Журнал выходит 4 раза в год.
Литературная и корректорская правка **Марии Новак**
Адреса электронной почты редакторов *AI*:
И. В. Герасимов (Отв. Ред.): office@abimperio.net
С. В. Глебов (США и Канада): glebov@abimperio.net
А. П. Каплуновский (Западная Европа): akapluno@yahoo.de
М. Б. Могильнер (Россия и СНГ): ai@bancorp.ru
А. М. Семенов (Центральная и Восточная Европа): semyonov@abimperio.net
И. С. Мартынюк (Рецензии и библиография): igor.martynyuk@abimperio.net

Почтовый адрес редакции:
И. В. Герасимов
Ab Imperio
420015 г. Казань А/Я 157
Электронная страница журнала **http://abimperio.net**
© Авторы статей и иных опубликованных материалов, 2004.
Материалы журнала реферируются в следующих изданиях:
Historical Abstracts и ***America: History and Life***
Номер издан при финансовой поддержке **фонда Тиссена**
и фонда Джона Д. и Кэтрин Т. Макартуров
По поводу подписки на *AI* обращайтесь в редакцию.

The journal is published four times a year.
Style editing and proof-reading by **Mariia Novak**
Electronic addresses for editorial correspondence:
Dr. Ilya Gerasimov (Executive Editor): office@abimperio.net
Dr. Serguei Glebov (USA and Canada): glebov@abimperio.net
Dr. Alexander Kaplunovski (Western Europe): akapluno@yahoo.de
Dr. Marina Mogilner (Russia and NIS): ai@bancorp.ru
Alexander Semyonov (Central and Eastern Europe): semyonov@abimperio.net
Igor. S. Martynyuk (Reviews and Bibliography): igor.martynyuk@abimperio.net

Postal address:
Dr. Ilya V. Gerasimov, Ab Imperio
P.O. Box 157, Kazan 420015 Russia
Please visit the *Ab Imperio* Home Page at **http://abimperio.net**
Each contribution copyright © 2004 by its author. All rights reserved.
Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in
Historical Abstracts and ***America: History and Life***
This issue is produced with financial support from **Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung**
and the **John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation**
For subscription, please contact editors or our authorized distributors:
Kubon & Sagner Buchexport-Import: www.kubon-sagner.de
EBSCO: www.ebscoind.com;
East View Publications: www.eastview.com;
and **www.amazon.com**

Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space

AB IMPERIO

Исследования по новой имперской истории и национализму
в постсоветском пространстве

Редакция **Editors**

Илья В. ГЕРАСИМОВ **Ilya V. GERASIMOV**
Сергей В. ГЛЕБОВ **Serguei V. GLEBOV**
Александр П. КАПЛУНОВСКИЙ **Alexander P. KAPLUNOVSKI**
Марина Б. МОГИЛЬНЕР **Marina B. MOGILNER**
Александр М. СЕМЕНОВ **Alexander M. SEMYONOV**

Рецензии и библиография **Reviews and Bibliography**
Игорь С. МАРТЫНЮК **Igor S. MARTYNYUK**

Литправка и корректура **Style Editing and Proofreading**
Мария О. НОВАК **Mariia O. NOVAK**

Приглашенный редактор номера **Issue's Guest Editor**
Сергей МАРКЕДОНОВ **Sergei MARKEDONOV**

2/2004

www.abimperio.net

around the time "Wilhelm Gustloff" sank and thousands of helpless German civilians drowned, close by, on the shores of Eastern Prussia, the death march of thousands of remaining inmates from the concentration camp Studthoff ended with their SS guards shooting them in the surf of the Baltic sea. Bringing this kind of events together in the memorialisation of the twentieth-century German past without fostering apologetics for the unrivalled criminal energies of Nazi Germany will be the real challenge for the 21st century.

SUMMARY

Статья Стефана Бергера посвящена анализу болезненных и эмоциональных дискуссий о немецкой национальной идентичности 1990-х гг. Автор реконструирует иллюзорные поиски национальной "нормальности" в объединенной Германии, анализируя различные попытки реинтерпретации "немецкости" и ренессанс политики национального символизма. Он также рассматривает дебаты о немецкой идентичности в контексте изменяющейся роли Германии в международной политике. Значительная часть статьи отведена рассмотрению присутствия национал-социалистического и коммунистического наследия в современных дискурсах немецкой идентичности. Автор завершает статью размышлениями о возрождении дискурса германской жертвенности в начале 2000-х гг. (ГДР как жертва коммунистической диктатуры; немцы в целом как жертвы тотальной войны и ее последствий), который связывается с проектом нормализации немецкой идентичности (немцы должны помнить как свои преступления, так и страдания). Ст. Бергер заключает, что активизировавшаяся тенденция нормализации (и мемориализации) немецкой истории XX века в целом через восприятие себя как жертвы, на фоне "забывания" собственной вины за преступления нацизма, может стать настоящей проблемой Германии XXI века.

Maya NADKARNI
Olga SHEVCHENKO

THE POLITICS OF NOSTALGIA: A CASE FOR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POST-SOCIALIST PRACTICES

A spectre is haunting Europe – the specter of Communism

K. Marx, F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

It is good to be young in any system, even in one that falls within an inglorious and lusterless era of our history… [T]hat's when we chased girls, that's when we were drunk, that's when we were young… [T]here was shit in the Kádár-era pancake, but there was pudding on top.

Barta Balázs, *Index* website (www.index.hu), October 19, 2000.

I fear that, after listening to these [reminiscences], the former KGB informants and disciplinarians will rejoice... And will infect today's youth with their longing for the past.

G. Il'in, liberal Russian daily *Obschaya Gazeta*, November 6, 1998.

> I know that I will never feel as carefree and as blissful as I did back then. Although if I found myself back there, I would howl from all the idiocy of that life. I guess I didn't make my share of mud pies in that sandbox... And now the fun is gone, and my little scoop and pail are lost somewhere... But the best ice-cream is still the waffle cone for 20 kopecks.
>
> One of over 400 Russian responses to an Internet list (posted on www.livejournal.com) "You come from the 70s/80s if...", April 6, 2003.

Introduction

Just months after the political transformations of 1989 and 1991 when nothing seemed more impossible than the return of state socialism to Central and Eastern Europe, communist symbols and iconography suddenly acquired a new visibility rather than fade into obsolescence. Over the next decade, communism would enjoy a healthy afterlife as a cultural and political commodity, from hammer-and-sickle tee-shirts in Bulgaria, to popular collections of socialist-era songs in Russia, to trendy "workers' canteen"-themed restaurants in Budapest – all fell under label "nostalgia".

It is thus no surprise that the specter of Communism would also re-emerge to haunt the former Soviet-bloc states, this time in the form of public debates about the attractions and dangers posed by these cultural practices. Indeed, nostalgia has become such a central term for analyzing how post-socialist societies relate to the recent past that it raises the question of why it has become so widespread in the first place – both as a phenomenon and as a conceptual category through which to unify disparate cultural phenomena across the region. What do these nostalgias have in common, and what makes them different from nostalgia elsewhere?

For what makes the similarity of these memory practices so remarkable is that the experiences of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe were so dissimilar compared to that of the Soviet Union.[1] Communist rule lasted longer in the USSR than it did in Central and Eastern Europe and was fueled primarily by internal political dynamics, not by constant negotiation between local party elites and an external imperial power. The ideology of

[1] This holds even when one bears in mind the internal heterogeneity of socialisms in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe.

socialism, by extension, was somewhat less orthodox in Central and Eastern Europe where elites of different countries explored ways to "nationalize" communist doctrine as a way to respond to the crises of post-Stalinist system of the Soviet bloc. Unsurprisingly, the differences did not cease with the fall of communism, but only became more apparent. Because the socialist system was not viewed as indigenous but was rather associated with the external Soviet power and imperialism, its break-up in 1989-1991 was juridicially and politically more complete in Central and Eastern Europe than in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Communism's legacies, both in terms of Communist ideology and the lasting institutional forms and practices of late socialism, are more observable today in post-Soviet Russia than in Hungary or the Czech Republic. This is evident, for example, by the fact that the Communist party has survived in post-Soviet Russia as a major political agent whereas in Central and Eastern Europe there has been a conscious attempt to remodel the left along the lines of social democracy: an attempt which – as shall be discussed later – has made the political uses of nostalgia more problematic.

This article seeks to address a number of questions that these differences raise by drawing on examples from Hungary and Russia. Does the popularity of similar cultural/historical symbols (socialist-era consumer products, iconic images, cultural products of late socialism) have the same significance in national contexts that now follow very different trajectories? That is, when do apparently identical memory practices in the two countries reflect similar patterns of public memory and public values, and when is the resemblance merely superficial? Indeed, when do these resemblances facilitate misrecognition of nostalgic practices both within and across national borders? And, ultimately, what is it that shapes the cultural and political implications of these apparently similar nostalgic practices in each given case – or in fact, makes them politically effective or able to be incorporated into politics, at all?

To make such distinctions, we argue, requires not only ethnographic attention to local cultural contexts, but also to internal variation within these contexts. To whom are specific forms of nostalgia addressed and how is this audience defined (age-group, economic class, etc.)? Who defines these practices as nostalgic in the first place – those who define themselves as participants or observers, "locals" or "exiles" – and are they supportive of these practices or do they oppose them?

As these questions about location suggest, the power of nostalgia is precisely its susceptibility to being co-opted into various political agendas,

which nostalgia then cloaks with an aura of "inevitability". This in turn has produced innumerable critical discourses devoted to deciphering these agendas – discourses which tend to assume that the very structure of nostalgia endows it with a particular political meaning. Such essentialism seeks to define the inherent properties of nostalgia rather than viewing these properties as socially embedded, as products of different subject positions of those who encode and decode these nostalgic practices. That is, these critics look for the substance of the phenomenon – whether it is phrased in terms of a "return to communism" or the equally rose-tinted version of the past purported by right-wing reactionary politics – and not the social relations that produce it (institutional breaks, generational change, international network alliances, etc.). Thus, domestic cultural commentators attempt to distinguish "good" from "bad" nostalgia, scanning each manifestation for signs of its cultural "health," while foreign mass media similarly divides nostalgia into either the thoroughgoing commodification of communist symbols (and hence, the triumph of capitalism) or, in contrast, the proof of dangerous atavistic cultural attachments. Meanwhile, scholars at home and abroad try to pose correctives to these mainstream arguments by viewing these very same nostalgic practices as critical and subversive, and thus an endorsement of neither the socialist past nor the capitalist present.

Rather than participate in these discourses – which we also view as part of the larger "nostalgia industry" – we examine the different logics that undergird the nostalgic cultural practices they attempt to describe: political kitsch, "Proustiana," postmodern, etc. Can political intention – and, as a consequence, the ability to mobilize this intention for politics – be divined from the different structures of post-socialist nostalgia? Using comparative examples from Hungary and Russia, we argue to the contrary that both the meaning and significance of nostalgic practices only emerge from within a larger field of political possibility. Similar practices, inspired by similar sets of longings, can thus follow very different political trajectories in terms of their political interpretation ("reactionary" versus "reflective") as well as their political impact. Any analysis of post-socialist nostalgia must thus guard against two temptations: reading politics into nostalgia (that is, assuming inherent political meaning or implications to specific nostalgic practices) and reading nostalgia into politics (assuming that every reference to the past is indeed a nostalgic one).

Background

For a cultural practice so fundamentally concerned with the past, nostalgia is firmly rooted in modernity. Coined in the late seventeenth century as a term to describe the physical sufferings endured by Swiss soldiers stationed abroad, nostalgia initially signified a melancholic state associated with geographical rather than temporal displacement. What later made the term so fit to describe the peculiar discontents caused by the flow of history was, as Peter Fritzsche suggests, the modern Europeans' deepening awareness of the accelerating pace of social change that engendered not only unsettlement, but also "a compelling historical understanding that appeared to deny the possibility of resettlement".[2] In other words, in the aftermath of the French Revolution and increasingly since, remaining in one's native place could no longer prevent the experience of displacement. New generations of Swiss soldiers were bound to face disappointment upon their return home, since their sites of origin, transformed in the time of their absence, no longer seemed familiarly domestic.

Nostalgia, then, is a product of a particular temporality and way of approaching history (a "regime of seeing" as Fritzsche would have it): one that views individuals and societies as caught up in a destructive and irreversible flow of time.[3] It emphasizes the irretrievability of the past as the very condition of desire. For longing in nostalgia, as writers from Susan Stewart[4] to Svetlana Boym[5] point out, is never longing for a specific past as much as it is longing for longing itself, made all the safer by the fact that the object of that desire is deemed irrevocably lost. Nowhere is this "longing for longing" more visible than in instances of material or sensory nostalgia, where the physical object deployed as emotional mnemonic, be it a rerun of an old film or a madeleine dipped in tea, is structurally incapable of satisfying the desire that it stirs, for the simple reason of this desire being self-referential. What is at stake in each case is not the film or pastry nor

[2] Peter Fritzsche. How nostalgia narrates modernity // A. Confino, P. Fritzsche (Eds.) The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture. Urbana and Chicago, 2002. P. 77.

[3] Cf. the work of an American sociologist Fred Davis who interprets nostalgia as a by-product of massive identity dislocations associated with social change without, however, historicizing the notion of social change itself: Fred Davis. The Yearning for Yesterday. New York, 1979.

[4] Susan Stewart. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Durham, 1993.

[5] Svetlana Boym. The Future of Nostalgia. New York, 2001.

even the historical period they signify, but rather the individual's memory of past desire (whether of a particular version of the future or of an alternative present) and the awareness of the impossibility of reliving this desire again.

This is not to say that the referential content of nostalgia is irrelevant; rather, that it is opportunistic and changeable. What persists despite nostalgia's historical promiscuity is its peculiarly modern optics and the effect it creates of simultaneous connection with and dissociation from the imagined past. To think productively about nostalgia, then, is to treat it as a "cultural practice, not a given content";[6] that is, to attend to how the meaning of nostalgic practices, far from being pre-determined by their historical referents, is shaped situationally in the process of their creation and re-enactment.

Turning to the manifestations of post-socialist nostalgia, one is struck by how closely the themes of spatial and temporal displacement intertwine. Communist ideology, of course, was deliberately and emphatically anti-nostalgic. But given the insularity of the Soviet bloc (within which Paris and Prague, as Lidia Libedinskaya recently remarked, were experienced being as inaccessible as the moon and Mars[7]), spatial displacement through emigration or exile was experienced as having as the same finality as the flow of history. While this is no longer the case, a different kind of spatial displacement – this time following economic, rather than political logic – makes geographical distances *within* the country feel insurmountable to the many Russian families who are unable to afford long-distance travel. More significantly, the very historical transformation that the socialist countries have undergone during the past 15 years has been experienced by many of their subjects, as well as observers, in geographical terms. "We experienced ten years earlier what all of Russia experienced after *perestroika*," says Rita D., one of Svetlana Boym's respondents who immigrated to the US years before 1991. "Now... it seems that the whole of the former Soviet Union went into immigration, without leaving the country".[8]

This substitution of spatial for temporal imagery, however, tells only part of the story. While space can, at least theoretically, be traversed, the flow of time is utterly irreversible. It is this irreversibility that gives nostalgia its modern meaning of incurable affliction. The years of post-socialism, therefore, saw not only a shift from a spatial to temporal logic of nostalgic desire (a shift which paralleled the historical evolution of the term), but

[6] Kathleen Stewart. Nostalgia – A Polemic // Cultural Anthropology. 1988. Vol. 3. No 3. P. 227.

[7] Lidiia Lebedinskaia. Takaia vot istoriia // Voprosy literatury. 2000. No. 3.

[8] Svetlana Boym. The Future of Nostalgia. New York, 2001. P. 328.

also a realization, uncomfortable for some and welcome to others, that the rupture which nostalgic desire attempts to breach could only deepen with the passage of time.

The nostalgic practices of today, therefore, through their very existence instantiate and acknowledge the sense of dislocation from the past. In other words, a sense of break from the past is necessary for nostalgia to exist in the first place; the perception of loss is the precondition for discourses of return and recovery. In this, nostalgic practices differ from reactionary politics whose agenda is precisely to reconstruct the past in the present, thus denying that anything of value can be irrevocably lost. This analytical separation, however, does not prevent reactionary politics from attempts to appropriate nostalgic sentiments in its own interests (attempts which, as we will show below, can occasionally succeed). In these attempts, images and associations that gain power through nostalgia are used as symbolic currency in attracting a following for projects whose agendas may be motivated entirely by contemporary interests. The ways in which the American Right appropriates broad societal nostalgia for the 1950s for advancing conservative family policies, for example, has been written and remarked upon[9]. Closer to home, nostalgia for the socialist past was used with similar success to gain public acceptance of the Russian youth organization *Idushchie Vmeste* [Moving Together] organized by a former Presidential administration bureaucrat Vasilii Yakemenko. The rationalizations put forth by the supporters of the movement lay bare nostalgia's fundamental preoccupation not with the past, but with the fantasies that structured that past, since the most common defense of the movement provided by one of the author's Russian respondents approximated the sentiment that "at least under socialism, young people believed in something."[10] Nostalgic rhetoric notwithstanding, however, the organization's neoconservative ideology had little to do with cherishing the memories of the past and in fact targeted Communism, alongside Fascism, as an example of ideology "built on hatred and murder, on deceit and betrayal, on blood and suffering of nations."[11]

[9] Stephanie Coontz. The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap. New York, 1992.

[10] Admittedly, the factual accuracy of this statement, particularly when pertaining to the period of late socialism, is contestable at best. See Alexei Yurchak. The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretense, and the Anekdot // Public Culture. 1997. Vol. 9. No. 2.

[11] The quotation comes from the Moral Codex of Membership published on the organization's web site, http://www.idushie.ru/rus/about/kodeks/index.php.

The logic of nostalgic desire

What is the longing that sets into motion the wheels of post-socialist nostalgic desire? As the example of *Idushchie Vmeste* suggests, insofar as a general answer to this question is possible, it has to start from an examination of the fantasies that socialism spurred into being. Perhaps the most central of these fantasies, and one shared throughout the socialist camp, was the fantasy of the capitalist "Other," a fantasy to which the developed capitalist countries responded in kind by generating an image of an equally-stereotyped socialist doppelganger. It is difficult to establish which of these fantasies, having disappeared after 1989-1991, left a greater gap in the symbolic order. But the ease with which both Western onlookers and their East European counterparts have embraced many post-socialist nostalgic discourses suggests that the fantasy of moral and political certainties of the Cold War might be missed on both sides of the vanished Berlin Wall.[12]

This political fantasy of the West had a number of different dimensions. For the millions of those who drew their knowledge about life outside the Iron Curtain from official sources, Western countries represented the ultimate dystopia that rendered the socialist reality enviable by comparison. This depiction could be employed to justify "temporary hardships" and mobilize public acceptance of unpopular political and economic measures, if not actual support. The loss of such a stable referent made it much more difficult to normalize the relative deprivations of post-socialism through external comparison.[13]

At the same time, other socialist subjects, including many members of the liberal intelligentsia, drew upon the notion of the Western "Other" during the Cold War as the repository of Western ideals of democracy and thus as ultimate political references to model "ideal" and "proper" political behavior. This fantasy, however, did not outlive its dystopic counterpart. As post-socialist countries had to increasingly deal with international *Realpolitik*, their citizens came face-to-face with the less glamorous reality that

[12] In this context, it is notable that Germany, which is the space where East and West came to look each other in the face, is the country most marked by the "nostalgia industry": Daphne Berdahl. "(N)Ostalgie" for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things // Ethnos. 1999. Vol. 64. No. 2.

[13] The only remaining – and much utilized – option is the internal comparison through which many post-socialist subjects continue to normalize their condition in reference to "Others" who are doing worse. The "Others" of such comparisons, of course, are now almost exclusively the speakers' compatriots.

Western countries primarily seek to defend their own national interests rather than to maintain the political principles upon which they were founded. Political disappointment with the West's "betrayal of its own principles" is thus inseparable from the symbolic role the West played for the political imaginary under socialism. Post-socialist nostalgia gives shape to the mourning over this loss of the moral and political certainty of pre-1989 idealism.

But, as the residents of the former Eastern bloc would be quick to point out, the fantasies of the capitalist "Other" entailed not only political divisions, but more importantly, projections of consumer desire and fantasies of material abundance and "normality" more generally.[14] While post-war socialist regimes strove to measure up to the consumer standards attained by advanced capitalist countries,[15] the pace and rules of the competition were not of socialism's own making and the outcome of the competition was largely not in its favor.[16] As a result, Western goods were endowed with a "magical" and transformative capacity based on their perceived higher quality, unavailability, and prestige; consumer utopia appeared to be located just outside socialism's borders, in a Western culture characterized by Coca-Cola, bananas, and unlimited consumer choice. The characteristics of this utopia, however, were markedly socialist in that this abundance was fantasized as available to everyone; today's frequent indictments of the social injustices of the "abundance of the few" recall the allure of this fantasy and the disappointment associated with its failure. As a result, once-disparaged items of socialist mass production have acquired the authenticity that Western products are now perceived to lack. They are now embraced as vehicles of the once-utopian dreams and desires for the idealized West, and as silent witnesses of an era in which consumer abundance was imagined as universally available.[17]

[14] Krisztina Fehérváry. American Kitchens, Luxury Bathrooms, and the Search for a "Normal" Life in Postsocialist Hungary // Ethnos. 2002. Vol. 67. No. 3.

[15] Indeed, there is evidence that even during the pre-war years, consumption was shaping up in the USSR to become an important arena of ideological competition with the capitalist West. See Jukka Gronow. Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of Good Life in Stalin's Russia. Oxford, 2003.

[16] David Crowley, Susan Reid. Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe // Susan Reid and David Crowley (Eds.). Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe. Oxford, 2000. See also Susan Buck-Morss. Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West. Cambridge, 2000.

[17] In fact, as a result of conflation between the two, objects that were originally produced in the course of a (failing) competition with, and often direct borrowing from, the West, may now be misrecognized as emblematic of the socialist "abundance for all."

This reversal reveals nostalgia as a practice centered on the unattainable structure of past desire – the impossibility of re-experiencing the fantasy of the West as it was once construed. Regardless of whether this disappointment is mild or acute, such nostalgia also represents a way to mourn one's "lost childhood innocence" in not only personal but sociopolitical terms. Coming to terms with the harsh realities of the market economy is narrated as a collective entrance into "adult" life: a theme made visible in a number of German and Hungarian coming-of-age films that take place at the time of the political transition. In the Russian context, this generational narrative is complicated by the fact that the same period is associated with a loss of yet another fantasy, this one peculiar to the Soviet cultural imagination. This fantasy is the one of international prestige and geopolitical power, buttressed by the very real military presence of the USSR throughout the Eastern bloc, but interpreted on the level of daily consciousness in the misleadingly benign terms of assistance to and cooperation with the "brotherly nations" of the Warsaw pact. The experience of witnessing this fantasy re-cast by its former subjects in the substantially less flattering terms of imperial aggression added more than a touch of bitterness to the Russians' experience of 1989-1991, so that in the Russian case, the loss of innocence (with its connotations of inevitability and natural progression) became inextricably – and problematically – tied to a less palatable fall from grace. Clearly, not all nostalgic practices in post-Soviet Russia draw on the two fantasies to the equal extent, but there always remains a possibility that nostalgia for the lost innocence of socialism can get misrecognized or phrased in terms of nostalgia for the former glory (as well as the other way around). As we shall argue, this contradictory nature of nostalgic desire in the Russian context lies at the very heart of the ambivalence nostalgic practices evoke among the Russian cultural commentators and drives their reluctance to endorse practices which, in the East European setting, may appear politically less problematic.

Because post-socialist nostalgic practices do not concern the past itself, but rather the subjects' memory of their own past investments and fantasies, what is also at stake in this loss is not only one's former innocence or grandeur but the imagined futures these fantasies projected. As Walter Benjamin recognized several generations ago, this is what gives the outdated detritus of consumer culture in particular such poignancy and endows socialist consumer products once reviled as cheap and "inauthentic" with the auratic appeal once invested in difficult-to-attain Western goods.[18] Too recent to possess age-value as relics, these objects in their obsolescence nonetheless reveal the diverse utopian fantasies once embedded within them by making palpable the disjuncture between these former dreams of the future and the present reality. Thus, the seemingly trivial and impersonal consumer products of socialist mass production ironically offer a powerful idiom through which to mourn the personal and societal nad'vete they are perceived to represent.[19]

[18] Susan Buck-Morss. The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project. Cambridge, 1991.

The forms and practices of post-socialist nostalgia have mesmerized not only the countries of the former Soviet bloc, but also their cold war counterparts. One reason for the unremitting Western media fascination with this topic undoubtedly stems from the loss of the political Cold War "Big Other," a logic by which the end of state socialism in Eurasia and Eastern Europe proves the triumph of democratic ideals and the commodification of political icons into kitsch demonstrates the success of capitalism. In addition, however, 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). That is, it also mourns the loss of the flattering fantasy – also thoroughly disenchanted by the East's experience of a market economy – by which the West perceived even the most banal elements of its everyday life to be an envied and unattainable luxury in the eyes of its ideological enemy. For example, a scene in *Moscow on the Hudson*, a Columbia Pictures film from (not inconsequentially) 1984, portrays the abundance of an average American grocery store as so overwhelming to new Russian émigré Vladimir that he keels over in a faint. In contrast, today's Western popular mythologies do not offer any such equivalent; the "Other" of the contemporary West, Islamic fundamentalism, exhibits no comparable fascination with the consumer paradise of modern capitalism.[20]

For other observers, on the other hand, post-socialist nostalgia offers a vision of popular resistance to capitalism that more traditional forms of political mobilization failed to ensure. It gives voice not only to the loss of

[19] In Hungary, for example, the book *Szivárvány Áruház* (Rainbow Department Store, 2002), a collection of photographs and personal memories of socialist-era toys and products, went through several printings.

[20] Some reactions to attacks orchestrated by bin Laden suggest that Western thinking is still caught in a mental warp of assuming that it does. Thus, in the days following the attacks, the U.S. media heroized everyday acts of leisure and consumption, such as attending baseball games and shopping at the mall. These activities were not only viewed as a demonstration of national indomitability and economic patriotism, but as a way to taunt bin Laden, who presumably envied such recreation while he "hid in his cave".

the fantasy of the West as imagined utopia, but also to the dissolution of socialism's own utopian aspirations (both the grandiose ones expressed by ideology and the more prosaic ones embodied in its consumer goods). This vision interprets post-socialist nostalgia as a critique of the present and of capitalist triumphalism that would discard the legacies of socialism wholesale without stopping to ask what might remain of value from the past, in terms of both political and personal memory. As a result, it often collapses into a politics by which every nostalgic gesture towards the past is read as subversive, even though these same nostalgic gestures may be used with equal effectiveness to maintain the status quo. Thus, for these (predominantly Western) nostalgia enthusiasts, the value of nostalgic practices stems from the critical distance these practices are hoped to provide post-socialist individuals otherwise immersed into the culture of late capitalism.

While many local cultural commentators would tend to agree concerning the inherently political nature of nostalgic practices, for them the political meaning that nostalgia holds is typically the opposite: inherently conservative and politically dangerous. To use a distinction proposed by Gasan Guseinov,[21] while in the case of nostalgia enthusiasts, the political meaning of nostalgic memory is shaped in a rhetorical field created by the opposition *Soviet communism – American capitalism*, the local critics usually see the field as defined by the contrast *Communism – National socialism*. Given the shift of interpretative context, it is hardly surprising, then, that the ideological value of nostalgic practices shifts correspondingly. Instead of summoning hopes of resistance against the hegemony of neoliberalism, nostalgic practices signify a dangerous denial of socialism's totalitarian legacy and a willingness to forget (and thus, a risk to repeat) the mistakes of the past. Although this viewpoint cannot be considered properly nostalgic (unless one introduces a category of nostalgic repulsion to counter the more self-explanatory nostalgic attraction), it does adhere to the logic of nostalgia in that it exhibits a similar preoccupation with the past, this time centered around the desire *not* to desire it and is thus equally fascinated by past fantasies as dangerously alluring or tempting to others.

Types of nostalgic practices

What is the relationship of these various fantasies (of the dream of the West, of being the East's glamorous "Other," or of the lost potential of

[21] Gasan Guseinov. Revolyutsionnyi simvol i kommertsia // Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie. 2003. No. 64.

socialism) to the actual cultural practices of post-socialist nostalgia? Nostalgia may make visible the desire for a structure of fantasy that it is now perceived as lost, but it does not seek to recreate these fantasies. Rather, it takes on forms defined by structures of intention that fully inhabit the present-day realities of post-socialism.[22]

Thus, the first form of nostalgia to emerge after the transition was the commodification of the official symbols of communist ideology, such as busts of Lenin and Soviet medals. In Budapest, for example, young entrepreneurs opened a pizzeria called "Marxim"; decorated with red banners and barbed wire, it is still in operation today. In Russia, entrepreneurial artists enriched the standard variety of painted wooden *matryoshka* dolls popular with the tourists by including satirical portrayals of stackable communist founders, Marx, Engels and Lenin, with Stalin, Khruschev and Gorbachev also making occasional appearances. But as the very speed with which these phenomena emerged makes clear, these cultural practices were not concerned with nostalgia itself, but rather with *making nostalgia possible* by establishing the necessary break between past and present. Mocking and ridiculing the ideological symbols associated with the socialist past, these practices self-consciously deprived previously potent images of their prior meaning. While the agenda to which this symbolic practice contributed was new, the practice itself was not. In fact, it drew directly on the tradition of subversive political humor under late socialism, when icons sacred for communist ideology were subverted through their incorporation into everyday profane contexts (as in jokes and anecdotes or in the underground artistic trend of *Sotsart* started by Moscow painters Vitalii Komar and Alexander Melamid, who humorously used iconographic clichés of socialist realism in paintings with titles like "Stalin and the Muses" or "Stalin in front of a Mirror").[23] In a sense, late socialist subversion *anticipated* the post-socialist use of images in that it commercialized ideological icons before such commercialization became an actual possibility; the very name of *Sotsart* obviously evoked the more internationally recognized trend of Pop Art, which in its own

[22] In other words, we argue that, in contrast to Guseinov's oppositions mentioned above, the actual practices of today's nostalgia exist in a different rhetorical field – one defined by tension between *Socialism* and *Post-socialism*.

[23] See an article by Masha Lipman for a fascinating discussion of other ways in which late socialist political humor remains unexpectedly relevant for the circulation of today's political images. See Masha Lipman. The Putin Toothpick // The New Yorker. 2004. March 8.

way exposed the close connections between ideology and commercialism.[24]

Converting political icons into kitsch was thus part of the necessary symbolic work of that time, in order render the former icons powerless and to enable post-socialist subjects to look back at the past with no fear of its return. Although such a "threat" no longer remains, this type of nostalgia is nonetheless still much in evidence today (i.e., Budapest's Statue Park Museum of socialist-era statues; the socialist relics still widely available for sale on Arbat street in Moscow; and "Ossi World," the communist theme park now being constructed to capitalize upon German "Ostalgie"). Its materials (hammers and sickles, shades of "communist" red) are familiar and its logic (mocking what once was presumably feared) is simple, unlike the more ambivalent pleasures discussed below. In contrast to the subversive and risky nature of these practices under socialism, today's production of Soviet-themed kitsch is fueled by market logic and is targeted primarily at the outsiders to whom it provides reassuring evidence that socialism is comfortably (and profitably) dead and that capitalist logic reigns supreme, regulating the circulation of socialist relics as commodities. This nostalgia of political kitsch is thus popular with foreign tourists and media, since it is the one most legible to – and hence performed most emphatically – to non-locals.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, two other forms of nostalgic practices appeared, both characterized not by a concern with historical disjuncture but rather with establishing continuity between past and present selves. The first form of nostalgia, which might be glossed as "Proustiana," is similar to political kitsch in that it is also expressed through the marketing, consumption, and display of material culture. (Like kitsch, it is also very easily commodified, although the only place where it appears to be genuinely profitable is Germany.) Here the objects of memory are not relics of the former regime's ideology, but rather the detritus of the previous era's everyday life and they conjure up a humor based not on mockery, but rather ironic affection. They thus serve as what Winnicott terms "transitional objects"[25] in that they provide a convenient combination of materiality (that is, they can be manipulated in the present) with their signification of the past state of the subject (teddy bears is his classical example). Moreover, since many of these objects were products of socialist-era consumer cul-

[24] The difference between the two is that Pop Art approached commercial brands as ideology whereas *Sotsart* was rather concerned with exposing ideology as a brand.

[25] Donald Woods Winnicott. Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena // International Journal of Psychoanalysis. 1953. Vol. 34.

ture, their sudden transformation in social value also enables commentary on the post-socialist East's disenchantment with the once idealized West. The density of meaning and memory sedimented onto such objects has made them fashionable as commodities (the renewed popularity of East German brands in Germany; the revival of the soda "Bambi" in Hungary and of "Baikal" and "Buratino" in Russia); in curatorial practice (the exhibit *Our Happy Childhood* in the Historical Museum in Moscow; the exhibits *Kitsch and Cult* and *Fingerprint of the Twentieth Century* in Budapest), as well as academic studies of nostalgia at home and abroad. The popularity of documentaries as well as re-televised socialist-era films and television programs similarly demonstrates the success of "Proustiana" in that these visual texts are often read as cultural artifacts of Soviet life.

But these films need not merely serve as objects of memory; the extradiegetic sights and sounds they index also conjure up the settings and atmospheres that structured the socialist era. This next form of nostalgia similarly refers to everyday life under state socialism, yet while it intersects with nostalgia for socialist-era material culture, it is primarily concerned with embodied knowledge and practices that composed everyday life and one's embeddedness in both actual and metaphorical spaces of socialist-era sociality: the *habitus* (in the sense of ingrained dispositions) of late socialism. Here, a discourse of loss predominates that of a recovery because, while the materiality of objects gives the perception of greater access to and continuity with past selves, the cultural emotions and "fugitive sensibilities"[26] of a lost age are less easily retrieved. Indeed, the "sociality" these nostalgic practices attempt to evoke (nostalgia parties, group singing activities, theme-cafes and restaurants like *Zhiguli* in Moscow and *Menza* in Budapest) could only come into existence as a coherent entity once the era was perceived to have irrevocably passed and thus could be fantasized into something to be desired in the first place.

The attempt, however partial, to conjure up this mode of being in the world is central to the success of such programs as *Starye Pesni o Glavnom* (*Old Songs about the Most Important*) which rely on the physical re-enactment of the communal singing rituals of the past[27] in the hope to re-connect with lost sociability through reproduction of the same bodily motions.

[26] Susan Sontag. Notes on Camp // Susan Sontag. Against Interpretation. New York, 1966. P. 276.

[27] For a discussion of the power that corporeal rituals have to create symbolic solidarities and to link individuals with the past, see: Paul Connerton. How Societies Remember. Cambridge, 1989.

Mimicking the practices of informal kitchen gatherings of the 1960s and 70s, this show offers its studio audience the opportunity to join voices with celebrities of the same era in singing songs of their youth. These reenactments of socialist-era rituals of communality, however, entail a crucial slippage of meaning. Originally valued for their disconnection from the world of socialist officialdom, these practices are now misrecognized as representative of the entire socialist experience, thus allowing participants to overlook their initial political function.[28]

As these appeals to communality make clear, what both nostalgia for material culture and nostalgia for the *habitus* of socialism share is a discourse on cultural belonging that stands in stark opposition to the international language of political kitsch described in the first type of nostalgia above. Both nostalgias depend upon acts of reading and recognition that demonstrate competence at deciphering a cultural inheritance (however grudgingly embraced) that outsiders are assumed incapable of comprehending. For example, a collection of socialist songs called "The Best of Communism" was number one in Hungary for several weeks in 1998, but while the foreign media interpreted this popularity in terms of political kitsch, Hungarian informants explained that they valued these songs neither despite nor because of their political content. Instead, their nostalgia was based upon the personal and communal experiences associated with these songs (singing around the campfire, stealing one's first kiss, etc.) rather than the ideology they represented. Similarly, in the case of socialist-era consumer goods, both Russians and Hungarians explain their nostalgic attachment not as "proof" of the superiority of the former regime and its economic system, but rather as an expression of national loyalty. In other words, the relevant axis of comparison for them is not capitalism versus socialism, but rather the West versus Hungary/Russia. (The irony here is that many of these products were bought by Western-owned multinationals during the 1990s and thus remain "Hungarian" or "Russian" only in the memories of their consumers.)

Another type of nostalgia similarly defined in terms of its interpretative practice is the fashionability of socialist historicity itself with the generation too young to have concrete memories of state socialism. This is not a difference in the *object* of nostalgia (as in the first three types listed above), but rather in the subject's *relationship* to it: one of abstraction rather than

[28] Cf. Semen Faibisovich. Pesni o glavnom // Neprikosnovennyi Zapas. 1998. No. 2; Nataliia Ivanova. Nostal'iashchee // Znamya. 1997. No. 9.

materiality; historical citation rather than a metonymic slide into personal memory; ironic distance rather than longing. Those who practice such "postmodern" nostalgia are not interested in consuming a specific historical image or object, but rather the aura of "pastness" to be found, for example, at the popular socialist-era-themed *Cha-Cha-Cha* coffeeshop located in a Metro underpass in Budapest. Evoking a hip, generalized sense of retro without being anchored by a specific local history, these sites exemplify what Fritzsche calls "nostalgia without melancholy" and Marilyn Ivy[29] has termed "nostalgia of style" – nostalgia without a referent and hence without pain, as opposed to "modernist nostalgia," which still longs for an origin.

Finally, if "nostalgia without melancholy" adheres to nostalgic forms while emptying them of their emotional content, another form of historical politics retains the longing for origins but foregrounds the historical promiscuity inherent to nostalgia, with practices that aim to preserve national identity through a nondiscriminatory embrace of all events and periods of national history. It is accomplished through practices of state institutions, from minor ones, such as the issue of historical postal stamps, to large-scale, such as the notorious return of the Soviet national anthem passed by the Russian Duma with Putin's approval in 2000. While these moves are often thought and spoken of in terms of nostalgia, nostalgic language does not seem adequate for describing the mechanism of these practices' effectiveness since they draw their power not from exploiting popular attachment to a particular historical era, but rather from lumping all historical referents – socialist and earlier – together in an effort to achieve an unproblematic historical legitimacy. The debate around Russia's state symbols demonstrates the importance of this distinction: along with the Soviet-era national anthem, the Duma also approved the pre-revolutionary Russian tri-colored flag and the two-headed eagle as symbols of the Russian Federation, thus suggesting that the task of integrating diverse historical periods trumped the nostalgic task of pledging allegiance to any particular one.[30] What has enabled this all-too-wide historical embrace in the first place is the fact that *all* periods of Russian history are experienced as fundamental-

[29] Marilyn Ivy. Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan. Chicago, 1995. P. 56.

[30] The same historical omnivorousness was more recently revealed in the electoral propaganda posters of United Russia, which featured images of Stalin and Budennyi alongside with those of Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. A testimony to the fact that these posters are animated by a logic different from nostalgia is that a portrait of the recently deceased post-socialist actor Sergei Bodrov graced the posters as well.

ly discreditable. In other words, it is the recognition of *impossibility* of nostalgia for a specific historical period that enables these practices to hold broad rhetorical sway.

Nostalgia beyond good and evil

The multiplicity of nostalgic types discussed above points to the danger associated with naturalizing the distinction that is often drawn both by local cultural observers[31] and in academic discussions (cf. Svetlana Boym) between "good" (ironic, self-reflexive, elegiac) nostalgias and their "bad" (aggressive, political, reactionary) doppelgangers. "Good" ("reflective") forms of nostalgia are either interpreted as apolitical or are associated with subversive, critical, progressive politics (although what the exact take on this politics may be differs among commentators). Correspondingly, "bad" ("restorative") nostalgia is seen as explicitly reactionary and regressive and is typically interpreted as evidence of the inability to part with the past. Evidence of this type of nostalgia embraces such phenomena as diverse as the revival of old TV programs, popular attachments to the Brezhnev (in Russia) and Kádár (in Hungary) eras that consistently emerges in public opinion polls, and the Russian hardliner V. Anpilov's opposition to the removal of Lenin's corpse from the Mausoleum on Red Square.

As we have been pointing out throughout this paper, not every wistful reference to the past can productively fit under the heading of nostalgia. For the category of nostalgia to retain analytical rigor, it has to be distinguished from other types of investment in the past, such as images of the Golden Age, nationalist mythologies, and reactionary politics more broadly. Peter Fritzsche[32] makes the case for such separation by pointing out that while a reactionary insists on the necessity of reinvigorating lost traditions and installing them in the present, nostalgic longing – which reinforces the very distance between past and present by attempting to breach it – acknowledges the impossibility of doing so, preferring instead to contemplate and lament the bygone moments from afar.[33] Once such qualifications are made, the task of distinguishing between "bad" and "good" cases of post-socialist nostalgia has to be reformulated into the task of exploring the distinction between the nostalgic practices themselves and the political causes to which these practices may or may not contribute. In other words, the ideal types of "reflective" and "restorative" are most productive not when they refer to the ethnographic types of nostalgic practices discussed in the previous section (and which, via Fritzsche, cannot be restorative by definition), but to the political projects into which they can be incorporated in each particular context.

[31] Nataliia Ivanova. Nostal'iashchee.

[32] Peter Fritzsche. How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity // A. Confino, P. Fritzsche (Eds.). The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture. Urbana and Chicago, 2002.

[33] Renata Salecl points out that it is this disengaged sensibility that gives a nostalgic some degree of mental and psychological stability: since the desired period is irrevocably gone, the mourning individual need not take any responsibility for the present. Renata Salecl. Where is the Center? // http://www.westfaelischer-kunstverein.de/archiv/2000/ausstellungen/whereis/vortraege/salecl.pdf.

Ethnographically, the problem with applying the categories of "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia to actual behaviors is that most nostalgic practices tend to fall in-between or, more frequently, function as both. Thus, as Natalia Ivanova[34] points out, while the Russian TV show *Starye Pesni o Glavnom* was envisioned by its creators as an exercise in irony and self-estrangement, the bulk of its audience whole-heartedly embraced and celebrated the opportunity to join their voices in tunes of their past without a trace of sarcasm. Nonetheless, sincere as the audience's involvement may be in this case, one would be hard-pressed to argue that the longing for the lost home (i.e. "restorative" longing) trumped the longing for longing itself (i.e. the "reflective" one) in their enjoyment of the program. The distinction seems particularly muddled since many of the Soviet-era songs featured in the program contained elements of longing for far-off lands and times in their original lyrics. These tourist ballads and urban adventure songs spoke of the Soviet youth's desires for travel and action, and extolled the virtues of exploration and displacement. It would be a simplification, therefore, to argue that these songs, as now reproduced in the program, attest to the audience's longing for the "home" of socialist sociality, since the home itself is imagined here in terms of homelessness and longing.[35]

To state this more broadly, the same practice may be used to signify a number of different things: a discomfort with the new expressed in a wistful longing for the old sociality; or, on the contrary, skillfulness at consuming the past with "proper" ironic distance by spinning nostalgic images in new capitalist ways; or even the spirit of *stieb*, sarcastic political humor under the previous regime. Indeed, the same emotions may co-exist within

[34] Nataliia Ivanova. Nostal'iashchee.

[35] Cf. our earlier discussion of nostalgia as desire for the past structure of desire. Given this definition, the longing for home constitutes the longing for the fantasies and desires that structure this presumed site of origin. The very distinction between home and longing in the context of nostalgic desire thus becomes suspect.

the same individual. After all, material success and fluency with the new transnational "rules of the game" does not preclude a resistance to fitting seamlessly within the new global order. In Hungary, for example, a popular ad campaign in 2001 for *Dreher* beer played upon its audience's perceived ambivalence by presenting a dazzling selection of slang, images, and icons from the socialist 1980s with the slogan "We speak one language" (*Egy nyelvet beszélünk*). This assertion of solidarity (and, to outsiders, cultural intranslatability) ends with a group of successful, yuppie Hungarian thirty-somethings, enjoying their *Dreher* beers at a fashionable bar. It thus uses post-socialist nostalgia not to mourn the past, but to support the status quo by suggesting that one can "have it all": be culturally distinctive and, at the same time, produce oneself as European by consuming and achieving at "Western" levels.[36]

Apart from the polysemy of nostalgic practices, there is another factor that complicates the task of making an assessment of a given practice's inherent political significance: in order to retain an aura of authenticity, nostalgia has a stake in insisting on its political neutrality, its apolitical if not anti-political quality. This tendency holds even (or, rather, especially) in nostalgic expressions which explicitly or implicitly critique today's state of affairs since the legitimacy of the challenge that nostalgia advances against the post-socialist political order is premised precisely on the non-partisan quality of memory which alone can lend it an aura of objectivity. Thus, in our field-work experience, even explicitly critical statements of older Russians were often preceded by qualifications that denied the speaker's investment in a particular political agenda. For example, denouncing corruption of the 1990s, Vera, a Muscovite cleaning lady in her forties, told one of the authors, "I am not going to claim that the communists were not stealing. Yes, they stole. But we did not know, did not have to see it. Yes, there were many negative aspects. And yet, I would say... that I lived decently. Perhaps not in luxury, no, but there was some kind of soulfulness among people. Everyone had more or less the same way of life." If political criticism is concealed here as nostalgia, nostalgia itself is concealed as a nonpartisan account.

Considering Vera's political convictions (she has consistently voted communist throughout the 1990s), one would be tempted to question the political neutrality of her nostalgia. Yet it may be instructive to compare her recollections of bygone soulfulness with the expressions of nostalgia articulated by young Russians and Hungarians in their memories of material culture and private lives of the socialist era. The recurrent refrain that accompanies memories of one's childhood possessions, pioneer camp adventures or school encounters sounds not unlike Vera's (and are also frequently couched in terms of soulfulness): It was "stupid, but nice: a part of my life." Why do such statements sound less ideologically objectionable to liberal readers than Vera's musings? Why do they comfortably fall into the category of reflective nostalgia while Vera's memories of socialism belong to the far less attractive and more politically dangerous restorative kind?

[36] Maya Nadkarni. Csak a szépre emlékezem [I only remember the beautiful]: Consuming Nostalgia in Post-socialist Hungary / Paper presented at the Annual Soyuz Symposium of Post-socialist Cultural Studies. 2002. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

One possibility is that the rhetoric of Proustiana is simply more credible in its purported political neutrality. As its very name suggests, it has respectable foreign ancestry and its manifestations are not confined to the former socialist countries. After all, as many of our informants pointed out, "isn't everyone nostalgic for their childhood?" Moreover, this understanding of Proustiana as being a more global and hence more neutral practice has another implication, given that it is practiced primarily by a younger, urban/cosmopolitan yuppie class with the careers and disposable income to purchase these objects and to frequent trendy socialist-themed bars (as well as to write editorials/cultural commentary denouncing the older generation's nostalgia). By asserting the difference between their own forms of nostalgia and that of their older and, typically, less well-traveled compatriots, this ascending elite can "have it all" in yet another way: to be nostalgic and yet progressive, to indulge in pleasurable melancholy for the past as they enjoy the fruits of the present. And while there is no reason to doubt that nostalgic desire can, indeed, combine all these things, it appears that in this particular case, their modernity comes at the expense of projecting political backwardness onto nostalgic practices elsewhere.

Does all of the above mean that nostalgic practices cannot be assessed in terms of their political and ethical implications, and that any value judgment should remain beyond the reach of social and cultural analysis? This need not be the case. The principles for such an assessment should zero in not on creating taxonomies of inherently reactionary and progressive practices or intentions, but rather on the ways in which these practices fit into the larger field of political possibilities in every given case. In other words, the kernel of political significance of nostalgic practices is determined by the larger socio-historical logic of national post-socialist development, so that identical practices, or even identical intentions animating these practices, fulfill radically different social functions depending on the context in which they unfold.

Nostalgia between innocence and responsibility

As the examples above make clear, the nostalgias we have described and the moral evaluations assigned to them tend to fall along generational lines and indeed function as important signposts of group belonging. Message boards on the internet, for example, feature topics that refer specifically to a child's experience during late socialism; responses to the questions "You come from the 70s/80s if ..." include "Your parents were summoned to school because you were trading [foreign] gum wrappers right in front of the teachers' room" or "You remember that you shouldn't take candy or chewing gum from foreigners; they say one boy was poisoned that way." The slower pace of obsolescence of socialist goods, however, also meant that a greater range of ages shared similar experiences and objects, so that "generations" under socialism did not change at the same pace as today, where the difference of a few years can mean mutual unintelligibility in terms of popular culture. Thus, the appeal to socialist memory in itself can function as an appeal to collective experience (or rather, an experience fantasized as collective the moment it vanished). Post-socialist nostalgia both reinforces generational boundaries and provides the fantasy of uniting across them, as when members of different generations join their voices in singing the "yard songs" of the past.

What enables this fantasy of cross-generational belonging is that the younger generation's nostalgia is often misrecognized as following the same logic as that of the older generation, both by the individuals themselves and by cultural critics and observers (as one of our opening quotes suggest). While to some extent this perception is accurate (all generations are subject to Proustiana, although the physical objects that trigger it may differ across generational lines),[37] the older generations of Russians and Hungarians do not always partake in the more consumption-oriented nostalgic practices of those under forty, nor does the younger generation intend practices constructed not only as nostalgic but also as fashionable to be open to everyone. In turn, those over 50 have their own reasons for voicing nostalgic sentiments. These reasons are usually spoken of in terms of the older generation's economic deprivation and sense of alienation from post-so-

[37] Journalist Yulia Kalinina notes a peculiar role reversal that took place at the exhibition *Our Happy Childhood*: "It is the adults that run the show. They rush from one display to another in enormous agitation, exclaiming 'I had this one! And you? And me too! And this one, too!' The juniors follow them in quiet disbelief". (Iuliia Kalinina. Babushka s peryshkami // Moskovskii Komsomolets. 2002. No. 54. 12 marta. S. 6.)

cialist reality, although this rhetoric of alienation (which presupposes a preceding stage of authenticity) should not be taken at face value since in itself it can be thought of as part and parcel of the nostalgia industry. A more adequate way to conceptualize this experience of post-socialist transition is as an experience of radical disjunction between one's *habitus* and the *field* of cultural and economic practice – a condition which generates what Bourdieu calls *hysteresis of habitus:* the unsettling lack of fit between one's internalized dispositions and the new "rules of the game" which constantly reminds individuals of their lack of agency and control.[38] Understandably subject to *hysteresis of habitus* to a greater extent than their younger counterparts, the generations that came of age prior to 1985 may voice nostalgic sentiment not as a way to express their allegiance to the socialist field of practice, but rather to articulate their frustration over the current state of disjuncture.

Most cultural momentum arguably lies behind nostalgia experienced by thirty-somethings, since the political upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s paralleled their own coming of age. Hence the many the films that chronicle adolescent turmoil against a backdrop of political transition. Personal rites of passage invariably take priority over national ones; as one character in the Hungarian film *Moscow Square* (2001), a gentle comedy that follows a group of graduating high school students in the final days of socialism, declares: "Who the fuck is Imre Nagy?"[39] (Imre Nagy, prime

[38] Pierre Bourdieu. Outline of a Theory of Practice. Cambridge, 1977.

[39] The film *Little Journey* (*Kis Utazás*; 2000; see Fig. 1, which depicts a poster advertising an event held to promote the film), on the other hand, takes up these themes of generational conflict intertextually. Set in the early 1980s, the film's depiction of a particularly late socialist combination of sexual rebellion and political apathy is a direct response to Gyula Gazdag's *The Whistling Cobblestone* (*A sipoló macskakő*; 1971). Like Gazdag's film, *Little Journey* similarly portrays a group of teens at a summer camp, but whereas the protagonists of the first film, set in the aftermath of 1968, are capable of greater – albeit fleeting – political idealism, the youth of the subsequent generation are bored and disaffected, and their rebellions against authority motivated by self-interest.
Indeed, even the title of *Little Journey* – a play on the well-known song "Great Journey" (*Nagy Utazás*) – can be read as another nod of recognition of this generational transformation, contrasting the "great generation" (*nagy generáció*) of 68-ers with the lesser ambitions and easier life of the "little generation" that followed. "Great Journey" was the theme song from the film *We Never Die* (*Sose halunk meg*; 1993), an "audience-oriented" coming-of-age film that portrays a fictionalized version of popular actor-comedian Róbert Koltai's teenage memories growing up during normalization (the 1960s). *We Never Die* does not address the leftist political idealism of 1968 per se; rather, its broadly accessible tone of wistful affection for the innocence of youth made it one of the

minister of Hungary during its failed 1956 uprising against the Soviets, was exhumed and reburied in the spring of 1989, and this televised event was one of the major defining landmarks of Hungary's peaceful political transformations.) Indeed, this emphasis upon adolescence is metaphorical as well as literal, given the widespread perception that these societies were collectively forced into adulthood by the political transition, no longer sheltered by the hand of state paternalism.

Fig. 1. Poster advertising a presentation of the the film *Kis Utazás*.

Projecting nostalgia into childhood makes it possible to evade its political implications by tying it to the period when perception is by definition pre-political. Those who came of age at the time of the political transition are old enough to have concrete memories of the previous regime, yet young enough to discard possible questions of responsibility and petty compromise altogether. Yet the very fact that these subjects explicitly dismiss their nostalgia as mere longing for the universal experience of childhood suggests the opposite: the persistent suspicion that the politics of these practices are something that needs to be justified. Each new film or fad has thus been accompanied by articles and reviews which make a point of arguing that the objects and practices themselves had little to do with politics and even when they did – i.e., the Young Pioneer songs mentioned earlier – they were not actually perceived as such at the time. In other words, they claim, nostalgia for the relics of an era does not mean nostalgia for its political ideology as well, any more than nostal-

first domestically-produced post-transition films to be a popular success in Hungary. *Little Journey*, on the other hand, made by a young director (Mihály Buzás) and staffed by unknowns, chronicles similar rites-of-passage with a wry fatalism that made it primarily appealing to those who actually grew up during that era, and thus experienced those historically-specific cultural emotions firsthand.

gia for the 1980s in thirty-something Americans represents an endorsement of the policies of the Reagan administration. The difference is simply that the material culture of this generation's youth is an artifact of a now-discredited regime and any manifestation of nostalgia therefore tends to be placed within an assumed political framework by locals and foreigners alike.

But just as childhood is a time when one is not even aware of political considerations, the objects now targeted by nostalgic desire are associated with the practices and material culture of everyday life, a sphere that many people choose to remember as similarly depoliticized. That is, not only are people nostalgic for the dreams of their youth and for the certain level of material comfort and security provided by the paternalist state, but they are also nostalgic for the very distinction between public political involvement and private material concerns encouraged in post-1956 Hungary and in stagnation-era USSR. Unlike the nostalgia for one's understandably limited perception of childhood, this nostalgia is based upon a misrecognition since the material sphere *was* political: the Kádár and Brezhnev regimes drew their legitimacy from the unwritten social contract through which the populace retreated from public involvement into private affairs and their own material concerns, receiving in exchange relative security and freedom from political harassment. The political nature of the material sphere accounts for the emphasis post-socialist discourses place upon consumption and consumer culture. It also underlies the frequent adage that "under Brezhnev, everyone had enough to eat."

Nostalgic memory, then, is purposefully constructed as non-political in both the object of its longing and in its contemporary implications. But this is where the Russian and Hungarian cases differ since the political context in which such remembering takes place plays a crucial role in how politically (in)consequential nostalgic memory can claim to be. In 2001, for example, the head of the socialist Hungarian Workers' Party, Gyula Thürmer, proposed that the state permit the erection of a statue to János Kádár, the leader who had led Hungary through three decades of relative economic security under socialism. Given the Workers' Party's perennial complaint about its lack of proportional representation in Hungary's private and state news media, Thurmer's suggestion, which he also sent to leading politicians, probably would have failed to register on the public radar had it not been picked up by one of Hungary's recently-established commercial television stations, TV2. It devoted one of its most popular programs, the weekly news-roundup *Fokusz* (Focus), to examining this campaign and to collecting viewer opinions via its weekly phone-in poll. To everyone's apparent

surprise, 80% percent of those who phoned in agreed that Kádár deserved a statue of his own and the question for the following week's poll, ("Is it better now to be young?") also received an emphatic response in favor of the past.

This catchphrase later found its way back into public currency as the Workers' Party campaign slogan for the national elections in 2002, but to no one's surprise, neither it nor any other party was able to the leverage emotional capital of Kádárism into political gain. Indeed, in the first round of elections, the Workers' Party once again failed to overcome the five percent hurdle necessary to gain parliamentary representation. As the interviews *Fokusz* conducted during their polls had made clear, nostalgia for Kádárism could only have political force insofar as it was constructed in explicitly nonpolitical terms. As long as politicians, celebrities, and average Hungarians alike could justify their fond memories solely in terms of their "stomachs" – that is, their memories of material comfort and security – the emotions summoned by nostalgia were effective across the political spectrum which at that time was split fairly evenly between right and left. The Hungarian Socialist Party, impatient to re-invent itself as a European socialist party with no links to the past, could make vague reference to protecting the concerns of the "simple people" without taking responsibility for the injustices of socialism; while the right-wing could dismiss nostalgic practices as merely the expression of dissatisfaction with post-socialism on the whole rather than an endorsement of communism and hence a specific rejection of right-wing anti-communist discourse. Bringing nostalgia explicitly into the political sphere would thus invalidate its usefulness and emotional legitimacy. It would subject the left to a critique of the Kádárist regime's now-shunned lack of democratic values, and it would be read as an overwhelming rejection of right-wing ideology.

Instead, nostalgia became one of the implicit targets of more general anti-communist rhetoric deployed by the then-ruling center-right coalition government during the elections. By warning that the victory of the Hungarian Socialist Party would mean the "return" of communism to Hungary, it attempted to represent the socialists in the worst possible light, as not a new European party but an old and corrupted one that bore all the sins of the past era. Nostalgia was rarely mentioned explicitly, but by summoning such counter-memories and associations among its constituents, the center-right coalition implied that post-socialist nostalgia threatened Hungarian democracy because it "whitewashed" the past. Indeed, nostalgia was all the more dangerous because it was not recognized as such. The government

ultimately lost it's bid for re-election, but given the fact that its defeat was narrow, this campaign can nonetheless be interpreted as successful in mobilizing public sentiment and transforming the emotional tenor of the elections from a political battle to a "holy war."[40]

Going back to the *Fokusz* poll, a similarly nostalgic breakdown of public sentiment is not at all unthinkable in the Russian context: a recent poll by the Yuri Levada Center reports that 46% of the poll sample preferred the pre-perestroika state of affairs, although only 5% see a return to this era as possible.[41] However, the (mis)memories of socialist-era political disengagement appear more problematic here because they embody not only recollections of the past, but blueprints for the present. In other words, if the return of socialism at this point in history is widely recognized as impossible, the return of the familiar social contract of the stagnation era and the

[40] While this anti-communist campaign did not directly attack nostalgia, one important exception is the exhibition strategy of a new, government-funded museum opened just months before the election: the "House of Terror" (*Terror Háza*), dedicated to Hungary's victims of fascism and communism. Here, in a stately building on a tree-lined boulevard in the center of Budapest, the local fascist Arrow Cross Party tortured and murdered Jews and political prisoners after its putsch in October 1944. Later, the Hungarian Communist Party's State Security Authority – the AVH – used the same house as their headquarters and the same cells to imprison and torture political prisoners.
By speaking on behalf of both sets of victims, and uniting them under a logic of generalized totalitarian "terror," the House of Terror marks an important shift in the historical politics that have structured political and cultural debates in postsocialist Hungary. Since the end of socialism, acknowledging the persecution of Jews and of anti-communists have constituted two crucial – and mutually-exclusive – historical reference points within Hungarian public discourse: any mention of one set of victims was perceived as a denial or trivialization of the other. The House of Terror introduces a new temporal logic into these debates by uniting these two histories of persecution into a narrative of "terror" inflicted upon twentieth-century Hungary more generally. This historical argument both speaks on behalf of the two sets of victims and elides crucial distinctions among the different periods included in its logic: who was persecuted, who was victimized, and the differences between the hardships of Stalinist Hungary and the more relaxed atmosphere of late socialism. In other words, the museum – like the electoral campaign it reinforced – attempts to discard the past wholesale and to discredit the entire socialist experience in Hungary. In so doing, the House of Terror not only integrates everyday socialist artifacts that in another context might be interpreted as kitsch into the same totalitarian past that includes machine guns and Soviet tanks. It also and more importantly attempts to delegitimize postsocialist nostalgia and its self-definition as apolitical, by implying that like the tanks and torture chambers, these objects should be regarded as instruments of political terror rather than targets of nostalgic affection.

[41] See Press-Release No. 30 (19 March 2004) "Nostal'giya po proshlomu" on the Center's web site http://www.levada.ru/press/2004031901.html.

promise of stability in exchange for political disengagement represent the very essence of Putin's domestic politics. The non-political nature of nostalgic memory thus becomes incorporated into the profoundly political project of deepening the gap between the "authorities" and the populace, and the material memory of socialism turns into a stake in this game.

This trend towards employing nostalgia politically can be read, for example, in the electoral material of Aleksandr Pleshakov, a member of pro-Putin *United Russia* party who ran in the 2003 Duma elections. Pleshakov's strategy of attracting voters included repeated appeals to the shared experiences of socialism, from the memories of the "holiday feasts" which "smelled of laurel leaf and vanilla" and were preceded by "store rush, queues for chicken, canned green peas *Globus* and *Ptich'e Moloko* candy boxes" to the experience of *subbotnik* labors preceded by "a ritual drink chased by cheese spreads and sausage for 2 roubles 20 kopecks a kilo."[42] Innocuous by themselves, memories of everyday realities of socialism are invoked here as a type of political mandate. They are expected not only to position Pleshakov as "one of our own", an individual sharing the readers' experiences and memories, but also to implicitly point to holiday feasts and collective drinking rituals as the ultimate stuff of life, thus sidelining political involvement and public participation as something inconsequential and unnecessary. The non-political promise of nostalgia, already witnessed in the Hungarian case, here turns into a tool of political alienation, uncontested by rivaling political parties.

Furthermore, because the longing for the lost fantasy of the West can coexist in the Russian case with the longing for the fantasy of one's own imperial power, nostalgic recollections retain a possibility of yet another slippage: the very same practices/images that signify lost body of cultural knowledge for some may be read as longing for the lost imperial grandeur by others. The leaflet for a karaoke cruise on board of the *Alexander Blok* cruise ship (see Fig. 2) illustrates this duality well. In the Hungarian context, a poster like this would most likely be read in along the lines of the *Dreher* beer commercial discussed above and it is not impossible that the actual clients of the karaoke cruise ship would partake in this reading as

[42] Gennadii Krasnukhin, who discusses Pleshakov's material in a liberal web-based journal (Russkii zhurnal. 2003. 10 November, http://www.russ.ru/ist_sovr/20031110_kras.html), notes that his soliloquy entails a telling slippage: unlike the cake of the same name, candy sets *Ptich'e Moloko* were never available for open sale; they could be purchased only in closed *nomenklatura* stores. Attempting to build solidarity by tapping into shared practical knowledge, Pleshakov thus unwittingly reveals his privileged background.

well. But given the images used in the leaflet, another reading is possible, one that accentuates the imperial pride and the mourning for the lost of prestige in superpower competition (in which the conquest of space was, of course, one of the privileged arenas).

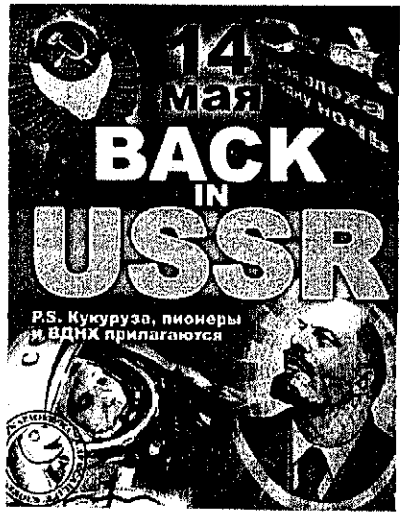

Fig. 2. Russian karaoke party poster.

Practices of nostalgia in Russia, as a result, retain a specific open-endedness that permits not only multiple readings, but also a possibility of misrecognition by those who enact them of their own motives. Disaffection and longing caused by the loss of a utopian fantasy can easily be misread as a longing for the Empire's lost greatness. For an example of such a mechanism of misrecognition, consider the much-discussed intelligentsia's drift towards populist and traditionalist politics.[43] Originally fuelled by the loss of intelligentsia's utopian fantasy of the democratic capitalist West (a fantasy in which the intelligentsia as a social group was particularly invested), this disaffection is now interpreted (often by members of the intelligentsia themselves) as the mourning for the Soviet imperial presence, which is now phrased in terms of a "strong state that is respected on the international arena." On the surface, nothing could be further apart than these two fantasies. But the effect produced by the loss of one is so similar to the effect triggered by the loss of the other that two formerly opposite groups (democratically-minded intelligentsia and "etatist" nationalists) often find themselves on the same side of the barricades.

The similarities in the nostalgic sentiments visible in Hungary and Russia, therefore, should not detract from an appreciation of the very real differences in which these similar practices function in each particular case. A number of other contextual factors contribute to these differences as well. To note the most obvious one, since the socialist project was very much imported into Hungary, appeals for its political rehabilitation are all but

[43] See Boris Dubin. Slovo – Pis'mo – Literatura: Ocherki po istorii sovremennoi kul'tury. Moscow, 2001.

impossible for parties with even a moderate nationalist agenda.[44] In addition, Hungary's recent ascent to the EU makes the meaning of the term "irretrievability" entirely different from the one it has in the Russian context. In the former case, nostalgia's fixation on irretrievability has the meaning of being caught in the irreversible flow of European integration, while in the latter, it has more to do with the point of origin (and thus the irrevocable drift of a former superpower) than with the point of a (yet uncertain) destination.[45] Irretrievable as both of these transformations may be, they thus generate different possibilities for collecting political dividends from avowedly non-political nostalgia: Hungarians, as it were, can "afford" to be nostalgic because they see no actual possibility of return to the Kádárist era whereas Russian nostalgic practices continuously face the danger of generating political capital for populist and imperialist projects. Thus, when individuals indulge in them, the important difference lies not with the inherently different structure of nostalgic desire itself in the Russian case, but rather with the wider space of political possibilities within which this desire can (or cannot, as in the Hungarian case) generate political capital.

There is a sense in which, even in Hungarian context, 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.[46] For some, this provides a way to maintain personal continuity in the face of historical disjuncture and irresolution; nostalgia enables its subjects to integrate their memories into personal narrative without either endorsing or

[44] A testimony to this crucial difference in the political landscapes onto which nostalgic practices are projected is the fact that these practices threaten different political factions in the two countries in question. While nostalgic desire appears most dangerous to the liberal and cosmopolitan Russians, in Hungary it tends to evoke protest predominantly from right-wing nationalists.

[45] Both ascension to the EU and the loss of the superpower status can, of course, be evaluated negatively as well as positively depending on the ideological position of the actor.

[46] The same "pacifying" effect of nostalgia could be observed during Paul McCartney's "Back in the USSR" concert in Moscow in 2003 when individuals from President Putin to former dissidents could nostalgically recollect the days of their socialist-era "Beatlemania" without dwelling for too long on the fact that they belonged to diametrically opposed ideological camps at the time. Indeed, much of the event's success could be thought of in terms of the opportunities it allowed to a wide range of individuals to partake in the same collective identity framed in now obsolete Cold War terms.

condemning an era not yet perceived to have fully resolved into "history."[47] For others, particularly the younger generation, the value of nostalgia lies in its function as a communicative practice. The emphasis is not upon establishing a frame to give sense and coherence to one's personal set of memories, but rather upon finding a common idiom for discussing the past with others, regardless of how these memories fit into one's larger family or social history during the socialist era and independent of how positively or negatively one chooses to evaluate the former system as a whole. From this standpoint, nostalgia for the everyday life of Kádárist Hungary appears to be one of the few safe discourses available for talking about the past. Indeed, given the often-polarized political and cultural climate of post-socialist Hungary, such nostalgia offers perhaps the *only* idiom through which to find common ground in discussions of the socialist era.

Conclusion

In May 1999, the Sakharov Museum in Moscow opened an exhibit entitled "The Idea of the Museum of the USSR." The idea behind this exhibit was to generate responses and create a blueprint for a permanent exposition of the same name which would, as formulated by the Museum's director and human rights activist Yuri Samodurov, help the new democratic Russia "to comprehend and experience the epoch of USSR's existence as an epoch of a different civilization which sank into Lethe like Atlantis." The response that the exhibit generated was highly controversial. Some visitors were happy to partake in a collective project of defining the nature of the Soviet era; many of the themes they proposed for display in the future museum would be already familiar to a reader of this article: artifacts of socialist period, elements of material culture, "official" and "unofficial" art and so on. "I would like [for the museum] to show everyday life – with hopes, love, wishes for the better," – wrote one visitor in the exhibit's Guest book, – "lace curtains and children's beds. And how my Mom had to toil to procure even the bare necessities for her children." Yet the idea of such a museum also elicited pro-

[47] Historical politics in post-socialist Hungary have focused upon the failed revolution against the Soviets in 1956 as a way of distancing the recent past, in light of the negotiated and bureaucratic nature of Hungary's political transition. While in the early years, this emphasis was effective in excising the intervening years of normalization, the memory of 1956 has now become so politicized that its interpretations divide rather than unite Hungarian post-socialist national identity. Instead, the success of these earlier efforts at instantiating historical break are visible in the very nostalgia whose attempts at recovering youthful memories "lost" to the past reinforce the perception that loss has indeed occurred.

tests which came not only from communist hard-liners, but also from those who saw Samodurov's project as a dangerous attempt to cater to the public's nostalgic sentiment. For them, the initiative meant that "the rumors of the Empire's death were greatly exaggerated," as one liberal critic put it and the Sakharov Museum was in the process of creating "a living corpse".[48]

The controversy surrounding the project of the museum illustrates the complexities and tensions inherent to the study of nostalgia. In light of the political leverage held in Russia by the Communist Party, the reservations of the museum's opponents are not hard to comprehend. Yet, given the idea's authorship, it is clear that imperial nostalgia was not the only – and, indeed, not the main – sensibility underlying this project. And if that is the case, one has to wonder whether, in resisting the sentiment that kept much of East European socialist-themed projects going, the museum's opponents were not, in fact, refusing their compatriots the humanity of their memory of the past and whether by their vocal protests against "museumifying the Empire" they did not, in fact, keep it more alive.[49]

This text is an early attempt to destabilize the prevalent notion of nostalgia as an internally coherent body of cultural practices, and to show that the meaning and logic of nostalgic practices reside within specific social contexts in which they are embedded. It views nostalgia as both more universal than is usually recognized (in that the same logic of nostalgic desire animates many practices in the two locations we have surveyed) and more unique to each cultural setting (in that these practices are inevitably transformed by the political agendas and pre-existing ideological tensions specific to each locale). More thorough ethnographic analysis is necessary before reading politics into nostalgia and nostalgia into politics. But while we have argued that nostalgia cannot be assumed to be political (just as the politics of the past cannot be assumed to represent nostalgia), politics are nonetheless at work, both in what these practices accomplish and in who does the labeling and naming of practices as nostalgic.

Nostalgic practices can represent an effort to move beyond the past and to render the past harmless, but it can also create phantasmagoric loyalties and divisions. But what often matters most for these distinctions is not the inherently political content of specific nostalgic practices, but rather the

[48] Nikolai Molok. Nashe nasledie // Itogi. 1999. No. 29.

[49] Indeed, as James Young has argued aphoristically in his study of Holocaust memorialization, "the surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution." James Young. The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning. New Haven, 1993. P. 21.

political field of possibility in which these practices can be put. It is in this aspect that more studies of politics of nostalgia are needed before the messy concept obtains the character of an analytical category.

SUMMARY

На протяжении 1990-х гг. и по сей день в культурном пространстве стран Центральной и Восточной Европы и бывшего СССР постоянно присутствуют мотивы ностальгии по социалистическому прошлому. В глазах многих наблюдателей дискурс ностальгии имеет политическую окраску, однако дискуссии по поводу взаимоотношений между ностальгией и политикой зачастую носят недифференцированный характер. Как правило, ностальгии приписывается ряд априорных политических значений и смыслов (прогрессивных – для одних, реакционных – для других), что приводит к ее восприятию как феномена со стабильным содержанием, неизменными признаками и устойчивыми характеристиками. Авторы этой статьи предлагают альтернативный подход к анализу постсоциалистической ностальгии, который акцентирует смысловое многообразие ностальгических практик. Это многообразие в значительной степени определяется групповым авторством ностальгических практик, т.е. тем, кто, как, для чего и с каких идеологических позиций мобилизует широко распространенное (если не универсальное) желание соотнесения с прошлым. Критически сравнивая ностальгические практики, распространенные на настоящий момент в России и в Венгрии, авторы статьи описывают различия между ними, демонстрируя, что одни и те же символы могут означать диаметрально противоположные вещи в зависимости от интенций, с которыми они задействованы в каждом конкретном случае в конкретной стране. В то же время, схожие ностальгические посылы, характерные для обеих стран, обрастают локальными смыслами, понятными только при рассмотрении их в контексте местных политических баталий. Другими словами, многие выражения ностальгии представляют меньшую политическую опасность в венгерском контексте не потому, что они имманентно более "доброкачественны", но потому, что в геополитическом контексте современной Венгрии ностальгию практически невозможно политически эксплуатировать. Смысл и значимость ностальгии, таким образом, формируется в поле общественных отношений и политических возможностей. Именно эти отношения, а не имманентные характеристики ностальгии, заслуживают дальнейшего изучения, если мы хотим понять роль ностальгии в постсоциалистическом пространстве.