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Washing Machine Races, Gulag Pizza, and McLenin Kitsch-ification in Post-Socialist Hungary

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ABSTRACT *During the cold war, material culture could symbolically mark conflicts between the East and West. Lenin, Marx, the sickle and hammer symbolized communist strength. Household items and electronics were marvelled at as new and advanced in contrast to the Western capitalist exotic 'Other'. In Hungary today, these symbols become Communist kitsch that can undermine former tensions and illustrate a collective ambivalence towards the post-socialist condition by (1) reinterpreting time and space, (2) symbolizing the cold war 'other', (3) creating fantasized spaces, (4) and by representing a generational divide. Making former symbols of Communist strength 'kitschy' illustrates a mockery of the past, which becomes fodder for humour much like Bakhtin's discussion of inverse of power. The kitschification of Communism evokes various understandings of nostalgia in material form that underscores reinvented commentaries on the past as well as a response to an uncertain present and in the process neutralizes political complexity.*

KEYWORDS *Kitsch, post-socialism, Hungary, memory, humour*

‘**W**hat might be under this green and white fuzzy blanket?’ Fábry Sándor queries mischievously to his audience. ‘Old Marxist categories come to mind, of who defeats whom . . .’ On post-socialist Hungarian television, Fábry has a ‘Tonight Show’ style talk show (Ésti Showder) with a recurring comic skit he calls the ‘Dizájn Center’ (Design Center). In this skit he looks at nostalgic material items, especially Soviet era electronics such as portable personal sun tanning machines, old reel tape

recorders, old pinball machines ('Flipperek'), and East-German razors that pulled hair rather than shaving it. Tonight he has selected three audience members (Kriszti, Tomi, and Zsuzsa) for what he is cryptically calling a 'somersault' race but he soon reveals as a washing machine race. This washing machine race accentuates the inadequacies of the Russian Evreka brand centrifuge laundry spinners that tended to bounce about the room if the wet clothes were not perfectly balanced. The washer race represents both an absurd, yet nostalgic look at the difficulties of the past. Communist kitsch can be seen from many different perspectives such as humour, as longing for elements of the past, and as subversion of past authority, but ultimately it softens the past. This paper argues that communist kitsch gives insight into a desire for collective understanding about both the communist past and post-communist present, yet it also highlights a cultural ambivalence towards both much like a carnivalesque turn that can affirm a repressive system yet also parody and mock it. I am creating the term 'kitschification' to describe the process in which material culture symbolically reflects a reinterpretation and disempowerment of past powers. This reinterpretation creates a fantasy of the past and highlights the intricate connection between memory and its responses to present-day social, economic, political, and cultural contexts. Kitschification creates a multivocal key symbol reflecting multiple perceptions (East, West, Generational, class, political, etc.) and is expressed in multiple ways (Retro fashion, everyday material items, tourist items, etc.). The kitschification of Communism evokes various understandings of nostalgia in material form that underscores reinvented commentaries on the past that neutralizes political complexity.

Multiple understandings of communist kitsch provide a kind of 'everyday' social commentary on post-socialist Hungary today. Generational divisions as well as complicated political tensions with the West (EU and America) and Russia provide fodder for comic release. For example, Fábry Sándor's comedy aligns with a conservative party FIDESZ. Ironically FIDESZ stands for 'Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége' translating as 'The alliance of young Democrats' because in 1988 the first members were students protesting the then communist regime, but today they are no longer young, and their national conservatism would be closer to our understanding of a conservative Republican party. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán representing the FIDESZ party won the popular vote and controls the parliament giving the party control to revise the constitution and initiate numerous laws. When I asked my informants to describe Prime Minister Orbán, several suggested he flip flopped, going from

one extreme to another. Ella, a 56-year-old lawyer, simply put her two hands together and turned them from one side to another, indicating Orbán's changing views. Agi, a 46-year-old female, works at a bookstore, and her neighbour, Peter, 62, has had on and off jobs for as long as I remember. They both feel Orbán appeals to people like themselves, a 'kis emberek', the little people. Both marvel at the renovations throughout the city, yet when suggested that these were funded with EU money, Peter insisted, 'it is our money', and repeats Orbán's campaign theme 'Együtt az ország' roughly translating as 'bringing the country together'. Fidesz main political rivals, MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt, Hungarian Socialist Party (Social democracy)), representing the former Communist Hungarian Socialist Worker's party, asserts in the 2014 campaign however 'Hungary is not just for them', picturing an awkward grimacing portrait of Orbán. Though he is extremely popular, several of my informants expressed underlying fears that he is a 'robber' and a 'dictator'. Furthermore, these same critics of his regime, typically educated intellectuals, did not want me to record or identify them for fears of government retaliation. The Fidesz party, though lavishly using EU funds to dramatically renovate the country, has been critical of EU authority. The government has shown growing controversial ties to Russia, such as a Russian-backed South Stream gas pipeline that would be jointly operated and owned by the Hungarian Development bank (MFB) and 'Gazprom', a Russian energy corporation.

Based on fieldwork observations in Budapest as well as insights from established informants, this article looks at material objects formally associated with the Socialist era that people now view as kitsch. Printed materials, websites, restaurants, shops, tourist sites, and souvenirs, along with ethnographic interviews give insight on Communist kitsch as it sheds light on understanding struggles over the intersection of the past and present. Pisti (b. 1957) would call to let me know when Fábry's show aired on TV, and though I being an American often do not understand Fábry's humour, I could see his appeal. When I told Pisti I was interested in exploring communist kitsch, he accompanied me on visits to several 'retro' themed Cafes, and Communist tours. 'Retro' tends to be a more recent concept related to style and marketing, a trend particularly of interest to a younger generation. Pisti would not typically go to these places, but he enjoyed the opportunity to explore them with me. In a prior interview in 2013, I was surprised that Pisti claimed his participation with the Young Pioneers as the best period of his life, yet in retrospect I can understand his nostalgia for the Communist era as he has struggled in today's society. Having taken a flexible interest mortgage from a Swiss bank to purchase a home for

his mother, Pisti, like many others, had not anticipated the rising interest rate of the Swiss Franc. The current mortgage crisis starting in 2008 created insurmountable debt well over the value of the home itself forcing Pisti to seek minimum wage work in Germany and rent out his apartment trying desperately to support himself and his mother. Multivocal symbols, such as Communist kitsch, appeal to disparate groups and entail multiple meanings. For someone like Pisti there can be feelings of nostalgia for a past way of life less stressful than today, yet for a younger generation who did not live through the Communist era, there might be an attraction to Communist kitsch as a form of retro style. Still for an American like myself there can be an attraction to Communist kitsch as representing the cold war image instilled from American propaganda.

The process of kitschification contributes to effacing the political complexity of the socialist and post-socialist condition yet different people have different perceptions of it. This paper explores communist kitsch as illustrating a collective ambivalence towards the post-socialist condition by (1) reinterpreting time and space, (2) symbolizing the cold war 'other', (3) creating fantasized spaces, (4) and by representing a cultural and generational divide. Material objects can evoke meaning yet also comment on the past as illustrated in Fábry Sándor's humorous 'design center' routine that pokes fun at Soviet era electronics. The Hungarian tourist industry seems to promote communist kitsch to appeal to Western perceptions of the cold war 'other' creating an identity to appeal to the Western consumer. However, Hungarians can use communist kitsch to preserve a collective memory of everyday life practices. This image of everyday life takes form in fantasized representations of the lived experience that use communist kitsch to create retro-themed spaces such as cafes and restaurants. Perceptions of communist kitsch differ: The Western tourist has a different perception than the local Hungarian. A generational divide exists between those old enough to have experienced socialism and the younger generation who are more accustomed to a globalized economy. This paper looks at the implications of turning former symbols of oppression to kitsch in order to address the multivocality of Communist Kitsch as it sheds insights into the past and present, identity, and power.

Communist Kitsch

Though certainly not all formerly Communist countries experienced communism in the same way, we can still gain insight into understandings of communist kitsch through Milan Kundera's perspective: a complex mixture of apathy

towards an oppressive system yet also sentimentality. During the Communist era, Kundera suggested that communist kitsch in the Czech Republic was related to a complacency people appeared to have towards an oppressive system (2004). He was disturbed by the way some people participated in Communist events, regardless of whether they firmly supported Communism or not. By going along with the system, Kundera posits they were not challenging it. From this point of view, Communist kitsch can be understood as a form of dangerous apathy. Communist kitsch can be compliance and apathy as Kundera suggests, but also, I believe, through parody it highlights social uneasiness. In post-socialist Hungary, Communist kitsch takes on new meaning as people refurbish the past to fit the new challenges of a market economy, thus providing commentary not only on the past but also on the present-day society. The next section addresses the meaning of Communist kitsch as it relates to nostalgia and retro trends.

What is Kitschification?

Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, or prohibitions, of the past, of power. (Bakhtin 1984: 94)

Kitsch can inspire a kind of cringe response looking distasteful or tacky yet at the same time elicit fondness or humour. Making something kitsch that once represented Communism reinterprets a past power that might have been once prohibited. Nadkarni and Shevchenko argue that ‘Converting political icons into kitsch was thus part of the necessary symbolic work of the time, in order to render the former icons powerless and to enable post-socialist subjects to look back at the past with no fear of its return (Nadkarni & Shevchenko 2004: 500). Looking at humour, to paraphrase Bakhtin, reveals another facet of kitsch as a way to ‘liberate’ from a past power. Humour often focuses on topics society finds uncomfortable or fears and it can play on things the culture finds distasteful or grotesque (Bakhtin 1984: 223, see also Mikula 2003: 172). Societal taboos may be too difficult to talk about directly, but humour allows us to address potentially volatile topics (see Freud 1960). In de Certeau’s discussion of legendary objects, he suggests material objects of the past can be ‘spirits’ of the city that articulate time and space (1998: 135–137). ‘Certainly, the pedagogical processes of which they are the object include an internal contradiction: they must at once protect and civilize that which is old, make new that which is old (de Certeau 1998: 137)’. With this in mind, I interpret communist kitsch in Hungary as indi-

cators of the Communist past (that which is old) and reinterpreted in the post-socialist present (make new that which is old). The question then arises, what is the significance of this process? This process is linked to what I am calling *kitschification*. Though scholars debate over the meaning of 'kitsch' (Boyers and Boyers 1990), I am looking at it within the particular context of post-socialist Hungary and how this process of kitschifying can highlight shifting understandings of the past. Kitschification describes a process by which popular culture reinterprets time and space, and as a form of humour and nostalgia, it can smooth away political and historical controversy.

Nostalgia and Communist Kitsch

Originally the term nostalgia referred to a sort of pathological longing for home, and Communist nostalgia in particular might be perceived as a longing for the past communist era after its demise in 1989. However, the term itself raises far more complicated issues. Svetlana Boym suggests the roots of the meaning behind nostalgia stem from understanding it as a medical condition that Swiss doctors could cure with opium and leeches (2001: XIV). Within today's global society, Boym sees two general trends: (1) restorative nostalgia (reconstruction of the lost home, a lost truth and tradition), and (2) reflective nostalgia (desperate or ironic longing particularly in light of complications of modernity) (2001: XVIII). Like restorative nostalgia, communist kitsch reconstructs a past 'home' or way of life connected to Hungary's communist past, and might portray this past as 'truth and tradition' and yet as Boym suggests these can be invented truths and traditions. Like reflective nostalgia, communist kitsch conveys a sense of longing yet also looks at it from the context of present-day society and may call 'it into doubt' (2001: XVIII). Communist kitsch symbolizes in material form both the longing for the past, and questioning of it, but furthermore, through parody harks of issues of power, and social commentary of both the past and present. Nadkarni and Shevchenko outline at least four different types of nostalgia: proustiana, habitus kitsch, cultural belonging, and fashion nostalgia. In some cases, nostalgia might be commodified in politically neutral forms, it can entail aspects of everyday life during the communist era that no longer exists, and its shared experience might inspire cultural belonging, yet also distinguish generational divides between those who lived during the communist era and a younger generation who did not. Yet as Nadkarni and Shevchenko warn

nostalgia plays an implicitly, if not explicitly, political role. Post-socialist nostalgia enables Hungarians "to not talk about the past while talking about it": to retain

one's childhood memories while refusing to pass definitive judgment upon the larger political and historical context within which they took place. (Nadkarni & Shevenko 2004: 516)

My friend Pisti, for example, retains a fondness for his childhood participation with the Young Pioneers as he interacted with a group of friends and they worked on collective activities, and though the Young Pioneers was run by the Communist Party, Pisti did not, as Nadkarni and Shevenko suggest, dwell on the political historical implications of this.

Former communist items, now perceived as campy or kitsch, can be linked to identity, memory, power and resistance associated within the context of present-day society. Berdahl suggests East-German Ostalgie 'tells us more about the present than the past' (Berdahl 2010: 59). She perceives the celebration of former East-German products as indicators of politics that both 'contests and affirms a new order' (Berdahl 2010: 49). She states 'For many people on both sides of the inter-German border, this lack of product innovation and consumer choice, more than any political difference, constituted the principle distinction between East and West' (Berdahl 2010: 49). Ostalgie, she states, 'does not entail an identification with the former GDR state, but rather an identification with different forms of oppositional solidarity and collective memory. It can evoke feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction – sometimes within the same individuals (Berdahl 2010: 56)'. Given my friend Pisti's current economic struggles, it is not surprising he should long for the past. Communist Kitsch in Hungary, like Berdahl's discussion of East-German Ostalgie, can reflect a type of nostalgia that may be associated with the past, but actually tells more about the present and the complicated sometimes conflicting emotions it inspires.

Communist kitsch can indicate how the trauma of dramatic change can lead some to grasp for control by reinventing the past. Jonathan Bach talks about the impact of change on former citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). As a response to the dramatic societal changes people turned to the World Wide Web to create a virtual reproduction of the GDR 'as parody, as nostalgia, as memory, as history, as biting commentary on the present and as subtle digs at the past' (2005: 265). Bach also explores the ways in which nostalgic consumption patterns express both a modernist nostalgia and nostalgia of style. The modernist nostalgia 'is a longing for a mode of longing that is no longer possible (Bach 2005: 547)'. Bach suggests the exposure to Western modernism and post-modernism creates feelings of disorientation spurring a 'mod-

ernist nostalgia'. 'The modernist nostalgia of the East is a straightforward longing, not for a past per se but for the fantasies of the past' (Bach 2002: 554).

Communist kitsch can take form in creating a fantasy of the past that is no longer possible, or in fact may be a rosy picture of what might have been. Susan Stewart suggests nostalgia is sad, inauthentic, and ideological in that:

the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality. (Stewart 1993: 23)

She suggests nostalgia provides an imagined idealistic image of the past so that 'nostalgia is the desire for desire' (Stewart 1993: 23). Communist kitsch reflects a longing people had during the Soviet era of the future; of the possibilities of Western consumption, it reflects a longing that one used to have of the past for a time filled with possibilities. However, this longing, the fantasies of the West bringing a promising future, no longer exists. An older man, knowing I am American, approached me to share a story about the first time he had an American coke. Someone had smuggled it in from the West and he recalled how special it felt to take a sip of something that to him represented America a place he could not travel to, a place with products unavailable in Hungary. Today, he lamented in disappointed angry undertones, the shelves at Tesco are filled with Coca-Cola so that now he no longer has that special feeling he associated with his first sip. Like Stewart's discussion of nostalgia, this man's story suggests the 'longing for longing' for things from the west, 'if only we could have access to Western products, if only we could travel freely, if only we could taste a coke'. This longing of possibilities confronts the disillusionment of present-day society in which these items no longer carry the same forbidden sense of longing (see also Bach 2002: 549–551).

Communist kitsch in Hungary may be a response to sudden societal change and way of life, but also a response to a global economy traditionally controlled by the West. Bach argues there is a nostalgia of style, a 'neokitsch' associated with the present-day trend to consume East-German products. He sees this as ironic because during the Communist era people longed for Western goods. Yet these neokitsch items appeal not just to people from the former East Germany, but also appeals to those too young to actually experience East Germany and to westerners looking to consumption as 'a privileged site for the fabrication of self and society, of culture and identity in a new age of

anxiety governed by the floating signifier of globalization' (Bach 2002: 553). Ironically, Bach argues that there is a connection between nostalgia for the past longing for capitalism and a response to the traumatic change's potential loss of GDR identity that creates 'a longing for the intangible material world across the border, and the capitalist nostalgia of today's unified Germany organized around an aesthetics of kitsch. As the direct memories of the GDR fade, the taste that remains may not be the bitter aftertaste of longing lost, but a highly aestheticized and decontextualized sense of camp' (Bach 2002: 554).

Balming political tension through humour, the process of kitschifying Soviet era memorabilia makes it more palatable for today's society, as some may be attracted to the aesthetic qualities of the period or find the pieces nostalgic. Though many of the people I talk to insist that they are not political, there are strong political divisions as some see Prime Minister Orbán as a saviour renovating the country and bringing the nation together, while others fear he is taking too much political control. Certainly different types of people use Communist kitsch items and have different perceptions of them making Communist kitsch a multivocal symbol particularly relevant to today's society. One form of communist kitsch, as will be discussed in the following, deals with how it is marketed and for whom.

Communist Kitsch Appeals to Western Perceptions of the Cold War Other

The Hungarian tourist industry portrays itself as the 'cultural other' by creating a simplified reinterpretation of the past, a kitschified version, for the Western tourist gaze. Verdery links post-socialist studies to post-colonial studies to suggest a parallel emphasis on knowledge and representation. 'Just as postcolonial studies examine the "self" and "other" in the colonial encounter, we might further explore the history of such representations in the socialist and capitalist worlds – each holding up the other as its nemesis, the image of all that is evil' (Verdery 1996: 17). I would argue that today the Communist East 'other' image has become marketable to the Western tourist, yet ironically, Hungarians themselves create this image for sale (see also Sabonis-Chafee 1999). Why would they present themselves as a cold war stereotype? Berdhal looks at the consumption of former East-German products as a form of resistance highlighting East West divisions. She states 'Rather than using coveted western goods to construct and express resistant political identities, as under socialism, eastern Germans turned to old GDR products – an inversion of what John Borneman termed the "mirror imaging process" that contributed to the construction of two German

states and identities during the Cold War' (Berdhal 2010: 45). Just as Berdhal suggests, the commodification of communist kitsch can reflect past cold war tensions symbolizing power struggles, resistance, and identity that can both 'contest and affirm the new order of a market economy'. Fehérváry further notes 'in the context of the state's utopian promises, on the one hand, and the populace's increasing exposure to images of the West and western consumer goods on the other, the Cold War opposition between communist and capitalist systems become embodied in their respective products' (2006: 56). Fehérváry suggests state socialism stressed making quotas, quantity, to provide consumer goods to everybody. Yet people perceived the substandard quality of these consumer items in contrast to Western goods, so that the products themselves 'came to stand for the inferiority of the socialist system itself, as well as the state's negligent and even "inhumane" treatment of its subjects' (Fehérváry 2006: 56). Material items associated with socialist past can symbolize East West divisions provoking 'cultural other' perspectives.

The 'cultural other' is a Western-centric comparison from a position of power pitting us (the self) against them (the other). Constructing the 'cultural other' has to do with issues of representation and how this representation could be used against them. The 'other' may be portrayed in a simplified stereotyped manner often as primitive, backward, less sophisticated, or exotic. To make a group of people 'the other' denies them agency and complexity. This simplification process creates oppression and exclusion (see Fanon 1952; Asad 1973; Said 1978; Spivak 1988). During the communist period, travel to and from communist countries was restricted, hence limiting the tourist market. Following the fall of communism, former communist countries have become popular destinations for the Western tourist in part out of curiosity for a society they knew little about.

Ironically the tourist industry in Hungary creates a kitschified image of the 'communist Other': a cartoon version of what American tourists believed Cold War communism to be. The Red Scare, Hollywood Blacklists, house un-American Activities Committees, space wars, all represented the Cold War struggle for power between Western Capitalist Societies and Communist societies. When President Reagan infamously stated 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall' it was not simply to remove the Berlin wall that separated Eastern (communist) Germany and Western (capitalist) Germany, it was for Gorbachev to surrender the war for Communism and embrace Capitalism. Western tourists want to see the cold war 'other'. Hungarians willingly sell this kitschified version of the Cold War, despite that the everyday experience of communism was much more varied, complex, and contested than the average American was

led to believe. Bach observed in Germany a difference between the way East and West Germans marketed and perceived Communist Kitsch. Bach suggests that Westerners may perceive East-German nostalgia (Ostalgia) 'as deluded ingrates longing pathetically (if understandably) for the socialist past. Yet when the subject is the knowingly ironic westerner (or "sophisticated" easterner) enjoying the retro aura of GDR era design, Ostalgia appears as (p)ostmodern artifact valued precisely for its lack of emotional attachment to a specific past' (Bach 2002: 546–545). Westerners saw kitsch as a mockery of a once powerful and oppressive regime, yet for East Germans the appeal of communist kitsch lies in the form of material goods from their past everyday lives. The Berlin wall did fall, and communism seemed to crumble with it and as a result Western tourists (self) want the negative stereotyped images of Communism (the other) that were promoted during the Cold War to be affirmed, to justify and legitimate Capitalism's conquest. The following looks at various ways tourism markets a kitschified Cold War through symbols such as the Trabant, Communist-themed tours, tourist sites, and communist souvenirs.

Elaborating Symbols of Communism: The Trabant

Communist kitsch creates a stereotyped image of the cold war 'other' that provides an additional facet to understandings of historical 'truth' as seen for example in the depiction of the Trabant. Ortner (2008) defines 'elaborating symbols' as providing categories for thinking about how the world is ordered and how people should act within it. The Trabant car provides an 'elaborating symbol' of the Communist era especially in terms of material shortages and the ability to adapt to the challenges of the era. The Trabant was a two-cylinder East-German car that was popular during the Communist era. Because the state system often had a shortage of products, Gyuszi (b. 1956) remembers his family paid in full and then waited several years to obtain what he affectionately called the 'the Trabi paper car'. One had to measure how much gas was in the tank by sticking a dipstick in a bottle under the hood. Though made to hold four people, remarkably the Trabant endured many uses: from family bus, hauling van, to tow truck with a rope. Sadly Gyuszi's father heard the Trabant with its two-cylinder engine would be illegal to drive and sold the beloved car. Gyuszi still regrets the loss of the family Trabi and often stops to look inside parked Trabant cars and reminisce, if only his father had not sold the car so soon (see also Berdahl 2010: 60–67). Gyuszi is not alone in his fondness for the car, as among a post-socialist generation, the Trabant has become a nostalgic hobby car as seen in various car clubs (see www.trabantklub.hu).

However for the Western tourist the Trabant has become a key symbol of the difference between the East and West: it is slow, problematic, and backwards, in comparison to Western manufactured cars (See Berdahl 2010). Several Trabant tourist packages in which the tour guide drives the tourist in an old Trabant claim to give the *true* communist tour yet these tours create stereotyped images of what life was like during the Communist era. There are a number of Trabant tours such as the CityRama, which encourages tourists to ‘get into the old, small and smelling (sic.) vehicle and get familiar with the mysteries of Hungary’s communist history down in the former bunker and up on the Stalin’s grandstand’ (www.cityrama.com). Using the word ‘mysteries’ seems to make the experience exotic. In the Budapest hotel guide tour, they suggest, ‘there is no better way to see Budapest than with an original Trabant 601 With this unique sightseeing in Budapest you can combine unsurpassed driving feeling and nostalgic sightseeing with the real atmosphere of the past communist era’ (www.budapest-hotel-guide.hu/en/budapest-sightseeing-tours/trabant-tour.php). This tour gives you the ‘real atmosphere’ of the past so that the tourist could feel what it was like to live during the Communist era. Budapest Tours summarizes ‘how it all started, how Big Brother told us what to do and what not to do. We’ll teach you about how life was behind the Iron Curtain. Learn how children were brought up, how families lived, how we could travel, where we could travel, how long it took to get a passport and many interesting experiences from black markets to banana lines’ (Small Group Budapest Walking Tour – <http://www.viator.com>). This gives the impression that people were passive lemmings that followed Big Brother’s instructions without question, when there were many forms of everyday resistance and there was more to everyday life than oppression and inconvenience. The Trabant tour creates an ‘authentic’ lived experience for the tourist, yet this ‘authenticity’ simplifies stereotypes that do not necessarily depict people’s more nuanced life experiences. For the local Hungarian, the Trabant is a hobby car that illustrates a fondness for a material object from their past, not a reminder of nor a fondness for communism. Communist kitsch stereotypes the past and hence negates the complexity of experience.

Communist Tourist Sites: Statue Park

Post-socialism resulted in symbolic removals of the socialist past, yet Communist kitsch evokes this socialist past as exemplified in Hungary’s Statue Park. Whereas in some former socialist countries, communist statues and symbols

were removed and destroyed, Hungary saved many of the statues in a place called 'Szobor Park', which translates as Statue Park, but it is also referred to as 'Memento Park'. The advertisement for the park describes it as having 'gigantic statues and ghosts of communist dictatorship (www.szoborpark.hu)'. The park itself did not provide guided tours though outside tour groups might bring their own guides to describe the statues. On my visit to the park, the worker at the gate who collected fees and sold tourist guide booklets in English and Hungarian explained the English version was more expensive than the Hungarian, yet she also remarked that few Hungarians visited unless they had emigrated from Hungary or were accompanying a foreign friend who wished to visit. As Beverly James suggests, though there was a slew of political manoeuvring behind the building of the park, 'the Statue Park is not a burning issue for most Hungarians (James 2005: 37)'. Nadkarni suggests the park statues allow the visitors to forget yet remember the socialist era.

Framing the park with the consumption of such socialist kitsch has made it more marketable for Western European and North American visitors, who view the park as proof of both the oppressed socialist past that feared and hated these statues, and the democratic present that is free to laugh at them. Indeed, western reports of the park opening often played into these fantasies of monumental ignominy: describing the park's architecture as a humorous 'theme park or Leninland', or romantically locating the park on a 'bleak' or 'windy' hilltop. (Nadkarni 2006: 203)

There is a general feeling that it is made for tourists. Visiting the 'ghosts of communist dictatorship' seems to create a cultural 'other' for the Western tourist's gaze.

Communist Tours

Communist tours symbolize kitschified versions of communism stereotyped for the tourist's gaze, and yet the Hungarians themselves create these images of the communist past for the Western consumer. Communist kitsch in tourist packages depicts the Cold War 'other', emphasizing a simplified binary opposition between East and West. The free Budapest communist walking tour claims the tourist will gain:

Personnel (*sic*) and realistic insight into what life in Hungary was like under Communism and what has happened since. This tour also provides an interesting first hand account of life pre and post Iron Curtain and helps to understand the local way of living and not just see the city from a tourist's viewpoint. The undercover

stories reveal interesting facts about traveling, housing, education, media, propaganda, sport, healthcare, religion, economy under Communism and in comparison with the post-Communist era. Tour (sic.) provides clear picture about everybody over 30 lived through and how it affects current attitudes of locals. (Budapest Tours.net 2011)

In the summer of 2011, I participated in the 'Communist walking tour' throughout the streets of Budapest (Budapest Walking Tours). Most of the participants were Americans, though there was one couple from Australia, and a woman from Mexico. Most were in their late 20s and 30s, but there was a good representation of retired American baby boomers. A man and woman tour guides often told stories of their own personal experiences to give a sense of authenticity. Both of these tour guides had lived outside Hungary in Western countries before returning contributing to their strong English competency, but also an ability to look at their own country from a Western perspective. My Hungarian friend, Pisti came with me on the tour, but we soon realized the tour would be all in English, and since he does not speak English, he left. In fact, most guides to 'communist' sites are in Western languages not Hungarian hence not for the native but the tourist to view 'the other'. Highlights of the tour included a secret escape bunker for the Communist elite, and gun-pocked buildings showing the impact of the 1956 rebellions. In Szabadság Tér in front of the American embassy still stands one of the few remaining Communist monuments: the Soviet Army Memorial built in 1945 topped with the red communist star. The tour guide suggested the Russians originally placed it in front of the US embassy as a 'in your face' gesture. In the post-socialist period, however, the Americans have placed their own statue as a response: Looking towards the US embassy over the Russian monument stands a slightly larger than life statue of President Ronald Reagan installed in 2009 in honour of what would have been his 100th birthday. Several people took smiling photographs next to Ronnie. Yet the tour also tried to show the complexity of the era. The tour guide Éva recalled when she was a student that the state had removed a section of the textbook that covered George Orwell, yet the teacher had brought in her own copy for the students to read indicating that in practice there were everyday forms of resistance. Not only did the tour reinforce the Western view of the oppressive communist state and highlight the triumph of Capitalism as exemplified by Ronald Reagan's statue, but it also described everyday forms of resistance.

Communist kitsch appeals to the Western tourist as being able to touch these real-life examples of Communism forces the Westerner to realize how

symbols of oppression affected people's lived experience. At the end of the tour, tourists were given a more visceral experience as the tour guides' allowed the group to touch their personal collections of Soviet era objects such as a propaganda postcard glorifying the Soviet housing projects, a soviet era blue passport, and a stamped party book. Underneath the kitschified façade of the Cold War, the tour guides attempted to show the complicated nature of the experience from the perspective of people's everyday lives. In 2007 I taught a post-socialist anthropology course at UCLA during which I brought in my own collection of Soviet memorabilia, including Communist party books, Work IDs, red star pins, Soviet sport awards. I encouraged students to look closely many fascinated with the ability to pick up, and handle symbols of Communism. One student asked in shock, 'How did you get these items?' Until that question, it had not occurred to me that these would be difficult to obtain as people gave them to me as they wanted to get rid of them. In the summer 2014, many similar items such as red star pins, Lenin statues, and Stalin paintings can still be obtained at the Ecseri flea market where, according to a market vendor, mostly Western tourists buy them. Fascinated with being able to handle Communist symbols integrated into people's everyday life experiences creates a tangible visceral experience for a Westerner who did not have the first-hand experience of living during the Communist era. Like the 'exotic other', these symbols are like souvenirs from a life that would be hard to imagine.

Communist Kitsch as Souvenir

Kitschification can also be like a souvenir because it makes a fantasized representation of a time and place that creates a cold war 'other' for the Western gaze. Souvenir stems from the French word meaning memory, yet these often depict a stereotyped image of the Communist past rather than authentic reality. Souvenirs are sold as a depiction of place to remember one's visit and they capture memories of experience associated with interpretations of a place. Literature on souvenirs suggests that they often stereotype the place, and perhaps do not accurately depict the culture (Watson Kopachesky 1996). 'The consumer's story cannot be separated from the form of souvenir. Their own story connects aspects of place, people, culture, time, and/or heritage to their own understanding (Ballengee-Morris 2002: 103)'. According to Ballengee-Morris, souvenirs do not necessarily depict an accurate portrayal of time and place but rather the owner's assessment or understanding of the time and place. Souvenirs can be stereotypical representations that put an emphasis

on a 'romanticized heritage' versus the complex reality of the place (Ballengee-Morris 2002: 106). In the swank Budapest shopping street, the Váci utca, tourist shops sell Communist-themed items from cups with Lenin's face, to Russian military hats, and communist red stars. Hungarians sell communist-themed souvenir items but most are sold or marketed to Western tourists eager to have their 'cold war' assumptions about the communist 'other' reaffirmed.

Why would Hungarians market souvenirs from a disturbing past? Carmen White looks at Fiji tourism to note the ways souvenirs such as war clubs and cannibal forks can mark 'difference' from the Western tourist, a type of sensationalism evoking both the fantasies and fears associated with Fiji 'savage' 'barbarian' cannibalist past. This imagery combined with presenting contemporary Fijians as friendly and congenial, ultimately invites 'a tourist gaze upon a successful colonial project whereby Fijians were "tamed" from, and exorcised of "primitive" impulses that allowed their purer impulses to emerge. [...] Still, while souvenirs and other emblems of material culture highlighted in Fiji tourism are significant to the creation of narratives, tourism promotion is particularly reliant upon living, breathing Fijians to carry its central themes' (White, 2005: 168). She goes on to suggest the industry presumes tourists desire to see the exotic native other. In much the same vein, Nadkarni and Shevchenko note that post-socialist nostalgia appeals both to those from the former Soviet bloc and their cold-war foils, as 'post-socialist nostalgia also appeals to the desire to see oneself through the "Other's" desiring gaze (the lost structure of fantasy that both East and West mourn)' (Nadkarni & Shevchenko 2004: 497). The fact that Hungarians produce and market Communist souvenirs shows their market potential – Western tourists buy it, and in a Capitalist economy, Hungarians can profit from it.

Westerner's view of Communist kitsch can arouse sensationalist fantasies and fears associated with the 'cold war' other, yet also induce a sense of victory having tamed it. Though Communist kitsch may portray one perspective of the past for the Western tourist, it may also portray another perspective for Hungarians who desire to re-experience particular memories and associations connected with this past as explored in the following discussion of fantasized spaces.

Communist Retro Kitsch Preserves a Collective Memory of Everyday Life Practices through Fantasized Space

Kitschification celebrates the people's unofficial experiences regarding life during the communist era. Every individual has their own unique memories

and interpretation of the past, and for some this everyday daily experience, the so-called authentic memory, is often paired in contrast to 'official' historical depictions. Focusing on material culture from people's private lives and experiences expresses the daily experience over the official depictions. In looking at the socialist experience, the 'emotional works of flesh and bone people have usually been overlooked (Yan 2003: xxii)'. Yes the historical political context influences the individual experience, and yet people chose to focus on this individual experience of everyday life outside the state to represent their social reality.

Retro and Kitsch

Retro refers to a stylized version of a recent past typically reflected in material objects. Soviet Retro in Hungary, for example, might include red polka dot fabric, Terv cigarette boxes, East-German Trabant cars, and red soviet stars. Retro often reflects personal style linked to capitalist market consumption. Unlike the concept of nostalgia, Platt argues that 'Retro makes past history close to us rather than apprehending and struggling against historical distance' (Platt 2013: 464). Retro unlike nostalgia's longing pathology can be a form of style or fashion. He goes on to state that "Soviet retro" describes the revival or continuation of traditions that appear never to have been lost, rather than the quixotic overcoming of the deleterious effects of time and the total disjuncture of collapse associated with post-socialist nostalgia' (Platt 2013: 464). Retro can intertwine with forms of nostalgia and kitsch to give a stylized reflection of the past without a longing sense of melancholy, as Nadkarni and Shevchenko note a 'nostalgia without a referent and hence without pain, as opposed to "modernist" nostalgia, which still longs for an origin (Nadkarni & Shevchenko 2004: 503)'.

Though retro style items may on the surface appear neutral, the people who engage with them may have divergent views such that a person of an older generation who lived through the soviet era may see these items as sparking a memory from their own past, whereas a younger generation may simply perceive them as hip or fashionable. From Bach's perspective Ostalgia in East Germany has two forms: a 'modernist' nostalgia, and a 'nostalgia of style'. This 'nostalgia of style' corresponds with the 1990s retro trend in Hungary, and while Bach suggests it primarily reflects a Western perspective, I would add that it also often reflects the perspective of a younger generation that may never have experienced the Socialist era first hand. In Fehérváry's discus-

sion of the film 'Csinibaba' (1997), she explores how the 1960s era film reimagined consumer culture to serve a corrective function for a younger Hungarian generation. Youth preferred this reinvented past than the one told by their elders, and could better identify with it. 'The very possibility of this construction, however, lies in the symbolic value of everyday material culture within the socialist system' (Fehérváry 2006: 55–56). At the retro-themed Táskarádió Eszpresszó Café in Budapest, Pisti (b. 1958) was drawn to an old tin placard nailed to the wall that listed the rules for the children's youth pioneer movement operated by the Communist party. He jokingly stood at attention and attempted to recite the rules from memory. Pisti though university trained has struggled to obtain full time work currently surviving on 100,000 F (\$500) per month to support himself and his mother. He had never been to the Táskarádió Eszpresszó Café in part because he simply could not afford it, and furthermore most customers were Western tourists or younger generation Hungarians. I wanted to go, and I wanted to show him the retro-themed pub. In an earlier interview I asked when was the best time of your life, to which he recalled his childhood especially his participation with the young pioneers. In the circumstance of the retro-themed café, the presence of this material object related to the young pioneers spurred his memory of the past, a memory void of politics, though technically the Communist party ran the young pioneers club. A younger person, or in fact someone like myself not raised in Hungary, might see these objects as a type of style filled with bright colours and funny figures, but they certainly would not spark a memory from my own childhood. On another occasion, I met with a young woman, Ella, at this very same Café, a place she recommended we meet as it was close to her work and she had been there before with friends and work colleagues. Ella, (b. 1984) university educated and profiting from her ability to speak English, works for the EU in Hungary. She avidly posts on facebook, has hair extensions, and consistently texts on her iphone. Ella remarks how the elderly workers in her office complain that in the old days they did not have to work as hard, but Ella says today 'we have to work to pay off all the loans the country took'. Her friend, Marika, called it a type of nostalgia afflicting the older generation. When we met at the Táskarádió Eszpresszó Café, it inspired her to recall how her friends and work colleagues had gone to a retro-themed party. Ella, born just before the fall of communism, has little or no memory of living during the Communist era and has adapted to a busy fast-paced work and consumption culture of her generation. She perceives Communist retro as a cute kitsch style.

I asked several senior women what they thought about the retro trend and they did not seem to understand my question as they did not participate in going to retro-themed places or buying retro-themed items. Yet, old material objects can still spark fond memories. One day I was cleaning behind some cabinets and found an old package of 'Ultra' soap in a small paper bag with an image of a housewife wearing a white apron and red polka-dotted handkerchief on her head spinning a clean plate in the air. Seeing this old bag, Albertina néni (b. 1939) started to laugh as she recalled the time she had to resort to using it as shampoo. During the Socialist era, there were often periods of shortages of consumer goods so when Albertina néni could not find shampoo, she decided to wash her hair with Ultra dish soap powder, consequently suffering from dried hair and dandruff for many months afterwards. Though an item from their past might spark a memory, these retro-themed places represent capitalist market ventures that appeal more to a younger generation or tourists. Nadkarni and Shevchenko discuss the 'fashionability of socialist historicity' for a younger generation: 'This is not a difference in the *object* of nostalgia, but rather in the subject's *relationship* to it: one of abstraction rather than materiality; historical citation rather than a metonymic slide into personal memory; ironic distance rather than longing' (Nadkarni & Shevchenko 2004: 502).

Communist kitsch linked to retro-themed spaces ironically highlights the seriousness of political conflict yet also downplays it to focus on the mundane day-to-day aspects of the time period. 'Retro' refers to the era of Communism (1945–1989) and yet it is recounted in a playful style as retro-themed places serve to relive the experience of the past from the safe perspective of the present. To make something 'retro' is the practice of modelling something on the past, but in the case of Hungary, it also carries a feeling of fondness for a past way of life. The key to understanding this retro phenomenon is to highlight the contradictory and ambivalent attitudes toward the past (see also 'ostalgie' Berdahl 2010). In Marita Sturken's study of kitsch following the 9/11 attacks in New York, she suggests there was a type of 'comfort kitsch' that both reenacts the past historical trauma, but also distances from history and politics, she states: 'such objects, no matter how well intended, cannot be innocent. They evoke innocence, they sell innocence, and they promote it, but in their very circulation they participate in a comfort culture that simplifies and reduces, that efface political complexity' (Sturken 2007: 94). In much the same vein, retro softens and distances the past into comfortable kitsch.

Communist kitsch allows one to visit recreations in time and space, allowing people to return to certain aspects of the past or their younger selves evoking

nostalgic longing. The kitschification trends look at the past from the perspective of the everyday experience and this has led to a number of stores and establishments that highlight the material objects of the era. A Café located near Budapest's Szabadság Tér ('Freedom square') called 'Terv' makes reference to the Communist 'Five Year Plan'. During the Socialist era in Hungary (1947–1989), the Communist plan was to increase production through centralization and to focus on heavy industry by setting target figures and establishing quotas for production. Though it contributed to providing employment for all, and provided redistribution for social services, it also led to dysfunctional production practices, product shortages, and a system of bribery or under-the-table favouritism. Other than the name of the Café, the interior looks like a museum of everyday artefacts of the era rather than homage to its politics. Old matchbooks and cigarette covers of the era, old photographs, toys, and electronics covered the walls. Other than a few personal party books, and communist-star-decorated sport awards, the décor makes little reference to the politics of the era. It looks more like you have walked into someone's living room with their personal memorabilia hung on the wall. A small restaurant close to the Opera House called 'Spajz' (which translates as kitchen pantry) gives the feel of sitting at someone's old kitchen table and like the café, material objects from the Communist era decorate the walls such as old coffee grinders, candy boxes, and plastic toys. These images relate to Boym's description of kitsch as being 'often associated with a nostalgic vision of the middle-class home; it domesticates every possible alienation, satiates the insatiable thirst with artificially sweetened drinks that quench the very need for longing' (Boym 2001: 279). Walking into these places gives one the feeling of what it was like to live during that era. Like a tourist visiting a foreign land, a customer going to these establishments can visit a past place that no longer exists and perhaps never existed. There is a sense of familiarity that makes kitsch appealing, and yet it also evokes a longing for a problematic past.

Communist kitsch establishments that evoke images of the past may also wink an eye of parody at it. Located primarily in the Belvaros (inner city), retro-themed cafes and shops lure young Western tourists. The older Jewish neighbourhood now called Kultúra utcája (culture street) is officially noted as representing the Jewish culture, the electrotechnic museum, and the Elte University, but known in many tourist books for its trendy bars, escape rooms, and ruin pubs. On Dohany utca, up the street from the Jewish Synagogue lies a dress shop called 'Szputnyik' (www.szputnyikshop.hu). Sputnik refers back to the Cold-war tensions as seen through the Space Exploration industry.

Sputnik was the first satellite put into orbit, by the Russians in 1957, 'one upping' the technological competition with the USA. Every Hungarian child knew Yuri Gagarin, the first astronaut to fly to the moon, as a national hero, not the American Neal Armstrong, who later was the first to land on the moon. The dress shop sells retro dresses, vintage, and new clothing inspired by the Communist era style: bright red polka-dotted fabric, simple cotton dresses, and scarves. The sign states in both English and Hungarian 'Fashion from the past, style from the future'. This version of communist kitsch aligns with Bach's understanding as an 'aestheticized and decontextualized sense of camp' (Bach 2005: 554). Communist kitsch can depict a saccharine version of the past.

Making light of brutal regimes and atrocities in the form of kitsch may appear distasteful and disturbing because it seems to void the seriousness of the past, but the distortion of the past may be a victory over it (see Bakhtin 1984: 62). Exaggerations can become caricature but can also have a critical moral dimension. Exaggerating or making fun of a politically controversial past presents a 'contradictory' version of the past that can serve as a coping mechanism to deal with it in the present (see also Freud 1960; Sturken 2007). In addition, Georgescu argues that they might serve to contest certain stories of the past. Georgescu looks at ironic and comic performances as expressions of alternative memory that 'should be seen as active and strategic responses to present-day challenges rather than as "survivals" of communism' (Georgescu 2010: 157). Furthermore she argues 'ironic messages are characterized by a certain richness that allows them to perform memory work and socio-political critiques simultaneously' (Georgescu 2010: 171). Humour and irony can be a response to present-day conditions. Nadarni's work in Hungary found that many of her informants early in the transition felt duped: they longed for Western capitalism and yet when they got it there were new social issues and problems. From this dissatisfaction and confusion, Nadkarni explores 'irony' from a modernist perspective. Nadkarni states 'Whereas irony relies upon a shared denial of the veracity of surface reality, kitsch thus makes a fetish of this surface and seeks to foreclose alternative readings (Nadkarni 2007: 617)'.

A parody of the uncomfortable past, as exemplified in a restaurant called 'Marxim', copes with the past, but also present-day society. On the Buda side of Budapest Marxim is a Pizza Parlor, which may translate as 'my Marx' but also may be a play on words referring to the elite French restaurant Maxim's. Both translations downplay the seriousness of Marxism by making it personal (my Marx) or associating it with a capitalist bourgeois elite restaurant (Maxim).

This restaurant allows the customer to experience the Socialist past complete with barbed wire fences, barred windows, and pictures of Lenin. The menu mocks the past with options like ‘red October’ referring to the Tom Clancy novel based on true events of a Soviet submarine’s defection, but in this case it refers to extra tomatoes on the pizza. The ‘Gulag’ pizza refers to the acronym for the government agency that overlooked the Soviet forced labour camps, and on the ‘Pre-election Promises’ pizza you can choose any toppings you want. The webpage for the restaurant states in Hungarian ‘Itt csak a külső ségek idézik a szocreált, minden más a velejéig romlott kapitalizmus! (marxim-pub.hu)’ ‘Here only the surface reminds you of socialist realism, everything else is corrupt to the bone Capitalism!’ The Pizza parlour makes fun of the scary past in an ironic way by paraphrasing and satirizing soviet propaganda yet it also makes reference to the present market economy. The pizza parlour simplifies the atrocities of the past but from the safe perspective of the present. Nadkarni suggests the rapid way kitsch became popular was not about a desire to return to the Soviet past, but a way to create further distance from it. ‘Making the soft dictatorship of yesterday equivalent to that of the repressive Stalinist 1950s – a period that for decades had already been experienced as past – helped to distance an everyday suddenly consigned to the dustbin of history’ (Nadkarni 2010: 194). I would add to Nadkarni’s argument that creating binary divisions between the ‘Soviet’ past and ‘Western’ present overlooks the hybrid nature of post-socialist society or as Verdery might suggest, the post-colonial style ability of the past to impact the present. Furthermore, addressing the harshness of the past through humour overcomes it yet not directly addresses it either. Kitschification can invert power and recontextualize it yet this capacity to soften the past contains the troubling ability to not problematize it. One can visit the socialist past by having pizza at Marxim’s, but inevitably have to return to post-socialist society where ‘everything else is corrupt to the bone Capitalism!’

Though Communist kitsch suggests a distorted view of the past from different perspectives, they all in different ways dampen political complexity. While the Western tourist may be looking for an affirmation of cold-war stereotypes, Hungarians may be looking for a fantasy of the past both for a generation too young to remember what Communism was like, and for others old enough to see it as part of their personal experience and memories.

Communist Kitsch Illustrates a Generational Divide

Often we think of a naturalized history as one collective account yet post-socialist studies force us to reconsider history as a neutral category. It is not a

dichotomy between the State official version versus the people's version nor is it a matter of individual versus collective memory. The socialist state sometimes consciously attempted to create a social memory by censoring the past (literally in textbooks), or by reinventing traditions to replace old ones. We should value collective memories in terms of the societal context (see Ten Dyke 2001). New meanings of the past are created from the post-socialist perspective, from the memories of the people who lived through it, and from a younger generation who simply sees it as a cool style. Some may have fond memories; others may not. Regardless, the material culture of communism has a different meaning now than what it originally had and this seems to reflect growing nostalgia as a response to dissatisfaction or confusion with present-day post-socialist society.

Generational perceptions of communist kitsch differ. In 2010 the Hungarian government auctioned off Socialist era artefacts that most likely hung in official government offices such as portraits, sculptures, and photos of Lenin. Whereas some of these artefacts were mass-produced pieces with little artistic merit, famous Hungarian artists made others. A 22-year-old woman, Timeo Szabo bought a sculpture of Lenin for \$1000 (Fairclough & Gulyas 2010). Born after the fall of Communism, she has no personal memory of the experiences but she states 'We're not into Lenin really . . . It will look pretty in the office (Fairclough & Gulyas 2010)'. A middle-aged man, György Török, 45, bought a Lenin picture for \$50 as memorabilia of his youth rather than because of any political nostalgia he may have felt. 'When I was young, I didn't really look deeply into the faults of the system . . . I lived a calm, secure life where bread cost 3.5 forints and everyone had a job' (Fairclough & Gulyas 2010). For some people, these artefacts have come to represent a memory of a way of life free of the problems of today where bread now costs 160 forints and unemployment runs high. They also represent generational divides between those old enough to have experienced communism and a younger generation who simply thinks, 'it will look pretty'. No longer do these artefacts simply represent an oppressive state as they have taken on new and different meanings in this case one aesthetic and the other childhood nostalgia. Kitschification softens the political edge of communism.

The older generation seems to desire to make sense of the rapid changes in their society and to inform the younger generation of their experiences. Dogossy wrote a book *Azok a Jó Kis Hatvanas Évek* (Those were the good old 60s) (2005) for her son to understand what it was really like to grow up in Socialist Hungary in the 1960s. She explains why she wrote the book.

'You're not going to understand, momma,' my college student son used to say. And he's right. More and more things I do not understand. I do not understand why you need to send a text message to a friend in the classroom, when you will see him for lunch in the cafeteria, I do not understand why you need a small cube on the computer screen to watch TV while preparing for tomorrow's final exams. And I do not understand how things work such as the Internet phone, call waiting, binary numerical systems, and I am even embarrassed with not understanding even more simple technology like the combustion engine.

As a response she thinks about her past and the things she remembers but never thought before to tell her son. She did not think he would understand or appreciate her experiences:

For a long time that is what I thought, I never said it, because this would only be the answer, 'Momma, you do not understand.' Then I changed my mind. I want to keep the memories for those who lived through this time with me, and there is something for those who are interested in what these controversial times were, in the sweet 60s. (Dogossy 2005: 10, author's translation)

As this quotation indicates, not only does she want to have a record of life from the past, but also she responds to the difficulties of adjusting to the present. Nadkarni's discussion of kitsch sheds light on this response she feels retro and nostalgia themed spaces 'market the exoticism of the recent past to a generation of teenagers and young adults too young to have any memory of the socialist era themselves' (Nadkarni 2007: 621). Dogossy's description highlights the generational divide between a post-socialist generation accustomed to the Internet, and websites, in comparison to an older generation trying to make sense of their place in the new post-socialist world. She highlights the difference between growing up in a market economy versus her own experience growing up in socialist-era Budapest. The co-author, Ács Iréne, fills the book with archival photographs of communist kitsch objects of the era. Dogossy wants her son's generation to understand what life was back then, so that he can better understand her, and this understanding of daily life experiences includes communist kitsch material items. She wants to share this information with others who experienced this era to create and preserve a shared memory. She highlights a preference to focus on the regularity of everyday life as symbolized by the regular material objects of the day.

With the advent of rapid changes post-communism, there appear to be growing divisions between generations used to two different forms of society

– a socialist one, and a post-socialist one – and political divisions between some who perceive ‘communism’ as dangerous and others who see ‘socialism’ as okay. This is not to suggest there is a clear-cut dichotomy between the two societies, but rather a perception, albeit inaccurate, of a time that was compared to a time that is. One senior woman, Ada, an avid fan of Viktor Orbán, boasts how he is ‘ours’ (a *miénk*), reflecting Orbán’s political slogan that asserts Hungary as ours. Ada néni cheers every time a Fidesz member speaks from the TV and jeers when others critique them, especially the MszP who she calls the ‘komcsis’ (Combies). Her university-educated son, Frigyes, though clearly adoring and respecting his mother, gets in constant arguments over her political views. He thinks her addiction to TV news has brainwashed her as she supports Fidesz unquestionably. Even though he claims he is not into politics and hesitates to affirm any political affiliation, his mother calls him a ‘liberal’ and he says he likes the LMP (Lehet Más a Politika, Politics Can be Different (Green liberalism)). Before we started the interview, she said Frigyes told her to make sure to turn off the TV when I got there, but of course it constantly blares on. Frigyes jokes in English that the TV is a ‘magic box’ and it is like a ‘watching machine, washing machine’, as it brainwashes her, making swirling hand gestures at the sides of his head and rolling his eyes to emphasize his point. When I ask her why she thinks she and Frigyes have such different political views, she replied that ‘he didn’t live through the same experiences as I did, he learned about 1956 revolution through his school, he doesn’t really understand’. Looking at a micro experience, at how individuals express and interpret the transition, sheds insight into its complicated nature (Burawoy & Verdery 1999; Hann 2002). Hence, generational differences that Dogossy suggests might see a different perception from the older and younger generations, but also a desire for shared collective understandings for those that did experience the socialist past. While on the one hand kitschifying the past seems to reflect a desire to create a collective understanding of this past experience, there is also a cultural ambivalence towards both the past and present.

Communist Kitsch as Collective Understanding and Cultural Ambivalence

The kitchification of communism is a way to reveal the socialist era from the people’s perspective rather than an imposed state version, yet ironically it may also preserve the comfort of the past amid post-socialist change. Bakhtin talks of how humour can reveal the truth behind the official picture of events. He suggests the use of ‘sober popular imagery’ could ‘break up official lies and the narrow seriousness dictated by the ruling classes . . . [and strive] to disclose

its true meaning for the people (1984: 439)'. In her work on East Germany, Ten Dyke addresses what she calls 'remembrance work', the way ordinary people 'engaged themselves with memory and history in ways that were personal and unique (2001:139)'. She looks at how individuals attach meaning to the objects and what the people have to say about the objects they collected to explore how individuals attribute memory and history to the objects and the forms of discourse this entails. She is interested in the way history was explained to her and 'how life experiences shape historical understanding and interpretation (142)'. In Hungary, ordinary people use Communist kitsch to recreate an idealized version of the past. Kitsch reveals a different picture behind the communist system: though there was official state doctrine at the 'macro' level, at the individual 'micro' level, people may experience and interpret societal constraints through everyday practices. I am interested in the ways the people amid these changes make sense of the world around them and the kitschification of communism is one way in which to view this process as reinterpreting the past effaces political challenges and societal conflicts. The following looks at Communist kitsch in terms of collecting memorabilia, 'retro' trends as preserving memory, and rewriting history with material culture.

Communist kitschification involves collecting memorabilia from the past creating an implied comparison to present-day post-socialist society. The difficulty involved in the process of adapting to a market economy can lead to a desire to preserve a memory of a way of life that one was used to (Wallace 1956). Ten Dyke shows the various ways in which people attempt to remember the East-German past as something important to be documented before it is forgotten in order to distinguish East Germany from the West (2001). Berdahl suggests *Ostalgie*, a nostalgia for East Germany, 'both contests and affirms a new order' (2010: 49). Similarly, Communist kitsch in Hungary both appears to look towards the communist past to preserve a fantasized version of a past way of life but also compare it to post-socialist Hungary today.

A 'Retro' trend in Hungary that plays on Communist Kitsch seems to suggest an urgency to preserve a memory of place that once was yet this also seems to comment on post-socialist strains. For example, there has been a yearly calendar since 2012 called 'Retro Budapest' in Hungarian, English, and German. Each month shows a photograph of a part of the city, such as the Vaci Utca (a posh shopping street) both during the communist era, and then now. Though in most cases the buildings remain, the city has visibly changed. Communist state-run stores have been replaced with Western brands and communist symbols have been removed. This calendar evokes a sense of retaining an

image of the past given the rapid changes since 1989. Following the collapse of communism, several of my informants were disoriented due to the rapid change in the visual landscape. Communist statues may have been used as meeting points or directional signposts, but now these were gone. Communist street names were replaced. Patrick (b. 1962) jokingly remarked that the only thing that seemed to remain the same were the bus lines. People were lost in their own city and today there seems to be a desire to remember the city they had known before 1989.

The kitchification of Communist material culture both comments on the past as well as the strains of the post-socialist present. One Communist kitsch t-shirt depicts Lenin's face with the McDonald's arches over his head with a slogan stating 'McLenin' hence creating a commentary on both Communist and Capitalist societies. When I asked several elderly women to describe what it was like to live in the Socialist era and now, several simply stated, 'I am not political'. When pressed for a response, a common answer was 'both have their problems. One is not necessarily better than the other, they are just different'. McLenin represents this view, as it blends corporate capitalism with socialism both systems flawed in their own different ways.

Kitschification's tendency to focus on the regularity of everyday life is another way to rewrite history from the perspective of the everyday people. Valuch writes of the period of the János Kádár regime, the prime minister in Budapest who held office from 1956 to the fall of Communism in 1989. Rather than writing a typical historical political account, his intent is to focus on the experiences of everyday life. In his introduction he writes:

'Watch my hands, because I am cheating' – said Rodolfo, a great magician, at the beginning of his performances. Indeed, looks can be deceiving: the everyday history has many faces and many memories, and is linked to many illusions, especially in the Kádár era. Nowadays a lot of people remember life was great, or at least they survived . . . In the eighties, living conditions deteriorated gradually, making a living became more difficult in Hungary. These were the changes in the framework of everyday life in the Kádár era. (Valuch 2006: 5, author's translation)

As this quotation suggests, the memory of the past has many illusions. Just like Dobossy's book, Valuch uses archival work of Ács Iréne that intersperses the book with communist kitsch – historical photographs and everyday artefacts from toys, stamps, propaganda photos, lottery tickets, subway passes, party books, advertisements, etc. Valuch uses material objects of the era with the intent to give an authentic account of what life was really like in the past.

Many still have these Communist kitsch items in their households making them tangible links to history. And yet 'looks can be deceiving' as there are many realities, including cultural ambivalence.

Material Objects Evoke Memories and Politicized consumption

Returning to Fábry's washing machine race, material objects that come to represent the communist past can evoke memories that become humorous in the context of present-day society. Fábry Sándor, the host of the television program, in his typical fast pace banter teases the audience:

Do you have any idea of what lies here [under the lumpy fuzzy blanket]? Not them. They have no idea. Quickly forgotten. Zsusza, take for example what Ferenc József recommended in 1896 at the millennial exhibition, when these were originally unveiled: throw them out! Think back in time and in the spirit of the legendary 1960s and 70s, towards Brezhnev stagnation, towards Kádárism, towards *Cucilizism*, those forty damned years, which it is suitably called. Today we still have not processed this time period. My father won a socialist travel award, but I think the devil was hidden in the details, though indeed it proved to be an award, because he was the only one allowed to travel . . . In an intellectual competition, Dad won a stay in the Socialist Jurij Gagarin resort. Every good deed receives punishment (Nothing comes for free), because he also received an 'Evreka' brand soviet washing machine. Nothing about this machine had saving value other than that the Evreka had a cast iron chassis on the waist of the canister, which was the equivalent to the Eureka brand's. [My parents] put it in the bathroom, as it was a 220 Evreka, no need to draw attention to what Evreka did not do. It did not wash; it had never had anything to do with washing! (Fábry 1999 Author's translation)

Simply describing the inadequacies and frustrations of the soviet design flaws of the Evreka washing machine evokes raucous laughter from the television audience. *Cuci* refers to a baby's pacifier, and it plays on the sound of socialism (*cucilizmus*, *Szocializmus*). This joke plays on words as it suggests the Socialist system babied its citizens through state redistribution systems. Sometimes humour gets lost in the translation, but for those who went through the same frustrations, these consumption items of the Communist era create a shared experience for this particular audience in the present-day context of post-socialism (see also Berdahl 2010: 128). In some cases, Fehérváry suggests, old images of state socialism might be replaced with 'new ones more in accord with the criteria of value most salient in a neoliberal world' that would appeal more to a younger generation (Fehérváry 2006: 55). Georgescu in her study of ironic per-

formances of the socialist past said that ‘Despite their alleged indifference to historical accuracy, the efficiency or ironic practices of remembrance depends on their ability to strike a sensitive chord in their audiences by drawing on their memories of the Communist period even as they actively construct and shape these memories’ (Georgescu 2010: 163). Berdahl, looking at the re-unification of Germany, explored consumption in terms of power relations permeated by ‘complex negotiations of identity, gender, and memory within changing political and economic structures’ (Berdahl 2010: 35). She suggests consumption symbolically represented the transition, ‘state socialism collapsed not merely because of a political failure, but because of its failure, quite literally, “to deliver the goods”. The drab and clumsy East-German products that embodied this failure were quickly collected as “camp” by West Germans as they were resoundingly rejected by the easterners who had made them. Museum displays of GDR products similarly affirmed and constructed an image of socialist backwardness as reflected in and constituted by its quaint and outdated products’ (Berdahl 2010, 37). Fábry’s design centre routines represent this same ‘campy’ reflection that mocks the limitations of former socialist consumption items yet unlike Berdahl’s East West German divisions, Fábry’s audience consists of Hungarians old enough to remember these products, and young enough to have not. The Washing Machine Race unites the audience due to an older generation’s collective memory of the Communist period, and through humour and parody reshapes these memories for a younger generation who, like Berdahl’s Western audience, view it as campy or retro kitsch.

During Hungary’s communist era, in everyday life, Soviet household items and electronics, such as the ‘Evreka’ brand washer in Fábry’s washing machine race, were marvelled as new and advanced in contrast to the ‘Western other’. These household technologies could mirror cold-war technological tensions such as the Soviet Sputnik and Yuri Gagarin versus NASA, yet they were a part of the average person’s everyday experiences. Today these symbols take form as tourist souvenirs and as items that spark memories of everyday life. As Fábry Sándor’s ‘design center’ focuses on the flaws of the devices, as well as the flaws of the societal system, his monologue makes former symbols of Communist power and advancement ‘kitschy’ creating a mockery of the past, and fodder for humour and ‘play’, much like Bakhtin’s discussion of the inverse of power that flips the hierarchy of power making former Soviet strength benign through parody. Humour and play can serve to undermine these former tensions while also keeping the memory of conflict alive as a reminder of what was, and what could be.

Various understandings and uses of communist kitsch in post-socialist Hungary indicate not simply nostalgia for the past, but also uneasiness with the present global market economy. The post-socialist era's complexity and the difficulty in theorizing about the transition to a market economy raises many questions and critiques, such as questioning a unilinear 'evolutionary' style development from Socialism to Western-style Capitalism when in fact the socialist past can inform perceptions of the post-socialist present, or an uncertain future (Burawoy & Verdery 1996). Burawoy and Verdery stress the importance of looking at these events from the micro perspective, 'In conventional portraits of the "transition" the micro is determined or is an expression of structures, policies, and ideologies of a macro character, with little theorization of the unintended consequences brought about locally by political and cultural contestation intertwined with economic struggles' (1999: 1). Material objects of everyday life (a micro perspective) can be a way to explore a complex process of counter memories in light of societal change (a macro perspective) as expressed in Communist kitsch.

Conclusion

The kitschification of communism indicates ambivalence towards the past in light of present-day dissatisfactions arising post-communism: high inflation, a division between rich and poor, generational divides, a loss of socialist perks. From this perspective kitsch sells days gone by, a way of life that has changed. Laughter liberates from censorship effacing restrictions (Bakhtin 1984: 93–94). 'Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter (1984: 66)'. Kitsch humorously allows one to address this cultural ambivalence. Éva, the guide for the Communist Walking Tour, states 'We had an ambivalent relationship to the state as an oppressor but we were used to the state providing for us'. She states:

Do Hungarians have a nostalgia for Communism? Yes and no. Did you like communism? No. Did you like the leaders? No. Did you like the Communist Party? No. Did you enjoy being part of the young pioneers? Yes. We have an ambivalent relationship to the past. We hate state oppression but we were also used to the free education and healthcare. I like that period in my life – I was a teenager, younger and more beautiful.

Even today ambivalence towards the past can be symbolized through kitsch. Today it is illegal to wear or display the communist star in public. The Marxim Pizza parlour used to have the communist red star as part of their

sign but the Budapest authorities pressured them to take it down. As a compromise the owner of Marxim altered the shape of the star by making the bottom points of the star longer. Yet kitsch exemplifies contradiction because tourist shops sell the communist star on hats and clothing in the elite Vaci utca shopping area. Looking back at the past as symbolized in material objects is complicated as there were many reasons for dissatisfaction with Hungary's socialist past, yet also reasons to relish living through it.

Communist kitsch represents things that make up people's everyday experiences of the past and highlights the contradictory nature of memory as both a commentary of the struggles over the transition yet also a longing for an imagined past. Post-socialism began with the symbolic amputation of the socialist past by removing Communist imagery stuck on buildings and bridges, by taking down paintings of communist leaders from offices, and yet Communist kitschification indicates people wish to remember the socialist era through material objects as it appeals to many different people for different reasons: the older generation and post-socialist generation, Hungarians, and Western tourists. Communist kitsch incorporates official state socialist material culture and everyday material culture. Though there may have been problems during the Communist era such as censorship, limited goods, under-the-table favouritism and bribery, they are not the same problems that have arisen post-communism such as economic strain, homelessness, and unemployment. Today political tensions arise over ethnic tensions, conflicts with EU, government pressures on the media, as well as government ties to Russia. Although Fidesz promotes anti-communist rhetoric, Viktor Orbán also appears to pursue ties with Russia seeming to side with a former Soviet past. To make the socialist past a mockery reinterprets what it was, and dethrones a past power reshaping something that was once unpleasant.

Humour often addresses issues that people may find difficult to talk about, so that under the guise of 'kitsch', mockery can allow for political commentary from people who do not define themselves as political. To talk about politics can be difficult for many reasons: fear (particularly for those who remember the more oppressive Communist era), social taboo or politeness, or even for fear of not understanding the complicated nature of politics itself. Kitsch figuratively allows people a way to cope with and perhaps mask the difficulties, struggles, and ambiguities of the Communist and post-socialist eras.

Kitschifying communism evokes comparing the present with the past. Through humour, the problems of the Communist past seem to be overlooked as there were appealing aspects from the past particularly from the safe distance

of the present. Focusing on everyday material objects rewrites history from the people's perspective as they reclaim a version of everyday life outside the official state. Craving to re-experience this past inspires certain memories, and emotions as indicated by 'authentic' restaurants, stores, and theme parks yet kitschification, like a souvenir, creates a fantasized representation of time and place. To kitsch-ify evokes feelings of ambivalence as both a victory over the past, yet also an homage to it. Though kitschification may simplify reality, enforce stereotypes or create a fantasy past, it serves as a trope to represent the complex nature of memory as well as social commentary on the present. Hungarians can market Gulag pizza to a younger generation or Western tourists because it refers to a scary past in a safe funny way. McLenin T-shirts mark the ironic merging of McDonalization globalization and former Communist symbols each with their own problems and complications. Fábry Sándor's Washing Machine race parodies the difficulties of the past perhaps arousing memories for an older generation, or inspiring enjoyment from a younger generation too young to remember yet finding hilarity in the jumping washing machines. Communist kitsch as humour may unify a group in laughter but it is troubling because it effaces, simplifies, and soothes over Communist era and Post-socialist era political complexities.

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