

MAKING (DIS)CONNECTIONS: AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN MATERIAL AND VIRTUAL MEMORIES OF THE HOLOCAUST IN BUDAPEST

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Abstract: Following Hoskins' often-cited notion of "new memories" (Hoskins 2001), which are generated by traditional media in the broadcast-era, now, in a post-broadcast age, we seem to face yet another "memory boom" (Huysen 2003), also known as a "connective turn" (Hoskins 2011). Instead of focusing on the consequences of this connective turn, however, in this paper, we aim to conceptualize another kind of (dis)connection: we analyse the interrelatedness of various – digital and analogue, virtual and material – memories. Focusing on the diverse practices of memorialising the Hungarian Shoah, and more specifically, on the controversy over the Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation in the urban, as well as digital space, we do not only show how memories (dis)connect an actual and a virtual community, but also how these different kinds of memories (dis)connect with each other in the urban and digital space.

Keywords: *shoah; digital memory; memorial; counter-monument; Hungary*

Introduction

Following the rapid progress of digital media technologies during the recent years, the academic interest in digital memory culture, including social networking sites, has radically increased (e.g., Erll – Rigney 2009, Garde-Hansen – Hoskins – Reading 2009, Richardson – Hessey 2009, Garde-Hansen 2011, Ernst – Parikka 2013, Rutten – Fedor – Zvereva 2013, Kaun – Stiernstedt 2014, Hajek – Lohmeier – Pentzold 2016). Among these analyses discussing the formation and disformation of memory through digital channels, there are a number of authors who argue for a paradigm shift in memory studies. After Hoskins' often-cited notion of "new memories" (Hoskins 2001) that are

generated by traditional media in the broadcast-era, now, in a post-broadcast age, we seem to face yet another “memory boom” (Huysen 2003), also known as a “connective turn” (Hoskins 2011). As William Merrin describes in his 2008 post on *Media Studies 2.0*,

In place of a top-down, one-to-many vertical cascade from centralised industry sources we discover today bottom-up, many-to-many, horizontal, peer-to-peer communication. “Pull” media challenge “push” media; open structures challenge hierarchical structures; micro production challenges macro-production; open-access amateur production challenges closed access, elite-professions; economic and technological barriers to media production are transformed by cheap, democratised, easy-to-use technologies.

Even though the issue of digitally disadvantaged people and the overwhelming presence of corporate logic in digital sites must be taken into account (see e.g., Garde-Hansen 2009), the argument is still about a certain kind of democratization of memory through crowdsourcing, as well as a more radical sense of a “history from below” (Thompson 1966). How does, then, the “connective turn” affect memories mediated by older “technologies”, and how do these different historiographies coexist?

Following the line of authors such as Bolter and Grusin (2001), Huysen (2003), or Jenkins (2006), we aim to analyse in this paper the interrelatedness of various – digital and analogue, virtual and material – memories. For the purpose of our research, we have decided to focus on the diverse practices of memorialising the Hungarian Shoah, and more specifically, on the controversy over the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* (Budapest, 2014) as echoed in the urban, as well as in the digital space. The reason behind our choice of this particular case is twofold: besides the fact that post-socialist cities, especially Hungary, remain rather under-represented in digital memory studies (as an exception see e.g., Pető 2016), the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* can also be interpreted as a case par excellence showing the interplay between the digital and non-digital practices of memorialisation. In this sense, we do not only show how memories (dis)connect an actual and a virtual community, but also how these different kinds of memories (dis)connect with each other in the urban and digital space.

After a historical account of the urban development and symbolic status of Liberty Square (where the memorial currently stands), we divide our paper

into two parts. First, we provide an iconographic reading of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*: we closely analyse the black and white low-resolution image of the official design plan, as well as the image of the realized memorial. Second, after this art historical approach, we study various Facebook sites: during our research, we identified eight Facebook pages/groups/events/communities¹ that came to existence as a response to the plan of erecting the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*. In all of these cases, we conducted a short survey with the administrators, in which we inquired about the initiators, the reasons behind creating the particular site, and moreover, the expected and actual outcome of the online activities. We argue that virtual memory discourses re-facilitated the appearance of a number of material forms of practices at the very site of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* in Budapest, which then further enhanced the virtual pop-up of “new” memories; in its Hoskins-ian, as well as in its literal sense.

The (In)Accessibility of Liberty Square

The current appearance of Liberty Square offers a peculiar experience for passers-by. There is not a single square in Budapest that has – as Mélyi (2010) has also noted – such a large amount of fences on its ground: a memorial, an embassy, and a playground are all surrounded by the metal structures of cordons. Although we know the story of private public parks with walls too well (see e.g., Zukin 1996), the question of (in)accessibility seems to form an essential element of the history of this square.

The origins of the urban development of Liberty Square go back to Count István Széchenyi’s idea in 1842 of creating a promenade in Pest. As the first public promenade, Széchenyi’s aim was to offer an accessible space for people from different walks of society to meet and to talk. The common usage of the space, he argued (cited in Zichy 1997: 213), would reduce class differences and bring different people closer together. In this way, the primary role of the promenade would have been to function as a space for removing social differences; as a surface of “peer-to-peer” communication.

Yet, following its realization in 1846, the square was repeatedly appropriated by various ruling powers, subordinating the function of the square to convey

¹ A Holokauszt és a családom, A Holokauszt áldozatainak és túlélőinek oldala, A Holokauszt az én történetem is, Holokauszt – vállaljuk fel ami történt, A Roma Holokauszt és a családom, Pycsába a náci emlékművel, Eleven Emlékmű, Menetrend.

particular political messages². While in the period immediately following the 1848 revolution and war of independence, the promenade became associated with Habsburg oppression³, after 1900, the enlarged area of the square was renamed as Liberty Square in allusion to the events of 1848. Although the situation of the new square was fundamentally influenced by the construction of the building of the Parliament on neighbouring Kossuth Square, which also resulted in attaching state functions, primarily financial, to Liberty Square, at the beginning of the turn of the century, the symbolic representations on the square further underlined its connections to the freedom fight. In 1905, the city of Budapest introduced the idea of erecting a memorial in remembrance of the executed Prime Minister Batthyány, as well as a Batthyány Eternal Flame (which was not completed until 1926).

In 1920, after Hungary lost two thirds of its territory, a new chapter in the political utilization of the square was opened. Within the framework of an irredentist cult demanding the cancelling of the peace treaty in Trianon, four statues were erected in 1921 on the Northern, semi-circular ending of Liberty Square. The two-meter high allegoric figures of *West*, *North*, *East*, and *South* represented the cut-off lands of Hungary through various historical symbols. Similarly, a *Country Flag with Shrine* – another piece of the irredentist cult – was built in approximately the centre of the square in 1928. While the 20-meter high pole was standing on a pedestal with a flag at half-mast, which was supposed to remain so until all cut-off territories rejoined Hungary, the pedestal also included a shrine that housed clots of soil from towns of the truncated country, from all counties of historic Hungary, as well as from important Hungarian historical sites. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, several more statues were inaugurated in the same vein on Liberty Square.

The position of these statues, however, fundamentally changed after WWII, when the new political power rejected the idea of what the statues and the *National Flag* stood for: repealing the peace treaty. On February 22, 1945, hardly 10 days after the liberation of Budapest by the Soviet army, a city mayor decree was issued on the erection of a *Soviet Heroic Memorial*. The irredentist statues survived the siege of Budapest in good shape, so at first, they were not meant to be demolished, and the new memorial was supposed to be placed behind the *National Flag*. According to this concept, the square was to be

² On the political, social and cultural significance of spatial representations, see e.g. Connerton 1989, Hutton 1993, Huyssen 2003, Rév 2005, Nadkarni 2006.

³ Several leaders, including Count Lajos Batthyány, the prime minister of the first Hungarian government, were executed in the courtyard of the Neugebäude, located next to the Promenade.

divided into two; on the Northern part, the irredentist statues were to face one another with the *National Flag* behind them, whereas the *Soviet Heroic Memorial* was to stand in the open part in the South. However, the location of the latter was changed by the Soviet city command to create enough space for military parades, and so the *National Flag* was demolished. The *Soviet Heroic Memorial* was inaugurated on May 1, 1945, but it did not gain its current position until early August 1945, when the irredentist statues were also removed. Thus, even though for a few months, the Soviet memorial was surrounded by the semi-circle of the irredentist statues (Pótv 2003: 56 and 112); after 1945, the political message of the square became mediated primarily through the Soviet memorial. While the name of the square did not change, it was reinterpreted by dedicating it to the Soviet army as the liberators of Hungary. The foundations of the socialist system were laid by the Soviet liberation in 1945, but, unlike the Horthy Era, placing a multitude of statues by the one dominant monument did not ensue. Only one socialist-realist statue of a worker and a peasant couple with children was built in 1950 on the fifth anniversary of the liberation⁴. At the same time, even though the end of the war in 1945 truly brought a sense of relief, especially for the Jewish population, which experienced 1945 as liberation, this feeling of Soviet liberation gradually transformed into a feeling of occupation⁵ by many. Nothing underlines this transformation better than the two statues being damaged in the 1956 revolution: while the statue *For Great Stalin from the Grateful Hungarian People* was completely torn down, the star at the top of the *Soviet Heroic Memorial* and the Soviet coat of arms were removed during the revolution, and a Hungarian flag was put in the place of the star. After crushing the revolution, the Kádár regime – put into power by the Soviet Union – renovated the *Soviet Heroic Memorial*, but not the statue honouring Stalin. As opposed to the Rákosi and Horthy regimes, Kádár chose not to use Liberty Square as a political symbol, and did not add a single statue – obviously to emphasize the break with the Rákosi Era in its use of symbols and models.

After the regime change, the symbolic use of Liberty Square showed both stability and change. While the new statues of General Harry Hill Bandholtz⁶

⁴ A duplicate was sent to Moscow for Stalin's 70th birthday in 1949.

⁵ On the ambiguous interpretation of 1945, see e.g., the conference *Europe, 1945: Liberation, Occupation, Retribution* (2–4 June 2015, Moscow).

⁶ Between 1919–1920, Bandholtz was the US representative of the Inter-Allied Supreme Command's Military Mission in Hungary, who was charged with disarming the Hungarian military and supervising the withdrawal of the Serbian and Romanian armies.

(originally erected in 1935, destroyed during socialism and re-erected in 1989), or Ronald Reagan⁷ all questioned the socialist narrative of the square, the *Soviet Heroic Memorial* stayed unaltered in its original place. Even though the presence of the memorial is certainly important for specific groups, especially for former communists who organize regular commemorations there, its presence is experienced as a provocation by many: besides various instances of its vandalization, skinheads wanted to blow it up in 1992, the Movement of Revisionists demanded its demolition in 2002, and the World Federation of Hungarians put up a tent in 2007 next to the statue, intending to stay until Károly Antal's memorial would be removed. While the tent was gone, the tension remained. To counterbalance the Soviet monument, two monuments were erected, one by a group close to the extreme right-wing party, Jobbik, the other by the Christian-national party, Fidesz. While in 2013, the bust of Miklós Horthy⁸ was placed in the Calvinist church at one end of the square, inaugurated by pastor Lóránt Hegedűs (a known adherent to Jobbik), the total reinterpretation of the Soviet memorial was made possible by the 2012 Preamble to the Constitution⁹ (enacted by Fidesz) that brought about the plan of erecting a memorial commemorating the German occupation. As opposed to all other statues and moments, the *German Occupation Memorial*, later renamed as *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* was placed on the long axis of the square – theoretically – counterbalancing the Soviet memorial of “liberation”, but practically putting the two monuments, i.e. the two “occupations”, in juxtaposition. In the interpretation of the authors, the name of Liberty Square acquired a new, antonymic, meaning: officially it became the square of occupation, i.e., the loss of liberty.

From Analogue to Digital Practices

On the very last day of 2013, the Hungarian government decreed the realization of a memorial commemorating the 70th anniversary of the German occupation of Hungary¹⁰ (Közgazgatási és Igazságügyi Minisztérium 2013). By the same token, the government also classified the memorial as a “project of national

⁷ Reagan played a role both in relaunching and in ending the Cold War.

⁸ Horthy served as Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary between WWI and WWII, from 1920 and 1944. In the hope of regaining the lost territories of Hungary, Horthy allied with Nazi Germany.

⁹ The Preamble states that Hungary was not an independent country between the German occupation of 1944 and 1990; therefore it is not responsible for any crimes committed in this period.

¹⁰ Despite being its ally, Hungary was occupied by Nazi Germany on 19 March 1944.



Figure 1. **Demonstration** at the site of the **Soviet Heroic Memorial** in 2014.
Photo by Sára Gábor.

economic importance”, which not only enabled to evade the authorization of some of the otherwise necessary permits, but also to execute the memorial at an accelerated pace. Even though this high-handed practice unambiguously sheds light on the ever-increasing distance from the original conceptions of an “open” square by Széchenyi, the concept and aesthetics of the *German Occupation Memorial* itself contained a number of contradictions that ultimately could be used to ridicule this practice of writing history from above.

Among the official documents on the realization and execution of the memorial – first *German Occupation Memorial*, then *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* – one could not find many details (let alone a model) on the future appearance of the memorial. Yet, a very vague and indistinct black and

white visualization, along with the sculptor Péter Párkányi Raab's¹¹ description, was enough to launch a series of counter-demonstrations. The image, together with Párkányi's text, became immediately circulated on the internet, and within hours the memorial was literally all over the news. But what do we actually see in this scanned picture and how does it relate to Párkányi's own interpretation? As Péter Párkányi Raab (2014: 18) stated in his description, "the composition consists of two main elements: of the figures of the German imperial eagle and Archangel Gabriel; moreover, it consists of 13 columns, of a doorway with tympanum and architrave, and of inscriptions". One certainly sees some kind of figures in the picture, but besides a feathered creature (perhaps, indeed, an eagle) and a winged character (perhaps, indeed, an angel), in the left bottom corner, there is also a third, mysterious person with an umbrella. What is (s)he doing in the image? What does the umbrella symbolize? Is it a sign of effeminacy, as in Ancient Greece, or a mark of masculinity as in the various theories of Freud? Or is it just an unintentional element of the composition? Looking once again at the image, one also recognizes a structure resembling a Greek temple. At the same time, it is as if the columns at the back faded into the background and constituted the trunks of trees. Is this meant to be a surrealist painting? Or an homage to one of the classical surrealist painters? Párkányi (2014: 18) then continues his description with the symbolic explanation of his composition: "On the monument the figures of the oppressor and the oppressed, the occupier and the occupied appear. [...] They represent two cultures: the one that regards itself as stronger (but in any case more aggressive) overtowers [...], settles on, and swoops down upon the other figure that has gentler and softer lines. This figure is the figure of Archangel Gabriel, who represents Hungary, and who is the man of God, the power of God, and a divine power in the history of culture and religion". The naïve viewer, however, can neither identify the feathered creature with Germany, nor the winged character with Archangel Gabriel symbolizing a Hungary that is victimized. Even though the picture does mediate a limited sense of tension between the dark bird and the light figure, the image may just as well suggest that the light figure welcomes or at least prays to that bird. In a certain sense, the bird, framed by a triangle, even crowns the figure, which is placed in between the rectangular construction: the triangle constitutes

¹¹ On the same day of publishing the measure on the erection of the memorial, the government also contracted Párkányi Raab in order to prepare the description, the concept, and the design plan of the memorial. The deadline for this assignment was set as January 3, 2014.



Figure 2. **Official design plan of the Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation.**

Source: Párkányi 2014.

a certain kind of roof put on that square. Returning to the description of Párkányi (2014: 18), he also embeds his memorial within the wider context of Budapest. As he states: “The Hungarian and Budapest reference for the figure and sculptural formation of Archangel Gabriel is the main figure on the top of the column on Heroes’ Square, between the kings and the seven chieftains. This figure on Heroes’ Square walks in-between clouds. In my composition he is conquered; he is grounded”. As he goes on, Párkányi (2014: 18) further exemplifies the elements that are supposed to refer to the conquest of the angel: first, in contrast to the colonnade of Heroes’ Square, here, the columns are broken and ruinous; second, in the case of the memorial on Liberty Square, the angel is deprived of one of his wings, thus being unable to fly; and third, in contrast to the angel of Heroes’ Square, who proudly raises the Hungarian crown into the sky, here the orb (another Hungarian crown jewel) is about to fall out of his hands. Examining the image, we are again left puzzled by these references: the columns barely appear as damaged, the wings of the bird seem to be more injured than that of the figure’s, and no apples or any other falling object can be detected in the hands of the angel. The correlation between the elements of

the *Millennial Monument* and Párkányi's memorial remain hidden. Párkányi (2014: 19) then concludes: "In its scale, the angel appears to be unconquerable when compared to the eagle. [...] One has to indicate who (s)he is with, who is the good and who is the bad in the particular situation. We fear not the bigger, but the more aggressive. The two figures are not in contact, they do not touch each other, so I rely on the mapping in the head of the audience". Yet, as we have illustrated in this paragraph, Párkányi may have completely misunderstood and miscalculated the straightforwardness of his memorial – at least of the memorial visualized on the sketchy and rough plan. What about the realized statue, then?

During the period starting with the beginning of the construction of the memorial on April 8 and its delayed completion on July 20, the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* – which was placed in between the entrance of an underground garage and a road with average traffic, moreover with its back to the Soviet Heroic Memorial, i.e., at a rather unfortunate and insignificant spot – gradually revealed its thought-to-be-final ideological and aesthetic form. Even though the memorial remained close in most of its detail to the original design plan of Párkányi, a considerable change – in all probability, due to problems in the statics – also took place: the dimension of the composition was radically decreased. Now, the much lower *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* appears as being almost suppressed by the trees rising over the statue. As aesthete Péter György formulated (Czenkli 2014), the memorial became "too small to be big", further ridiculing its own presence as a "rival" to the Soviet Heroic Memorial (Mélyi 2014).

At the same time, the realization of the memorial did not resolve the ambiguities surrounding the statue; on the contrary, it generated even more, many times conflicting, interpretations. Párkányi, with his self-contradicting interview to Heti Válasz on July 24 (Szőnyi 2014), himself added new fuel to the already existing confusion. Taking into account the elements of the composition, there is barely a section of the memorial that was left without comment: the eagle, the angel, the columns, as well as the inscription all became the subjects of semantic investigation by various left-wing and right-wing organs. Among the parts of the memorial provoking heated debates, the figure of the eagle occupies by all means a distinguished place. According to the initial understanding of Péter Párkányi Raab (2014: 18), the feathered creature corresponds to a German imperial eagle. When Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (2014) connected the eagle to Germany, he likewise strengthened this interpretation. Aside from revealing the anatomical problems of the representation and ridiculing the fact that the eagle appears to



Figure 3. **Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation.**

Photo by Sára Gábor.

have knees, several art historians nit-picked this interpretation. Both András Rényi (2014) and Katalin Dávid (Sümegei 2014) – who is also a member of the Hungarian Academy of Arts in close alliance to FIDESZ – argued that the German imperial eagle is a coat of arms animal, and as such, it unnecessarily offends the entire German nation. In reaction, Párkányi (Szőnyi 2014) tried to back out of his former position, and claimed that even though the description suggests that the eagle is a German imperial eagle, “in reality it is not, as I did not want to condemn a nation, and that’s why I did not design it in accordance to the German coat of arms animal, but I remodelled it”. Does this remodelled

eagle refer to something else then? Párkányi remains silent about a possible new definition. The ultimate devastating criticism came from art historian Ernő Marosi: at the conference *Historical Memory and Historiography* (organized by The Institute of Philosophy and History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Marosi discussed Johann Nepomuk Ender's painting *From Darkness, to Light. The Allegory of the Hungarian Academy Of Sciences* (1831), where Hebe, the Greek Goddess of the Youth, offers the drink of science and art to the Hungarian nation depicted – most surprisingly – as an eagle. The eagle, thus, can just as well symbolize Hungary.

In a similar vein, the figure of the angel also opened up a whole universe of diverse interpretations. While Párkányi (2014) identified Archangel Gabriel with Hungary in his description, Orbán (2014) already designated the angel as a symbol not referring to the innocent state, but to the innocent victims. Later Párkányi (Szőnyi 2014) – most likely trying to manoeuvre between his earlier understanding and Orbán's latest "focus" on the victims – reintroduced a new main character to the story: he shifted the emphasis from the angel to the orb in the hand of the angel, and he defined this orb as the representation of the state, and through the state, the victims. In this sense, the angel – with or without the orb – came to reflect both the figure of the state and the victim. However, while art historian András Rényi (2014) stressed that according to iconographic rules, the angel cannot be an allegory for victims, Roma representatives – in line with art historian Katalin Dávid (Sümegei 2014) – highlighted that Archangel Gabriel represents the will of God (S.N. 2014). For them, this juxtaposition of the angel and eagle suggests that the Holocaust was caused by divine predestination (S.N. 2014).

So, here we are with the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*. Does the eagle represent Germany then? Or is it merely a bird resembling the German imperial eagle from a distance? Does it refer to Hungary? And what about the angel? Is it a symbol of the innocent Hungarian state? Does it stand for the Hungarian victims? What do the columns signify? According to Párkányi (2014), the columns also "may be humans, lives that are now fragments, but could have been wholes". But how can columns correspond to victims if they traditionally – as Rényi (2014) pointed out – symbolize transitoriness and not the moment of a tragedy? And who, specifically, are these victims? Do the inscriptions clarify this? While the text *Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation* now frames the tympanum of the construction, a smaller inscription *In memory of victims* has also been attached in Hungarian, English, Hebrew,

German, and Russian to one of the columns standing aside. Yet, instead of illuminating some of the problems, the issue of inscriptions further increased the feeling of being puzzled: according to Rabbi Zoltán Radnóti (2014), besides using a grammatically incorrect word-order, the Hebrew text mistakenly uses the word “korban” (קרבן), which primarily refers to animal sacrifices, not to victims¹². The question, thus, remains: who is this monument dedicated to? Do the Hungarians, both the perpetrators and the persecuted, all fall within this narrative of victimization?

During the course of the year of 2014 not only questions accumulated: after the nocturnal completion of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*, more and more protest actions took place on the square. However, while protesters kept changing the “image” of the statue, on July 23, authorities crowned the “construction” of the memorial and installed surveillance cameras behind the statue. These cameras, together with the high number of policemen present on the square, definitively rewrite the already complicated structure of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*: according to the Hungarian Liberal Party, the cost of securing the square amounted to as high an amount as 88.3 million HUF (ca. 280,000 EUR) up until July 22, 2014 (cited in Czene 2014). While this element clearly redefines the “project of national economic importance” as a project of national security, the footage recorded by the surveillance cameras also narrates a digital history of the memorial.

From Digital to Analogue (Counter-)Practices

The story of the *Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation*, however, does not end with the discussion of the controversial process of its realization. The argument according to which public works of art are zones of intersecting social activities where the creators (producers) do not define the particular memorial any more than the general public (recipients)¹³ has to be taken seriously to a far greater extent in the case of Párkányi’s memorial. Here, the boundaries between the “politics of authorship” (Schumacher 1995) and the “politics of spectatorship” (Bishop 2012) are unambiguously blurred, pushing the project towards the phenomenon of “participatory heritage” (Giaccardi 2012).

¹² Since then there were more arguments pro and contra using the word “korban”. For more details see Sturovics 2015.

¹³ In this regard, see e.g., the understanding of heritage as a discourse (Smith 2006), or as a performance (Haldrup – Baerenholdt 2015).

After Sándor Szakály's (head of the newly established VERITAS Historical Research Institute) statement that the 1941 deportation of Jews from Hungary to the Ukraine was "only an immigration enforcement procedure", and after the disclosure of the official design plans of the memorial in January 17 and, respectively, January 19, a chain of protests started, whose form and method radically differed from previous actions in the history of Budapest. Certainly, in 2014, traditional and long-established genres of protest were also mobilized: besides political actions, artistic happenings – such as the installation of a huge mirror in front the memorial by *Kréta* or the performance of Viktória Monhor sitting on a chair and screaming for 18 minutes – also took place, but the statue has also been consummated by unknown persons with a piece of black fabric saying "We mourn democracy", and some civilians even threw eggs at the monument¹⁴. Yet, on January 22 something very interesting happened. A Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too (A Holokauszt az én történetem is)* was launched by Júlia Dániel, an unemployed high school teacher inviting her acquaintances' to use January 26, the official Holocaust Memorial Day, to flood the internet with personal Holocaust stories. Discussing how passive or dynamic are memories on Facebook, Richardson and Hessey (2009) argue that social networking sites actively allow sharing and archiving the "self" online. Did the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too* serve the same purpose? Instead of inviting her friends to a real event in the outside world, she asked them to act within the area of the cyberspace, and to do it on the very same day. She requested those people willing to join the event to post about their "loved one who was a victim of the Holocaust". She asked them to tell how they were related to these persons, "to recall the place and circumstances of their death", and to share "their photos, their names, or any other details you find important" (Facebook/A Holokauszt az én történetem is/About 2014). As if her idea meant to indeed specify and individualize the victims of WWII, and to reveal their origin: their Jewish origins.

At the same time, in parallel to a smaller protest of people in the flesh and blood taking place at Liberty Square, Mátyás Eörsi, a distinguished figure of the former party Alliance of Free Democrats, created a Facebook group, dubbing it *The Holocaust and My Family (A Holokauszt és a családom)*. The group – similarly to the Facebook event – invited others to tell their stories of the Holocaust. However, in contrast to the former, *The Holocaust and My Family* was set up as

¹⁴ On the various reinterpretations of memorials, also see Kunt et al. (2013) and Székely (2013).

a group where one had to “request” the administrators for permission to join. Even though the group is public, it has a moderator who controls what actually appears on the site. According to the opening statement of *The Holocaust and My Family*, “Everyone, every Hungarian, every Hungarian of Jewish, Swabian, Slovak, Serbian, Romanian, Roma, Croatian, or of other origin, even those who crossed the Verecke pass together with their father Arpad, has a story about their family from the time of the Shoah”. As he continues, “Lately, ‘thanks’ to the government’s memory politics, more and more stories are revealed that have been so far either concealed or kept as family secrets, and which should not sink into oblivion. This is why I opened this Group, and it would be useful for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren to read as many stories as possible about this dark period” (Facebook/A Holokauszt és a családom/About 2014). Then, pretending to talk about practical issues, he tries to reassure and convince those who might be frightened by the group’s openness: he declares that “one of the aims of the group is to break the culture of silence. Our parents, grandparents tried to hide their Jewishness, they tried not to talk about their sufferings, and we saw, we still see, where it lead us. We find it unacceptable that the descendants of the victims keep silent, whereas the children of the sinners are boisterous” (Facebook/A Holokauszt és a családom/About 2014). For those who do not dare to tell their stories under the conditions of this group, administrators offer to share their stories anonymously. Then, as if this passage had resolved all the fears, they – referring to Germany as a model – invite the progenies of victims and of perpetrators, too, as well as people with all kinds of political beliefs. After asking for family stories, they also promise that abuse and indecency will not be tolerated. Interestingly, at the time of the creation of the group, some sections of the description of *The Holocaust and My Family* repeated itself: it is as if the sometimes chaotic sentences had signified the hurry and excitement of the author who is a highly educated lawyer in his sixties. He seemed to be totally thrilled and acted out of passion. Though not absolutely overtly, but his text – besides articulating his faith in breaking the silence of the forbears – unintentionally also reveals his Jewishness. Yet, is there a need to have two similar kinds of “gatherings” on Facebook? Or did it happen just by chance? Is it possible that the organizer of *The Holocaust and My Family* did not have the information about *The Holocaust is My Story, Too*? Did the latter group reach a different group of people than the first one? We cannot exclude it. Or does the difference between a Facebook event and a moderated Facebook group bear such significance that it makes room for both of them?

However, soon after the appearance of the aforementioned Facebook event and group, a Facebook community with the name *The Holocaust – We Shall Take Responsibility for What Happened* (*Holokauszt – vállaljuk fel ami történt*) was also created. In contrast to the group, here, becoming part of the community automatically happens when “liking” the page. Their rather terse introduction “Let us confront what happened...” (Facebook/Holokauszt – vállaljuk fel ami történt/About 2014) seems to implicate that the governmental acts upset not just those who want to remember their own and their ancestors’ sufferings, but also those who would like to address Hungarian responsibility. Yet, why are they so taciturn to tell us more about their conception? Are they worried that there will be no interest for their initiative? Or that they will get aggressive comments denying Hungary’s responsibility?

Thus, within two and a half weeks, three truly unusual things happened in the cyber space. At the same time, while both the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too* and the Facebook community *The Holocaust – We Shall Take Responsibility for What Happened* seem to be having problems with reaching people (the former has only 338 “guests”, and the latter has 65 “likes”)¹⁵, the Facebook group *The Holocaust and My Family* conquered this social media with stunning speed. As of April 2016, the group had 7,100 members, which not only proves the changing characteristics of the demonstration, but also the societal – or at least sub-cultural – need for something entirely new. According to the founder of the *The Holocaust and My Family*, the key to the success of the group was the strict moderation by administrators, ensuring that the group was a much “safer” place to evoke personal and often painful memories. After the creation of the group, hundreds of people shared their – partly never even published – personal and family stories, and similarly, they also showed photos of their dead to the more than 7,000 members of the group and to anyone reading the posts. And there are not only Jews who have stories. There are stories of by-standers who were witnesses to certain events, and of people who helped, too. Yet among the group’s members, there are also people who just sympathize with the persecuted and their descendants, and who feel that this is their issue, too. People, who would like to acknowledge Hungarian responsibility for the Shoah. If, however, there is a need in Hungarians to confront Hungarian responsibility in WWII, why is the Facebook event and community dedicated to this specific objective so unsuccessful? Is it possible that the idea of a Facebook group is much more attractive?

¹⁵ Data checked on 2017–06–25.

As Garde-Hansen et al. (2009) emphasize, digital memories, particularly social networking sites, are appealing partly because they enable to think outside of the box: the categories of producers and consumers, the collective and individual, as well as public and private are overwritten by the combination of these traditional sociological concepts. Yet while we are indeed witnessing a greater personalisation of memory practices in the digital field, alongside with the emergence of the collective as a new networked community, neither the Facebook event, nor the Facebook community seemed to help this cause. Even though the organizer of the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too* told us that her idea was to counteract the voices according to which the Holocaust memorial year, and the Holocaust as such, is only the private matter of a few people, she also wanted to avoid “intensive yammering”. Instead, she wanted people to simply be confronted with the presence of the Shoah. As she recalls, this is why she decided to set up an event rather than a group. Nevertheless, according to her, the greatest success of the event was still that it created the opportunity for “weeping together”, and to enable a platform where people could feel the binding strength of their common fate. In contrast to the Facebook event *The Holocaust is My Story, Too*, which functioned as a one-time event, and as such, basically fulfilled its task, the organizers of the Facebook community *The Holocaust – We Shall Take Responsibility for What Happened* seemed to be in hiding. Looking at the page of the community, one does not really find information about who launched it and about who takes care of it. This, for sure, discourages even those who find the page. And probably, this is also a sign of the not-whole-hearted activity of the organizers themselves. Even for the purpose of our research, we were not able to contact them.

After a one-and-a-half-month-long pause in the protests, a flash mob was organized on March 23 on Liberty Square. The protest *Living Memorial – My History (Eleven emlékmű – az én történelmem)* was founded on Facebook, and it was attended by a high number of people at the site of the memorial. While organizers called for “creating a common platform in the social media where a grassroots exchange of stories and a dialogue can begin”, they also asked for bringing “memorial stones and candles, small crosses or personal objects that express our emotions, our personal concerns” to the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* (Facebook/ *Eleven emlékmű – az én történelmem*/About 2014). They extended their cyber-space activity and the group also appeared in the “real” public space in “real” person. And their action has left its traces on the square, too: a hat and other items such as candles and pebbles – just like

on the graves in Jewish cemeteries – remained on site, drawing the attention of those passing by in the weeks to follow. Without any organized event, it slowly became a place of a “grassroots memorial” (Margry – Sanchez-Carratero 2011) or a “spontaneous shrine” (Santino 2006) that was frequently visited and crowned with other relics.

Similarly, after the beginning of the construction of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* on April 8, virtual and “real” activities further emerged. On May 4, stories published on the wall of the Facebook group *The Holocaust and My Family* were read in public by two actors and two actresses. The event was organized by the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, and it was held in the former synagogue at Rumbach street. Soon, the recording of the two-hour long event, held in the fully-packed building, was also uploaded to YouTube. Simultaneously, *The Holocaust and My Family* also created another group *The Holocaust and My Family – messages, requests, recommendations, questions, etc. (Holokauszt és a családom – üzenetek, keresések, ajánlások, kérdések, stb.)*, which complements the first group. The reason behind the creation of this second group is the vast number of comments that members would like to post and that do not fit into the framework of the main page. Aside from sharing family stories, people also use the group to find and reconnect people appearing in different family histories, or just to discuss daily events that are connected to the original topic, to talk about related books, films, etc. – the role of this page is to meet these demands.

Nonetheless, on May 13, less than two weeks after the first reading in the former synagogue and in close immediacy to the 70th anniversary of the beginning of deportations from Hungary, there was another reading from the same material. The invitation said that “it is high time to give voice to those stories concealed for many decades. They should find their places among the sentences whispered or shouted. If a manuscript does not burn, the sentences that have been articulated should also exist somewhere” (Notice of the reading marathon 2014). This time, however, authors also had the opportunity to read their own texts, and actors, actresses, and writers replaced only those who wanted to avoid public appearance. The “reading marathon” was meant to run from 6 p.m. until midnight in a middle-sized theatre. Eventually, it lasted to 2 a.m., and was concluded with a joint candle-lighting ceremony of mourning. The growing audience not only filled the approximately 350 seats of the theatre, but some also had to stand¹⁶.

¹⁶ Later, the material was also published in a book (Fenyves 2015).



Figure 4. **Living Memorial.** Photo by Sára Gábor.

On the very same day of the second reading, emails were sent out by Gyula Hosszú, a former secondary school teacher of history who had earlier written a textbook about the Shoah. He and some of his friends set up a new Facebook event, and they invited their acquaintances for a regular commemoration on Liberty Square. *Timetable – 1944 (Menetrend – 1944)* commemorated the deportation of Jews from the countryside: “From the 15th of May until the 9th of July, we will linger from 8 till 9 in the evening for an hour at the fountain at the corner of Liberty Square and Sas Street, in the grassy area. The core of the commemoration is silence; there will be no speeches nor programme. However, there will be signs in an ever-growing number; they will list the cities from where the trains departed and the number of the deportees that were sent off that day. We will also give some historical background of the villages, towns, ghettos, and camps, whose dwellers were deported on that day” (Facebook/ Menetrend – 1944/About 2014). For almost two months, different people gathered in the grassy area every night. They stood there, looked at the horrifying dates shown on the boards, lit candles, or wrote down the names of their family members killed in the deportations. They gave voice to their existence through their silence.

Before the conclusion of *Timetable – 1944*, other projects popped up, too, most notably the *Yellow-star Houses* project organized by the Open Society Archives, mobilizing a large number of people. *Yellow-star Houses* commemorated the 70th anniversary of the forced mass relocation of 220,000 Budapest Jews into almost 2,000 apartment buildings. It commemorated the time when both the houses and their residents were forced to wear the yellow star. As organizers stated in their leaflet, “Together with Budapest residents and the cultural organizations, theatres, and public institutions based in the former yellow-star houses, we are holding commemorations at the 1,600 yellow-star houses still standing today. Starting in the early morning and lasting until the late evening, the aim is to make this 70th anniversary visible across the city” (Csillagos Házak 2014). Free memorial plaques, easily attachable to the walls of houses, were also provided. Even though the Open Society Archives were the official initiator, and they provided some financial support for the project, the peculiarity of the event was that commemorations were primarily realized by activists and the residents of the buildings. The events that were held in about 5 percent of the formerly marked 1600 houses and institutions (museums, synagogues, schools, archives, etc.) turned out to be very different from what the organizing team had envisaged: residents collected data about the persecuted of the house in archives, they presented these findings to other residents, former residents, both Jewish and Gentile, shared their stories and memories from the period, some baked Jewish pastries, some read poems, and some played music. Alongside with the commemoration in the urban space, initiators also set up a webpage (<http://www.yellowstarhouses.org/>) that not only documents the history of yellow-star houses throughout Budapest, but also functions as an interactive map collecting stories about the particular houses. It is as if those who – unconsciously or deliberately – earlier vowed silence had all of a sudden changed their strategy: many seemed to enjoy the feeling of “coming out”. It was the par excellence practice of writing history from below.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have demonstrated various (dis)connections between memories mediated by older and newer “technologies”. The paper began with discussing the historical development of the urban site of the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*, in which we introduced the idea of an open or closed space, as well as set the ground for analyzing the (in)accessibility of the

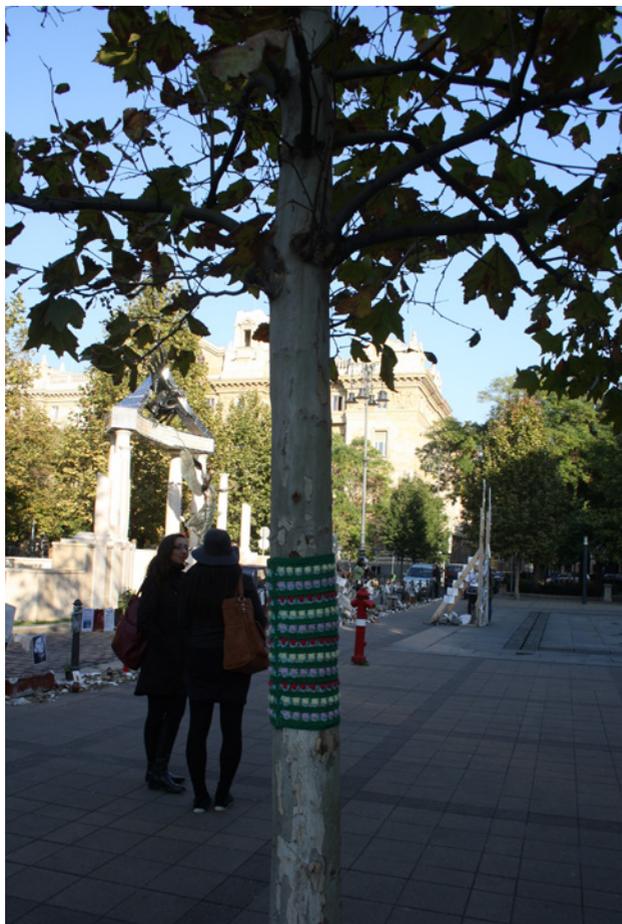


Figure 5.
Liberty Square.
Photo by Sára Gábor.

memorial itself (in a symbolic, as well as literal sense). We have argued that the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation* is inaccessible in various senses: besides the unfortunate location of the memorial, the process of its realization was closed to any public discussions, and the memorial's ridiculous iconography also made its historical message illegible, ultimately also leaving the question of who is this memorial dedicated to (i.e., who are the victims of German Occupation) open. At the same time, we have also shown that this inaccessibility provoked various responses in the digital realm, transforming the memorial – even if through counter-practices – into a more accessible platform in the urban space, too.

Nevertheless, the question arises: can we interpret this case as a successful story of unlocking memories? Did the appearance of digital memories ultimately provide virtual and actual access to history? While the *Living Memorial* still co-exists with the *Memorial to the Victims of German Occupation*, converting Liberty Square into one of the most exciting spaces of Budapest, authors of this paper ultimately do not argue for the reversal of the previous tendencies of Hungarian memory politics. Not only did the activity on the Facebook site *The Holocaust and My Family* rather slow down after the life stories published within the group were published in book form (Fenyves 2015), but according to recent news (Botos 2017), the Hungarian government is planning to erect another memorial at Liberty Square, now dedicated to the memory of Soviet Occupation, with an almost-ready design plan. We can only hope for more (dis)connections in the digital and urban realm.

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