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## '56 after '89: Re-commemorating Hungarian History after the Fall of Communism

Governments and civic groups erect public memorials in national capitals to record and legitimize selected events and people, so as to define collective history. Budapest provides a rich case study of how changing political regimes and their opponents also alter, re-interpret and remove memorials in their attempts to control national narratives and express and consolidate political authority. This paper uses archival research, interviews with memorial decision-makers, and analysis of individual memorials to explore how various key themes of Hungarian history have been articulated through Budapest's commemorative works, and how the expression of particular commemorative subjects has been contested, modulated or repressed. Analysis explores which approaches to commemoration have remained constant throughout Hungary's several regime changes, and what broad shifts have occurred in memorial themes, forms and locations. An examination of major memorials erected, removed and replaced in Budapest up until the 1989 collapse of Communism provides a context for understanding the subsequent proliferation of memorials to the 1956 Anti-Communist Uprising and the newly-completed reconfiguration of the key national space, Kossuth Square. The paper identifies four specific dynamics in the reframing of Budapest's memorial landscape since 1989 for current consumption: decontextualization, iconoclasm, liberalization, and avoidance.

## Introduction

The 1956 Budapest uprising against Hungary's Communist government toppled a nine-metre-tall statue of Stalin erected on Parade Square in 1951. This very public form of iconoclasm is now metonymic for regime changes everywhere. But iconoclasm is only the most blatant among a range of approaches through which new regimes exploit both existing and new memorials to interpret the past for current consumption. This paper takes Budapest as a case study of how public memorials reflect and reinforce political change.

Memorials symbolize collective identity and the political power that stems from it, and they are used to consolidate and exercise that power. They use images, figures and themes from the past to "articulate and legitimize present-day political circumstances".<sup>1</sup> In societies undergoing political change, new rulers seek to declare their power and diminish the importance of previous regimes by translating the authority of existing memorials. The removal or alteration of old memorials is just as important as the erection of new ones. Some of the starkest twentieth-century examples of such shifts occurred under National-Socialism in the 1930s and in the post-war Soviet Union and its satellites, including Hungary.<sup>2</sup> The Nazis, for example, altered the memorial at Berlin's *Neue Wache* to portray the Nazi state as a successor to the Holy Roman Empire and to sanctify soldiers' deaths as being necessary for national renewal.<sup>3</sup> In Russia, Lenin decreed the removal of many Tsarist monuments, while in states such as Estonia where cultural assimilation was viewed as particularly necessary, hundreds of pre-Soviet monuments were destroyed and replaced in the early years of Soviet rule.<sup>4</sup>

The political and metaphysical fixity implied by stone memorials is never guaranteed. Across post-Soviet Europe, "many iconoclastic waves [have] successfully destroyed the myth of monumental eternalization".<sup>5</sup> Monuments intended to educate future generations have frequently been subjected to "repressive erasure": a type of forgetting "with the explicit purpose of casting all memory of [disgraced regimes] into oblivion".<sup>6</sup> Such processes often involve careful choices. Non-political monuments may be left in place unaltered, for example, and some memorials are

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- 1 Nuala Johnson, "Sculpting heroic histories: celebrating the centenary of the 1798 rebellion in Ireland," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 19/1 (1994): 78.
  - 2 See Robert R Taylor, *The Word in Stone: The Role of Architecture in the Nationalist Socialist Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (London: Routledge, 1999); Reuben Fowkes, "The Role of Monumental Sculpture in the Construction of Socialist Space in Stalinist Hungary," in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2002): 65-84; Reuben Fowkes, "Soviet War Memorials in Eastern Europe, 1945-74" in Charlotte Benton (ed.), *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945-1968* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 11-32.
  - 3 Karen Till, "Staging the past: landscape designs, cultural identity and *Erinnerungspolitik* at Berlin's *Neue Wache*," *Cultural Geographies* 6 (1999): 254; Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Dovey, *Framing Places*, ch. 5.
  - 4 Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion, 1997).
  - 5 Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997* (London: Reaktion, 1998): 202.
  - 6 Paul Connerton, "Seven types of forgetting," *Memory Studies* 1/5 (2008): 60.

given new meanings through direct alteration or changes to their surroundings. Such reworking is particularly characteristic of the memorial landscape of Budapest, which has endured several changes in its system of government since 1918.<sup>7</sup>

## Hungarian History in Budapest's Memorials

Hungarian national history can be conceptualized as a series of failed regime changes. These shifts have precipitated iconoclastic erasure and the erection of new memorials, particularly in richly-decorated Budapest. An outline of Hungary's pivotal historical moments and key political actors is necessary to understand the symbolic resonance of Budapest's current memorial landscape.

During the early eighteenth century, nationalists including Ferenc Rákóczi II fought for independence from the Ottomans and then the Habsburgs, although Hungary remained under imperial control.<sup>8</sup> In 1848, Lajos Kossuth led another Hungarian quest for autonomy, and although temporarily successful, this attempt was suppressed by new Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph in 1849, and Kossuth was exiled.<sup>9</sup> Kossuth has symbolized Hungarian nationalism ever since. 1867 brought the Dual Monarchy, with Gyula Andrassy's appointment as Hungary's first Prime Minister and Budapest's designation as joint capital with Vienna. The Empire's collapse at the end of the First World War saw Mihály Károlyi's brief presidency of the Hungarian Democratic Republic, followed by Béla Kun's equally short-lived Socialist government in 1919.<sup>10</sup> In the post-war Treaty of Trianon (1920), Hungary lost about two thirds of its pre-war territory and population.<sup>11</sup> Trianon still resonates as a rallying cry for irredentist nationalist groups that want Hungary's pre-1920 borders restored.

When the Second World War began, conservative Admiral Miklós Horthy had been the Kingdom of Hungary's Regent for over twenty years. Hoping to reverse Trianon, Hungary joined the Axis. Despite Hungary's alignment with Germany, Horthy resisted Nazi aims to exterminate Jews and Roma, at least in Budapest, until October 1944, when he was deposed by the Nazi-aligned Arrow Cross Party. Heated debate continues about Horthy's achievements and faults, and how he should be commemorated.<sup>12</sup> The Arrow Cross regime accelerated the murder and deportation of Budapest's Jewish population. At that time Hungary had Europe's largest Jewish population, but in 1944, 430,000 were deported.<sup>13</sup> These deaths have only recently been memorialized in Budapest. In 1945 the Soviets liberated Hungary from German rule, and in 1947 it became a Socialist state. In 1949, the

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7 Emilia Palonen, "The city-text in post-Communist Budapest: street names, memorials, and the politics of commemoration," *GeoJournal* 73 (2008): 221.

8 László Kontler, *A History of Hungary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002): 185-189.

9 Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (London: Abacus, 2008).

10 Kontler, *Hungary*, 332.

11 Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001): 262.

12 Kenneth Foote, Attila Tóth and Anett Arvay, "Hungary After 1989: Inscribing a new past on place," *The Geographical Review* 90/3 (2000).

13 Molnár, *A Concise History*, 292.

Communist 'People's Republic of Hungary' was declared, but in 1956 there was an armed popular uprising. A 50,000-strong student-led protest in Budapest led to reformer Imre Nagy being installed as Prime Minister. In response, Soviet tanks crossed into Hungary, and several days of street fighting saw approximately 2,500 killed. Many leaders, including Nagy, were later executed.<sup>14</sup> In 1989 the country became a free-market democracy, the first former Soviet-controlled state to establish autonomy. The first democratic government declared the 1956 Uprising a "popular insurrection" rather than a "counter-revolution". A new constitution from 2012 defines the years between the 1944 Nazi invasion and the 1989 collapse of Communism as a period when Hungary did not legally exist because it lacked self-determination.<sup>15</sup> The remainder of this paper will explore how various commemorations linked to these two somewhat-contrary judgments shape Hungary's national history and identity.

## Memorials 1898-1989

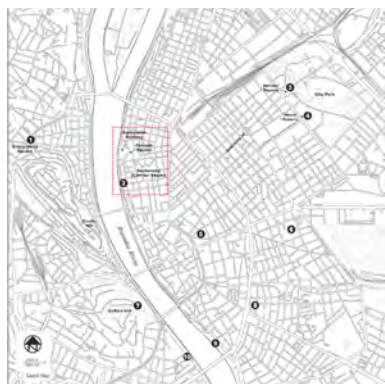


Fig. 1. Budapest city map showing major memorials and memorial precincts. Credit: Emery Huang.

1. 1956 Memorial (Association of Hungarian Political Prisoners, 2001)
2. Shoes on the Danube Memorial (Gyula Pauer and Can Togay, 2005)
3. Millenium Monument (Albert Schickedanz and György Zala, 1896)
4. 1956 Revolution Monument (i-Ypsilon Group, 2006)
5. Great Synagogue and Budapest Jewish Museum
6. Monument to the Martyrs of the Counterrevolution (Viktor Kalló, 1960)
7. Liberation Monument (Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl, 1947)
8. Corvin Cinema, 'Pest Lad' (Louis Gyorfi, 1996)
9. Roma Holocaust Memorial (Ákos Maurer Klimes and Tamás Szabó, 2010)
10. 1956 memorial at Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Róbert Csikszentmihályi, 2006)

Since the time of the Dual Monarchy, Budapest's memorials and commemorative precincts have been transformed numerous times to reflect shifts in Hungarian politics and changing views of the past. Kossuth Square, outside Hungary's Parliament, has been a key national commemorative precinct since it was dedicated shortly after the Parliament building's inauguration in 1898, the fiftieth anniversary of Kossuth's anti-Habsburg rebellion. The first memorial erected here was to Gyula Andrásy. In 1927, the square acquired its current name when a Kossuth memorial, approved in 1906, was finally added. Lajos Batthyány, Prime Minister in 1848, and seven other ministers stood in subsidiary positions to Kossuth, hero of the Revolution but merely finance minister in Batthyány's cabinet. This was a somber, "pessimistic" group with downcast faces, reflecting the subsequent defeat of the nationalist movement in 1849, although it was described at the time as

<sup>14</sup> Kontler, *Hungary*, 429.

<sup>15</sup> Erik Thorstensen, "The Places of Memory in a Square of Monuments: Conceptions of Past, Freedom and History at Szabadság Tér," *AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association* 5 (2012): 28.

expressing “serene determination and not disappointment”.<sup>16</sup> During the Horthy era, memorials were added to István Tisza, the nationalist First World War prime minister assassinated in 1918, and to Ferenc Rákóczi II, a leader of the early eighteenth century nationalist uprising. In 1921, a quartet of irredentist memorials were erected on nearby Szabadság Tér (Liberty Square), representing the territories *North, South, East* and *West* that Hungary ceded in the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>17</sup>

Hungary’s subsequent Socialist rulers recognized the political value of public iconography, and after they took power in 1947 they both added and removed memorials, in a purposeful campaign to “[change] people’s minds and view of history” and “to suppress or eliminate signs of Hungary’s past”.<sup>18</sup> By 1952, ten major monuments to “Soviet heroism” were added to Budapest.<sup>19</sup> Already in 1945, a memorial to the Soviet Army had replaced the war-damaged Trianon memorials on Liberty Square. The Andrásy and Tisza memorials in Kossuth Square had also been damaged during the Second World War, and the Communists removed both.<sup>20</sup> In 1952 they replaced the original Kossuth memorial with a more dynamic group, recasting 1848 as a proletarian victory against Habsburg imperialism. Kossuth stands with “arm outstretched, pointing to the future”, set high above Social Realist statues of a soldier, armed peasants and workers, and young poet Sándor Petofi, another rebellion leader.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, large statues of Soviet Army Captains Steinmetz (Sandor Minkus, 1948) and Ostapenko (Jeno Kerenyi, 1951) framed the city’s two southern gateways. Both men were idolized as peace-loving martyrs, apparently killed at those places delivering a truce proposal to the German and Hungarian troops in 1945. A nine-metre-tall Stalin statue, erected on Parade Square to commemorate Stalin’s 70th birthday, paid ideological homage and provided a tribune for party officials. It was partially manufactured from melted-down pre-1945 “bourgeois” monuments, making it as much a material rupture with pre-war history as a symbolic one.<sup>22</sup> In a symbolic attack on the Communist rulers, protestors pulled down this statue during the 1956 Uprising; the sawn-off boots remained briefly as a reminder. The USSR’s repudiation of Stalinism the same year ensured it was not rebuilt. The Communists continued using the empty tribune for watching parades until the 1980s. Steinmetz and Ostapenko were also destroyed in 1956, but re-erected in 1958.

By 1960 the Communist regime had already erected a memorial to the *counter*-revolutionary “martyrs” of 1956 in Republic Square, a five-metre-high expressionist statue of a collapsing hero, opposite the Communist Party headquarters that they had ostensibly died defending.<sup>23</sup> Budapest’s

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16 András Gerő, *Public Space in Budapest: The History of Kossuth Square* (Wayne, NJ, Centre for Hungarian Studies and Publications, 2009): 65.

17 Bob Dent, *Every Statue Tells a Story: Public Monuments in Budapest* (Budapest: Europa, 2009), 246.

18 Fowkes, “The Role of Monumental Sculpture,” 65.

19 Géza Boros, “The metamorphosis of Liberty: the monument to Hungarian liberation” in *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945-1968*, ed. Charlotte Benton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 69-84.

20 Gerő, *Public Space*, ch 3.

21 Bob Dent, *Budapest: A Cultural History* (Oxford: OUP, 2007): 138; Gerő, *Public Space*, ch. 3.

22 Michalski, *Public Monuments*, 141.

23 Reuben Fowkes, “Public Sculpture and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956,” *Inferno* 7 (2003): 39-51.

most prominent remaining Soviet-era memorial is the Liberation Monument, widely visible high on Gellért Hill. Because an imperial military barracks had stood nearby since the failed 1848 revolution, the location had symbolized Habsburg repression.<sup>24</sup> The forty-metre-high monument was a female figure holding a palm leaf, guarded below by a Soviet soldier. Its plinth featured bas-relief depictions of post-war reconstruction. This central group was flanked by a torch-bearer and an allegory of “victory over fascism”: a man battling a dragon.<sup>25</sup>

The ideological impact of some other memorials erected by the Communists is less overt. In 1975 a statue was erected on Kossuth Square of Mihály Károlyi, Prime Minister and President of the Hungarian Democratic Republic in 1918-1919. His suitability to the Communists lay in their common opposition to the conservative Hungarian nationalism of Tisza (whose vacated memorial site he occupied) and of Horthy. In 1980 a memorial to 1930s poet Attila József filled the site vacated by Andrásy. József was popular and a Communist Party member during Horthy’s regime, and his words could be readily appropriated.<sup>26</sup> A first memorial to Raoul Wallenberg, a Swede who saved many Jews during the war, had been erected in 1949 but ‘disappeared’ the night before its official unveiling. An American-sponsored memorial to Wallenberg was erected in 1987.

## Memorials after 1989

After 1989, Budapest again saw its memorial landscape re-made. Hungary’s new Parliament decided that widespread destruction of monuments recalled the Soviet approach, and allowed each municipality to manage its memorial legacy. In 1992, the Soviet elements of Budapest’s Liberation Monument were all removed. The memorial’s meaning was shifted to Hungarian liberty generally, rather than Soviet liberation from Germany.<sup>27</sup> Forty-one other major Soviet-built memorials in Budapest were removed to privately-run Memento Park, a purpose-built venue for historical education on the city outskirts, “separated... physically and symbolically from their original sites and political meanings”, and from everyday life.<sup>28</sup> A central pathway within the Park, representing Socialism, dead-ends at a blank wall, framed by the former city gatekeepers Steinmetz and Ostapenko.<sup>29</sup> This is the only way in which the Park maintains a link to the meanings and uses of any of the Soviet memorials’ former locations.

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24 Fowkes, “The Role of Monumental Sculpture,” 71; Boros, “The metamorphosis of Liberty,” 70.

25 Boros, “The metamorphosis of Liberty.”

26 Gerö, *Public Space*, 84-85.

27 Fowkes, “Soviet war memorials,” 16.

28 Foote et al, “Hungary After 1989,” 308; Beverly James, “Fencing in the past: Budapest’s Statue Park Museum,” *Media Culture Society* 21 (1999): 291-311.

29 Akos Rethly, *In the shadow of Stalin’s boots: Visitors’ guide to Memento Park* (Budapest, Private Planet Books, 2010): 21.

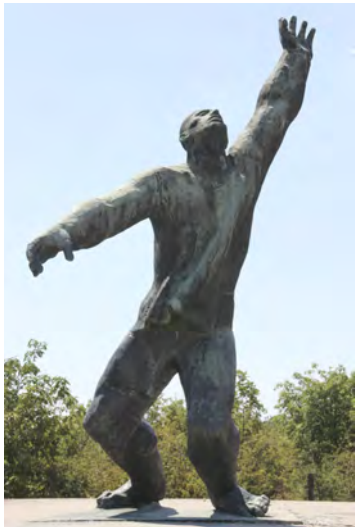


Fig. 2. The decontextualised memorial to the counter-revolutionary martyrs of 1956 (Viktor Kalló, 1960), now in Memento Park, on the outskirts of Budapest. Credit: Quentin Stevens.

New commemorative themes and sites developed since 1989 have broadened Budapest's historical narrative, including those related to fascist crimes during the Second World War. Most prominent are national memorials on the Danube and at Budapest's Jewish Museum recognizing the murder of Jews and Roma. New memorials were also erected to several of Budapest's "righteous gentiles" who saved Jews: in 1992 to Carl Lutz, and in 1999 a reproduction of the lost 1949 memorial to Raoul Wallenberg.<sup>30</sup> There is significant on-going dispute over how to approach Hungary's wartime and post-war history. A controversial new monument to all victims of the 1944 Nazi occupation, for example, is perceived to shift attention away from the Holocaust and Hungarian cooperation with Nazi Germany.<sup>31</sup> The 1945 Soviet Army memorial remains the only central memorial remembering any events from the Second World War. In 2002, a statue of Béla Kovács, a moderate politician persecuted between 1948 and 1956, was erected on Kossuth Square, ostensibly personifying all victims of Hungary's Communist dictatorship.<sup>32</sup> It did little, however, to address the crimes of Communism, and the 2012 constitution's forgetting of the Soviet era makes thorough commemorative reflection unlikely. Memorials to the 1956 Uprising are a notable exception.

30 Dent, *Every Statue*, 271ff.

31 Marton Dunai, "Hungary PM defends contested monument to Nazi victims" Reuters (22 January 2014), accessed 12 May 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/22/us-hungary-holocaust-german-memorial-idUSBREA0LIH820140122>.

32 Gerö, *Public Space*.



## Commemorating 1956

Since 1989, many groups have erected '56 memorials with varied sites, aesthetics, and audiences. Like 1848 before it, the '56 Uprising is an event that all Hungarians agree is important to the definition of modern Hungary. Although the events happened fifty-eight years ago and their remembrance was suppressed for thirty-three years, different constituencies today act on quite divergent views as to who and what should be remembered, where, and how. The Budapest Galéria, which reviews memorial designs, have never rejected any locally-sponsored '56 proposals, nor have any unofficial ones been removed.<sup>33</sup>

Many '56 memorials have strong connections with actual sites of conflict, including several erected on Kossuth Square. The first memorial to '56 resistance fighters erected after the 1989 fall of Hungary's Communist regime was at their unmarked burial site in a suburban cemetery. This location, however, was too peripheral to command public attention or to support major ceremonies.<sup>34</sup> In 1991 the Association of Hungarian Political Prisoners (POFOSZ) unofficially laid a symbolic stone sarcophagus to killed freedom fighters in Kossuth Square, beside the memorial to eighteenth-century independence fighter Rákóczi. Although the conservative (MDF) Hungarian government of 1990-94 was suspicious of the motives behind the 1956 uprising and its ardently communist leader Imre Nagy, for the 35th anniversary in 1991 the MDF and POFOSZ erected traditional Hungarian timber grave poles on Széna tér (Hay Square), a major site of street fighting.<sup>35</sup> Between 1998 and 2001 a multi-storey shopping mall was built adjacent. Public protest prevented the timber memorial's destruction, and the mall developers also agreed to fund a new sculptural memorial. Many '56 fighters were youths, and this memorial features "the romanticised, heroic figure of the ...'Pest Lad', who is depicted wrapped in the Hungarian flag, in a Christ-like pose".<sup>36</sup> The stainless steel flag is riddled with 'bullet holes', another recurrent theme in '56 memorials. The informal memorial remains. Beginning in 1990, numerous memorial plaques were installed by veterans' groups on the Corvin Cinema, also scene of prolonged street battles; there are now over twenty. Some plaques commemorate actors killed elsewhere during the Uprising, and one has a map outlining events at fifteen nearby locations. In 1996 the '56 veterans' organization unofficially erected a realist statue outside the cinema entry based on a photograph of an actual 13-year-old rifle-bearing "Pest Lad".<sup>37</sup>

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33 Victoria Harms, "Monument discourse and the Hungarian case: Competing political interpretations in Budapest's monuments for the Hungarian Revolution of 1956." (MA diss., Central European University, 2007).

34 Fowkes, "Public Sculpture."

35 "Creating Communities: The Postcommunist City - Text of Budapest," Emilia Palonen (2006), accessed 29 January 2014, <http://www.iwm.at/read-listen-watch/transit-online/creating-communities/>; Harms, "Monument discourse."

36 Fowkes, "Public Sculpture," 5-6.

37 Fowkes, "Public Sculpture;" Géza Boros, *Emlékművek '56-nak [Monuments to '56]* (Budapest, 1956-0s Intezet, 1997).



Fig. 3. '56 memorial in the form of the Pest Lad at Corvin Cinema (Louis Gyorfí, 1996).  
Credit: Quentin Stevens.

Following the 1994 change to a socialist-liberal government, several further memorials were installed in and around Kossuth Square to mark the uprising's 40th anniversary in 1996.<sup>38</sup> These generally serve as foci for official government remembrance, rather than for distinct groups of Uprising veterans. POFOSZ added a relief-sculpted headstone to the existing sarcophagus, depicting protestors trampling Communist emblems.<sup>39</sup> *Flame of the Revolution* was a tall stone block abstractly representing an eternal flame, engraved with '1956' and the Kossuth-era Hungarian coat-of-arms, and topped with an actual eternal flame. A statue of Imre Nagy was installed in adjacent Martyr's Square. The square acquired this name in 1936 after the 1934 memorial erected there to the republican martyrs of 1918-19, murdered by Béla Kun's Communists. In 1945 that memorial had been dismantled, and the square's name was suppressed until 1990.<sup>40</sup> Nagy faces away from the 1946 Soviet Army memorial on nearby Liberty Square and toward Parliament. This memorial thus re-deploys several existing signifiers of Communist domination. In 2001, numerous small bronze spheres were set into the façade of the Agriculture Ministry building facing Kossuth Square, suggesting bullet impacts, although the shots fired at protestors came from that building's roof.<sup>41</sup>

38 Palonen, "Creating Communities."

39 Gerö, *Public Space*.

40 Gerö, *Public Space*; "New Street Names in Budapest," Magda T. Somogyi (2005), accessed 14 January 2014, [nevtan.arts.unideb.hu/nevtan/informaciok/pisa/tsm-a.pdf](http://nevtan.arts.unideb.hu/nevtan/informaciok/pisa/tsm-a.pdf).

41 Duncan J. Smith, *Only in Budapest: A guide to hidden corners, little-known places and unusual objects* (Budapest, JEL-KEP Kiado, 2008).



Fig. 4. 'Bullet holes' in the arcade of the Ministry of Agriculture building at Kossuth Square (József Kampfl and Ferenc Callmayer, 2001). Credit: Quentin Stevens.

The 50th anniversary in 2006 inspired another flurry of commemoration, both official and popular. A replica of the remnant boots from the toppled Stalin statue was installed on top of a replica tribune opposite Memento Park's entrance.<sup>42</sup> Turai contrasts this with Germany's contemporary Holocaust memorials, suggesting the boots merely reproduce an historical image, without critically engaging with inherited artistic forms, symbols and memories. Turai notes that the boots, like the Park, are detached from everyday life. Memento Park does little to remind audiences of victimhood under Socialism, and does not encourage reflection on complicity, and thus fails to "heat" memory, to "(trigger) active memory work".<sup>43</sup> It conforms to a widespread Western European critique that Socialism, unlike Nazism, is often remembered in a cool, dispassionate way.<sup>44</sup>

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42 Hedvig Turai, "Past Unmastered: Hot and Cold Memory in Hungary," *Third Text*, 23/1 (2009): 97-106.

43 Turai, "Past Unmastered," 105, citing James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993).

44 Charles S. Maier, "Hot Memory... Cold Memory: On the Political Half-life of Fascist and Communist Memory," *Transit* 22, 2002; Slavoj Žižek, "Two Types of Totalitarianism," *London Review of Books* 27/6 (17 March 2005).



Fig. 5. Replica of the boots from the statue of Stalin (Sandor Mikus, 1951) that was toppled in Parade Square in 1956, erected opposite the entrance to Memento Park.  
Credit: Quentin Stevens.

For 2006, Hungary's democratic Socialist government asked the Galéria to run an open competition for a central memorial on Parade Square, at the site of the toppled Stalin statue. An expert panel of artists selected the abstract design of the i-Ypsilon Group, artists born after the uprising. It is a forest of 2006 steel columns; toward the memorial's front they rise from two to eight metres, transition from rusted to stainless, and gather closer together to form a bright, unified wedge cutting into the 1950s-styled cobblestone pavement at a 56° angle to the street. Walking among the columns gives visitors the sense of joining a swelling crowd. The expert panel's chair, personally involved in the 1956 protests and in destroying the Stalin statue, suggests this seemingly-abstract memorial is actually representational, resembling the students linked arm-in-arm, and argues the memorial has to speak to younger generations with progressive aesthetic tastes who have no personal memories of the event.<sup>45</sup> Some critics thought it more resembled a military phalanx; some felt the design too closely imitated Berlin's 2005 Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Others suggested the memorial's anti-populist design and development process reflect the democratic Socialist government's continuity with the former Communists. To address strong conservative opposition, the government subsequently installed a '56 flag nearby (a formal resolution similar to Washington's Vietnam Veterans' Memorial),<sup>46</sup> added an explanatory plaque, and renamed the site "'56 Square".<sup>47</sup>

45 Harms, "Monument discourse"; Attila Szigmond, interview with author, 5 August 2013.

46 Charles L. Griswold, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall: Philosophical Thoughts on Political Iconography," *Critical Inquiry* 12/4 (Summer 1986): 688-719.

47 Harms, "Monument discourse."



Fig. 6. '56 Revolution Monument at Parade Square (i-Ypsilon Group, 2006).  
Credit: Quentin Stevens.

At the suggestion of a former conservative Prime Minister, an autonomous “Public Foundation for Freedom Fighters”, representing the conservative tastes of many veterans’ organizations, had run a parallel, invitation-only design competition in 2005. Their alternate collective '56 memorial was unveiled mere hours before the official one.<sup>48</sup> This was a figurative sculpture of a dense group of citizens bursting through a gateway at the University of Technology, led by a raised-up woman, suggesting an allegory of liberty. This work is essentially a more representational version of the official scheme, with the same overall composition and the same symbolism of a gathering, rising, emancipated citizenry. Its problematic formal and symbolic parallels to the de-Stalinized Liberation monument on Gellért Hill and the armed peasants of the Social Realist Kossuth memorial seem to have gone unnoticed.



Fig. 7. Memorial to the 1956 Uprising at Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Róbert Csikszentmihályi, 2006); an alternative to the official memorial on Parade Square.  
Credit: Quentin Stevens.

Budapest’s '56 Uprising memorials take a range of forms and locations which reflect the range of interests that have a stake in this history. They include a variety of figurative depictions of heroes and martyrs (the counter-revolutionary martyrs in 1960, the Pest Kid, Imre Nagy, relief portraits on the Corvin Cinema, groups of protestors, the '56 flag); and symbolic references to death and violence (stone sarcophagus and headstone, timber grave poles, the eternal flame, bullet holes).

48 Harms, “Monument discourse.”

The most significant abstract memorial, i-Ypsilon Group's controversial scheme on Parade Square, was essentially copied elsewhere in a more palatable form, and modulated by the later addition of a flagpole. Many of the earliest '56 memorials are in everyday spaces that became battlegrounds; later official 'national' memorials were incorporated into key symbolic sites, Kossuth and Parade Squares, but do not necessarily resonate with the general public. Most unofficial '56 memorials have received formal recognition; none have ever been removed. Despite their differences, Budapest's various '56 memorials share a focus on individual and collective bravery and sacrifice. Rather than engaging with and reinterpreting the Communist's 1960 memorial to their own '56 fallen, democratic Budapest has removed it from public space and from everyday political consciousness. This is in contrast to Germany, another country dealing with its Nazi and Communist past, where numerous counter-memorials have challenged and diversified commemorative narratives.<sup>49</sup>

## Kossuth Square

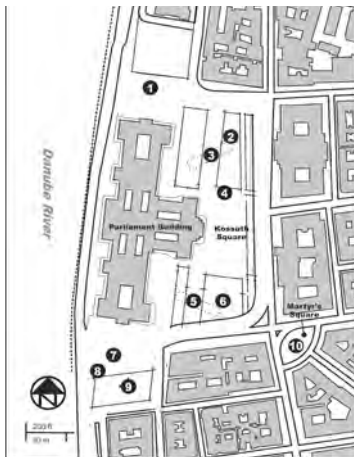


Fig. 8. Map showing the placements of memorials in re-developed Kossuth Square. Credit: Emery Huang and Quentin Stevens.

1. István Tisza (György Zala, 1934-48 and 2014-) Mihály Károlyi (1975-2012)
2. Lajos Kossuth Memorial (János Horvay, 1927-52 and 2014-) (Communist version: Kisfaludi Strobl Zsigmond, 1952-2012)
3. Underground Lapidarium (Former Ventilation Tunnel)
4. Flame of the Revolution (Mária Lugossy, 1996-2012)
5. Underground 1956 Memorial (Former Ventilation Tunnel)
6. Ferenc Rákóczi II (János Pásztor, 1937-)
7. Andrássy memorial (György Zala, 1906-45 and 2014- Atilla József (László Marton, 1980-2012)
8. Atilla József (2014-)
9. Béla Kovács (Kligl Sándor, 2002-2012)
10. Martyrs of the Nation 1918-1919 Memorial (Richárd Füredi and Jenő Lechner, 1934-1945) Imre Nagy Memorial (Imre Varga, 1996-)

While the 1956 Uprising is an unchallenged national subject commemorated throughout Budapest, at Kossuth Square one site has had to incorporate memorials to many different events and values. There has been a particular increase in the symbolic potency of Kossuth Square over the last decade. In 2006, evidence that newly-re-elected Socialist Prime Minister Gyurcsány had knowingly deceived the people about government finances led to large protests outside Parliament which claimed to continue the anti-Communist, democratizing efforts of 1956. After a conservative coalition was elected in 2010, the new Secretary of Culture proposed relocating the abstract

<sup>49</sup> See Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Quentin Stevens, Karen Franck and Ruth Fazakerley, 'Counter-monuments: the Anti-monumental and the Dialogic', *Journal of Architecture*, 17(6) (2012): 951-72.

Parade Square '56 memorial to Memento Park, insinuating its Communist connotations.<sup>50</sup> In this anti-Communist context, Kossuth Square has recently been legally redefined from a municipal to a national space, and it is being completely remade in its pre-Soviet 1944 condition. For the recently re-elected conservative Prime Minister Viktor Orban, this project reflects Hungarian self-determination and national pride. However, 1944 is also associated with Miklós Horthy, a very conservative leader who cooperated with the Nazis. Orban's once-liberal party Fidesz is now seen to pursue a conservative agenda not dissimilar to that of Hungary's second-largest party, the anti-Semitic, extreme-right Jobbik.<sup>51</sup> For some, Kossuth Square's redevelopment reflects a conservative politics that looks back to a pre-1944 past to define Hungary's future.

The replanning of Kossuth Square has involved changes to several memorials. The Rákóczi memorial has been restored and retained. The former statues of Andrásy and Tisza and the original 1927 Kossuth memorial were all recreated from casts and photographs. Andrásy's statue was apparently melted down to make Budapest's Stalin and Lenin statues, while the original Kossuth figures were kept in another town. The fate of the Communist Kossuth ensemble is undecided. The statue of Mihály Károlyi was removed from the Square, largely because conservatives blame him for Hungary's humiliating post-war loss of territory. The 2002 statue to Béla Kovács, victim of Communism, has also disappeared. Following public protest, the 1980 statue of poet Attila József was retained.<sup>52</sup>

The government decree for the project also required installing the garden parterre proposed in 1882 by the Parliament's architect, Imre Steindl, which predates all four revived memorials; adding 600 carparking spaces and a visitor centre; and, paradoxically, emphasizing the '56 uprising, especially the shootings that happened on the Square.<sup>53</sup> The solution places all these latter elements underground. Steindl's Parliament design provided evaporative cooling through two large fountains, with subterranean brick tunnels drawing fresh air through the water curtains and into the building. The fountains had been destroyed when the Rákóczi and Kossuth statues were built, and the tunnels forgotten. Plans were altered to allow these dramatic, rediscovered spaces, eight metres wide and six metres high, to be opened and re-used. One contains a '56 memorial; the sarcophagus illegally installed in 1991 is being reinstated there. A steel parapet around the tunnel's new entry stairs has been punctured with real gunshots, to graphically convey the historic events. This scheme brings the crucial events of 1956 to light within the nation's main representational space, and apparently has the endorsement of the '56 organizations.<sup>54</sup> However, it also constructs confusing spatial metaphors:

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50 <http://www.origo.hu/kultura/20110215-az-56osok-teren-akar-muzeumi-negyedet-a-kormany.html>, accessed 17 January 2014.

51 Jan-Werner Mueller, "Hungary's election offers some disturbing lessons for Europe," *The Guardian* (10 April 2014), accessed 12 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/09/hungary-election-europe-prime-minister-viktor-orban>.

52 Gerő, *Public Space*; Dent, *Budapest*; Thorstensen, *Places of Memory*; Maier, "Hot Memory"; Reuben Fowkes, "The past reloaded," *Time Out Budapest* (June 2012): 58-59; Tamas Wachslar, interview with author, 5 August 2013.

53 [http://www.nemzefotore.hu/steindl\\_imre\\_program.htm](http://www.nemzefotore.hu/steindl_imre_program.htm), automatic translation, accessed 13 December 2013; Tamas Wachslar interview.

54 Tamas Wachslar interview.

history up to 1944 is shown at ground level, and history from 1956 is in a layer beneath it, literally burying the commemoration of an uprising. The years between 1944 and 1989 are ignored, although the *Shoes on the Danube* memorial near the Parliament commemorates the Arrow Cross's murder of Jews, and the proposed new memorial to victims of the Nazi occupation will be visible beyond the Nagy statue on nearby Liberty Square. The parliamentary decree precludes commemorating any significant events and individuals since 1989 on Kossuth Square, including the declaration of the current Hungarian Republic. The Square's refurbishment can therefore be understood as a spatial expression of the political right's on-going consolidation of power, emphasising a pre-1944 historical narrative that supports their current aspirations for Hungarian self-determination, and disconcerting implications of perceived continuity with the Horthy era.

## Conclusion

Budapest has had a highly dynamic commemorative landscape, subjected to repeated revision, particularly since the Second World War. Successive regimes have modified and translated existing memorials, motifs and historical subjects to fabricate histories that suit their own self-image, constituency, and ambitions. Four distinct approaches can be discerned in the on-going management of Budapest's memorials: decontextualization, iconoclasm, liberalisation and avoidance.

Memento Park illustrates decontextualization because the memorials were all removed from their original sites. Often these sites contributed to the histories and meanings that the memorials reflected, such as the 1960 memorial to the *counter*-revolutionary "martyrs" outside the former Communist Party headquarters, and the original location of Stalin's boots on the Communist parade ground. Other sites had given memorials specific connection to Budapest's everyday life, as with Steinmetz and Ostapenko, who have lost their role as the city's guardians. The Communist memorials are now all recast as forlorn symbols of a discarded ideology, with no account of how that era came to an end, or how that past relates to present ideals and everyday life. Thus, these memorials are decontextualized from historical change as well as site meaning. Successive Hungarian governments have been iconoclastic in destroying or removing existing memorials to subjects they view as ideologically wrong, including those to Andrásy, Tisza, the republican martyrs of 1918-19, Trianon, Wallenberg, Stalin, and, later, most other Communist memorials. They have also removed memorials to less-partisan individuals they perceived as 'weak' in the context of national pride, including Károlyi, Kovács, and the despondent 1927 Kossuth.

In terms of liberalisation, since 1989 there has been an increase in the thematic and political diversity of Budapest's memorial landscape. This has been furthered by particular constituencies, including different '56 veterans' organizations with varied aesthetic, political and symbolic



attitudes.<sup>55</sup> Although the redevelopment of Kossuth Square appears to counteract this ongoing complexification of Budapest's commemorative landscape, the retention there of the Attila József statue and the subtle accommodation of a '56 memorial illustrate that a broader spirit of Hungarian liberation can overcome particular party dogma. But the outcome reverses and neutralizes the political and commemorative spirit of both '56 and '89. Since 1989 there has perhaps been less formal experimentation in memorials than under the Communists. One observable point of continuity is that Hungarians have shown a continued preference for figurative memorials. The 1956 Revolution Monument on Parade Square is widely disliked, for example, because its abstract form is seen to signify anti-populism on the part of the democratic Socialist government. Its symbolism was reproduced at the University of Technology in a more figurative form. The *Flame of the Revolution* memorial was simply removed.

Avoidance is a fourth recognizable strategy for managing remembrance of the past. Other than the 1956 Uprising, there has been little treatment in Budapest of difficult, 'negative' aspects of national history, particularly in comparison to other former Communist countries. Commemoration has only rarely extended to the history of the less powerful. Jewish Hungarians have so far only been commemorated by the *Shoes on the Danube* memorial and several works within Budapest's main synagogue. It was only in the late 1980s that memorials were erected to several "righteous gentiles". Budapest's recent commemorations of the Holocaust and the persecution of Roma avoid addressing Hungarian culpability. Compared to Germany, where the Holocaust has been the subject of many memorials, Hungary's Nazi-aligned history remains largely unexamined. The Second World War remains sufficiently contentious that there is no central national memorial. The newly-proposed memorial on Liberty Square is heating up discussion about this history.<sup>56</sup> With the Bela Kovács statue gone, Imre Nagy's memorial is the only central marker that acknowledges victims of the Communist dictatorship, even though Hungary was the first to challenge Communism in 1956 and the first to escape it in 1989. Memorials to 1956 emphasize contestation and suffering during the Uprising, but not the suffering before or after. Memento Park does not aid this remembrance. Expression of Communist state violence is essentially confined to the House of Terror museum on Andrásy Avenue. The steel cut-out awning that casts the shadow of the English word 'terror' onto that building's façade is perhaps the only public memorial in Budapest that offers a challenging memory of Socialism.

By contrast, Hungary's various regimes have retained almost all pre-existing 'positive' memorials that broadly convey national identity and values, in particular Liberty, even when the political origins and aesthetics of these works are disliked. This includes memorials to Rákóczi, Kossuth (in different forms), József, the Liberation Monument, and all '56 memorials except for *Flame of the*

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55 Ágnes Szöllösy and Andras Szilágyi, interview with author, 2 August 2013; Gerö, *Public Space*; Magdaléna Marsovszky, "Holy Turul, Help Us! Hungary's Völkisch-ethnic-national Turn," translated from *Stimmen der Zeit* 6 (2011): 390-400, accessed 31 July 2013, <http://www.con-spiration.de/texte/english/2011/marsovszky-e.html>.

56 "Gábrriel arkangyal és birodalmi sas lesz a Szabadság téren" (January 19, 2014), accessed January 29, 2014, [http://index.hu/belfold/2014/01/19/gabriel\\_arkangyal\\_es\\_birodalmi\\_sas\\_lesz\\_a\\_szabadsag\\_teren/](http://index.hu/belfold/2014/01/19/gabriel_arkangyal_es_birodalmi_sas_lesz_a_szabadsag_teren/).

*Revolution*; the illegal '56 memorials at Hay Square and Kossuth Square were also ultimately made official. These works all avoid the problematic specifics of national history since 1918. No regime has ever erected a public memorial, positive or negative, to Horthy, although a member of the right-wing Jobbik party erected a bust of him on church land in Liberty Square. Horthy's association with the Axis powers means he remains too controversial for an acceptable statement about him to be set in stone.<sup>57</sup> If a public memorial to Horthy is ever erected, the strategies of decontextualization, iconoclasm, and liberalization remain available to translate and alter its significance.

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<sup>57</sup> "Gov't declines to comment on Horthy monument", accessed 7 May 2014, <http://www.politics.hu/20131104/govt-declines-to-comment-on-horthy-monument/>