

In Search of Memory

**Tracing commemoration and remembering in New York and Budapest through the
analysis of the Tenement Museum and Orczy House**

“City-reading”

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1. Grounding the Site

The urban individual is always contextualized: in their own surroundings, in the whirlpool of spaces and places, within and among their own-construed landscapes and landmarks. The individual, by consistently seeing themselves in relation to the urban context, lives in a persistent discourse with everything that is around. The term *discourse* is of main importance here, as this paper will focus on the possible directions of this indeed verbal and performative discourse between the city and its dweller. And, within the discourse the readable city will be found; one to be read as a text. Of course, the textual-readable city is no new terminology in fields of urban analysis; it has long served as a lens through which the individual is to be analyzed from the times of the Bible to our own days (LeGates and Stout 243).

But how could we read the city as text when we are practically standing between the lines? Michel de Certeau seeks to give an answer to this question with the idea of the “pedestrian speech act” (97), where the walking of the individual is seen as a spatial “acting out” of place, determined by, as he summarizes it, strategies of government (97). Hence, a way to comprehend the sets of texts and meta-texts on the one hand, and enunciate them on the other hand, is a form of acting-out. My question is centered on the postulation that cultural memory and commemoration contribute to our acting-out of places to great extents; and this happens without the obligation of the place being physically present in the urban context. In

other words, I will attempt to explore how places can function as identifying forces even though they have vanished from the surface of the city. This comparative cultural analysis will juxtapose and compare a Manhattan neighborhood with a site once cultural in Budapest in order to examine spatial practices and their “acting out” in light of commemoration and cultural memory.

As the first case in point, the building of the Lower-East-Side Tenement Museum (also referred to as 97 Orchard Street), in New York will be taken as a representative of present traces of past identities. As the second, Budapest’s historical Jewish quarter and the Jewish community will be scrutinized through the site of the once present Orczy House, a complex which used to stand in the heart of the Jewish ghetto and was torn down in 1938. Both in New York and Budapest, since both neighborhoods and the communities thereof have been subject to elimination but revived after all, these sites, as traces of the past bespeak an essential change in urban identity. Even though one of the sites is a now museum and the other is an apartment house, the link between the two will be found in the fact that both of them were tenement houses and had similar functions in the urban social environment. Via these examples I will argue that the two urban developments, the one in New York and the one in Budapest, evoked essentially similar social phenomena and therefore partook in the ways urban identity manifested.

Gábor Gyáni, the renowned historian agrees that the urban context (“the city as a work of art”) is an embodiment of changes of society and is a documentation of history (208). His argument correlates with my own fundamental argument that the city is to be read as text, with a complex network of meanings and where the discourse between reader and text, text and writer manifests itself physically. He also claims that throughout history “urban architecture created the sense that history reflects contemporary reality” (208), which argument immediately reinforces the question whether the visual will be taken as “real” and

the not visual as “not real”. My argument will be based on the presupposition that visual presence does not necessarily contribute to the “realness” of spaces and places but it is the other way around rather: the reality of spaces and places sometimes, but not always, is manifested visually. My main purpose is, therefore, to trace signs in the urban context which make the verbal discourse between city and the city dweller palpable, with the Jewish Lower East Side and the Budapest Jewish quarter in focus.

The comparison of Budapest and New York through the analysis of two sites—Orczy House in Budapest and the Tenement Museum in New York—will serve as a point by which the two cities can be put in parallel.

2. The Tenement-Orczy House Symmetry and Asymmetry

The growth of New York and Budapest followed a rather parallel trajectory; and as Bender and Schorske point out in their essay, an influx of migrants and immigrants to both cities had changed the social landscape by the turn of the century (3). The difference was that, while New York was becoming more and more diverse in ethnicity, Budapest was growing more and more Magyar (3). This influx, naturally, required for both cities to expand horizontally and reach out of their historical city walls. In New York this meant the area of the Lower East Side (“Tenements”) and in Budapest, the unification of Pest, Buda, and Óbuda. While these cities continued to expand, and while the historical outline of the city was slowly transformed into the modern, Haussmann-pattern in Budapest, the very traces of the in-between (of the historical and the modern) period seemed to vanish from the city landscape. What I mean by traces are the artifacts that could tell about the rapid social change Pest had undergone. In New York, what followed the influx was rather the formation of a chaotic Manhattan atmosphere, dominated by immigrants who had very little space—literally—

to live on, with the need that the city itself had to keep up with the changes of society. Therefore, in these cities, the alteration of the city landscape took place somewhat analogously. I read the Tenement Museum and Orczy House as exhibiting two sites of memory which point to the times of the immigrant influx; but while the former gathers the sense that there is will to remember, the latter, being absent from the city landscape, refuses to do so.

A place that is not present within the realms of physicality but is indeed present in urban memory is not very hard to find in such a historical city as Budapest. As the urban landscape changes and continually renders newer and newer layers to the historical and older ones, a persistent shift between present and non-present nodes takes place. In New York one is faced with non-present traces constantly as a consequence of the rapidly and consistently changing nature of the city landscape. Orczy House is somewhat different from those places that have simply disappeared from the city landscape and appeared in the memory of the city dwellers. It has not only disappeared but has also been replaced; the importance of which will be discussed later. Being a religious, mercantile and educational center, the Orczy House represented several periods of change in Jewish assimilation and isolation as well. Therefore, in this binary opposition, the house became a landmark for the Jewish community for almost two hundred years and, as the reader will recognize, in ways similar to New York tenements did for the New Yorker's mind.

Considering the tenements of New York in comparison with the Orczy House predicts several similarities through which the two sites can be analogously analyzed. Nevertheless, it is necessary that the tenement itself be placed in the urban, contextual reading first; meaning that I will trace as to what the tenement embodies in New-York identity.

Abandoned by middle-class families in the late nineteenth century, apartment houses became a perfect fit for newly arrived immigrants with little money and usually with a poor

command of English language. These houses basically became sites of the grandest shift in New York society—the island was now beginning to be occupied not by the wealthiest, but the poorest of all. From the 1840s and 1860s the Lower East Side became synonymous with the immigrant: German, Polish, and Jewish poverty. Therefore, the neighborhood quickly entered collective consciousness as a Jewish area: from the viewpoint of its already existing tenants and the new ones as well. New buildings were erected for the huge crowds of newcomers, and by the 1860s tenement houses were the only option for new dwellers (“Tenements”).

Regardless of the worst living conditions imaginable, immigrants kept arriving in New York in the pursuit of happiness: where the formerly arrived community was already moneyless and extremely desperate. According to Jacob Riis, sociologist, reporter, and reformer, the tenement-atmosphere hardly could have been part of the American Dream with its filthy, dark rooms and crowded spaces:

[...] four families occupy each floor, and a set of rooms consists of one or two dark closets, used as bedrooms, with a living room twelve feet by ten. The staircase is too often a dark well in the centre of the house, and no direct through ventilation is possible, each family being separated from the other by partitions. Frequently the rear of the lot is occupied by another building of three stories high with two families on a floor. (Riis, “The Awakening”)

In these circumstances, and according to Riis’s depiction sometimes with eighty to a hundred children living in each tenement, and with despairing mortal rates, the Lower East Side neighborhood began to be perceived as the scaffold of immorality and degraded conditions. Its habitants were rather seen as catalysts, not subjects of this modern-world, urban degradation (Riis, “Genesis”), which greatly contributed for the neighborhood to be read as “ghetto” or “slum” for many decades to come. Similarly to the transformations in Budapest, even though whole tenement areas were practically built to accommodate immigrants, it was

the efflux of aristocracy and the upper-middle class from the area that made room for this change in the first place.

This means that a similar shift took place in the Lower East Side as in the Orczy House and the historical ghetto, where higher-class families such as the Orczy family made possible the opportunity of integration of Jews into the Hungarian-based society. Of course, the two developments can be differentiated by the recognition that while in New York, social change did not happen out of conscious will but necessity, in Pest it did.

Still, it is not only the grand change in society that made the Lower East Side a symbol of immigration. What the tenement represents is heavily loaded of, to the most extent, a very deep sense of disappointment not only in the “New World” but also in the past possibilities of the old one. The Jewish community thus comes into focus again: a community that is built up from citizens from several distinct countries in Europe who seek to escape persecution and instead of stepping on the “Promised Land,” they find crowded, dark tenements and inhumane living conditions. Writing on the Lower East Side and the tenement-conditions, the American historian and professor of Judaic Studies, Hasia R. Diner retrieves the past of the Jewish immigrant; capturing precisely and most beautifully the moment of recognition and possible disappointment:

They never looked back as they traveled in steerage across the ocean to a land of freedom, their landing welcomed by a massive statue grasping the beacon of liberty. What they found, however, was a warren of dark, crowded streets, the Lower East Side of New York. Dirty and dank, this neighborhood, with its jumble of buildings that made no room for light or fresh air, became their new home. (7)

Diner’s depiction is surely somewhat based on Riis’s mentioned reports but reveals more: the image of the Jew (and naturally, that of the immigrant) is torn between the “beacon of liberty” and what they find as their “new home”. The contrast between the two is simply too striking,

and the impossibility of meeting the two is perceived as essentially traumatic for the generation that would build a new America, which controversy is missing from Riis's more sociological analysis. The majority of immigrants around the 1860s, when the first rush of tenement-building began, was made up of Germans and Polish Jews ("Tenements"), thus they became the first ones to fight their circumstances. Riis, writing *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890, captures this very shift in the Jewish Lower-East-Side identity, when a few families had already made their way up from poverty to a higher social status. This very moment is embraced in Jewish memory when talking of the neighborhood: a symbol of past, left-behind struggles and, at the same time, "the beacon of liberty" which nevertheless offers a way out of persecution.

That is one of the reasons why the Tenement Museum bears so much importance in the reading of the whole area today. Though the apartments represent (truthfully, for they are homes of actual families) several different eras between 1860 and 1935 and families from different backgrounds, the Jewish community could never be left disregarded when analyzing or reading the neighborhood of the Lower East side. The community is as much a part of the area as it is of Pest's historical city, since the processes of the place/individual, city/walker identification take place continually. But Orczy House is the unseen memorial, the non-existent reminder on Pest's historical skyline: it is its very absence that places the building on the continuum of Jewish collective memory. In other words, Orczy House is remembered, in contrast with the Tenement Museum, not because it helps remembering but because it cannot function as a site where remembering is reinforced. The controversial presence of the Madách Houses, which now occupy the site, bespeak this contrast, which I will elaborate later on in this paper. Here it is rather the similar function but different means of remembering that the two sites of memory encompass what needs emphasizing.

The fact that both buildings, having been apartment or tenement houses (tenement, in the original meaning of *dwelling*) were central sites in a similar social change in both cities; both took part in the change and sheltered communities, mainly Jewish, when the world moved toward liberal ideals for a few decades. They both identified their surroundings and for that reason, both the Lower East Side and Pest's historical ghetto are mentally construed in light of their present/past existence. Orczy House, compared to the Tenement Museum, ceased to actively identify the Jewish neighborhood by 1938, thus has an indeed different mode of identification. The fact that its importance is not a consequence of certain cultural labeling—meaning that it was given a connotation but it had carried its cultural importance originally—is the chief difference between the two sites. Orczy House is the perfect authentic (in the Benjaminian context as well) artifact, which never got to be deprived of its aura. The following pages will explore the ways in which Orczy House could establish its paramount position in Pest's cultural life and, as the reader will discover, the ways Orczy House becomes a parallel representative of the aforementioned changes of the Lower East Side.

3. Invisible Presence in the City

As Krisztina Keresztélyi, Hungarian scholar of cultural policies explains, though it was not until 1786 that the Jewish community was allowed by law to settle in Pest's inner city, trading was permitted inside the city walls (166). Géza Komoróczy in the renowned historical book, *The Jewish Budapest* mentions that a need for a housing center for permanently settling Jews emerged, which Baron István Orczy recognized at the time (103). Baron Orczy bought the site in 1728 and the one next to it in 1795, where the inn, named “König von Engelland”, was standing (103). By the unification of the two sites the Orczy-complex was born, containing 48 apartments and as many as 140 rooms. The inn, originally

belonging to the Mayerhoffer family, gave name to the street by it: Király Street. The process of name-giving followed the trend of collective memory: as the inn became more and more emblematic of the neighborhood, the more the neighborhood was to be defined by it. This street thus became one of the most influential commercial centers of Pest at the time and became a notion which defined the image of the city fundamentally.

Despite the fact that the Orczy family did not belong in the Jewish community per se, the very fact that the house became the ultimate hub for Jews and Jewish cultural life bespeaks a new, more accepting and liberal trend in the perception of Jewishness. The possibility of assimilation arose but so did the possibility of total isolation. According to Gluck and her essay “The Budapest Flâneur,” Jews made up 21% of Budapest’s overall population and 50% of all the merchants in the country (3). This position in society, naturally, presented an opportunity for the Jewish community to partake in the country’s affairs via a certain degree of integration. The Jewish mind nevertheless is much more deeply rooted in a particular sense of isolation, and therefore assimilation never actually became a true possibility in the “Jewish question.” Writing on how authenticity (and authority) is reflected in Jewish philosophy, Neil Gillman, American scholar of Judaism, explains that “the Jew must feel, in the depths of his being, both the marginality of his condition in the modern world and the need to articulate, primarily for his own integrity, why he remains a Jew after all” (232). The Jew is therefore consistently torn between an inherited state of marginalization and the urge to express the nature of his true Jewishness.

How does this contribute to the reading of Orczy House as a landmark, not present but not completely absent either? The fact that the house stood on the very border of inner and outer city, on the line between where Jews were allowed and where they were not, tells a lot about its metaphorical presence. Gluck also explores the ways in which Jews never made a clear decision as to what degree they wished or did not wish to assimilate; whether they saw

themselves as Hungarians or as solely Jews in a country with a limited set of possibilities. She claims that while there is an indeed strong sense of belonging in the Jewish mind or way of thinking, the lack of self-recognition is the ground upon which Jewish indecisiveness is rested (3). The very location and development of Orczy House bespeaks this claim; since it was a center which never belonged to either the inner or the outer city, and from 1786 Jews were allowed to settle within the city walls, it became a representative, and a reminder, of Jewish isolation. Therefore, it can be established that while Jews claimed a very strong sense of “togetherness,” by never actually leaving the ghetto for the city, they rather submitted to exclusion than integration. Without Orczy House, this duality probably would not have been perceived as a prototypal characteristic of the Jewish community.

Gluck places this dilemma within the confines of visibility and invisibility, where a decision as to whether to be seen as a Jew, or not seen at all needs to be made. Ignác Goldziher, scholar of Islam and member of the Hungarian Academy of Letters and Sciences, writes the following in his journal when he is asked to appear in traditional Hungarian clothing in spite of him being a devout Jew:

Today I have made my first official appearance in traditional Hungarian garment [...]. A junior officer came to my house in Holló Street in cavalrymen's uniform. We went together in an open-coach on a dicky-seat through Dob street, with typical Polish brethrens standing in long lines on the street. What they were thinking by seeing my egret cap, I was wondering. Certainly not that I it was *me* who was in exile more than them. For another thing, I was told to have had the looks of a fine Hungarian. (361)⁵

What Goldziher is telling here corresponds with the previous statement that Jewish identity in Budapest and Hungary included an indeed weighty and arbitrary desire to comply with the

⁵. Original text in Hungarian: „Délelőtt volt az első hivatalos megjelenésem díszmagyarban [...]. Holló utcai lakásomra huszáregyenruhába öltözött altiszt jött értem. Nyitott kocsiban utaztam a bakon a Dob utcán át, hamisítatlan küllemű lengyel hittestvérek hosszú sorfalai között. Mit gondolhattak ezek kócsagtollas kalpagom láttán? Azt az egyet biztosan nem, hogy inkább vagyok *én* góleszban, mint ők. Egyébként állítólag nagyon mutatós, magyaros jelenség voltam.”

rules of both the Jewish and the Hungarian custom. It is 1917 when he writes this, at the time when the Jewish community had already separated into three different groups with three synagogues in the neighborhood, all of which originate from Orczy House.

Komoróczy also brings the fact to our attention that conflicts within the community exercised influence on the construction of Orczy House and, inevitably, the whole neighborhood. This separation coincides with the times when Orczy House ultimately functioned as a site for religious and social changes. First, since the community was growing rapidly, a greater synagogue needed to be built. Then, in 1825, five years after the construction of the great synagogue, a group of believers who wanted to reform some orthodox customs (those relating to unmarried men and sorority) founded a new *minjan* (109)⁶ the opposite side of Király Street. This was the first instance for separation within the community. In 1829, by the request of the owner, the community had to add a lean to the building, which became the new synagogue, called Cultus Synagogue. This is where the Neologue stream matured into a separate denomination, which now occupies the Dohány street synagogue (117).

However, the immense influence of Orczy House on the neighborhood did not limit itself to the grounds of sacredness: as already mentioned, it rapidly grew into a commercial center. The Orczy House was (*is*, in present tense as well) an ultimate symbol of Jewish presence in Pest, and also of the fin-de-siècle social crises in Hungarian society. Apart from the prayer-houses and coffee houses, numerous little shops occupied the lower floor. With the crowd in and around Orczy House, two operating slaughterhouses could serve the needs of the community, along with the restaurant König von Engelland on the corner. The restaurant gained *jus caveatum*, the full right to trade coffee in the building (Komoróczy 103) and therefore it was one of the first places to grow into a true parlor. It was where the hearings of

⁶ *Minjan* meaning a group of believers. Used in: Géza, Komoróczy et al. *A zsidó Budapest*. MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport. Budapest, 1995.

Jewish clerks took place, thus the place became a religious and commercial center at once. There was no way for a Jew not to be magnetized by the gravity of Orczy House, as all matters concerning the community were discussed among its very walls and the house, consequently, served as a filter in the community's life.

It was natural, however, that the community—the whole of the Jewish and that of Orczy House, too—was commonly perceived as peculiar and somewhat distant from the Hungarian custom. While playing a fundamental role in Pest's economic and cultural life; since there was a system on its own, bearing no resemblance to the Hungarian system, Hungarian Jewry was rather regarded through the exotic gaze⁷ of the gentile (Komoróczy 115)⁸. The house was crowded at all times, and even dirty, for sewage outages were only installed in publicly used spaces. Though the house was renovated, due to the separation of denominations and the spreading out of Jews in the city which was now free to enter, it solely became destructed and ruinous (Komoróczy 117). In light of these facts, it becomes merely apparent that the house was not only a building in which the community lived, but one that also served as a physically, visually perceptible mirror to the distinctive features of the community itself. In this respect and with the historical context in mind, Orczy House rightfully can be interpreted as part of a synecdoche: in which the part/whole relationship boils down to building/city. But if we regard the influence of the house itself on the individual, the relationship reciprocates and turns into a whole-for-part, building/individual-based relationship.

Conclusively, there is no way one could not recognize the importance and utmost influence of the building in relation not only to the Jewish but the whole of the Budapest community. The building inevitably and permanently marked Jewish identity in Budapest, as much as the urban environment formed Orczy House as well. The crisis that dominated

⁷ Meaning that the non-Jew sees the Jew as an „exotic object”, therefore outside the realm of his own norms.

⁸ Illés Kaczér's quoted depiction in the chapter „Orczy ház” is indeed telling of how Jewry was looked upon through the eyes of a gentile.

Jewish identity manifested itself on physical levels, leaving traces of its alteration (such as the separation of denominations) to the generations to come. The identity crisis and the extreme shifts in the perception of the urban self can be tracked down in the tenements of New York, where desperate immigrants, of whom many were Jews, exposed themselves to impossible conditions and labor in search of a brighter future. This is pinned down in the analysis of the tenement house itself. It is concluded that the two sites can be easily seen as paramount in retrospect; but what made them important in their own days and, more importantly, what reaches out to the city walker today of their past functions?

4. Moving Through the Point

Kevin Lynch, author and urban planner, distinguishes five elements that add up the content of the city in physical forms: *paths*, *edges*, *districts*, *nodes* and *landmarks* (LeGates and Stout 99), which help locating the Tenement Museum and Orczy House in the urban context, and may help answer the above raised question. He compares these five elements with regard of the moving of the individual; how they see themselves in the city and how the city is seen through the moving of the individual. According to the definition of these concepts, the Orczy House becomes, as I read it, a node and a landmark, but I even see a possibility that all five definitions apply to Orczy House and the Tenement Museum, regardless of whether we take the physically present house, as in New York, or the one existing in cultural memory, as in the case of Orczy House.

Lynch defines nodes as strategic points in the city through (here, *through* is to be understood physically) which the observer marks their path: “the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is traveling” (LeGates and Stout 99). He adds that they may be concentrations “which gain

importance from being the condensation of some use or physical character, as a street corner hangout or an enclosed square” (99), meaning that nodes are where a prototypal characteristic of a district (which is already a condensation site for certain features in the urban environment) is found concentrated; defining the place as a symbol of the whole of the environment.

Contrary to Orczy House, 97 Orchard Street did not become a node itself in the times of tenement buildings but it did in the 1980s, when the museum was established in it. Then, the building became a single symbol of the Lower-East-Side tenement and that of the immigrant in general; as though capturing a whole series of events in a single photo. Nevertheless, if the symbol of the tenement is extended to the whole district and the period of time, so is extended on physical and temporal scales, it becomes a point of focus the city walker enters and exits consistently, relating him or herself to the past inevitably. In this sense, the Museum becomes *space* in de Certeau’s context: where space (*espace*) is practiced place (*lieu*) with “vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables” (de Certeau 117). It is thus the praxis, according to de Certeau, which creates space out of place. In case of the Museum, this interpretation is complemented by what Pierre Nora, the French historian, calls *lieux de mémoire*. He briefly explains that in the museum the very absence of practice and the ritual puts the observer into a mentally absorbed distance from what is observed (the artifact, in this case):

Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders—these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity. It is the nostalgic dimension of these devotional institutions that makes them seem beleaguered and cold—they mark the rituals of society without the ritual; integral particularities in a society that levels particularity; signs of

distinction and of group membership in a society that tends to recognize individuals only as identical and equal. (“Between” 12)

To my reading the Tenement Museum even reinforces Nora’s idea of the museum, being a marker of “rituals of society without the ritual,” since it is not only the artifacts that create an illusion of eternity but also the building itself: where the act of reminiscence becomes multi-layered and encompassing in the sense that it is artifact within the artifact. De Certeau’s temporal and directional interpretation of space and Nora’s *lieu de mémoire* can be pinned down here: the Tenement Museum creates space in which the individual is identified by the space itself via the practice of recognizing the ritual represented in and by the space. In the case of Orczy House, where the building once functioned as a node but no longer does in the visually observable urban environment, this marker is eliminated: in the memory of those who are (imaginatively or actually) nostalgic about the building, it is solely the ritual that remains with no marker or sign representing it.

It is not only the Museum, however, that puts the city walker in parallel with history in continuity. From above, the city landscape still tells about this phenomenon: the Lower East Side buildings, especially the ones mentioned in Riis’s study can be seen as artifacts reaching out to the 21st-century landscape.⁹ The shape of dumbbell tenements, sometimes attached to newly-build apartment houses bespeaks the unstoppably changing, but nevertheless somehow always commemorating approach to the past and history in America. The sight of the area from a bird’s-eye view is in itself a true artifact: what we see is a composition, similarly to the Museum’s own collection, of traces that tell distinctive stories but altogether gain further connotations. Namely, the in-between state of what remains in collective cultural memory and what enters the realms of history is embraced by the recurring Dumbbell-shape tenement on the landscape.

⁹ See Image 1.

In Lynch's other category stand the districts, which are "large city areas which the observer can mentally go inside of, and which have some common character" and are also "identifiable from the inside, they are also used for exterior reference if visible from the outside" (LeGates and Stout 99). Both areas, the Budapest Jewish quarter and the Lower East Side, comply with this definition still today. In Pest, as the ghetto began to gain more and more power (but not equality) in the life of the city, an inevitable conflict of identity and a possibility of assimilation took place. To the ghetto, Lynch's definition of districts could be properly applied: it could be distinctively identified from the inside and from the outside as well, having characteristics that were easily and exclusively to be identified with the neighborhood. In Goldziher's journal entry this can be tracked down; his walking through the Jewish quarter in "traditional Hungarian garment" becomes uncanny, as the Hungarian-Jewish controversy becomes the narrative of this gesture. This could not happen without the "ghetto" being a *district*, defined by its own characteristics and being subject for a "mental entering."

A very similar phenomenon is to be found in the district of the Lower East Side, which is also depicted by Riis. In the chapter *Jewtown* he recollects a dialogue with a pawnbroker who "enjoyed the advantage of the situation," and explains that several Jewish families, by trying to save money while keep living in absolutely inhumane conditions, managed to escape poverty and found their ways to a higher social rank. What Riis's depiction here tells us is that, compared to the 1860s-wave of influx of Jews and when the district became a generally Jewish one, by the turn of the century Jews silently started to spread out in the city and left the impossibly poor Lower East Side; therefore they once again changed the characteristic of the district inevitably. The district was no longer defined as merely Jewish but started to obtain "poor" as a general connotation.

Therefore, it can be established that the two buildings, being nodes within the confines of their own districts, perpetrate their own forces of identification and are present, regardless

of their actual, physical presence in the city landscape. As to Jewish collective memory and commemoration, there is an indeed strong bound between Jewish history and the two buildings since both the Tenement Museum and Orczy House are/were representations of history. Furthermore, and reaching back to the metaphorical reading of 97 Orchard Street as part of the part/whole synecdoche, its influence cannot be overlooked in the analysis of New York urban identity. Orczy House, on the contrary, embodies Jewish identity (and its crisis) of Pest by not being capable of carry out its presence as *lieu de mémoire*, which will be elaborated in the following pages. The Tenement Museum and Orczy House are nodes; pinning down single elements through which the observer can identify him or herself.

But how do these landmarks contribute to our reading of history today? Do we commemorate anything through them and if yes, how? I am seeking modes by which the urban individual operates in the self-identification process and strategies which help him or her commemorate a certain moment in history. These are *places*, but are also *spaces*, which are in and out of the power-relation between individual and the urban environment. Reaching back and considering de Certeau's argument on *lieu* and *espace*, the simultaneous reading of the two buildings comes into controversy, as one of them, evidently the 97-Orchard Street building, still partakes in the dialectic of commemoration, while Orczy House one does not. Can these places, especially Orczy House, be read as *sites of memory*?

5. Urban Remembering through *Lieux de Mémoire*

Objects, sites, moments (and here I could go on until virtually everything is covered) that we relate to as part of the past inevitably evoke a sense of remembering; otherwise they would not be part of the past-present continuum that we, as individuals, are identified by. Pierre Nora's approach to history and memory, the construed divisions that appear within

memory and the *lieu de mémoire* will help designate the two sites, Orczy House and the Tenement.

He claims that while history is the reconstruction of the past and, since it is based on the singling out of elements of the past, is incomplete; memory is in “permanent evolution” (28), and is subject to the individual’s own absorption revived periodically (“Between” 8). It is therefore concluded that, while memory is present, “perpetually actual” and memorialized through sites, history is bound with events that “are no longer.” Nora explains that *lieux de mémoire* exist because *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of history (since while memory fades history persists) do not exist. Where do the two sites stand in this categorization? 97 Orchard Street indubitably seeks to represent and conserve traces of the past via the presentation of artifacts. Clearly, the objects found in the tenement house such as spoons, cabinets, torn pieces of newspaper etc. have been forcefully given a secondary meaning which they did not bear originally and therefore they do not only participate but they also function as catalysts in the process of retrieving the past.

By Nora’s definition, the Tenement Museum is a prime example of *lieu de mémoire*, not only because it is a museum but also for the mere fact that it is exactly those tenant’s memories that lived there that contribute to the physical appearance of the museum. Here, what Nora describes as an “illusion of eternity” (“Between” 12) is manifested, for the individual memories of the tenants can only enter (thus be part of) history via the Museum, the force that collects and institutionalizes memory into historical artifacts. Evidently, in this regard the Museum and Orczy House will sharply contradict one another as Orczy House has no external representative or embodiment, and no referent exists by which its past could be retrieved. However, the layering which both sites undergo by means of remembering will serve as common ground in the analysis of the two.

Lieux de mémoire, according to Nora, are created by the will to remember and the play within continuity and discontinuity (therefore memory and history) of life and death (“Between” 19); which definition leaves room for the Orczy House and the Tenement to be read as analogous sites of memory. In the case of the Tenement Museum this will of remembering is rudimentary, as it represents a vivid and continually changing discourse between individual and collective memory. Orczy House, however, stands on the edge of these two. The complex is always exclusively seen through the lens of the historian as there is no palpable trace of its existence. It cannot be retrieved fully for the site itself is non-existent; having been torn down for almost 80 years, the building seems to leave the realms of cultural memory and enter those of history. Nevertheless, let us not limit the possibilities of Orczy House to be merely remembered as part of history. Since identity is taken as a push-and-pull force in the power relations of cultural memory and since, for the reasons presented previously, Orczy House is veritably present in Jewish identity, the house should be taken as site of memory, not only as site of history.

It can be established, then, that what connects the two sites in light of commemoration is the cause of remembering: the self-searching experiment of the individual. The process which seeks to reveal a sense of origin through the notions of the present; which thus becomes a “question of representation,” which Nora defines as “distance-memory” (“Between” 16). The observing of these sites outside of personal memory and from the realms of distance memory is exactly what happens with 97 Orchard Street and with the reading of the long-lost Orczy House within the urban contextualization. In other words, what we make of the past in retrospect defines and outsources these sites as important and symbolic. In our distance-memory, the Orczy House is seen as a symbol of Jewish heritage, integration and centralization of course, but its absence is symbolic of even more.

From the “panoramic distance”—as Nora defines it—of the retrospective view of the past, the disappearance of Orczy House seems to have multiple layers in meaning. The building was demolished in 1938 as part of an urban project which proposed to build a new avenue running from Károly Avenue up to Damjanich Street: from the heart of the Jewish quarter, the ghetto, up to the then existing outskirts of the city (Román 19). This would have meant the complete tear-down of the ghetto. The disappearance of Orczy House immediately marked the beginning of a greater, world-wide change: the rise of extreme right ideals and anti-Semitism. What is unsettling in light of this is not solely the vanishing of a Jewish-identified monument but rather what was replaced by it: an imperial-style round of buildings which ultimately signified the upcoming Second World War in style, function and meaning. The entrance to the avenue, which now stands dysfunctional in the heart of the city, is a prime example of Fascistic-imperial architecture and its planned function—to create space for transparency and government instead of the obscure, complicated alleys of the ghetto—bespeak the change in governmental power and imperial ambitions of Hungary.

Therefore the Orczy House embodies a moment in history which was not necessarily foreseeable but paved its way into collective memory beforehand. It is ironic, however, that it was exactly the outbreak of the war which put a halt to the project and eventually saved the ghetto as an architectural and cultural site of memory. This controversy, that while the Holocaust meant the death of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews, the outbreak of the War itself saved the historical ghetto from demolition; the history of the ghetto and Orczy House emphasizes its indeed valid reading as *lieu de mémoire*, for it commemorates and archives a moment in history by its own simple existence. The house, nevertheless, does not only commemorate destruction (as marker of war), but also the opposite: survival. Therefore Orczy House, as site of memory, is forced to exist between the binary oppositions of life/death, war/peace, and survival/perish. In this regard, the symbolism of Orczy House being

non-present physically but present on the continuum of memory is to be read from both approaches: from the direction of destruction and from that of survival. It may be that, as still a topic of taboo, it is this very controversy that hinders Orczy House from being regarded as not only an urban artifact but also part of collective memory and be seen as *lieu de mémoire*.

The Holocaust, especially if seen from the point of view where it in effect saves the Jewish neighborhood, still stands at the center of frustration around the world—the Orczy House engaging with the role of the non-present, hidden reality: the trauma. If Orczy House does embrace the trauma that is not supposed to be faced, then, the very difference between the American and Hungarian/European norms of commemoration is pinned down. While the Tenement Museum grasps the core of the trauma by representing and testifying it: claiming that *it is*; Orczy House fails to appear in Hungary's understanding of the Second World War. I may argue that this non-presence, the refusal *to be*, therefore the indeed arbitrary existence underneath the surface is why Orczy House is nevertheless present, though not *seen*.

Therefore, reaching back to Gyáni's previously mentioned argument that the real is conceptually understood as visible, it becomes clear that though reality is palpable when it is visible, visibility is not a notion by which reality should be defined in the urban context. The still readable symbolism of the not present Orczy House and the fact that the House left traces of its existence in the urban social environment is proof that nodes visually no longer perceptible are just as much "real" as ones that we can see.

By walking through the 'living' memory of tenants and therefore partake in the binary oppositions mentioned before, two contradictory foci engage in the process of commemoration and remembrance. Jews of the Lower East Side, having successfully escaped poverty in general, thus, based on this sharp contradiction, identify themselves through the neighborhood and the Museum, which also means that Lower-East-Side Jewish identity is much grounded in memory and seeks to establish its own *lieux de mémoire*. Hasia

R. Diner explains that while Jews were to reanimate the European milieu in the New York environment, due to the social mobility the American Dream offered and made possible, the next generation of Lower-East-Side Jews emerged as successful, and its members were one of the first self-made men of the American Dream (20). Therefore, it was not only the mark Jewry left on Lower East Side that signified the perception of the neighborhood, but also the fact that Jewry had left the neighborhood. In Hasia's words: "The memory of the Lower East Side assumed its power not only from the Jewish sojourn but also from the drama of exodus from it" (20).

Accordingly, what the Lower East Side—thorough the Tenement Museum—represents is both the commencement of a new America and New York and the termination of an era marked by persecution and day-to-day struggling of Jewry. This duality—having a start and an ending point—gives room for the individual to explore its importance from the panoramic distance of memory, and the temporal viewing frame of the tenement-era becomes maximal. Thus it is looked back upon by the critical gaze of the individual: the new historian who places his subject between himself and history. The importance of the individual experience and the signal that remembering happens through the lens of not *history* but *memory*, is to be pinned down in the Tenement Museum. In its brochure one can read that the various apartments were to be furnished in accordance with the personal memories of the inhabitants: "relying on Esposito's memories and a store of artifacts, the Museum recreated the Baldizzi apartment as it has been in 1935" (*A Tenement* 9). It is evident, therefore, that without the deeply personal connotation of these apartments, the Museum would not succeed in retrieving the past such carefully and truthfully to the observer.

Yet, what the Museum also symbolizes is not only the struggle of newcomers but the revival of the whole neighborhood as well: it is understood as the nest of the Dream and the self-made man of New York: "98 Orchard Street has become the center of animated

conversation about making it in—and remaking—America” (*A Tenement* 21). It can be established, then, that the Tenement, as well as Orczy House, carries opposite connotations that add up to a thorough reading of the whole neighborhood. It is inevitable, however, that I ask: what would we see if we were to recreate the memories of Orczy House? Would an institution—a museum, for instance—be able to regenerate memory without solely remaining on the terrain of history?

6. Sacred Memory: the Trauma

Within the discourse between city and walker, therefore between text and reader, it can be established that identification happens in a two-way direction, following a historical trajectory similar in New York as in Budapest. In the process, the Tenement Museum and Orczy House take on similar roles, rested upon the desire to remember while keeping the invincible compulsion to suppress the trauma of genocide. These sites have both been tenement houses and their functions have changed significantly as history continually reinvented their past-identities.

It is this very reinvention that overwrites their roles as *lieu de mémoire*, because they are sought after within the realms of *memory*. As it is more apparent in the Tenement Museum, the memory of immigrants and Jews that had long lived in exile is understood as a somewhat spiritual bridge between the observer of the present and the past. Pierre Nora explains that “memory situates remembrance in a sacred context” (*The Realms* 3), which is exactly what can be witnessed in the Tenement Museum. As for Orczy House, Nora’s interpretation of the “sacred context” becomes viable in the case of the historian or the researcher: though it does not appear in collective memory (or have left it—it is a question of perspective), it is an imaginative memory of the historian that places it in the sacred territory.

What the Tenement Museum managed to find, and what the researchers of Orczy House have still trouble finding is first-handed, personal memory of the site. There is a vast gap between what is known of Orczy House from memoirs and historical artifacts and what might serve as a base for recalling *memory*.

The dysfunctional presence of the Madách Houses is nevertheless one of the permanent traces that remind the reader of the city of an unaccomplished mission which, again, triggers the core of the unspeakable trauma. While, as I claimed before, the Tenement Museum is a recollection of several distinct memories, the Orczy House remains one single, invisible memory with no immediate relation to the individual today. What this tells us about the difference between New York and Budapest is that while the American culture of commemoration can be understood to heavily rely on personal, immediate *memory*, the Hungarian one rather relies on mediate *history*, with the agent being the temporal distance between event and its observer as “mediator”.

Although indeed very different in the dialectic of commemoration, the possibility that the building in 97 Orchard Street and Orczy House could have easily become identical in function and position in cultural memory is what needs to be recognized. The similarities between New York and Budapest are traced and pinned down in the analysis of the two sites: both buildings sheltered those who were somewhere unwanted, became symbols of current social alterations, and inevitably identified their own environment crucially. It is these two sites through which the individual, us, assumes that the past is to be retrieved by them and, ironically, Orczy House is presented to us as a counter-argument, in a sense that it makes an impossible proposal to stay undersurface while also forcing itself to the fore of the collective conscious of Budapest. The Tenement Museum, embracing this duality, functions as a site of memory; while it represents the past objectively and the needs of the observing individual.

The answer to the previously raised question as to whether retrieving memory would be possible in the case of Orczy House may therefore lie in the analysis of how the act of commemoration is manifested in the context of Budapest. Whether this dilemma can be attributed to inclination or willingness (which may be present or not, as the two sites themselves) to uncover the repressed reality is not necessarily within the scope of this paper, but it can be certainly established that both Orczy House and the Tenement Museum find their roots in the desperate search of Jewish identity and naturally, that of the immigrant, while presenting two very different modes of commemoration.

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Image 1

The layout of the Dumbbell Tenement exhaustively described by Jacob Riis and the bird's-eye view of Henry Street today.

Source:

https://maps.google.hu/maps?q=google+maps+henry+street+new+york&rlz=1C1CHKZ_huHU484HU4



Image 2

The Tenement Museum around the 1860s.

Source: <http://www.bartleby.com/208/>



Image 3

Orczy House around 1937.

Source: <http://budapest-anno.uw.hu/>