

**ANTHROPOLOGY
AND NOSTALGIA**



Edited by

Olivia Ange and David Berliner



berghahn
NEW YORK • OXFORD
www.berghahnbooks.com

- Stoller, P. 1995. *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa*. New York: Routledge.
- Ten Dyke, E. 2000. 'Memory, History, and Remembrance Work in Dresden', in D. Berdahl, M. Bunzl and M. Lampland (eds), *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 139-57.
- Todorova, M. 2010. 'Introduction: From Utopia to Propaganda and Back', in M. Todorova and Z. Gille (eds), *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 1-13.
- Todorova, M. and Z. Gille (eds). 2010. *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. New York: Berghahn.
- Tucker, H. 2002. 'Welcome to Flintstones-Land: Contesting Place and Identity in Goreme, Central Turkey', in S. Coleman and M. Craug (eds), *Tourism: Between Place and Performance*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 143-59.
- Turner, V. 1988. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Verdery, K. 1999. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wallace, M. 1989. 'Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at a Disney World', in W. Leon and R. Rosenzweig (eds), *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 158-80.

The Politics of Nostalgia in the Aftermath of Socialism's Collapse

A Case for Comparative Analysis

Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko



A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism.

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

Introduction

It is good to be young in any system, even in one that falls within an inglorious and lustreless 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), 19 October 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'im, *Obschaya Gazeta*, no. 23, 6 November 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. . . .

whereas in Eastern Europe there was a conscious attempt to remodel the left along the lines of social democracy: an attempt that – as shall be discussed later – made the political uses of nostalgia more problematic.

These differences raise a number of questions, which we answer in this chapter drawing examples from both Hungary and Russia. Did 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 followed very different trajectories after 1989? That is, when do apparently identical memory practices in the two countries reflect similar memory work, and when are these mere superficial resemblances? Indeed, when do these resemblances facilitate key misrecognitions 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. Whom do specific forms of nostalgia address, and how is this audience defined (age group, economic class, etc.)? And who is terming these practices nostalgic in the first place – those who define themselves as participants or observers, 'locals' or 'exiles', in support of these practices or in opposition?

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 that 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 view these properties in their social embeddedness as products of the different subject positions of those who encode and decode these nostalgic practices. That is, these critics look for the substance of the phenomenon – whether that be 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' nostalgias, scanning each manifestation for signs of its cultural 'health', while foreign mass media similarly divide nostalgias into either the thoroughgoing commodification of communist symbols (and hence, the triumph of capitalism) or, in contrast, the proof of dangerous

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 twenty kopecks. One of over 400 Russian responses to an Internet list (posted on www.livejournal.com) 'You come from the [19]70s/[19]80s if . . .'; 6 April 2003

Just months after the political transformations of 1989 and 1991, when nothing seemed more impossible than the return of state socialism to the former Soviet bloc, communist symbols and iconography suddenly acquired new visibility, rather than fading into obsolescence. Over the next decades, 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 falling under label 'nostalgia'.

It is thus no surprise that the spectre 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 would become such a central term for analysing how post-socialist societies relate to the recent past that it raises the question of why it became 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 did these nostalgias have in common, and what made them different from nostalgias elsewhere?

What makes the similarity of these memory practices so remarkable is that the experiences of socialism in Eastern Europe were so dissimilar compared to that of the Soviet Union. Communist rule lasted longer in the USSR than it did in Eastern Europe and was fuelled primarily by internal political dynamics, not by constant negotiation between local party elites and the external imperial power. The ideology of socialism, by extension, was somewhat less orthodox in Eastern Europe, where elites of different countries explored different ways to 'nationalise' communist doctrine as a way to respond to the crises of the post-Stalinist system of the Soviet bloc. Unsurprisingly, these 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 power of the Soviet Union's imperialism, its break-up in 1989–1991 was juridically and politically more complete in Eastern Europe than in the former Soviet Union countries. Communism's legacies, therefore, 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 evidenced, for example, by the fact that the Communist party survived in post-Soviet Russia as a major political agent,

that views individuals and societies as caught up in a destructive and irreversible flow of time.¹ It emphasizes the irretrievability of the past as the very condition of desire. Indeed, longing in nostalgia is never longing for a specific past as much as it is longing for longing itself, as writers from Susan Stewart (1993) to Svetlana Boym (2001) have pointed out (drawing from Lacan). Such longing is 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 return of an old film or a madeline dipped in tea, is structurally incapable of satisfying the desire that it stirs, for the simple reason that this desire is self-referential. What is at stake in each case is not the film or pastry, nor even the historical period each signifies, but rather the individual's memory of past desire (whether an alternative present or a particular version of the future), and the awareness of the impossibility of experiencing 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' (K. Stewart 1988); that is, to attend to how the meaning of nostalgic practices, far from being predetermined 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 Libedinskaja (2000) has remarked, were experienced as being as inaccessible as the moon and Mars), spatial displacement through emigration or exile was experienced as having 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 twenty-odd 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

atavistic cultural attachments. Meanwhile, scholars at home and abroad have attempted 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' – in this chapter we examine the different logics that undergird the nostalgic cultural practices these commentators attempt to describe: political kitsch, 'Trousiana', postmodern, etc. Can political intention – and 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', in Boym's terms [2001]) 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 unsettling, but also 'a compelling historical understanding that appeared to deny the possibility of resettlement' (2002: 77). 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. The 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 familiar.

Nostalgia, then, is a product of a particular temporality and way of approaching history (a 'regime of seeing', as Fritzsche would have it): one

The Logic of Nostalgic Desire

What is the longing that set into motion the wheels of post-socialist nostalgic desire? As the example of *Iduschie Vneste* suggests, in so far as a general answer to this question is possible, it has to start from an examination of the fantasies that socialism spured 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 doppelgänger. 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.⁵

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.⁶

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 the ultimate political reference to model 'ideal' and 'proper' political behaviour. This fantasy, however, also did not outlive its dystopian counterpart. As post-socialist countries entered into the stage of international realpolitik, their citizens were forced to confront the less glamorous reality that 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

to the US years before 1991. 'Now . . . it seems that the whole of the former Soviet Union went into immigration, without leaving the country' (Boym 2001: 328).

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 that paralleled the historical evolution of the term), but also a realization, uncomfortable for some and welcome to others, that the rupture of nostalgic desire attempts to breach could only deepen with the passage of time.

The very existence of the nostalgic practices of the past decades has thus helped to create rather than overcome the sense of dislocation from the socialist 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 that, as we will show below, can occasionally succeed). In these attempts, images and associations that gain power through nostalgia are used as symbolic currency to attract support for projects whose agendas may be motivated entirely by contemporary interests. The American Right's appropriation of broad societal nostalgia for the 1950s in order to advance conservative family policies, for example, has been written and remarked upon (Coontz 1992). Closer to home, nostalgia for the socialist past was used with similar success to gain public acceptance of the Russian youth organization *Iduschie Vneste* [Moving Together] organized in 2000 by a former Presidential administration bureaucrat Vasilii Yakemenko.⁷ 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 defence of the movement one of us heard from her Russian respondents went along the lines of 'at least under socialism, young people believed in something'.⁸ Nostalgic rhetoric notwithstanding, however, the organization's neoconservative ideology had little to do with cherishing the memories of the past, and in fact targeted communists, alongside fascism, as an example of ideology 'built on hatred and murder, on deceit and betrayal, on blood and suffering of nations'.⁹

fantasies to an 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 former glory (as well as vice versa). 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 Russia's liberally inclined cultural commentators, and it undergirds their reluctance to endorse practices that, 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 argues, this loss of a projected future is what gives the out-of-date 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 (Buck-Morss 1991). Too recent to possess age value as relics, these objects in their obsolescence nonetheless have the potential to reveal the diverse utopian fantasies once embedded within them, by making palpable the disjunction 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 naïveté they are perceived to represent.

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 Western media fascination with this topic undoubtedly stems from the loss of its Cold War political 'Other', a logic by which the end of state socialism in Eurasia and Eastern Europe proved 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, nostalgia also mourns the loss of the flattering fantasy – also thoroughly disenchanting 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;

of material abundance and 'normality' more generally (Fehérváry 2002). While post-war socialist regimes strove to measure up to the consumer standards attained by advanced capitalist countries,⁷ 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 favour (Crowley and Reid 2000, see also Buck-Morss 2000). As a result, Western goods were endowed with a magical and transformative capacity based on their perceived higher quality, and 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, formerly 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.⁸

This reversal reveals nostalgia as a practice centred on the unattainable structure of past desire – the impossibility of re-experiencing the fantasy of the West as it was once constituted. 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.⁹ In the Russian context, this generational narrative has been complicated by the fact that the same period is associated with a loss of yet another fantasy, this one peculiar to the Soviet cultural imaginary. 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 recast 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

Types of Nostalgic Practices

What has been the relationship of these various fantasies to the actual cultural practices of post-socialist nostalgia? Nostalgia may make visible the desire for a structure of fantasy now perceived as lost, but it does not seek to recreate these fantasies. Rather, it has taken on forms defined by structures of intention that fully inhabit the present-day realities of post-socialism.¹¹

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, Khrushchev and Gorbachev also making occasional appearance. 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 humour 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').¹² 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 way exposed the close connections between ideology

and commercialism.¹³ Converting political icons into kitsch was thus part of the necessary symbolic work of that time. It rendered former icons powerless and enabled 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 (e.g., Budapest's Statue Park Museum of socialist-era statues; the socialist relics still widely available for sale on Arbat

the 'Other' of the contemporary West, Islamic fundamentalism, exhibit its no comparable fascination with the consumer paradise of modern capitalism.¹⁰

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 have failed to ensure. It gives voice not only to the loss of 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, as well as of the 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 politics 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 (2003), 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 parallel between communism and social nationalism. 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, risk repeating) 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 centred around the desire *not* to desire it, and it is thus equally fascinated by past fantasies as dangerous allurements or temptation to others.

street in Moscow; and the Communism Tours widely available in many East European Cities).
 The materials of such nostalgia (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, the post-socialist production of Soviet-themed kitsch has been fuelled by market logic and is targeted primarily at the outsiders to



3.1 A stand advertising a communism-themed hostel and tours in Krakow train station. Photo by Olga Shevchenko

COMMUNISM TOURS
 TAKE THE CULT TOUR
 WITH
 CRAZY GUIDES

Experience Stalin's gift to Krakow
 in a genuine Eastern Bloc Tabat! automobile!
 The only private tour of the ideal communist city.

RECOMMENDED BY
 REUTERS
 BBC

COVERED BY
 MICHAEL PALIN FOR
 BBC

UNAVAILABLE SERVICE

www.crazyguides.com

3.2 A leaflet for communism themed tours in Krakow. Image courtesy of Crazy Guides®

whom it provides reassuring evidence that socialism is comfortably (and probably) dead, and that capitalist logic reigns supreme, regulating the circulation of socialist relics as commodities. This nostalgia of political kitsch has thus been popular with foreign tourists and media, since it is the one most legible – 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 dis-

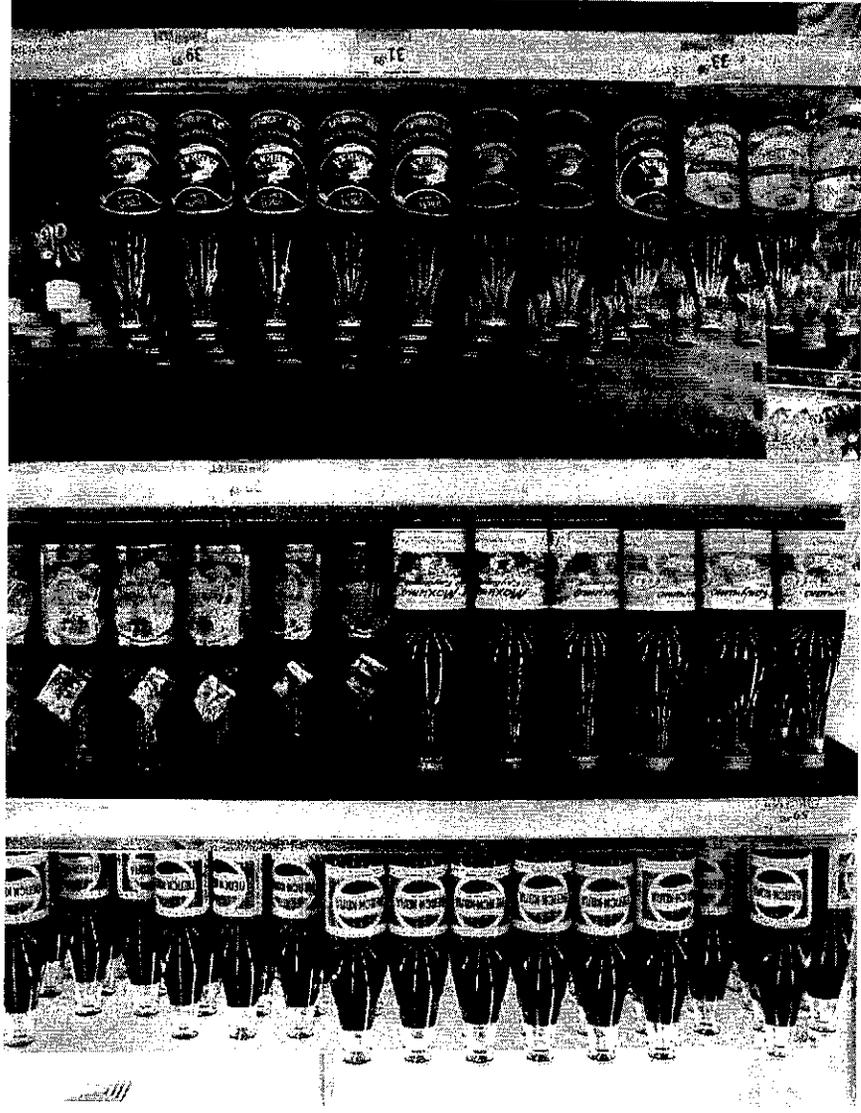
juncture but rather with establishing continuity between past and present selves. The first form of nostalgia, which might be glossed as 'Troushtiana', is similar to political kitsch in that it is also expressed through the market-ing, consumption and display of material culture. (Like kitsch, it is also very easily commodified, although the only place where it appears to be genuinely profitable so far is Germany.) Here, however, 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 humour based not on mockery, but

rather ironic affection. They thus serve as what Winnicott (1953) terms 'transitional objects' in that they provide a convenient combination of materiality (the ability to be manipulated in the present) with their signification of the past state of the subject (much like the teddy bears in his classic example). Moreover, since many of these objects were products of socialist-era con-

sumer culture, 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 temporary revival of the soda 'Bamb' in Hungary and of 'Baikál' and 'Buratino' in Russia; see figure 3.3); in curatorial practice (the exhibit *Our Happy Childhood* in the Historical Museum in Moscow; the exhibits *Kitsch and Gull* and *Fingerprint of the Twentieth Century* in Budapest), as well as popular and academic studies of nostalgia at home and abroad (such as the book *Sztarvady Arhivaz* (Rainbow Department Store, 2002), a collection of photographs and personal memories of socialist-era toys and products, which went through several editions). The popularity of

documents as well as re-televised socialist-era films and television programs similarly demonstrate the success of 'Troushtiana' in that these visual texts are often read as cultural artefacts of Soviet life.

But these films need not merely serve as objects of memory; the extra-diegetic 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



3.3 Supermarket shelves lined with Soviet-era brands: *Baikál* and *Limonád* on the bottom, and 1980s-stylized *Fypsi-Kola* on the top. Photo by Olga Shevchenko.

of greater access to and continuity with past selves, the cultural emotions and sensibilities 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 as desirable 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 Piesni o Gitanom* (Old Songs about the Most Important), which, between 1995 and 2000, relied on the physical re-enactment of the communal singing rituals of the past" in the hope of reconnecting with lost sociability through the reproduction of the same bodily motions. Mimicking the practices of informal kitchen gatherings of the 1960s and 1970s, this show offered its studio audience the opportunity to join voices with celebratives of the same era in singing songs of their youth. These re-enactments of socialist-era rituals of communality, however, entailed a crucial shippage of meaning. Originally valued for their disconnection from the world of socialist officialdom, these practices were now misrecognized as representative of the entire socialist experience, thus allowing participants to overlook their initial political function (cf. Faibisovich 1998).

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 materiality; historical citation rather than a metonymic slide into personal memory; ironic distance rather than longing. Those who practice such nostalgias 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* coffee shop located in the early 2000s 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 (1995: 56) has termed 'nostalgia of style' – a postmodern 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 miscuity inherent to nostalgia, with practices that aim to preserve national identity through a non-discriminatory 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 mechanisms 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 continuity and legitimacy.¹⁵ The debate around Russian state symbols demonstrates the importance of this distinction: along with the Soviet-era national anthem, the Duma also approved the pre-revolutionary Russian tri-coloured 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.¹⁶ It is this all-too-wide historical embrace that is increasingly becoming the go-to strategy of working through the past in Putin's Russia.

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.

Ethnographically, the problem with applying the categories of 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia to actual behaviours is that most nostalgic practices tend to fall in between, or (more frequently) function as both. Thus, as Natalia Ivanova (1997) points out, while the Russian TV Show *Starve Femi o Glanom* was envisioned by its creators as an exercise in irony and self-estrangement, the bulk of its audience wholeheartedly 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 society, since the home itself is imagined here in terms of homelessness and longing.¹⁸

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 socialist retro in new capitalist ways; or even the spirit of *stob*, the sarcastic political humour under the previous regime. Indeed, the same emotions may coexist within 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 the beer Dreher 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) ended with a group of successful, yuppie Hungarian thirty-somethings, enjoying their Dreher beers at a fashionable bar. It thus used 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 (Nadkarni 2010).

Ironically, what necessitates this strategy in the first place is arguably the fact that *all* periods of Russian history are experienced as potentially dis-creditable. 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 (Ivanova 1997) and in academic discussions (Boym 2001) between 'good' (ironic, self-reflective, elegiac) nostalgias and their 'bad' (aggressive, political, reactionary) counterparts. '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 phenomena as diverse as the revival of the old TV programs, the popular attachment to the Brezhnev era (in Russia) and Kádár era (in Hungary) that emerged in polls in the early 2000s, and the Russian hardliner V. Anpilov's opposition to the removal of Lenin's corpse from the Mausoleum.

As we have been pointing out throughout this chapter, not every wistful reference to the past can productively fit under the heading of nostalgia. For the category of nostalgia to retain analytical rigour, 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 (2002) 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.¹⁹ Once such qualifications are made, however, 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 programs 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

Nostalgia between Innocence and Responsibility

to purchase these objects and to frequent trendy socialist-themed bars (as well as to write editorials and 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-travelled 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, however, should focus 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 sociohistorical 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.

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 they function as important signposts of group belonging. Message boards on the internet in the early 2000s, for example, featured topics that refer specifically to a child's experience of late socialism; responses to the questions 'You come from the [19]70s/[19]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 consumer '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 more precisely,

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 that 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 that alone can lend it an aura of objectivity. Thus, in our fieldwork 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 the 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 non-partisan account.

Considering Vera's political convictions (she 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 is also frequently couched in terms of soulfulness): the era was, in the words of one Hungarian informant, '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?

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

high school students in the final days of socialism. 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.

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 that 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, these subjects claim, nostalgia for the relics of an era does not mean nostalgia for its political ideology as well, any more than nostalgia for the 1980s in thirty-something Americans represents an endorsement of the politics of the Reagan administration. The difference is simply that the material culture of this generation's youth is an artefact of a now-discredited regime, and so any manifestation of nostalgia tends to be placed within a political frame, 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 a certain level of material comfort and security provided by the paternalist state, but they are also nostalgic for the very distinction between public and private 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, however, this nostalgia is based upon a misrecognition, since the material sphere *was* political: Kadar's and Brezhnev's regimes drew their legitimacy from the unwritten social contract through which the populace retreated from public involvement into their own private affairs and material concerns, receiving in exchange relative security and freedom from political harassment. This political nature of the material sphere accounts for the emphasis post-socialist discourses have placed upon consumption and consumer culture.

What enables this fantasy of cross-generational belonging, however, is voices in singing the 'yard songs' of the past.

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. 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.¹⁹ But the older generation of both Russians and Hungarians does not always partake in the more consumption-oriented nostalgic practices of those who came of age as communism ended, and nor does this younger generation intend for practices constructed as both nostalgic and fashionable to be open to all. Indeed, those who spent much of their adult lives under socialism have had their own reasons for voicing nostalgic sentiment. These reasons usually reflect this older generation's economic deprivation and sense of alienation from post-socialist 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 habits and the 'field' of cultural and economic practice – a condition that generates what Bourdieu (1977) calls 'hysteresis of habitus': the unsettling lack of fit between one's internalized dispositions and the new 'rules of the game' that constantly reminds individuals of their lack of agency and control. Understandably subject to hysteresis of habitus to a greater extent than their younger counterparts, the generations that came of age prior to the mid 1980s 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 disjunction.

For the younger generation who came of age during the political upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s, what has been at stake is not the assertion of past agency and present-day alienation, but rather recuperating the experiences of an era now remembered as innocent and apolitical. A number of films have thus attempted to appeal to this demographic by chronicling their adolescent turmoil against a backdrop of political transition. In these films, personal rites of passage invariably take priority over national ones, such as the teenaged indifference to the defining landmarks of Hungary's peaceful political transformations in the film *Moscow Square* (2001), a gentle comedy that follows a group of graduating

Indeed, nostalgia would prove to be effective politically only when it was invoked as a dangerous threat. In the months preceding the 2002 elections, the right-wing coalition government then in power argued that its main opponent, the HSP, was not a new European party but merely the inheritor of the sins and corruption of the past era. Warning that an HSP victory would mean the 'return of communism' to Hungary, these right-wing opponents thus targeted nostalgia as the sinister whitewashing of the socialist past. This war against nostalgia was exemplified in the government's opening of a 'House of Terror' museum, dedicated to the victims of fascism and communism, just months before the elections took place. The museum's exhibition included not only relics of authoritarian rule, such as tanks and torture chambers, but the same everyday consumer objects and socialist artefacts that had already been recuperated as nostalgia. In so doing, the House of Terror sought to delegitimize post-socialist nostalgia and its self-definition as apolitical, by implying that such Proustiana should be regarded as instruments of political terror, rather than objects of nostalgic affection. Ultimately, the HSP would win a narrow victory over its right-wing opponents, but the continued popularity of the House of Terror over the past decade suggests that such attempts to discredit – or at least introduce ambivalence into – nostalgic memory have nonetheless found a receptive audience.

Going back to the *Diary* poll, a similarly nostalgic breakdown of public sentiment is not at all unthinkable in the Russian context: a 2004 poll by Yuri Levada Centre reports that 46 per cent of the poll sample prefer the pre-perestroika state of affairs, although only 5 per cent see return of this era as possible (Press-vypusk 2004). 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 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 materials of the businessman Aleksandr Pleshakov, founder of the Transaero airline and a member of pro-Putin party United Russia who ran for Duma elections in 2003. 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

It also underlies the frequent adage that 'in Brezhnev times, 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 proposed that the state permit the erection of a statue to János Kádár, who had led Hungary through three decades of relative economic security under socialism. One of Hungary's recently established commercial television stations, TV2, devoted its weekly news roundup *Diary (Naplo)*, to examining this campaign and to collecting viewer opinions via its weekly phone-in poll. To the presenters' apparent surprise, 80 per cent 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 favour 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 the party was unable to leverage the emotional capital of Kádárism into political gain. Instead, in the first round of elections, the Workers' Party once again failed to win the 5 per cent necessary to gain parliamentary representation. Why did this nostalgia fail when imported into the political arena? As the interviews *Diary* conducted during their polls made clear, nostalgia for Kádárism could only have political force insofar as it was constructed as explicitly non-political. That is, as long as politicians, celebrities and average Hungarians alike could justify their fond memories solely in terms 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 (HSP), impatient to reinvent 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. In contrast, bringing nostalgia explicitly into the political sphere would invalidate its usefulness and emotional legitimacy. It would subject the left to a critique of the Kádárist regime's lack of democratic values, and it would be read as an overwhelming rejection of right-wing ideology.



3.4 Karaoke cruise flyer

(the democratically minded intelligentsia of 1989 and 'etalist' 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 how these similar practices function in each particular case. A number of other contextual factors contribute to this difference as well.

peas *Globus* and *Pitche Moloko* candy boxes' to the experience of *subbotnik* (supposedly 'voluntary' weekend labours – OS) preceded by 'a ritual drink chased by cheese spreads and sausage for 2 roubles 20 kopecks a kilo'.²⁰ Innocuous by themselves, memories of everyday realities of socialism were invoked here as a type of political mandate. They were 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, uncontented 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 presence, nostalgic recollections retain a possibility of yet another slippage: the very same practices/images that signify a 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 the Alexander Blok cruise ship illustrates this duality well. In the Hungarian context, a poster like this would most likely be read 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 well. But given the images used in the leaflet, another reading is possible, one that accentuates imperial pride and the mourning for the lost edge in the global competition of the superpowers (in which the conquest of space was, of course, one of the privileged arenas).

Practices of nostalgia, as a result, retain in Russia a specific openness 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 (see Dubin 2001). Originally fuelled by the loss of the 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 a mourning for the Soviet imperial presence, which is now phrased in terms of a 'strong state that is respected in 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

present appears to have triumphed over the past. That is, the condition for such nostalgia seems to be not only the irretrievability of state socialism, but the superiority of what emerged to replace it. With the recent years of economic and political crisis in Hungary, as well as the disenchantment with the failed promises of transition more generally, nostalgic practices have thus faded in popularity. In some cases, the waning of nostalgia has merely signalled the success of the commodification of specific relics of the socialist past and their integration into the present day, such that these former symbols of the past have become almost entirely detached from their referent. In other instances, the concept of nostalgia has itself become stigmatized, as when it is invoked to characterize the older generation's reactionary longing for the security and stability of the previous era. Now read as a socially divisive idiom of entitlement, such 'nostalgia' has become the target of broad resentment and political critique. The triumphalist nostalgia once pervasive in the early 2000s, however, has disappeared, along with the fantasy of mastering both the present and past that it then made visible. Thus, while we might expect that the experience of economic and political upheaval would only fuel nostalgic longing, it has instead overturned the very conditions for its possibility.

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 that 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 the USSR's existence as an epoch of a different civilization which sank into Lethal Atlantis' (Samodurov n.d.). 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 chapter: artefacts 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, 'Iace 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 protests that came not only from communist hard liners, but also from those who saw Samodurov's project as a dangerous attempt to cater

To note the most obvious one, since the socialist project was very much an import into Hungary, appeals for its political rehabilitation are all but impossible for parties across the political spectrum.²¹ In addition, Hungary's membership in the EU gave the term 'irretrievability' an entirely different meaning 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 super-power) than with the point of a (yet uncertain) destination.²² Irreversible as both of these transformations may be, they thus generated different possibilities for collecting political dividends from avowedly non-political nostalgia. Hungarians, as it were, could afford to be nostalgic as long as they saw no actual possibility of return to the Kádár era, whereas Russian nostalgic practices continuously face the danger of generating political capital for populist and imperialist projects. Thus, when individuals indulge in nostalgia, 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, however, a sense in which, even in the Hungarian context, nostalgia has played an implicit, if not explicit, political role. Post-socialist nostalgia has enabled Hungarians 'to not talk about the past while talking about it': to retain childhood memories while refusing to pass definitive judgment upon the larger political and historical context within which they took place.²³ For some, this has provided a way to maintain personal continuity in the face of historical disjuncture and irresolution; that is, nostalgia enables its subjects to integrate their memories into personal narrative without either endorsing or condemning an era not yet perceived to have fully resolved into 'history'. For others, particularly the younger generation, the value of nostalgia has resided in its function as a communicative practice. It has offered a common idiom for discussing the past with others, regardless of how these memories fit into larger family or social histories during the socialist era, and independent of how positively or negatively Hungarians choose to evaluate the former system as a whole. From this standpoint, nostalgia for the everyday life of Kádár's Hungary appears to have provided 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,²⁴ such nostalgia has offered perhaps the *only* idiom through which to find common ground in discussions of the socialist era.

But as the fantasy of 'having it all' promised by the Dreher beer commercial suggests, such common ground may be only possible as long as the

Practices' (Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko, *Ab Imperio* 2004 [2]: 487-519).

Notes

1. Cf. the work of 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 (Davis 1979).
2. *Idushie Vmeste* were later reorganized into *Nashi* in 2005 and Yakemenko himself was appointed Head of the Federal Youth Agency. In 2012 he announced that the *Nashi* youth movement, too, would be reorganized and shortly thereafter he was removed from his post with the Federal Youth Agency, so the future fate of the movement is unclear.
3. Admittedly, the factual accuracy of this statement, particularly when pertaining to the period of late socialism, is contestable at best (Turchak 1997).
4. The quotation comes from the Moral Codex of Membership published on the now-defunct organization's website. Retrieved from <<http://www.idushie.ru/rus/about/kodeks/index.php>> (accessed 5 May 2004).
5. 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' (Berdahl 1999).
6. 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' comparators.
7. 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 (Gronow 2003).
8. 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 borrow-ing from, the West, may now be misrecognized as emblematic of the socialist 'abundance for all'.
9. Such as *Moscow Square* (*Moskva ter*, 2001), *Sunshine Alley* (*Sonnenallee*, 1999) and *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003).
10. Some reactions to the bin-Laden-orchestrated attacks of 9/11, however, sug-gested that Western thinking was still caught in a mental warp of assuming the desiring gaze of its political Others. Thus, in the days following the attacks, the US 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.

This is a revised version of the text that first appeared in *Ab Imperio* as 'The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-socialist

to the public's nostalgic sentiment. For them, the initiative meant that 'the rumours 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' (Molok 1999).

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 were 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 comparators 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.²⁵

Whether due to the criticisms it had faced, or because of causes external to the project, the Museum of the USSR failed to materialize in the years following this announcement. However, in recent years, three more initiatives have been unveiled, each promoting what the authors considered 'the first Museum of the USSR'.²⁶ This time around, the rationale for the cre-ation of such a museum was strikingly different. 'Museum of the USSR will bring in billions' was the headline of an article reporting on the discussion surrounding a proposal unveiled in 2012 at a cultural forum in Ulianovsk (Chernyshova 2012). In keeping with this logic of commodification, the archi-tectural critic Georgii Revzin, too, justified his own proposal of a Museum of the USSR in Moscow by the need to build up 'the brand of the city' (*brand goroda*) by exploiting the aspects that make Moscow uniquely attractive to foreign tourists (Zubova 2011). But while the socialist past as an object of nos-talgic desire may become increasingly instrumentalized, a parallel process of enchantment seems to be taking place among precisely the liberal circles of the Russian intelligentsia who eschewed the pleasures of nostalgia for social-ism but who continue to mourn the opportunities lost during the early years after 1989. It may thus be time to think about post-socialist nostalgia in yet another sense: as nostalgia for the promised future of post-socialism itself and for the optimism that its early moments seemed to herald.

Acknowledgments

Russians, in Hungary it tended to evoke protest predominantly from right-wing nationalists.

22. 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.

23. The same 'pactifying' effect of nostalgia could be observed during Paul McCartney's *Back in the USSR* concert in Moscow in 2003, when individuals from Vladimir Putin to the former dissidents could nostalgically recollect the days of their socialist-era 'Beale-mania' without dwelling for too long on the fact that at the time, they had belonged to diametrically opposed ideological camps. 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 the now obsolete terms of the Cold War.

24. Historical politics in the first decade of post-socialist Hungary focused upon the failed revolution against the Soviets in 1956 as a way of distancing the more recent experience of Kadar's 'soft dictatorship' and evading the negotiated and bureaucratic nature of Hungary's political transition itself. While this emphasis was initially effective in exciting Hungary's decades of post-1956 normalization, the memory of 1956 later became so politicized that its interpretations divided rather than united Hungarian post-socialist national identity.

25. Indeed, as James Young has argued aphoristically in his study of Holocaust memorialization, 'the surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution' (Young 1993: 21).

26. One museum was purportedly opened in Chelabinsk, the other two were proposed in Ulianovsk and in Moscow.

References

Berdahl, D. 1999. "'(N)ostalgie' for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things", *Ethnos* 64(2): 192-211.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boym, S. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Perseus Books.

Buck-Morss, S. 1991. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

—. 2000. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Chernyshcheva, V. 2012. Muzet SSSR Prineset Milliardy, 1 October 2012. Retrieved from <www.rg.ru/2012/10/01/reg-pfo/muzey.html> (accessed 14 November 2012).

Conerton, P. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coontz, S. 1992. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.

11. In other words, we argue that, in contrast to the two Guseinov's models mentioned above, the actual practices of today's nostalgia exist in a different rhetorical field – one defined by tension between socialism and post-socialism.

12. See an article by Masha Lipman for a fascinating discussion of other ways in which late-socialist political humour remains unexpectedly relevant for the circulation of today's political images (Lipman 2004).

13. But while Pop Art approached commercial brands as ideology, Sotsart was rather concerned with exposing ideology as a brand.

14. See Paul Conerton for a discussion of the power that corporate rituals have to create symbolic solidarities and to link individuals with the past (Conerton 1989).

15. Ilya Kalinin makes this point compellingly in Kalinin 2011.

16. The same historical omnivorousness was revealed in the electoral propaganda posters of United Russia in 2003, 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-Soviet film star Sergei Bodrov graced the posters as well.

17. 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 (Salecl 2000).

18. 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 fan-tastes 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.

19. Journalist Yulia Kalina 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' (Kalina 2002: 6).

20. Gennadii Kraskukhin, who discussed Pleshakov's electoral materials in a liberal web-based journal (Kraskukhin 2003), noted that his soliloquy entailed a telling slippage: unlike the cake of the same name, candy sets *Fish's Moboko* were never available for open sale; they could be purchased only in closed non-market stores. Attempting to build solidarity by tapping into shared practical knowledge, Pleshakov thus unwittingly reveals his privileged background (and indeed, the bio blurp on the news portal Lenta.ru identifies him as the son of Petr Pleshakov, the Soviet minister of Radio Industry).

21. A testimony to this crucial difference in the political landscapes onto which nostalgic practices are projected is the fact that these practices threatened different political factions in the two countries in question. While nostalgic desire for socialism appeared most dangerous to the liberal and cosmopolitan

- Stewart, K. 1988. 'Nostalgia - A Polemic', *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (3): 227-41.
- Stewart, S. 1993. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. 1953. 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: A Study of the First Not-Me Possession', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34: 89-97.
- Young, J. 1993. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Yurchak, A. 1997. 'The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretense, and the Anekdot', *Public Culture* 9(2): 161-88.
- Zubova, E. 2011. 'Grigorii Revzin: Moskve Nuzhen Muzet SSSR', 12 December 2011. Retrieved from <http://slon.ru/russia/grigorij_revzin_moskve_nuzhen_muzey_ssr-723783.xhtml> (accessed 14 November 2012).
- Crowley, D. and S. Reid. 2000. 'Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe', in S. Reid and D. Crowley (eds), *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 1-24.
- Davis, F. 1979. *The Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: The Free Press.
- Dubin, B. 2001. *Slovo-Pis'mo-Literatūra: Očerki po Istorii Sovremenoi Kul'tury*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.
- Fabisiovich, S. 1998. 'Pesi o glavnom', *Neprikoznoventnyi Zapas* 2: 4-7.
- Fehérváry, K. 2002. 'American Kitchens, Luxury Bathrooms, and the Search for a "Normal" Life in Postsocialist Hungary', *Ethnos* 67 (3): 369-400.
- Fritzsche, P. 2002. 'How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity', in A. Conhno and P. Fritzsche (eds), *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 62-85.
- Gronow, J. 2003. *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of Good Life in Stalin's Russia*. Oxford: Berg.
- Gusejnov, G. 2003. 'Revolutsionnyi Simvol i Kommertsia', *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* (64). Retrieved from <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2003/64/gus13.html> (accessed 29 January 2013).
- Ivanova, N. 1997. 'Nostaliaschee', *Znamia* 9: 204-11.
- Ivy, M. 1995. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kalinin, I. 2011. 'Nostalgic Modernization: The Soviet Past as "Historical Horizon"', *Slavonica* 17 (2): 156-66.
- Kaliniina, Y. 2002. 'Babushka s Peryshkami', *Moskovskii Komсомолец*, 12 March, p. 6.
- Krasukhin, G. 2003. 'Na Zerkalo Necha Peniat', *Russkii Zhurnal*, 10 November 2003. Retrieved from <www.russ.ru/1st_sovr/20031110_kras.html> (accessed 5 May 2004).
- Libedinskaja, L. 2000. 'Takaja Voi Istoria', *Voprosy Literatury* 3: 253-77.
- Lipman, M. 2004. 'The Putin Toothpick', *The New Yorker*, 8 March 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/03/08/040308ta_talk_lipman> (accessed 28 January 2013).
- Molok, N. 1999. 'Nashe Nasledie', *Itogi* 29.
- Nadkarni, M. 2010. "'But It's Ours": Nostalgia and the Politics of Authenticity in Post-Socialist Hungary', in M. Todorova and Z. Gille (eds), *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 190-214.
- Press-vypusk 2004. 'Press-vypusk No. 30: Nostalgija po Proshlomu', 19 March, 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.levada.ru/press/2004031901.html> (accessed 14 November 2012).
- Salecl, R. 2000. 'Where is the Center? Retrieved from <www.westfaelischer-kunstverein.de/archiv/2000/ausstellungen/whereis/vortraege/salecl.pdf> (accessed 25 January 2013).
- Samodurov, Y. n.d. 'The Idea of the Museum of the USSR: An Exhibition-Laboratory', Retrieved from <http://old.sakharov-center.ru/projects/nssr-museum/exhibit.htm> (accessed 5 March 2014).