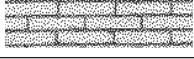


## 6



## Underground

The most famous photographs of the 1956 Revolution capture the moment when the soldiers and policemen who had been defending the headquarters of the Budapest Party Committee left the building. Faced by the superior force of storming revolutionaries, the defenders understood that further defense was hopeless and gave up the besieged headquarters. On their way out, at the very gates of the building, the defeated were received by deadly machine-gun fire. *Life* magazine carried a series of close-up pictures of the killing.

*Life* photographer George Sadovy's photo-report of the bloodbath became one of the most famous sequences of war photographs ever made, comparable only to such legendary pictures as the Hungarian-born Robert Capa's war reportage from the front during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>1</sup> When

Chapter 6 is a rewritten version of "The Counterrevolution," in *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*, ed. Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu (Budapest: Central European Press, 2001).

1. When *Picture Post*, the British journal, published an eleven-page photo-reportage of the Spanish Civil War in December 1938, it called the twenty-five-year-old Capa, "the best war photographer of the world" (*Picture Post*, December 3, 1938, pp. 13–24).

On September 23, 1936, the French journal *Vu* published a series of Robert Capa's pictures, among them one of the most famous war photographs ever taken, known as "The Death of the Militiaman," or "The Falling Soldier," that Capa shot on September 5, 1936, at Cerro Muriano (pp. 1106–7). In 1975 Phillip Knightly, a British journalist, published a book *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam; The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagan-*

*Life* decided to publish a special issue devoted exclusively to the images of the revolution, Sadovy composed a narrative account to accompany his pictures:

The fighting really began to flare up. People were dropping like flies. . . . Now the ÁVH [the abbreviation of the Hungarian secret police] men began to come out. The first to emerge from the building was an officer alone. It was the fastest killing I saw. He came out laughing and the next thing I knew he was flat on the ground. It didn't dawn on me that this guy was shot. He just fell down, I thought. . . . Six young policemen came out, one very good-looking. Their shoulder boards were torn off. Quick argument. We're not as bad you think we are, give us a chance, they said. I was three feet from that group. Suddenly one began to fold. They must have been close to his ribs when they fired. They all went down like corn that had been cut. Very gracefully. Another came out running. He saw his friends dead, turned and headed into the crowd. The rebels dragged him out. I had time to take one picture of him and he was down. Then my nerves went. Tears started to come down on my cheeks. I had spent three years in war, but nothing I saw then compared with the horror of this. I could see the impact of bullets on clothes. There

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*dist, and Myth Maker* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1975), which, for the first time, alleged that one of Capa's two most famous photographs—"The Falling Soldier"—had been staged (the other one is a GI landing on Omaha Beach on D-Day in Normandy). Richard Whelan, Capa's biographer (*Robert Capa: A Biography* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985]) after a time-consuming investigation ascertained that Capa—born as Ernő Endre Friedman in Budapest—had, in fact, photographed the death of "The Falling Soldier" during the battle at Cerro Muriano, on September 5, 1936. Whelan, relying on the testimony of an eyewitness, was able to identify the soldier in Capa's photographs (Federico Borrell Garcia, a twenty-four-year-old Republican volunteer from the village of Alcoy, near the city of Alicante). In his article "Proving that Robert Capa's 'Falling Soldier' Is Genuine: A Detective Story," written for *Aperture Magazine* (no. 166, spring 2002) Whelan reconstructed the probable chain of events, which led to Borrell Garcia's death and Capa's famous picture:

Capa encountered a group of militiamen . . . from several units—Francisco Borell Garcia among them—in what was at that moment a quiet sector. Having decided to play around a bit for the benefit of Capa's camera, the men began by standing in a line and brandishing their rifles. Then, with Capa running besides them, they jumped across a shallow gully and hugged the ground at the top of its far side, aiming and firing their rifles—*thereby, presumably, attracting the enemy's attention*. . . . Once Borell had climbed out of the gully, he evidently stood up, back no more than a pace or two from the edge of the gully and facing down the hillside so that Capa (who had remained in the gully) could photograph him. *Just as Capa was about to press his shutter release, a hidden enemy machinegun opened fire. Borell hit in the head or heart, died instantly and went limp while still on his feet, as Capa's photograph shows.* (My emphasis; Whelan published a version of

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was not much noise. They were shooting so close that the man's body acted as a silencer.<sup>2</sup>

Sadovy shot several rolls of film on Köztársaság (Republic) Square, while covering the siege of the Budapest party headquarters, which, incidentally, before the end of World War II, had served as the headquarters of the *Volksbund*, the Nazi sympathizer association of Hungarian Germans. *Life* published dozens of his photographs, among them the four-picture series of the massacre of the ÁVH soldiers, most of them enlisted men without rank. (See Figure 6.1.)

In the first picture the six young men are crowded against the wall near their captured building. On the left side of the six-portrait photo, a very good-looking thick-haired blond sergeant (the only one with marks of rank on his shoulder), about twenty-six years of age, with a bloodstain on his face, is looking distrustfully ahead, slowly raising his arms. There are quite a few similar faces, typical of the 1950s, looking into Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini's camera on the pages of *Paris Match* from November 3, 1956, which carried Imre Nagy's retouched color photo, "l'homme de Budapest,"

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his *Aperture* article in the *American Masters* series of PBS. See [www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/)

In Capa's biography, Whelan wrote, "To insist upon knowing whether the photograph actually shows a man at the moment he has been hit by a bullet is both morbid and trivializing, for the picture's greatness ultimately lies in its symbolic implications, not in its literal accuracy as a report on the death of a particular man" (Whelan, *Robert Capa*, p. 100; emphasis added). As the biographer was not able at that point to demonstrate the authenticity of the picture, he opted for the idea that for the evidential status of the document it was not an issue of how the picture was made, but rather what it wanted to communicate. A few years later, when additional information became available on presumed specific circumstances of Capa's shot, Whelan changed his strategy and was at pain to prove that Capa's famous photograph had not been faked, but rather was unquestionably authentic. Whelan did not realize that in the course of his painful efforts he claimed something much more serious: that Capa had personally been responsible for the fall of the "Falling Soldier." Whelan wanted to clear the photographer morally; he finally craved for a picture, which did not just look like but was, in fact, a document; he now insisted on the specific circumstances of the specific event. For the sake of morality of specificity as opposed to the immorality of generalization, the detective-turned-biographer was ready to sacrifice Capa's integrity and implicate him in the killing of the most important figure in the history of war photography (see Maria Mitropoulos, "The Documentary Photographer as Creator," <http://www.media-culture.org.au/0108/Photo/htm>).

2. John Sadovy, "The Fighting Really Began to Flare up," in *Hungary's Fight for Freedom*, a special *Life* magazine report in pictures, 1956, pp. 26–45.

on its title page. *Paris Match* published a close-up of the massive crowd at László Rajk's reburial (a one-time member of the Internationalist Brigade in the Spanish Civil War) on October 6, 1956, just days before the outbreak of the revolution, with a number of similar open faces, so familiar from the *Life* series.

The top button of the sergeant's uniform, on the pages of *Life*, is unfastened; he is wounded below his left ear, he is like a hunted animal forced out of the depths of the forest, who now feels with utter certainty that he cannot be alert enough to counter what is surely about to happen to him. The next moment, the next picture was captured in the midst of a drift of bullets, the camera focused but unstable, Sadovy's hands visibly shaking; the faces are somewhat faded, as if the light had to penetrate through a translucent veil. The soldiers are taken aback, and "in a last instinctive gesture they try to ward off the bullets with the upraised hands."<sup>3</sup> The group of soldiers double up in pain on the third photo. They are on their feet at the very moment before crumpling. In the last picture they fall to the rubble-strewn sidewalk, just in front of the gate of building they left a moment ago. The sergeant's body has already tumbled to the ground, his head suspended for a last unrealizable moment in the air, as if it did not quite want to believe what has happened to the body.

John Sadovy's pictures were published all over the world. *Correio de Manhã*, the Rio de Janeiro daily, gave permission to the *Délamerikai Magyar Hírlap* (South American-Hungarian Herald), a right-wing Hungarian diaspora paper, which decided to republish the photos, but under the misleading title "This Is How the Russians Kill." The pictures found their way into the *White Book*, the official Communist version of the events of 1956, this time, naturally, as the ultimate proofs of the extreme brutality of the "counterrevolution," the inhuman nature of the organized anti-Communist terror.<sup>4</sup> Although the world was convinced that in looking at the pictures they were watching the last seconds of humans who would be dead a moment later, three of the soldiers in Sadovy's photos, one of them the

3. Ibid., pp. 38–39.

4. Maire-Joze Mondzain, "La vérité est image mais il n'y a pas d'image de la vérité" [Truth Is Image, but There Is no Image of Truth], in her *Image, icône, économie. Les sources byzantines de l'imaginaire contemporain* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966); quoted by Bruno Latour, "What Is Iconoclasm; Or There Is a World Beyond the Image Wars?" in *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe, Germany, and Cambridge, MA: ZKM and MIT Press, 2002), p. 14.

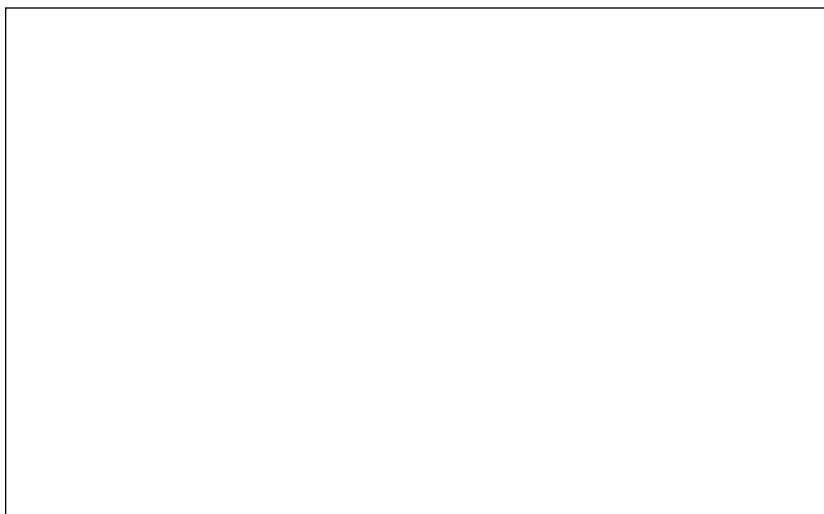
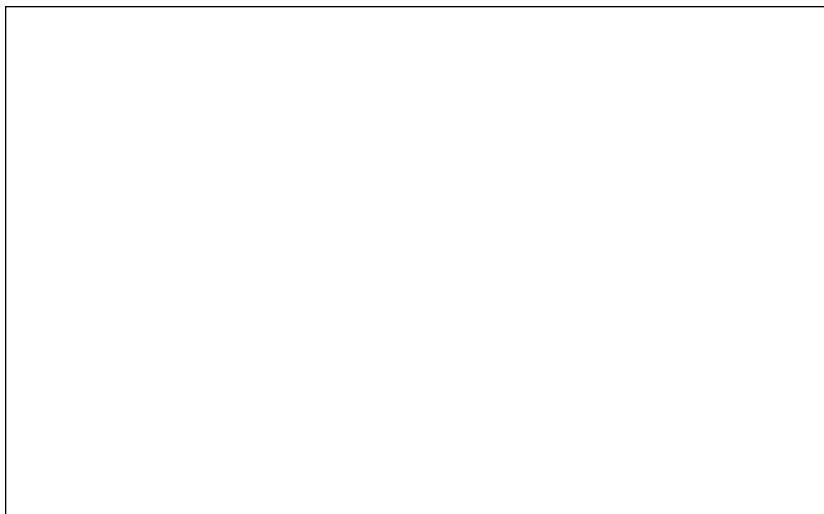
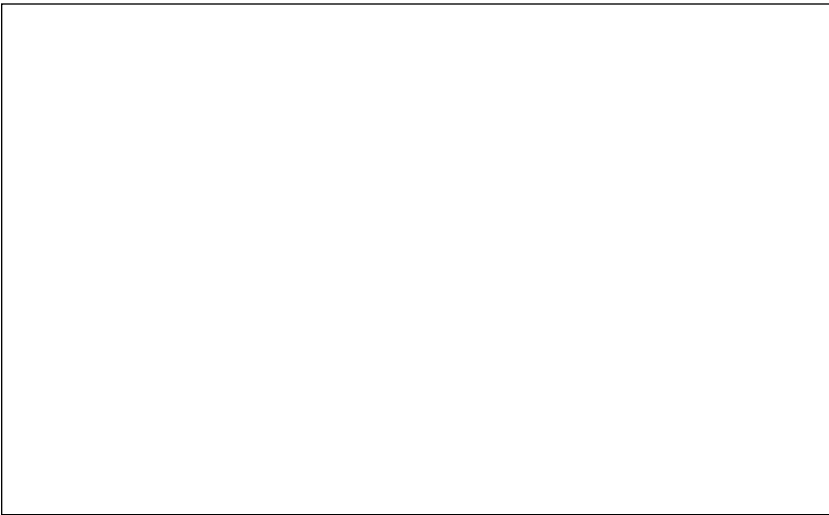
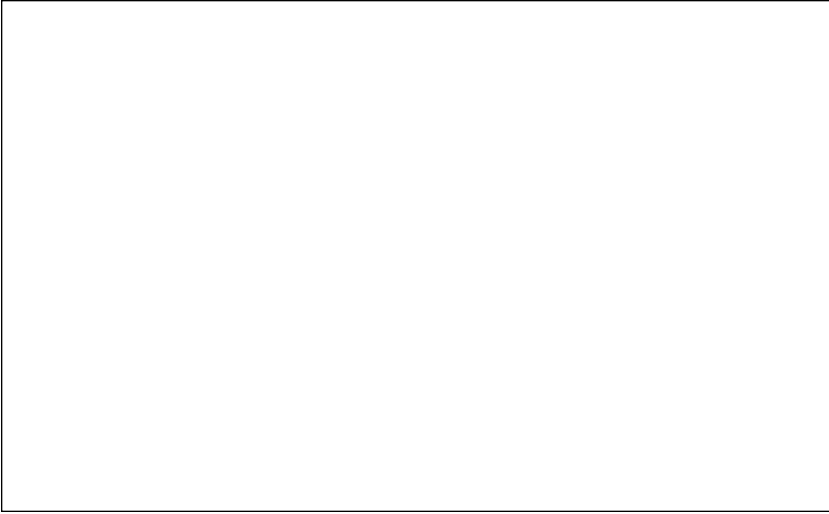


FIGURE 6.1. <<four photographs to come>>John Sadoy's photo-series on the events on Republic Square, October 30, 1956. *Hungary's Fight for Freedom*, *Life* magazine, 1956. Copyright by *Time* Inc.

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sergeant, miraculously survived. In the spring of 1957 *Népszabadság*, the official daily of the Communist Party, ran a series under the title "Those who Came Back from the Grave."<sup>5</sup>

Sadovy was not the only photographer on the streets of Budapest during the thirteen days of the revolution. *Time Inc.* itself had six correspondents and photographers in the city; four were held for a time by the Soviets, one was wounded, but all survived, together with John Sadovy. Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini, the twenty-seven-year-old *Paris Match* photographer, however, was killed on November 30 on Republic Square, while covering the events in front of the Budapest party headquarters. When he went down, according to eyewitness accounts, he handed over his camera and said to a companion, "Here, take a picture for me."<sup>6</sup>

Sadovy's photos were included in the authorized Communist version of the events on Republic Square, in *Köztársaság Tér 1956* (Republic Square 1956), first published in 1974. Ervin Hollós, who authored the book together with his wife, was in the building during the siege. Immediately after the defeat of the uprising, he became deputy head of the Investigation Department of the Ministry of the Interior, the agency in charge of investigating "the counterrevolutionary atrocities" during the 1956 events, among them the massacre on Republic Square. Later on, he changed his career and became the official historian of 1956, making good use of the confessions he had coauthored as the chief investigator of the "counterrevolution."

Besides the textual account, in order to situate the narrative and to inscribe the memory of the events as counterrevolution in an easily memo-

5. It emerged from the interviews that by having imitated that they were dead, the severely wounded and hospitalized soldiers somehow escaped the rage. *Népszabadság* followed their life for some years, and on the occasion of the anniversary of the siege, customarily, revisited them. After some years, however, they disappeared from public sight and became completely forgotten.

The soldiers have been rediscovered after the collapse of Communism, and one of the right-wing papers published a report about them. Contrary to the facts, the paper insisted that the Communists, in a sinister way, made use of Sadovy's photos by having presented them as if Sadovy had photographed the death of the young men, as if the soldiers had been murdered by the revolutionaries, when, in fact, they survived the massacre. From the post-1989 report it emerged that the Communist journalists had reasons to discontinue following the life of the miraculously escaped soldiers. One of them became an alcoholic; another divorced and lived in deep poverty; all three of them became allegedly deeply disappointed and thought that the authorities abandoned them.

6. Henry R. Luce, editor-in-chief, "Foreword," a special *Life* magazine report in pictures (1956).

rializable localization system, *Köztársaság Tér 1956* provided an extensive photographic coverage of the events. The pictures came mostly from the pages of *Time*, *Life*, and *Paris Match*. With the help of the photographs the historians condensed the most important events, connected to specific locations—primarily to Republic Square—in order to guarantee that future memories would be tied to known and concrete localities.

The pictures were included in the official account in order to solidify the status of the massacre as an immovable event. Photography, so it seems, does not require mediation; it promises noninterventionist objectivity. As the image is not made directly by human hand—it is just mechanical reproduction of “reality,” it is an action at a distance—it promises the immediacy of evidence, almost as if it were revelation.<sup>7</sup> It is not made, but seemingly brought forth and revealed, like an object found in the depth of an archive. It does not refer, resemble to reality, but instead, it stands for reality and takes the place of the original.<sup>8</sup> It is thus an appropriate medium to transform a particular event into a frozen document, into a sign.

After the revolution, the courts made use of this evidence, these photos, when identifying and charging those who had taken part in the massacre on Republic Square.<sup>9</sup> The images were used as *hyperfacts*, capable of referring to and revealing other, more fundamental, until-then-barely visible facts: the striking similarity of the bloodbath to other right-wing, anti-Communist incidents of the past. The images—when looked at from the right perspective—suggested their own frame: in this case, the counterrevolutionary nature of the event. In that frame, suddenly everything fell into place; the hidden came into light.<sup>10</sup> The status of noninterventionist “objectivity” of the photograph and its ability to reveal the hitherto unknown

7. On *acheiropoietic* images, images not by a human hand, like the direct imprint of God on the Holy Shroud in Turin, see Marie Jose Mondzian, “The Holy Shroud/How Invisible Hands Weave the Undecidable,” in *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe, Germany, and Cambridge, MA: ZKM and MIT Press, 2002), pp. 324–35.

8. Cf. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 67.

9. Cf. Hollós and Lajtai, *Köztársaság Tér 1956*, p. 168.

10. “In 1898 Secondo Pia, a lawyer and photographer, was instructed to take the first photographs of the [Holy] Shroud. On May 28 he exposed two 20 x 23.5 inch glass plates, which he developed the same night. The photographs were said to have revealed something new and unexpected: on the negative there appeared a positive image. It showed the front and the back of a male body, bright on a dark background, apparently three-dimensional



do not contradict each other: Röntgen representation is capable of showing up what has been invisible for the human eye in a presumably empirically reliable, nonsubjective way.<sup>11</sup>

The book carried portraits of the most important Communist martyrs of the bloodbath as well, among them the three truce-bearers, who were massacred when they left the building with a white flag. Imre Mező, one of the secretaries of the Budapest Party Committee, carried the white handkerchief on a stick. It was supposed to show that the defenders had realized that it would be irrational to continue the fight. He was shot and then miraculously smuggled into a hospital, where he died. (The street that leads from behind the party headquarters to the National Pantheon—where he was finally buried—carried his name until 1989, when it got its original name back.) One of the other truce-bearers, a colonel of the army, was shot and hanged with his head down, the other soldier was hit by a burst of machine-gun fire and when he was down, his heart was cut out.

*Köztársaság Tér 1956* took full advantage of the fact that slaying of the truce-bearers carrying a white flag was a familiar image for readers of Hungarian Communist history books. There was already a ready-made, available frame for the pictures: during World War II, before the siege of Budapest, two Soviet truce-bearers, who had been sent to negotiate the possibility of saving the city, were killed by the Nazis at the eastern and southwestern gates of the city. Both soldiers, Captains Steinmetz and Ostapenko, were given huge monuments at the entrances to the city during the Communist period, reminding the people of the cruelty of Fascism and the sacrifice of the Soviets. Captain Steinmetz's body was translated, that is, reinterred under the pedestal of his statue in 1949. Both monuments were blown up during the days of the revolution, and both of them were recast in 1958. (After 1989 the sculptures were moved to the sculpture park, the "skanzen" of the memorials from the Communist pe-

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as though lit from above. The brownish traces—hardly decipherable on the shroud itself—became a light and readable image. . . . The long history of the shroud suddenly appeared as a prelude. In retrospect it became the history of a code, unlocked only in the age of photographic reproduction" (Peter Geimer, "Searching for Something: On Photographic Revelations," in *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe, Germany, and Cambridge, MA: ZKM and MIT Press, 2002), p. 143.

11. Cf. Loraine Daston and Peter Galison, "The Image of Objectivity," *Representations* no. 40 (fall 1992): 81–128.

riod, while the new anti-Communist historiography came forth with an alternative account, according to which one of the captains was shot by mistake from behind by the Soviets; the other, while drunk, drove his car into a ditch.) Before 1989, however, the history books did not miss the opportunity to point out the parallel between the two cowardly acts, as one of the most visible proofs of the fact that it was indeed Fascism that had been let loose during 1956.

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At the beginning of the 1950s, five years after the end of the siege of Budapest, stories were circulating in the city about a strange platoon of German soldiers who emerged from the tunnels of Kőbánya in the outskirts of Budapest. The soldiers, according to the rumor, had gone into hiding at the end of the Soviet siege of the city, using the old and deep tunnels that had been built at the time of the Turkish occupation in the first half of the seventeenth century. During the siege the tunnels served as storage space for one of the German divisions, which accumulated large quantities of dried rations in them. The entrance fell in at the end of the war, and the members of the lost platoon lived on dried food for years, while they dug their way out of the underground labyrinth.<sup>12</sup>

On November 2, 1956, two days after the fall of the Budapest party headquarters, *Magyar Függetlenség* (Hungarian Independence), one of the revolutionary newspapers revealed that after they stormed the building, the revolutionaries had found “large quantities of half-cooked pancakes in the kitchen, enough for considerably more people than those actually found after the siege, but the ÁVH-men [members of the secret police] mysteriously disappeared.” When the number of the dead, laying in the square was added to the prisoners taken by the revolutionaries, the sum total, including civilians, was less than one hundred. The number surprised the victors, who had assumed that hundreds of soldiers and policemen were quartered in the party headquarters, together with hundreds or even thousands of prisoners, women and children among them.

In the indictment of one of the post-Republic Square trials, the Budapest Military Court stated that before the siege, rumors had started circulating among the fighting groups about the underground prisons and casemates that lay beneath the party headquarters, and the hundreds or

12. Péter Gosztonyi, “A Köztársaság téri ostrom és a kazamaták mítosza” [The Republic Square Siege and the Myth of the Casemates], *Budapesti Negyed* 2 (March 1994): 16.

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even thousands of freedom fighters who were held there.<sup>13</sup> On the morning of the siege, one of the revolutionary military leaders assured his men, “We are absolutely certain that under the party headquarters there are several floors of underground cellar prisons, full of political prisoners, whom it is our duty to free.”<sup>14</sup> The so-called *White Book*, the official Communist version of the events, claimed that in the days before the bloody battle, horror stories had circulated in the city about thousands of prisoners who had been suffering in the underground labyrinth for already ten years.<sup>15</sup> One of the dailies wrote about medieval prisons, other organs about “the torture chambers of the inquisition,” “the secret of the tunnels under the party headquarters,” and “the mysteries of the Communist casemates.”<sup>16</sup>

When the beleaguers entered the building, they immediately tried to make contact with the prisoners. The revolutionaries investigated the cellars but found nobody. They searched for secret entrances that supposedly led to the underground labyrinth, and listened to noises and hammering coming from below. Some of the occupants claimed that they had heard cries from below, and later on *Magyar Nemzet* reported that on lifting the receiver of the telephone in one of the empty offices, a member of the occupying forces overheard an abruptly cut-off conversation between an ÁVH officer and a guard from the underground prison, who anxiously inquired about the outcome of the fighting. “Let us out! We are prisoners. We want to live!” was purportedly heard from deep below. “How many of you are there?” came the question from above. “Hundred and forty,” arrived the barely audible answer from the depth of the bunker.<sup>17</sup>

When the fighting ceased, in the early evening of October 30, the search began on the square. The revolutionary military units issued warrants for the arrest of those who might have taken part in designing the underground structures and for the officials of the Budapest Sewage Com-

13. Budapest Military Court B. IV. 432/1958. sz; quoted by Hollós and Lajtai, *Köztársaság Tér 1956*, p. 105.

14. Supreme Court of the Hungarian People's Republic. Tb. 46/1960/5. sz; quoted by Hollós and Lajtai, *Köztársaság Tér 1956*, p. III.

15. *Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben I. kötet* [Counterrevolutionary Forces in the Hungarian October Events], vol. 1 (Budapest: Information Office of the People's Republic of Hungary, 1957), p. 22.

16. Cf. János Molnár, *Ellenforradalom Magyarországon 1956-ban* [Counterrevolution in Hungary in 1956] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), p. 184.

17. *Magyar Nemzet*, November 3, 1956.

pany, who were supposed to know the secret entrance to the underground structures. The Hungarian National Radio repeatedly requested anyone who had information about the layout of the casemates to report, without delay, at the headquarters of the rescue operation. On next afternoon, General Béla Király, the commander of the revolutionary National Guard, appointed a lieutenant-colonel to head the drilling.

Some of the Western photographers, together with a few Western film crews, had stayed on the square even after the final fall of the building and took pictures of the search. One of the photos shows two men, probably from the National Postal Services, listening carefully to an aural detector placed at one of the manholes on the square. The National Geophysics Institute, on the request of the Headquarters of the National Guard, sent a cathode-ray oscilloscope, four Soviet made geophones, and one anode-battery with the necessary cables.<sup>18</sup> The National Guard ordered the Hungarian-Soviet Oil Exploratory Company to send drilling rings, boring tools, even drilling vans and a boring rig to the square. From the Oroszlány coal mines three boring masters were ordered to the city and from the Zala oil fields, and experts with sophisticated equipment were sent to aid the explorers. (See Figure 6.2.)

To start, twenty-meter exploratory wells were drilled, but on November 3 the wildcat wells went even deeper than that. The government sent powerful excavators to the works, and one of the pictures, published in *Köztársaság Tér*, clearly shows the enormous ditch excavated by the machine used for the construction of the Budapest underground. The Budapest Sewage Company sent workers, pickaxes, shovels, ropes, and other supplies. After the unsuccessful attempts to find the entrance to the labyrinth from the cellars of the building, the explorers descended into the sewage system to find the mysteriously invisible underground prisoners. The scene, described by some of the newspapers, resembled to the setting of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, when the former prisoner Jean Valjean carries in his arms the seriously wounded Marius through the labyrinth of sewers under restless, revolutionary Paris.

People who claimed to know the secret of the casemates came one after the other to help the searchers, who continued to work day and night. An engineer pointed at the elevator shaft, and the drilling started once more

18. Expert report; Supreme Court of the Hungarian People's Republic B. F. I. 461/1958/10; quoted in Hollós and Lajtai, *Köztársaság Tér 1956*, pp. 205–6.

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FIGURE 6.2. Postal workers are searching for the underground prisons on Republic Square, November 1, 1956. Photo Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.

inside the building without a moment's delay. Somebody suggested searching for an armored door covered by concrete in the cellar; an iron door was blown in, but it did not lead anywhere; the newspapers searched for a mysterious woman who allegedly, for unknown reasons, knew the exact location of the entrance under one of the elevators that led to the sewers. Large crowds, hundreds of people, stayed continuously on the square, where two days after the end of the siege, several deep holes, on each side, were constantly being searched and deepened. High-powered floodlights illuminated the dark scene during the late autumn nights. In the meantime the cellars of all the neighboring houses were investigated, especially after a woman claimed that one of her relatives had been kept under one of the houses and then released and had reached the surface from beneath another building several hundred meters away.

The Budapest Police Headquarters informed the newly published daily *Új Magyarország* (New Hungary) that "the underground prisons were not built by the Budapest Party Committee but either by the Gestapo or,

on the orders of the Gestapo, by the Buda Public Development Company during World War II. The Communists simply took over and made use of the structure that the Nazis had constructed.” The supposition was made believable by the fact that the headquarters of the ÁVH, where the defendants at the Communist show trials were tortured and interrogated in the cellars, had been before the end of the World War II the headquarters of the Arrow-Cross Party, the Hungarian Fascists, who had tortured and killed Communists and Jews in the prisons of the building. “One of the exits from the air-raid shelters opened into a huge wine cellar under the offices of the by now nationalized former Public Buildings Design Company. As a consequence of nationalization, the company ceased to exist, so a thorough search has started in the archives of all the construction companies of the city to locate the design drawings.”<sup>19</sup>

George Mikes, a London-based Hungarian émigré who worked for the BBC, claimed that the prisons could be reached only through a hidden entrance from either the cellars or from one of the boxes of the City Opera building, which stood opposite the party headquarters on the other side of the square. A captured ÁVH officer, who managed to mislead the explorers, had revealed the secret—according to Mikes’s account. After days of self-sacrificing explorations, the rescuers had to give up the search, and the 154 prisoners—thus Mikes—together with their captors, perished in the depths.<sup>20</sup>

The miners, oil workers, geometers, well drillers, acoustics experts, army and police officers, and members of the National Guard had to give up the search after four days, as the Soviet troops came back to Budapest early in the morning on November 4. The defeat of the revolution suspended the search; the mystery remained unsolved; the prisoners have never been found. The fact that they had not been found did not disprove the existence of the underground prisons, but instead the tragic fate of the prisoners.

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In 1896, by the time of the millenary festivities (according to the original official historical version, the Hungarian tribes had conquered the Carpathian basin in 895 but as most of the festive investment could not be

19. *Új Magyarország*, November 3, 1956.

20. George Mikes, *The Hungarian Revolution* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1957), pp. 118–19.

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completed by 1895, the government, together with the Academy of Sciences, decided to revise the received historical wisdom, and declared that the exact date of the millennium should be a year later, in 1896) the first underground on the European continent was opened in Budapest. The underground railway was officially referred to as the “crust-railway”; the tunnel ran under the surface, just a few steps down of the world above. It was a remarkable engineering achievement, the proof of the modernizing potential of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the pride of the city of Budapest even at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

On September 17, 1950, the Council of Ministers officially announced that as part of the First Five-Year Plan, the construction of the new Budapest subway should immediately begin. The building of the subway was meant to be the flagship construction of the Five-Year Plan, second only to the development of Stalin City, the pride of Socialist urban development, a Magnitogorsk-type Communist urban utopia with a mammoth steel-mill, based on imported Soviet iron ore.<sup>21</sup> The decision of the Hungarian Council of Ministers came just a few months after the inauguration of the fourth and most lavish section of the Moscow metro, which was opened on the occasion of Stalin’s seventieth birthday.

Construction began immediately at fourteen different sites of the city, and according to the plans, it was ordered that the first section should be completed in less than four years. At that time there was still no drilling shield in Hungary; it was mostly unskilled pick-and-shovel men, recruited from the countryside, who worked at the sites.<sup>22</sup> The first stroke of a hoe was reported in June 1950 at “work-site no. 6.” under the building at 66 Rákóczi Avenue, right behind Republic Square. Soon more than five thousand people, including numerous miners, were working day and night in three shifts in the deepening holes, for, according to the plans, unlike the “Millenary underground” that runs just under the surface, the new Socialist metro was envisaged to operate deep under the ground.<sup>23</sup> Newspaper re-

21. On Magnitogorsk and the construction of the Communist urban utopia, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

22. János Kelemen, *A budapesti metro története* [The History of the Budapest Subway] (Budapest: Műszaki Kiadó, 1970), pp. 57–58.

23. Miners working at the construction of the underground railway received special coverage in the press. They were hailed as the real heroes of the construction, in part, as a restitution for their past, historical suffering. Ever since the publication of Frederick Engels’s *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, miners—especially young boys



ports frequently compared the technically inferior, old “cut-and-cover” underground, with the vertically superior, extremely deep location of the modern Socialist tunnels in progress. The unusual and unnatural depth of the tunnels became a source of speculation about the real but hidden function of the underground: the citizens of Budapest were convinced that the real purpose of the very deep tunnels was to provide air shelters for the nomenclature of the party in case of a nuclear incident. Even the official chronicler of the metro construction had to acknowledge in 1970 that it had been senseless to dig such deep tunnels under Rákóczi Avenue in the first half of the 1950s.<sup>24</sup>

The work strictly followed the script of the Moscow metro construction: “The Budapest underground express-train is being built exactly following the guidelines of the 87-volume plans of the world-famous Moscow metro,” claimed an article on the plans.<sup>25</sup> Delegations of Hungarian engineers frequently visited the Moscow sites and took part in regular study tours, while Soviet experts worked at the construction sites with imported Soviet equipment. The reports proudly announced that the Budapest underground would resemble neither the outdated old Budapest underground, whose first passenger had been Emperor Francis Joseph himself, nor “the empty bleakness of hopeless functionality, which reminds the thousands of workers who ride the Paris metro of the daily drudgery of exploitation.”<sup>26</sup> Without the plans that had been generously provided by the Soviet Union, it would have taken years just to complete the drawings for the planned metro, wrote the daily of the Hungarian Communist Party.<sup>27</sup>

The newspapers calculated the exact time that would be saved by traveling on this fast and deep marvel of Socialist technology. The workers

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working underground—have been considered the most exploited social group of the proletariat (Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, trans. Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1892], esp. chap., “The Mining Proletariat,” pp. 241–60.

24. Kelemen, *A budapesti metro története*, p. 50. The subway lines at certain sections under Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, run in hundred-meter depths.

25. “Földalatti Gyorsvasút 1954” [Underground Express Train 1954] *Világosság* (October 6, 1951).

26. József Révai, *Vita építészetünk helyzetéről* [Debate about the Present Situation of our Architecture] (Budapest: Architectural Department of the Association of Hungarian Artists and Applied Artists, 1951), p. 58.

27. “Épül a Földalatti gyorsvasút” [The Underground Express Train Is Under Construction], *Szabad Nép*, April 13, 1952.



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of Budapest, by using the metro, instead of the crowded buses and street-cars (there were almost no private cars in the city at that time, only black-curtained Soviet limousines for members of the highest echelons of the party), would gain nine million working hours annually, equal to twenty-seven thousand full two-week holidays for the working people of the city to enjoy. During these nine million hours it would be possible for millions of people to watch more than four and a half million movies.<sup>28</sup> Besides, according to a popular science journal, the construction of the metro would greatly contribute to our knowledge of the ancient history of the city. The construction workers bring to light information that had remained buried for thousands, even hundreds of thousands of years under the city from the prehistoric times of Budapest, which the socialist regime had decided to uncover, bring into the surface and share with the working people of the capital.<sup>29</sup>

Not long after Stalin's death in 1953, the new Soviet leadership ordered the Hungarian Communist leaders to the Kremlin to announce the appointment of Imre Nagy as the new Hungarian prime minister. Rákosi, the Stalinist secretary general of the Hungarian party and chief architect of the show trials, remained in office. The new Hungarian government was strongly advised to follow the new Soviet example and slow down its over-ambitious investment plans, including unrealistic developments in heavy industry and infrastructure, and, in a country of extreme scarcity of goods, to channel part of the resources into production of consumer goods. In early fall of 1954, at the time when, according to the original plans, the first line of the new underground was to have opened, the citizens of Budapest noticed with surprise the sudden silence around the drilling towers at all fourteen building sites in the city. The thousands of workers who emerged from under the ground were sent away, mostly back to the countryside. The secretary general, when addressing the meeting of the Budapest Party Committee, explained, "We have decided to temporarily halt the construction of the underground, because the concrete, the glass, the iron, the steel that would have been used under the ground, are now needed on the surface for the construction and reconstruction of the public transpor-

28. Ibid.

29. "Budapest ősföldrajzát derítik föl a Földalatti gyorsvasút építői" [The Workers of the Underground Express Train Uncover the Prehistoric Geography of Budapest], *Élet és Tudomány*, May 28, 1952.

tation system above the ground, and for the building and renovation of apartment buildings for the well-being of our working people.”<sup>30</sup> In the same newspaper, a professor of the Budapest Technical University pointed out that halting construction was in fact equivalent to continuing the project, as the preservation of the completed tunnels would substantially enhance their quality. At the same time, an escalator, ten meters long, originally intended for one of the metro stations, would be set up at one of the end stops of the pioneer railway, built for the children with Soviet help in the Buda hills, in order to help citizens of Budapest to familiarize themselves with this new technical innovation. By the time the construction of the metro was resumed and the first line completed, the people of the city would have learned not to fear this unusual means of transportation and would know how to use it.<sup>31</sup>

Some of the construction materials were shipped to eastern Hungary to help in the reconstruction of the flooded area around the Tisza River. The newspapers proudly announced that from the summer of the coming year onward, “the Budapest Horsemeat Factory would be able to use the refrigerating equipment which until now was employed under the ground to freeze the underground water in order to protect the tunnels from incoming floods.”<sup>32</sup>

After the 1956 revolution the newspapers revealed not only the enormous waste that had accompanied the hasty and irrational work, but also the human cost that was paid during the four years of the works. Hundreds of members of the Socialist brigades suffered from “caisson disease” because, in the midst of the *stakhanovite* work contests, they had not enough time to acclimatize to the sudden change of air pressure when descending to the underground workings or coming up from the deep tunnels. A public hospital not far from Republic Square had to be transformed into a specialized “metro hospital” to treat the victims of the construction work.<sup>33</sup>

30. “Mi a helyzet a földalattival?” [What Is the Situation with the Underground Railway?], *Népszava*, September 29, 1954.

31. Ibid. (Conversation with Dr. Károly Széchy, Kossuth Prize-winning professor of the Budapest Technical University.)

32. “A Földalatti Gyorsvasút építéséhez használt gépek, berendezések a lakosság szolgálatában” [Machines, Equipment Used at the Construction of the Underground Express Train in the Service of the People], *Esti Budapest*, September 7, 1954.

33. “A földalatti-építkezés botrányának hiteles története” [The Authentic Story of the Scandal of the Underground Construction], *Népszabadság*, December 31, 1956.

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In the end, the building of metro line no. 2 proved to be the longest-lasting underground construction project in the world. The metro is not only an important part of the transportation system of the city but a huge air shelter that can accommodate more than two hundred thousand people about thirty meters under the surface, with its own independent electricity and water-supply systems, ventilation, and air-filtering equipment.<sup>34</sup> After the beginning of the initial construction work, during the darkest times of the cold war, in the midst of dramatic shortages, the citizens of Budapest were convinced that the tunnels housed huge food reserves, hospitals, special bunkers, logistical centers, and offices for the military and political leadership.

The belief in the existence of the secret underground tunnels was fed by sporadic unsubstantiated reports about the Moscow “Kremlin line (Metro-2),” the secret underground labyrinth that, allegedly, had been started on Stalin’s order even before the outbreak of World War II. The first public report on the Metro-2 was published in the Russian magazine *AIF* only in 1992, although a Pentagon publication had made the maps of the secret line public in the previous year.<sup>35</sup> The command center of the Civil Rescue Committee was supposedly built under the Sovietskoi Square. The Sovietskaya Station was abolished in 1979, when it was realized that the planned expansion of the Moscow metro would need an irrationally long detour as a consequence of the secret station. Before World War II a tunnel was built, wide enough for two passenger car lines that led to and from the Kremlin (the entrance, allegedly, was under the Spasski Gate of the Kremlin). According to the published map, there is a line that runs from the Izmailovskii Park Station to Stalin’s underground bunker. This is the route that Stalin is supposed to have used on his way to representative state rituals. According to Jurij Zaichev, an expert of the Metro-2 story, the secret metro line ran under Stalin’s dacha in Kunchevo, where a special bunker was constructed with a large study, the so-called Generalskaia, the venue for the meetings of the National Defense Council during the Great Patriotic War, and with a simple bedroom for the Generalissimo.<sup>36</sup>

The May/June 1997 issue of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* published Andrei Ilnitsky’s *Mysteries Under Moscow*. Ilnitsky describes a group

34. Kósa N. Judit and Péter Szablyár, *Föld alatti Pest* [Underground Pest] (Budapest: Városháza, 2001), pp. 13–14.

35. “Military Forces in Transition” (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 1991).

36. Cf. [www.metro.ru/metro2](http://www.metro.ru/metro2).

of explorers, the “Diggers of the Underground Planet,” who, starting in 1990, decided to systematically explore the “six, and in some places as many as twelve levels under Moscow.” The “Diggers believe the powerful and inaccessible Russian capital—with all its special security departments—is vulnerable from below. . . . The current city government is aware of the possibility of an undeclared ‘revolution’ from below, and the problem of Metro security stays on the agenda at government meetings.” Vadim Mikhailov, the leader of the “Diggers,”

thinks there may be evidence of Stalin-era executions in some passages under the city. Under Solyanka Street, for example, there is a large inaccessible network of tunnels that may conceal a mass burial site. . . . Other Soviet secrets lie under Moscow, including a second ring of Metro lines built by Stalin on the outskirts of the city, but never used by the public. . . . Muscovites speculate that the ring was employed by the military to shuttle bombs around the capital.<sup>37</sup>

“Some people say there is nothing better than the Taj Mahal, but I know they’re wrong. In the Moscow metro there’s a Taj Mahal at each station,” thus Alexander Kaletski begins his *Metro, A Novel of the Moscow Underground*.<sup>38</sup> About three-quarters of the walls of the “Underground Palaces,” as the official Moscow guide calls the metro stations, are covered by natural stone: coarse-grained pink marble from the southern shore of Lake Baikal, white marble from the deposits in the Ural Mountains, from the Altay, and from the Caucasus, black marble from Armenia, deep-red marble from Georgia, yellowish, green-gray, and brown shades and layers of spotted marble-type limestone from the Crimea.

Thanks to the unique decorative character of quartzite found in Kareliya (the only place where this material of a rich raspberry shade is extracted) the underground hall of Baumannskaya Station has a peculiarly solemn architectural style. Semi-precious stones may be found and seen at the oldest Metro stations in Moscow. These are pink rodonite and marble onyx. . . . Mayakovskaya Station is rightly considered to be the main architectural masterpiece of the Moscow metro. This is a station, which lies deep underground, and belongs to the first, the oldest line of the Moscow metro. The station was opened in 1938. A mock-up of the station was successfully displayed the same year at the International Exhibition in New York. . . . The vaulting of the central hall of Mayakovskaya Station has thirty-three mosaics

37. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 53, no. 3 (May–June 1997): 11–14.

38. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), p. 1.

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based on cartoons by the famous Russian artist Alexander Deineka. The theme of all mosaics is called "One Day of Soviet Skies." The light character of structures, emphasized by the sparkling bends of stainless steel, is shaded by red and pink shades of rodonite, a fine semiprecious stone.<sup>39</sup>

It was not only the master plan, the volumes of technical descriptions, the experts, the supervisors, and the technical equipment that came from Moscow, but the aesthetic and ideological program of the Budapest metro as well. As early as the summer of 1951, an exhibition was organized above one of the prospective metro stations to familiarize the citizens of Budapest with some of the planned works of art that were to have decorated not only the stations but the tunnels as well. The paintings, in golden and silver frames, were supposed to give a foretaste of the heroic and tumultuous frescoes and mosaics of the underground art.<sup>40</sup> A visionary journalist working for *Brightness* reported:

The soccer match is just over and the hundred-thousand-strong crowd is pouring out of the brand new People's Stadium. All the people in their Sunday dress are heading in the very same direction: to the colossal bright red-marble building, complete with a four-story-high green-marble cupola. The marble building, bathed in the Sunday sunshine, is covered with the famous greenish marble from Siklós and decorated by numerous fountains and sculptures cast from white chalk. . . . The rails are divided by green-marble panels decorated with huge mosaics that testify to the unparalleled sporting achievements of our people, the guardians of peace, the builders of the ever brighter future.<sup>41</sup>

As the "Moscow metro serves as the example in every possible respect for the Budapest Underground Railway, which will try to live up to the comparison," the aesthetic and ideological program of each station was organized around a specific propaganda theme reflecting the world high above.<sup>42</sup> The station at the People's Stadium would have emphasized the life of our sporting youth; the station beneath the Eastern Railway Station would have depicted and glorified the unbreakable alliance between the

39. <http://www.Moscow-guide.ru/Culture/Metro.htm>.

40. "Képkiallítás a Földalatti Építkezésénél" [Exhibition of Paintings at the Construction of the Underground], *Népszava*, July 25, 1951.

41. "Földalatti Gyorsvasút, 1954," *Világosság*, October 6, 1951.

42. "Milyen lesz a Földalatti Gyorsvasút állomásainak képzőművészeti díszítése" [What Will the Artistic Decoration at the Stations of the Underground Express Railway be Like], *Magyar Nemzet*, February 21, 1952.

working class and the peasantry, with miners and potato-pickers in the center; the next theme elevated Socialist art, while the station under Stalin Square, “which will be the single most important among all the stations, where in the future, three metro lines will cross each other,” should have illustrated “all the important historic events related to the Liberation of Hungary, and would express the eternal gratitude of the Hungarian People to our Liberator, the Great Stalin”; stations would have been devoted to the Socialist Constitution (ratified on August 20, on Saint Stephen’s Day, so that the semireligious traditional Hungarian holiday would be eclipsed by the “Day of the Constitution and of the New Bread”); to the importance of the continuous Hungarian progressive liberation movements; to the Hungarian People’s Army, “the Guarantor of Peace in the World”; to all the progressive elements of Hungarian historical traditions; the station under Moscow Square would have presented the achievements of the First Five-Year Plan; and at the final station, under the Southern Railway Station, from where trains leave to Lake Balaton, the most popular holiday destination of the country, art would have been devoted to the theme of the state-sponsored holiday of the working people.<sup>43</sup>

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To save Utopia from the evil forces of the surrounding imperfect world, Boris Groys, the Russian-born art historian once argued, there is a strong need for clear-cut spatial separation. It is no accident that the majority of reports of utopian places come from travel accounts, from time travel, from islands, from a different time zone, or from a high plateau.<sup>44</sup> People, a workforce, building materials, and a certain infrastructure are all needed to realize a utopian vision, so a real desert is not the most suitable place for the undertaking. A habitable part of the world, by contrast, which has already been occupied by groups and communities of people, would certainly threaten the integrity of the utopian construct. The ideal place could be an uninhabited area, relatively near an inhabited place: this might offer the feasible location. To realize his utopian master plan, Peter the Great found an apparently suitable place: the marshes at the mouth of the Neva River, where, on morass he built his utopian Westernized world, Saint Petersburg.

43. Ibid.

44. Boris Groys, “A fölalatti mint utópia” [The Underground as Utopia], in *Groys, Az utópia természetrajza* [The Natural History of Utopia] (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 1997), p. 35.

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When the Soviet leaders decided to build the center of the Communist new world, they moved the capital from the swamps to Moscow. Groys recalls that the avant-garde artists and revolutionary theoreticians first proposed to lift the new Soviet capital into the cosmic sphere, well above quotidian life on earth. Malevich suggested planning and building so-called planits that would have helped mortals to float above the ground in the air. El Lisitzky's constructs would have stood on very long supporting legs, high above historic Moscow, while Velimir Hlebnikov, the poet, proposed that the inhabitants of Moscow should be provided with movable glass homes above the ground.<sup>45</sup> The problem with all the avant-garde visions was that they lacked deepness, depth in a literal sense.<sup>46</sup>

Stalin's ingenious solution was to open up layers for the Socialist utopia that had not been inhabited, or utilized before, that lacked the traces of tradition of the inherited, spontaneous, organic development. By exploring, excavating, and exploiting the underground, the planner became the sole master of the stone world under, and became able to design a sphere, which he alone could totally control. While under the ground, the subjects became absolutely dependent on the plan of the master, who controlled not only the entrances and the exits, the artificial light (this was not Tommaso Campanella's *Civitas solis*) but also the form and rules of life of his subjects beneath the ground. As the description of the "Underground Palaces" guide showed, Stalin's metro (its official name was "Metro in Honor of Lenin's Name") was a vehicle of transportation not so much from one local, marble-

45. "But is there a real need for building in the air? 'Generally speaking,' no. But 'in this case'? We live in towns that were born before our time. The tempo and needs of modern life are already too much for them to cope with. We cannot raze them to the ground overnight and start again correctly from a clean slate" (El Lisitzky, *First Skyscraper near Nikitinsky City-Gate* [Moscow]; cf. <http://www.utopia.ru>).

46. Groys, "A fölalatti mint utopia," pp. 37–38. One of the entries to the Lenin Mausoleum competition in 1925 proposed "a colossal monument, a tower . . . that should be of a height only accessible by the latest engineering technology. The dimensions of this monument should eclipse all the currently existing tallest buildings in the world. It should proudly soar above St. Basil's Cathedral [on Red Square]. If the proposed monument were the height of the Eiffel Tower, its constructions and its upward soaring would worthily symbolize the great leader, as an innovator and a revolutionary, and the contrast to St. Basil would be truly striking" (A. Gruzdinsky's entry; cf., *Russian Utopia*).

The "Russian Utopia: A Depository," a catalog prepared for the Venice Biennale, VI International Exhibition of Architecture, contains a rich collection of vertically ambitious avant-garde architectural plans from the 1920s and 1930s (A-Fond, Moscow, 1996).

covered station to another but to the subsequent stages of the Socialist utopia.<sup>47</sup> (See Figure 6.3.)

Socialist realism became the only tolerated program of representing the world at the time when the first metro line under the Soviet capital was opened. Social realism was definitively not a style of artistic representation but an officially sanctioned way of making the world (available). It stood in stark opposition to “bourgeois objectivism,” with its (false) acceptance of the world’s being resistant to our will. According to official Socialist critics: “bourgeois objectivism” aimed at faithful representation, “the presumed truth,” thus acknowledging the difficulties of overcoming the natural and social laws of outside reality.<sup>48</sup> “Bourgeois subjectivism” was not considered to be a lesser danger, as it lacked the determination to change the world, and thus accepted the world as it was subjectively (and falsely) perceived.

Alexander Kalecki, in his sharply anti-Soviet autobiographical novel, acknowledged:

The Metro is a world in itself—in the winter it’s warm down there, cool in the summer. And it’s always sparkling clean. No Russian would dream of spitting on the metro’s marble floor; he’d sooner spit on the coat of another passenger. When I walked along the spotless platform under the high romanesque ceilings, mosaics, and crystal chandeliers all around, my entire body took in the sparkle of the station—my eyes, the whiteness of the marble walls; my hands, the pleasing feel of nickel pools; my feet, the smoothness of the polishes stone. Why the modernization of Russia started with the hanging of chandeliers beneath the earth I didn’t know, but I did know that when I was underground, I felt free.<sup>49</sup>

47. The Central Line, however, turns into itself. “This line embraces the center of Moscow, drawing its one-hour underground circle which rings the heart of the city and connects all its nerves and arteries. . . . Throughout the day, jam-packed trains run along the Circle Line. There is no end to the river of people, as there is no end to the circle. Alcoholics worship this line. It’s their haven—there’s no need to worry about being dumped out or arrested at the last stop; they can keep on circling around and around until they sober up, and the best part is that the farther they go, the closer they are to where they started” (Alexander Kaletski, *Metro: A Novel of the Moscow Underground* [New York: Viking, 1985], p. 1).

48. See, however, Barnard Williams’s *Truth and Truthfulness*: “The fact that there are external obstacles to the pursuit of truth is one foundation of our idea of objectivity, in the sense that our beliefs are answerable to an order of things that lies beyond our own determination” (Barnard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002], p. 125).

49. Kaletski, *Metro*, p. 2.





FIGURE 6.3. Vladimir Favorski, Moscow Metro Station. *Sosialistinen realismi—Suuri utopia*, exhibition catalogue. Valkoinen sali, Helsinki, Finland, July 17–September 22, 2002.

(The underworld as the location of utopia is not a twentieth-century recognition. John Foxe, who studied law at Grays Inn in the 1520s, the author of the anti-Catholic “Acts and Monuments” [published in 1563], argued that purgatory—the existence of which was so fiercely and lengthily defended by Thomas More, in his “The Supplication of the Souls”—could not be found anywhere, “unless it be in Master More’s Utopia.”)<sup>50</sup>

The theme of the secret metro line resurfaces in Groy’s short essay as well:

People have long whispered about the existence of another, a hidden line, deep beneath the known ones; about a secret network, that forms a double, an underground Kremlin, where the Soviet leadership would hide to in case of war. . . . Russian nationalist circles maintain even today, that careful study of the plans of the Moscow Metro reveals the form of a Star of David, referring to the Jewish as-

50. Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 250–51.

piration for the rule over the Russian capital. This theory is substantiated by the fact that it was Lazar Kaganovich, who led the construction work of the Moscow Metro under Stalin. . . . And Kaganovich was the only Jewish member of Stalin's narrow circle of Communist leaders.

(Lazar Moiseyevich Kaganovich, the one-time Kubany [Ukraine] shoemaker, is one of the most frequently mentioned villains on extreme anti-Semitic websites. The name of the longest living member of Stalin's Politburo—he died in 1991 at the age of ninety-seven—is connected not only to the construction of the underground labyrinth under Moscow but also to the destruction of the enormous Cathedral of Christ the Savior at the back of Red Square.) “The Star of David might refer to the prefiguration of all utopian cities: the heavenly Jerusalem, built of stone, and devoid of vegetation.”<sup>51</sup>

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The archive of Radio Free Europe includes an odd collection known as the “Items.” An “Item” is an interview made with freshly arrived emigrants from behind the iron curtain to the West, or with tourists: visitors, who, in most cases, had the mistaken notion that they were talking to either an interested former compatriot, a casual acquaintance, or with a Western journalist. It did not occur to the majority of the interviewees that they were talking to an employee or a contractee of an intelligence agency, who would write a formal official report in their native language, complete with an English summary and evaluation comments. The texts, arranged by subject headings, were used later on by the programmers working at the national desks of the radios. Before the collapse of the Communist regimes, most of the “Items” were destroyed by the radios, partly in order to protect

51. Groys, “A fölalatti mint utopia,” p. 44.

“You see,” Salon went on, “I was born in Moscow. And it was in Russia, when I was a youth, that people discovered the secret Jewish documents that said, in so many words, that to control governments it was necessary to work underground. Listen.” He picked up a little notebook, in which he had copied out some quotations. “Today’s cities have metropolitan railroads and underground passages: from these we will blow up all the capitals of the world. Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Document Number Nine!” . . .

“If I follow you, then, there’s a conventicle of Jews—some Jews, not all—who are plotting something. But why underground?”

“That’s obvious! Any plotter must plot underground, not in the light of day. This has been known from the beginning of time. Dominion over the world means dominion over what lies beneath it. The subterranean currents.” (Umberto Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum*, trans. William Weaver [London: Picador, 1989], p. 443)

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the interviewees, who, despite the anonymous format of the documents (the initials or pseudoinitials of the interviewers, however, are always noted on the front page of the interview) might be recognized. Thousands of the “Items” from the national desks, however, survived the shredding and provide unique information for scholars of Communist times.

The “Items” form a weird collection. In some cases it is obvious, and we even have direct proof, that the interview is a product of pure fiction. As some of the interviewers were paid by the piece, the contractors tried to produce as many interviews as seemed acceptable. A well-known Hungarian writer and sociographer, who immigrated to London and worked for the radios, composed some of the interviews facing just his typewriter in the solitude of his study. In most cases, the tourist and especially the recent emigrant wanted to please the interviewer and said what was—according to his anticipation—supposed to be expected of him (the overwhelming majority of the interviewees were young or middle-aged men). The collection reveals the notions that the East European had about the supposed image of Communism in the West. It is also apparent that this circular impression was typically formed by having listened to the programs of Radio Free Europe, where, in turn, the programmers made use of the interviews when broadcasting anti-Communist propaganda to the East. The stories that were told in reply to the suggestive questions of the covert agents—who presupposed the obvious anti-Communist leanings of the refugees who were waiting for their residence permits or of the tourists who were stunned by all the commercial wealth of the West—testified to the effectiveness of the self-fulfilling prophecies of the Western propaganda based on the information distilled from the severely biased “Items.”

Among the Hungarian “Items,” under the subject “Resistance” there are a few interviews, which explicitly deal with the storming of the party headquarters and the underground prisons. “Item” no. 1264/57 originates in Vienna (probably from one of the refugee camps), and according to the English summary, “Source comments on the chapter [of the official *White Book*] ‘Attack Against the Headquarters of the Party Committee of Budapest.’ He refutes the statement of the *White Book* that the underground of the headquarters did not exist.”<sup>52</sup>

52. Fonds HU 300-40-4 Hungarian Information Items (Police and Security), Records of the Research Institute of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Open Society Archives (OSA), Budapest, Hungary.

The source, a forty-nine-year-old former journalist from Budapest, states that he had kept a diary during the days of the revolution and recorded all the noteworthy events. He was present when, after the end of the siege, the besiegers entered the building but were not able to find the entrance leading underground. On November 3, the journalist reported to a captain of the technical division of the army that he had found telephone and electricity cables, which lead beneath the building. On the orders of the captain, geophysical equipment was immediately shipped from one of the coal-mining districts, and by the help of a radio telescope the rescue teams were able to make contact with the 131 prisoners, who said that they had been forced to descend to the underground prisons from room no.3 in the party headquarters.

Forty of us from the investigation team searched the building from roof to cellar but were unable to locate room no. 3, as the rooms of the building, unfortunately, were not numbered. . . . We decided to return the next morning, on November 4, and to carry on with the help of explosives. In view of the start of the Soviet attack, however, we had no opportunity to revisit the site. According to the catering book we found in the building, the kitchen catered for 250 people, and this clearly proves the existence of the underground prison and the secret passage, through which at least one hundred members of the ÁVH could leave the building via the tunnel of the underground railway. The political prisoners, however, remained forever underground. The circumstances of the construction of the party headquarters substantiate my claim. The construction of the building started parallel with the building of the underground railway [*sic*]. [Before World War II the building served as the headquarters of the *Völkshund*.] A delegation of forty Soviet engineers arrived in Budapest to lead the construction of the tunnels, and not a single Hungarian engineer was allowed the see the full plan, they were shown only small segments of the complete master plan. All of us who worked at the construction [this is the first mention that the journalist had personally participated in the work] were completely convinced that we were not building an underground railway, but nuclear shelters, instead.<sup>53</sup>

“Item” no. 3169/57 also originates from one of the Austrian refugee camps, and the source this time is a thirty-two-year-old technician from Budapest. The title of the “Item” “Underground Railway in Budapest and Party Headquarters at Köztársaság tér” is the first mention of the assumed direct connection between the underground prisons and the underground

53. Ibid., pp. 2–3.

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railway. The English summary remarks, "Source took part in the attempts to locate the underground rooms with technical equipment for eight days [the siege took place on October 30, the Soviet troops occupied Budapest on 4 November]." <sup>54</sup>

"In order to see the story in a clear context, we have to go back to the construction of the Budapest underground railway," insists the technician.

At one point of the line, a detour was built in the direction to Köztársaság tér, but the tunnel did not turn back anywhere to the main underground line. . . . This work was headed by an ÁVH officer, whose cover name was Kovács. He was a local party secretary, but in order to mislead the workers, he had been expelled several times from the party. . . . This part of the tunnel was built mostly by prisoners sentenced to death, who, without exception, were executed later on. As it proved to be impossible to supply all the necessary workforce from among prisoners sentenced to death, a few of the construction workers survived, and when the works stopped after 1953, all of them were sent to far away workplaces in remote parts of the country. Some of them returned during the days of the revolution, and they were the ones who were able to provide precise information about the whereabouts of the detour line. . . .

After midnight, on October 29 [the siege took place on October 30], the investigators transported an aerial detector from one of the mines to the square, which enabled the search team to listen to the vulgar conversation of the ÁVH officers, the crying of the children, and the screams of the women. We could determine the direction of the tunnel, which lead to a spiral staircase beneath the royal box, now reserved for the secretary general, of the City Opera, on the opposite side of the square. . . . In a cellar we have accidentally discovered a telephone switch. One of the members of the National Guard happened to know the secret password, which enabled him to start a conversation with the ÁVH officers underground. The officers, believing that they were talking to one of their comrades, requested him to turn on the water tap and asked him about the outcome of the siege. Naturally, we did not tell them that the headquarters had fallen and the revolutionaries had occupied the building. . . . On the square, with the help of taping equipments, the military managed to capture ciphered messages coming from below the ground, but they were not able to decipher the secret code. . . . We decided that next day, November 4, we would break through the wall at one end of the tunnel of the underground railway, but at daybreak the Soviet troops arrived, and the search had to be stopped. . . . On that day the Soviet military occupied the building, and during the coming days, the rattle of firearms could be

54. Ibid.

heard from the direction of the party headquarters. . . . The Soviets imposed a curfew until seven in the morning, but when I ventured into the street, immediately after the end of the curfew, I saw corpses every morning, children and women among them, lying flat on their faces in the square. In my estimate, during the next two weeks, about one hundred bodies were collected from the square after the end of the nightly curfew. Obviously, these were the people who had been kept underground.<sup>55</sup>

The text shows how the uplifting, bright—although artificially lit—utopia of the Stalinist underground was turned into the image of hell. The mirror image of the cellars under the party headquarters is also featured among the “Items.” An interview that originally came from the Vienna News Bureau on September 2, 1957, describes, as the title phrases, “How the *White Book* Was Put Together.”

According to the source:

The fighting was still going on in Budapest, when, in the former headquarters of the ÁVH, in 16 Jászai Mari Square [this building—commonly referred to as the “White House”—after 1956 became the Ministry of the Interior, and later on, until 1989, was occupied by the Central Committee of the party], or precisely in the cellars of the said building, the idea of the *White Book* that would uncover the counterrevolution was born. Please do not fool yourselves: this was not a cold, unfriendly, and dirty coal cellar, but a basement equipped with all imaginable comforts, an ample quantity of foodstuffs, hoarded in the “operation officers’ shelter,” three levels below the ground. Only their uniform distinguished those who stayed in this luxurious cellar from the rats. These rats with a human figure were the employees of the Political Department of the National Police Headquarters and their relatives. . . . The only resistance these “heroes” were able to think of was heroically resisting the temptation to leave the secure cellar and face up to the revolution.<sup>56</sup>

Following the depiction of the scene, the interviewee then gives a detailed description of the “curly dark hair,” “the thin stature,” and “the characteristic nose” of the rats, in whose mind the idea of the *White Book* was born. These characteristic people understood that with the help of real-life documents it would be impossible to prove to the world, and to the UN that the “Hungarian Revolution was neither the Revolution of the People, nor the Revolution of the Hungarian Youth but the instead, it was the ‘Horthyist-Fascist’ mob, financed by counts, barons, bank directors and

55. Ibid., pp. 3–5.

56. Ibid.



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the United States that wanted to overthrow the most glorious achievement of the twentieth century: the people's democracy."<sup>57</sup>

The source insists that the photographs included in the *White Book*, among them the pictures of the massacre on Republic Square, in front of the Budapest party headquarters were fakes, doctored photographs prepared in the safe and secluded cellar, three floors underground, in the building of the "Headquarters of the ÁVH."<sup>58</sup> The ÁVH officers of characteristic appearance retouched the pictures in the depth of their well-appointed cellar, to turn the barbarity of the Communist secret police into sinister accusations against the Hungarian revolutionary youth.<sup>59</sup>

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In 1992 the first post-Communist conservative government commissioned a two-part film-report on the underground prisons from the Hungarian National Television (the only television channel at that time in the country). The investigative film-report was aired in early March 1994, shortly before the parliamentary elections, as part of the so-called Unlawful Socialism series of the Hungarian television.<sup>60</sup> By that time the popularity of the first post-Communist conservative government—which had been in office since May 1990—was fading dangerously, and all the polling agencies predicted a Socialist victory and even an absolute Socialist majority in the upcoming elections.

As part of the transition from one-party rule, in 1989 the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party reinvented itself as the Hungarian Socialist Party and had to divest itself of a large number of its former buildings, the head-

57. Ibid., p. 2.

58. "Images offering evidence that contradicts cherished pieties are invariably dismissed as having been staged for the camera. To photographic corroboration of the atrocities committed by one's own side, the standard response is that the pictures are a fabrication, that no such atrocity ever took place, those were bodies the other side had brought in trucks from the city morgue and placed about the street, or that, yes it happened and it was the other side who did it, to themselves. Thus the chief of propaganda for Franco's Nationalist rebellion maintained that it was the Basques who had destroyed their own ancient town and former capital, Guernica, on April 26, 1937, by placing dynamite in the sewers (in a later version, by dropping bombs manufactured in Basque territory) in order to inspire indignation abroad and reinforce the Republican resistance" (Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003], p. 11).

59. Fonds HU 300-40-4, OSA, p. 3.

60. *Pincebörtön* [Cellar Prison], two-part, 120-min film, directed by Zoltán Dészy, MTV (Hungarian Television), Budapest 1992-94.

quarters of the party, the White House of the Central Committee, among them. The newly baptized party moved its central offices to the former headquarters of the Budapest Party Committee, the huge building that stands on Republic Square. After the first democratic elections in 1990, the Socialist Party ended up with a tiny block of seats in parliament. The election was won by a conservative, right-wing conglomerate, which had as its primary aim to reestablish the continuity of Hungarian history and to carry on from where “authentic Hungarian national history” had been artificially interrupted. The conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum, led by a failed historian, argued that from March 19, 1944, when German troops came to occupy Hungary, the country had lost its sovereignty, which was regained only at the moment when the first post-Communist democratically elected government was sworn in. Hungary, consequently, could not be held responsible either for the Holocaust or for the gulag; the Germans and the Soviets, respectively, were to blame.

Practical considerations played the most important but not the only role in the decision of the Socialist Party to move its central offices into the former Budapest party headquarters on Republic Square: this was the largest party property in Budapest besides the White House, the former Central Committee building. The Socialist Party was not in a position to hold on to the White House: its location was too prominent at the moment of the transition; it stands beside the Danube, near the Parliament, and is too visible from everywhere in the city. The party wanted to normalize itself and project the image of a modest, almost invisible political organization, which detests privileges.

The reburial of the executed prime minister of the 1956 Revolution was the single most important representative event of the transition. It was the resurfaced memory of the postrevolutionary terror that proved to be decisive in delegitimizing the Communist rule. When in 1990 the successor party moved to the scene of the bloodiest and most visible anti-Communist atrocity, it moved not only to the scene of merciless slaughter but to the location on which the counterrevolution was “made up.” The scene recalled the atrocities that might have justified for the postrevolutionary Communist “justice.” The party could evoke its victims, its victimhood, its own pain in the face of the post-1989 discourse of nationwide suffering and mourning. In 1990 the enormous monument dedicated to the “Victims of the counterrevolution” still overwhelmed the square, the windows of the