THE REMAINS OF THE HAPPIEST BARRACK – THE MATERIALITY OF NOSTALGIA AND TRAUMA IN POST-SOCIALIST HUNGARY

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Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the research question of how is the state socialist past represented to Hungarian teenagers. It uses the Statue Park of Budapest and the House of Terror as exemplary case studies where tensions between different approaches towards the past are displayed. In this paper I argue that most ubiquitous strategy of dealing with the state socialist past is its homogenization and distancing. This approach enables those who are presently in power to define themselves in contrast with the communist past as liberal and democratic. The House of Terror with its ethical-traumatic understanding of the past and the collective victimization of the nation is a site where these intentions are clearly presented. As opposed to this, the Statue Park, while offering this kind of approach as well, also enables the visitors to interact with a specific representation of the past in alternative ways, such as active re-living, individual or cultural nostalgia, irony and laughter.

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I. INTRODUCTION – TIME OUT OF JOINT

In 2004, a new statue was installed at ’56-osok tere (Square of the ’56-ers), Budapest. The former Felvonulási tér (Procession Square) is one of the most contested and symbolically overburdened public spaces of Budapest, which, during the state socialist period gave place to the Stalin-tribune, Lenin’s 4m high statue and the monument of the People’s Republic of Hungary. All of these were removed (and transferred to the Statue Park museum), and thus the square that was formerly used to host maydays and other processions, was left without monuments. In 2004 the new statue called *Időkerék* (Time’s Wheel) was installed, in the form of a giant hour-glass, which was supposed to be turned each year, 1st January. However, for some curious reason (apparently the lack of maintenance) the grains stopped falling only a year after its consecration, and it has not been fixed ever since. Time stopped in Hungary.

Indeed, although more than two decades have passed since the system change of 1989, Hungarian memory politics still have an obsession with the state socialist past under the nationwide mottos of “reconciliation” and “facing the past”. There is a new generation growing up who have no personal memories about the previous regime, and the state considers it its major responsibility to present a “truthful image” to these adolescents about the near and not so near past. The presentation of such an image forms the central inquiry of this paper.

What kinds of representations of the communist past are available in present day Hungary and how are they articulated at strategic sites of remembering? This is the primary question the present thesis seeks to answer. Responds to the main problem are going to be discussed with the introduction of two sub-questions. On the one hand, regarding the production side of official memory politics, the most important question is that of interests. *What are the present political interests that are being served by memory projects?* On the other hand, though, the

efficacy of these attempts on triggering certain kinds of memories is also of interest. Therefore, *my second sub-question concentrates on the responses given by the "new generation",* the teenagers and young adults who have no first-hand personal experiences about the state socialist era.

In this thesis I argue that most ubiquitous strategy of dealing with the state socialist past is its homogenization and distancing. This approach enables those who are presently in power to define themselves as opposed to this image as liberal and democratic. Therefore such memories of the previous regime are essential for the self-legitimization of the present government – who, during their university years, had an active part in establishing a democratic opposition for the then ruling MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party). The House of Terror with its ethical-traumatic understanding of the past and the collective victimization of the nation is a site where these intentions are clearly displayed. As opposed to this, the Statue Park, while offering this kind of approach as well, also enables the visitors to interact with a specific representation of the past in alternative ways, such as active re-living, individual or cultural nostalgia, irony and laughter.

I chose the Statue Park and the House of Terror as exemplary cases of my inquiry because of their strategic position in terms of post-Kádár memory practices. Apart from these two institutions a number of other projects could have been included here, such as the Iron Curtain Museum of Vashegy, the Pantheon of the Workers Movement in the Kerepesi Cemetery, or even the temporary exhibition in the Modem museum of Debrecen about socialist realism and sots art. However, the House of Terror and the Statue Park stand out within this selection, since these are the earliest museums of the kind, which – probably due to their Budapest location – have by far the largest audience. Since both sites are open to the public and adolescents are encouraged to visit them during school trips, they can be regarded as central means of official, top-down remembering practices.

Besides, the House of Terror and the Statue Park are also different in a number of ways, their approach to the past and their economy included. The House of Terror is a state owned and state financed project, and allegedly one of the priorities of the present Orbán-government; has a large budget and is able to use the most modern technological equipment like LCD-screens, sound effects etc. As opposed to this, the Statue Park, although also state-owned, does not receive any financial support from the government and is currently run by a private enterprise, solely using the sources provided by the tickets and the souvenir shop. The differences of the two sites along with their prominent role in post-socialist memory production make them comparable and representative of such projects in Hungary.

Both museums have been subject to extensive academic engagement from the field of anthropology, history, cultural studies and museology, not even mentioning the intellectual debate that sprang after the opening ceremony of the House of Terror (and which is revived from time to time).

The literature on the Statue Park shows a thematic shift around the early 2000s. Prior to that, scholars dealing with the site agreed on its primary function as "coming to terms with the past" (James 1999, Losonczy 1999, Foote et al 2000). It is interesting, though, that this phrase that appears exactly the same way in all of these texts is almost the word by word translation of the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (to struggle to come to terms with the past) which was (and is) used to describe Germany's situation after the Holocaust, when they had to learn how to live with their past (see further Giesen 2004 on "perpetrator traumatization"). However, the more recent texts like that of Maya Nadkarni (2003) and Zsolt K. Horváth (2008) rather focus on the irony that is presented in the Statue Park and picture the museum as a site of structural tension.

In the case of the House of Terror, all critics regardless of their nationality and the date of their paper agree on the theatricality and illusionism of the museum, which seeks to present the communist era in a demonized, exaggerated way (Christensen 2011, Hwang 2009, K. Horváth 2008). It can be said that practically all of these texts attempts to uncover the truth concealed behind the dramatized nature of the museum – and this thesis will be no exception from the pattern. However, these studies are fundamentally different as well, since the scope of inquiry is different each time, some looking at the perspective of the foreign visitors (Hwang 2009), others focusing solely on the aesthetic analysis (György 2006), while the disciplinary backgrounds are also diverse.

In relation to this body of literature this thesis is able to offer new insights for three reasons. First, with the analytical separation of the production and reception sides of the two museums the dynamic interplay between the two approaches becomes visible, while this this understanding is also able to point out the possible points of interferences and subversions. For me the most interesting instances were those when the intended message was altered and misinterpreted by the visitors since it provided new, fruitful grounds for looking at cultural memory. Second, the theoretical frame of trauma and nostalgia discourses that I use through my discussion can place the understanding of the two museums into new contexts, while it could add to the clarification and applicability of the terms as well. Finally, all these papers – just as the present thesis – are bounded in their own temporality. Acknowledging this fact can be a major benefit of this paper. Previous works on both the Statue Park and the House of Terror sought to raise the question of what kind of past was being constructed at each site. However, what they did not reflect upon is another, just as important problem: from what kind of present are these pasts constructed? Within this context, one is maybe too easily tempted to take the twenty-three years of the post-1989 period as "present", while leaving without

reflection the possible internal ruptures of this time frame. In what follows, I will also try to acknowledge such differences.

In the next chapter I am going to look at the theoretical implications of my key concepts – such as trauma, nostalgia and materiality. Then, after presenting the methods I have used for the research, three analytical chapters are to follow. The first one deals with the results I got from a photo elicitation survey made with adolescents about their knowledge on the state socialist era. The second section looks at the self-representation (the intended meanings) of the two museums, the House of Terror and the Statue Park and draws a frame within which various interpretational strategies from the visitors' side are imaginable. The third chapter examines the responses of young visitors about the exhibitions they have seen. Finally, my concluding remarks offer a way of organizing my findings into an intelligible way.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature related to the main questions of the present paper is focused on the following issues: trauma and nostalgia/Ostalgie as wider theoretical frames along with discussion on materiality in general and the materiality of remembering in particular. At first, however, it is important to briefly look at what the literature has to say about post-socialist Hungary as a cultural unit and parallel to this, about official top-down remembering practices here.

II.1. The context: post-socialist Hungary

The first and most important problem to arise is the question of system change itself. In Hungarian, there are a number of variations even in the denomination itself, ranging from *rendszerváltás* (changing the system) through *demokratikus átalakulás* (democratic transformation) and *békés átmenet* (peaceful transition) to *rendszerváltozás* (system change). The main stake of these names is precisely that of agency, namely that who changes what when one is to talk about the system change. In general public discourses the *rendszerváltás* form is the most intuitive, but since it implies a too strong sense of a certain agency 'making it happen', social scientific texts rather tend to use the *rendszerváltozás* label.

This ambiguity about the lack of any specifiable agency is wittily described by István Rév: "in Hungary, there was no revolution in 1989, not even a velvet one. […] The regime melted like butter in late summer sunshine. Even in its demise, communism succeeded in not denying itself. Its strange death fooled the people one more time by denying them the experience of their sovereignty" (Rév 2005, 30). Parallel to this, Maya Nadkarni also associates this period of the system change with the visible lack of heroism; "there were simply no more Stalins to tear down", she argues (2003, 199). Probably one of the primary reasons of the absence of

intense, heroic moments in the history of the system change is due to the nature of the compromises the Kádár-government made with its citizens. As Heller et al described it as early as 1992, the most emphasized part of this "contract" was pragmatic: the system wished to assure its legitimacy with a relative independence within the private sphere, offering a limited yet existing "freedom of choice" in consumption (Heller et al, 1992, 111).

This characteristic feature of the late Kádár-era as one encouraging private consumption as opposed to collective actions – along with the relatively smooth and "unnoticeable" nature of the system change – allows for three different strategies of remembering the state socialist period: a kind of nostalgic longing for the individual material progress, indifference springing from the "nontalk" strategy of the previous regime, and trauma, of which the very silence can be regarded as a symptom. Nostalgia is closely associated with the individual perception that 'it was better back then', that is, a person with average wage could afford to have a car, a fridge and a weekend house – and for most people it was more tangible than the hearsay information about the secret agency and the limitations of public discourses (such as the presence of the Soviet troops or the 1956 revolution). Second, the absence of public discourse on certain topics was so prevalent even in the mid-80s that many of the generation who were socialized in the state socialist era still stuck to these restrictions. The lack of talking about these topics has created its own web of references, which, with an ironic wink, still pointed at the absence of the forbidden topics without actually mentioning them. Yet, the next generation has no or very little knowledge about what is being hinted at, which clearly encumbers intergenerational, non-official knowledge transmission. Finally, there seems to be a ubiquitous trauma discourse in post-1989 Hungarian memory projects and official channels through which knowledge of the past is transferred. Here it is obviously the retaliation of the revolution and the terror of the 1950s that is pictured as traumatic from the horizon of the post-communist Hungary. In addition, this thirty years of consensual silence is in accord with

the individual and collective trauma studies dealing with Holocaust survivors, where there is a period of latency – of approximately twenty years; a generation's time (Assmann 2006, 92).

In the following I shall only deal extensively with the nostalgic and traumatic interpretations towards the past, and will only touch upon the third option of silence and muting the past. This decision can be explained by two factors. On the one hand, even though some of the collected data shows that young people do not have any specific knowledge about the state socialist period, no empirical evidence can prove that it was the result of the Kádárian strategy of forceful forgetting. On the other hand the primary foci of this paper are memory projects, that is, sites where a certain kind of memory is to be *produced*. For these reasons forgetting, although an issue that must be considered within this context, will only appear in the answers the young visitors provide as opposed to the intentionality of the creators.

II.2. Trauma and nostalgia

For the first glance, trauma and nostalgia as various approaches towards the past may seem to mutually exclude each other. In the common sense understanding of the words, "trauma" would mean a break in the texture of time and as such the rejection of the past, while "nostalgia" implies a wish to bring back the past without any modifications. However, there are a few, viable ways offered by the literature that make it possible to envision them within the same frame. Piotr Sztompka for instance, in his paper on cultural traumas and social change identifies a shift from "discourses of crisis" to "discourses of trauma" where an event that is perceived as traumatic or critical implies the collapse of "the inherited cultural environment, the socially shared pool of ready-made templates for symbolizing, interpreting, framing and narrating the on-going social praxis" (Sztompka 2004, 450). This is very much similar to what Ann Swidler notes as the importance of culture as a toolkit for strategies of actions in "unsettled lives". "In such periods, ideologies – explicit, articulated, highly

organized meaning systems (both political and religious) – establish new styles or strategies of action" (Swidler 1986, 278).

One of the basic consequences of cultural trauma, according to Sztompka, is a sense of "cultural disorientation", when "the socialized, internalized culture that they carry 'in their heads' or in their semi-automatic 'habits of the heart' clashes with the cultural environment in which they find themselves" (2004, 454). As a result an obsession with the past also appears which can take multiple forms, like nostalgic longing or the reappearance of past events in a traumatic manner. However, this context suggests that the source of the "cultural trauma" is not the hard dictatorship of the 50s or the consequences of 1956 as contemporary memory politics seem to imply, but rather an event that happened much later, in 1989. Accepting Sztompka's framework would allow for a kind of reconciliation between these two approaches towards the past. It could also illuminate many obscurities regarding the topic; that is why I am inclined to use it for my purposes. I believe that it is the system change of 1989 that can be regarded as a "cultural trauma", and this is what induces all kinds of memory projects targeted on the near or not so near past. It is the altered frame of understanding – from the premature consumer society of the late Kádár-age to the sudden economic crisis of the mid-90s – that raised the demand to trace back the source of trauma to something else, the suppressed and muted memory of 1956. I argue that this was a way of making the trauma external to the imagined community of Hungarian people, and as such it became possible to build a coherent national image and strong sense of nationalism by drawing on not only private, but intimate memories, which is a characteristic feature of post-socialist societies (e.g. Verdery 1993, Wagner 2003).

As for the history of the two concepts – trauma and nostalgia –, both have a thematically wide and interdisciplinary literature ranging from the 1960s and showing an exponential growth from the end of the 1980s, both trends being witnesses of several shifts in the meaning of the

central terms; trauma and nostalgia respectively. In the case of "trauma", the definitions offered by the literature show such a variation that it would be impossible to clearly identify the limitations of the concept: it is either everything or nothing that would be considered traumatic experience. As opposed to this, while the concept of nostalgia has also been subject to a number of alterations in the last three decades, most of the works dealing with the notion fail to overcome its definition as a kind of unambiguous longing that identifies nostalgia as the preference of the past in the stead of the present and associates it with an approval and admiration of all aspects of its object.

However, since the present paper attempts to offer a frame in which cultural trauma and nostalgia as discursive styles refer to roughly the same past, it is crucial to clearly define their meanings as they are used in this context – along with the possible points of their interferences.

Regarding the relationship of the two terms, it is possible that both fall into the category that Mieke Bal mentions as "travelling concepts" (Bal 2002), that is, terms that have a considerable career within a discipline or an academic field, yet their meaning is subject to continuous mutations over time. Miklós Takács (2009) identifies three stages in the development of the term "trauma", while the changes within the concept of nostalgia are still left without much reflection or even acknowledgement. However, the way the meaning of trauma shifted – from surgical to psychical level and finally reaching a cultural reading – can set a pattern for nostalgia studies as well. Although, as it is mentioned in every piece of literature concerned with the concept of nostalgia, the first phase of the term is more or less synonymous with a kind of melancholia induced by "homesickness"; a spatial longing, for instance for one's hometown or home-country. This initial interpretation is parallel with the first identifications of trauma as a bodily injury, a rupture in the continuity. The second stage is that of a metaphorical extension, which requires a sense of abstraction; in the case of

nostalgia it means a sense of moving away from longing for actual spaces to longing for past times, where returning is absolutely not realizable. As for the trauma, the metaphoric extension implies the shift from bodily to mental wounds, as it has been identified as PTSD by the American Association of Psychiatrists as late as 1980. The third step in both cases is that of introducing the concept for a cultural level, which requires either to take the original concept metaphorically, or to revise the terminology and its adjacent presuppositions along with fully acknowledging the difference of individual and collective memory work.

However, the recognition of the difference between the individual and collective phenomenon is of problematic nature, as Wolf Kansteiner remarks, "collective memory studies have not sufficiently conceptualized collective memories as distinct from individual memory. As a result, the nature and dynamics of collective memories are frequently misrepresented through facile use of psychoanalytical and psychological methods" (2002, 180). As a potential answer for this critique, I propose another distinction regarding the terms "cultural" and "collective" memory, especially in their relation to the individual processes of trauma and nostalgia. The question here is closely connected to the way works dealing with these concepts picture the relationship between the individual and group level.

The term "collective" would allow for a synecdochical transition, where individual traumatic and nostalgic experiences form the basic components of a group- or nationwide extension of the concepts. This approach may be illustrated with the place Auschwitz has acquired in social memory studies, where the individual traumas of a segment of the population are accepted and displayed as "collective", as a pain shared by each and every member of the group. This collective experience is what is more often subject to generational transmission. As opposed to this, "cultural" trauma and nostalgia is rather understood in metaphorical terms, where no initial experience of individual traumas and nostalgias is needed, and it is merely a matter of discursive practices that specific events or periods are regarded as

"traumatic" or "nostalgic", which always already implies the perspective and interests of the present from where the past is constructed. It could be said that the cultural type of trauma and nostalgia is meant in quotation marks, referring to specific threads of association and approaches of the past rather than actual wounds and longings. Furthermore, this approach would also allow for a less rigid separation of individual and collective experiences, allowing for a productive interplay between the two levels. For this reason, I shall use the terms "trauma" and "nostalgia" in this latter sense, which would enable the identification of both the actors interested in producing them and the interplay between the two levels of experience. In the following, this is going to be a crucial point since, as I shall argue, one of the stakes of both the Statue Park and the House of Terror *as* memory projects is their capacity to mobilize individual experiences in order to picture cultural memory as a collective one.

II.3. Trauma

The focus of academic interest on trauma varies from post-Auschwitz oral histories – which can be framed as the prototypical field of trauma studies (Berger 1995; Rothe 2011; Schmitz 2001) – through child abuses, sexual harassment, genocides and "shell shocks" towards the collective traumas caused by violent means of oppression and imposed systems of dominance that are perceived as external for the people who suffer from them (Sztompka 2004). However, in spite of the huge thematic spectrum, from a postmodern point of view a limited set of theoretical questions form the focus of trauma studies. These inquiries refer to the mediated nature of the trauma experience (Hartman 2003), the possible ways of differentiating between individual and collective trauma – and consequentially knowledge/memory transmission, the ethical-Christian vocabulary and understanding of trauma and its applicability to scholarly researches (e.g. with terms like forgiveness, delinquency, victimhood, testimony and guilt) and finally the question of agency, that is the issue of who are traumatized by whom and under what conditions (Volkan 2002). If one looks

at the associations assigned to the word in academic discourse, it becomes apparent that it is most frequently linked with a kind of respect towards the past and the actual victims of past traumas with a moral imperative to remember. It was Aleida Assmann (2006), who identified a shift in memory studies when the denominations of the participants were radically changed: from the initial use of winners and losers (regarding shell-shock syndrome and other war-related traumas) the literature gradually moved towards "heroes", "perpetrators" and "victims", which do not at the least exclude each other. The change in categories was accompanied by an ethical dimension of remembering, which still seems to characterize much of the literature and practically all the events or sites that are labeled as "memory projects". It could be said that memory projects are manifestations of the moral aspect of remembering *by definition.*

The moral imperative to remember, being prevalent in trauma literature in particular – and in the discourse of cultural memory in general as well – offers a number of examples for illustration. The campaign run by the Hungarian government entitled "The past must be confessed" for the memorial day of the victims of communism (also being a motto of the House of Terror) is only one of them.

II.4. Nostalgia

Geographical location is a crucial issue in categorizing "nostalgia studies". It seems that authors who are writing about the United States' waves of nostalgia approach the phenomenon from the perspective of marketing analysts, primarily looking at the use of nostalgia in the success of certain products (Belk 1990; Havlena 1991; Holbrook 1993; Holbrook 2003; Ruppel 2009). Besides the marketing preferences yet partly based on these researches, another trend is in formation, concentrating on the popular and material culture as

the roots of nostalgic behavior (Anderson 2008; Cashman 2006; Grainge 2000; Holdsworth 2011).

The literature offers a whole variety of definitions for nostalgia. Fred Davis's 1979 book, which has a paradigmatic importance within the topic, coins it simply as "yearning for yesterday", remaining at the common sense explanation of the phenomenon. This underlying idea of nostalgia as longing provides the basis for the definition offered by Holbrook and Schindler: "A preference (general liking, positive attitude or favorable effect) towards experiences associated with objects (people, places and things) that were more common (popular, fashionable or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood or even before birth)" (1991, 108). Although this definition offers a more accurate description of the scientific limitations of the concept, we still cannot claim that it succeeded in overcoming the everyday use of the word.

What is left without reflection here, just as well as in the majority of literature on nostalgia, is the difference between the individual, collective and cultural levels of the phenomenon. Davis, in his initial work on the topic, tries to identify a public-private continuum of nostalgia, where public nostalgia would be related to iconic objects, people or events that are able to induce the same kind of, so to say, consensual nostalgia in a whole group of people, while private nostalgia is related to individual experiences and their position in the particular person's biography – just as Proust's madeleine cookies did (Davis 1979, 124). However, one must also consider Linda Hutcheon's take on the subjectivity of nostalgia: "irony and nostalgia are not qualities of objects; they are responses of subjects – active, emotionally- and intellectually-engaged subjects" (2000, 203). Therefore, it is not due to the specific objects, but their subjective perception that they are regarded as triggers for nostalgic behavior. An object with an allegedly consensual meaning attribution might also evoke truly personal, intimate memories – as it will be visible in the case of the statue of lieutenant Ostapenko.

Probably this very subjectivity of nostalgia is the reason why one is tempted to identify it as a merely private phenomenon, just like Mills and Coleman defined it as "a type of autobiographical memory" (1994, 205). However, as it has already been mentioned, in the case of Hungarian memory projects, one must account for a cultural kind of nostalgia, which works with a set of stereotypes. This approach has the unquestionable benefit that, since it produces a most typical object that has never actually existed, it does not have an original. As such, no initial, personal memories are assigned to these objects, and as a result they are able to provide an easily recognizable cliché-like imagery of the past, which is open to any kind of meaning attribution. For instance the "commie souvenirs" that are so popular in the post-socialist countries would fall into this category of cultural nostalgia.

One of the most interesting takes on cultural nostalgia can be linked to Paul Grainge, who offers a possible reading of nostalgia in terms of cultural recycling, while imagining "the particular narratives of cultural memory" as being "produced through the recycling and/or random hybridization of past styles", and therefore regards nostalgia as a fundamental practice of postmodernism (Grainge 2000). This interpretation is in sharp contrast with other views claiming that cultural nostalgia would mean just the exact opposite of postmodernism, since it lacks the innovative irony that is a distinctive feature of postmodernism as a philosophic and representational tradition (Hutcheon 2000).

II.4.1. Ostalgie – Nostalgia for the worse past?

The dynamics of merging the seemingly mutually exclusive concepts of nostalgia and irony can provide a means of theoretical and methodological progress in nostalgia studies, and that is inevitably one of the core ideas of post-socialist and post-colonial nostalgia studies. The scholars conducting research in the former communist or colonized countries, while still acknowledging consumer approaches to the topic (Bach 2002, Cook 2007), already account for more contradictory features of the post-socialist or post-colonial memory practices, since

here the supposedly homogenous feeling of nostalgia – implying an elegiac longing for a past to which one can never return – is contrasted with a "rupture in history", the collapse of the Empire or the USSR (Bissell 2005; Boym 1995; Ekman 2005). This break was supposed to mean the end of the foreign oppression, popularly acknowledged within the context of liberation and the initiation of a "peaceful transition" into Western-type democracy, along with the availability of the long desired Western commodities. However, nostalgia fundamentally operates as a selective process which marks certain aspects of the past as more valuable than the present, therefore, scholarly texts on nostalgia in post-colonial and post-communist frame must envision a certain kind of double dynamics, also reflecting upon the internal contradictions caused by the context. It is interesting, though, how one segment of the post-socialist nostalgia texts is preoccupied by the politics of nostalgia (Ekman 2005), while the majority of texts focuses on the material culture and the media serving as the channels and triggers of nostalgia (Castillo 2008; Cook 2007; Rubin 2009).

In this sense the idea of Ostalgie, "nostalgia for the East" might offer theoretically stimulating answers to a number of criticisms against nostalgia studies. Linda Hutcheon's already mentioned postmodern critique emphasizes the lack of tension between meanings and that nostalgia takes no notice of the irretrievability of the past. As opposed to "standard" nostalgia, the core of Ostalgie is precisely its indetermination of dual meanings. It can be explained by the survival of specific objects, that is, certain material signifiers of the previous era did not perish after their signified – the ideological legacy of the Soviet Union – had ceased to exist. Therefore the perception of these objects offers an ironic disposition, which, according to Hutcheon, functions on two levels at the same time, and operates with the ambiguity of meanings (Hutcheon 1994). The objects remaining from the state socialist age create the basis of Ostalgie as a fundamentally ironic practice of remembering, and the irony of double

meanings can also be the reason why these material remnants are perceived as funny from a post-socialist perspective.

However, the concept of Ostalgie – although it partly answers the critiques concerning nostalgia – without a doubt produces its own questions. Even the name raises a set of problems inasmuch as it would picture a homogeneous "Western" kind of nostalgia, and therefore it reproduces the modern West versus the backward East dichotomy, while it also describes itself as an undivided whole that would apply to each and every post-socialist country. However, the very recent appearances of expressions like "Titostalgia" (Velikonja 2008) in the former Yugoslavia or the more and more widespread use of "*Kádár-nosztalgia"* in Hungarian discourse points out the internal ruptures within the framework of Eastern nostalgia, and Ostalgie is once again used in exclusively East German context.

However, an inevitably common feature of all these nation-specific nostalgias is that the past evoked this way is by no means idyllic or perfect, and as such, the traditional pattern of common sense nostalgia – as longing for "paradise lost" or for the good old times when things were still "real" or authentic – does not function here. Maya Nadkarni quotes the well-known passage from the Hungarian cult film *The Witness* "a little bit sour, a little bit yellow, but it's ours", referring to both the Hungarian orange and to the Kádárian past that is evoked in Hungarian post-communist nostalgia. She moves on to identify this peculiar longing for an age that is burdened by officially encouraged bad memories of terror, secret services, oppression and the abuse of many fundamental human rights as "the poetics of inauthenticity" (Nadkarni 2010, 182). This approach is seemingly free from any kind of political implication, in short, post-communist nostalgia does not mean that its subjects wish the state socialist era to return. However, the seemingly nonpolitical nature of Ostalgie does not imply that it *is* indeed devoid of such ambitions. In fact, post-communist nostalgia is often used to support or undermine certain political claims (Boyer 2006, Boyer and Yurchak 2012).

Based on all this, what can be regarded as an innovation of both nostalgia and Ostalgie as means of dealing with the past is that it integrates the past into the present under entirely different conditions than most of the traditional, "historia est magistra vitae" approaches. This idea is based on the insight that nostalgia turns towards the past with different goals. Within the traditional concept of the past, the primary stake of dealing with the past was to gain some kind of information, which could be used to shape the present and the future. Here the past was regarded as a collection of lessons, which could be applied without first-hand experiences. For instance the traumatic understanding of the past might be related to this approach.

As opposed to this, in the case of nostalgia as a discursive pattern, the past does not mean a set of ready-made data and precedents, but it rather reuses the past as a set of metaphors, a cultural toolkit of "symbols, stories, rituals and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" (Swindler 1986, 273). In the following I am going to use the terms "traumatic" and "nostalgic" in this sense, where trauma means a moral/ethical dimension of "coming to terms" with the past, while nostalgia offers an ironic, subversive, playful way of remembering.

II.5. The materiality of remembering

Yet, what is common in the two approaches – and is also of central importance for this inquiry is the materiality of remembering. Since the primary scope of this research is how certain memory projects are constructed within museum spaces, these objects – remnants or replicas – acquire a key position. How are subjective meanings and emotional ties created for these objects that are preserved and presented in the House of Terror or the Statue Park?

The importance of material artifacts as mnemonic devices enhancing individual remembering has been acknowledged since the origins of rhetoric. However, their role in establishing

cultural memory is a relatively new topic and is largely due to the contributions of museum studies. Alan Radley, for example, emphasizes that "artefacts survive in ways unintended by makers and owners to become evidence on which other interpretations of the past can be reconstructed" (1990, 58). Therefore, the re-contextualization and consequentially reinterpretation of the objects that are displayed in museums contributes to fit them into a coherent narrative and transforms them from relics of historical value to illustrations that prove something about the group (nation) itself. From the perspective of the present paper, Radley's approach is an exceptionally fruitful one because it enables not only a respectful interpretation of the past (which, on the level of objects would mean the silent acknowledgement of the exhibited artifacts), but also allows for a kind of interactive engagement, where the tangibility of the objects encourages people to "re-engage in activities embodied in the object's ritual uses" (Radley 1990, 52).

From this aspect, the authenticity of the displayed objects seems to lose its importance in the demonstration of a specific idea. As Zsolt K. Horváth argues, "authenticity in this regard is seen as an intellectual relationship between the reality of the past and the artificial context of the museum. The authentic object must be considered as a fragment of an earlier world's reality which, in a museographic context, by its mimetic function, is able to produce a general meaning (2008, 269). However, in the case of the museum displays, the authenticity of the objects is subordinated to the simulacrum they create. Baudrillard (1998) uses the notion of simulacrum to refer to the nullification of the true-false, original-replica dichotomies. Simulacra are not simple "copies" of some original, but they point out that they have no initial source to be copied. Therefore, these museum spaces are largely dependent on the tangibility of the displayed objects, and as such, they form autonomous units by themselves, regardless of their referentiality to any kind of external reality. They are coherent representations of a past, without the actual need of this past to exist.

But how is the materiality of these museums related to a top-down process of meaning inscription? In this matter it is Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's insights that can be used as guidelines. Gumbrecht – in *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* – establishes a distinction between "presence effects" and "meaning effects", the latter referring to the interpretational practices of the humanities and social sciences where attaching transcendental meanings to the objects seem to be a fundamental preoccupation of scholars of humanities. In contrast, "presence effects" are defined by the materiality of the object of study, that is, it occupies a certain space within reality and it is visible and tangible; they "exclusively appeal to the senses. Therefore, the reactions that they provoke have nothing to do with imagining what is going on in another person's psyche" (Gumbrecht 2004, xv.) According to Gumbrecht, what Martin Heidegger, father of modern hermeneutics implied in his much debated concept of *Dasein* (usually translated as being-there/there-being) is also the tangibility of the world surrounding us and its meaning is not restricted to the inevitable nature of limited perspectives. Thus, the metaphysical practice of interpretation should be altered regarding that "we conceive of aesthetic experience as an oscillation (and sometimes as an interference) between 'presence effects' and 'meaning effects'" (Gumbrecht 2004, 2). The author also argues that aesthetic pleasure is always derived from "moments of intensity", therefore it is clearly the material quality of the object or event – having bodily effects on the observer – that provokes the experience (99).

This framework is of crucial importance concerning the scope of the present paper, since it allows not only to assign multiple interpretations to the same material reality, but it also enables a more nuanced analysis of the affective mechanisms that are working in certain spaces – in this case the House of Terror and the Statue Park.

III. METHODOLOGY

The primary scope of this paper is to reveal both the intention behind and the visitors' actual responses to the two memory projects – the House of Terror and the Statue Park – dealing with the state socialist era of Hungary.

Their analysis here is based on an analytically useful distinction between the production and reception aspects of the two projects, and therefore I use four complementary methods of analysing the modes of action in the two places – a **discourse analysis** of the two web pages, visitors' guides and the related contemporary accounts in non-scholarly papers and speeches (e.g. opening ceremonies, the guiding offered by the staff, educational books distributed at the museums etc.); a **spatial-aesthetic analysis** of the two spaces; and **structured** and **semi-structured interviews** with visitors and guides/staff.

III.1. Discourse analysis

The production side of these memory projects can be best observed in the two web pages and the reviews, which provide rich material to reveal the intentions of the curators and the makers of the two museum spaces. Therefore, a comparative analysis of the discourses around the Statue Park and the House of Terror will clarify what is *meant* to be transmitted, what kind of past is formulated in the two exhibitions. These texts can be regarded as guidelines to how the exhibitions should be perceived – which of course does not always coincide with how they are actually interpreted. Here the focus is on the boundaries these preliminary interpretations set, and parallel to this the gaps they leave for transgression and subversive attitudes.

As for the non-scholarly or semi-scientific reviews, the websites of both museum offer a selection of writing, with the significant difference that the Statue Park homepage integrates

some parts of these texts into its own "about" and "info" sections, while the House of Terror website has a rather counter-intuitive and well-hidden, yet really thorough and precise documentation of everything that has been written about the museum since its opening in 2002. This is why the Statue Park page has a necessarily selective and thematically arranged collection, while the House of Terror gives an almost unmanageable yet impartial, complete assembly. For this reason I limited my researches to the non-scholarly reviews offered by the two websites respectively, since these are the ones that are marked as important by the creators themselves, and therefore these are intended to contribute to the deliberate meaning production offered by the pages.

This offers a particularly interesting insight for two reasons. First, no previous literature dealing with either of the institutions has considered the inclusion of these sources. Second, interpretation is usually a solitary act: one is generally left alone with the object, site or text and formulates a reading that is enabled by the object itself, regardless of the intentions of the creators. However, in the case of institutionalized practices of remembering such as museums, there is a chance to contrast the intentions with the actually perceived phenomenon, which can be a fruitful approach in studying how the past is re-imagined in a specific (post-communist) context.

III.2. Spatial/aesthetic analysis

The spatial/aesthetic analysis functions as a link between the production and reception sides of the two memory projects, since it offers an insight to how the two museums function (or do not function) as active sites of memory production from a critical perspective. The two museums are examined in comparison to each other, including the basic underlying ideas of the two 'memory projects' along with the organization of the exhibitions and the structural arrangement of these two, entirely different spaces. How are the museum spaces organized

and what kind of aesthetic experience can be gained of them? How does it construct a coherent sense of the past? These are the main questions this section seeks to answer. The inventory and analytical tools of cultural studies are the guidelines of this part, regarding the two museums as cultural texts.

A special focus on the souvenir shops will also be introduced, since the commodification of cultural memory may also provide reflections on how the – not rarely humorous and ironic – objects as 'souvenirs' – aids of memory – construct various kinds of collective identities. This latter idea of also observing the souvenir shops seems particularly interesting, since the interrelation of the exhibitions and the souvenir shops received little academic attention. Besides, in this particular case the souvenir shops of the House of Terror and the Statue Park seem to approach the communist heritage in very similar ways – in spite of the entirely different memory representations of the two institutes.

III.3. Structured interviews: photo elicitation surveys

In order to get a preliminary image about the knowledge of the young generation about the communist age, I used surveys that were distributed among 38 adolescents (born between 1996-1998). I used exclusively teenagers a set of reasons. First, they do not have first hand experiences about the Kádár-era, therefore they provide the primary target public of the museums (as they define themselves as sites of education and knowledge transmission). Yet, I hoped that they still had some information about the era, since they were supposed to already have covered these topics in history/civilization/literature classes. This point is crucial in the sense that they should be familiar with the cultural context in which the museums are situated. Besides, this age group is typically open to the influences of popular culture which is unavoidable when one wishes to reflect upon the experience of the souvenir shops and the materiality of remembering.

For partly practical reasons, I had to reduce the breadth of the age group to 14-16 year-old respondents, a decision, which does not account for the possible variety of post-Kádár generation based on their age; yet it still offers a visible pattern that can be regarded as representative of these adolescents. I contacted two high school teachers, one from Debrecen and one from Budapest, who willingly gave me the chance to distribute the surveys during literature or history classes. Thus, 20 students from Debrecen and 18 from Budapest participated in the survey.

Since my primary aim was to see how much and what kind of information they had about the pre-1989 decades, the questionnaire consisted of three images and a set of related questions (see Appendix). Photo elicitation as a method, according to Douglas Harper (2002) one the one hand triggers memory and on the other helps respondents to define what a particular segment of culture means to them. Although this method has been only used to induce autobiographical interviews or to reflect on specific subcultures, I was convinced that it still has a great potential in revealing issues in connection with representations of collective memory. The images were designed in a way that they would cover a wide range of media, such as objects, specifically statues, iconic people and (in)famous photographs as well.

By using this method it became possible to see what kind of preliminary image is created in the adolescents about the past they had not lived in. Besides, a set of underlying assumptions has also been made visible; which I compared with the opinion of visitors after having visited the Statue Park or the House of Terror.

III.4. Semi-structured interviews

The aim of this fourth, final stage of research is to see the effects the two museums have on the youngest members of the remembering community; that is to see if the spatial dynamics of the House of Terror or the Statue Park managed to induce certain types of individual

experience and knowledge about these sites of cultural memory (in short, if the two museums are successful as memory projects). After contacting the extremely helpful staff of both the House of Terror and the Statue Park, they informed me when a new school group was to arrive, I joined them and tracked their reactions, observing how they (do or don't) get involved by the exhibitions and how they interact with the objects and statues. Afterwards I contacted their teachers, asking them to assist in my project and maybe to offer some benefits (bonus grades) for the students willing to participate in the research. This way I could conduct interviews with 7 teenage visitors from the Statue Park and 6 from the House of Terror. The interviews were 10-15 minutes long, primarily focusing on their favourite parts, any "message" they think the respective museum conveys and their personal opinions on the topic.

In addition, I talked to tourist guides leading tours in either the Statue Park or the House of Terror, who would still contribute to the meaning production part, and also managed to interview 2 older visitors (25-30 years old) in both of the museums, which allows for a more nuanced reconstruction of the memory projects as they are perceived by the young visitors.

Since it is crucial here to get comparable results, I chose the semi-structured interview form, which enabled me to work with a scheme that is applicable in the case of both museums, and also left enough space for individual points of view.

All the interviews were conducted from 12th to 21st April, 2012. The only interviewee who is a public figure was Ákos Réthly, general director of the Statue Park, and the guide from the House of Terror, A., did not want her name to be displayed here. As for the teenagers and the young adult visitors, their names will not appear here either, only as initials if needed.

All the interviews and surveys were conducted in Hungarian, thus I am going to use my translations exclusively. As opposed to this, the webpages and other primary materials often

have an English version apart from the Hungarian one. In these cases I have compared the official translations to the Hungarian texts, and only used my translation instead of the one provided at the site if there were remarkable meaning differences between the two.

IV. "THE VIKING HAT WITH A SAILOR LOGO" – GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ON COMMUNISM

Looking at the effectiveness of the House of Terror and the Statue Park as memory projects also sets the need to examine what kind of images are present about the state socialist period and how are these communicated to the generation who have no personal experiences about this era. In this chapter I shall present the results I got from the picture elicitation surveys that I made with 38 high school students. There were no significant differences in the students' responses based on their location, so I will analyze them jointly.

The first set of questions, related to an image of a Trabant – one of the most popular cars of the Kádár-era – aimed to induce personal memories and individual opinions about the car as an iconic object of the past age. While all the teenagers managed to tell the brand of the car and they also agreed on the possible colors it could have, their opinions were entirely different on the topic. 24 students answered that they did not like the car because it "looks old", it is "ugly" and "outdated". However, 14 others found that the design was really appealing exactly because it "looks old" and it is "retro". Although my respondents unanimously recognized that this car was old, they were not able to link it to any specific era and did not attribute any meaning to them, except for the occasional appearance of nostalgic memories. One of the teens for instance wrote that "I really like it because it is a kind little car and I have nice memories about it."

The second section concentrated on a then-USSR military hat and now fashion accessory, an ushanka with sickle and hammer on it. My primary aim here was to reveal how my respondents relate to such an object, and whether they still have any notions of it being a symbol of something other than the height of fashion. 21 out of the 38 were able to identify the name of the garment as ushanka, while the others had the most creative solutions ranging

from *"ruszkisapka"* (Russian hat) to "Viking hat with a sailor logo*"*, but they generally did realize that it had something to do with Russia. One of the students even asked me if I have special interest in the Russians, since, according to her, everything I showed them was "somehow Russian". However, it was only one respondent who pointed out – as an answer given to the question "Why is it interesting or extraordinary (if it is)?" that "originally the Russian soldiers wore it to protect them against the cold, and now young people made it fashionable again". For all the rest, they did not see the object as interesting or even peculiar for some reason, and merely saw that as a fashion accessory, while two of the teenagers also commented on how they liked the "design of the logo".

In the third and fourth section I used a set of questions about the statue of Stalin, and also some inquiries regarding the concept of communism. This part targeted the knowledge about the mid-fifties, looking at how education about the state socialist period – which, regarding their age, took place approximately a year ago – managed to create solid or at least more or less accurate knowledge. All but three of my respondents recognized Stalin's statue (the rest referring to Lenin, "an old man" and Hitler), yet it seems that they had absolutely no information about when and why the statue had to be torn down. Two of the teenagers were accurate in their guesses as 1956, while five more managed to guess a date at least in the fifties. However, the rest either did not provide dates or gave World War II as an answer. As for the reasons, apparently only one of the respondents had exact information, the others were reliant on common sense assumptions such as "because the people hated him" or "because he was a tyrant". Some however showed great confusion: apparently ten out of thirty-eight talked about Hitler in Stalin's stead, mentioning for instance that "when he realized that he was going to lose the war, he committed suicide and that's why they tore down the statue".

Definitions of communism provided an even richer ground for revealing how these adolescents perceive the past. A large majority (30 out of 38) confessed that they had already

heard the term, but "don't remember" what it is, apart from sporadically mentioning that it was "the previous regime". However, those who did attempt to provide a definition for the survey had a specific and well definable idea about what communism is. One student said that "communism is when you work yourself to death and you still remain poor", but apart from her, the rest agreed on the idea of communism. "It means one person's domination over the rest", while some of the others even identified it with a more precise denomination of the same phenomenon: "communism is dictatorship".

Therefore, data shows that the teenagers who do not have any kind of personal memory about the state socialist age only have a kind of vague knowledge that is more or less restricted to the visual heritage of the era. They apparently realize that the objects I have presented to them are regarded as interesting by many because of their age, yet they only tend to recycle this imagery in a way that is absolutely freed from any kind of ideological implication they might had. In short, they are aware of the dynamics of past and present that create these objects as consumables but in their use of them, as it was seen in the case of the ushanka, they overlook these aspects.

As for the concepts and the verbally explicit memory of communism, they show an interesting agreement with contemporary mainstream representations of the pre-1989 past. As they tend to identify the state socialist era with "tyranny" and a time when everything was bad, their interpretations are in accord with what official memory politics have to say about the age – for instance in the case of the House of Terror. Obviously it cannot be said that these teenagers are "traumatized" by the communist past, but it is still true that some of the discursive patterns of trauma already affected them. For the question "What do you think it was like to live in that age?" 29 of the students responded that they suppose it was bad – although they had no specific knowledge about the era.

It is interesting, though, that apropos of the Trabant, they also accounted for a kind of nostalgia that linked the well-known image to their childhood memories, but it remains in the field of individual nostalgia for the late 1990s and is by no means related to a kind of cultural nostalgia that would reflect on the 1970s or 1980s.

V. MAKING COMMUNISM

V.1. Practices of official memory and the commodification of heritage

If one accepts the presence of both a traumatic and a nostalgic kind of remembering in post-socialist Hungary, it might also be seen that considering the past regime as a source of traumatic experiences seeks to mark 1989 as a rupture in history, while the nostalgia of the older generation for their youth – and consequentially for the late Kádár-era – is related to a sense of continuity. Yet, there is already a new generation growing up without any kind of personal, first hand experience of the previous era (one can count here those who were born from the late 80s). Obviously, one of the major responsibilities of the post-1989 Hungarian governments is to present a coherent image of the past targeted on this very age group. Their understanding of the recent Hungarian history would enhance their participation as Hungarian citizens, while also integrating them to a remembering community that provides the foundations of a modern nation unburdened by any harmful heritage of the past. The basic tension generated by the mission of knowledge (and opinion) transmission is that it is primarily linked to the presence of very specific objects – material remnants of the state socialist period. Given the limited quantity and semantically unstable nature of these objects, it is just natural that both the trauma and the nostalgia approaches are linked to more or less the same material heritage.

Therefore, what are the consequences of such memory projects which are closely based on their material foundations in understanding post-socialist memory and memorial practices in Hungary? It may be claimed that it is a conscious political strategy of remembering and making remember, which is focused on a set of various images of the past that are to be evoked by these approaches. Here it is primarily two museums, the House of Terror and the

Statue Park that can be mentioned, which try to establish certain remembering practices in a net burdened by often contradictory meaning attributions.

In this chapter I shall concentrate on the Statue Park and the House of Terror as exemplary sites of memory production, inscribing a whole range of different memorial practices upon material remnants of the previous era. For analytical reasons, I have separated the intention and interpretation sides of these two memory projects. This division obviously overlooks the temporally parallel and mutually reflexive nature of production and reception processes, yet it would allow for a clearer view in terms of the direction of the gaze while it can also point out the possible points of subversion.

V.2. The mediality of primary sources

As for the sources that reveal the intentions of the creators I used exclusively the ones that are available for anyone; that is, the ones that were intended to be read by the visitors. The mediality of these interpretational crutches is of crucial importance here, since it enables radically different strategies of reception in the two museums. In the case of the Statue Park, although a tourists' guidebook is available on the spot, it costs just as much money that it prevents Hungarian visitors from buying it. As a result, they are either left alone without any kind of interpretational aid, or can access the whole book in PDF format through the website of the park – along with a set of additional information about the concept, the history, the structure and the symbolism of the space. All this would offer a clearly articulated version of the original aims of the Statue Park as a memory project, but it functions in a different temporality – either before, or rather after the visit to the park. Therefore, it allows the visitors to formulate their own autonomous interpretations – which are often oblivious to the cultural-historical context the website offers, while the intentionality behind the museum space is only

revealed as a result of online research. This approach corresponds to the explicit aims of the Statue Park to present the state socialist period in an unbiased way.

As opposed to this, the House of Terror distributes information in an entirely different way. While the homepage is also fully featured here, it is rather a collection of interactive elements – like virtual tour in the museum, sending e-cards, etc. According to Zsolt K. Horváth, it also gave chance to add victims or perpetrators by uploading their name and photo if available. I have not found such options, but it is possible that the feature has been removed in the last few years. The data offered by the website is comprehensive, including every press reference, pictures, practical information, and even makes it possible to download the official music of the museum. However, parallel to this, bilingual (Hungarian and English) information sheets are distributed at the exhibition as well (in the form of mini essays on the topic of the rooms, approximately 25 pages altogether)[1]. Even if the visitors did not read these sheets, the core concepts, important quotations are written on the walls as well (both in English and Hungarian), so there is actually no chance for a visitor to unintentionally miss the "interpretational crutches" offered by the creators. In this sense the information that is presented at the website has an supplementary value: the exhibition can be perfectly understood (even if in limited ways) if one does not check the page, yet the information that is found on the website gives a set of additions that are on the one hand dependent on the actual exhibition, while on the other can modify, "overwrite" those sources.

V.3. A historical overview

One major type of knowledge that is to be gained of these supplementary sources is the history of the museum itself in both cases. This section has no intention of reconstructing the actual sequence of events that lead to the foundation of either of the sites, but it rather focuses

[1] A list of them with the abbreviations I use to refer to each can be found in Appendix 2.

on the way these processes are represented on the websites – that is, I am only dealing with the publicly available self-imagery here.

V.3.1. "The absence of book-burning"

After 1989 there was a growing public demand to make the "peaceful transition" of the system change visible – or rather invisible. The statues from the public spaces of Budapest were removed, and the inevitable question about the further fate of these objects was also raised. According to the website, the idea of destruction was quickly dismissed, since it would have contradicted the expectations of a "new Hungarian democracy" and "civilization", and therefore alternative solutions were needed. The municipality of the 22nd district offered the present territory of the Statue Park in order to have the creations "of documentary value" relocated.

However, an immense social debate emerged right after the decision. It can be argued that the debate goes back to a fundamental controversy that has been following aesthetics since its origins, since the selection of statues was guided by the opposing ideas of "artistic value" and "political function". Ákos Eleőd, the designer architect of the Statue Park writes about this issue in his 1991 tender: "eventually we would decide on the fate of artistic pieces based on political ideologies. At this point the subtle dignity of art should present itself: to find and accept the responsibility, which, in this case, leads on a thin ethical path. […] It is a joy to participate in the absence of book burning" (Memento Park, n.d.). Therefore, two contradictory issues were considered in the selection of the statues: on the one hand it was the artistic value that would make a statue worthy of preservation, while on the other hand it were the memories attached to these objects that made them synecdochical referents of the socialist age.

The second crucial question featuring in this debate was the function of the Statue Park: in other words, what kind of memorial practices are activated and legitimized by the park. A

lecture by Miklós Sulyok – also quoted by the Statue Park homepage – denotes the primary function of the Statue Park as it follows: "so that the next generations may never forget that there was a dictatorial regime, which rewrote and forged history, this way ensuring its power over its subjects. We are not going to be subjects again until our history, along with all its shame, remains ours. Memento Park is a warning to sobriety" (Memento Park, n.d.). It seems that the duty of remembering has been dominant in the discourses of the Statue Park from the beginnings.

V.3.2. "The past must be confessed"

The very same moral imperative appears in the discourse of the House of Terror as well; yet while the Statue Park offers it as one of the possible conclusions of the museum (among a number of other ones), the House of Terror chose Attila József Hungarian poet's already mentioned line as a motto: "A múltat be kell vallani" (The past must be confessed), which, strangely enough, is also used as a motto for the Memorial Day of the Victims of Communism. This coincidence leaves no doubts about the exact nature of the past that must be confessed, since, although the House of Terror is allegedly a memento of both the white and the red terrors suffered by the citizens of Hungary, partly due to the different temporal dimensions it is inevitably the communist terror that is emphasized at the exhibition.

The self-narration of the House of Terror that is found at the website also allows for such interpretations. While the self-described birth of the Statue Park emphasizes its organically embedded nature into the process of the system change and its immediate aftermath, there is a temporal gap in the House of Terror narrative. Although the English introduction of the website only mentions the need to "erect a fitting memorial to the victims and at the same time to present a picture of what life was like for Hungarians in those times", the Hungarian variant is more specific about "those times": "Forty-six years had to pass for 60, Andrássy Street, this neo-renaissance building to truly resurrect. The authorities, who were defending

the communist state at the cost of the sufferings and violent death of many, only left the palace in 1956" (Terror Háza 2012). After a sudden, half a century's shift in the narration, one of the next sentences (in both the English and the Hungarian version) is that "Opened on February 24th, 2002 at 5 pm, the House of Terror Museum – the only one of its kind is a monument to the memory of those held captive, tortured and killed in this building" (Terror Háza 2012).

This difference in the temporal frames the two museums seek to evoke is of crucial importance here, since both sites define themselves as complex "memorials", assembled of objects that would be triggers of memory on their own as well. However, the scope of remembering – at least according to the two self-descriptions – is diverse. It is often, maybe too often said, that the significance of memorials and monuments is not that they evoke something about a certain past, but that they also reflect on the present. However, this is especially true in the case of the Statue Park. "In 1989-90 … before the system change it was dictatorship, after it, already democracy. There must have been a single instance between the two… where dictatorship dissolved and Democracy was born. The […] Statue Park is a memento of this moment" (Memento Park n.d.). Therefore, by representing a broadly understood "past", the park manages to remember a just as roughly meant "present".

In contrast, the House of Terror works with a clear and visible temporal distinction of past and present. What is more, in the following I will argue that one of the primary stakes of the House of Terror is to create an unbridgeable abyss between the past that is labeled as "communist" or "oppressive" and the present, which, including the more than twenty years that passed after the system change, stands for democracy and tolerance. One of the free leaflets that are distributed at the sire also underlines such readings: "With its transformation, the 'House of Terror' is no longer simply a building. 60 Andrássy Boulevard has become a sculpture in the shape of a building, which is a monument to the victims".

V.4.Tyranny

The clearly different nature of the temporal frames offered by the two museums respectively might be one of the reasons why Ákos Réthly, creative manager of the Statue Park, when learning about my thesis plans, mentioned the following difference between the two memory projects: "This one [the Statue Park] is a memorial of the system change. That one there is a museum and a research institute, while this one can be seen as a piece of art." One might also add that the two sites *do not remember the same pasts*. Regarding the difference of the pasts evoked, the concept of "tyranny" and the way the two sites seek to approach this question has a decisive role. In this section I am going to demonstrate how each of the museums use "tyranny", "oppression", "dictatorship" and "terror" as interpretational frames for their exhibitions.

V.4.1. "One Sentence on Tyranny"

As the visitors wish to enter the actual territory of the Statue Park, they find their way blocked by a large and rusty iron door, the main entrance of the park, with Gyula Illyés's poem, *One Sentence on Tyranny* carved into it, exclusively in Hungarian.[2] The way it is displayed in the context of the Statue Park can be regarded as a mise-en-abyme of the interplay between presence and meaning effects, while parallel to that, it also points out the fundamental ambiguity between the trauma and nostalgia approaches of the near past, which is being displayed by the very existence of the Statue Park. The museum has a confusing multiplicity of denominations – not only regarding the names of certain segments within the park. The whole concept is called Memento Park, of which only two parts, the Statue Park (aka. One

[2] The poem is one of the best-known literary pieces in Hungary because – as it was written in 1956, after 1989 it has become a symbolic text clearly representing communist „tyranny". Besides, its language – while musical and inspired – is clearly understandable and straightforward, not leaving space for much guessing about its content.

Sentence on Tyranny Park) and the mentioned Witness Square have been realized.[3] However, the alternative denomination of the Statue Park raises just as many questions as it answers.

The materiality of the text, besides the interpretational frame it provides for understanding the Statue Park as a whole, also assigns new dimensions of meaning to the original text: the mutuality produced by the common context obviously influences the strategies of reading as well. The self as it is presented in the poem not only associates tyranny with a set of activities and behavioral patterns, but also describes it as a universal omnipresent feeling that is always already there in the everyday routine of the people. "Dohányod zamatába,/ ruháid anyagába/ Beivódik, evődik /Velődig" (It penetrates into the flavor of your tobacco, the fabric of your clothes, to your marrow)[4], and here tyranny defines not only deeds but thoughts as well: "Töprengenél, de eszmét/ Tőle fogan csak az elméd" (You would wonder, but your mind is only fertilized by it). The fundamental concept of the Statue Park is that the exhibited statues stand for the "megalomania" of the past system and were supposed to reinforce power on a symbolic level – which may induce new horizons of reading here. The poem's image of the omnipresent tyranny and the presentation of the prominent socialist realist pieces seem to form a dialogue, which underlines the intentional concept that the statues must be regarded as means of oppression. From this aspect certain lines of the poem might be exceptionally illuminating in nature, since the relationship between art and social milieu – which is one of the focal points of the poem – is obviously not something to be dismissed concerning the Statue Park either. Throughout the poem tyranny penetrates deeper and deeper, from individual relationships towards the general perception of the world: "Mert szépnek csak azt

[3] Ákos Réthly noted that the term Memento Park would suggest a „theme park" that can offer various ways of entertainment for the whole family for a whole day. He resisted this denomination until 2006, when the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution enabled them to complete some of the planned project sin addition to the statue park.

[4] Although there are more than one English translations of the poem, it was necessary to provide a more faithful, yet less artistic interpretation since the exact meaning of the original poem is not transmitted in either of them.

véled/ mi egyszer már övé lett" (For you only take as beautiful the things that has already been his) and then later: "néznél, de csak azt látod/amit ő eléd varázsolt" (You would look but only see what he has conjured to you), that is, the experience of the senses becomes legible exclusively through the filter of tyranny, and thus the possibilities of artistic reflection are also to be imagined within the frame of oppression.

However, the fact that these lines are read just in front of the Statue Park provides an ironic position in reading the monuments. The already quoted lines of "You would look but only see what he has conjured to you" can also reflect on the necessarily selective nature of a curator's work. The visitor can see works here, the value of which is not necessarily artistic, but can be regarded as "documents of an age", so they become relevant through the filter of "tyranny". The final lines of the text – "Mert ott áll/eleve sírodnál/ ő mondja meg, ki voltál/ porod is neki szolgál" (For he stands by your grave, he defines who you were, your ashes still serve him) also evoke completely different methods of meaning inscription in the radically new milieu of the Statue Park. If one considers the peculiar nature of socialist realist statues – that of being closed into their own materiality, deprived of their original signified they become their own parodies, the relationship becomes visible. Based on Illyés's text the oppressive power owns the soul and body of its subjects, and as such it is able to provide retrospective definitions of the people serving them.

If one considers the Bourdieusian definition of symbolic power as something that is invisible and inscribed into bodily practices, as something that is totally indirect, it seems that Illyés's poem is a straightforward illustration of the same topic, hinting at the fact that the statues of the communist era can be regarded as means of the symbolic power used by the previous regime. This approach to the statues – in spite of all the attempts to place them within a supposedly elevated and neutral site of collective memory – deprives the artistic objects of their status both as individual works and as pieces of art. Their only function within this frame

would be to illustrate how the Rákosi- and Kádár-system managed to smuggle ideology into the everyday life of people, how they were "brainwashed" by getting used to the sight of these works during their everyday routine, how they started to take the governing power – along with the presence of the statues – as natural and taken for granted.

Regarding the Statue Park's financial situation as one owned by the Hungarian state yet run by a private firm, it can be seen as a semi-official memory site. Therefore, it can also be claimed that one of its primary functions is to legitimate the position of the current governments by drawing a sharp dividing line between the Rákosi- and Kádár-regimes on the one hand as dictatorships that attempted to penetrate even to the everyday life of the people and the post-1989 governments on the other, who are inevitably depicted within this frame as enlightened, democratic and allowing for multiple perspectives. Now we have arrived to the idea of a political meta-discourse on symbolic power, itself being a successful means of producing symbolic domination again. Despite the declared attempt to encourage the dignity and multiplicity of remembering, it is still one sole approach to the past (and a clearly defined one) that is enabled within the space of the Statue Park. One of the things this interpretative practice (from the part of the curators and creators of the museum) leaves out of the picture is the possibility of personal attachment/affiliation towards these cultural objects (which are deprived of their status as such by getting into the Statue Park).

However, if one considers the mutual influence of statues and poem, two seemingly negligible yet crucial observations must be made. First, the positioning of the poem seems to offer a condensed example of the way how the "traumatic" and "nostalgic" demeanors are related to each other. As it was already mentioned, the verses are inscribed into an enormous iron door, supposedly the main entrance of the park. Yet, these doors are always closed by design, and it is only through a tiny sideway that one can enter the museum. As Ákos Réthly explained it during the guided tour, "you know that proverb that there is a side-door next to all large gates,

which means that if you cannot do something in the official way, we should try to find some other solution." This observation can be seen as a condensed version of what the Statue Park stands for. The way the museum offers an "alternative" approach for remembering the past while still preserving the more prevalent, "past perceived as tyrannical and traumatic" interpretation: the main door that is always closed. Therefore, this spatial arrangement might be interpreted in a way that the framing of the Statue Park as a collection of objects that were used to provide an all-pervading sense of invisible oppression is avoided by a tiny sideway of more inclusive memorial practices, which would also enable less trauma-centered approaches of remembering the communist past.

Besides, due to the corroding effects of the weather, certain parts of the text have become illegible, which might be understood as the dual game of inscribing and taking away meanings. On the one hand there is a gesture of guiding the visitors' frame of understanding evoked by the position of the text, while on the other hand the owners of the museum let the rust eat the letters of the poem, making it impossible to assign one single meaning to the park. The visitors have become unable tor read the text and they are once more on their own with the statues.

This impression of the visitor having been left alone in the process of interpretation illuminates the controversy that is present in both the production and the reception side of the park. Within the space of the park, the expected, "dignified" paradigm of remembering (which is related to the reconciliation with the past and as such offers a traumatic kind of memory) and the attempts to re-live the experience (related to the nostalgic approach and which would bring real financial benefits) although with different emphases, are equally present in the concept of the Statue Park. However, there is an obvious tension between the idea of dignified remembering and preventing future tragedies as declared aims of the Statue Park as opposed to the way visitors relate to the statues. Yet, it is not a dichotomy that can be

placed along the line of intentions versus reception. *It is rather a controversy that is induced by the production side solely,* since the visitors are limited in their available actions by the interpretational frames the museums offer.

Even the website commences its self-promotion with the following, tempting phrases: "HERE ARE THE REMOVED COMMIE STATUES!" (Memento Park n.d.). On the one hand the term "removed" suggests the associations of hidden, scandalous and forbidden, while on the other the term "commie", pejorative "slang" form of "communist" cannot be related to the idea of dignified remembering at all.

V.4.2. "Gigantic Ghosts"

Regarding the visitors' experience, one of the strongest tendency with both Hungarian and foreign visitors is to make photos of the tourists and statues together – often imitating their poses. Thus, the Statue Park seems to provide a carefree experience where visitors can actually touch the statues. In their original location this possibility was obviously not available since the statues were either too high or fenced. However, this behavior cannot be simply explained by a kind of disrespect towards the past. As one the visitors mentioned it, while climbing on the shoulders of Béla Kun's statue: "If they didn't want us to climb them, they would be fenced." And indeed, the spatial arrangement of the Statue Park not only allows for, but also stimulates such approaches, since the spatial position of the statues makes those segments visible that were not to be seen in their original locations, and as such, subverts the heroic image communicated by the statues. Furthermore, it also means the radical revaluation of scales, since the perspective moves from a distant one towards a closer look. All this is suited to the explicit intentions of the makers to display the megalomania of the past regime. The opening scenes of the website use the following expression to describe this phenomenon: "Gigantic statues and ghosts of communist dictatorship".

An emblematic example of this process is the monument of the Republic of Councils, which was made after the well known poster of the 1910s saying "Fegyverbe!" (To Arms!) The statue, which was originally located at Városliget, and was called either the "Running Fool" or the "Mad Cloakroom Attendant" in urban folklore, failed to provide a three dimensional adaptation of the poster and remained flat – only makes sense if it is watched from a specific perspective. While in its original location it was relatively easy to guide the visitors' glances towards the proper angle[5], it seems to be a lot more difficult in the case of the Statue Park, and on the other hand there is apparently no need to do so.

Therefore, it is central for the whole concept of the Statue Park to present the "commie statues" as objects above the human scale, which is also underlined by their spatial arrangement of the museum. The stake of this seemingly simplistic idea may be "gigantic" in the interpretation of the Statue Park exhibition. The depiction of the statues as monstrous opened the way to interpret them as the manifestations of megalomania. As such, the magnitude of the statues supports the idea of Illyés that tyranny penetrates every possible layers of the society. In this sense Eleőd and the other people working on the Statue Park did an excellent job inasmuch as they successfully repositioned the statues, ironically emphasizing their grandiosity for their own legitimization.

V.4.3. "Terror overshadowed daily life"

While the Statue Park seeks to establish its legitimacy through the depiction of certain statues as gigantic and as a result, as means of symbolic oppression, the House of Terror applies an entirely different strategy along with the similar framing of pop cultural products as tools for invisible violence. Since the idea of "terror" is admittedly the leitmotif of the exhibition, it is basically just an additional part of the museum's credo to show what it was like to live during "that age". As a result, there are only two rooms that are dealing with not directly terror-

[5] Although at Városliget the statue's obvious deficiencies were not visible because of its position, Ákos Réthly mentioned that „it still looked like a giant running out of the woods."

related issues: the "Propaganda" and the "Everyday life" rooms. Parallel to this, these are the only spaces where the music is significantly different from the rest: while all the other rooms feature gloomy and mystical tunes, these ones evoke the mood of the dynamic, inspiring communist songs. Therefore, the colorful posters of happy people illustrated with the cheerful music of state socialist times, for the first glance at least, does not create the impression of some kind of "terror" taking place. However, if one takes a look at the website (these rooms lack the printed info sheets), it becomes apparent how these "seemingly innocent" images of workers are also presented as means of terror. Yet, there are significant differences in the English and Hungarian interpretations of the same sites. As for the "Propaganda" room, the English version leaves it without reflection while the Hungarian one offers a brief, yet all the more telling explanation: "This room shows the age's absurd and ridiculous methods and documents of propaganda" (Terror Háza 2012), while leaving the exact source of their ridiculous nature unexplained. As opposed to this, the description – both in English and Hungarian – of the "Everyday life" room is one of the richest ones thorough the whole online exhibition guide. After an overview of the political situation in the 50s, the Hungarian version falls silent, while the English variant moves on to talk about the training of Little Drummers and Pioneers (as compulsory means of ideological education), the daily newspapers trying to influence what people think and closes the summary with the following phrases: "Everyone learned how to whisper since they feared being overheard or bugged. Terror overshadowed daily life" (Terror Háza 2012). A telling spatial solution of the room is that although all the posters are indeed very colorful and eye-catching, even the windows are covered with them, leaving no view towards the outside. The opportunity of "quick allegoresis" (de Man 1979) just offers itself on a silver tray; it would be almost too easy to demonstrate how the false vision of the communist ideology hid everything else from the world.

V.4.4. Making terror tangible

However, this reinterpretation and re-framing of everyday objects and visuals is just one method the House of Terror applies in order to create a coherent picture of the age. There are two other strategies that are to be considered here: rhetorically formulating statements about the oppressions of Hungary and making terror tangible. Both of these aspects can be regarded as explicit purposes of the exhibition, but while the conceptualization of terror is rather related to the written sources, the tangibility is obviously linked to the instances that are left without interpretational guidelines.

This latter claim on making terror tangible is more related to the affective impact the museum seeks to have than the knowledge it allegedly wishes to transmit. It is primarily the basement and the elevator taking there that belong to this category. If imagined in the broader context of the exhibition, these elements form the very end of the tour, which can also enhance their emotional impact. It is also interesting here that while almost all the other rooms of the exhibition included the descriptive information sheets, these written sources seem to rarefy in the basement spaces. No words are needed here, what is offered instead is "the sense of an age", an age, the temporal boundaries of which are loose and the representation unilateral. Based on the – interactive and printed map – of the exhibition, the following rooms belong here: Elevator, Reconstructed Prison Cells, Hall of Tears, Farewell and the Perpetrators' Gallery. With the lack of interpretative crutches it is the music, the lights and other hi-tech tools of remembering that should trigger the visitors' reaction, obviously more on an emotional than a rational scale. For the first glance it would mean the pure use of the Gumbrechtian presence effects without any meaning effects, the experience of being there as a vehicle to convey the essence of terror. However, regarding the whole context the interpretation is once again ready-made, even without the need of any further written aids.

From the first floor there is an elevator taking the visitor down to the basement. As it is described on the website (this time exclusively in Hungarian), "the lift slowly descends to hell

on earth, giving time for 'trans-substantiation' and reception. During the descent, a neutral person tells in a neutral voice about the method of the execution, in its own terrible simplicity. Time ceases to exist; it is only the black space that remains. Arriving at the basement, everyone is muted, it is impossible to ask, say, verbally illuminate anything here" (Terror Háza 2012).

Thus, the elevator primarily triggers feelings of claustrophobia and panic. It can host approximately 20 visitors, who, crammed against each other, having no chance to leave as they wish, are forced to watch the testimony. The ride is just long enough for one to notice the darkness, the intimidating nature of the space and the smell of other human bodies, to "live through" the terror as first hand experience.

What is crucial here, though, is that these elements of the exhibition do not only aim to provoke emotional answers, but they also count for the bodily responses as well: a feeling of discomfort, panic, even claustrophobia or nausea is included in the experience. These bodily responses are associated with not only the elevator, but also the cells where political prisoners were held. The main idea here is to create a sense of empathy with the victims and thus to enhance a kind of continuity as well.

After this vivid illustration of "terror", the visitors find themselves in the most affective, "meant for effects" spaces of the whole exhibition: The Hall of Tears and the Perpetrators' Gallery. The first one is a dark room with low ceiling, only illuminated by the tiny lights that are situated on fragile black crosses. Although there are no written explanatory pieces about this place either on the spot or on the webpage, the imagery is easily and universally decodable. The crosses and the lights almost instantly evoke reminiscences of the Christian tradition of mourning, applying a clear system of symbols, so that the visitor would immediately know that the space is designed for silent grief for those who were lost.

The basement section, through the emotional and physical answers it seeks to induce in the visitors, shows a variation in the exact scope of the exhibition. The experience of the prison and the Hall of Tears is only related to the idea of fascist and communist terror due to the context, and as such, they touch upon such "anthropological universals" as fear, despair and grief. However, the very final room of the exhibition leading to the staircase and the exit is the Gallery of Perpetrators, which allows the visitor to link the universal emotions to a specific historical era and a specific place; Hungary in the 20th century.

This oscillation enables the young visitors to identify with the collective position of the victim, which also integrates them into the officially acknowledged remembering community of the Hungarian nation. Hence the House of Terror's accentuated function in memory making – as a touristic and educational institution.

V.5. A lesson to be taught

V.5.1. "Closing the door on a century"

Apart from the emotional-affective appeal of the House of Terror, its other important task is to convey some kind of knowledge, that is, clearly defined interpretations of the past. This latter process is a highly guided process here with a body of rich written material that is offered to the viewer. Unlike the Statue Park, where the visitors – if they do not pay for guidelines (in the form of a book or a tourist guide) – are basically left alone with the statues, in the case of the House of Terror one might even talk about the excess of interpretation. This data is aimed at a specific presentation of "the age", and while in most cases these pieces seek to refrain themselves to objectively providing the facts, a number of underlying claims still become visible from the texts. These statements, "messages" have crucial importance in the legitimation of post-communist trauma-centered memorial practices just as well as for the House of Terror as an institute as well.

The first and most salient feature of the printed info sheets is that they consistently picture the "terror" and its manifestations – such as occupation, deportation, secret agency, etc. – as something that Hungarians had nothing to do with, as something that was without exception imposed from the outside. This process of externalization also appears on the level of grammatical structures and word choices. A prevalent use of passive forms is characteristic of the info sheets, even in Hungarian, where it is most unusual to apply these kinds of solutions. While there are no perpetrators named in these sentences (in the Hungarian versions they are only referred to in third person plural which would imply an indefinite subject), the victim is almost without exception Hungary or the Hungarian people who are depicted here as silent and inert by-standers of their own history. "Hungary was plunged into a hopeless economic situation", and then "the country became the theatre of war in the clash between the two Super Powers" (THI5) – the leaflets describe the double occupation after World War II. As the sheets move on to the Changing clothes section, it goes on to write that "the video clip depicts how an entire society was forced to 'turn coat', i.e. switch allies." (THI3) Many more examples could be brought to illustrate this point, all of them indicating the very same underlying idea that *Hungarians did not participate in the establishment of either of the terrors*, they were only passive bearers, or according to the discourse offered by the info sheets, heroic resisters: "in all parts of the country, in each generation, every social stratum, resistance was rife" (THI14).

However, when there was undeniable proof of Hungarians being part of the "terror machine", the House of Terror information sheets offer an effective strategy for dealing with it: naming them. This process results in a complete but symbolic separation of the perpetrators and a supposedly guilt-free now purified body of Hungarian nation. The best example of this process is the "Perpetrators' Gallery". Here, a whole wall is dedicated to the ones who "either

took part in such crimes, or gave orders for their implementation, or sanctioned such decisions, or supported them as instigators" (Terror Háza 2012).

This approach is very much alike to what Aleida Assmann (2006) coins as "victim-memory", which is differentiated from the "loser" inasmuch as the victim is a passive target of violence, and the term obviously implies a sense of power asymmetry (Pabis 2008). According to Assmann, the most characteristic feature of this kind of memorial practice is that since the whole community is imagined as victims of a power external to them, memory politics offer an unambiguous image of the past, where no counter-opinions are appreciated or even accepted. It is also important to notice Assmann's side remark here, that while in Western Europe these interpretations are being questioned and subverted, Eastern Europe is still witness to the resurrection of the national grand narratives emphasizing collective victimhood (2006, 218). While such a geographical distinction obviously overlooks local differences – such as the case of the Statue Park, which is an exception from this scheme – it is visible that the official memory-discourses of many post-socialist nation states tend to operate within this framework.

A second conclusion to emerge from the discursive patterns of the visitors' information sheets is that there is a visible – or in this case rather invisible – temporal gap in the representation of the communist era: while the 40-50s and early sixties are continuously mentioned in the material, no reference is made to the seventies and eighties. A frequent rhetorical strategy offered by the information leaflets is to present a kind of "communist continuity", where the starting point and peak is historically given and is located in the 1950s. The narrative stops here, adding nothing about the quarter of a decade that followed, and offers a post-1989 date as a point of reconciliation and relief. Although many examples could be brought for the ubiquitous use of this rhetorical strategy, here I shall only present the most typical one. The narrative of the 1956 revolution, as it is presented on the sheets, ranges from 1953, the death

of Stalin to 1958, execution of Imre Nagy, and then, with a peculiar temporal solution, it establishes direct continuity with the post-socialist political environment. "In October 1956, the Hungarian people proved to themselves and the world that there are no small nations, only helpless ones. […] With their courage and self-sacrifice, the Hungarian freedom fighters inflicted a mortal wound on the great Soviet empire" (THI7). Strangely enough, it took this mortal wound 33 years to have the Soviets removed from Hungary.

The handling of the temporal dimension in such manner may be due to the clash of communicative and cultural memory that is currently in progress concerning the 1970s and 80s. A large percentage of the Hungarian population have lived through those times, and as such, has personal experiences about them, which is not necessarily that of terror. Rather, the older generations tend to relate with nostalgia to the time of their youth, when life was allegedly easier, and at least from a retrospective horizon it seems that the financial situation of the individual was more assured than it is today. The stereotypical image of the dictatorial leader treating his subjects as children apparently worked in Hungary, and had positive side-effects as well: in return for the limited access to the public sphere, the state provided much more material benefits than it does today. Therefore, positive feelings towards one's childhood and youth in this case coincide with partly positive emotions towards a past system. Obviously, this perspective is not one that is to be represented in the House of Terror – since the main scope of the exhibition is the terror and injustice suffered by the people of Hungary, there is no place for affective feelings towards this past, it is not a House of Nostalgia, after all.

As a result, the House of Terror presents a homogenized image of the state socialist period, picturing the whole era under the umbrella term of "communism", taking no account of the internal differences of the age, just as the acknowledged shift from the hard dictatorship of the 1950s to the soft dictatorship of the 1970s and 80s. This practice of homogenization is

achieved by the above mentioned "temporal gap"-strategy, which allows for the depiction of the whole era – that is, from 1945 to 1989 – using the imagery of its harshest, 1945-1959 period.

This approach also contributes to a complete separation between the past – that is, the state socialist era – and the present (which would mean the time from 1989 on), at least on the level of discourses and imagery. It is well illustrated by Viktor Orbán's speech at the opening ceremony of the House of Terror, which is on display at the Farewell Room, along with his 1989 "system changing" speech on an infinite tape.

> "We closed the museum door on the long, pompous and awful twentieth century at the last moment. At the last moment, because it threatened to continue as before […] Now, we are putting the pain, the hatred behind the bars, because we want them to have no longer any place in our lives and in the future. We put them behind bars, but we will never forget them. The wall of the house that, until now, was the boundary between the interior and the street, from now will become the wall between the past and the future. What is inside belongs to the past and we shall become part of the future." (Quoted in K. Horváth 2008)

Closing the past here on the one hand implies that the historical continuity, the inevitable causality of the events have been broken, while on the other it also allows to regard the museum as an oversized memento of what should not be repeated. The (then and now) prime minister's extensive use of pronouns also underlines such interpretations. "We", as the coherent whole of the post-communist Hungarian nation is not only contrasted to our past selves or the state socialist past as such, but it is also juxtaposed to a certain "they". This idea is exceptionally prevalent in contemporary Hungarian political discourse, and can be also

linked to Aleida Assmann's already mention notion of victim-memory. "We" here marks a community that is already cleansed from perpetrators; it depicts itself as a group of innocent sufferers.

V.4.2. The dignity of nostalgia

As for the Statue Park, while it also displays features of cultural trauma, it also allows for nostalgia at the same time. Examples of the nostalgic type of memory may be seen in the irony of the souvenir shop or the anecdotic remarks of the guide – to which we shall get back later. Instances illustrating the "traumatic" type of remembering practices – along with their close association with the idea of dealing with the past "with dignity", which seems to be prevalent in the discourse around the park – are not to be found in the actual experience of the museum, but rather in a larger frame of discursive practices associated with the park.

As for the idea of "dignified remembering" or "handling the past with respect", it is not rare that even scientific papers dealing with the issue emphasize the presence of a "dignified past" and the imperative of remembering. Beverly James for instance, who, with her 1999 article was one of the first ones to analyze the park, compares it with Western museums building on the presupposition that the commodification of heritage, which is so frequent in the West is not a characteristic feature in Hungary, where there is still "a deep respect for the past" (James 1999: 305). James's insight, however, fails to acknowledge that the intentions of the creators and experiences of the visitors do not necessarily coincide. Furthermore, it is also very probable that the Statue Park appeared as a site of dignified remembering a decade ago, ever since, however, it is another kind of interpretation partly based on the commercialization of the Statue Park that has become dominant.

The differences of the primary credo of the Statue Park and the practical utilization of the space becomes apparent even by a close examination of the museum's website, since the part dealing with the concept of the park lays particular emphasis on the idea of "handling the past

with dignity and respect". Ákos Schellner for instance, the chief architect of Budapest at that time said the followings about Eleőd's plans: "The statue park is a really sensitive, complex topic of historical importance, the architectural interpretation of which was a creative task with high responsibility. One of the primary merits of the 'One Sentence on Tyranny'-park is the *dignity of handling this topic*, that it did not sacrifice the importance of the idea for the ever-shifting power structure of current politics" (Memento Park, n.d.). At another instance the webpage quotes Szilárd Sasvári, the cultural referent of the Parliament: "The Memento Park is both *worthy and suitable* for the task to raise the attention of the world both in its architectural form and in its content. […] The Memento Park is suitable for hosting *respectable* cultural programs (e.g. international conferences, musical concerts, films, stage performances" (Memento Park, n.d.). Many examples emphasizing the "dignified" nature of the Statue Park may be found on the webpage, as if the central organizing principle of the space would be an elegant, elevated handling of the past.

However, if the curious visitor browses a little further, they might easily get to the conclusion that on the level of practical realization it is not merely a "dignified" kind of remembering that can be observed. The site offers a whole range of organized tours and activities for smaller groups, the most interesting of which is the event named "DictaTour". According to the description provided on the page, it goes like this: "Get into the old, small and smelling vehicle and get familiar with the mysteries of Hungary's communist history down in the former bunker and up on the Stalin's grandstand. Drive along the architectural heritage of the so called 'Socialist realism' and gain the most experience about the era's gastronomy and hospitality in a restaurant run since the early '70ies" (Memento Park, n.d.). Such services make it possible to interactively re-live the past and establish a dynamic relation between the iconic objects of the past and the visitors of the present, and as such, it cannot be fitted into the idea of "dignified past" by any means.

What happens here is, instead of a kind of knowledge transmission, a presentation of a specific zeitgeist. Here the transmission of this mood is enacted through presenting various iconic, easily recognizable objects of the Kádár-age within the same context. This way the program is based on an implicit contract of interpretation, where the participant temporarily suspends his present and accepts both the Statue Park and the related trip as heterotopias. Michel Foucault argues that one of the distinctive features of heterotopias is their quality to offer a different temporal frame. "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 1986: 26). Thus, time functions in a different way in heterotopies, and it is able to create the illusion that the percipient is living in a different time from what he got used to in his everyday experience. So, if a visitor going to the Statue Park temporarily accepts the "time out of joint" induced by the heterochronic nature of the park, s/he will have the chance to "live through" the socialist age – or at least its most typical representation.

Beverly James's threefold typology might be of importance regarding the uses and readings of the past. She argues that memorial monuments are able to fill in their function of remembering in three ways, and based on these approaches she distinguishes between traditional, modern and post-modern monuments. Within this frame a traditional monument celebrates national heroes or certain values, aiming to make people do similarly heroic deeds. Modern monuments stand as warnings so that history will not be able to repeat itself. The third type, the postmodern monument demands engagement and gives space to multiple parallel readings.

James argues that the Statue Park inevitably belongs to this latter, postmodern category – however, it must also be noted that all elements of this typology can be identified in

connection with the Statue Park. The dynamics of the space are provided by the fact that it is storage of "traditional" monuments – such as the statue perpetuating the Soviet-Hungarian friendship, and the park as a monument is based on the re-contextualization of these objects. Yet, as it was already apparent, the intentions of the creators and the guidelines on the webpage indicate that the Statue Park is a modern monument, "a warning for sobriety". However, experience contradicts both approaches and moves the interpretation of the park towards postmodernism. Although Beverly James described "engagement" as a silent, lonely observation (as it would be the case with György Jovánovics's installation at Parcel 301, memorial for the martyrs of 1956), if one considers engagement as first-hand experience, it becomes easy to see the relationship between engagement and the re-living of the past offered by the park.

V.5. Memory at work

So far, it has become apparent what strategies are used by each of these museum sites and as a result, what kinds of memories are evoked or induced by these methods. In the case of the House of Terror it is a clearly visible attempt to present the whole communist era in terms of the "photogenic" imagery of the fifties (Poblocki 2008: 158), which, along with its very easily recognizable visual heritage, also implies that "terror" was the exclusive characteristics of "the communist age" as such. As opposed to it, the Statue Park, while obviously allowing for such interpretations, offers their subversion as well, producing a theoretically dignified yet practically contestable and ironic understanding of the past. It is interesting, though, that both of these approaches spring from the very materiality of the objects that are presented: in the Statue Park the difference of the perspective and turning tangible that was once only visible from a distance undermines the ideological monopoly of "tyranny" as an interpretational frame. As for the House of Terror, the materiality of the exhibitions functions as illustration for the seemingly simple thesis: terror penetrated everything. Here, the efforts to make the

visitors re-experience the past are used to evoke a sense of universally human empathy (and thus, sympathy) for the victims of the communist terrors.

However, since these museum spaces are described here as actively functioning memory projects, the actors, whose political or symbolic benefits influenced the outcome of the projects, are also of importance here. In the case of the House of Terror, the identification of the political actors who support the claim is not only easy, but is also encouraged by the creators. Upon arrival, a huge marble plaque greets the visitors, saying (both in Hungarian and in English) that "the House of Terror Museum was built with the support of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. […] The inspiration for this museum was given by its director, Mária Schmidt."

Therefore, it was the previous center-rightist Orbán-government that established the institution, starting the constructions in 2002, just a few weeks before the elections. Since the prime minister, Viktor Orbán had a most active role in the political discourse around the system change, it was without doubt beneficiary for the party to use the House of Terror as a demonized, one-sided representation of communism. Focusing on the fifties, there was no need to reflect on the livable conditions of the late Kádár-era, the system they – as university students back then – sought to overthrow. The House of Terror contributed to the establishment of a complete rupture between the past and the present. This idea of complete temporal separation is still visible in the party's name, Fidesz (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége – Federation of Young Democrats), since both of these ideas reflect upon the prime minister and his party being "the next generation", who put an end to the terrors of communism.

Regarding the Statue Park, though, the constellation is far from being this simple. The information about the owners and runners of the museum were well hidden in the FAQ section of the website, and it was only this medium and the personal interviews I have

conducted that reflected on this topic. The homepage offers the following information: "Statue Park is the property of the Hungarian State. It is operated by a private venture as a tenant, solely on its own receipts, coming from ticket prices and the earnings of the Souvenir Shop of the Park" (Memento Park, n.d.) Thus, the motivations of the actors are entirely different in the two cases. For the House of Terror it is crucial to proudly present the prime minister's name on a marble plaque, since it contributes to reading his party's activities as political achievements. As opposed to this, the Statue Park, by not emphasizing its financial status seeks to present itself as a neutral signifier of the past that is independent from any current ideological games of party politics. And indeed, one of the primary benefits of the Statue Park is the multiplicity of interpretations it leaves open. Probably this is why its location and other, distinctive features give space to so much guessing from the side of the visitors.

VI. LEARNING COMMUNISM

Following one of the basic insights of hermeneutics, intentions from the side of the producers and the way the creation is perceived do not necessarily coincide. So far I unpacked the intended meanings of the two memory projects – as it was visible from the self-descriptions of the museums. In the following I shall look at the responses given by the Hungarian teenager visitors to the sites. The aim of this section is to show how the official interpretations are contested at reception, and whether the intended knowledge and opinion transmission can be regarded as a successful nationwide project.

VI.1. Differences in visitors' experiences

The way the visitors understand the exhibitions depends on a number of intersecting factors in both cases, such as the presence or lack of a tourist guide, the nationality and the age of the visitor. Obvious as it might sound, the presence of the guide brings the exhibited objects closer to the visitors, renders them comprehensible – but it is only true for the Statue Park. As one of the 14-year-olds I have interviewed remarked, without the guide, no one would have cared about the statues. All of them had positive feelings about the interactive nature of the tour, which, as they said, enhanced their understanding of the age (no matter that some of them actually spoke about the Second World War as "the age"). Yet, one also needs to consider Eleőd's initial intention of remaining unburdened by value judgments, avoiding representation either as a park of shame or a site of mockery. In this context even the existence of such guided tours goes against the underlying idea of neutrality, since a guide, no matter how impartial he or she might be, still offers a single interpretation of the displayed items and therefore directs the attention of visitors towards specific objects and particular ways of understanding them.

Nevertheless, it is not surprising that the young visitors were really grateful for the interpretational aid provided by the guide. Three out of eight mentioned how it was helpful in understanding "what those symbols actually meant", or confessed that the way they analyzed a particular statue together made her change her preliminary negative opinion about that particular piece. Furthermore, the guided tour also succeeded in adding a set of memorable anecdotes, humorous personal stories to the display of statues, such as the one about the Smurf marzipan figurines that were dried on the right arm of a bronze Lenin in the early nineties, the statue of the liberating Soviet soldier that attracts lightning and once made the fax machine explode, or the effigy of Árpád Szakasits (secretary of the Hungarian Social Democrat Party in 1927-8), which, from a certain distance, was often mistaken to be a visitor by the employees of the park. According to their accounts, the young visitors were especially keen on these tiny remarks of the guide. As one of them put it, "there are these museums when it's dead boring, and all you get is a schematic text that you would learn at history lessons anyway. But this guy told us about really special things. He made us involved."

In the case of the House of Terror, as A., one of the guides formerly working there mentioned, it is generally not typical of visitors, not even groups to ask for a guided tour. This might be because of the already mentioned excess of written information that is provided at the site. Yet, the group I have followed through the exhibition did have a guided tour. As the teacher, K. explained it to me, she insisted on this decision since "otherwise they would just wander around understanding nothing about the exhibition." In the House of Terror, however, the style of the guidance was also entirely different from what I have experienced in the Statue Park. The anecdotes and personal stories that were so much appreciated in the case of the Statue Park are completely missing here – since the context does not allow for such humorous and individualized remarks.

Strangely enough, though, the guided tour here seems not only to underline the otherwise also apparent "message" the House of Terror wishes to convey, but it also has a specific impact on the affective experience the visitors get. As one of the students I have interviewed mentioned it, "she [the guide] helped us with the basement as well", referring to the verbal interpretation offered when they arrived at the reconstructed prison cells. However, if one contrasts this approach of (almost) continuously offered interpretations with the idea of "being left without words", as it is depicted by the website, a fundamental controversy can be seen.

One of the affective strategies the House of Terror tends to use is that of audial effects – the music composed by Ákos Kovács and occasionally the silence equally included. The benefit of these devices is that they create a mood, "a sense of the age" without the need – or even the possibility – to conceptualize and to verbally define it. Maybe this is why some of my interviewees who visited the museum without a guide, told about how they were unable to speak "down there", in the basement cells. One of them, a girl in her mid-twenties commented that "I felt sick. I really wanted to get out. I just… I don't think I can talk about that, sorry." Therefore, in the basement section of the museum it is exactly *the lack of interpretation*, the exclusion of verbalized experience that contributes to the highest effect: this is how the re-living of terror operates on a level beyond rationality.

However, with the guide following the group, most of this effect is taken away when her words are positioned against the bodily experience of claustrophobia. By offering interpretation, "meaning effects", it is exactly the well calculated nature of artfully induced "presence effects" that is lost or diminished.

Besides the presence or absence of the guide, the Statue Park also shows differences based on the nationality, acknowledged by both the employees and the Hungarian visitors of the park.

Upon my first arrival to the Statue Park, after having seen no one but a German couple who were having picnic under the memorial of Soviet-Hungarian friendship – which would be very much unanticipated and unacceptable behavior had they been Hungarians – I asked Ákos Réthly about this supposed difference in the perception of the park based on nationality. According to his observations, the posing and the fascination with both the Trabant displayed by the entrance and the visual gags of the souvenir shop are closely related to the experience of "Western tourists", while the "funny approach" is less characteristic of the Hungarian visitors. "All the local visitors have a bit of agent past, a bit of relocation, a sense of being unheeded… everyone has a bit of pain. I wouldn't say that these are brought to the surface here, but it gives a kind of basic restraint in their attitudes." Therefore Hungarians would not find it funny to pose with the statues due to the "personal involvement", or rather the communicative memory that still inherits the underlying idea of the statues being means of an oppressive, dictatorial regime.

Strangely enough, there is a kind of ambiguity in the answers provided by the student visitors on this matter. When asked about the idea of posing, all of them said that it was their teacher who had a number of ideas about different poses, but they also noted that by themselves they would not think of these statues as things to pose at. One of them even mentioned that "probably it might be more exciting for the Americans, because we learn about it, we know about it, but they… they did not live through it. For them it's fun to see… a big dictatorial man (sic!) and haha, let's pose with him. But for us, we can feel what it was like for the people back then, and it's less amusing to make fun of it." However, based on my personal experience following them along the park, it can be said that they actually enjoyed climbing onto the statues and they started posing the minute the guide turned his back to them.

It is not surprising that in the case of the House of Terror one cannot talk about such differences in the visitors' perception according to their nationality. It is partly due to the

closed museum space, the dim lights and the gloomy music (as opposed to the open air exhibition of the Statue Park) that visitors – almost without an exception – lower their voice, start to "behave", as A., the guide explained. Yet, this univocally moderate attitude of the visitors regardless of their nationality may also be due to the strict interpretational frame presented by the House of Terror.

VI.2. The cozy friend - Ostapenko

Although there may be significant differences in the visitors' perceptions due to their nationalities, in the following I shall only focus on the Hungarian teenagers and how their interpretations subvert, ignore or modify the officially provided explanations.

As for the Statue Park, an exemplary case of the re-interpretational process is the statue of Ostapenko[6] (Jenő Kerényi, 1951), which fulfills an iconic role within the Statue Park collection. "The Ostapenko" is the most typical and well-known example of a shift in meaning from state ideology towards urban, unofficial practices of remembering – which change already occurred before 1989. Initially, the statue was a memorial of lieutenant Ilja Afanisevich Ostapenko, who died a heroic death in 1944, when the "liberating" Red Army arrived in Budapest. However, it originally stood in the 11th district, by the road leading to Lake Balaton, one of the primary touristic destinations of Hungarian people, and as such, it became closely associated with the unambiguously positive recollections of holidays (György 2000, Nadkarni 2008). Parallel to this, the statue acquired an important place in urban folklore as well, and expressions like "Do you know when? When Ostapenko changes steps!" became a well-known element of Budapest slang in the 1970s-1980s. Based on all this, the statue of lieutenant Ostapenko had lost its original implications by the time the system change occurred. It became an emblematic landmark that helped in finding one's way, formed a

[6] The Russian „Остапенко" has many transcriptions in Hungarian, therefore I shall use the English form „Ostapenko".

common reference point, and also induced a set of nostalgic memories. However, at the very moment the statue was taken to the Statue Park, it was deprived of its original associations – in other words, the practices of bottom-up remembering were overwritten by top-down, centralized memory practices. This latter type of memory does not leave anything pleasing, or even personal about the recent past, which approach is parallel to the attempt of the Statue Park to homogenize the whole socialist past in order to picture it as it was in the 50s, the most strictly Stalinist period of the 40 years labeled as "the communist era". As Nadkarni argues, "while countless Lenins proved the infuriating fact of Soviet occupation, it was perhaps even more pressing to remove Osztapenkó, who called attention to the ways forty years of socialism had become cozy an familiar" (2008, 201).

From this aspect the ambiguous and multi-layered meanings of the Ostapenko statue can be regarded as parallel to the visitors' interpretations about the location of the Statue Park. The Memento Park is situated in Budatétény, 22nd district of Budapest, approximately in half an hour's bus ride from downtown through a clearly residential area of the city. Being under some enormous high voltage wires and by a highway, it is not the most typical location one would expect from a museum of national importance – as one of my interviewees noted it, "it is in the middle of god's back". As it is, the Statue Park with its 42 statues and plaques – even if one accounts for all the planned but at this point unrealized segments – has a rather modest demand of space, and as Z., a visitor in his late twenties I have interviewed, insightfully mentioned, it might as well have been placed in Városliget, right in the center so that everyone would be able to easily access it. Therefore, the location of the Statue Park as something almost unreachable and peripheral is an influencing factor both in the reading of the whole concept of the park and in the impressions visitors have about the museum of such. Although the choice of the site was allegedly due to the offer made by the municipality of the

22nd district and as such can be explained by financial reasons, both the visitors, scholars and the staff of the Statue Park have their own very specific explanations of this fact.

Beverly James for instance, in her work on the Statue Park interprets this distance as a very conscious decision of the creators, which would on the one hand deprive these statues of their former "rhetorical power", while parallel to this it would also keep them isolated from the general flow of time. This idea of isolation is also present in a number of interviews as well, for instance M., a young man even sees it as an analogy of how Hungarian post-communist governments deal with the past: "The strange thing about this Statue Park is that the government approaches it just like it approaches communism. Yes, we had it, we have it, there's nothing to deny about it, but we'd just move it somewhere out of everything, hide it as much as possible. Yet at the same time we still want to get a lot of money out of this nostalgia."

One of the primary functions of this exclusion of the park to the outskirts, I argue, is to physically just as well as symbolically marginalize the already mentioned Kádár-nostalgia from the officially supported communicative memory that is similar to the reading offered by the House of Terror, which seems to concentrate on a traumatic understanding of the near (or actually not so near) past, right in the city center. Nostalgia for the Kádár-age, especially for the 1970s and 80s would obviously subvert the understanding of the past as being "terrible" or "oppressive", since it would evoke the familiarity and coziness present in the communicative memory of the people. Perhaps this is why the lady selling the tickets at the Statue Park could answer to Z's idea about placing the park in the Városliget instead that "probably they wouldn't support such a thing so much in the center."

The phenomenon of posing, the contested meanings assigned to the statues, even the souvenir shop of the Statue Park are generally regarded as subversive against the whole concept of

dignified remembering. However, as it has been argued, the Statue Park not only enables but also encourages visitors' interpretations that are against this former paradigm. The playfulness of nostalgia and the respect towards the past that is characteristic of traumatic discourses are equally present even in the creative/production side of the park. This would allow for two conclusions here. First, the visitors are not acting *against* the park's official frame of understanding but *within* it, that is, their sometimes disrespectful behavior is enabled by the lack of official interpretation offered at the spot. Ákos Réthly characterized this feature in its difference to the House of Terror: "the most important thing is, I think, the greatest difference is that here we don't tell you what to think." Second, although the Statue Park had no intention to be comical, and indeed it is not, it is still *ironic.* Éva Kovács (2003) argues that "appropriating the Statue Park still turned out to be 'funny', and it has become a site for ironic trips. Yet, the ironic use does not mean passivity or forgetting." If we consider Linda Hutcheon's definition of irony once again – as the dynamics provided by the duality of meaning, this can be regarded as the most dangerous characteristic feature of the Statue Park. It is dangerous for the rightist politics of remembering, but not because of its nostalgic nature. It is threatening because it does not deny anything, it does not question the legitimacy of any approach towards the past, it enables multiple ways to relate to the "communist age".

VI.3. "Error"

In contrast with the relatively open discursive space offered by the Statue Park, the legitimacy of the House of Terror is strongly reliant on its univocal "othering" of the past as a "terrorist regime" that did not respect any of the fundamental human rights. In short, as it was apparent, the project is dependent on describing "communism" as the complete opposite of what the post-1989 can offer in terms of "democracy" or "freedom". Therefore, anything that does not fit into this very paradigm can be regarded as "subversive" – as opposed to the case of the Statue Park, where the dominant discourse is challenged by the park itself and the multiplicity

of voices it offers. The nature and theme of the House of Terror obviously does not allow for ironic or mocking approaches, the most daring interpretation being a set of pictures saying "House of Error"; a pun exploited by many visitors and enabled by the way shadows fall on the pavement. The original idea was to have an extension of the roof with the word "TERROR" carved out of it, so that it would cast a shadow on the pavement, presumably to symbolize that "terror overshadowed daily life". What happened was that the creators did not account for the movement of the sun, and as a result, apart from a few minutes each day, it reads as "error". But apart from this minor manifestation of the visitors' playfulness, the museum does not leave much space for alternative approaches.

One of the instances that it can happen – in a shy way of course – is the question of music. Three of my teenaged interviewees out of the six mentioned that they were looking forward to getting to the House of Terror because they had heard about the music. "I knew it was Ákos who made the music, and I was curious what it was like", says one of them. Ákos Kovács, musician of the museum has made a career under his first name "Ákos", and is really popular among those who are fans of intellectual, lyrics-centered soft rock music. As a result, the fact that he had composed the music for the House of Terror attracted interest – especially from the younger generations – that was not linked to the memory of communism at all. Not surprisingly, two of my interviewees mentioned that they were disappointed by what they got at the museum. "I thought it would be something entirely new, but then, when I listened to it, I said 'but hey! I have it at home! And never thought of it like this." Such reactions point out two things. First, by being able to identify the prominent popular artist as the composer of the "House of Terror themes", the imperceptible character of the music is ruined. Even the teenagers consciously paid attention to the music (all but one of them), after learning that the artist was Ákos. Second, this knowledge, while also serving as a kind of self-promotion for the House of Terror, involves contexts in the process of understanding that on the one hand

were unintended, and on the other are entirely unrelated to the core idea. The induction of new contexts can be regarded as threatening the integrity of the whole exhibition since it allows for other interpretations as well.

However, another site where visitors' interpretations contest the core of what the House of Terror apparently has to say is the field of explicit, intellectually based criticism itself. Since its opening in 2002, the museum has been target of many attacks, particularly from leftist-liberal intellectuals who are centered around the *Élet és Irodalom* such as Péter György, Sándor Radnóti, István Eörsi or Géza Boros. These authors have criticized the House of Terror exactly for the biased knowledge and meaning production and the visibility of its "constructedness" in terms of dramatization and demonization. Thus, while the House of Terror holds exclusive demands to the presentation of "truth" as such, the core point of these critics is that the museum is not truthful or real enough. It is very much like what John Joseph Cash has coined as staged authenticity: "Historical sites, artifacts and images are recontextualized as objects for appropriation and consumption, like souvenirs […]. They can become examples of "staged authenticity", a stand-in for historical reality acknowledged as such by both hosts and guests, that dominates or replaces the historical context" (2011: 250).

Strangely enough, though, this very discourse also appears in what the teenagers say about the museum. In one way or another, almost all of them mentioned the constructed nature of the "reality" that is presented at the House of Terror. One of them, a 14-year girl, when I asked her about her experience in the elevator, almost immediately answered: "That's totally Disneyland", while another one added: "I think it was a bit too dramatized. For a museum. But it made me feel bad." Besides, when I asked them about the "message" of the museum if it has any, four out of six used causative structures, reflecting on what the House of Terror as a museum wants to let them know. "By the end I got that they want me to commemorate the memory of all people who suffered through those years… yeah, it's sad" – said one of them.

While these instances are intentional reflections on what my interviewees have experienced during their tour, their ignorance of basic historical facts is also telling, and can be regarded as a symptom of the House of Terror's failure as a site of knowledge transmission. When asked about what they found particularly interesting in the exhibition, most of my interviewees agreed that it was nice how the museum presented "the age", and managed to "show how these… everyday people saw it… at that time". However, when I tried to specify what they meant by "the age" and who was it exactly that induced terror, I faced great uncertainty. With the exception of one student, who said that it was the World War, after some hesitation most of them came up with identical solutions: the age was by and large understood as "communism". Apparently none of them realized that the House of Terror supposedly talks about *two kinds of terrors,* fascist and communist. Therefore, regarding the case of the House of Terror, one might get to the conclusion that it definitely fails as an institute of knowledge transmission, while it is, to lesser or greater extent, successful as a memory project.

VII. CONCLUSION

According to Jan Assmann, history becomes myth through memory. It does not mean that it would become unreal, but on the contrary, this is how it becomes real, a restless normative force (2006, 53). Therefore, the "truthfulness" of history can be measured by its impact on the present. This thesis attempted to show how myths are formed of history in post-socialist Hungary. Considering that such memory practices can never be seen as innocent, and also imply a very specific and well determinable perspective from the present, one of my primary aims was to see what is at stake when the communist era is remembered. Parallel to this, I had no intention of uncovering what the state socialist period was "really like". I chose the two most prominent representations of the period in order to reveal the dynamics of production and reception – as it appears in the case of the House of Terror and the Statue Park.

With the use of cultural trauma and cultural nostalgia as my primary theoretical foci during the research, I looked at the ways these concepts – as possible frames for understanding the past – are used, misused or completely ignored within the Hungarian context. A possible way to look at my findings is to arrange them along "master tropes" of remembering communism. One of these tropes that can summarize my results is that of *distance*, both in physical, spatial and symbolical sense.

In this thesis I have been arguing that both of the museums operate with strategies of distancing the past. This approach was understood as a way of legitimizing the post-1989 present in terms of fully developed democracy by representing the state socialist period as its Other, the ideal type of an immoral, dictatorial and tyrannical regime. It is primarily the House of Terror – but to some extent the Statue Park as well – that creates a complete separation between the past that is labeled "communism" and the present, which is exactly defined by its temporal and other differences from the past (see the term "post-communism").

This distance is created by expanding the imagery of the 1950s, the darkest times of the state socialist era to the whole period, leaving the 1970s and 1980s as possible sites of communicative memory and individual nostalgia unrepresented. Therefore, even the near past is temporally distanced and merged into the well-known and easily understandable image of terror in the fifties. Strangely enough, though, in the House of Terror this distancing is dramatized through proximity effects, like the materiality and presupposed authenticity of the displayed objects along with the music and lights that contribute in making the visitor re-live the past as a specific feeling, as something perceivable.

Although the Statue Park – with offering Gyula Illyés's poem as a possible interpretational frame – also allows for such understandings, the idea of distance and proximity has other interpretations in this case. Here the proximity of the statues is contrasted with the originally intended perspective assigned to them: these statues were not torn down, but the idols were dragged from their sky-high pedestals. They became visible and tangible once again, visitors climb on them, use them, look at them in ways which were never intended. The statues' reposition in the Statue Park implies that they are necessarily presented as "gigantic" or monstrous creations, as examples of the past regime's megalomania. As such, they can underline the distance between past and present drawing a clear dividing line between the two temporal horizons. On the other hand, though, the shift of the perspective also presents the statues' imperfections, making them more understandable through their flaws.

The idea of proximity can also function in connection with the Statue Park on a metaphoric level. As it has been discussed, the presence of the statues induces nostalgic memories in many, and since these interpretations are also presented during the guided tour, a kind of cultural nostalgia is being transmitted parallel to the traumatic/moral approach that is expected by current mainstream memory politics.

The two museums' differences about the "master trope" of distance-proximity may also be the cause of their spatial location and their distance from downtown Budapest. The position of the two sites is parallel to their centrality as memory projects. The House of Terror, being in the heart of the city, by one of the most beautiful boulevards of Budapest, stands for values and approaches that – according to the marble plaque at the entrance – are of crucial importance for Viktor Orbán's then and now governing party. In contrast, the Statue Park that is situated "in the middle of god's back" is also far from the "mainstream memory politics" inasmuch as it enables not only the "victim-memory" of the past, but it also allows for alternative: ironic and nostalgic representations.

But let us get back to the Time's Wheel for one last instance. It is known that it stopped somewhere in 2005. But when did time stop in Hungary? When was the moment that clocks across the country ceased to tick and when an "obsession with the past", "an urge to remember" started? It is possible that it actually stopped twice. For the first time it was in the late 1960s, and consequentially the seventies and eighties – at least from the perspective of official remembering practices – just floated away without anyone noticing it. And then, time stopped again in the mid-90s when the only way to legitimize the government was a rather explicit claim that "we are unlike 'them'". But when will it become rentable to send a repairman who would fix the Time's Wheel along with its unfortunate symbolism?

Appendix 1: Picture elicitation survey (translated to English)

Sex:
Year of birth:

Do you know what it is? What color is it?

Where have you seen cars like this? Did you have one at home?

Do you know anything about it apart from its brand?

Do you like it? Why (not)?

What is it? What is on it?

Do you think this object is interesting/funny in any way? Why?

Would you buy it? Why (not)?

Whose statue is it?

Why and when do you think it they tore it down?

Do you know anything else about the statue or the person?

"Communism"

Have you ever heard this expression? What do you think it means?

Can you give a synonym for the word?

What was it like to live at that time?

Did your parents tell you about this period?

Thank you!

Appendix 2: List of primary material and their abbreviations

THI1 – “Anteroom of the Hungarian Political Police”

THI2 – “Cardinal Mindszenty”

THI3 – “Changing clothes”

THI4 – “Churches”

THI5 – “Double Occupation”

THI6 – “Gulag”

THI7 – “Hall of the 1956 Revolution”

THI8 – “Internment”

THI9 – “Justice”

THI10 – “Passage of Hungarian Nazis”

THI11 – “Peasants”

THI12 – “Reconstructed prison cells”

THI13 –“Resettlement and deportation”

THI14 – “Resistance”

THI15 – “Room of Gabor Peter”

THI16 – “Room of the Soviet Advisors”

THI17 – “The fifties”

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