

9-2005

# Piacular Subjectivity and Contested Narrative in the Imre Nagy Memorials

Karl P. Benziger

*Rhode Island College*, [kbenziger@ric.edu](mailto:kbenziger@ric.edu)

Richard R. Weiner

*Rhode Island College*, [rweiner@ric.edu](mailto:rweiner@ric.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/facultypublications>



Part of the [Political Theory Commons](#)

---

## Citation

Benziger, Karl P. and Weiner, Richard R., "Piacular Subjectivity and Contested Narrative in the Imre Nagy Memorials" (2005). *Faculty Publications*. 251.

<https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/facultypublications/251>

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ RIC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ RIC. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@ric.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@ric.edu).

---

**Piacular Subjectivity and Contested Narrative  
in the  
Imre Nagy Memorials**

**Karl P. Benziger and Richard R. Weiner  
Rhode Island College**

*Presented: at the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR)  
Conference at Corvinus University in Budapest  
8 September 2005*

*and*

*at the Narrative Matters 2006 Conference,  
Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia  
27 May 2006*

## Piacular Subjectivity and Contested Narrative in The Imre Nagy Memorials

Karl P. Benziger and Richard R. Weiner  
Rhode Island College

*“What disgusts me is that those who are hanging me will one day rehabilitate me.”*

The character Imre Nagy speaks his final words at his trial on June 15, 1958, as portrayed in a film by Márta Mészáros, *A Temetetlen Halott* (The Unburied Man), 2004.

*“The Hungarian people and the International Working Class will acquit me of the allegations set against me and as a result I have to sacrifice my life.”*

Imre Nagy final words at his trial June 15, 1958.<sup>[1]</sup>

The dead man is not mourned because he is feared; he is feared because he is mourned.

The funeral of Imre Nagy on June 16, 1989 can be seen as a critical moment in the Hungarian transition to a democratic republic as it explicitly undermined the moral and political authority of the communist government then in power. This Nagy memorial *signified* a *longing* for a national identity tied to the spirit of republicanism that had been thwarted in 1956 and had roots going back to 1848. The unity of purpose displayed by the Hungarian people at the funeral brings to mind Emile Durkheim’s analysis of piaculum and the conscience collective. This is what the sociologist, Robert Bellah described as how a society interprets its historical experience in light of a transcendent reality.<sup>[2]</sup> In this case study of the Nagy memorial, the republican spirit emerges as a possible transcendent social movement that fills the collective conscience.

For Emile Durkheim, piacular rites emerge:

- where the trauma of collective misfortune is valorized as an intensely cathetic basis of identity [transcendent signifier];
- where propitiatory sacrifice associated with the trauma reveal a need for self-negation felt by the community [i.e.: through atonement practices]; and
- where the metaphoric shared “drinking of the blood” generates a “collective effervescence” that restores sacred identity and mutual recognition of stabilizing social bonds [i.e.: through sacralizing imagery].

<sup>[1]</sup> János M. Rainer, *Nagy Imre 1953-1958: Politikai Életrajz II* (Imre Nagy a Political Biography) (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1999) 430-431. In another version found in Arpad Kardarkay’s work on George Lukács, Nagy states, “I also know I will have a reburial. I only fear that the funeral oration will be delivered by those who betrayed me.” *George Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 437.

<sup>[2]</sup> Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) 3.

Piacular subjectivity is the collective experience of those moments revealed in specified collective representations. The concept can be understood as a collection of representations mutually created (“phenomenologically constituted”) by a particular community as [1] normative attachments and commitments in a public language; and as [2] reconstructable chains of practices and practical reasoning. The piacular moments reveal what Durkheim called the *collective conscience*.

As another memorial, Márta Mészáros’s film narrative *A Temetetlen Halott* (The Unburied Man) released in 2005 provides us with a portrayal of Nagy as a redemptive sacrifice that highlights this debate over narrative. In her account, Nagy repudiates and separates himself from his former colleagues. Whereas, in the trial transcript his final words repudiate his accusers, but maintain his staunch allegiance to communism and the working class. This paper utilizes the Mészáros film as a stepping-stone in an examination of the construction of narratives related to Nagy and the 1956 Revolution. Nagy’s reburial lends itself to the more morphological approach of Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs, but in the absence of Soviet occupation a more complex narrative emerged. A second level of understanding emerges in which political parties joust for legitimacy utilizing traces of Nagy’s story to create narratives suitable to their own needs, ensuring the emergence of a third level in which these factional narratives compete for public attention.

In the final scene of *A Temetetlen Halott* two young girls place flowers on the grave of Imre Nagy created for his reburial in plot 301 of the *Köztemető* (Public Cemetery) in Budapest. *Kegyelet* is synonymous with Durkheim’s concept of piacular rites and is defined as duty toward the dead. Hungarians often use the analogy of Antigone’s obligation to her brother in describing how powerfully this value operates in Hungarian society. *Kegyeleti* ritual, that includes leaving flowers and lighting candles, reinforces that value in order to interpret the historical context of the present through the remembrance of the past. The connection between personal mourning ritual and politics is long established in Hungary, especially after the establishment of the Dual Monarchy in 1867.<sup>[3]</sup> Funerals in the wake of the failed 1848 Revolution served to fortify Hungarian nationalism. The return of the remains of the 1848 Revolutionary Lajos Kossuth in 1894 from Turin, Italy was marked by a funeral accompanied by three days of mourning.<sup>[4]</sup> According to historian Alice Freifeld the return and eventual internment of Ferenc Rákóczi II, leader of the failed Rákóczi Rebellion against the Hapsburgs, 1704-1711, was linked to the romanticized myth of the nation surrounding Kossuth and 1848. Public sentiment was such that Emperor Franz Joseph rescinded a law that had declared, “Rákóczi a traitor and [by extension] accepted the cult of an anti-Hapsburg rebel.”<sup>[5]</sup>

<sup>[3]</sup> The Compromise of 1867 established internal sovereignty for both Austria and Hungary although the Austrians (Hapsburgs) maintained control of foreign policy for the empire. Tibor Frank, “Hungary and the Dual Monarchy, 1867-1890,” *A History of Hungary*, Peter F. Sugar et. al., ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 252-253.

<sup>[4]</sup> John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1988) 120.

<sup>[5]</sup> Alice Freifeld, *Nationalism and the Crowd in Liberal Hungary, 1848-1914* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) 288.

Plot 301 had originally been the place where those executed for their participation in the Revolution had been buried anonymously. In the wake of 1989, this place of deep sorrow has been transformed into a national site commemorating not only Nagy, but all of the freedom fighters who were victims of juridical murder during the terror enacted by the Soviet backed regime of János Kádár.<sup>[6]</sup>

## I

The execution of Prime Minister Imre Nagy on June 16, 1958 for his support of the ill-fated 1956 Hungarian Revolution can be understood as a conscious attempt to blot out the memory of a politician and movement. His trial was held in secret and it was only after his execution on June 16, 1958 that the public learned of his fate and that of some of his principal federates. Stories from those imprisoned and the families of those executed provided the threads from which a narrative of Nagy's final days could be reconstructed. For example, the State buried the victims of the terror anonymously and an attempt to locate Nagy's grave was based on stories of families who searched and hoped they had located the graves of their loved ones buried in the same plot.<sup>[7]</sup> Only gradually could the story of Nagy's final years of life be reconstructed, provided at first with bits and pieces of stories from those at the trial, the execution, or with him during his imprisonment in Snagov, Romania. It was during the 1980's and early 1990's that the public was finally able to gain access to the legal proceedings and other archival materials that countered the State's official account of the trial provided in a White Paper. Still, we are presented with the problem of what traces of the story are remembered and what is consigned to oblivion.

Nagy was and remains a controversial figure in Hungarian politics. He was part of the Muscovite faction of Hungarian communists who had spent considerable time in the Soviet Union, leaving in 1929 and returning to Hungary only in December of 1944. His association with Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin got him into trouble with the Hungarian Communist Party. Both men were interested in agricultural reform, advocating for a partitioning of estates rather than nationalizing estates, as advocated by Joseph Stalin, in an attempt to maintain an alliance with the peasant base of their respective countries.<sup>[8]</sup>

<sup>[6]</sup> Kádár had been part of the Nagy government and had flown to Moscow on November 1 returning to Hungary as the Soviet's choice as Prime Minister, being sworn in on November 7. In the wake of the Revolution's defeat Nagy refused to resign as Prime Minister, leaving Hungary with two prime ministers. Nikita Khrushchev had already considered this possibility and had stated on November 3 (before Kádár's return to Hungary), "If Imre Nagy does not resign he is in the service of the enemy." See "Working Notes of Imre Horváth from the Session of the CPSU, CC Presidium, 3 November 1956," *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: A History in Documents*, Csaba Békés et. al., ed., (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002) 360. Juridical proceedings were agreed to by Moscow in March 1957. See: Alajos Dornbach, *The Secret Trial of Imre Nagy* (Westport: Praeger, 1994) 16.

<sup>[7]</sup> For example see: Béla Kövér, "301es parcella köztemető," *Magyar Nemzet*, May 3, 1989, p. 21 and Rainer, *Nagy Imre 1953-1958*, 436.

<sup>[8]</sup> Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller, *Hungary, 1956 Revisited: The Message of a Revolution, A Quarter of a Century Later* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983) 119 and Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography 1888-1938* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973) 303, 384.

Stalin's path to modernization for the Soviet Union centered on the development of heavy industry and forced agricultural collectivization. A policy he enforced with notable brutality. Real efforts at land reform were not executed in Hungary until after World War II. This led to Nagy's ouster from the Hungarian Communist Party in 1936 and according to the historian János M. Rainer, was more than likely compromised by the KGB to inform on Hungarians living in Moscow prior to World War II. He became a Soviet citizen in the same year and was reinstated in the Hungarian Communist Party in February of 1939.<sup>[10]</sup> Bukharin's refusal to recant his position ultimately cost him his life in one of the more notorious show trials of 1938, a point not lost on Nagy.

Nagy became Minister of Agriculture on December 23, 1944 and actively participated in the creation of the one party state that finally came into existence in May 1949. He was affectionately portrayed as the "*Földosztó Miniszter*" (minister of land distribution).<sup>[10]</sup> His most open differences with the chairman of the party, Mátyás Rákosi, had to do with Stalinist land collectivization, but it wasn't until the show trials of 1949 were under way that he was forced to perform the ritual of self-critique for these differences.<sup>[11]</sup> His ability to survive the treacherous politics and the accompanying terror of the Stalinist period is attested to by his eulogy of Stalin in the Hungarian Parliament after his demise in March 1953.<sup>[12]</sup> Nagy's fortunes rose with those of Nikita Khrushchev and in the wake of the discredited politics of the Stalinists, Nagy became Prime Minister.<sup>[13]</sup> Rákosi, however, was left in his position as party chair with many of his federates left in place within the government ensuring continued infighting between the two rivals and their factions.

Nagy instituted a series of reforms known as the *New Course*, advocating for an economy focused on light industry and agriculture as opposed to the Stalinist focus on heavy industry. He opposed forced collectivization and began granting amnesty for those victimized by the terror. Importantly, Nagy advocated for democratization within the one party state where the collective wisdom of the party would forestall the return of the abuses meted out by the Stalinists. Writer's circles began to flourish and the critique of Stalinism was institutionalized.<sup>[14]</sup>

<sup>[9]</sup> János M. Rainer, interview by author, 6 April, 1998 and Rainer, *Nagy Imre: A Politikai életrajz, Első Kötet, 1896-1953* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1996) 190, 196.

<sup>[10]</sup> Imre Patkó, "Az MKP Listavezetői Nagy Imre," *Szabad Nép*, 27 August, 1947, 3.

<sup>[11]</sup> Rainer, *Nagy Imre: A Politikai életrajz, Első kötet, 1896-1953*, 397, 418.

<sup>[12]</sup> István Rév, "Covering History," Getty Conference, Hamburg, Germany, 1977.

<sup>[13]</sup> Rákosi's economic policies had nearly wrecked the economy and the ensuing diminution in the Hungarians standard of living had caused a real disaffection with the communist party. This general disillusion with the party was reinforced by a wave of brutality that had brought prosecutions against 1.5 million people in three and a half years in a population of 4.5 million adults. "Notes of a Meeting between the CPSU CC Presidium and a HWP Political Delegation in Moscow, June 13 and 16, 1953" in Csaba Békés et. al., ed., *The 1956 Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1996) 16-17, see also the introductory essay page 5.

<sup>[14]</sup> Nagy stated, "injustices of the past must be undone...the Party leadership has the will to do this." *Szabad Nép*, 20 October, 1954. See also: Walter Laqueur, *Europe in Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992) 304, George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) 93, 101.

Clearly an affront to Rákosi, he and his associates worked to stall the New Course and discredit Nagy. Nagy was accused of pandering to the *petit bourgeoisie*.<sup>[15]</sup> The heightening of the Cold War in 1955 played to the hands of Nagy's opponents and Khrushchev insisted that Hungary continue collectivization and the development of her heavy industry. He claimed that Nagy's policies were playing into the hands of the West that hoped Hungary would become another Yugoslavia. Khrushchev demanded that Nagy either admit his mistakes or stand-alone.<sup>[16]</sup>

Nagy's refusal to submit to self-criticism ensured Moscow's acquiescence with the Hungarian Party's decision to remove Nagy from the leadership in April 1955 and his ouster from the party in December of that same year.

Nagy vigorously defended himself in a series of essays eventually compiled and published in London entitled, *On Communism*. The essays attack the despotism and cruelty of the Stalinists and further elaborate the benefits of the New Course and what he claimed was the return of procedural law, although never attacking the politics that led to the establishment of the one party state. On one hand he extolled Hungarian friendship with Moscow, and yet, highlighted the importance of self-determination.<sup>[17]</sup> His ideas were disseminated and debated within the Writer's Circles that continued their critique of Stalinism fortified by Khrushchev's critique at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress in February of 1956. The return of Rákosi and his federates to power was generally not welcomed and public critique of the regime intensified to the point that the Soviets removed Rákosi from power, allowing him to be replaced with another Stalinist Ernő Gerő.<sup>[18]</sup> Gerő's ascendance to power did nothing to stymie critique and a state funeral for victims of Rákosi's terror on October 6, 1956 set the stage for the Revolution.<sup>[19]</sup> The most notable of these victims was László Rajk, Minister of the Interior and popularly known as a hero of both the Spanish Civil War and World War II.<sup>[20]</sup>

<sup>[15]</sup> For example see: István Almási, *Szabad Nép*, 11 January, 1955, 2.

<sup>[16]</sup> "Notes of Discussion between the CPSU CC Presidium and a HWP Leadership Delegation in Moscow on January 8, 1955," *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 60-64. The historian Joseph Rothschild also claims that Georgii Malenkov's removal from power left Nagy bereft of one of the staunchest backers of the New Course within Moscow in *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 154-155.

<sup>[17]</sup> Nagy, *On Communism*, for example, 62, 56-57, 237-238.

<sup>[18]</sup> Charles Gati, "From Liberation to Revolution, 1945-1956" *A History of Hungary*, Peter F. Sugar, et. al., ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 378.

<sup>[19]</sup> For example see: József Szalai, "A Szocialista Törvényesség megszilárdításának néhány kérdése" (A few questions about the strengthening of Socialist lawfulness) *Társadalmi Szemle* (June/July, 1956):32-33. The historian György Liván calls the funeral a "dress rehearsal for the Revolution." György Litván ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt, and Repression, 1953-1963* (London: Longman, 1996) 48-49.

<sup>[20]</sup> Rajk was known for his intense loyalty to the communist party and helped create the feared security police (AVH). His arrest on charges of conspiracy and treason had the intended result of creating fear within Rákosi's inner circle. Rajk was brutally tortured, but believed that he would be saved from the gallows and later rehabilitated by his public confession to the charges placed against him. See: *László Rajk and his Accomplices Before the People's Court*, Ferenc Koltai ed. (Budapest: Budapest Printing Press, 1949) for example pages: 62-65, 89-90, 217-219 and Tibor Huszár, *Kádár* (Budapest: Szabad Tér Kiadó-Kossuth Kiadó, 2001) 152.

Moscow had debated Nagy's fate with Gerö even suggesting that he face prison for his unwillingness to accept self-criticism, but the unsettled politics of Hungary led to his restoration to the party later in October.<sup>[21]</sup> Throughout 1956 Writer's Circles had agitated for Nagy's restoration as Prime Minister, a demand underscored by student and worker's councils after the funeral of October 6.<sup>[22]</sup> The outbreak of Revolution on October 23 came as a surprise to all including Imre Nagy. His return to power as prime minister on October 24 was premised on the belief that this would stymie the revolt. Nagy's modest reforms would ensure Soviet dominance in Hungary similar to the Polish model. Though Nagy refused to call for Soviet assistance he actively supported the forceful suppression of the Revolution, only gradually joining with the demands of the Revolutionaries.<sup>[23]</sup> Nagy's call for a return to his New Course no longer resonated with the street. His proclamation of a multi-party government and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact sealed his fate.<sup>[24]</sup> Nagy spent the last year and a half of his life imprisoned in Snagov, Romania and later in Budapest where he was executed.

Nagy remained a communist until the end of his life. Though gradually joining with the demands of the Revolutionaries for the establishment of a multi-party republic, he remained convinced to the end that procedural democracy could be accomplished in the guise of a one party state. As a martyr of the Revolution, however, he signified a longing for a national identity tied to the spirit of procedural republicanism with roots going back to the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.

The spectacle of Nagy's reburial on June 16, 1989 undermined the moral authority of the communist government and can be analyzed as a contested narrative on the power to suppress and the power to actualize republicanism in terms of Emile Durkheim's analysis of piacular rituals and the collective conscience. As a collective celebration of the vértanúk (blood witnesses) Nagy and those reburied with him provided contrast to the Soviet backed regime then in power, and thus, deadly attachment to the Soviet backed counter-revolution.

<sup>[21]</sup> "Record of Conversation between Yurii Andropov and Ernő Gerö, October 12, 1956" *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 178-179.

<sup>[22]</sup> In addition to demanding Nagy's return to power they insisted on the establishment of a liberal state that included freedom of the press, assembly, and a plural democratic system, going well beyond what Nagy had contemplated in his New Course reforms. See: "The Sixteen Points Prepared by Hungarian Students, October 22-23, 1956," *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 188-189.

<sup>[23]</sup> For example: In a radio address Nagy claimed that counterrevolutionaries had taken advantage of the real grievances expressed by workers. "Nagy Imre Miniszterelnök Rádióbeszède, October 25, 1956," Zoltán Ripp, *Ötvenhat októbere és a hatalom: A pártvezetés végnapjai* (Budapest: Nepvilág Kiadó, 1997) 138-139. According to the historian Miklós Horvath it was hoped that the overwhelming display of force would cow the workers as it had in Berlin, 1953. See: "Soviet Aggression Against Hungary in 1956," Lee W. Congdon and Béla K. Kiraly, ed., *The Ideas of the Hungarian Revolution, Suppressed and Victorious 1956-1999* (Highland Lakes: Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc., 2002) 70-74.

<sup>[24]</sup> "Proclamation by Imre Nagy on the Creation of a Multi-Party System, October 30, 1956," *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, 290-291.



This first level of meaning revealed by the funeral, though important as a contingent factor of political change, tends to downplay the more complicated narrative of this political history. The effervescent moment of unity displayed by the Hungarian polity certainly contributed to a referendum decision that stripped the party of power. This moment was short lived, however, as evidenced by debate over the nature of the state, haunted throughout by memories of the Revolution and Hungary's tumultuous twentieth century past. What was the meaning of Nagy's symbolic status in a country whose revolutionary spirit had been largely subdued and co-opted by the socialist "prosperity" that separated Hungary from other satellites under Soviet thrall? In this guise, historical attachment needed to be found in the events leading up to the Revolution or prior to the ascension of the Stalinists in 1948. As we have briefly reviewed, the example of Nagy who had played a key role in the establishment of the Stalinist state is problematic to the kind of heroic narrative used to legitimize various contemporary political factions, especially those that view the political transition of 1989 as the triumph of the capitalist model. Historical memory in this light is selective.

The political scientist Katherine Verdery claims that Nagy's symbolic magnetism can be found in his power to legitimate a diverse number of platforms [both negatively and positively].<sup>[25]</sup> According to Verdery, Nagy has legitimating effects "not because everyone agrees on [his] meaning but because it compels interest despite (because of?) divergent views of what [he] signifies."<sup>[26]</sup> Because of this, Verdery claims that she is "not interested in the shared mentalities found in the conscience collective, but for conflict among groups over social meanings."<sup>[27]</sup> But is it not possible that the shared mentalities that Durkheim found in the conscience collective are a result of, or a manifestation of continuing discourse regarding the various social frames under consideration?

Jay Winter underscores the importance of affect -- how the ritual associated with World War I memorials served both the purpose of commemoration and the possibility of forgetting. Citing Sigmund Freud's discussion of melancholia, he reasons that forgetting helps create the boundaries necessary for one suffering from melancholia to once again look forward rather than remain locked in grief.<sup>[28]</sup> In this light, perhaps the funeral of Imre Nagy created the possibility settling the past and looking towards the future, or more cynically as an attempt to lock out the past. For example, political factions associated with the former communist regime or those to whom Marx is anathema. As noted earlier, however, forgetting and selective remembering stimulates discourse as well as contest of the memory narrative.

<sup>[25]</sup> The anthropologist Clifford Geertz discusses the importance of charismatic figures in their ability to stimulate both negative and positive political dialogue in his seminal essay "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: reflections on the Symbolics of Power" in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>[26]</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post socialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 31.

<sup>[27]</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>[28]</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 113-114.

Winter's discussion also underlines a limitation of structuralist theory as formulated by Durkheim in that his theory relies on a collective conscience determined by social facts that exist externally to the individual. According to Durkheim the collective conscience is transcendent and informed by natural law, leading him to associate it with a Supreme Being. Neither the facts of phenomenological experience nor logical inference necessitate this conclusion. The phenomenological facts regarding the connection between politics and social institutions such as *kegyelet* can be explained in terms of the individuals from whom shared meetings and patterns of behavior are acquired. An explanation of this sort does not need to have recourse to the notion that shared ideas somehow miraculously engender forces that dominate and elevate individuals. How can we explain the forming of the "collective forces" involved in moral experience?

## II

Durkheim associates epistemological and phenomenological connotations with the collective conscience which enables him to employ this concept in explaining moral obligation.

With respect to its *epistemological* meaning, the collective conscience according to Durkheim refers to:

(1) a conscience "which is shared in common with our group (i.e., a particular social entity) in its entirety, which, consequently, is not oneself, but society living and acting within us."<sup>[29]</sup>

(2) a conscience of shared moral meanings, i.e., the awareness and sharing of moral norms derived from symbolic representations engendered collectively;<sup>[30]</sup> and

(3) a conscience which "by definition is diffused throughout the whole society, but it nevertheless has specific features which make it a distinct reality."<sup>[31]</sup>

As for the various qualitatively distinct *phenomenological* experiences associated to such a conscience of collective norms, Durkheim notes:

(1) that the projections of the collective conscience are experienced as an echo in ourselves of a force which is foreign to us, and which is superior to what we are;<sup>[32]</sup>

<sup>[29]</sup> Durkheim, *Division of Labor*. Trans. by George Simpson (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 151.

<sup>[30]</sup> See Ernest Wallwork, *Durkheim: Morality and Milieu*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) pp. 35-36.

<sup>[31]</sup> Durkheim, *Division of Labor*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>[32]</sup> Wallwork, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

- (2) that these projections are experiences
- (a) *impersonally*
  - (b) *objectively* (as they are external to the associated individuals of a social entity<sup>[331]</sup>
  - (c) as *obligatory*, i.e., these collective norms function as moral constraints<sup>[34]</sup> which have an “imperative character;”<sup>[35]</sup> they “exercise a sort of ascendancy over the will which feels constrained to conform to them.”<sup>[36]</sup>
- (3) that the moral experience comprises
- (a) the perception of collective representations, and
  - (b) the internalization of collective norms;<sup>[37]</sup> and
- (4) that such collective norms may be internalized differently and hence may affect individual members of society very differently.

Collective representations in Durkheim’s scheme do not constitute the social reality itself; they are only the projections, only the manifestations of it. Such typical manifestations of collective life include: moral rules, precepts, religious beliefs and practices, juridical codes, myths, folklore, proverbs, popular sayings, and language. These collective representations, he indicates,

cannot form a circle closed upon itself, the source whence they derive must be found outside them. Either the *conscience collective* floats in the void, like a sort of inconceivable absolute, or it is connected with the rest of the world through the intermediary of a substratum on which, in consequence, it depends. On the other hand, of what can this substratum be composed if not of the members of society as they are socially combined.<sup>[38]</sup>

That substratum to which collective representations are attached are what Durkheim labels institutions: recognized normative patterns or social bonds. And this notion give rise to his development of “depth levels” of social reality.

The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, a student of Durkheim, saw the collective conscience as fluid. Asserting that, “what we can know of the remembered past depends entirely upon its commemorative leavings.”<sup>[39]</sup>

<sup>[33]</sup> Durkheim. “La Science positive de la morale en Allemagne,” *Revue philosophique*, v. xxiv, p. 134.

<sup>[34]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>[35]</sup> Durkheim. “Cours de science sociale: *Revue internationale de l’enseignement*, XV, p. 48. Cited and translated by Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*: (London: Allen Lane, 1973) p. 42. This passage is from the opening lecture of Durkheim’s first course at University of Bourdeaux entitled “La solidarite sociale.”

<sup>[36]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>[37]</sup> Wallwork, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>[38]</sup> Cited by Lukes, *op. cit.*, p. 231 (from a Review on Antonio Labriola in *R*

<sup>[39]</sup> From Patrick H. Hutton’s excellent discussion of Halbwachs in his article “Sigmund Freud and Maurice Halbwachs: The Problem of Memory in Historical Psychology,” *The History Teacher*, 27, 2 (February, 1994): 149. *evue Philosophique*, XLIV in 1897, pp. 645-51); cf. Peter Winch. *The Idea of a Social Science*, (London: 1958), pp. 23 ff.

According to Halbwachs each generation must reinterpret the past in the context of the present in order to come to a collective understanding of the event or person under study.<sup>[40]</sup> His seminal study entitled, “The Legendary Topography of the Gospels” provides an historical case study of how contemporary understandings and needs over time created sites of memory in Jerusalem that would accord with the stories laid out in the four gospels. Importantly, Halbwachs claimed that in spite of differences found in the stories of the gospels themselves, they represent a collection of memories held in common [traces of history]. Legitimacy of the sites rests in how closely they remain to the gospel, not the historical reality of the site itself.<sup>[41]</sup> As Lewis Coser reminds us in his introduction to Halbwachs’ work on collective memory, “the past is always a compound of persistence and change.”<sup>[42]</sup>

Halbwachs’ presentist approach recognized the continuing discourse that surrounds issues of memory. As historian Patrick H. Hutton asserts “memory is a function of power to determine the way the past is to be represented...setting scholarship on a genealogical course.”<sup>[43]</sup> Addressing the construct of power Barry Schwartz asserts that collective memory has an “orientational function...being both a mirror...and model for society”<sup>[44]</sup> Unlike Durkheim Halbwachs’ approach to collective memory considered groups rather than attempting to create universals. In this guise collective memory is multifaceted and can be an “effective marker of social differentiation.”<sup>[45]</sup> Seen in this light the funeral signified the republican spirit infused with the demand for a sovereign state and at the same time stimulated “discourse and argument” regarding the meaning of the 1956 Revolution and its relationship to Hungarian politics in 1989 that was temporarily subdued during the funeral.<sup>[46]</sup>

<sup>[40]</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998): 109. The authors’ point to the connection between Halbwachs, Edward Shils and Benedict Anderson in regard to generational memory. Edward Shils asserts that younger generations define themselves in contrast to earlier generations and both authors underscore the importance of youth in nationalist movements. See: 123 and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991) and Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>[41]</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Translated and Edited, Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) see: “The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land” especially, 194, 231-235.

<sup>[42]</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>[43]</sup> According to Hutton the historians job is to “trace present ideas retrospectively” in “Sigmund Freud and Maurice Halbwachs,” 150.

<sup>[44]</sup> See Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) 18-19 and Olick and Robbins discussion, “Social Memory Studies,” 124.

<sup>[45]</sup> Olick and Robbins., 111.

<sup>[46]</sup> The speeches at the funeral were remarkably similar calling for Hungarian sovereignty, democracy, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops. See especially the speeches of Sandor Kopacsi, Imre Mécs, and Victor Orban. It has been remarked that the applause stirred by Orban’s speech could be found in the tenor of the presentation and the fact that he represented the future generations of Hungarians at the time. Karl P. Benziger, “The Funeral of Imre Nagy: “Contested History and the Power of Memory Culture,” *History and Memory* 12, 2 (Fall/Winter, 2000): 152-153. See also: Richard R. Weiner, “Discourse and Argument in Instituting the Governance of Social Law,” *Central European Political Science Review*, 5, 15 (2005): 6-34.

George Gurvitch conceived of the collective conscience as a reality *sui generis*, without necessarily floating into a transcendent abstraction requiring a leap into faith for its existence. This he does by providing for the intuitive dimension of every consciousness. The immediate and direct route of intuition is seen as allowing for non-symbolic interpenetration, and thus making the collective conscience properly psychological. The collective conscience as a manifestation of collective psychical life is seen as going beyond symbolic communication and cognition into a realm of intuitions—affectual or emotive, intellectual and volitional.<sup>[47]</sup>

The collective conscience is not seen as external to each conscience, but immanent within it. This is based on the phenomenologists' of "intentionality:" the conscience exists as a tension towards that which is beyond it and resists it; consciousness is consciousness of something. Contrary to Durkheim's "classical" conception of the individual consciences closed up within them, and passively receiving external and objective representations of the collective conscience, Gurvitch's notion of the collective conscience is presentative. By virtue of the latently open conscience, there can be interpenetration or participation of consciences, immanent within each conscience.

Gurvitch attempts to solve Durkheim's problem of the relation between individual consciences and collective consciences in terms of their mutual and dialectical interpenetration. In so doing, he presupposes that neither consciences nor cognition need aspire to an objective status outside the contradictions immanent in social existence and its history.

Moving beyond the more morphological structuralism of Durkheim and Halbwachs we are moved to ask, "To what extent does the June 16, 1989 memorial serve as a collective memory signifier?" this addresses Pierre Bourdieu's poststructural critique—the need to move beyond a focus on the categorical to one of texts, forms of life and their effects/affects.<sup>[48]</sup>

<sup>[47]</sup> Symbols are a mediation between the content of the signification intended, and the collective actors involved. Such symbols can veil the communication they seek to disclose and so hinder participation in it. Gurvitch believed that there are depth levels of social reality below the symbolic levels that are spontaneous, innovating and creative in nature and ontologically prior as the foundation of any social framework of knowledge. See: Georges Gurvitch, *The Social Frameworks of Knowledge*, translated by M.A. and K.A. Thompson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) supplement, 231-234. It is a social interaction that Alfred Schutz saw as essential to all communication: a "mutual tuning-in relation" by which I and Thou are experienced by participants as a "We." See chapter nine especially pages 214-217 in Alfred Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, Helmut O. Wagner, editor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Gurvitch asserts that beneath all forms of Collective attitudes, organizations, patterns, signs, roles, and symbols, there exists a sphere of collective behavior, ideas, and values, and at the most profound level: the collective conscience.

<sup>[48]</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Translated R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

And this additional query also addresses Durkheim's other significant contemporary on the theme of collective memory -- Henri Bergson, who provides foundational work on memory, perception, and the "intuition of durée." These themes are developed by Gilles Deleuze, who moves beyond the inter-subjectivity orientation of Gurvitch (and Habermas/Ricoeur today), to the affect/effect of constellations of "subject positions," "zones of indetermination and experimentations" - - where things may go off in unforeseen directions or work in unregulated ways.<sup>[49]</sup>

In a similar post-structuralist vein, we address the query raised by Judith Butler. To what extent is there an actualization of "the promise of signifiers that have not yet delivered on the promise of order."<sup>[50]</sup> In our case: Does the legitimacy signifier of the June 16 Memorial live up to its potential?

Deleuze following Bergson moves beyond representation to memory and desire/remembering and yearning. The historicization of the experience of time and memory are not understandable as coherent wholes, but open to critique and deconstruction.<sup>[51]</sup> Collective memory is the presence of the past in public. And the flows of desire re-cathect to images -- movement images and time images. These are the stutters, the hesitations, the moments of rapture and fragmentation, the prolonged duration (durée), the juxtapositions, the flashbacks, the flash-forwards, the perception of time not just as chronology.<sup>[52]</sup> They involve what Derrida calls "spectral" or ghostly remembrance -- as presence that counters an absence, caused by suppressing, forgetting, repressing, and/or traumatically sealing off.<sup>[53]</sup> They never die; they are always to come - - and to come back. Memory traces. Flows of desire, Flows of movement, Flows of time, Unconscious wishes, Suppressed pasts, Haunting specters. The desire to make meanings, The desire to make narratives and myths. Conjuring up hidden pictures, Signifiers of desire and attachment. Mythic signifiers. Historiographic signifiers.

<sup>[49]</sup> See: Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonianism*, Translated H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988), *Pure Immanence*, Translated A. Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2002), and *Difference et repetition* (Paris: universitaires de France, 1969).

<sup>[50]</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 220.

<sup>[51]</sup> See for example, Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft, Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (1979)/ *Futures Past: On Historical Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

<sup>[52]</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Translated by H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Translated by H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>[53]</sup> See for example, Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Translated by P. Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Deleuze frames movement images and time images in a manner that recalls the *disemptive* method of Georges Sorel:<sup>[54]</sup>

- foregoing an attempt to grasp a thing in toto/resisting any tendency to discover internally consistent totality; and
- viewing totality from various vantage points, rather than seeking the single focus from which totality can be taken in.

Diremptions differ from Weberian ideal types in that they do not set out to present internally consistent ideal pictures or repetitive causal occurrences or sequences of events. They take us from one plateau to another.

Unlike Durkheim, Halbwachs or Gurvitch, poststructuralism presents memory culture not as a field of reflective representation, but as a field of traces— as an *assemblage* establishing connection between multiplicities, between deconstructable moments of experience without ever providing an assured final resting place for a reflection on ourselves.<sup>[55]</sup> We are moved by poststructuralism from the use of concepts of role-playing and role-taking (*la langue*) -- to an understanding of the concept of “positioning,” that is, the ways in which subjectivity is positioned in discursive practices (*le langage*).<sup>56</sup>

The recollected text is a field of recombinatory elements for novel imaginative projecting and instituting. The constellation of discursive subject positions exist as arcs and trajectories -- as a predicate logic with unfulfilled commitments and claims. Along this arc of subject positions, relations are constantly being dissolved, recast, and reformulated so that an identity emerges and is not discovered. Diremptive scanning reveals floating signifiers that have not delivered on their commitments. They are positioned within narratives not as sedimented moments or static snapshots, but as panning shots of a collective identity/collective conscience in motion.

<sup>[54]</sup> See John J. Cerullo, “A Literary Sorel: “Disempting a *Fin de Siecle* Moralism,” *History of Political Thought*, 24, 1 (2003): 130 and H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, Revised ed., (New York: Random House Vintage, 1977) 92-93, 173.

<sup>[55]</sup> In *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) chapter one footnote 11 John Rajchman cites Isaac Joseph, “Gabriel Tarde: Le monde comme féerie,” *Oeuvres de Gabriel Tarde*, volume 4, pp. 9ff in an anthology edited by Eric Alliez, *Empêcheurs de penser en rond* (Paris, 1999). Rajdman sees the Joseph piece as “Deleuze-inspired,” in developing Deleuze’s idea of Tarde “as inventor of micro-sociology – in opposition to Durkheim’s holism and historicism.” Tarde is presented in a Bergsonian context where he “discovers another kind of space and time of belief and desire.”

<sup>[56]</sup> Rom Harre and Bronwyn Davies, “Positioning : the Discursive Production of Selves: *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* (1991), 20:1, 44-63; Rom Harre and Luk van Langehove, *Positioning Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); and Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Ladau, Mouffe and Zizek*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

### III

The director of the film *A Temetetlen Halott*, Márta Mészáros has asserted that in the wake of 1989 over half the country claimed to have been part of the pre 1989 opposition to the communist regime. And the historian László Deme points out that a poll taken in 1988 indicated that over 50% of Hungarians in Budapest viewed the 1956 Revolution as a counter-revolution, in stark contrast to mass participation one year later at the funeral.<sup>[57]</sup>

Very few Hungarians would challenge the judgment of the Hungarian people made explicit by Nagy's funeral on June 16, 1989. The demand for proper burial, justice, and sovereignty created a moral imperative that infused the establishment of the Republic on October 23, 1989. In this light, the filmic depiction of the next generation paying tribute to Nagy found in the Mészáros film confirms this interpretation. It is what precedes this final scene, however, that reveal the lines of contestation over Nagy's symbolic status. The film plays to both the first level of analysis and a second level that stimulates discourse and conjures selected traces from the past.

Mészáros constructs her Nagy character as a social democrat perhaps accounting for a script in which his last words condemn his executioners as opposed to his statement regarding his faith in the international working class.<sup>[58]</sup> The script is informed by Nagy's diary, his daughter Erszébet Nagy's memories, and documents. The historian János Rainer, who acted as the consultant on the film, asserts that Nagy saw the Soviet dominated worker's movement as being corrupt and having no meaning, but remained a communist placing his trust in the integrity of the international working class.<sup>[59]</sup> Equally disturbing to the historical record is her portrayal of Nagy as a man abandoned by his friends. This assertion has been challenged not only by historians, but members of the families whose loved ones were part of Nagy's inner circle. Pal Maléter, Defense Minister, and József Szilágyi, Secretariat in the Nagy government were executed on the same day as Nagy. In a letter to Mészáros published in the daily newspaper *Népszabadság* the families complain that these were the people who remained faithful to Nagy and through their shared ordeal "belonged to each other." According to them the selective portrayal of Nagy with its assertion that he was betrayed by those faithful to him makes the story unbelievable.<sup>[60]</sup>

<sup>[57]</sup> See Mészáros in *Beszelo* online (November, 2006); and László Deme, "Liberal Nationalism in Hungary, 1988-1990," *East European Quarterly*, 32, 1 (Spring, 1998): 63-64. It should be noted that fear could have been a factor in the poll. For example, in 1988 the police forcefully suppressed commemorations and demonstrations staged on June 16, 1988.

<sup>[58]</sup> In her interview in *Beszelo* she asserts that his transformation to a social democrat took place after his return from the Soviet Union at the end of World War II.

<sup>[59]</sup> Rainer, *Nagy Imre*, 431. Interestingly, Rainer asserted, in regard to the historical inaccuracies found in the film, that the film was a dramatic rather than an historical accounting of Imre Nagy.

<sup>[60]</sup> Nyílt level Mészáros Mártának (letter to Mártá Mészáros) *Népszabadság*, January 25, 2005 and György Litván, *Népszabadság*, June 16, 2005, p. 5.



This is not the first time that a film has stimulated controversy regarding the memory of Nagy. A 1996 television documentary based on János M. Rainer's two volume biography of Nagy resulted in a lawsuit brought by Erszébet Nagy to stop the program from being broadcast. She felt that parts of the film might harm the memory of Imre Nagy. The lawsuit was ultimately dropped, as the court declared that Rainer had not damaged the memory or memorial of Nagy and had lawfully exercised his freedom of speech. The decision resulted in the documentary being shown on television.<sup>[61]</sup>

Perhaps what was problematic for Erszébet Nagy was that in the course of the documentary, the film portrays her father as a loyal member of the communist party, surviving the Stalin years in Moscow as well as the Rákosi years in Hungary, in addition to his defiance of the party on several occasions. In this portrayal, Nagy's patriotism is not questioned, but the film resonates, in part, to claims by the Socialist Party that Nagy belongs to them.

The Mészáros film presents the republican spirit embodied by one man, Imre Nagy. Her story ignores the complications presented by the context of the Imre Nagy group and Nagy's less savory past. A presentation of Nagy as a contested figure would break with the reified version of the embodiment of the republican spirit revealed at his funeral in 1989. This type of revision seems reminiscent to that described by Maurice Halbwachs. The multiple uses and argumentation over Nagy and 1956 by political parties may in fact make Nagy less accessible to the Hungarian people more interested in economy than historical detail that seems unconnected to present day contingencies.<sup>[62]</sup>

Focusing on the struggle of one man and his family as he struggles with his fate may be much more compelling, in spite of historical inaccuracies. Hence, the memory of Nagy that is accepted by the next generation could be the one shaped more by popular media, rather than by politicized history or historical scholarship. According to Mészáros, although Magyar Televízió has not purchased the film, over 150,000 Hungarians have seen her film in the theater.

<sup>[61]</sup> "Megszüntették az eljárást a Nagy Imre-film története ellen (The lawsuit has been dropped against the historian of the movie), *Népszabadság*, July 9, 1996, 5. The film begins with Nagy's exhumation at Plot 301 and continues with his funeral, at this point the film reviews Nagy's life ending with death row and his place of execution. Róbert Baló, János M. Rainer, Nagy Imre élete és halhatatlansága (Imre Nagy's life and immortality), Magyartelevízió, 1996.

<sup>[62]</sup> The historian György Litván observes that there remains a certain nostalgia for Nagy's nemesis, János Kádár. *Népszabadság*, June 16, 2005. Perhaps part of the nostalgia for Kádár can be explained by the ferocious problems that continue to plague the economy, leading those disenfranchised from the market economy

The practice and tradition of *kegyelet* that infuse the patriotism of Nagy address issues of morality [underscoring by the sociologist János Kiss earlier in this paper] and the spirit of the collective conscience made manifest at the funeral. On the other hand there is a conscious attempt to seal off the commemoration as demonstrated by the political infighting over the meaning of 1956 that has characterized politics in Hungary since the establishment of the Republic, revealing a conflict over what the republican traditions in Hungary are. Mészáros claims that it is the political use of Imre Nagy by right and left wing factions that underlie historical distortion of his character. As was discussed earlier, Nagy can be problematic to both the left and right wing factions. She claims that when she approached the former FIDESZ secretary Attila Várhegyi to discuss her film project she was told, “Nagy is not our hero.” And when she approached the Socialists about her project they were not enthusiastic.<sup>[63]</sup>

Financial support outside of Hungary from Poland and Slovakia are what made the film possible. In this light, she claims we have to tell the truth [about Nagy] in a popular language.<sup>[64]</sup>

The lack of enthusiasm for the movie by the two largest parties in Hungary can in part be explained by their desire to control the portrayal of Imre Nagy and the 1956 Revolution, reflective of problems raised by Deleuze regarding “zones of indetermination and experimentations.” For example, at the funeral of Nagy, Victor Orbán representing FIDESZ, accepted Nagy as a signifier of the republican spirit and blamed the communist party, including the reformers within the party who were present at the funeral explaining that, “the bankrupt state that has been placed upon our shoulders is a result of the suppression of our revolution...we cannot understand that those who were eager to slander the revolution have suddenly changed into great supporters of Imre Nagy...[rushing] to touch the coffins as if they were charms of good luck.”<sup>[65]</sup>

<sup>[63]</sup> FIDESZ is a center right wing party led by Victor Orbán. Interestingly, he delivered one of the more stirring speeches at the funeral of Imre Nagy. The Socialist Party was formed by the reform faction within the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. They continue to link themselves to Nagy, but with caveats related to their less savory past. See Benziger, “Imre Nagy Martyr of the Nation,” *East European Quarterly*, 36, 2 (June, 2002).

<sup>[64]</sup> See Beszelő on line (November, 2004) and Lajos Pogonyi, *Hamis, torz és elfogult?* (Fate, distorted and biased?) *Népszabadság*, January 25, 2005.

<sup>[65]</sup> Henry Kamm, “The Funeral of Imre Nagy,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1989, p. 6.

However, in 1998 when FIDESZ came to power as the dominant party in a right center coalition, a concerted effort was made to legitimate a past that, in part, legitimized the anti-bolshevist government of Miklós Horthy, 1920-1944 and the short lived Republic that followed the ending of the war.<sup>[66]</sup> In this light, the communist role in the 1956 Revolution needed to be subdued.

On the other hand, the more complicated story of Nagy's transformation from a communist not interested in political pluralism to his commitment to the Hungarian republican spirit is a story that fortifies the Socialist platform, as many members were at one time members of the Communist Party. For example, George Lukács who joined Nagy's cabinet, saw Nagy as an unremarkable politician without a clue and without a vision, and yet, as someone who stepped up in the heat of the moment and contributed to the nation.<sup>[67]</sup> During the introduction of a bill that made Imre Nagy a martyr of the nation Imre Szekeres, a member of the Socialist Party, likened this transformation to that of Paul.<sup>[68]</sup>

#### IV

The peculiar ritual of the funeral is intimately connected to *remorse* both for action and inaction taken during the Revolution and after. Orbán's critique at the funeral spoke volumes about both the regime that had been directly responsible for putting Nagy to death and those within the reform faction that had helped sustain the system. Nagy's execution was well publicized and designed to shock, affirming that no one was immune from the power of the State.<sup>[69]</sup> This had a chilling effect on Hungarians with memories of the Rákosi terror still fresh in their minds. The government had promised at the time of Rajk's funeral that there would be no return to this type of repression.<sup>[70]</sup> This fear gave rise to a silence we have already discussed. Imre Mécs referred to remorse at the funeral when he asked Hungarians to examine their consciences and reflect on the passive acceptance of the regime by many, in addition to those who betrayed the Hungarian people [Kádár's counter-revolution].<sup>[71]</sup>

<sup>[66]</sup> Miklós Horthy and his alliance with the Axis powers comes with its own baggage. After World War II much of Hungary lay in ruins, hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians had been killed in bloody battles at the Don, in Budapest, and in POW camps. Over 550,000 Jews were murdered between 1941 and 1945. For example see: Péter Gosztonyi, *A Magyar Honvédség a második világháborúban* (The Hungarian Army During World War II) (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1995), Tamás Stark, *Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust and after the Second World War, 1939-1949, A Statistical Review* (Boulder, 2000), and Benziger, "The Trial of László Bárdossy: The Second World War and factional Politics in Contemporary Hungary," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 3 (July, 2005).

<sup>[67]</sup> Kardarkay, *George Lukács, Life, Thought and Politics*, 427-429 and Judith Marcus and Zoltán Tar, *George Lukács: Theory, Culture and Politics* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1989) 140.

<sup>[68]</sup> Az Országgyűlés: tavaszi ülészakának 41. Ülésnapja 1996, Június 3-án, 21200.

<sup>[69]</sup> The full page story was placed on the third page of *Népszabadság*, *Magyar Nemzet*, and *Népszava* June 17, 1958. See also Grzegorz Ekiert, *The State Against Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 90.

<sup>[70]</sup> Lukács was part of the committee in charge of Rajk's reburial. He resigned from Nagy's cabinet on October 30, 1956 claiming that he was disappointed that Stalinists remained in the framework of the multi party government being formed, but according to Kardarkay could very well have been tipped off that Moscow was planning to rid itself of Nagy. Kardarkay, *George Lukács*, 429-480.

<sup>[71]</sup> *Magyar Nemzet*, June 17, 1989.

For many it is preferable to seal off the commemoration and continue in the present without its ramifications. But in the highly politicized debates regarding the memory of 1956 and symbolic importance of Nagy this is impossible. For example, the former FIDESZ chairman, Zoltán Pokorni, resigned after it was revealed that his father had collaborated with the Kádár government after the Revolution.<sup>[72]</sup> The peculiar ritual of Nagy's funeral strengthens and reaffirms those who fought in the War of Independence and were active members of the opposition, along with the many who were silent but in accord with the goals of the Revolution.<sup>[73]</sup> But it does not necessarily act to create solidarity within the polity as it exists now.

Time is often a critical factor in the evaluation and memorialization of heroes. Abraham Lincoln's political acumen and abilities were highly contested by his contemporaries. As the historian Barry Schwartz shows it was only in the next generation that controversy surrounding Lincoln's abilities gave way to his reified status that rivaled and ultimately surpassed that of George Washington.<sup>[74]</sup> This was in part because of a long tradition of Republicanism going back to Washington. In the case of Martin Luther King, his heroic memory began almost as soon as the nation was made aware of his death. Imre Nagy is different in this regard. Unlike Lincoln or Martin Luther King, Nagy was unable to see his task through. Though Lincoln and King were cut down before they could fulfill their respective missions, they had accomplished much before being assassinated.

Nagy lived to see the arrested development of a Republic and was then executed. Having never recanted the republican goals of the Revolution, Nagy was recast as a romantic hero akin to those of 1848. He died knowing the lie because it was a violation of the law that no procedural republic would allow. This is in stark contrast to the Bukharin-like character portrayed by Arthur Koestler in *Darkness at Noon*, in which Rubashov, a victim of a Stalinist-like show trial, *adjures* to the State and its lack of procedure, and though innocent, confesses and is executed.<sup>[75]</sup> As the historian Stephen E. Cohen asserts, Koestler's portrayal distorts the memory of Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, who, though confessing under duress put up a spirited defense at his trial against Stalin and his supporters. Unlike Nagy however, Bukharin remained faithful to the socialist republic, albeit in distress.<sup>[76]</sup> Koestler seems prescient however when writing about his character Rubashov, as he seemingly prefaced the fate of László Rajk. Rajk had been led to believe that he would be rehabilitated after confessing to crimes against the State. The godfather of his child János Kádár assured him that though the Party knew of his innocence he needed to make the supreme sacrifice for the party. We can dramatically separate Rajk from Nagy, as Rajk remained a believer in the Party.<sup>[77]</sup>

<sup>[72]</sup> *Magyar Hirlap*, July 4, 2002. FIDESZ had earlier in the spring of 2002 revealed that the newly elected Prime Minister, Péter Medgyessy, had been a member of the Hungarian secret service during the 1970's.

<sup>[73]</sup> The First Act of Parliament declares the 1956 Revolution a war of Independence.

<sup>[74]</sup> Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 57-58, 64-65, 304. See also Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies," 129.

<sup>[75]</sup> Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, translated by Daphne Hardy (New York: The Macmillan and Co., 1945) 234, 238-239, 251.

<sup>[76]</sup> Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 305-307, 372-380

<sup>[77]</sup> George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948-1954* (New York: Praeger, 1987) 47-48. This chilling lack of coincidence was not unnoticed by Lukacs and Nagy.

Ideal typically, the martyrdom of Nagy presents a further distinction noted in 1983 by Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller. Nagy unlike Bukharin and Rajk sought to transcend Bolshevism and restore both an emancipating and procedural sense to the socialist project. He died outside the Party, even if he sought a coalition between Party faithful and both Western Marxists and socialist planners.

Beyond the Durkheim and then Halbwachs effort to make implicit the movement of liberal and social democratic republicanism at work within the French collective conscience since 1789, the Hungarian case reveals oscillating movements of republican and authoritarian definitions of social order. Within this contrast of movements, a social republic emerged with a commitment egalitarian opportunity, redistributive justice and social welfare. The legacy of Nagy has contributed to the attempt to compliment social republic practices with procedural republic practices of due process of the rule of law, and the active participation of the “citizens” who are the source of the Republic.<sup>[78]</sup>

Discussion of Nagy’s memory in public was forbidden by the State for thirty-one years. Unlike the United States the Republican spirit of 1848 had had little opportunity to prove itself. The tradition of Republicanism exists in commemorations, poems, and song that celebrate the martyrs of the nation. The piacular rites of the 1989 funeral reawakened these traditions, but they existed at that point in the mind rather than in actual practice. In this sense Nagy remains critical to the present as an *emergent signifier*, as he must be confronted in any discussion of 1956 and the meaning of republican tradition in Hungary.

The Mészáros film provides a narrative that strongly resonates with the first level of analysis discussed earlier by its portrayal of Nagy as a blood sacrifice, allowing the viewer to reflect on a discourse bounded by the institution of *kegyeleti* ritual fused to an intense national spirit. At the same time her portrayal of Nagy as *ecce homo* provides the viewer with a second level of ideas and images, or souvenirs that provoke discourse and lead to the third level of meaning -- the more complicated political narratives utilizing Nagy that are informed positively or negatively by his image. At the end of the Mészáros film two young women bring flowers to the grave of Imre Nagy, recognizing Nagy and in this sense atoning for wrongs inflicted upon him. Sealing off trauma in a way that recognizes the significance of the past and underscoring the promise of the next generation as it takes its place in the political arena.

## V

Piacular subjectivity can be understood individually or inter-subjectively as atonement for guilt which we share in; but beyond as a collective conscience of ourselves as a community. This is a collective conscience where the past and future converge, where the dead are addressed as well as future generations. The relation of narrative to subjectivity involves a moving toward subject positions, as well as an appreciating the extent to which subject positions fulfill their promises.

Piacular subjectivity involves acts of repentance in atoning for some great sin. “There is no atonement other than repentance.”<sup>[79]</sup>

<sup>[78]</sup> Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller, *Hungary 1956 Revisited*, 118-121.

<sup>[79]</sup> Auguste Sabatier, “La doctrine de l’expiation et son evolution historique,” Paris: 1903.

Piacular practices go beyond remorse, contrition and a solemn earnestness. They involve the casting off of an affliction of the soul, a dispelling of nightmares, and a yearning for deliverance from a guilty conscience over the death of innocent victims, symbolized here by Nagy. And to an extent, the funeral of Nagy augurs the reincarnation of the Hungary's soul as a republican conscience.

Dominick LaCapra claims that the generalizations found in competing narratives pose a danger in the ability of a society to “come to terms with the past.”<sup>[80]</sup> Societies that have experienced trauma and violence are often thought to require a re-birthing in order to come to terms with what has happened-to face its truth and “work through it.” LaCapra has repeatedly emphasized how the psychoanalytical concept of “working through” is essential to any adequate understanding and response to trauma.<sup>[81]</sup> In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama / Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Walter Benjamin talks of chasing spirits back into their bodies, and redeeming them through law. In discussing these German “mourning plays” (*Trauerspiels*), Gillian Rose recalls the burial of the Athenian general Phocion, unjustly executed and slandered. His wife – determined to mourn his death and provide proper burial rites beyond the city walls of Athens – ate his ashes, giving them a proper burial, incarnating him. Rites of mourning extend into hope for the future, for new attachments and for re-engagement with life.<sup>[82]</sup> LaCapra points us to a third option. This is more self questioning meta-narrative--one which helps us to gain critical distance from the trauma and collective effervescence associated with it so that we can assume responsibility in dealing with it.<sup>[83]</sup>

The Nagy memorials ultimately refer to how we participate in the tragedy of Nagy's execution. It is in the tradition of the lamentation and spectacle of the Central European mourning play that Benjamin critically analyzed in the middle 1920's. This is a tradition that Benjamin saw as dissolving the tragic into spectacle.<sup>[85]</sup>

88

<sup>[81]</sup> See: *The Holocaust Historians: Theory and Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) and Revisiting the Historian's Debate: Mourning and Genocide,” *History and Memory*, 80-82.

<sup>[82]</sup> Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>[83]</sup> Interview with Professor Dominick LaCapra. Shoah Resource Center, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, June 9, 1998, [http://yad-vashem.org.il/odot\\_pdt](http://yad-vashem.org.il/odot_pdt).

<sup>[85]</sup> See: Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung der deutschen Trauerspiel*), Trans., J. Osborne (London: Verso, 1988) and *Understanding Brecht* (*Versuche über Brecht*), Trans., S. Mitchell (London: New Left Books, 1973).

Beyond the mourning, Benjamin argues, can we transcend the spectacle of shared suffering, shared melancholy, and shared atonement? Can we do so in a meaningful and knowing participation in the tragic, not as a closed drama based on myth, oracular mystery, martyrdom or the un-interred corpse? Can we do so as an incomplete and unfolding drama characterized not by a sense of redemptive finality, but by an ongoing redemptive critique – with a collective conscience that history might have been different and can be different?

Narratives enable us to grapple with the ambiguity, the diversity, the discontinuity and the mystery that comes with our being in the world, and with the collective memory that comes with being. To an extent, the collective representations involved in the reconstruction of knowledge within a narrative may reveal an immanent propositional content of the way we negotiate our world and our humanity. Narrative attempts to provide closure to some sense of our being in the world. In so doing, narratives foreshadow, backshadow, and side shadow. As readers [or viewers], we need to guard against illusory or mythic unifying narratives.

The dead refuse to go away. They stir up dread and haunting - - until their promise is fulfilled and their narrative is completed, “until their stories register.”<sup>[86]</sup> Events, images, memories, and explanations are conjured up diremptively. There is both a collective forgetting in overcoming trauma by confining it to oblivion<sup>[87]</sup>; and there is a collective remembering.

We have focused on meta-narratives conjuring up a haunting narrative. These meta-narratives - - caused the reappearance of what has disappeared - -what has been repressed, reinterpreted and blocked from memory. The meta-narratives that are The Nagy Memorials – both the funeral and the film – provide us with examples of contested meaning of traumatic collective experience. That contested meaning can involve (1) a mix of justification/legitimation/accounting/ideology, (2) colonized nostalgia; (3) redemptive myth; and (4) transfigurative performance. The performance involves re-interring a spectral presence, representing its meaning, re-enacting its pathos, and re-engaging piacular participation in ritual.

<sup>[86]</sup> Charles Lemert. *Durkheim's Ghosts: Cultural Logics and Social Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 6.

<sup>[87]</sup> Marc Auge. *Oblivion*. Trans. M. de Jager. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

In these contested meta-narratives we see levels of function/purpose.

- commemoration ceremony
- piacular atonement ritual
- myth
  - (i) sacrificial
  - (ii) redemptive
  - (iii) foundational
  - (iv) illusory
  
- ideological reconstruction  
and the immanent critique of  
its propositional content/logic.

In the conscience/consciousness engaged by the narratives, there are the levels of material practice in ritual, souvenirs as images, souvenirs as ideals, awareness of repressed memory, yearning and desire.

*Piacular Subjectivity* and *Collective Conscience*, as Charles Lemert notes,<sup>[88]</sup> are ghost concepts that live on, haunting us, refusing to go away, open to revision. Piacular subjectivity as a collective conscience could be understood as the master narrative from which the aforementioned meta-narratives derive. Thus, piacular subjectivity can be understood as the depth level narrative relations of moral conscience shared collectively - - both in terms of a need to recollect and recognize transgressions/sins, and a need to atone for them.

Yet our attempt at narrating the piacular subjectivity involved in the funeral and the film reveal less of a master narrative, and more of a field of traces - - both representational and non-representational images and practices.

What we have re-collected and revealed is a text of yearning and longing for a Hungarian collective identity in the practices and movements of historical groups. That text reveals a great deal of presence of absence, and a field of recombinatory images, ideas and yearnings open to diverse re-assembling.

<sup>[88]</sup> Charles Lemert. *Durkheim's Ghosts: Cultural Logics and Social Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.



In closing, we may also ponder the events of October 23, 2006. Specifically, we may consider the extent to which the peculiar subjectivity studied in the Hungarian context can fragment into an extremism that can be characterized as a baroque subjectivity: the mournful and melancholy evocation of a sense of passion and ecstasy, the assaulting of the senses and the emotions rather than the invocation of resignifying commitments that relate past moments to the present and future ones, as well as to a rebirth. A baroque subjectivity can manifest the weakness of a core collective conscience: marked by the grotesque, the bizarre (*barroco* in Portuguese); and positioned between a melancholic despair and the dizzying, inhabited by ghosts, zombies, and the dead, bleeding both into the past and into the future.<sup>89</sup>

October 23, 2006 was the day in which commemorative rites to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 Revolution disintegrated into a rushing out of all the demons, and into a repetition of a mood of betrayal and abandonment. The government of Socialist (MSzP) Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany caught in lies and hypocrisy placed the biggest wreaths of flowers, while at the same time sought to manipulate extremists in the crowds for its political aims. On the other side, Viktor Orban of the Opposition Conservative (FIDESZ) party refused involvement in the commemorative rites, in promoting his own party's political aims. Neither political bloc acted responsibly to heal the wounds of the 1956 Revolution and the martyrdom of Nagy so Hungary could move on. Path dependent collective action confronting an impasse, rather than path shaping rebirth or reconstitution.

---

<sup>1891</sup> Discussion of "baroque" informed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos: (1) "Three Metaphors for a New Conception of Law: The Frontier, The Baroque and the South," *Law and Society Review* (1995), 29:4; 569-584; and (2) "Nuestra America: Reinventing a Subaltern Paradigm of Recognition and Redistribution," *Theory, Culture and Society* (2001) 18:6, 185-217). Also note the Chilean film-maker living and working in Paris: Raul Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema*, trans. Brian Holmes. Paris: Dis Vior, 2005.

Piacular subjectivity in the case of the Nagy memorials involves both a participation in melancholic reaction to events, as well as in the patterns of yearning. What lurks in the yearning for a redemptive narrative. Piacular subjectivity here can be grasped as *kegyeleti* rites of mourning, expiation, and atonement which involves both a remembering and a forgetting. Central in the case of the Nagy memorials is the un-interred corpse.<sup>90</sup>

Further, there is a talking to the dead, and the sacredness of there example. Collective memory is essential to a group's sense of identity; and how that identity is negotiated with regard to past collective trauma.<sup>[91]</sup> Memory itself is located here within the discourse of those talking about the past. Witnessing collective trauma resists conventional narrative. The meta-narrative of the reburial and the *Mészáros* film involves narrating new foundations-metaphorically re-birthing and re-constituting

What does not exist is any pre-existing or primordial sense of Hungarian collective identity or collective conscience that the likes of Horthy advanced. Nor does there exist any totalizing concept of Hungarian piacular subjectivity in Durkheim's original sense of what a collective conscience is. Rather, the piacular subjectivity experienced as a collective conscience is pluralistically and pragmatically perceived as an arc of subject positions from which we can draw on. This we can do as we interrogate the recollected discourse of memory, as we interpolate the haunting voices calling on us to fulfill the promises of their commitments. These claims haunt us not just with memory, but also with the possibility of uncanny actualization.

---

<sup>[90]</sup> Dominick LaCapra, "Revisiting the Historian's Debate: Mourning and Genocide," *History and Memory*, 80.

<sup>91</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Trans. K. Blarney (Cambridge: MIT Press. 1987). First published in France, 1975.