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Photographic origins of postmemory in Tibor Fischer's *Under the Frog*

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Abstract Tibor Fischer's novel, *Under the Frog* (1992), as I shall argue, could be conceived as a narrative expansion of collective memory, or rather postmemory (Hirsch), partly triggered by famous press photos. The novel exists in a productive interrelatedness with the Western European myth also inspired by these photographs about the Hungarian revolution of 1956. The book added life to the dead photos which, although part of an interpretation, were only skeletons of the story of 1956. The fictional recontextualization of scenes and figures experienced as two-dimensional images creates a valid narrative of the events of 1956 that verifies our notions and images we construct mentally about this historical moment. This fictional narrative engages in a dialogue with the author's posterior knowledge about the scenes and characters previously encountered in the widespread Western press photos of the Revolution. My thesis that crucial scenes in the novel can be regarded as textual evocations of wellknown photos about the events leads to interesting questions about *Under the Frog*. These are related to what is the cultural background of the novel's treatment of the representations of the Revolution, what new meanings are added to the photos by the book and how Western discourses, represented by the press photos and the novel, modify Hungarian cultural memory of the 1956 Revolution.

Keywords Western press photos of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 · Postmemory of Hirsch · Ekphrasis · British novels about Hungary · Fictionality in images · The British picture of the 1956 revolution · Ricoeurian mimetic circles · Photo of Vagn Hansen about Erika Szeles

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It is a literary commonplace that historical novels, however vividly they portray a period, can never entirely grasp lived reality. On the pages of *Ivanhoe*, Walter Scott, the father of the historical novel, formulates the idea that "fiction itself can hardly reach the dark reality of the horrors of the period" (Scott 1998, p. 192). After the postmodern turn, such a statement poses many doubts. Firstly, there can hardly be any consensus as to the nature of reality or social reality. Secondly, the secondary nature of fiction has changed as fictionality gained a defining role in constructions of reality. The "mutual implicativeness" of literary discourse and historical discourse is widely studied in Hayden White's theoretical *oeuvre* (White 1999, p. ix). Thirdly, it seems that postmodern historical novel writers have a powerful representational medium at their disposal, namely photography.

It has been suggested that the documentary value of photography lies within its mechanical production. The fact that photos are created without the creative intervention of humans lends it the hypothetical power of evidence. Photos are presumed to be in indexical relation to their objects. As Judith Keilbach argues, a photo affects us like a phenomenon in nature, "as a sign which refers to the object it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object" (Keilbach 2009, p. 55). As Roland Barthes says, "Photography's noeme is precisely *that-has-been*" (Barthes 1981, pp. 99–100). Both citations support the suggestion that in its supposedly direct and unmediated way, a photo creates the illusion of historical reality.

However, the evidentiary value of photography is, in fact, highly questionable. As Áron Kibédi Varga claims, photography is not another way of telling a tale, but rather a way of evoking it (cited in Blatt 2009, p. 118). In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes also suggested that the indexical illusion created by photography is overridden by the viewer's intention (Barthes 1981, p. 27). Therefore, being devoid of a title or a caption—a narrative which provides it with textual context—a photo necessarily suffocates in meaninglessness or polysemy. Photos trigger stories which are already narrative constructions of historical reality. Thus, photography forms a whole together with the narrative that contextualizes it. Moreover, photos are made, sorted, and structured into images directly in order to fit into certain narratives or even ideologies (Hirsch 1997, p. 96). Consequently, photos are far from being unmediated or documentary representations of a past moment. They are carriers of versions of reality; they are narratives, personal or collective memory discourses. So, photos rather create than mirror versions of reality. This is also supported by Susan Sontag's claim that for modern consciousness to perceive an event as real, photos are necessary: they define and create reality for us (Sontag 2005, p. 6).

Following the line of thought that, since its invention, photography plays an essential role in creating historical reality, it could be claimed that historical novels about those times from where photos are available arguably rely on them in their portrayal of past worlds. Maintaining the idea that, in perception, photos are accompanied by a requisite narration, it seems that historical novels which rely on the available photos of a historical event create narrative out of narrative, fiction out of fiction. One such historical novel is Tibor Fischer's *Under the Frog* (1992). In this essay, I argue that the portrayal of historical reality in this novel is partly inspired by press photos that had a significant role in creating the myth, the identity and the collective memory of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Everyday memory

triggered by a personal photo requires intricately-patterned artistic structure to support its preservation and communication according to Mark Prince (2012, p. 9). This is also true of collective memory evoked by press photos. Photography necessarily triggers narration both in cases of personal memory and also in cases of collective historical narrative. Carrying the parallel further, it can be suggested that a novel about a historical event reveals processes in perceiving, evaluating and narrating stories of photos very similar to the processes of individual photo perception. I examine what those gestures are parallel to personal memory narratives, which the author of *Under the Frog* does by responding to questions posed by historical photos.

My fundamental claim is that *Under the Frog* employs the technique of depicting the historical background of its plot based on the myth of the Revolution of 1956 which was partially created by press photos, largely published in Western-European papers. Although press photos may be conceived as reference points in the novel, they are far from being the only source of collective memory concerning the 1956 Revolution. The role of other media such as radio, television, and books should be emphasized. Fischer primarily highlights the influence of personal accounts and his own experiences in Hungary at the end of the 1980s (Bayer 1997). Creation of historical background therefore seems to rely on multiple sources. However, press photos arguably have a strong influence also in some of the other sources. Typically, books and television documentaries contain photographic illustrations. Family stories, belonging to communicative memory conceptualized by Assman (1995, p. 127), are integral parts of constructed narration which can later be attached to photos. Moreover, the fact that Fischer worked in Hungary as a journalist might easily have introduced him to widespread Western press images.

Some of the photos about the historical events get a significant role in the novel to the extent that the narration at some points may be considered as a caption under the photos. It is not by chance that three different editions of the novel displayed three different contemporary press photos about events of the Revolution (Fig. 7). The story of the novel can be seen as an alternative narrative, a personal version of the Hungarian Revolution, or the picture of the Hungarian Revolution familiar to the average educated European reader. In recycling, re-contextualizing and giving new meanings to some of the myth-making photos of the 1956 Revolution, Tibor Fischer's novel participates in creating a collective memory of the Hungarian Revolution. Photos influence collective memory which influences the creation of the historical *tableau* in *Under the Frog*. The novel in turn influences the narratives connected to the pictures, resulting in a changed collective memory, all engaged in a cycle. This cycle, which is analogous to Paul Ricour's threefold mimesis, poses several questions. Firstly, at what points can the direct impact of the press photos be identified in the text. Secondly, what are the exact new meanings given by the novel to the identity of the Revolution. Thirdly, if the first claim about some of Fischer's narration conceived as evocation of widespread press photos is accepted, what is the original picture of the Revolution, created by the photos that the novel builds upon. Speaking about the novel of a British writer who is of Hungarian origin, the question also arises whether this original picture is akin to the Western or rather to the Hungarian renderings of the story of 1956.

Fig. 1 Youngsters dancing on the remains of the Stalin Monument, entitled 'The Boot Square', the photo was made by Dr. Miklós Balás (with the permission of HUNGART ©). *Source* Online, retrieved June 1, 2015 from: http://www.rev.hu/fotodb/f?p=110:3:407630764372052::NO::P3_PHOTO_ID:630

Postmemory through photo perception

The generally-increasing presence of photography in fiction referred to by Horkotte and Pedri (2) can be applied to historical novels about modern times. In its treatment of the historical background, Tibor Fischer's novel is also endowed with a certain photographic quality. Reading about iconic moments and scenarios of the 1956 events, one has the impression that one has already seen the depicted scenes somewhere or is currently seeing them. Events of political history appear in the novel as if viewed from a marginal position. Gyuri, the focalizer, is a typical observer narrator who depicts the emblematic historical scenes rather than actively participating in them. This spectator gesture enriches many scenes with attitudes of photo perception.

A symbolic moment of the Revolution is the collective effort to topple the Stalin statue. It is documented in many photographic and motion picture images as well as in communicative memory accounts. The youth and enthusiasm of people involved often appear in photos, one example can be seen in Fig. 1. Youth and excitement can also be felt in the description of the novel: "it was like that moment of schoolboy exuberance when the teacher was going to walk in and curtail the pranks" (208).[1] This sentence can reflect on the atmosphere created by the scenes represented in many photos' especially in this one: young rebels, probably schoolboys and college students revel on top of a toppled tyrant figure that has been an unquestionable authority so far. Remarkably, the narrator enriches his description with a typical retroactive gesture of those watching a photo of a past event while being aware of the forthcoming fate of the characters in the picture. We tend to disapprove of the

[1] All quotations from the novel are from the following edition: Tibor Fischer. *Under the Frog*. (2002). Ld: Vintage.

fact that characters in the photo are ignorant of what would happen later; which we, from the present, are well aware of (Bernstein 1994, p. 16). The narrator includes in his description of this symbolic event the knowledge that the 'pranks' of the Revolution will soon be curtailed by the oppressing Soviet army. In a reader who is aware of at least some visual images of the Revolution, this gesture evokes the impression of watching a frozen moment of history in the form of a photo. The text then creates narration about the photo defined-collective memory image (one possible example may be Fig. 1) as if those boys in the photo could or should have been aware of their future as well.

This retroactive re-evaluation of the meanings of photos connected to the 1956 Revolution appears in *Under the Frog*. Considering the fact that Tibor Fischer belongs to the second generation of Hungarian emigrants of 1956, the whole narrative of the novel may be considered as a Hirschian postmemory. In the words of Marianne Hirsch, "postmemory describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up" (Hirsch 2014). The writer's relationship to photos, some of which appear in ekphrastic form in the book, is that of a second generation viewer of a photo displaying events in which he was not personally involved (Keilbach 2009, p. 54).

According to Anette Kuhn, photos are prompts to verbal performances of memory (Kuhn 2007, p. 3). In case there is no direct memory to the image, only a parental or collective memory, the viewer engages in 'postmemory work'. The viewer thus creates a narration in connection to the picture which has an important meaning for him, about his origins immediately preceding his own arrival in the world (Kuhn 2007, p. 7). Doing this 'postmemory work' in the form of art is not entirely unique. Mark Prince quotes Laura Horelli's photographic works in which she can do her 'griefwork', connected to her troubled past, as if in quotation marks, in the context of artwork (Prince 2012, p. 9). Tibor Fischer's *Under the Frog* is interpreted in the same way.

Techniques in creating historical background out of photos

The process of photo perception includes a direct denotation of the referent followed by an artistic framing (Prince 2012, p. 8). Anette Kuhn observed the work of ordinary photography in the production of memory. She claims that in photo-bound memory work, which she considers an active reconstruction of the past, the first step is to consider the characters in the photo and then imagine taking their position yourself (Kuhn 2007, p. 2). In case of family photos, this process is even more emphatic. In *Under the Frog*, this 'postmemory work' element is strengthened by the name of the protagonist, Gyuri Fischer and the biographical data that Tibor Fischer's parents lived through the Hungarian Revolution as basketball players. In making his protagonist participate in events, visit scenes that have become emblematic of the Revolution partly due to press photos, represented by press photos, the writer himself goes through an imaginary adventure in the past. The way

he engages in participating in the reception of these photos, or rather phototexts (i.e. photos together with their specific culturally-associated meanings) basically defines his formulation of a new text, his novel. Adopting Götz Wienold's phraseology, a writer's active participation in perceiving the "initiant text", which, in this case, I suppose to be the myth-making press photos, determines his production of the "resultant text" (Wienold 1981, p. 100), the book. Thus, I claim that the author's assumptions about the context of the photos determine the creation of the characters, which throughout the novel increasingly resemble images of the Revolution which were present in contemporary Western-European media.

In late October 1956, at the news of the break in the Communist side, photojournalists rushed into Hungary from all over Western Europe. At the beginning of November, photos of the Revolution made the front-page covers of West-German, British, Swedish, French, Danish and American papers. Some of the most well-known photographers are Erich Lessing, Jack Esten, Michael Rougier, Vagn Hansen and John Sadovy. Their photographs were hardly known in Hungary before 1989. The only exception is John Sadovy, whose pictures about the brutal lynching at Köztársaság square helped the justification of counter-revolution interpretation propagated by the Kádár regime in Hungary for more than 30 years (Jalsowszky 2008).

Out of the huge number of photos taken and appearing at that time only a few reached a symbolic status, standing for the whole Revolution. The world-famous

Fig. 2 Erika Szeles with a machine-gun in Budapest, October 1956, the photo was made by Vagn Hansen Danish photojournalist, this image was on the cover of 13th November 1956 issue of *Billed Bladet* (with the permission of HUNGART © and the heirs and assigns of Vagn Hansen). *Source* Online, retrieved June 1, 2015 from: http://12160.info/photo/erika-szeles-1-15-year-old-hungarian-resistance-against-the

photo of the young girl with a machine-gun (Fig. 2) is one of them. It was taken by the Danish photographer Vagn Hansen and put on cover of Billed Bladet, 13th November 1956. This youngish girl with a determination in her eyes became the icon of the heroic Hungarian Revolution. This photo prompted the most memorable recycling of an emblematic press photo of the 1956 Revolution which is embodied in the creation of the character of Jadwiga. In the forthcoming ekphrasis of the photo, the text explicitly states that photojournalists took the picture of Jadwiga holding a machine-gun which backs the argument of the part being an ekphrasis. The whole figure of Jadwiga can be conceived as a fictitious contextualization of this picture in the form of an extended imagination play with the perception of this photo. The ekphrasis of the exact moment of the production of this picture reveals an obsessive endeavour to find answers posed by the picture such as to how she could obtain the Russian military coat or what her boyfriend's opinion about the capturing of the photo could have been:

> …far down the Üllői út by some scenic rubble, Gyuri found Jadwiga having her picture taken by a couple of Western photographers. They seemed to have a fondness for attractive women with weapons. Gyuri didn't like this at all. Jadwiga was merely handing out one of her polite smiles, her toothy calling card, but they weren't to know that. Gyuri came up to glower at the photographers but they had already finished and were on the move to their next step. (…) Jadwiga was wearing her quilted Soviet jacket, the pelt of a dead Soviet soldier, Gyuri thought bleakly. He had taken weapons from the dead internationalists, but weapons were somehow faithless, they didn't belong to anyone, they were just carried. Jadwiga's blue jacket, approximately a third of her small wardrobe had got ripped to shreds on the 26th as they were crawling along under Soviet fire at the Corvin. The noise of the tanks, more than anything else, had been terrifying. It was no more dangerous than being shot at by infantry but it sounded more dangerous. When Jankó fired the anti-tank gun in reply, Gyuri had believed he was going to die of fear. (…) Jadwiga was only upset by her jacket failing her in combat conditions, and tattering during her sniping. During one of her shopping expeditions in the lulls to collect ammunition and weapons from inoperative Soviets, she had returned with the tough jacket (233–234).

This is a detailed fictional context to the picture that has become symbolic of the 1956 Revolution. In analogy to this photo, the suggestion that other iconic descriptions in *Under the Frog* may also be related to different press photos arose. Based on the above ekphrasis, I believe that other phototexts are still to be found.

The conception of the fictional frame to this photo happens in a dynamic interplay of similarity and difference. The assumptions about the girl, her personality, her boyfriend, the whole scene and even its prehistory balance between what the author himself can imagine to do and feel in such a situation and what he knows to be a culturally- and historically-different atmosphere of the photo. For instance, the supposed bravery of the girl, Jadwiga, the fact that she is bolder in life and death situations than her boyfriend is perceived as strange and atypical in the narration of *Under the Frog*. This may seem peculiar in both the Hungarian culture

in the 1950s and for a British viewer in the 1990s. However, the narrator also seems to be aware of the cultural difference of the picture's context from his own. This awareness may be manifested in Gyuri's possessive feelings awakening at the sight of his lover being photographed by journalists. It displays a very conservative, male dominant attitude towards the event, even with a tinge of tribal barbarism, I dare say. Because, on other pages of the novel, Jadwiga was demonstrating, fighting and sniping together with countless other males, but in none of these situations was Gyuri's jealousy aroused. So, it must be that he seriously disapproved of photography and nothing else. Gyuri, most probably unlike his author, is portrayed here as a young man in Hungary in the 1950s for whom it does not happen that his girlfriend is photographed on a daily basis by foreign journalists and who is seriously worried by this (for us in the present) simple and insignificant happening. Moreover, the fact that in the political atmosphere in Hungary in the 1950s the photographic documentation of being active in the revolution counted as a potentially-dangerous issue would probably not occur as evident for the reader of the present.

The duality of the photo's perception and the portrayal of the girl's boyfriend who was born into a fictional life as Gyuri Fischer can be understood as an ironic reference to the similarly dual position of the author. Gyuri is portrayed at once from an insider and an outsider point of view. Their names, both being Fischer, and the focalizational aspect of narration, which only reveals Gyuri's inner thoughts, identifies Tibor Fischer with his protagonist very much. However, the explicit ekphrastic moment of using a Western European press photo to depict the Hungarian revolution, where the journalists appear as outsiders to Gyuri and his specific Hungarian culture in the 1950s emphasise rather the outsider and even foreign angle of observation. Furthermore, this point is strengthened by the fact that Tibor Fischer was in a similar situation when, as a correspondent to *The Daily Telegraph*, he worked as a British journalist in Hungary from 1988 to 1990. As a user of press photos as well as family anecdotes, the author is able to show the reader both the position of Gyuri and that of the photojournalists, both the Hungarian and the foreign standpoint: an insider and an outsider at once.

It takes a long path from seeing a photo's reality to grasping its truth, as Judit Keilbach suggests in his essay about Holocaust postmemories triggered by widely-spread photos of the event (Keilbach 2009, p. 59). She argues that there is a visual limit to the concrete depiction of the Holocaust which is the reason that additional contextualisation and captions are necessary. As opposed to the Holocaust, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is extremely well-documented in photography. Each and every moment, scene and character is photographed. However, life behind the flat pictures still eludes, as established by *Camera Lucida*, a seminal study by Roland Barthes (Barthes 1981, p. 64). Consequently, a conscious effort of reconstruction of their truth is also necessary.

The above demonstrated dual perception of a photograph, which oscillates between sameness and difference, demonstrates two different layers of understanding a photo's truth. Julia Adeney Thomas differentiates between two essential modes of photo interpretation (Thomas 2009). On the one hand, photos can be approached viscerally which fulfils the precognitive so-called 'recognition'. On the

other hand, if the viewer's relationship to the photo is rather discursive, cultural and interpretative, 'excavation' happens. Ideally, they complement each other and *Under the Frog* displays signs of both in its treatment of photos.

Recognition involves an act of substitution: the image is substituted with its referent, as seen or imagined by the viewer. Recognition basically sees the picture in its likeness to the viewer's reality (Thomas 2009, p. 158), as if events and persons were really as we experience them through the photo. This is visible in the author's gesture when he takes it for granted that the fundamental meaning of the widely-photographed 1956 events is identical to what seems evident from his standpoint. One description of an often-photographed scene provides an example of recognition. Lynches of AVO (State Security Agency) men are displayed in Western press photos about hanged and humiliated bodies of Communist state policemen: "The AVO man wasn't much good at flying. He came straight down and squandered all his energy on screaming. People didn't cheer this but nor were they bothered. It was about right (219)". There are many circulating photos of this topic. From the viewpoint of a British readership, pictures of John Sadovy or Michael Rougier's photo (Fig. 3) from Life magazine may have some impact on the myth of the Hungarian Revolution. In these pictures, it is indeed obvious that most people do not display radical feelings. There are always some figures that kick or spit at the dead body, but the majority of people stand there motionless, expressionless. It is not obvious, however, what their feelings might have been. Still, Fischer's description

Fig. 3 A lynched AVO man on a Budapest street 1956, the photo was made by Michael Rougier, a photojournalist of *Life* magazine (with the permission of HUNGART ©). *Source* Online, retrieved June 1, 2015 from: http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/hungary-news-photo/50412345

supposes that they all thought that it was morally right. It seems so obvious and true to the atmosphere (and adequate to the spirit) of the 1956 Revolution to suggest this. This assumption entails the experience that today (also in 1992, at the publication of *Under the Frog*), due to wider and wider publicity of the history of 1950s secret police operations, it is well-known to everybody what terrible crimes against humanity were committed by the AVO. Consequently, the idea that the onlookers in such pictures all agreed with lynching the AVO man seems evident in the instinctive process of recognition. But in suggesting this, the author projects his knowledge and belief into the photograph. As Adeney Thomas argues, in recognition, we see what we already knew, we interpret the other through our vision, we interpret past through present and the two mingle (Thomas 2009, p. 158).

As opposed to recognition, excavation of a photo is a much more complex interpretation. It involves reconstruction instead of substitution. In excavation, we see the photo not as a likeness to the represented reality, but as part of a whole, as part of its culturally-coded context. Instead of suggesting that the photo's meaning is obvious, excavation preserves the historical as well as cultural distance between the picture and the viewer (Thomas 2009, p. 159). Excavation is shown in Fischer's ekphrases when the narration is aware of the insuperable otherness of the photo's world. It appears in the description of the famous 1946 inflation in Hungary. This historical event is illustrated by the suggested evocation of the emblematic picture of an elderly man sweeping banknotes on a street surrounded by indifferent onlookers (Fig. 4).

> Elek didn't issue any unseemly lamentations. He simply sat in the armchair, at ease, as if enjoying a day off. He tried to resurrect his fortunes after the war, and more crucially, after the hyper-inflation, which Hungarians proudly pointed out had been the fastest and greatest in economic history. Once the inflation was over, Elek went to the bank where he had deposited millions, emptied his unfrozen account and bought a loaf of bread, hardly getting any change back. The gutters of Budapest had been clogged with discarded banknotes, the fallen leaves of an old order (46).

In apropos of the metaphor of "fallen leaves" for the "discarded banknotes" the famous press photo with the street sweeper (Fig. 4) can be associated as a photographic origin to this part.

In fact, this photo singularly rules the visual representation of the Hungarian hyperinflation of 1946, particularly in English-language accounts. Whenever this event is related, the photo with the street sweeper is displayed (Taylor 2013; Badkar 2011; Toscano 2011). Although personal narratives about the appalling measure of inflation are markedly present in collective memory, it is restricted to Hungarian collective memory. For the British readers, the idea of banknotes associated with fallen leaves is likely to evoke the famous photo. However, other elements of the photo are missing such as the people or the pillar. Therefore, this part cannot be considered as direct ekphrasis, rather a textual evocation of this singular photo which has a marked influence on especially Western European historical imagination of the Hungarian hyperinflation of 1946. Moreover, the text contains some indirect references to cultural memory shaped by the photo with the street sweeper.

Fig. 4 Sweeping the pengő inflation banknotes after the introduction of the forint in August 1946 (with the permission of HUNGART ©). *Source* Online, retrieved June 1, 2015 from: http://mek.oszk.hu/01900/01906/html/index1433.html

The "clogged" "gutters" of Budapest evoke the low part at the edge of the road from where the man is sweeping the piles of banknotes in the photograph. The metaphor of "fallen leaves of an old order" combines associations of the autumn and the end of an era in Hungarian history. The most striking element in the photo is not the fact that banknotes are swept, but the indifferent expression on faces of the onlookers. The detachment of people in the photo evokes the metaphor which lowers the emotional effect of the tragic historical cataclysm of the end Horthy era, which culminated in World War II to the emotional reaction associated with the arrival of autumn. Probably this detachment significantly present in the photo illuminated the fictional description which also shows signs of distance.

The textual evocation of the image displays this distancing attitude to the photo which is typical of excavation. In recognition, to a Western viewer, the object of this photo would at least be sad. In the depicted hyperinflation, Elek loses the reward of a life's work. Still, not only does he fail to protest actively against his misfortune, he and other similarly disadvantaged Hungarians are proud of the greatest inflation of history in quite a perverted manner. It looks particularly odd in the context of the Western work ethos. In this conception of the well-known press photo and its context, the novel's narrative makes it clear that what we face in this episode and in Hungarians in general is incomprehensible. With such an implication, Tibor Fischer's fictional context to the photo also fell into the pitfalls of excavations, namely that if you believe that through reference to our experience, the other cannot

be perceived correctly, you fail to see it (the other). Citing Adeney Thomas, if "we approach photos as embedded in their discursive worlds, we blind ourselves, no longer being able to rely on our eyes" (Thomas 2009, p. 167) and bereave ourselves from being able to draw any conclusions for us with relation to the image. What is diagnosable is only the impossibility of full comprehension.

The notion of excavation in Adeney Thomas's dual photoperceptional paradigm is partly associated with *punctum* theorized by Barthes. The Barthesian *punctum* is a detail on the photo which attracts the attention of the viewer and distresses them (Barthes 1981, p. 40). As Michael Fried suggests in his study about *punctum*, the essential gesture of *punctum* is surprise (Fried 2005, p. 548). One reason for this surprise is cultural historical otherness. This is the *punctum* of historicity which, according to Fried, is "brought out, developed by the inexorable passage of time" (Fried 2005, p. 561). Together with the British–Hungarian culture shock, this type of *punctum* causes the distance between the photos' world and their fictional re-contextualizations in *Under the Frog*. Thus, in the above-discussed photo (Fig. 4), an Adeney Thomasian excavation is prompted by the Barthesian *punctum* created by the most striking part of the photo, namely the indifference of the onlookers. This is the element which "pierces" the viewer "like an arrow" (Barthes 1981, p. 26). However, *punctum* and excavation are far from being identical. *Punctum* is highly idiosyncratic and unpredictable. It stands in opposition to the Barthesian *studium*, a sympathetic interest in the culturally-coded meaning of the photo (Barthes 1981, p. 43). *Studium* is a less complex notion than recognition and excavation because it suggests that the cultural semiosis of the photo is monolithic, whereas, the notions of recognition and excavation emphasize the rip in the cultural and historical decoding of the photo's discourse. Excavation is different from *punctum* in its awareness of the discursively-coded difference between the world of the photo and that of the viewer, which *punctum* only feels. *Punctum* is a very personal reaction to this discursive difference. Recognition is also aware of the difference, but it still stands on the viewer's side, reflecting the viewer's reality when creating a caption under the photo. It is instinctive in the sense that it suggests that the two realities might not be far from each other and constructs the other based on suggestions drawn from their own experiences, as this was shown in the fictional contextualization of the AVO man photo (Fig. 3).

Both instinctive suggestions and interrogating reconstructions are needed as the world is both visceral and discursive, according to Thomas (2009, p. 168). *Under the Frog* uses both recognition and excavation in its creation of a fictional historical background when it evokes the atmosphere of photos about the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In this fictional 1956 narrative, some photos serve as prompts to collective memory formulations. But these photos are already surrounded with a context, or rather more contexts. They are often so overdetermined by the multiplicity of meanings that they become symbolic of something more, often different from their depicted scenes. Through the emblematic photos, both Western Europe and Hungary created their own versions of the Revolution. Due to overuse of these pictures in exhibitions, books, films, and literature about the October 1956 events, our imagination about the Revolution is shaped by them, very much like in the case of Holocaust pictures as suggested by Julia Keilbach (Keilbach 2009,

p. 55). The relationship of the fictional context and the existing cultural memories of these pictures is therefore examined.

The cycle of contexts

As Susan Sontag established, in our modern world, reality is backed by photos. We need photos about an event to perceive it as real (Sontag 2005, p. 6). In addition, it is also ascertained by Roland Barthes that photos do not resemble the original; rather, they resemble an artificial image which creates an imaginary identity for the original (Barthes 1981, p. 100). Consequently, when Fischer creates a narrative background to his historical tale, he necessarily interprets the photos based on the myth of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution existing in his mind. There are captions which form a point of departure to these pictures in the author's consciousness. His work, however, is necessarily going to add to this myth and enrich the original source pictures with the meaning given by *Under the Frog*. Thus, Paul Ricoeur's threefold mimesis is enriched with photography as mediator or rather creator of the prenarrative structure of experience. Consequently, the cycle of representation, which forever returns into itself but which is always enriched with new meanings, includes the visual images of collective memory we share with others in mutual interpretation of the events. Press photos create what people believe to be the meaning of the 1956 Revolution. This meaning underlies the photos when they are used in *Under the Frog*. The novel, however, shifts the original meaning in the re-contextualization of the Ricoeurian Mimesis_2. Then, the photos, having gained new implications, re-enter the world of the readers to come into life there as parts of the story of the 1956 Revolution, or rather prompts to new stories about 1956.

The most fundamental question in connection to the formulation of historical background in *Under the Frog* by means of 1956 press photos is what kind of reality and whose version of reality provide the starting point to this process of re-contextualization. Given the fact that many photos which formulate the basis of descriptions of many scenes in the novel were published in Western European newspapers, it seems evident to suggest that the Western conception of the Revolution of 1956 and the meaning Western media gave these pictures are points of departures for the novel.

An investigation of the narratives emanating from the world press photos sheds light on the specific Western-European myth of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The symbolic status of the photo made by Vagn Hansen is central to this issue. The reason why the young girl with the machine-gun was put on the cover, as explained by the reporter who wrote the report about the October events, Paul Raae, was that he understood this revolution as a youth movement (Miklya Luzsányi 2011). It is noticeable, because there are other emblematic photos which highlight this stratum of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. For instance, Russ Melcher's picture about the young couple walking together in the Múzeum körút (Balázs 2006), or the memorable young boy with a gun bigger than him in Life magazine (Cosgrove 2013) also underline the important role of young people in the Revolution.

The photo of Vagn Hansen is of crucial importance in *Under the Frog*, as it also got onto the cover of the 2002 Vintage edition of the book. The image of the youth's Revolution widely-spread in Western Europe and the novel are mutually supportive of each other. Fischer's novel is after all about a young man in his early twenties and his friends, his girlfriend and her friends living through the Revolution. The reason why it should have been portrayed in this way lies in Adeney Thomas' notion of recognition. Western readers recognise more easily the face of 1956 Hungarian history if it fits into their notions about it.

There is a certain sensation-seeking attitude in positing the young children, the young men and young women in the centre of the picture about the Revolution. According to Ignác Romsics, the 1956 Revolution's three most important backing social strata were the university students, the working-class and the Hungarian soldiers (Romsics 2005, p. 391). Among these, Western press exhibited students the most. As András Fejérdy argues, Western papers had a slight inclination to overemphasize the role of youth in the Revolution (Fejérdy 2002, p. 90) and this is even more characteristic in the visual representation. This is partly due to the fact that it is more striking and profitable to display a beautiful young girl with a gun rather than some ragged soldiers or railway workers. However, photos about the young rebels also narrate a more optimistic and easily-accessible story when read "for the plot" as it is formulated by Blatt in connection to phototextuality (Blatt 2009, p. 116). Thus, the often-doubted documentary nature of such photos is obviously questionable when putting them into their accompanying narrations in this case as well. However, *Under the Frog* is prefigured by this narration about the Hungarian Revolution, which mostly displays its youngish strain.

The Western image of the Revolution embodied in this photo sneaks into the novel's interpretation of the history of 1956, and the novel enriches this discourse with its re-contextualization. As Susan Sontag claims, photography is not a medium of history, but rather a memento mori (quoted by Keilbach 2009, p. 54). Roland Barthes also calls attention to this feature of photography which makes it a lifeless object made out of a living subject. He claims that in photography, the person becomes a total image, death in person (Barthes 1981, p. 14). A dead photo was figuratively animated in the form of Fischer's novel. In this fictional reanimation, which is a key technique of historical fiction, the girl was given an imaginary name, an identity, a nationality and a personality. Consequently, the question arises as to what new meanings are added to the photos by the book.

In a wider sense, the last three chapters of the novel may be considered as a caption under the photo of Vagn Hansen. Silke Horskotte and Nancy Pedri argue in their essay that a photo taken out of its original context and included in fictional work gains a mock documentary aesthetic: it becomes fictional itself (Horskotte and Pedri 2008, p. 8). This is especially true about the photo in its recycled form as it appears on the cover of the novel, as if an illustration to the book's imaginary world. In her fictional identity, the girl is Jadwiga, a Polish girl learning at the University of Szeged. She is in her early twenties and has an abandoned husband in Poland. She is determined, idealistic and enjoys making love to her boyfriend, Gyuri. In her lively personality, Jadwiga embodies the revolutionary girl who is braver, more determined in fighting against the Russians than the male protagonist, Gyuri. Even

in their sexuality, she is the dominant one who initiated their first lovemaking: "'it's eight o'clock and you haven't pounced', she commented. 'You men are such frail creatures'" (181). Although she conforms to the Western collective memory of 1956 triggered by the sensational press photo, some details are more colourful such as Jadwiga's passionate sexuality. Describing her so in the 1950s was most probably unimaginable. Jadwiga's tragic death also underlines the symbolic significance of the photo. Such a girl, an emblematic revolutionary girl from Hungary 1956 could have no other end.

In 1992, when *Under the Frog* appeared, Jadwiga was the only identity this girl had in collective memory. It helped create an image of the way she could have spoken, the way she could have fought and the way she could have loved. The novel's narrative created an alternative imaginary life for the photo: a life that is not historical, but historical-fictional. However, as for the dry and solid facts, after 2006, in an upsurge of interest in the history of the Revolution, on the event of its fiftieth anniversary, Adél Tossenberger researched and found out about her real identity and life. She was Erika Szeles, a 15-year-old girl of Jewish origin. Her father perished in the Holocaust, her mother was a radical Communist believer and gave her a strict education. She became entangled in the revolutionary actions by way of her elderly friends among whom she was determined and unfaltering. Later, in the first week of November, she served the revolution as a Red Cross nurse during which she was gunned down by a Russian machine-gun and killed immediately (Miklya Luzsányi 2011). Eventually, by the time Billed Bladet appeared with her photo, Erika was dead.

With this knowledge in mind, present day viewers of the photo, and also readers of the book cannot avoid letting the two narratives intermingle. We read about Jadwiga with the strange retroactive Hirschian expectation. Hirsch suggests that viewers of photos integrate their present knowledge about the later fate of people in the photo with their perception and creation of cultural memory of the photo. It happens irrespective of the fact that the photographed people could not in fact have been aware of their futures (Hirsch 1997, p. 93), we watch them as if they could or should have been. We also expect the novel to reflect on what we already know about the Vagn Hansen photo girl, but what is lacking in the novel's consciousness. However redundant it seems, our imagination plays with Jadwiga and Erika Szeles simultaneously. This is an example of Ricoeur's Mimesis_3, where the work of art actively shapes our knowledge, imagination and memory of our real lifeworld. This final stage of the mimetic cycle entails a refiguration of the novel's configuration. Literary discourse returns the configured images back into the original lifeworld by the gesture of the Ricoeurian "calling it back to life" (Ricoeur 2004, p. 307) and also transforming that life.

To follow one step further the ever-gyrating cycle, it might be demonstrated how after Mimesis_3 the already-changed life context turns back and becomes a new Mimesis_1: a mine of experience and interpretation for a new reading of the same novel. One tiny detail from the life of the newly known girl, Erika Szeles, is related by one of Tossenberger's reminiscent interviewees. An emigrant friend of Erika's who knew her from before the Revolution donated a photo to the Hungarian National Museum in which Erika can also be identified. In the old man's memory,

all the girls of the folk dance group, which they attended together, were bound to each other. He related another story of Erika which featured a small anecdote. He was referring to one of the other girls in the photograph who died because of an unsafe abortion in 1956 (Tossenberger 2008). In light of this information, the part of the novel when Gyuri wanders about how much he wanted to make Jadwiga pregnant (183) gains a new understanding. Our historical knowledge about the fact that a girl of Erika's circles could have a hazardous sex life in the middle of the 1950s in Hungary, and with such tragic consequences, changes our perception of this few lines in the novel about Gyuri and Jadwiga. Before we knew about Erika, and the historical data about how dangerous unmarried pregnancy in the 1950s could be, this part in the text only expressed an intense sexual, even biological desire. But after Erika's life story, since she and Jadwiga are linked, the idea that Gyuri could also have made Jadwiga pregnant and that an abortion could also end up killing her starts an entire train of speculations about the novel.

The novel produces a retroactive vision of 1956 where the glimpse from 1992 is omnipresent. It is expressed in the description of another emblematic scene of the Revolution. The image of the head of the Stalin Monument dragged onto the middle of Blaha Lujza square is certainly a very strong collective memory image which is evoked by the text:

> near the buffet, lying in the middle of the road like a giant's abandoned football, was the head from Stalin's statue, dragged there by the jubilant public as a mark of their triumph, displaying the traitor's head on a gargantuan scale. A gentleman was seeking to knock off a chunk with the aid of a pickaxe, and it occurred to Gyuri that he should take a souvenir as well. He queued up patiently behind the man, when the soviet tank appeared (218).

The Stalin head lying on Blaha Lujza Square alone may not have been proof of possible phototextual quality, because this scene forms an essential part of the

Fig. 5 Budapest downtown with a Soviet tank and the head of the previously toppled Stalin statue (with the permission of HUNGART ©). *Source* Online, retrieved June 1, 2015 from: http://www.allworldwars.com/Revolutionary-Forces-of-the-Hungarian-Revolution-1956-by-Zoltan-Virag.html

cultural memory of the events. However, as a possible sample from the many existing photos, Figs. 5 and 6 display some specific textual parts from the novel. Photos such as John Sadovy's (Fig. 6) about souvenir hunters who tried to acquire pieces from the Stalin statue are evoked by the novel. The expressions "gentleman" and "patiently queued" evoke the specific atmosphere of these photos. This atmosphere can be captured by the patiently standing characters in trench coats and hats associated with old-fashioned gentlemen's style. Figure 5 may be linked to this description because of the tank in the background and the visibly frightened scattering it caused among the passers-by also present in the text. Certainly, countless other photos could be mentioned, what I argue for is that these black and white images about the Revolution have a considerable impact on the wording and on the specific theme of the text.

In creating a detailed context to such photos as well, Gyuri's story goes that he desires a souvenir piece from Stalin's head, so he approaches the remains of the colossus. Meanwhile, the Soviet tank appears and opens fire on him and on the surrounding buildings. Gyuri finds shelter behind Stalin's giant head which is an ironic and symbolic situation where a metaphoric allusion to the future fate of Hungary follows: "he had never been aware of how enormous, how global this desire was deep down, a desire that was in no way smaller than the universe—how he would do anything, absolutely anything to live, to live for even a few more seconds. If life meant huddling up to Stalin's head for the next 40 years or so that would be quite satisfactory as long as he could stay alive" (218). Though Communism in Hungary did not last another 40 years counted from 1956, the words "40 years" in this context definitely denote the period of Socialism which had to be endured in an uncomfortable huddling with the ideology hallmarked by such a dictator as Stalin. Of these '40 years', Gyuri the emigrant, the author, and the

Fig. 6 A man trying to chop off a piece of the toppled Stalin statue, the photo was made by John Sadovy (with the permission of HUNGART ©). *Source* Online, retrieved June 1, 2015 from: http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/hungarian-uprising-1956-a-budapest-crowd-destroys-a-statue-news-photo/183976139 and also https://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/tag/hungarian-uprising/

emigrant's son, declares that the instinct for life is human and understandable. Gyuri in the photo-prescribed scenery and Gyuri of the novel, however, could not have such thoughts about the future Hungary.

This scrutiny started from the idea of the historical novel, which *Under the Frog* definitely is, and its possible ability to depict the past as such. However, the fixed conception of past is demolished by the novel's interplay with the postmemory connected to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. This postmemory is also triggered by the press photos which form the origins of some descriptions in the book which aim at reconstructing emblematic scenes. This reconstruction is highly influenced by the dialogue between the fictional narrative and the reader's (and also the author's) posterior knowledge about the events and characters. Moreover, in the Ricoeurian mimetic cycle, the hermeneutic dialogue is enriched by new factual data about the described photos and the history of their figures even after the publication of *Under the Frog* (Fig. 7).

My claim that some parts in this novel are considered as detailed captions under the well-known and influential press photos about 1956 is shedding a new light upon the novel being the artistic postmemory of a second generation Hungarian 1956 emigrant. As such, Tibor Fisher's novel plays intricately with the interrelatedness of seeing the historical place and time from the point of view of an outsider, British photojournalist, and from the point of view of an insider, Hungarian homo-diegetic narrator. This duality is strengthened by the inherent duality of the photoperceptional theory of Julia Adeney Thomas, as the novel's narrator approaches the photographs both with the confident intuition of recognition and with the hesitantly culture-conscious excavation.

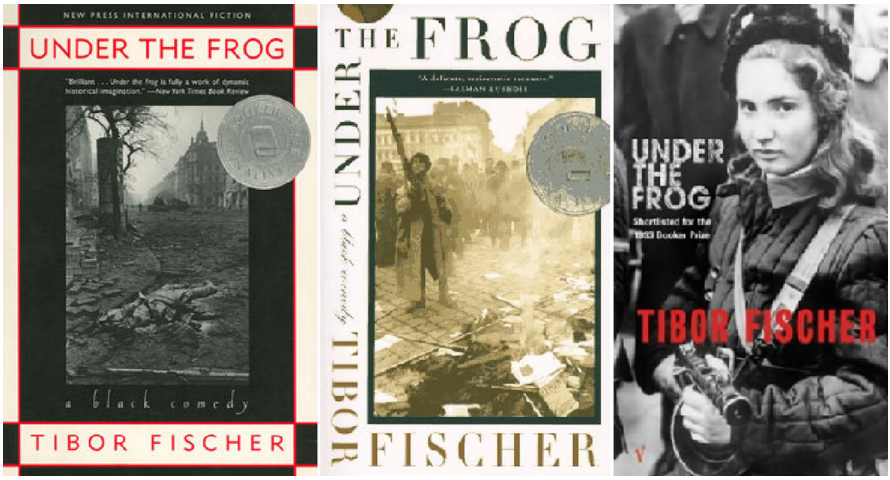

Fig. 7 Different editions of Fischer's *Under the Frog* (US: New Press, 1995, Ld: Picador, 1997, Ld: Vintage, 2002) which display historical press photos, the first two by unknown artists, and the third by Vagn Hansen (with the permission of HUNGART ©)

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