

272 *Underground*

new central offices looked at the memorial; the new party headquarters incorporated the monument, the plaque at the entrance, the notion of the place.

Footage from the newsreels shot on Republic Square during the days of the revolution introduced the two-part film, with aerial detectors, microphones in the manholes on the square, the work of the excavators, and the twenty-meter-deep holes all over in front of the building. The film director interviewed participants from both sides, those who had been present at the siege and contemporaries who had worked either in different party offices or for the secret police in buildings, which, without exception, had underground cellars. A former typist, who worked at the Ministry of the Interior, in the White House after 1956, recalled a frightening experience. One evening in 1959, when she went down to the cellars to shred some papers, she discovered that the walls were covered by a characteristic brownish color up to her chest. To her horror, she immediately realized the possible cause of the discoloration: it could not be anything but dried human blood, she reasoned. She remembered the stories about a gigantic mincing-machine next to the shredder in the cellar. The mouth of the mincer—in the stories—was connected to the sewage system, which in turn opened to the Danube. (The White House stands on the embankment of the river. It is the same building where the curly-haired officers were busy retouching the photographs.) The typist, wearing a wig, facing away from the camera—she supposedly still feared the Communists—recalled the bathtubs full of acid that provided the alternative technology to obliterate all traces of the prisoners.

In April 1993 the film crew commissioned a study by the National Geophysical Institute. The experts were requested to analyze the profile of the soil in front of the headquarters of the Socialist Party. The study discovered strange “anomalies” in the ground: the antitypy (toughness of material) of the soil was higher at a depth of 30–40 meters than nearer to the surface. Strangely enough—concluded the professional analysis—the “anomaly” was observable especially beneath the pedestal of the huge memorial, which had been built at the beginning of the 1960s in memory of the defenders of the Budapest party headquarters. At this point the crew ordered oil drillers to the square, who arrived with sophisticated equipment: drills fitted with diamond bit heads.

On the back of the pedestal of the memorial, which weighed several tons and was dedicated to “The Victims of the Counterrevolution,” there

was a small iron door, which instantly aroused the curiosity of the filmmakers. The drill with the exceptionally tough diamond bit was immediately positioned behind the door, and drilling started without delay through the strange opening. After days of work and fourteen meters of unhindered drilling through the clay bank, the apparatus hit something solid; probably concrete. When the bit was pulled out, it was discovered that the mysterious material had eaten up the diamond. The result was the same after the second and the third trial: the diamond head always became seriously damaged. In the meantime the mighty sculpture was removed and shipped to the outskirts of the city, to the "sculpture park," the ghetto of Socialist memorials, where the dead sculptures await the last judgment.

The intangible concrete material under the ground supplied the *argumentum ex silentio*, or "the evidence of things unseen," as Saint Paul formulated (Heb. 11:1), the proof based on silence, with which the film concluded.⁶¹ The anomaly, the inconclusiveness that prevented the continuation of the search, provided the solid material that was hard to refute: something must be there in the depths of the blood-soaked soil, which, even after long decades, keeps the secret that everyone knows. At the elections, the Socialists

61. A classic example of a proof firmly based on silence or on void is the trial of General Tomayuki Yamashita in October–December 1945 in Manila, the Philippines. The United States Military Commission in Manila, and later on the Supreme Court of the United States charged with and sentenced General Yamashita "the Tiger of Malaya" to death by hanging, for unlawfully disregarding and failing to discharge his duty as commander to control the acts of members of his command by permitting to commit war crimes and not preventing the atrocities from taking place. Yamashita most probably was not able to take action against the crimes, which members of the Fourteenth Army Group of the Imperial Japanese Army in the Philippine Islands committed in the final phase of the war in the Philippine theater. As one of the dissenting Supreme Court Justices expressed in his opinion: it was not alleged that General Yamashita had any knowledge of the crimes, which the military under his command had committed. He could not have any knowledge of what went on in the last phases of the war, since the advancing U.S. army successfully disrupted the communication between his command and the fighting troops. As Justice Frank Murphy has put it, "To use the very inefficiency and disorganization created by the victorious forces as the primary basis for condemning officers for the defeated armies bears no resemblance to justice or to military reality" ("re: Yamashita, 327 U. S. 1"; quoted by Aryeh Neier, *War Crimes: Brutality, Genocide, Terror, and the Struggle for Justice* [New York: Random House, 1998], pp. 230–31). For General MacArthur, who affirmed the death sentence, the ultimate proof was Yamashita's silence, his lack of communication, the nonexistence of any document to the contrary. On Yamashita's case, cf. *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals*, selected and prepared by the United Nations War Crimes Commission, vol. 4 (London: HMSO, 1948), Case No. 21.

274 *Underground*

won an absolute majority, the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum got 14 percent of the votes.

It was not the film that did not quite work but the figure and the dystopia of the cellar prison. Above (or beneath) Stalin's underground—the utopia of both the underground movement and that of the Underground—the post-1989 anti-Communists superimposed the underground cellar. It proved to be difficult, however, to tie the Socialist Party to a representative, intense, compressed counterfigure of its past. Unlike the gas chamber of Auschwitz or the gulag of Siberia, which although tied to more or less concrete locations, denote a horrifyingly complex and wide-ranging historical figure, the underground prison is not sufficiently unique, nor does it seem to be capable of evoking and denoting a whole historical epoch beyond itself. The notion of the dungeon is more conveniently tied to medieval castles, the torture chambers of the Inquisition, or to the tourist attraction of the *Maison des Esclaves* on Gorée Island, a short boat trip across Dakar in Senegal, than to the location and notion of terror during Communist times.⁶²

Despite everything we know of the cellars of the Lubyanka Prison in Moscow (where, among thousands of other prisoners, Raoul Wallenberg was detained) the Communist regime cannot be evoked by a shorthand reference to the underground prison, in contrast to Auschwitz, which—at least in the West—unequivocally recalls Fascism, human horror, vulnera-

62. According to the tourist guides, tens of thousands of slaves were gathered, incarcerated, and then shipped from the dungeons of the Slave House in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However,

despite the name, it's unlikely that the *Maison des Esclaves* was used to hold many captive slaves, apart from those who "belonged" to the merchant. . . . In fact some historians have pointed out that although the island was a vital trading center and strategic port, and an important slave culture existed here, Gorée itself was never a major shipment point of slaves. . . . Of the 20 million slaves who were taken from Africa, only 300 per year may have gone through Gorée. Even then, the famous doorway [of the dungeons] would not have been used: a ship could not get near the dangerous rocks and the town had a perfectly good jetty a short distance away. . . . The historians who refute Gorée's connection with slavery are anxious to avoid accusations of revisionism, and emphasize that many millions of slaves were taken from West Africa in the most appalling circumstances. . . . But they see the promotion of Gorée as a site of significance to the history of slavery as a mere commercialism base on distortion, a cynical attempt to attract tourists who might otherwise go to Gambia's Jufureh or the slave forts of Ghana. Gorée's fabricated history boils down to an emotional manipulation by government officials and tour companies of people who come here as part of genuine search for cultural roots. (David Else et al., *Lonely Planet West Africa*, 4th ed. [1999], p. 792)

bility of human beings, and not just the Nazis. “Why has Auschwitz become the universal exemplum with the stamp of eternal perpetuity in the European consciousness that embodies the whole world of Nazi concentration camps, together with the universal shock of the spirit over it, and with the mythical site, which should be preserved in order for the pilgrims to visit, like the Mount of Golgota?” asked Imre Kertész in one of his essays. What makes Auschwitz so perfect, asked the survivor of Fascism and Communism?

All truly great parables should be simple. And in Auschwitz, good and bad do not merge even for a single moment. . . . The picture is not distorted by a shade of alien color; the color, for example, of politics. The spirit of the narration here should not struggle with the fact that innocent—exclusively from the perspective of the movement, innocent—otherwise true-believer Nazis had been locked in Auschwitz; this story is not complicated by such a fact. . . . Auschwitz is fully explored, and in turn, it is both spatially and temporally a closed and untouchable structure. It is like a carefully prepared archaeological find. . . . And we know all spatial segments of the story. . . . It stands in front of us as the Apocalypse, as one of Edgar Allen Poe’s, Kafka’s or Dostoevsky’s horror stories, narrated with uncomfortable details; its logic, its ethical horror and ignominy, the excess of torment, and the horrible moral of the story, which the spirit of the European narration cannot leave behind, all these details are well known.⁶³

The right-wing historians and propagandists had no choice: the film had to be made. The world, the history that the Communists had created around Republic Square, the continuous deadly battle of the twentieth century, in fact of modern times, between Fascism and Communism, the white terror versus historical justice, Republic Square as just another instance of the white terror of 1919 and of 1944, could not be undone without revisiting the underground, without arguing that what happened on the Square, had been justified. By holding up the underground, by bringing it to light they could hope that the whole Communist historical construct, the world that the Communists made, could be undermined. Republic Square was the Archimedean point of the Communist interpretation of history, which the cellars could be expected to make both historically and morally untenable.⁶⁴

63. “Táborok marandósága” [The Perpetuity of Camps], in Imre Kertész, *A száműzött nyelv* [The Exiled Language] (Budapest: Magvető, 2001), pp. 49–51.

64. After the Socialist Party came back to power, in October 2002 the chair of the party announced that the party would change its name to “Social-Democratic Party” and

276 *Underground*

The “Historical Office,” which was set up by the Socialist-Liberal coalition government after its first election victory in 1994, moved out of the cellars of the Ministry of the Interior to its new premises in 1999. The “Historical Office” is an archive that holds mainly the documents of just one department of the former Communist secret services, previously stored in the Records Office of the Ministry of the Interior, located in the cellars of the ministry. This is the so-called III/III Department which, before 1990, was in charge of internal intelligence. The department, similarly to the practices of the East German Stasi and the Romanian Securitate, employed tens of thousands of formal and informal informers. By the time the office moved into its new building, the Socialists, together with their Liberal coalition partner had lost the 1998 elections, and a new, fresh, radical right-wing, nationalist government had taken over. As part of the celebrations of the opening of the new archives, an exhibition was organized in the cellar of the “Historical Office.”

The exhibition consisted of a reconstruction of an underground prison, allegedly from one of the former buildings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The building and its cellars featured in the 1994 television series. The exhibition presented a video, shot a few weeks before the opening, in early 2000, which showed the disused cellar with water up to waist-level. A tube was included among the objects on show, and the caption explained that the tube had been used for the ventilation of the cellar. The advisor of the prime minister, who opened the exhibition, and who previously had proposed a revisionist concept for the Hungarian part of the Auschwitz exhibition—which implicated, as a counter-image of the former Communist Hungarian exhibition in Auschwitz, the Communist leaders of the 1919 First Hungarian Soviet Republic (most of them Jews) for the Holocaust, the tragedy of the Hungarian Jews—called the attention of visitors to the probability that poisonous gas or a substance that could modify the functioning of the prisoners’ consciousness might possibly be blown in through the tube.⁶⁵

The reconstruction was the first attempt to show the underground to the public, to invite the visitors to experience it, to believe it by seeing. Real

would move out of its present building on Republic Square, in order to leave the tragic past behind, and emphasize the long road the party had traveled since the transition in 1989.

65. Cf. András Mink, “A Történelmi Kádár” [The Historic Kádár], *Budapest Review of Books* (spring 2002): 17.

presence provides the ground of eyewitnessing. The two-part film on television could not offer a tangible experience: despite the footage from the 1956 newsreels, it did not quite have the feel of a historical documentary. It was too openly politicized, it was shown too close to the upcoming elections, it was just like another movie, which had nothing serious to do with our present. A reconstruction in a real-life cellar, however, promised to produce, at least the effect of the real thing that nobody could fail to take seriously: the concrete historical object, like the key to the Bastille, stored under glass in the museum.⁶⁶

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Whoever has visited Budapest before knows that one of the most beautiful boulevards in the capital is Andrásy Boulevard. The tree-lined street, with lavish villas and stately apartment buildings, connects downtown Budapest to Heroes' Square. It was named after one of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's greatest Hungarian statesmen, Count Gyula Andrásy. The Neo-Renaissance building at 60 Andrásy Boulevard was designed by Adolf Feszty in 1880. It is also notable that the twentieth-century terror regimes, the Nazis and Communists, both decided on a villa located on this boulevard for their executioners' headquarters. The fact that both regimes chose 60 Andrásy Boulevard as the scene of torture and interrogation, speaks for itself.

This was the first paragraph of the introduction to the "House of Terror" on the web in January 2002, still before the completion of the House.⁶⁷

According to the marble stone at the entrance of the building, "the inspiration" behind the idea and the fulfillment of the House of Terror, was the very same person, "the chief advisor to the prime minister in affairs related to history [*sic*]," who had inspired the reconstruction of the underground prison in the Historical Office. The original introduction of the House (as a result of professional and public outcry, coming mostly from the left of the political spectrum, the Web site of the House has been slightly altered since) asserted, "During World War II Hungary found itself in the middle of the crossfire between the Nazi and Communist dictator-

66. The Catholic Church had also experimented with finding a concrete location for the entrance to Purgatory. The cave in the abbey at Lough Derg in Donegal County in Ulster became an important pilgrimage site, as the entrance to the world of the betwixt-and-between. Cf. Henry Jones, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: Containing the Description, Originall, Progresse, and Demolition of that Superstitious Place* (London, 1647); Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pp. 75–76, 93–101.

67. <http://www.terrorhaza.hu>.

278 *Underground*

ships.⁶⁸ On March 19, 1944, the Nazis occupied Hungary and raised the representatives of the extreme right, unconditionally faithful to them, into power. The new, collaborating Hungarian government did not guard the life of its citizens with Jewish origin any more.”

Historical statements—to paraphrase Ian Hacking—“are words in their sites. Sites include sentences, uttered or transcribed, always in a larger site of neighborhood, institution, authority, language.”⁶⁹ The words about the recent tragic history of Hungary are uttered in the House of Terror, and the site was supposed to provide authority for the historical events under description. The chain that connects the self-description of the House of Terror with the documented traces of the past is irreversible and not uninterrupted: moving backward from the narrative through surviving historical records, individual brute facts, and isolated events, one cannot arrive at the “total historical context” (in the sense of John Austin’s “total speech act context”) of 1944. The contours of the sunken world that glimmers through the story presented by the House are essentially different from what—after a professionally responsible and accurate study—comes through the historical documents. There is no *real situation* behind the text—this is just text; words, compromised by the site, by the House, that in turn, as an illustration of the possible consequences of the looping effect, is compromised by the words that the House was meant to authorize.⁷⁰

Linguistically it would have been possible for Hungary to fight against both the Nazis and the Communists; it would have been imaginable—in a linguistic sense, outside the frame of Hungarian history—for Hungary not to have been Germany’s last and one of its first allies; it would have been conceivable not to have had anti-Jewish legislation already from the early 1920s onward. The execution of the Jews could have been postponed until after the arrival of the Germans, and even the official Hungarian authorities would have had the option of not having actively and eagerly participated in the deportation of more than five hundred thousand Hungarian Jews. The House of Terror and the story it tells were presented as the embodiment of concrete, tangible, historically situ-

68. Archived on January 31, 2002. Cf.: András Mink, “Alibi terror-egy bemutatókozásra” [Alibi Terror—On the Occasion of an Introduction], *Népszabadság*, February 20, 2002.

69. Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 68.

70. Cf. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, pp. 122–27.

ated horror, as the only conceivable story to tell. The terror, however, it was meant to evoke was but fictional.

The villa at 60 Andrásy Boulevard had been the “House of Faith,” the headquarters of the Arrow-Cross Party before World War II, and the Communists, partly for symbolic reasons, decided to move the headquarters of the secret police into the very same building. After the war, at the beginning, Fascist war criminals were kept and interrogated in their former House of Faith. Where Jews and Communists had been tortured and killed before 1945, their torturers and interrogators were tortured and interrogated after the defeat of Nazi Germany and its Hungarian ally. (Not all the war criminals were taken to Andrásy Boulevard. Some of the perpetrators, who had been captured in Germany and deported back to Hungary, leaders of the Arrow-Cross Party among them, ended up in the cellars of the Military Intelligence, in the present building of the Central European University where I teach. When we purchased the building in 1992, the prison cells were still in the cellar, with the spy holes in the doors.) (See Figure 6.4.)

The Arrow-Cross leaders and war criminals were soon replaced in the cellars by the political opponents of the emerging Stalinist political system, critics of its oppressive measures, innocent scapegoats, and by more and more former Social Democrats and former Communist comrades of the consolidating regime. All the victims of the show trials spent time in the cellars, under the ÁVH headquarters; László Rajk, the former Minister of Interior, and later on, his interrogator and successor, János Kádár as well. Following the Stalinist logic of the exercise of power, most of the people who at one time occupied leading positions and upper-floor offices at the secret police, ended up in the cellars of the same building: they either knew too much, became too powerful rivals, or “dizzy with success,” a slot had to be filled at the upcoming public show trial, the history of the past, of the illegal movement had to be rewritten in the light of the needs of the ever-changing political situation; the alertness, the level of mobilization of the country had to be maintained under the circumstances of the cold war.

The defendants of the show trials, without exception, were accused of having collaborated with the secret police of the interwar regime, during the time when the Communists were underground. Following the example of the history of the Bolshevik Party in the Soviet Union, the underground movement was considered to be not only the womb of future victorious Communist parties but also the proof of the sacrifices by which the Com-



FIGURE 6.4. Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the Hungarian Arrow-Cross Party, in prison, in the cellars of the present-day Central European University. Open Society Archives.

munists deserved their later and necessary victory. In the Communist histories illegality was described as something inherently superior, especially when compared with the “collaborationist,” “revisionist,” “reformist,” and “treasonous” practices of the legal Social Democratic parties. Those formative chapters in the histories of the Russian, Chinese, German, Romanian, and Hungarian Communist parties are memorable and glorious because the founding fathers had to operate in extremely dangerous circumstances, under the constant threat of being exposed or uncovered. Underground, the members of the illegal party operated in precarious proximity to secret agents who tried to recruit, to bribe, to blackmail, and to break the moral backbone of the activists of the movement. An irrefutable sign of the permanent danger was the high number of recruited agents and that of those Communists who after being detected were sentenced to death or to long years in prison. As the rules and methods of illegal activity between the wars were distilled from the hard-learned lessons of the victorious Bolshe-

vik Party, so any mistake that led to uncover, could not be anything but the effect of particular human weakness. Exposure could only be the consequence of the presence of agent provocateurs in the ranks of the underground movement.⁷¹ The scripts of the show trials, the alleged treasons did not undermine the apotheosis of the underground movement; one story was dependent of the other.

During the show trials at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, the former Communist leaders in the dock were accused of having signed secret pacts with right-wing and Fascist secret services, of having been recruited into the ranks of the counterintelligence agencies, of having collaborated in giving up the illegal members of the party. The heroic stories from the period of illegality, in the authorized versions of the Communist history books, highlighted the weakness and meanness of the accused. "The only question for us here is whether you are just a wretched devil who has fallen prey to the enemy, or you have been a conscious and stubborn enemy of our movement from the very first moment on, when you set foot in the working class movement. This is the only question you must answer," asserted Kádár when, as minister of the interior, together with the minister of defense, he went to interrogate Rajk.⁷²

On May 18, 1951, it was Kádár's turn. The interrogation in 60 Andáßy Boulevard was secretly recorded, and the minister of defense, with whom on June 7, 1949, Kádár had interrogated Rajk, listened to the loudspeaker in the adjacent room. "What do we call what you did in 1943? [Kádár, who was the secretary of the illegal party at that time, following the instructions of the Komintern, had dissolved the illegal party, in order to reorganize it under a new name] . . . It is called class-treason," answered the broken Kádár, after long hours of psychologically cruel interrogation. "What kind of role did you play in dissolving the underground party?" "My role was conscious." "Conscious what?" asked the interrogator, a lieutenant colonel of the ÁVH, incidentally the son of the minister of defense, who was secretly listening

71. "The Party can never be mistaken," said Rubashov. "You and I can make a mistake. Not the Party. The Party, comrade, is more than you and I and a thousand others like you and I. The Party is the embodiment of the revolutionary idea in history. . . . History knows her way. She makes no mistakes" (Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphne Hardy [1940; rpt., London: Vintage, 1994], pp. 40–41).

72. MOL M-KS 276.f. 62/2 ő.e. Cf. László Varga, ed., *Kádár János Bírái Előtt Egyszer fent, egyszer lent 1949–1956* [János Kádár in Front of his Judges. Once Up, Once Down 1949–1956] (Budapest: Osiris-Budapest City Archive, 2001), p. 159.

282 *Underground*

from the adjacent room. “Conscious class-treason,” conceded Kádár. “Why were you in the movement in the first place? . . . What role can such a person play in the movement?” “I was recruited by the secret police. . . . Already in 1933 I was recruited; after my arrest, I had to sign.”⁷³

Andrássy Boulevard is now part of UNESCO’s World Heritage. Most of the palaces along the boulevard were built around the same time, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, during the *Gründerzeit* of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Around the completely gray façade of the House of Terror (even the glass of the windows is painted gray) the architect designed a black metal frame. The idea of the so-called blade-walls, which isolate the House from the adjacent palaces probably, came from New York, where Marcel Breuer detached the Whitney Museum of American Art from the neighboring building along Madison Avenue by means of the same design tool. Around the roof, as part of the black frame there is a wide perforated metal shield with the word “TERROR,” inscribed backward, the five-pointed star and the arrow-cross. When exactly at noon, the sun is supposed to shine through the perforation, the word “TERROR” and the signs of autocracy hypothetically cast a shadow on the pavement. The presumed “Darkness at Noon” harks back to the Hungarian-born Arthur Koestler’s Nicolas Salmanovich Rubashov, the most famous fictional Communist show trial character: the illegal Communist activist turned captive in Communist prison cells. The roof of the House of Terror points at what is under the ground: the cellar. (See Figure 6.5.)

After the German invasion, the short and blood-thirsty Arrow-Cross rule began. . . . In 1945 Hungary was brought under the sway of the new conqueror, the Soviet Union. The Hungarian Communists who arrived in the Soviet tanks, in contrast to the short-lived Arrow-Cross rule, settled down for the long-run. One of their first acts was to take over 60 Andrássy Boulevard, in order to signal to everybody that the moment of revenge has arrived. But that moment lasted but for very long painful years. . . . The museum wants to become memorial dedicated to all those people who fell victim either to Arrow—Cross terror, which lasted for a few months or to the decades long Communist rule.⁷⁴

The contrast between the duration of the Nazi and Communist rule (short months versus long decades) figures at least four times in the brief

73. The Interrogation of János Kádár [May 18, 1951] MOL M—KS 276. f. 62/63.ő.e. Reproduced in Varga, *Kádár János Bírái Előtt Egyszer fent, egyszer lent 1949–1956*, pp. 215–39.

74. <http://www.terorrhaza.hu> (archived on January 31, 2002).



FIGURE 6.5. The “blade walls” of the House of Terror, Budapest. Photo: János Szentiváni.

text. As if the Arrow-Cross never intended to settle down until the end of times (“resurrecting the thousand-year empire”), as if it had been meant just as a short intermezzo, in contrast to the devious and conscious Communists, who wanted to rule for long and painful decades. Incidentally, the text does not mention that there was a sort of connection between the coming in of the Soviets and the end of the Arrow-Cross rule.

When the Hungarian Communists arrived from the East in the safety of the foreign armored vehicles, they immediately signaled that the “moment [although a very long moment] of revenge has arrived.” The text stipulates that the Communists who came in with the foreigners (so they, just like the Nazi mercenary Arrow-Cross, could not been proper natives) settled in the House of Faith in order to take revenge for what the Nazis

had done to them, that is, to the Jews. The members of the ÁVH, the vanguard of the Communists, the Communists who were brought back by the conquerors were Jews, who wanted to take revenge for the Arrow-Cross rule, and punished Hungary, the whole country for what had been done to them (by the German Nazis).

The Hungarian Communists who came back with the Soviets from Moscow, in fact had suffered not so much as Jews from the Nazis but as Communists from the Stalinists purges. The Hungarian Communist movement was decimated in Moscow and most of those who survived the purges had suffered long years of persecution either in the gulag or in Soviet prisons, or were subjected to humiliating disciplinary measures. If they had felt to need for revenge, the appropriate target of that revenge would have been their fellow-Communists, who had denounced their comrades to the Soviet secret agencies back in Moscow. It would thus be more plausible to attribute the Hungarian Communist show trials, rather than the anti-Communist atrocities to the urge “to signal that the moment of revenge has arrived.”

Hungary—according to the introduction of the House—had tried to protect its Jews from the Germans, but the Bolsheviks—from whom Hungary had tried to save the blind West during World War II—with the help of their Hungarian agents let the Communist terror loose for more than four decades.

The *Sondereinsatzkommando Eichmann*—the deportation experts who came to Hungary with Adolf Eichmann after the German occupation in March 1944—consisted of less than two hundred people. The guarantee of success could not be but the collaboration of the Hungarian authorities. . . . As the events of the next months proved, Eichmann’s original calculation had been well founded. . . . The mass deportation of the Jews from the countryside started early in the morning on May 15 in Sub-Carpathia, and ended on July 8–9 with the transportation of the Jews around Budapest. In fifty-six days [!]⁷⁵—according to German documents—437,402 Jews were deported by 147 trains, with the exception of fifteen thousand, to Auschwitz.⁷⁵

The Soviets left only after Imre Nagy’s reburial, only after the first post-Communist democratic election, and this is the point where the story of the terror, as it is told in the House of Terror, terminates.

75. “Gábor Kádár—Zoltán Vági-Krisztián Ungváry, Hullarablás. A magyarországi zsidók megsemmisítése” [Robbing the Corpse. The Economic Annihilation of the Hungarian Jews], vol. 3 (unpublished manuscript, Budapest), pp. 159–63.

The secret police used the building until 1956 as its headquarters. The extremely cruel Communist terror stopped at the end of the 1950s with the final act of the postrevolutionary retribution, the execution of more than two hundred people (even a child among them) who were sentenced to death for their participation in the 1956 Revolution. After the beginning of the 1960s no one was sentenced to death for political reasons, and following the 1963 amnesty most of the imprisoned participants in the revolution were freed. The story of the House, however, is carved from one solid piece: it is the story of undifferentiated terror from the moment of the German occupation until the summer of 1991, when fifty-seven years later, the Soviet army left the territory of Hungary.

The building on Andrásy Boulevard is infamous for what has always been its invisible part to the public: the underground prison cells.⁷⁶ That which could not be seen was known to almost everybody. Even before the collapse of the Communist regime, the majority of the adult population of the country had heard horror stories about what went on in the cellars. The notion of the building and knowledge about its prisons were not divisible. The longest part of the introductory text to the House describes the prison and torture cells under 60 Andrásy Boulevard, where the resistance of the accused was broken, where a large number of them died already under interrogation, where the inmates had to suffer “the most horrible tortures one can possibly envision.”

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Out of the twenty-seven rooms of the House of Terror dedicated to the double history of terror, two and a half rooms are devoted to the history of the Arrow-Cross times. The exhibition starts with the story of “double occupation”:

Hungary emerged from World War I on the losing side. Once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, she had possessed a territory larger than Italy or England. However, under the terms of the Treaty of Trianon which settled the war, the empire was carved up, reducing its territory by two-thirds. . . . At that time the focus of

76. One of my parents' best friends, István Gyöngyössi, a show-trial victim himself—he was sentenced to nine years at one of the follow-up trials of the Rajk case—after having been rehabilitated, became the director of Chemokomplex, a foreign-trade company in the 1960s. He has his office on the second floor in the building at 60 Andrásy út. Once he interviewed somebody for a job, who when entering in his office, said, “I have already been in this building, but four floors below.”

286 *Underground*

politics was the implementation of a peaceful territorial revision. . . . In the mid-1930s, Hungary found itself in the crossfire of an increasingly aggressive Nazi regime in Germany as well as a menacing and powerful Soviet Union. First allies then enemies, the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships began a life-and-death fight to create a new European system of client and subordinated states, where there was no room for an independent Hungary. After the outbreak of WWII, Hungary made desperate attempts to maintain its fragile independence and democracy and maneuvered to prevent the worst: Nazi occupation. Significantly, Hungary managed to resist occupation until March 19, 1944, in the fifth year of the war. On June 26, 1941, air raids bombed the city of Kassa in Hungary. Reports at that time indicate that it was the Soviet air forces which carried out the attack. . . . Regent Horthy announced Hungary's participation in the war against the Soviet Union. . . . Until the Nazi occupation in 1944 Hungary had a legitimately elected government and parliament, where opposition parties functioned normally. . . . With the cooperation of the puppet Hungarian authorities appointed by the Nazi occupiers, the National Socialists began their assault on Western Civilization's value structure through the horrific and so-called final solution program. With record speed, the Nazi experts of Jewish persecution, the *Judenkommando*, began to round up and capture Hungarian Jews and on May 15, 1944, the deportation trains began running. In a period of two months, 437,402 Jews from the Hungarian countryside were sent to forced labor or extermination camps in the Third Reich. On August 27, 1944, Soviet troops crossed the Hungarian border. The country became the scene of life-and-death clash between the Nazis and the Soviet Union. The short, yet extremely brutal Nazi occupation during World War Two was then replaced by two generations of occupation of the Soviet Union. Hungary's sovereignty came to an end on March 19, 1944. For more than four decades, Soviet occupation troops remained on her territory. The last Soviet soldier left Hungary on June 19, 1991.⁷⁷

The tourist, walking in the maze of the House of Terror, while reading the syntactically inaccurate sentences and looking at the photographs (some of them—but we do not know which of them—are “real,” that is, contemporary, war—or documentary photographs, others are pseudo-documentaries or fictional reproduction) is not able to see through the (sub)text.⁷⁸ The upset visitor does not know that “the peaceful territorial

77. In each thematic room in the House of Terror there is a flyer, published in Hungarian and in English, which provides a narrative interpretation for the exhibition in the particular room. The quoted text comes from the English version of the flyer in the “Double occupation” room, in fact the first room of the exhibition. In this chapter I cite the text as it appears in the official flyer. I have not changed the spelling of the text either.

78. “A photograph is supposed not to evoke but to show. That is why photographs, unlike handmade images, can count as evidence. But evidence of what? The suspicion that

revision” meant that Hungary, in exchange for its support for Nazi Germany got back part of the lost territories from Hitler (as a consequence of the “First Vienna Decision” on November 2, 1938, still before the outbreak of World War II, and that of the “Second Vienna Decision” on August 30, 1940). Most of the visitors have not heard of the so-called *numerus clausus*, passed by the Hungarian Parliament already on September 26, 1920 (!), which restricted the number of Jewish students at the universities. The so-called first Jewish law, which radically restricted the number of Jews in the public sphere and professional occupations, was passed by the Parliament in May 1938, before the outbreak of the war. The “second Jewish law” had already been ratified before the German troops attacked Poland in May 1939, and the Nazi Nuremberg legislation became internal Hungarian law as a result of the “third Jewish law” in August 1941, which forbade mixed marriage between Jews and non-Jews.

Hungary did not take part in the war on Hitler’s side in order to resist Communism in advance, in order “save the blind West from the menace of Bolshevism” but for territorial gains. Hungary, as Hitler’s ally, attacked Yugoslavia before Hungary’s formal entry into the war. The Soviet military did not threaten Hungary during the interwar years. Hungary did not declare war only on the Soviets but besides Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, Great Britain, and the United States as well.⁷⁹ At

Capa’s ‘Death of a Republican soldier’—titled ‘The Falling Soldier’ in the authoritative compilation of Capa’s work—may not show (one hypothesis is that it records a training exercise near the front line) continues to haunt discussions of war photography. Everyone is literalist when it comes to photographs” (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 47).

79. As maintained by the contemporary anecdote, when, in the name of the Hungarian Kingdom, the Hungarian ambassador handed over the document on the declaration of war, the U.S. Secretary of State remarked, “It was most certainly a hard decision by His Royal Highness, your King.” Whereas the ambassador noted, that although Hungary was a kingdom, she had no king. “Than who is the head of the Hungarian state,” asked the surprised secretary. “Admiral Horthy is the Regent of the Kingdom,” was the historically correct answer. “Don’t you think than that your navy could be in grave danger during such a war?” came the sympathetic question from the secretary. “Let me remark,” responded the pedant ambassador, “that although Regent Horthy is an admiral, Hungary does not have a sizable navy, in fact, Hungary, momentarily, does not even have a sea.” “What happened to your sea, if I may ask?” continued the polite conversation the underinformed secretary, “We lost it after the Great War to Italy,” was the enlightening reply. “Then Italy should most certainly be your enemy in the ongoing war,” concluded the secretary of state. “Pardon me, Sir, but Italy is our ally,” sounded the matter-of-fact answer. . . . And in such a way the friendly chat went on for quite a long time.

the end of the passage, the Wagnerian leitmotiv of the “short, yet extremely brutal Nazi occupation” versus “the two generations of occupation of the Soviet Union” duly returns.

It was Admiral Horthy who, after the German occupation appointed Germany’s puppet government. It was the regent, who handed over power to the leader of the Arrow-Cross. Had the Hungarian army not committed horrific war crimes in the Ukraine and in the Soviet Union, had Hungary not remained Hitler’s last ally in the war, it would have been difficult for the Soviet Union to occupy Hungary and set the Communists in power after the war. But there are no perceptible syntactic differences between historical and fantastic sentences.

Under the section on “Hungarian Nazis” (by using the term “Nazi,” instead of “Arrow-Cross,” the flyer wants to stipulate that the Hungarian Fascists, who in 1939 had the electoral support of almost one million—about 20 percent of the votes—were in fact not really Hungarians) the text states, “The Germans defended Budapest as a fortress, which gave the Soviet Army a long and brutal fight. . . . The siege lasted from Christmas 1944 until February 13, 1945, resulting in great suffering and destruction. They reduced to ruin all bridges in Budapest. . . . More than one million people fled from the Red Army to the West and more than one hundred thousand never returned.” The third-person-plural personal pronoun, “They,” is sufficiently vague to leave the interested visitor in the dark, who might think that it was the Soviets who destroyed the city. The bridges, in fact, were blown up by the Germans; Budapest was bombed mostly by Allied airplanes. A large number of the “more than one million people” who fled from the Red Army, were Hungarian soldiers, perpetrators, war criminals, members of the political elite, responsible for Hungary’s participation in the war, who were fleeing from justice. However, once more the sentence is syntactically more or less correct: they fled as long as they could, before the Red Army arrived.

The half room, which is the threshold between the Nazi and Communist versions of terror, is dedicated to “cross-dressing.” As the “Changing Clothes” flyer explains:

After 1919 the Communist Party was organized illegally and, until the Soviet occupation, it had only a few hundred members. During the Second World War, only a few dozen Communist activists could usually be counted on. When the Hungarian Communist Party was organized in the wake of the Red Army’s arrival,

the growth of party membership became of decided importance. After the members of the Hungarian Communist Party succeeded in getting their hands on the internal and military-political investigative organizations, they had access to the Arrow-Cross membership records as well. Following this, the Communist party was joined in great numbers by people who “to a greater or lesser extent were infected by the counterrevolution and fascism epidemic,” said Mátyás Rákosi. The newly admitted “small Arrow-Crossers” in the Communist Party had to declare when and how long they had been members of the Arrow-Cross party, and state that this membership had been a mistake which they wanted to remedy. These declarations were sufficient no doubt to intimidate and blackmail those who signed them.

Communists and members of the ÁVH were thus either Jews, who came back with the Soviets or former members of the Arrow-Cross, that is, Hungarian Nazis. Neither of the groups could be classified as true-born Hungarian. (Hitler’s Germany, in fact, did not really support the Arrow-Cross Party, which was rather suspicious about claims of German superiority. Germany did not provide either political or financial help to the Hungarian Fascists and did not take the Arrow-Cross Party seriously until 1944. Hitler openly stated in 1938 that the right-wing Hungarian government was commendable and should be taken more seriously than a would-be National-Socialist administration.)⁸⁰

The director of the Soviet-style Political Security Department [later on the ÁVH] was a certain Gábor Péter, who had four years of primary school education and was trained, but never worked, as a tailor’s assistant. . . . Gábor Péter himself could not avoid fate. The head of the ÁVH and more than a dozen of his uneducated officers ended up behind bars in January 1953, due to Stalin’s pathological anti-Semitism. . . . The Soviet dictator had given the order for the construction of a so-called Zionist conspiracy. His most faithful student, Mátyás Rákosi [the secretary general of the Hungarian party], unhesitatingly gave up the mainly Jewish ÁVH officers, who for many years followed his inhuman orders, as prey.⁸¹

These statements are put forward as if the world did come wrapped up in a chain of isolated facts, which did not have anything to do with other facts, with which they are strongly connected. As if representation of the world were unambiguously determined by a few facts taken in their complete isolation; as if facts were not—in part—the consequences of

80. Cf. Ungváry, “Kik azok a nyilasok?” pp. 58–59

81. From the flyers “Anteroom of the Hungarian Political Police” and “Room of Gábor Peter, head of the Hungarian Political Police,” respectively.

ways in which we represent the world.”⁸² (“Facts are not individuated before any inquiry, though that does not mean that the inquiry creates them out of nothing.”)⁸³ Some of the brute facts of these sentences, like some of the isolated data compiled in other flyers, should be accepted. As proper sentences—and not only as a consequence of the awkward style, the syntactic and grave spelling mistakes—and as historical statements, however, they do not pass. History writing is not the morally uninformed art of chronicling isolated events of the past, understood as unrepeatable particulars located in space and time. A noticeably arbitrary selection and sequence (and omission) of a few disconnected brute facts in support of an obvious ideological preconception, which aims at constructing a worldwide, racially grounded conspiracy theory, from the perspective of actual political needs, in order to stigmatize an all-too-well defined group of humans, is offered by the House as history. A script, and a rather familiar one, is put forward as a normal, normalized, that is, obvious, neutral presentation of history.

Taxpayers’ money was used to construct the House of Terror as a “memorial dedicated to the victims of both the Nazi and the Communist terror.” On the perforated roof of the House there are both the arrow-cross and the five-pointed star. The inspirers, ideologues, and politicians who built this House, and devoted only two rooms to the close to six hundred thousand Roma, Jewish, and left-wing victims of the Holocaust, needed the “Hungarian Nazis” in order to put the Communist terror in context. The latter was longer-lasting, thus deeper, more devastating, and more infectious than the former. The Communist terror was near to, in the vicinity of and related to the Nazi terror, especially since the victims of the Nazi horrors, later on, at the very first moment, when they seized the opportunity, became the perpetrators of the devastating Communist dictatorship. The Jews were not only the victims of the Nazis, not only the perpetrators of the Communist terror, but even their own executioners: they, themselves, would not have been able to defend themselves from themselves. Only the

82. Cf. Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 33. See also Hacking, *Historical Ontology*, esp. pp. 1–26. As my argument shows, I do not fully subscribe to Latour’s or even Hacking’s somewhat milder constructivist position.

83. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 257.

Hungarians, the true victims, and the enemies of both kinds of terror, who found themselves in the midst of the crossfire of the life-and-death fight between these terrorists, could finally put an end to the slaughter.

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The last room of the House is dedicated to “Farewell.” On one side of the door the visitor can watch a video of the live coverage of Imre Nagy’s reburial from 1989, where Viktor Orbán, prime minister of Hungary in the year 2002, as a young radical, anti-Communist, liberal, new-age politician demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. On the opposite wall, several television monitors follow the farewell, the last move of the last division of the Soviet army, as it left the country on June 19, 1991. And on the other side of the door, the very last image of the memorial is the opening ceremony of the House of Terror on February 24, 2002, on the eve of the “Memorial Day Dedicated to the Victims of Communism,” less than six weeks before the next Hungarian general election, which was due in April 2002. Thus the story comes full circle: the pilgrim who comes to visit the House reads on the marble stone at the entrance that it was the prime minister who had the House built. And on the last image, the prime minister, in front of a crowd hundreds of thousands strong announces the opening of the House. His word became flesh: the Russians cut and run and the terror is over, it is turned and locked into the House that he, the leader of the new right, has built.

The young leader, the youngest prime minister ever in Hungarian history, on the pedestal, in front of the dreaded building, which he alone had the courage to tame, surrounded, on this festive occasion, by hundreds of thousands of his ecstatic adherents, under forests of the national tricolor, was rejuvenation incarnate. From the perspective of the opening, which then, inside was turned into the very last image in the last room of the House of Terror, the story of end and beginning became unambiguously comprehensible: after the long decades of decay—starting with the German occupation on March 19, 1944, and terminating with the disgraceful retreat of the Soviet troops on June 19, 1991—the new era began. Leader and his native people under the flag finally found each other and are ready to embark on the clear-cut road leading to future, which cannot be but the extension of the present.

Critics of the House of Terror repeatedly pointed out that the Arrow-Cross was evoked only in order to implicate the Communists by association.

292 *Underground*

They argued that as the House was nothing but an ideological and political construct; it was neither a memorial to the victims of Communism, who were exploited and cynically used for mean political propaganda, nor a monument to the hundreds of thousands who perished during the Fascist times, since they were barely visible. Both the chronological and the narrative frames of the House were carefully devised: the demonstration started with the “double occupation”—as if the German and the Soviet occupations had been coinstantaneous, and the Arrow-Cross rule had started immediately after the occupation, as if there had not been seven long months in between the coming-in of the Germans and Arrow-Cross takeover, as if the five hundred thousand Jews had not been deported during those months (in fact, in less than two months)—and in this way Horthy’s rule, which lasted until October 15, 1944, together with the deportation, had been pushed back (or forward) in this phantasmagorical chronology, and thus excluded from the decades of decline and degeneration. Horthy’s interwar Hungary could thus be incorporated into the mythic prehistory of the present.

The criticism was partly mistaken, however: the House of Terror in fact—in part as a consequence of the very invisibility of the victims of Fascism and the grave asymmetry of the arrangement—is a proper memorial of Fascism. The House in its context (the “blade-walls,” the prison-gray color of the building, the televised and recorded opening ceremony, the film of the mass rally, shown in the last room, the blocked entry at the gate, which meant to artificially produce a permanent queue, visible from everywhere on the busy Andrásy Boulevard), is almost a literal embodiment—and definitively, not just an illustration—of the emerging post-cold war, temporary consensus on the definition of “generic” Fascism. In the words of Roger Griffin, probably the most prolific but certainly the most dedicated and self-promoting exponent of the this new consensus: “Fascism is a genus of modern, revolutionary, ‘mass’ politics, which, while extremely heterogeneous in its social support and in the specific ideology promoted by its many permutations, draws its internal cohesion and driving force from *a core myth that a period of perceived national decline and decadence is giving way to one of rebirth and renewal in a postliberal new order.*”⁸⁴ (This insis-

84. Roger Griffin, “Introduction,” in *International Fascism. Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, ed. Griffin (London: Arnold, 1998), p. 14; emphases added. In his *The Nature of Fascism* ([London: Routledge, 1993], p. 23), Griffin provided a more concise core definition,

tence on the past of national decline and decadence versus the imminent rejuvenation that springs from the popular will of the people, sharply distinguishes Fascist and neo-Fascist ideology from its suspected double, Communism. Freedom for the Fascist is the triumph of the will as opposed to recognized necessity in Communist ideology. Instead of decadence and degeneration, the past, in the Communist imagination, is the succession of necessary stages, which eventually, following the iron laws of history, should lead—via inevitable and revolutionary human intervention—to the ultimate end of history. This explains the lack of vitalism, as an essential defining feature of Communism, the lack of eroticism of official Communist art, the inherent clumsiness of Communist propaganda, and so on.)

The House of Terror indulges in horror, in pain, in the suffering of the victims, primarily that of the victims of the Communist terror. The barely hidden perverted visual program, the deep and aggressive, mostly black and red colors, the surfeit of images, and the sensual, melodramatic music that surrounds the visitor, cannot conceal the aesthetic pleasure of the curators and the designers: it aims at arousing weird fascination.⁸⁵ From the layout, the design, from the whole show, from the captions, from the text of the flyers, and on the web, the visitor can memorialize the history, the words, and the world that Fascism made. The House is a monument of Fascism.

which he repeated in Fascism's new faces (and new facelessness) in the "post-Fascist" epoch. "Fascism is a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palin-genetic [renewalist] form of populist ultra-nationalism" (Mimeo article for *Erwaegen, Wissen, Ethik* to be published with twenty responses in 2004, p. 10).

The beginning of the emergence of a "Fascist minimum" (Ernst Nolte's phrase), most probably started with the publication of Nolte's famous *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* [The Three Faces of Fascism], published in 1963. See also Eugene Weber, *Varieties of Fascism* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1964); George L. Mosse, "Towards a General Theory of Fascism," in *Interpretations of Fascism*, ed. G. L. Mosse (London: Sage, 1979). See also the entry "Fascism" in the *Blackwell Dictionary of Social Thought*, by Roger Griffin ([Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993], pp. 223–24).

85. "Between sadomasochism and fascism there is a natural link. 'Fascism is theater,' as Genet said. . . . Sadomasochism is to sex what war is to civil life," stated Susan Sontag in a somewhat seductive manner (Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *The New York Review of Books* 22, no. 1 [February 6, 1975]; reprinted in Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* [London: Vintage, 1980], pp. 73–105; quote is from p. 103). On fascination with Fascism, see also Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Fascinating Fascism," an introduction to vol. 31 of *Journal of Contemporary History* (1966): 235–44.

The prefiguration of the House of Terror, most probably, cannot be found either in Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, or in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, or in the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. It is advisable to look further, if not spatially, at least, temporarily. Almost seventy years before the right-wing Hungarian prime minister opened the door of the house of terror, on October 28, 1932, on the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, the Duce opened the gate of the "Mostra della rivoluzione fascista," the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution. The *Marca su Roma*, Mussolini's entry to Rome in 1922, itself had symbolic meaning: it recalled both Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon and the march of Garibaldi's Mille. According to Margherita Sarfatti, one of the most important cultural ideologues of Italian Fascism, the exhibition "for the first time in the modern world brings an event in recent history into the fervent atmosphere of affirmation and of a religious ceremonial. . . . [It is] conceived as a cathedral whose very walls speak."⁸⁶

The exhibition bombarded the lost and disoriented visitors with documents, objects, signs, symbols, images, facts, and artifacts. The distance between fact and fiction, construction and reconstruction, genuine historical documents and artistic recreation disappeared. The ephemeral ritual space swallowed up the viewers, who were denied the detachment needed for contemplation or just for understanding the sight. The ambition of the organizers, the architects, the historians, the curators, and the politicians, who conceived the show, was to build a total, self-contained environment, the *apotheosis* of the movement and the Duce, that aimed at, not the rational, but the emotional reactions of the visitors, immersed in the flow of unexpected visual and rhetorical impulses.⁸⁷ (See Figures 6.6 and 6.7.)

The exhibition made use of techniques refined by the futurists, the expressionist theater, rationalist and constructivist architecture; the curators recruited *novecento* artists and supporters of traditionalist order in art. The use of the so-called *plastica murale*, that turned flat surfaces into moving images, turned the *mostra* into a real modern-day three-dimensional multimedia show. According to contemporary reports, descriptions, and

86. Margherita Sarfatti, "Architettura, arte e simbolo alla mostra del fascismo," *Architettura* (January 1933): 10; quoted by Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 117.

87. Cf. Carla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 128–76.

Figure 6.6 tk

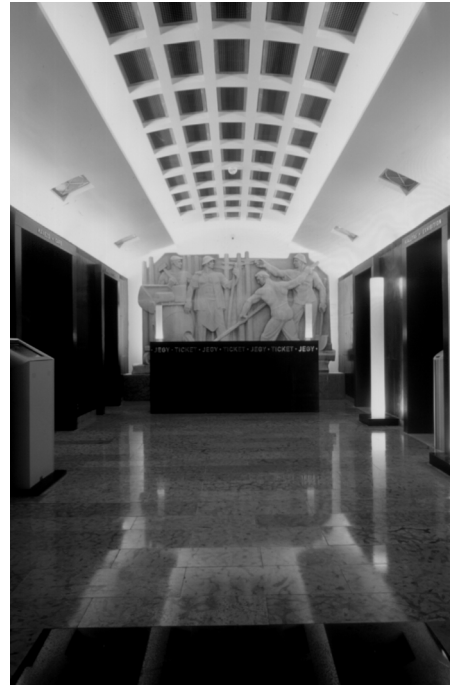


FIGURE 6.6. Mario Sironi's Gallery of Fasci. Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, Rome, 1932. <<Credit to come.>>

FIGURE 6.7. Entrance to the House of Terror. Photo: János Szentiváni <<Comp: Figs. 6.6 and 6.7 should be on the same page.>>

photographs, documents were sometimes presented in anthropomorphic forms, other times documents were used as frames, framing other documents or fictitious objects; immensely large-scale images alternated unexpectedly with surprisingly small-scale presentation.

The visitors had to follow the set pilgrimage route, which led through nineteen chronological and thematic halls, covering the period from the outbreak of World War I until the victory and achievements (in five additional rooms) of the Fascist revolution: from chaos through revolution to order. At the end of the pilgrimage the shaken visitor found herself in "Room U," the seven-meter-high Sacrament of the Martyrs, designed—similarly to the House of Terror—by a theater designer. The "Hall of Tears" in the House of Terror is a clear reference to the shadowy, mysterious "Hall of the Martyrs" at the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution: at both sites the

mixture of modernist and antique, Christian and profane elements, superimposed by sound and music, aim at overwhelming the upset pilgrims. The cross is the central object in both cases (although the House of Terror was supposedly built—in part—to commemorate the victims of both the Fascist and Communist terrors, among them the deported Jews). (See Figure 6.8.)

The dead at both sites is used as props for the show. In Budapest, a sign assures the dead, mostly the anti-Communist martyrs (among them persecuted members of the higher clergy), but including the victims of the Holocaust: “The sacrifice for freedom was not in vain.” In Rome, the victory of Fascism was meant to provide retroactive meaning for death in the trenches of World War I. Senseless death of hundreds of thousands of mute victims became exploited for obvious and explicit political aims at both places. Whereas in Washington and Berlin, despite the didactic and oversimplified presentations, there are solid bridges between the museum and the outside world, and the museums were built with well-documented and sincere intention of respecting the available evidence by the help of which the innocent dead could be remembered in a justified way, in Rome and Budapest the victims are cynically used for obvious political purposes. The House of Terror, similarly to the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution was not meant to be a space of memory; the Budapest building, influenced by its predecessor in Rome, is a total propaganda space, where death and victims are used as rhetorical devices.

The mostra turned out to be a fantastic success: in two years close to four million visitors paid homage to Fascism at the Palazzo della Esposizione, the facade of which had been rebuilt in rationalist style. Besides Göbbels and Göring, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Le Corbusier, and the pupils of a Hebrew school visited the exhibition. Pilgrims, two Hungarians and two blind men from the Dolomites among them, went to see the mostra by foot.

The Fascist exhibition was not without antecedents either. Mario Sironi, one of the most noted *novecentista* painters, had designed the 1928 Italian press pavilion at the Cologne International Press Exhibition, where he became acquainted with the work of the Soviet constructivist artist, El Lissitzky, who influenced his four rooms at the Fascist exhibition, among them “The March on Rome” and “The Hall of Honor, Dedicated to the Person, Ideal and Works of the Duce.” The Soviet material at the 1928 Venice Biennale and the 1929 Russische Ausstellung in Zurich also exerted direct influence on the anti-Bolshevik Rome exhibition. Giuseppe Terragni,

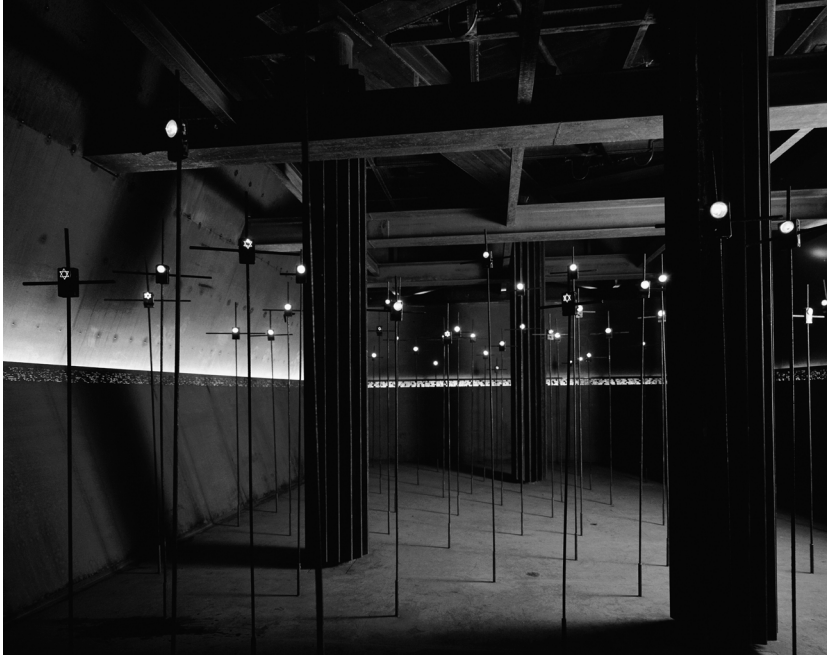


FIGURE 6.8. “The Hall of Tears,” the “Sacrarium” in the House of Terror.
Photo: János Szintiváni.

the greatest rationalist architect, the designer of “Room O,” “The Year 1922 up until the Events of October,” the architect of the famous Casa del Fascio in Como, borrowed from both El Lissitzky and Konstantin Melnikov.⁸⁸

It is no wonder that there were visitors who found the Fascist exhibition so much Bolshevik in spirit, that “with a change in emblems the pieces would bring applause in Moscow.”⁸⁹ The connection between Rome

88. See Thomas Schumacher, *Surface and Symbol: Giuseppe Terragni and the Architecture of Italian Rationalism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991). On the *mostra*, besides the works cited, see also Giovanna Fioravanti, *Archivio centrale dello stato: Partito nazionale fascista—Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* (Rome: Archivio di Stato, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1990); Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 109–21; Jeffrey Schnapp, *Anno X. La Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista del 1932* (Rome-Pisa: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2003).

89. Quoted by Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution,” in *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, ed. Richard J. Golsan (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), p. 26.

298 *Underground*

and Budapest is not accidental: the architect of the House of Terror, a well-known set designer, who in the past years designed the set of some Italian opera productions, back in the 1970s and 1980s had worked together with László Rajk on several neoconstructivist architectural and design projects. Rajk was one of the architects of the neoconstructivist catafalque for Imre Nagy's reburial in 1989.

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The exhibition starts on the second floor and after a labyrinth-like descent, the visitor arrives at a glass elevator on the first floor. It takes three and a half long minutes to lower the cabin two floors down, while a dribbling unpleasant-looking elderly man, the former cleaning attendant at the executions, recalls at an extremely slow pace how the prisoners in the cellars were hanged. One has no choice but to stare at the distasteful face on the huge plasma monitor, which fully covers one side of the elevator. At the end of the unbelievably slow descent the visitor arrives in the cellars, the symbolic center of the House of Terror. The long flyer, which describes the "reconstructed prison cells," devotes four lines to the short Arrow-Cross horror, the rest deals with the extreme brutality of the Communist terror, which was similar to methods from "the Middle Ages." "Based on recollections," assumes the text, "the building's cellar system had several floors. When the house was rebuilt, no signs of additional floors were found under the cellars. Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that additional cellars of the labyrinth were dug into the earth."

Under the ground the organizers reconstructed a "water cell, where prisoners had to continually sit in the water," a "fox-hole, where there were no lights and the prisoner could not stand up," "the guards' room" where "the ventilation system" from the reconstructed prison cell in the cellars of the Historical Office was reinstalled (this was the tube, through which, presumably, poisonous gas, or a substance, which could modify of the consciousness of the prisoners was blown in). The gallows were also re-created in the cellars. Whereas most of the objects on show do not carry the name of the donor or the lending institution, in the case of the gibbet, a small plaque authenticates the object. It was donated by the National Penal Authority, and according to the flyer, it was used until 1985. At the end of the long tour, for the first time since October 30, 1956, the underground became really identifiable and visible: a real prison, with water in it, with real spy holes and the real gallows. Instead of the site where imagination re-

sides, the underground found a concrete physical location where direct and personal encounter is offered to the visitors. Water in the cells, the tube, and the gibbet are—in the context of the prison—objects of ritualized display: they work as relics. The secret, the ultimate proof (although, in the end, it was another cellar, not the one under the Budapest Party Committee building on Republic Square) have come into sight, become physically perceptible for the pilgrims.

The House of Terror is not a marginal institution on the fringes of the city. It was built with close on twenty million U.S. dollars, a large amount of taxpayers' money in Hungary (the sum is almost twice the cost of the reconstruction of the Budapest Opera, which incidentally is also on Andrassy Boulevard). The opening of the House was an integral part—probably the most important event—of the 2002 election campaign. The principal aim of the governing radical right-wing party—the former young liberal party, turned radical right—was to win over the electorate of the Hungarian Truth and Life Party, in order to avoid the need for a formal postelection coalition with the Hungarian Fascists. The opening was scheduled on the eve of the “Memorial Day of the Victims of Communism,” a new remembrance, initiated by the right-wing government to compensate for and balance the “Holocaust Memorial Day,” introduced by the previous government.

Tens of thousands of the activists and sympathizers of an extreme right-wing radical party assembled on that day on Republic (Köztársaság) Square in front of the Socialist party headquarters, at the site of the siege back in 1956. The leader of the Hungarian Truth and Life Party pointed at the former Budapest party headquarters and baptized it the “First House of Terror.” At the end of the rally the mass was ordered to bend down, and the demonstrators pressed their ears to the pavement, to listen to the sound coming from below, from the prison under the ground from the distance of forty-six years. Then the participants stood up and the crowd marched over to Andrassy Boulevard to unite with the other tens of thousands of supporters of the political right in power, who were waiting for the prime minister in front of the House of Terror, which was bathing in sharp red light. As the leader of the Truth and Life Party remarked, in front of the House of Terror, the forces of the Hungarian anti-Communist right finally joined forces and became at last visibly and firmly united.

300 *Underground*

“We have locked the two terrors in the same building, and they are good company for each other as neither of them would have been able to survive long without the support of foreign military force. . . . In the very last minute, before it could return, we slammed the door on the sick twentieth century,” said the young prime minister, referring to the upcoming election. (Six weeks later, the Socialists, together with the Liberals won a narrow victory and came back to power. It became known only after the elections that the new Socialist prime minister had been a top-secret counter-intelligence officer in the 1980s, during the Communist times.) “The evil promised to redeem the world but instead, it tortured the people under the ground in the cellars.”⁹⁰

In July 1295 Pope Boniface VIII sent a mandate to the Bishop of Paris, Simon Mattifart de Bucy allowing him to build a chapel in the parish of St-Jean-en-Grève, on the site of what was probably the most famous case of host desecration accusation. The *capella miraculorum* emerged, which housed the *canif*, the knife, which became holy, as the miraculous consequence of the devious effort by a local Jew, who not believing in the dogma of transubstantiation, tried to test the holy host by piercing it with the knife. The miraculous host was locked in the parish church of St-Jean-en-Grève. According to the *De Miraculo Hostiae* (Of the miracle of the host), the Jew took out a knife and struck the host, which remained intact and began to bleed. He pierced it through with nails but the host continued bleeding. The Jew then threw the host into a fire, then finally threw it into boiling water. The water turned red, and the host was transformed into a crucifix. A poor Christian woman gave up the Jew; he was tried, found guilty, and burned. The Jew asked to hold his book when in the fire and thus be saved. The book and Jew were burned to ashes, while his wife and children converted.⁹¹

The story was thus converted, transformed into a concrete miraculous site: into a chapel, on the site of the demolished house of the Jew, with elaborate rituals, into an order, the Brethren of the Charity of the Blessed

90. Orbán: rács mögé zártuk a múltat. Tízezrek a Terror Háza megnyitóján [Orbán: We Have Locked the Past Behind Bars. Tens of Thousands at the Opening of the House of Terror], Index, February 24, 2002.

91. “De miraculo hostiae a Judaeo Parisiis anno Domini MCCXC,” in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, vol. 22, ed. M. Bouquet and L. Delisle (Paris, 1840–1904), p. 32. Reprinted in Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 40–45.

Virgin charged with the guardianship of the chapel. It was not just hearsay anymore that fueled the accusations; it was now possible and indeed sufficient, merely to point without hesitation at the chapel, and the solid structure provided concrete and massive evidence. "The news from Paris very soon existed in Latin and in French, and traveled to the adjacent regions . . . to the Low Countries, to southwestern Germany and to northern Italy by the very late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries."⁹² Visible facts, as Maurice Halbwachs reminded us in his *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte*, "are the symbols of invisible truth."⁹³ "No full-blown . . . accusation which resulted in vindication and violence was complete without the creation of an enduring sign to mark the event. . . . Ruins were not allowed to stand as traces of a still open past, but were assumed into new, polished structures," concluded the historian from the lessons of the postaccusatory practices of the Middle Ages.⁹⁴

The cellars under the House of Terror were neither invented nor recreated but finally found. Although the Communists had tried to cover all the traces of their heinous acts, the cellars could not be completely buried. The archaeologists of the Communist terror found them and laid them bare to the gaze of the victorious posterity. The visitor turned witness who was finally confronted with unmediated truth became now entitled to provide authentic account. The House is full of identifiable images (on the wall where the photographs of the perpetrators are lined up if they had been assembled in a photo spread for an eyewitness test: a few Fascists are mixed with a large number of ÁVH officers and Communist officials), recognizable names, abundant dates, and concrete objects. What the visitor is confronted with is clear evidence, which seems to be visibly objective, not invented, not made by the hands of the curators, but which unveils the so-far-invisible truths well hidden in the depths.⁹⁵ The cellars are turned into sacramentum, sings of (until now) hidden things.

Invisible truth, in turn, argued Halbwachs, needs to find firm roots in concrete facts; only claims based on concrete facts might leave long-lasting,

92. Ibid., p. 45.

93. Translated by Lewis A. Coser, *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 224.

94. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, p. 90.

95. On historic notions of objectivity, cf. Daston and Galison, "Image of Objectivity"; and the essays in Lorraine Daston, ed., *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

302 *Underground*

persuasive impressions.⁹⁶ Ideas should take on perceptible, concrete, tangible, localizable forms in order to find a firm place in memory: "If a truth is to be settled in the memory of a group it needs to be presented in the concrete form of an event, of a personality or of a *locality*."⁹⁷

In an earlier version of her analysis of the host desecration accusation, Miri Rubin concluded:

In those areas where the narrative had become most endemic . . . it was a real presence, of atrocities remembered, commemorated in local shrines. . . . The tale . . . grew in complexity and ambition, in size and ramification. No longer a single Jew, curious or malevolent, attacking a host with his kitchen-knife, but conspiracies of Jews. . . . The narrative evolved and converged with the growing desires for separation and excision of Jews from central European urban communities.⁹⁸

The architect and the interior designer of the House of Terror, Attila Ferenczfy Kovács, was the set designer of the Academy Award-winning film, *Mephisto*, directed by István Szabó—his first film was on the Holy Grail. (At that time the set designer was known simply as Attila Kovács; he started using Ferenczfy, referring to his title of nobility, only after 1989.) In an interview, after the opening the House of Terror he traced the influences that led to his design of the terror: "My first serious film-set design was *Dániel Szerencsés*, directed by Pál Sándor. . . . Quite a few elements from that film show up in the House of Terror too. How were you able to study the atmosphere of the most brutal terror in the years of 'soft dictatorship'?" inquired the journalist. "There was an extremely depressing hotel interior in that film, and when I was designing the set, the environment that had been so familiar from the Moscow metro helped me in my work. That overdecorated, desolate, and unbearably gloomy underground space found then its way to the House of Terror."⁹⁹

96. For an excellent theoretical reworking of Halbwachs's important insights, cf. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* [A Kulturális Emlékezet], trans. from the original German into Hungarian by Zoltán Hidas (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1999), esp. pp. 35–49.

97. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 200; emphases added.

98. Miri Rubin, "The Making of the Host Desecration Accusation: Persuasive Narratives, Persistent Doubts" (paper given at the Davis Center Seminar, Princeton University, October 15, 1993), pp. 31–32.

99. "A Mennyei Seregektől a Terror Házáig" [From the Heavenly Army to the House of Terror], *Magyar Nemzet*, April 2, 2002.

Owing to its mysterious origins and the need people have to give history a meaning in our godless world, *The Conspiracy* soon became a kind of bible, teaching that there is a

“mysterious dark, and dangerous force” lurking behind all history’s defeats, a force that holds the fate of the world in its hands, draws on arcane sources of power, triggers wars and riots, revolutions and dictatorships—the “sources of all evil.” The French Revolution, the Panama Canal, the League of Nations, the Treaty of Versailles, the Weimar Republic, the Paris métro—they are all its doing. (By the way, métros are nothing but mineshafts under city walls, a means for blasting European capitals to the skies.) . . . *The informed reader will, I trust, have no trouble recognizing the famous Protocols in The Conspiracy.* (Danilo Kis, *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*, trans. Michael Henry Heim [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997], p. 169 and Postscript, p. 198)