were much like the period he experienced in Serbia: “about life, death and frenzy.”

3.4. Analysis

I have proposed a conceptualization of mnemonic community as a process, because it is a common strategy of its members to relate to their conditions, and because they kept several of these patterns to refer to the event now, nine years after. However, they are a mnemonic community in another aspect as well: already at the time of it they shared certain patterns related to their past, such as references to places they have visited together, a common ‘myth’ of only virtually existent villages and towns, people they all knew, references to literary works they have read or written, etc. The combination of these elements contributed to the construction of a shared discourse and a collective memory, that were put into everyday practices, and led to a link between the members of the community of those who corresponded regardless of whether they had a direct experience of the air strikes or not. Hence, the group of *Symposion* is a mnemonic community in the sense that Halbwachs (1992) and Olick and Robbins (1998) used it, that the members of the group share the experience of a past event and have common cultural frames to refer to it; the in another on a more discursive level, in the way Skultans (1998) and Gedi and Elam (1996) refer to it, a common “myth” (Gedi and Elam 1998) or a common “cultural grammar” (Skultans 1998). In both senses though the community is created and maintained through the process of interaction, and narrative patterns create a shared discourse of its members.

Throughout the previous chapters I have been outlining the internal dynamics of the mnemonic community. I have argued, based on the discourse analysis of the e-mails and my

personal communication with their authors, that the e-mails served the function of normalizing the trauma through narratives about it, as a strategy for integrating it into the cultural identities of the members of the community (Robben and Suarez 2000), i.e. incorporating it into their everyday experiences (Gedi and Elam 1996). The interaction between the three distinct groups within the community, between what I have called the “insiders” (those who directly experienced the bombing), the “outsiders” (people from Hungary who corresponded with their friends from Serbia) and those “in between” (who are from Serbia but were in Hungary during the bombing), functioned as “pseudo-conversions” (Goffman 1982) that took place instead of face-to-face communication and shared its purpose: to create a shared sense of reality in a struggle against the alienation of the self (Goffman 1982), that is of crucial importance for the self-perception of social actors in a traumatic situation. This shared sense of reality involved a specific perception of time that is influenced not only by the objective events (the bombings) but also by the “perceptions, intentions and actions of individuals” (Aminzade 1992:460), because events depend not only on the number of days they lasted but also on the perception of its duration of those involved. Therefore narrative patterns, i.e. structuring a collective memory into a narrative form, have the function of integrating the traumatic experience into a meaningful structure and distancing oneself from it. Narratives, “theoretically structured stories about coherent sequences of motivated actions – can contribute to the construction of explanations of things that happened the way they did” (Aminzade 1992:485). Actors locate “events within trajectories of relevant long-term processes rather than to date them according to some universal “objective” time” (Aminzade 1992:466).

The normalcy of the event was created by common narrative strategies of avoiding the acknowledgement of the trauma, and filling in the silences with irony, humor, narratives

about everyday activities, literary experiences, social events, political attitudes etc. All these narrative patterns are substitutes for the non-existent discourse about trauma, fear and danger, and give coherence and order to the experience (Schiffrin 1994) that does not fit into the existing cultural schemas (Hutton 1993). As these patterns are shared and are re-appropriated by the members of the mnemonic community, they become formative of the collective memory as a collective discourse. Hence, narratives about the event shape the perception and the recollection of the event itself and constitute a “landscape of memory” to be lived in (Kirmayer 1996) that is specific to the group, both in the sense of its social positioning and the shared strategies for the creation of a common cultural framework for remembering.

4. Conclusion

In my research I brought together the literature from the fields collective memory studies, focusing on the creation of mnemonic communities, on trauma and war experience and on narrative memories in order to explore the puzzling case of the group around *Symposion*. First, I investigated what is there in the place of the missing cultural frame for remembering the bombing of Serbia in the spring of 1999, i.e. how is the non-acknowledged trauma represented in the e-mails I have analyzed and how it is referred to in the interviews I have conducted. Second, I explored why and how this community emerges into a mnemonic community, through what kind of practices and what kind of internal dynamism.

My research into the creation of the group around *Symposion*, their written and oral narratives therefore demonstrates thus that the creation of the collective memory and the mnemonic community is a process that is embedded in interaction and exchange of mnemonic resources, rather than being taken for granted. I argued that the mnemonic community is created through the interaction among those in Serbia and in Hungary, the shared discursive practices and the everyday 'rituals' of the group that have the function of normalizing the trauma that is represented through various shared narrative patterns.

I believe that the empirical case of the group around *Symposion* contributes to the understanding of the process in which narratives influence the memory of an event. This is especially important in the case of events for which there are scarce cultural frames to remember them (Appadurai 1981), usually provided by the state and 'official' history. In this sense the memory of the bombing and its construction into a 'normal' and positive event can be seen as an alternative to 'official' history and public remembering. The case of *Symposion*

also sheds light on the disputable issue of how individual memories become collective in the sense that they are not merely aggregates of personal recollections, what Olick and Robbins call “collected memory” (1998). It explains how individuals resort to each others’ memories and appropriate them, out of which process a mental map of memory emerges (Bloch 1998) that in turn serves as a material for future experiences for the members of the community. Lastly, it explains the dynamics by which extreme situations are integrated into the cognitive schemas in order to give them meaning, i.e. the process of normalization of experiences that are potentially traumatic or disturbing for the self and the internal cognitive order of individuals, and how this process becomes characteristic of a group, not only on individual level.

Due to the length and limitations of my research, I have focused on the issues of normalizing traumatic experience through narrative strategies, and the creation and the sustaining of a collective memory and a mnemonic community. However, there are several other related questions that deserve scholarly attention that came to the surface of the research problem while analyzing the e-mails and conducting interviews with their authors. Some of the most relevant and interesting ones are: How is the collective memory of the bombing in the case of *Symposion* different from the ‘mainstream’ memory of the event in Serbia due to the relative social position of the group (Bourdieu 1985), i.e. the fact that they are the representatives of the young intelligentsia of an ethnic minority? A research of a scope much larger than this would also explain the role that *Symposion* played in the perception and self-perception of the Hungarian minority in Serbia. My approach was a case study, not a comparative one, but this case could also have been compared to other historical situations in which a mnemonic community emerges out of a traumatic experience, such as the Second World War, the Holocaust, Nazi Germany, etc., and by placing the experience of the bombing in Serbia in the

framework of other similar events, it would be possible to contextualize and compare the construction of narratives, communities and shared memories, and arrive to more general conclusions.

Finally, during the interviews I have conducted with the members of *Symposion* I found out that many of the “insiders” have used the experience of the bombing as an inspiration for their later literary works. A research of a greater length would have included an analysis of these literary texts, too, because the comparison of the literary genre to the style of the e-mails would explain the mediation of an experience from the past to the future, from members of the community to non-members and the stabilization of memory in a written form, because technologies are not merely exterior aids to the consciousness and the storage of experience but also interior transformations of it (Ong 1982). I believe that all these empirical issues are important and interesting not only in themselves but also as key research sites that enable us to further develop the theoretical fields of collective memory studies, research on traumatic experiences and narrative analysis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Samples from the e-mails published in *Symposion* that I analyzed

avasolja, hogy ezút-
tkozatot.

vagyok. Körbesétá-
t ismét csak egy szo-
ember vagyok, aki
gát ebben a kilátástá-
magamban egy tíz
melyet ugyanezen a
grádi vendégek na-
lünkön a híres „sétá-
it mondott akkor ez
nokkal lehet, hogy
ni, de a horvátokkal
usan reagáltam erre
an pedig el voltam
hogy olyan ország-
tűnhet csak úgy el.
ában vagyunk. Most
amikor egyedül sétá-

t fekvő kecskeméti
sa már felismer. Nem
ssza Belgrádba, ami-
nak. Úgy érzem, ez a
ikor valami szépet és
t. Csak sokkal később



mindig valamely alapítvány
stb. kibaszott közjó
érdekében. Az egy dolog,
hogy tavaszilag ki vagyok
merülve, nem tudok
koncentrálni, csak ha nagyon
akarok, és még akkor sem
mindig. hagyom én abba!
panaszskodik valaki más, én
itt csak írom, hogy mi van
velem, de most ennek is
véget vetek, merthogy, mint
írtam, mennem köll forma
csokk

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Wed, 23 Mar 1999 12:19:47
+0100

Elrakodtam a szobámban, rend
van végre újra.
Az előbb minden ok nélkül
összetört a kedvenc lámpám.
Itt állt az
asztalomon, néztem ki az
ablakon, a lámpa meg fogta
magát, és
egyszerűen összetört.
Kinn csend van, csak a
madarak csörömpölnek.
Apámon tegnap éjjel kitört a
paranoia első foka.
Maria-Theresiopolis és
Nyárfás között járhatatlan a
meder, mondta a telefonba.
Vagyis, hogy lezárták az
utat Szabadka és Topolya
között?, kérdeztem.
Uh, mondta, vigyázz, mit
beszélsz.
Mára mindent elintéztem, már
csak a verspályázat
zsűrizése maradt, most hát
leülök, és estélig verseket
fogok olvasni.
Egy-két cigi, meg szerzünk
majd whiskyt és azt
szopogatjuk. Talán csevapot
is eszünk estére.
Nyitva az ajtó, bárki
bejöhet.

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com

symposion

Wed Mar 24 17:39:05 1999

J. ma 18, könyvet adok
neki, mert nekem senki sem
ad könyvet ajándékol (...meg
jo, hogy nem kuldtem el
rogtan, mert ide kell írnom,
van par kivétel, ami nagyon
ritka es en annal jobban
becsulom...)
ugy viselkedj masokkal,
ahogy szeretned, hogy veled
viselkedjenek.
tavaszi szel suttog a
fulekbe, a tarsadalom
gyilkol, vissza a
termeszethez.
marquez most teljesen rabul
ejtett, igen, ez a
korosztalyomra jellemzo.
tul hidegek a szavaim.
be is fejezem.

B.
+kimondott gondolatok:
En olyan zavarban vagyok.
nem tudom igazan, irhatok e
neked ilyeneket, mert tudom,
hogy szornyu a helyzet az
orszagotokban, es biztosan
sok a gondod, en nem tudom,
hogy viselkednek az olyan
helyzetben, azt hiszem,
nagyon felnek...
te meg azt mondtad (en nem
hittem el, pedig szeretnem),
hogy nem felsz semmitol.

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Wed Mar 24 07:49:20 1999

szóval fesztivál.
hát mondhatom, félek is, meg
várom is. nem tudom, ti ott
belülről hogy vagytok vele,
valahogy azt gondolom, hogy
hasonlóképpen.
én most már két napja igen
nyomott-rosszkedvű vagyok,
ilyenkor nem is szokok
leveleket írni, hogy ne
fárasszam az embereket.
Tv2-n nem láttalak, ellenben
most megnézem a Kusturicát a
Dunán, mindjárt kezdődik.

symposion

jövök rá, hogy az igazán
volna, ha azt mondom
valószínűleg nincs szü
viszont szükségem va
Ehelyett csak annyit n
Nem könnyű manapság
Szerbiában. Külön kép
embernek radikálisnak

Szorongva közelede
látok egyetlen jugoszl
benyomásom, hogy n
vissza ebbe a szerenc
hon bombázások várna
nem lehet látni a végé
van ebben a pillanatb
hogy megtörténhet, h
lyének nem tetszett az
mondtam. Lehet, hogy
rám egy hazafias kihall
hivatalos propaganda-
elő. Az sem biztos az
igaz lenne. Örök rejtél
miért lesz az ember ke
ját országával szemben
van. Szégyenérzet hat
amiért jelentőséget tu
nak és a saját szavaim
rendőrök kedvesen
örülnének, hogy egy
aki visszatér. Folytator
tóúton Belgrád felé. E
ót, keresek egy helyi
énekel: „It's a new day
it's a new life for m
good”.

Én is jól érzem mag
ért: mert haza megy
mert nincs jövőm. I
ami körülvesz, maga a
tam egy mondatot ez
múlt sohasem halott, i
valódi múlt”. Nem tud

neré? Ebben a pil-
etni magammal,
máját a jelenről,
Felébreds és rá-
svábbogár vagy,

et rakok a könyv-
halogatom ezt a
sok, amelyekben
sek megmagyaráz-
eim dobozokban,
oknál és barátok-
az ötlet, hogy az
re gyűjtsem, lepo-
felidézsem az el-
ondoltam, attól a
or a könyveim egy-
lesznek, az én éle-

tt ez a pillanat. A
alkalmat nyújtanak
edéséhez. Amikor
rendeztetés és ra-
altságok közé tar-
nber fel tud némi-

felhős ég miatt a
valószínűleg nem
óban, mindössze
ás hallatszik. A
gy a pancsevoi kö-
lpont. Nyitogatni
zokat. Korábbi ta-
nár tudom, hogy
szentimentálisnak
erességgel kell a
Félretesznek min-
üre nincs szüksé-
om, vagy egysze-
sak azokat tartom

ez nagyon szép. ahhoz
hasonló világvége-hangulatot
képzelek bele, mint amilyen
bennem van mostanság. persze
lehet, hogy csak magamon
átszűrve érzem úgy, de ez
az elrakodás a szobában, ez
elég baljóslatú. vagy
egyébként is szoktál rendet
tenni???

nagyon zűrzavaros napunk
volt ma, azért gondolom b.
mégis tudott időt szakítani
rád.

ja, most látom, mit írt,
meg hogy te mit írtál,
szóval sz. is
elmenekült?
anyukámmal még telefonozni
sem bírok.
Nahát szebb jövőt.
zs.

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Wed Mar 24 07:49:21 1999

kellemes, boldog es nagyon
izgalmas (sex)bombazast,
vasesot es
mennydorgest kivanok

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Wed Mar 24 07:49:26 1999

Ahoj, ahoj!
Be vagyunk szarva? Ne
aggódj! A Ljubisa szomszédom
is besötétített! Egy igazi
hazafi! Egy kis irodalom:
Én már ma láttam egy NATO
GÉPET! P.-t kísérttem haza,
amikor
elrepült fölöttünk. P. azt
mondta, hogy nem is biztos,
hogy NATO
gép, mivel huhogott, de én
mondtam neki, hogy a nők
tök hülyék a
technikához, mert az nem
huhogás, hanem turbulencia
volt. Láttam a JAG-ben, és
azóta tudom, hogy az az.
Egyébként nagyon örülnék, ha

symposion

egy bomba ide is lehullna,
állítólag 1 millió dollárba
kerül egy.
Na szasz!

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Wed Mar 24 07:49:35 1999

most hallom/nezem a
dunateveben, hogy valami
farkas geza lett a katonai
totumfaktum. nagy orom. mit
mondjak? kitartas elvtarsak?
tul cinikus lenne, ugyhogy
ervenytelen. a duna legalabb
nem fesztivalrol papol.
neztam a dunan az
undergroundot, szar film
nehany jo jelenettel,
sokszor gondoltam haza,
talan tul sokszor is,
elszoktam mar tole a
virtualis valosagban.
L.-nek egyebkent elloptak a
papirjait, a magyar
demokratikus burokraciaval
hadakozott, hetfore igertek
neki utlevelet. egyebkent
azt gondolom, vajdasagban
nem lesz bombazas, atrocitas
viszont lehet, kulonosen,
hogy nem lesznek ott
natokatonak, de ezt
gondolom, te jobban erzed.
bena vagyok, mint egy fasz
udv es probalj meg aludni,
igyal valamit, en is azt
teszem az L. altal hozott
palinkabol.

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Wed Mar 24 07:49:46 1999

Kepzeljuk el, hogy
kutyafobiank van. Felunk
minden kutyatol, meg a vilag
legkisebb kutyajatul is
felunk egy kicsit. De az a
mi kiskutyatul valo
felelmunk is joval nagyobb,
mint egy atlagos
(kutyafobiaban nem szenvedo)
ember nagy kutyatol valo

symposion

meg, amelyek kifejezette
momra. De melyek azok
lyek kifejezetten értéke
Vajon azok a könyvek, a
remekművek, vagy inkább
bé ismertek, amelyeket r
tatlan okok miatt szerete
művek, amelyeket több
vagy azok, amelyekről
azok az alkotások, amel
tak, amelyek politikailag
tak, amelyeknek a megje
tában kivételes fontossá
tunk? Talán minden köny
tartani, amelyben szer
ajánlás van.

Vajon valóban szükség
könyvekre, amelyek hatá
Vajon még ma is szükség
ra, Sartre-ra, Habermasra

Végül eldöntöm, hog
Arent és Max Frisch öss
tom meg. Erre a halomra
Örökös békéjét, Tolsztoj
Paul Johnson Értelmisé
még egy Ginsberg-vers
emelek, amelyben ez az
után, a belgrádi Skada
ahol a Politika színházár
túrájáról vitatkoztunk...
könyvet visszapakolom
Hopp, kifejejtettem Sing
szerb nyelven megjelent
it. Ezek között van az én
veszve Amerikában". Az
pok valamelyikén tehera
tetem a könyveket a Ré
nek, a festőnek a műterm
őket, aki most Horvátor
merősöm, akit a festő n
ügyeljen a műteremre, az
ritkán jár ide. Nem fogják

t, ameddig csak aka-

ennünk a hídon. Rá-
nád lábánál van. A so-
y a NATO repülőgé-
szórtak, amelyek fi-
a hidak rajta vannak
„A röplapokon azt ír-
„hogy a hidakat dél-
ött fogják bombázni.
fél hat van.”

gy pont ezt írja”, vála-

el láttam, esküszöm.”

szul láttad. Nem hi-
ppal fogják a hidakat
ne az áldozat.”

tottunk át kétszer a

gy azzal, hogy a köny-

tartom, megbolyga-
rt, amely a Balkánon

uk, sem a házi könyv-
okáig. A sorsuk általa-

cus is egyben. Emlék-
bromban egy napon

Lenin a házi könyvtá-
tor az ötvenes évek

gy épp akkoriban,
t a Kommunista Párt-

yv, vastag bőrkötés,
borítokon. Sötétben

ett ismerni a kopasz
ló állat. Az összegyűj-

ötetek azonban nem
A könyvek díszként

ában, olyan helyen,
ta őket. Apám Tolsz-

és főleg Turgenyevet
mondogatta: „Apád

gy évvel később apá-
l. Anyám azt mondta

felelme.

Ejjel egy ora van, es
megyunk haza. Beterunk egy
ejjel-nappaliba,
veszünk ket deci jogurtot
(joghurtot) muanyag
poharkaban, ezustpapirossal
lefedve. Megindulunk az
uton, iszogatjuk a
joghurtunkat (joghurtunkat),
amikor eszrevesszük, hogy a
vilag legszukebb utcajaban
vagyunk, ahol a multkor is
egy horda veszett kutya mar
megtamadt minket, de akkor
szerencsejobb helyzetben
voltunk, mert bicajon
ultunk.

Hubazeg, mondjuk magunkban,
amig az utolso kortyot
horpentjuk a poharkabol, mi
a faszt csinalunk, ha most
itt az egyik kivilagitatlan
bokorbol kiugrik egy veszett
dog?

Mit ad isten, az egyik kis
bokorka mogul tenyleg
kiugrik egy kutya, ugatni
kezd, mi egy kicsit
beparazunk, de amikor
meglatjuk, hogy mekkorka
kutyusrol van szo, nem
felunk tobbet. De mivel
valamivel csak el kell neki
terelni a figyelmet,
lerantjuk a muanyag
poharkarol az ezustpapir
fedelecsket, aminek a belso
fele egy adta jogurt
(joghurt), a kiskutya ele
dobjuk, es tovabbsetalunk.
(A poharat nem dobjuk el,
hatha a kovetkezo bokorban
egy nagyobb kutya rejlik)
A kovetkezo bokorbol
elougrik harom veszett
vereb, na most aztan
tenyleg beparazunk. Eloszor
egy kicsit felsikitunk,
aztan amikor latjuk, hogy
ettol a kutyak meg vadabbak
lettek, abbahagyjuk.
Haa! Ott a munyag pohar a
kezunkben, aminek a belseje
egy adta joghurt (jogurt).

symposion

Odavetjük a kutyak ele, most
aztan elkezdenek
majd lakmarozni es bennunket
hagynak tovabbmenni, ott mar
latszik is az utca vege.
De a muanyag pohar sajnos
fejfel lefele esik a kutyak
ele, de olyan beanaan, hogy
azok nem is veszik eszre,
hogy ott a belsejeben valami
fincsi dolog van, hanem meg
jobban bekattannak, es
megesznek bennunket.

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Thu Mar 25 12:46:55 1999

A nevem N. G., valószínűleg
rajta lehetek valami listán,
mert idonként kapom a te
írásaidat is. Személyesen
asszem nem ismerjük egymást.
Csak azért írok, mert
olvastam a before the rain-t
és most, hogy a helyzet
ilyen pocsek, azt akarom
mondani, hogy aggódom az
egész társaságért. Nem is
csak azért, hogy leesik-e
arrafelé valami, vagy nem,
mert szerintem inkább nem,
mint igen, hanem egyáltalán:
abban az országban élni.
Benne lenni egy
konfliktusban, amihez semmi
közötök nincs és mégis van.
A szolidaritásom
kifejeződése akart lenni ez
a pár sor, és ha bármire
szükségeitek lenne, írjatok.

From: somebody@word.com
To: somebody@word.com
Thu Mar 25 12:47:00 1999

Tegnap este a rendkívüli
állapot első tüneteként nem
működött a telefon
Tornyoson, bár lehet, hogy
ennek okát a készülék
rendkívül rossz minőségében
kell keresni, Tornyos
sakkbajnokságán az élen
állok ötből öttel, aj tyáo

symposion

neki: „Azért zártak k
a szád. Itthon beze
mit, csak az újságot k
részel”. Apám a leta
állt, mert beszélni me
nem következett be.
szította el. Át kellett
sebb lakásba. A fürd
s ha meleg vizet akar
tani alatta. Ebből kif
tonként fürödtünk.
szedte és eladta a bő
tekről. Az összegyűjt
tettük a vizet két sz
csak évekkel később
egy másik történet.

Tíz nap sem múlt
zik az ismerősöm. I
metlen dolog történt.
műtermet. Már beköl
festő holmiját az én
elhordták, most ism
nak. A helyi önkormá
sos munkát végzett,
szerint jártak el. Sza
műterem elvételéről
döntés a lomtalanítás
összeírtak, az elsőtől
nek nincs joga fellebb
most új hazájában, H
szigetén sütteti a has
ban vagyunk. Nekünl
san kell cselekednünk

Nekem nincs okon
tan fellélegezhetek.
történt, aminek vic
rendje és szokásai sz
lett.

A rendőr

Egy terepruhás, fe
int, hogy álljak meg. F

Appendix 2: Interview questions

For “insiders”

1. Connections to *Symposion* and/or position in it
2. How often did you receive e-mails, and from how many people? Where were these people? What were the characteristics and themes of these e-mails?
3. To what extent could those who were not in Serbia understand the situation in which you found yourself, and to what extent was the purpose of your e-mails to explain it to them?
4. How often did you write e-mails and to how many people? Where were the people you wrote to? What were the characteristics and themes of these e-mails?
5. What is the importance of these e-mails for the public? Why were they published?
6. What is their importance for you personally?
7. Did you have face-to-face interaction as well with the people you were corresponding with? If so, in what respects was it different from the e-mails?
8. How did the period of the bombing affect the editors of the *Symposion*, if it did?
9. How would you describe the political situation of that period from the perspective of *Symposion*? Do you think the editors were in danger?
10. What did the fact that you experience a war (if you would name it as such at all) add to your experience, if anything?
11. How would you describe your state of mind, feelings from that period?
12. What could you compare that situation to (film, literature...)?
13. How did you feel at the beginning of the bombing? Describe the first day.
14. How did you feel when it was over?
15. What plans did you have during the bombing, if any?
16. Describe a typical day from that period.
17. Is there an event or an e-mail that you remember very clearly? Describe it? Why that particular event/e-mail?
18. Have you considered using your experience in your literary works later? Have you done it?
19. How would you characterize the e-mails linguistically, maybe even literarily?

For “outsiders”

1. What was your connection with the editors of *Symposion*? What is your opinion about the journal?
2. With whom did you correspond during the bombing of Serbia and how often?
3. What were the characteristics, function and topics of the e-mails you received?
4. Why did you write them? How did you feel towards them?
5. Can you compare the situation in Serbia then to anything you experienced, read or watched? How did you imagine the state of mind your acquaintances in Serbia were in?
6. How would you describe the public attitude in Hungary towards the bombing of Serbia?
7. And your own? To what extent was it different from the general attitude? To what extent was this difference due to the fact that you had more information and contact with people who were in Serbia?

8. Did you have face-to-face interaction as well with any people you were corresponding with? If so, in what respects was it different from the e-mails?
9. Describe the first meeting with your friends from Serbia after the bombing.
10. Did your relationship change during your period?
11. Is there a story or an e-mail that you remember clearly? Describe it. Why that particular story?

For those “in between”

1. Connections to *Symposion* and/or position in it
2. When did you go to Hungary and why? How did you feel here during the bombing?
3. To what extent could people in Hungary understand the situation in Serbia? To what extent was your perspective different because you are from there?
4. With whom did you correspond and how often?
5. What were the characteristics, function and topics of the e-mails you received?
6. How would you describe the e-mails you received linguistically, maybe literarily?
7. What were the characteristics, function and topics of the e-mails you sent?
8. What is the importance of these e-mails for the public? Why were they published?
9. What is their importance for you personally?
10. How did the period of the bombing affect the editors of the *Symposion*, if it did?
11. Can you compare the situation in Serbia then to anything you experienced, read or watched? How did you imagine the state of mind your acquaintances in Serbia were in?
12. Did you have face-to-face interaction as well with any people you were corresponding with? If so, in what respects was it different from the e-mails?
13. Describe the first meeting with your friends from Serbia after the bombing.
14. Did your relationship change during your period?
15. Is there a story or an e-mail that you remember clearly? Describe it. Why that particular story?