

4

URBAN CHANGE AND THE
POLITICS OF REMEMBERING IN
CONTEMPORARY BUDAPEST

Attila Szanto

This paper reconstructs key aspects of Budapest's structural and symbolic transformations since 1989, and examines their effects on the subjective experience of the city in everyday life. Based on a study of contemporary narratives of the Hungarian capital, the paper shows how people's memories of the socialist past are challenged by recent transformations, and how this in turn leads to a variety of subjective strategies to cope with urban change. These strategies include, for example, nostalgia for the past, a weak sense of continuity between the past and the present, and ongoing shifts between a focus on positive and negative aspects of the past and the present. The paper argues that during times of accelerated urban change remembering loses its well-established modalities: 'there occurs a memory crisis ... a problematisation of the normal relationship of the present to the past' (Boyer 1994: 26).

With the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989 and the advent of a market-driven economy a new era in the history of Budapest began. By the late 1990s almost the entire inner city housing stock, which previously had been owned by the state and later by local districts, was privatised (Izsák 2008: 336; Szabó 2001: 182). Tenants were given the opportunity to acquire their homes at prices well below market value (Bodnár 2001: 41), but due their lack of financial resources and the absence of government subsidies large parts of the inner city areas are still in a desolate condition.

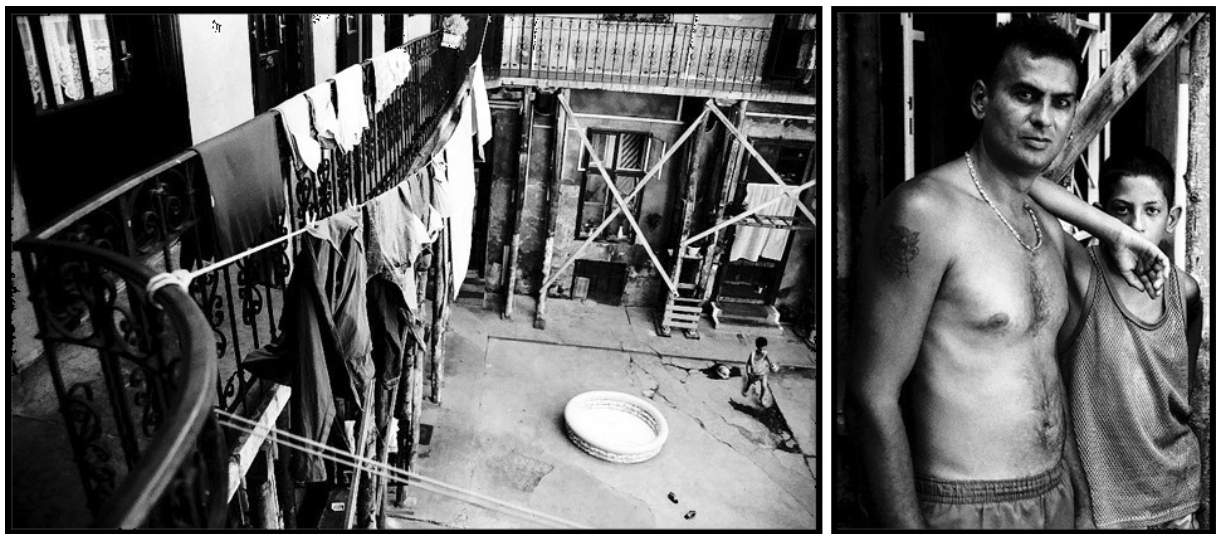
As the state withdrew from the housing market, urban renewal was almost entirely in private hands, where it was vulnerable to the resources and economic interests of owners. In Budapest, there is to date no comprehensive urban agenda that would set out wide-ranging and enforceable criteria for urban development. This is in turn an unintended side-effect of the 1990 administrative reforms: with the intention of overcoming centralised forms of government, political power now lies predominantly with the 23 districts, while the Mayor's authority is rather weak. Urban renewal and urban restructuring are thus the affair of private capital; projects of any scale are commonly negotiated between private actors and districts, and are often played off one against the other. '[P]rivatisation of formerly state-owned dwellings', Bodnár (2001: 56) concludes, 'is the principal means of urban restructuring' today.

Some of the now privately owned buildings have been refurbished, but restoration has been partial. Prime locations have been quickly restored (Lichtenberger et al. 1995) and converted to office or retail use, and more office space and up-market dwellings have been created through in-fill developments in the nineteenth century urban fabric of the inner city. The influx of capital into parts of a rundown urban environment – whether in the form of wealthy residents, the conversion of apartments to office or retail use, or high quality in-fill development – is known in the literature as gentrification, in the course of which the existing residential population is displaced by the more wealthy (Bodnár 2001, Smith and Williams 1986, Smith 1996). What is distinctive about Budapest is the speed at which gentrification occurred: 'Unlike that in London or New York prior to the 1970s ... Budapest gentrification did not begin as a largely isolated process in the housing market, but came fully fledged in the arteries of global capital following 1989' (Smith 1996: 174).



Gentrification of the inner city: restored building with ground floor converted to retail use, next to building with shotgun holes on the façade from the 1956 uprising. Mikszáth Street in the 8th district. Photograph by Attila Szanto.

In contrast to these developments, large inner city areas are still in a desolate condition, and evidence of poverty and misery in urban space is paramount: in Budapest, poverty and disintegration are the experience of a large number of the population. Following the collapse of the socialist workplace guarantee and the erosion of the welfare state, the city's public realm bursts with provoking encounters. The exclusion of a vast number of people – in particular Roma and low-skilled workers – from access to wealth has turned the public realm into a place of conflict. In inverting the social hierarchy, those who are excluded often exercise a form of spatial power over wealthier people in the streets. This is not a matter of ghettos that one could simply avoid: homeless and drunk people populate almost every underpass, beggars ask for money at traffic lights, and at the entrance to major underground station there is a small black market for fruits and vegetables, cheap sweets and clothes.



A rundown inner city courtyard in the 8th district ... and two of its inhabitants. Photographs by Gábor Kápolka

The transition from state socialism to capitalism has been accompanied by unemployment, declining real wages, increasing social inequalities and status uncertainties. By 1994, the number of employees decreased by 1.4 million, a dramatic figure when contrasted with Hungary's overall population of ten million: 'more jobs disappeared in the first half of the 1990s than had been created during the four decades of state socialism' (Galasi 1998: 1). In 1992, 22 per cent of the Hungarian population lived below the subsistence level, but by 1995 that share increased to 30-35 per cent (Andorka and Speder 2001: 150); 42 per cent lived below the subsistence level in at least one of the years 1992 to 1994 (ibid: 156), meaning that almost every other citizen was affected by poverty at that time. Using another poverty measure, Galasi (1998) shows that about one-third of the population were at least once within the bottom quintile of the income distribution between 1992 and 1996. Molnar (2006: 10) shows that real income and expenditure of households dropped by more than 20 per cent between 1993 and 1997, and reached 1993 levels only in 2001. At the same time, income inequalities have widened: in 2003, average income within the top decile was over eight times higher than in the bottom decile (Mozser 2006: 107). Whereas similar inequality figures might be perceived as normal in Western countries, they represented a sharp contrast to rather moderate inequalities during socialism, where the average pay

of the top 10 per cent was less than three times higher than of the bottom 10 per cent in 1979 (Beskid and Kolosi 1983: 111). There has been a significant level of income mobility too. Between 1992 and 1996, more than half of the population in the middle three quintiles changed quintiles between years (Galasi 1998: iii-iv), suggesting that downward mobility and status uncertainty after 1989 were fairly high.

Even as unemployment rates rose, real wages declined, and social inequalities and status uncertainties increased, Hungary saw a massive transformation and expansion of its retail sector from the early 1990s. Whereas under socialism consumption was restricted to a limited number of available goods, there is now an abundant choice of commodities. These developments are probably best symbolised by the numerous western-style shopping centres that have been erected in the inner city and at traffic nodes between central Budapest and the predominantly residential outer districts since 1989, accompanied by several large scale retail parks within 20 minutes' driving distance from the city. At the same time, there is an obvious polarisation of retail uses today. Shopping centres stand next to second hand shops and Chinese outlets selling cheap, poor quality clothing. Where the rich shop, the poor linger: plaza hopping has become a common leisure activity for the less wealthy, symbolising a marginal sense of inclusion into the consumer society. Others make a detour in order to avoid the painful confrontation with their own economic limitations.

In order to understand how the transformation of Budapest has affected the everyday lives of its inhabitants, the next section theorises the spatial and temporal aspects of remembering and their relation to urban design.



The Westend City Shopping Centre is the largest building project in Hungary since the late nineteenth century, and to date the largest shopping and entertainment centre in Central and Eastern Europe. Erected upon an 11 hectare brownfield site in 1999, it accommodates more than 400 retail units, 14 cinemas and a three-storey replica of the Niagara Falls (Bodnár 2001: 146–7; Szabó 2001; www.westend.hu). Photograph by Attila Szanto.

Memory, Experience and Place

Urban experience and place are intimately connected with each other. Experience, as Casey emphasises, is necessarily place-bound: it 'takes place in place and nowhere else' (Casey 1987: 182). Places shape urban life, and this has immediate implications for our understanding of memory. Because the experience of the city is never without the places that stage it, memory should be recognised as containing reference to place that, as Casey (ibid: 184) observes, 'serves to situate one's memorial life, [that is,] to give it ... a local habitation.' Past events and their settings are remembered together, for they were not experienced separately: '[a]s embodied existence opens onto place, indeed takes place in place and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific: it is bound to place as to its own basis' (ibid: 182). Memory 'unfolds in a spatial framework' (Boyer 1994: 68).

The relationship between memory and place manifests itself in two principal ways. We may remember events that elicit memories of their places; or we may remember, or visit, places that elicit memories of events that they once hosted. Memories elicit places, just as places elicit memories: there is 'an elective affinity between memory and place. Not only is each situated to the other; each calls for the other' (Casey 1987: 214-5). Crucially, the relationship between memory and place is largely invisible to others: 'Below the level of visibility ordinary inhabitants enact their own maps of the city' (Tonkiss 2005: 127). Others don't know in what ways our memories connect us to certain places; they don't know in what ways places that stage our urban narratives connect to, and derive their meaning from, past experiences. Memories elicit and shape narratives that produce their own subjective urban geographies that may not have much in common with official discourse: 'a migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city' (de Certeau 1988: 93); it transposes the experience of the city into 'another spatiality' (ibid.). It is often our invisible past – painful or not – that guides our experience of the city by affecting where we go, what we do, and what all this means to us: 'Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body' (de Certeau 1988: 108).

Memory, then, 'is not a means to access the past but the medium for its experience' (Tonkiss 2005: 121). Places support the recollection of past experiences, as their material details recall the details of narratives that one only vaguely remembers. To revisit certain places helps refresh memories of both past events and the places themselves: 'we come back to places where we have spent a part of our life to relive and rediscover details that had vanished,' Halbwachs (1992: 199-200) observed, while Ruskin (1880: 178) was convinced that remembering itself could not be accomplished without the support of places: 'we may live without [architecture] ... but we cannot remember without her.' Boyer (1994: 26) joins in by stating that 'memory orients experience by linking an individual to ... specific places.'

Memories need to be grounded in places, real or imagined, in order to remain accessible for the human subject. This is because 'the order of the places will preserve the order of the things [to be remembered]' (Cicero, cited in Casey 1987: 183). Places that do not change much over time support the recovery of one's own memories whenever one revisits them. Yet what happens if places do change

significantly, as happened in Budapest during the 1990s? What is the affect of accelerated urban change on everyday urban experience? The next sections attempt to give answers to this question.

Methodology

The findings presented in this paper are grounded empirically in the analysis of twenty narratives of Budapest, which were obtained with the help of the technique of the narrative interview. The main reason for choosing this method is its strength in exploring a field whose conceptual cornerstones are only vaguely known. In this context, the use of in-depth interviews in general, and of narrative interviews in particular, is widely acknowledged in the literature (Bohnsack 2000, Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000, Kohli 1978, Maindok 1996, Patton 2002): 'The underlying assumption is that the perspective of the interviewee is best revealed in stories where the informant is using his or her own spontaneous language in the narration of events' (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000: 61). As already stated, aspects of narrative urban subjectivity could not be anticipated, and first clues as to which aspects may be significant were far from being concrete. Nor could particular themes that might dominate narratives of Budapest be known in advance.

As Jovchelovitch and Bauer summarise, 'the idea of narrative interviewing is motivated by a critique of the question-response schema of most interviews. In the question-response mode the interviewer is imposing structures in a threefold sense: (a) by selecting the themes and topics, (b) by ordering the questions and (c) by wording the questions in his or her language' (2000: 61; see also Schütze 1977). By contrast, the verbal narratives elicited by help of the chosen method could be expected to offer particularly rich accounts of subjective memories and their social, spatial and biographical contexts.

Interviews were conducted between spring 2005 and summer 2006. In the sample there are men and women of different ages, social background and faith, people who were born and raised in Budapest, people who moved away a long time ago yet return occasionally, and people who never lived there but visit regularly. Interviewees were selected with the aid of the snowball technique (Flick 1995: 76, Patton 2002: 237). Through respondents' recommendations initial information about potential further interviewees was obtained, and this in turn helped decide whether the recommended person – judged by the emerging conceptual framework of the study and the composition of the sample – was of potential interest to the study. However, prior to discussing the findings of the empirical study it may be helpful to briefly reconstruct the symbolic transformation of Budapest since 1989, and the associated discourses on remembering and forgetting.

The symbolic transformation of Budapest's public realm

Since 1989, the public realm of central Budapest has been largely purified of vestiges of the socialist regime. Statues and memorials that once stood at every important street or square in the city were quickly removed after the change of regime and relocated to an open-air museum in the outskirts of the city. Such 'ritual act[s] of removing the past' (Kovács 2001: 80) paved the way for a symbolic refurbishment of the public realm. Street names associated with the workers' movement, state

institutions, or key personalities of the history of socialism were renamed shortly after 1989 and usually recall the Austro-Hungarian period that many people refer to as Budapest's golden era.

For Halbwachs, street names do not primarily 'render homage to ... great speculators or administrators who served the public interest ... [but] are signs of origin' (cited in Rossi 1984: 141). However, we still need to ask why certain origins are considered more important than others and identify the discourse that establishes what is publicly remembered or forgotten. In this context, the renaming of streets or statues represents a symbolic act of forgetting that is itself a negative form of remembering. Statues, events or names removed from public display and discourse continue to haunt both the private and public imagery as 'nonevents, nonproblems, nonpersons' (Rév 1995: 25) until they may or may not disappear completely. Or, they may disappear just to be 'reactivated in a different guise, in the context of a different, inorganically re-created narrative' (ibid.) of the postmodern city. Such remembering may be seen as an act of forgetting, given that it manipulates the past as it transposes it into the present.



The statue park opened in 1993 with over fifty figures of Marx and Lenin, worker-heroes and Soviet soldiers. Kovács (2003) points to the ironic form of remembering that the park encourages. The grotesque dance in which the figures engage makes the visitor smile – and reflect on the ideological message that they embody. Photograph by Attila Szanto.

In Budapest, many attempts have been made since 1989 to revitalise the imagery of the nineteenth century bourgeois city, but excavated images tend to idealise the past by reducing it to aspects that evoke positive associations, and make the city more attractive to inhabitants and visitors. Lenin Ringstrasse became Theresa Ringstrasse, but it hardly reminds one of the oppression under the reign of the Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa; images of national greatness hardly contemplate its dependence on the Habsburg rulers who created Greater Hungary to stabilise the multi-ethnic eastern

part of the Empire; and, finally, while images of nineteenth century coffeehouses correctly depict these as institutions of the bourgeoisie –hosting literary circles, political debates and the free press – they hardly disclose the fact that these images are little more than a shadowy simulacrum of the past, connected to economic or political interests rather than to the everyday life of the contemporary bourgeoisie. In conclusion, contemporary discourses reproduce collective images of the nineteenth century city kept alive throughout the twentieth century, and often locate these in places used for different purposes in the past.

In light of these developments, the symbolic transformation of Budapest's public realm might be interpreted as a two-fold act of forgetting that intentionally erases the memory of the socialist past (or at least attempts to do so), while it also replaces any accurate memory of the nineteenth-century city with the deceptive clarity of the image. Recent transformations recall Halbwachs's distinction between memory and history – the former intimately connected to lived experience, the latter disconnected from it. For Halbwachs, '[m]emory had to be linked to lived experience; otherwise it was reduced to "history," becoming abstract or intellectualized reconstructions, debased or faked recollections' (Boyer 1994: 26). As soon as lived memories fade, the past reinserts itself into the present in the form of 'debased or faked recollections' – as a collection of fragmented images prey to manipulation by political or economic actors. Alternatively, the past inserts itself into the present by being exhibited or hidden away in museums, like the Statue Park, which cannot resolve the paradox of showing and bringing into the present a past detached from lived experience (cf. Boyer 1994). The recent transformation of Budapest provides examples of both ways of becoming alienated from the recent past.



Image on the left shows the Liberation Memorial on Gellért hill, erected by the Soviet conquerors in 1947. In 1989, the flag-carrying soldier and the red star were removed from the assembly. When the last Russian soldiers left Hungary in 1992, the central figure, the 'Genius of Freedom', was wrapped in white cloth and renamed 'Spirit of Freedom'. The image on the right shows the memorial today. Photographs (from left to right): Szabó Ervin Library, Miklós Déri, Attila Szanto.

Rossi believed that 'the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like the memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locus of the collective memory' (Rossi 1984: 130). Yet when certain symbolic places in the city disappear as they get crushed by discourses of remembering and forgetting – and the associated distortions, idealisations, manipulations, inventions, and simulations – the question arises whether similar processes occur at an individual level. How is the socialist era remembered or forgotten, present or absent, in contemporary narratives of Budapest? The following sections attempt to answer these questions by reference to the findings of the empirical study.



Budapest, the City of Coffee.

In the illustration announcing the 2007 competition of coffee houses, the 'Spirit of Freedom' holds a coffee bean instead of a palm leaf above her head. Taken from www.kavehazak.hu

Presences and Absences

Many interviewees above thirty recall the splendour of department stores during socialism, and the quality and variety of the goods on display: 'there was diversity and abundance. Shops were decorated with love and taste ... Department stores were located in old palaces meaning that you could buy goods in an intimate atmosphere of warmth' (Éva). Others recall the department stores located in historic buildings as 'spring-like and really nice' (Helén), and their memories of Budapest of the 1960s and 1970s are accordingly positive.

To pacify the crowd after the events of 1956 (and to demonstrate the achievements of the socialist regime), from the 1960s onwards mass consumption became a key characteristic of Hungarian society (Szilágyi 2002). This special policy of making available a relatively sophisticated supply of goods (at least in comparison to other socialist countries) was commonly referred to as Goulash Communism: 'Budapester fashion has always been famous. There were boutiques, that is, the so called Goulash Communism was unique in so far as there were small private businesses' (Éva). The more prestigious department stores in Budapest were located in the ornate historic buildings of the distinctive nineteenth-century urban fabric. For Éva, Helén and others, consumption in socialist Budapest represented an ideal mixture of choice between goods of a decent aesthetic quality, embedded into the nineteenth-century cityscape whose solemnity and elegance matched their preference for the bourgeois way of life: 'Women dressed very tastefully ... When I visited Budapest in 1965 for the first time, women used to wear white gloves on weekend walks. I will never forget a lady whom I once saw wearing a white costume, red shoes and a red purse – I would certainly not come across such a phenomenon today' (Éva).

Others recall the splendour of department stores during socialism, but not in the same way as Éva and Helén do: 'I was a pretty woman and I always liked to dress up nicely. I went about once a month to buy what was within reach for me' (Margit). Margit is a fifty-eight year old hairdresser who has always been aware of her economic limitations. Nevertheless, she could occasionally afford to shop in the same exclusive department stores as Éva and Helén, and participating in the city's splendour made her experience a fragile sense of inclusion: 'You know, price gaps were much smaller than today when one dress costs 100,000 and another 5,000, so you could afford things more easily. It was lovely to walk around and marvel at clothes there'. Margit's positive memories of socialism suggest that the inequalities of class and status, although by no means absent, were not unbridgeable. This may have been the effect of the socialist rhetoric of an inclusive society, and certainly of rather modest income inequalities compared with today. 'When I was young I knew this feeling of comfort – when we were still equal. Those who were poor and those who were rather rich were equal. A rich man earned 10,000 while you had 1,800, so there wasn't such a big difference between people'.

Éva, Helén and Margit's narratives have a distinct class and status overtone. Their memories of socialist Budapest are largely positive because the city supported their sense of class or status (or, as in Margit's case, mitigated their economic limitations by allowing for a basic degree of participation in urban life) and the corresponding lifestyle. How have Budapest's recent changes affected their relationship with the city?

Relief and Melancholia

Interviewees frequently referred to the socialist city, in particular as they try to grasp contemporary Budapest and its recent changes. Some emphasise existing continuities between pre- and post-1989 Budapest, while others talk more about what is new; yet others hold on to a city that has faded away. At times of accelerated urban change the very relationship between memory and the city becomes contested. Rather than offering everyday guidance to urban narratives, memories often serve as a measure to judge what is new, and to find subjective ways of coping with it.

One way of coping is to focus on aspects of urban life that seem to resist change, or that change in a favourable way: 'I still consider Andrásy Boulevard as Europe's most beautiful street. I particularly like the bit between the Basilica and Oktogon Square, and the pleasant atmosphere of cafés and restaurants on Liszt Square' (Éva). Others too appreciate the revival of the coffee house culture, or the disappearance of socialist aesthetics characterised by 'terribly unambitious shop windows and neon ads' (Tamás). Because virtually all street names with a connection to socialism changed after 1989, 'it was very easy, thank God, to successfully forget' the recent past (Tamás). Éva, Tamás, Helén and others welcome the increase in places supportive of a bourgeois lifestyle, such as restored historic neighbourhoods, the new National Theatre and boutiques located in ornate nineteenth-century buildings. These places offer a sense of continuity to the bourgeois narrative by providing a field in which it can unfold (Bourdieu 1990, 2002).

Another way of coping with change is to oppose developments that contest one's view of the city. For example, Éva and Helén reject new western-style shopping centres that challenge their affection for architectural heritage: 'Shopping centres like the Westend are absolutely misplaced in Budapest. They completely destroy its historic cityscape' (Éva). Like the increase in car traffic, shopping centres and other retail targeting the less wealthy run counter to the solemnity of the nineteenth-century urban fabric, turning formerly exclusive sites into places of mass consumption: 'I would like Andrássy Boulevard to remain as it is. After all, it has always been an elite place ... and I very much appreciate boutiques that radiate quality. ... It is not crowds that walk into elegant shops ... I hope it won't turn into a place of mass consumption' (Helén).

Memories of a once well-maintained and distinctive nineteenth-century urban fabric have become further troubled by the dramatic increase in social inequalities during the 1990s, in the course of which encounters between the rich and the poor have become more frequent and more confronting: 'There is no longer the same cleanliness or orderliness, and somehow the population's appearance and composition have changed. The city has lost its pretty character' (Éva). The wealthy have responded to the polarisation of urban space by avoiding certain areas of the inner city. Their attempts, however, are not always successful, and their sense of taste and claims over the inner city are frequently contested: 'there are homeless people everywhere. One feels sorry for them, but they make a horrible impression. You can't appreciate the beauty of a street when you see ... drunk, unfortunate people' (Éva). Occasionally, people's very sense of comfort is threatened: 'It is outrageous ... We were on our way to the theatre and in search for a car park ... And right there stood a Gypsy, ready to take our money! We were in a car park that resembled a construction site, sinking in mud, and had to pay a horrible sum. I despaired when seeing this in the heart of the city' (Helén). In some cases, the gap between contemporary Budapest and the city as remembered has become unbridgeable, leading to an estrangement from the city in everyday life: 'Budapest attracts me less and less since the regime has changed ... I don't find much of the atmosphere of the late 1960s, the 1970s and even the 1980s. Almost everything has changed ... This is not my old Budapest any more' (Éva).

The memories of the less wealthy have been contested too, albeit in different ways. Those who have experienced a decline in social status cannot afford to buy in shops that were within reach for them during socialism. The polarisation of places of consumption into cheap second-hand shops or Chinese outlets that sell poor quality clothing, and expensive boutiques or shopping centres aimed at the middle-classes (and nothing quite in between) left them without places that they could appropriate: 'Do you know where I buy clothes? At rummage sales. At second-hand shops ... That's it! I go to second-hand shops and buy a pullover or a shirt for 500 Forint [£1.50; AS]' (Margit). Buying in these places confronts Margit with the fact that better places in Budapest have become out of reach for her, whereas shopping in boutiques or plazas has become unthinkable. With a fierce voice Margit says of the latter: 'I have never been. Don't even ask me. I don't have the money to buy expensive things. ... I have no clue as to what a plaza looks like.' Moreover, plazas are more complex than the places Margit was accustomed to: 'It gets on my nerves that they want to determine where I should go. You can't go straightforward just to buy biscuits and leave. No, you need to go upstairs and then downstairs again. You are forced to look at everything and if you have 3 Forint with you they will want to take it from you. That's fairly aggressive.' Margit responded to the polarisation of urban spaces by withdrawing from the city almost completely.

Not all responses to urban change are filtered through individuals' sense of social class or status. The relationship between memory and urban change can become problematic in other ways too. Ádám, who left Budapest in late 1989 to spend only one year abroad, recalls his return to a city radically changed: 'I remember the dreadful experience of standing at Oktogon Square, shocked about realising how aggressive the city has become. Car traffic, as well as life in general, had become very tough. The whole city changed completely during subsequent years.' Márton, a student in his mid twenties, reports how he once set off to buy a Russian dictionary, but was unable to find one in the entire city.

During times of accelerated urban change remembering itself seems to lose its well-established modalities: 'there occurs a memory crisis ... a problematization of the normal relationship of the present to the past' (Boyer 1994: 26). As the city changes, the relationship between memory, narrative and place can become dysfunctional. Habitual ways of narrating may become problematic, as places where narratives used to be lived alter or disappear. New places appear, but people may reject them, or encounter them silently, without knowing how to make them one with their ongoing lives. People may sustain their narratives despite the change in the city, and enact these in increasingly strange places. Memories may become abstract and slightly unreal, and increasingly incommunicable to others, as the actual sites of perception and enactment fade and disappear over time. For Halbwachs, 'memory always unfolded in space, for when memories could not be located in the social space of a group, then remembrance would fail' (Boyer 1994: 26). As sites of subjective remembrance disappear, memories degrade to individual fantasy, resembling more a hallucination than an intersubjectively confirmed truth. All this may be associated with a disturbing simultaneity of different times: nostalgia for the past that alienates the human subject from the present, a lack of a sense of continuity between past, present and future, constant shifts between (and repulsion from) positive and negative aspects of urban change.

The Silence of Historical Events

The recent transformations of Budapest have challenged the relationship between memory and everyday life, and the paper has presented different subjective strategies to cope with this. This section looks at individuals' ways of remembering key historical events that occurred during recent decades.

Only three interviewees mentioned the 1956 uprising. All three were close to the events (but not actively involved in them) to a degree that at times their lives were in danger. Nobody else mentioned 1956, and this finding is surprising in so far as it contrasts with the omnipresence of 1956 in public discourse, peaking around the fiftieth anniversary of the uprising – the year when most of the interviews were conducted. Likewise, there were no accounts of oppression, surveillance, or of state terror during socialism, and nobody mentioned the Soviet army either, although it had a massive presence in Hungary until 1992. Similarly, only one interviewee referred to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the proclamation of the Republic in 1989. Finally, only one interviewee paid attention to Hungary having joined the EU in 2004.

In conclusion, events that assume a prominent position in public discourse, and that can be found in every book on Hungarian history, are largely bypassed by interviewees included in the sample. While this does not mean that these events are irrelevant (most interviewees reflect upon, and react to, Budapest's recent change), it nevertheless seems that lived experience operates within its own timelines. It is, perhaps, less focussed on special events – on moments when history is written – but adapts more silently to gradually changing urban contexts in subsequent years.

While there is a silence of memory with respect to events that have shaped the history of Budapest and Hungary, narratives of Budapest also reveal the perseverance of memory in some contexts.

The Perduringness of Memory

Some memories seem to resist urban change, as the case of seventy-nine year old Vera reveals. Vera migrated to Switzerland during the 1956 uprising, yet she keeps returning to Budapest regularly in order to cherish her memories of the city: 'Memories play a crucial role in this. Whenever I returned for a visit [in the 1970s], I went to ... class reunions to meet people with whom I grew up. Ballrooms where I used to dance were particularly dear to me, so I went to see them ... I visited the places of my youth, and this meant very much to me.' Re-visiting these places brings memories of her youth back to life, and as these memories emerge intensely, new details surface: of events themselves, of places that staged them, of people involved in them. Sometimes, it is tiny details in which a past experience crystallises. Vera's memory of raspberry juice served on Sunday excursions to the Buda hills, like Bachelard's (1994) odour of raisins drying on a wicker tray, shows how memory fragments sometimes preserve the spatial and emotional landscapes of one's youth. These fragments store and connect the places, events and people of a narrative – and feelings too.

In all these examples, '[t]he city appears ... not simply as the background to events in a life, but as an agent of memory, a store of meanings that belong as much to the place itself as they do to the individual' (Tonkiss 2005: 114). Places, Casey (1987 and 1996) says, gather memories which they release in our presence; and they hold memories securely over a long period of time. In Vera's case, this can be observed particularly well, perhaps because she took only minor details with her when she left Hungary in 1956 – the landscape of the Buda hills, the name of a park, the walk between her school and her home – details that were not affected by the manifold transformations of Budapest since then. The perseverance of Vera's childhood memories, however, also reveals that the remembered city is a peculiar type of object, located not only in the external world but also in the internal landscape of the mind, whose symbolic reality can be more enduring than the reality of stone (Halbwachs 1992: 205). Symbolic cityscapes may remain intact even as the actual places that they refer to disappear. In this case, memories continue to be imputed to places that lie beyond or underneath the ones that the eye perceives today.

Another striking continuity between socialist Budapest and its capitalist successor lies in the paramount importance of consumption, understood as the symbolically and emotionally charged relationship between the human subject and the realm of objects. Despite the obvious political and

economic differences between socialist and capitalist Budapest, what seems to have resisted change is the human subject's excitement about the commodity world at hand. This excitement represents a principal continuity that should not be overlooked in light of the changing aesthetics of commodities and the level of choice between them. It is this excitement that allows people to enact the "same" narratives in the "same" city. This continuity, it seems, does not require the uninterrupted existence of concrete places of consumption, but is sustained by the human subject's habitualised way of relating to commodities as such. Even as the city changes, 'the force of habit soon renders people who remain in a place insensitive to [it]' (Halbwachs 1992: 205). That is, people may continue perceiving the same old city despite its gradual change.

Consumption, one could argue, represents a form of habitualised memory (Connerton 1989), stored in the routine actions of the body and the perceptual gaze. It levels out, and survives, the transformation of the city. Narratives of consumption represent lived memories of socialism; one may even say that memories of socialism in the context of this study are to a significant degree expressed as memories of consumption. Despite, or rather because of, the change of political institutions and the economic regime, memories of consumption continue to inform urban narratives in Budapest in an increasing number of places: shops, cafés, boutiques, department stores, shopping centres, retail parks, and the universe of the commodity world on display.

Conclusion

This essay considered the cornerstones of the structural and symbolic transformations of Budapest since 1989, and then theorised the complex relationship between memory and place. Based on an empirical study conducted in 2005 and 2006, it explored how memories of various aspects of the socialist city continue to inform individuals' experiences in contemporary Budapest. It also suggested that many of these memories have become problematic as the corresponding aspects of urban life have changed, and in some cases disappeared. The examples discussed gave an insight into subjective strategies to refine and redefine one's relationship with the city.

The forces behind Budapest's recent changes are manifold, and more actors are engaged in the politics of design today than in the past. The socialist state that once orchestrated the advent of mass consumption in the aftermath of the 1956 uprising has given way to a plurality of actors who affect the nature and pace of urban change today. The 1990 administrative reforms introduced the 23 local districts as important players in urban regeneration, and the privatisations of the 1990s attracted a vast number of private investors with their particular agendas for shaping fragments of the contemporary city. Discourses on remembering and forgetting, circulated through the fields of politics, the media and the economy, further complicate the scene.

The politics of design have transformed Budapest to a large extent. They affect the everyday urban experience through emerging new physical forms, uses and populations, and through discourses that overwrite and in some cases replace the physical and symbolic landscape of the city. Yet these changes are necessarily filtered through subjective experience: through individuals' memories, their

sense of social class and status, and other aspects of their daily life. As de Certeau (1988), Gyáni (1995), Lüdtke (1995) and others argue, the everyday constitutes a sphere of experience irreducible to material production, historical events or institutional change. The politics of design thus is to be read in conjunction with the politics of everyday life.

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