

INNOCENCE LOST: CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF 1960s CONSUMPTION FOR 1990s HUNGARY¹

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In 1997, a Hungarian musical comedy called *Csinibaba*² overcame competition from Hollywood blockbusters to break box-office records domestically.³ Young people flocked to the film in record numbers and bought the CD of pop songs, several of which became subsequent hits. On the surface, the subject matter of this overwhelmingly successful musical comedy was rather dark and melancholy—a coming-of-age tale set in the post-Stalinist 1960s. Much like the internationally-acclaimed Hungarian film *Time Stands Still* (Gothar 1982), *Csinibaba* focuses on the experiences of 1960s teenage youth, their interactions with authority figures, and the ways their subjectivities are shaped by their relationship to the western music, pop culture and commodities frowned upon by the state. However, in *Time Stands Still*, released in the early 1980s, the hallmarks of 1960s western youth culture, such as rock-n-roll, blue-jeans, and long hair are appropriated and redeployed in the Hungarian context as a way of symbolizing rebellion against an oppressive and invasive political system,⁴ and yearnings for, as Herbert Eagle has suggested, a life allowing for uncompromised passions (sensual, ethical, religious) (Eagle 1989). The pull of the West here lies less in the attractions of its dubious pleasures (Phillip Morris cigarettes and Coca-Cola), than as an alternative to the stultifying future these teens confront in the lives of the defeated adults around them.

In stark contrast, *Csinibaba*, released in the postsocialist 1990s, avoids any overt reference to the political repression and malaise of the era. Instead, it draws upon Communist-era caricatures, popular songs, and slogans to depict a silly and colorful world, where the figures of authority are harmless buffoons and fashionably-dressed youth hanging out in cafes, dreaming of Coca-Cola and Niagara Falls. In an interview, Tímár claims this is the world he remembers when he was an eleven-year-old boy, tagging along with his older sisters and their musician boyfriends experimenting with rock-n-roll (Balogh 1997). In his film, 1960s youth were preoccupied with recreating western fashions, pop music and consumer culture. The era was

indeed characterized by a longing to get out of Hungary, but less to escape the prevailing sense of ennui and hopelessness than in order to experience “the real thing.”⁵

Csinibaba's focus on consumption in the sixties might be analyzed as plausible historical revisionism, since it offers a perspective on how the socialist state's increased attention to providing consumer goods in the 1960s might have affected everyday life. Nonetheless, it is clearly not a candidate for what Robert Rosenstone calls the “New History Film”—or a film which is “more serious about extracting meaning from the encounter with the past than with entertaining audiences or making profit for investors” (Rosenstone, 1995:7). On the contrary, movie reviewers accused the director, Tímár, of setting out to prove that Hungarians were capable of making a film which would appeal enough to movie-goers to turn a profit.

In fact, this film makes little attempt to provide an accurate revision of the past. It is instead an example of the widespread phenomenon in the former socialist countries known as “socialist nostalgia,” in which artifacts from the socialist period are recontextualized in the postsocialist present in numerous ways and for a diversity of reasons, but never as representations of oppressive political power. Formerly potent symbols of power such as busts of Lenin are mocked, rendered harmless, or redeployed as “style.” Now-obsolete consumer goods become mnemonic of everyday life under socialism, and pop culture references evoke shared memories and practices.

In this article, I will discuss the particular ways *Csinibaba* evokes and satisfies the “desire for [past] desire” (Stewart 1993) so common in practices of socialist nostalgia throughout the former socialist world—a wistful sense of loss of an imaginary in which it was still possible to conceive of the West as a utopia (see Bach 2002; Berdahl 1999; Boym 2001; Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004; Veenis 1999). *Csinibaba's* cinematic representation of the past is, of course, only conceivable from the

perspective of the post-socialist present—a present where western consumer goods and indeed the West itself have been disenchanted and are now part of the banal and often bitter experience of the free market economy.⁶ But I also address a central agenda of the film, intentional or not, that is not properly nostalgic at all. This agenda concerns its target audience, the primary movie-going population in Hungary—youth between the ages of 13 and 25, most of whom had very little direct experience with state-socialist constraints and even less memory of them. Here, I understand the film and its reception by youth as illuminating a matter of intense significance in Hungarian life: the experience of consumption and the continuing identification of consumer goods with western or socialist bloc stereotypes. For an older generation, this formulation of the past as an era of innocent expectation, forged through perceptions of western consumer goods, reflected their understanding of the post-Socialist 1990s as an end to childhood and an awakening to the harsh realities of an adult world. But for its primarily youthful audience, this reconstruction of the consumerism of the past, and with it the lifestyles of their parents, proved enormously attractive. I argue, then, that the film participates in a postsocialist project replacing old images of state socialism and its subjects with new ones more in accord with the criteria of value most salient in a neoliberal capitalist world. These criteria, internalized particularly by younger generations, tie value on an international stage to the degree to which countries and their populations are identified with the modern, fashionable and technologically-sophisticated material worlds circulating in the mass media and materialized in local space via consumer goods.

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On the surface, *Csinibaba's* success came through the commercialization of socialist nostalgia, resurrecting the wealth of jokes and stereotypes engendered by the old regime (which the postsocialist era had not been able to replicate) and reminding viewers of the “safety” within the oppressiveness of the old order. The film’s minimal plot line revolves around the characters’ frantic preparations to enter a new nation-wide, televised, talent competition. During a time when travel to western capitalist countries was prohibited, the overwhelming attraction of the contest is that the winner will represent Hungary in competition in Helsinki—

which “counts” as the West. Although the vaudevillian slap-stick of these preparations is amusing, the audience—young and old—laughed uproariously at familiar stereotypes from the old regime which were once lampooned in cabarets. These include the female functionary in uniform, like a silly tram conductor and a humorless, masculine party apparatchik; the young pioneer dressed in infantilizing boys’ school shorts and red bandanna; factory workers making off with tools and materials under their shirts; and the film’s central character, the housing block warden, full of self-importance as he broadcasts the day’s propaganda over the courtyard loudspeaker.

Movie-goers of Tímár’s generation (aged 45-50 in the mid-1990s), who themselves came of age during the 1960s, generally found the film entertaining and a relief from the Hungarian cinematic tradition of making dark and depressing art films. Yet, the film’s blithe treatment of what many remember as indeed a dark and oppressive time sat uneasily for some. As the 48-year-old actor playing the housing block warden put it in an interview: “I was young then too. Of course I have many nice memories...but if I think about it, like hell would anyone want to go through that time again” (Filmstudio interview 1997).

In the end, the film was not for the generation who lived through the period it depicts, despite Tímár’s denials that he set out to make a film which would be popular with youth. *Csinibaba* features a new crop of contemporary actors, many of the same generation as the movie-going public. Tímár’s signature use of camera techniques and fast editing readily appealed to a generation raised on MTV but alien to an older generation.⁷ The music drew on pop-hits from the 1960s, but these were remixed for modern tastes by contemporary pop stars—capitalizing on the 1990s fashion for retro. *Csinibaba's* appeal to contemporary youth extended beyond its modern form and entertainment value, into the particular ways the film played on nostalgia for the state-socialist era. Its portrayal of 1960s youth as active participants in modern consumer culture performed a corrective function for 1990s teens and twenty-somethings. Youth embraced this reconstructed narrative of their (recent) ancestral past as one far preferable for their sense of self than the one they had been subject to by their elders and western discourse. Furthermore, they were able to identify with the experiences of

1960s youth as depicted during the socialist era as remarkably similar to their own. The very possibility of this construction, however, lies in the symbolic value of everyday material culture within the socialist system.

During the socialist period, the intense politicization of consumption had far-reaching consequences not just for how Hungarians understood the regime and their relationship to it, but for the particular ways they idealized capitalist systems.⁸ As I have argued elsewhere (Fehervary 2005), in the context of the state's utopian promises, on the one hand, and the populace's increasing exposure to images of the West and western consumer goods on the other, the Cold War opposition between communist and capitalist systems become embodied in their respective products. In accord with state-socialist ideology, its mass production emphasized quantity over quality in an effort to make goods available to everyone in society. However, the perceived "inferior" quality of these products—in comparison to western products—came to stand for the inferiority of the socialist system itself, as well as the state's negligent and even "inhumane" treatment of its subjects. Select western products, on the other hand, were encountered out of context and valued as powerful icons of a different world. The properties of these goods, carefully designed, it seemed, either to make people's lives easier or to provide entertainment and pleasure, were understood as not just evidence of a better production system, but iconic of a more natural and humane political system, one valuing human dignity.⁹ After 1989, the geo-political basis for this dichotomy disappeared, as Hungary "joined" a European sphere. Yet, just as the disparity in standards of living did not vanish overnight, so too have identifications with the ex-Socialist state lingered on.¹⁰ For both eastern Europeans and western onlookers, consumer goods (their consumption more than their production) became a primary means of producing and consequently indexing stereotypical images about places and their populations.

In the 1990s, Hungarian youth were particularly defensive about the prevailing international "image" of the former Soviet bloc states, one for which the color gray had long served as the "ur" metaphor. After 1989-91, the postsocialist citizenry continued to be identified with inferior, cheap products, lack of style, and an ignorance of modern commodities and technology.¹¹ A 22-year-old I knew in the steel

town of Dunaújváros could barely contain her indignation while telling me the story of a friend of hers working as an *au pair* in France, whose host family thought they had to show her how to use a VCR. Regardless of what the family intended by this gesture (Were they merely showing her how to use their *particular* VCR?), it speaks volumes that these young women experienced the incident as degrading and insulting.

In *Csinibaba*, Timár uses the ploy of an adolescent perspective to avoid references to political oppression, deliberately leaving out red stars and signs of a Soviet military presence. The existential suffering of the era is often mocked—trivializing what for many was a time of concrete hardship, fear and misery. In the factory scene, the 6-to-7 day workweek of the period is nowhere in evidence; instead, on pay-day besotted workers stumble around singing "I'm feeling a little melancholy today..." as a lament over their miserable wages, and thus, their lack of buying power. Though this pop song from the 1960s was considered overly light-hearted for the time, it became a smash hit in its reworked form in 1997.

During two other scenes, youth viewing the movie are as oblivious to references to the more ominous dimensions of the period as their screen counterparts seem to be. One film critic noticed at a showing that when the housing block warden is broadcasting the day's lottery numbers and can't bring himself to report the last two digits: "56," the audience did not get the reference to the Revolution of 1956, long a taboo subject for the socialist regime (Szárnyas 1997). To 1990s youth, the warden appeared as a bumbling and irksome, but ultimately harmless, authority figure—strolling around his little domain in an attempt to keep order. They did not recognize what their elders would have, that his leather hat marks him as a retired member of the state secret police.¹² Thus, youthful movie-goers did not have to be "burdened" with reminders of a suffering they never experienced and no longer wanted to hear about. Once framed as noble and even heroic by western commentators, after 1989 the political suffering and oppression endured by state socialist citizens suddenly became transformed into a stigma and fused with the shame of poverty. *Csinibaba* is able to reinscribe this "suffering" in contemporary terms of consumerism, as oppression is eliminated and the "tragedy" becomes the teen protagonists inability to get ahold of western brand name

consumer goods and experience “the West” for themselves.

Thus, the press-releases for *Csinibaba* missed the point when they suggested the film’s appeal would come from making fun of a 1960s populace “fed on potato-dumplings, who think that Helsinki is practically America.”¹³ Facilitating this kind of mockery is certainly a factor in the popularity of socialist nostalgia generally, as a mode of distancing oneself from the past. But in *Csinibaba*, a bigger draw for 1990s youth was the film’s construction not just of characters but of an entire popular culture that was the opposite of the Soviet bloc stereotype—of gray, uniform and shabby goods in equally gray, uniform and shabby shops, and of socialist consumers committing the unpardonable sin of being ignorant of popular culture and brand-name commodities.

Instead, the film’s teen characters are portrayed as savvy and hip, and conversational in the qualities and merits of western goods and consumer culture. While they are prevented from participating in this culture directly, they make do with available substitutes in their construction of self. Some of these, such as Bambi sodas and cool sunglasses, are the new non-essential products distributed by a state attempting to assuage the consumer desires of its populace.¹⁴ Despite their material divide from the West, nothing about these hipsters suggests that they are not full co-evals of their western counterparts. They sport the latest hairstyles and dress fashions, do the twist, and even practice a kind of celebrity worship characteristic of mass culture. The teenage angst of these *Csinibaba* youth stems from knowing the difference between their own material culture and that of an unreachable West. Their desire to get out, to leave the country, is not motivated by ideals of political freedom, but by their critical awareness of consuming simulacra.

When the “real thing” does enter their world, it is an event. In a critical scene, most of the youthful cast sits in an outdoor cafe, chatting, posing in sunglasses and drinking their Bambi sodas.¹⁵ An older man, sitting alone, pulls out a pack of cigarettes and everyone turns to stare in open admiration: “Look, American cigs!” Sixties-style electric guitar riffs replace Paul-Anka-like ballads as he lights a cigarette, and a table of girls emit a collective sigh as he is enveloped in smoke: “American cigarettes, how manly!” A youth cries, “Wow, they’re Chesterfields!” “The aroma!” sighs another,

“They say they have cocaine in them.” The third youth, slightly nerdy, chimes in, “No, it’s opium! Cocaine is in Coca-Cola!” Here, unlike the tame Bambi sodas and local cigarettes, the western “real thing” can offer pleasures along a different dimension. The process of discussing this scene with a friend who was in her early 20s in 1968 sparked a vivid memory of her first sip of Coca-Cola. A college boyfriend had managed to smuggle a bottle into the country, and served tiny portions in champagne glasses. The bottle had such a distinctive shape, and they all thought they would experience some kind of hallucinogenic effect. Nothing happened, but she liked it anyway, and still buys it. Many western commodities that found their way into Hungary at the time served as icons of another, magical world, but the state’s moral censorship of certain commodities as “decadent and corrupting” only reinforced the perception of their enhanced quality.

Given the defensiveness of 1990s youth to presumed slight derived from their association with socialism, it is not surprising that they would embrace *Csinibaba*’s reconstructed narrative of their (recent) ancestral past as one of relative material prosperity and vitality. Instead of having to identify with a tragic history marked as deficient or “lacking” in relation to Europe in terms of material prosperity, they could now identify with the stylish consumerism of their parent’s generation. As some friends in their mid-20s said to me after seeing the movie, “Our parent’s really had class and style back then!” This, in turn, had the effect of reinscribing their subjective experience as consumers in the present. It had the capacity to liberate them from the subject position forced upon them by dominant imagery of naive, provincial eastern bloc shoppers, and allowed them to imagine themselves as consuming based upon generational experience and confident taste.

It is in such examples of socialist nostalgia that the specter of social class in postsocialist relations is most clear. The reinvigorated salience of class and family background in the local Hungarian context becomes inseparable from people’s perceptions of their own value based upon Hungary’s uncertain position in a global hierarchy of nation-states—now a part of Europe with a European history, now relegated to the impoverished and excluded “second-class” nation states.

Despite the abundance of western goods which have circulated in Hungary since 1989 and the advertising wars which Coke waged with Pepsi to gain prominence in Hungarian refrigerators, youth in the 1990s could nonetheless identify with the experience of their youthful on-screen counterparts. Like those counterparts, 1990s youth were also completely unconcerned with the political situation except as it might impinge on their lives in the form of parents or other authority-figures.¹⁶ They too were preoccupied with western brand-name commodities, and found that they were often beyond reach—though for financial rather than geopolitical reasons. Finally, they too saw these commodities as representative of a “good life” which is taken for granted in western Europe and the United States, the criteria for “normalcy” they feel they are denied because of their unfortunate status as Hungarian citizens (see Fehérváry 2002).¹⁷

The film, with its coming-of-age theme, replayed commonplace narratives of the regime change in 1990s Hungary. These discourses described the transition as a passage from youthful idealism to adult confrontation with reality, from life described as soft and safe to one that is hard and unprotected – in short, the passage from innocence to experience.¹⁸ In an interview, director Tímár said his intention was to depict “the entire country in adolescence” during the 1960s (Karacsony 1997). This move is comparable to how Hungarians in the 1990s thought of the “naive” ways people once conceptualized life in the West.¹⁹ From the perspective of today’s disenchantment, the state-socialist era was a time when “the West” was still an enchanted place, a symbol of possibility, a way out of “this life.”²⁰ As many analyses of nostalgia in general and postsocialist nostalgia in particular note, this is not a longing for a specific past, but a longing for a kind of longing, a kind of fantasizing, that was possible in the past. The pleasures or comfort provided by such a fantasy are no longer possible with present knowledge and experience. An older generation might remember the joys of goods from the West and how they evoked a different world—indeed constructed an image of a world—that has been shattered by postsocialist experience. In discussions about the movie, even a 24-year-old acquaintance could remember a time marked as “special” by the occasion of a banana, or how excited she and other kids were at school when a friend got a western youth magazine with fold-out posters of pop bands. After 1989, however,

particularly for youth, it was no longer acceptable to demonstrate such appreciation for western goods; in fact, discursive norms for distancing oneself from the backwardness of socialism required normalizing such goods, even if they were expensive (Rausig 1998; Fehérváry 2002).

Csinibaba recaptures this longing for “the West,” while simultaneously marking this “West” as the product of fantasy. One scene depicting a showing of Fellini’s *Dolce Vita* epitomizes this confusion of mass cultural image for reality: when screen goddess Anita Ekberg beckons from the fountain, the men in the theater rush the screen to try to join her, pulling it down as the image disintegrates and they all have to go home. *Csinibaba* ends with the loss of innocence, a bittersweet awakening to the impossibility of escape and the realities of the here-and-now. One of the main characters—a sensitive young man who forms a rock band for the competition—is overjoyed when he begins to receive letters from a girlfriend who defected with her family to Canada four years before. “Oh Attila” the letters croon, “I’m standing near Niagara Falls, imagining you were here with me. You drinking a Coca-cola, me drinking a Pepsi. Love, Katinka.” “Is this a dream?” he asks rhetorically, “her and me, drinking Coca-Cola and Pepsi?” By the film’s end, he has discovered that the competition has been rigged all along. “We couldn’t leave something as important as THAT to chance, could we?” asks the housing block warden. And, it turns out, the letters from the West *were* a dream—or at least a fantasy. They were written by a lovely girl he’s been ignoring in his focus on getting out; after she tells him the truth, he cries impetuously, “I’m going anyway!” To this, she replies with the indulgent amusement of an adult for a child, “Oh, Attila, all that is just silly dreaming” (*su-su-bolondság*).

In the film, only Chesterfield cigarettes, a jazz record and an Italian movie enter the otherwise closed-off world the characters live in. No voice of experience from outside disrupts the characters’ imagined longing for the West and the sense of possibility it offers. Perhaps there was no need to include such a voice in the film’s narrative. By the mid-1990s, any romantic notion of the West had been replaced with a much more pragmatic one, especially by youth. It was and continues to be a place to go and work, often in semi-legal and undignified ways, in order to make enough cash to come back,

secure an apartment, and attempt to construct a miniature Dolce Vita at home.

Conclusion

Like many other so-called “nostalgia” practices in the 1990s,²¹ *Csinibaba* counters perceptions of socialist consumer society as dowdy and cheap, instead reconstructing it as fashion-savvy and quality-conscious. In so doing, it serves up a material culture history of the socialist period that, instead of being marked as an aberration or abject compared to that of western Europe, runs parallel to a normalized western capitalist trajectory. Such projects, while seemingly empowering, also reinforce the legitimacy of neoliberal capitalism and the consumption-based classes and identities it produces.

Notes

¹This article is an expanded version of a paper of the same name I presented to the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia in 1998, in a panel organized by Marko Zivkovic. It contains material that has since been elaborated theoretically and ethnographically elsewhere (Fehervary 2005), though not in relation to this film. Since this paper was first written, numerous articles on socialist nostalgia, particularly regarding the phenomenon in unified Germany, have been published. Among the most notable are (in chronological order) for Germany: Berdahl (1999), Betts (2000), Ten-Dyke (2001), Bach (2002), Boyer (2006). Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko (2004) provide an overarching analysis of the category, comparing the cases of Hungary and Russia. I am grateful to Matthew S. Hull, Eric Karchmer, Jennie Burnet, and David Altshuler for their thoughtful comments.

²*Csinibaba* (1997), directed by Péter Tímár, was based on a novella written by Gyula Márton entitled *Bambi Szalmaszállal* (Bambi-soda with a Straw). The literal translation of *csinibaba* is Pretty Baby, but English-language press releases of the film use the name “Dollybirds.”

³*Csinibaba* was by far the highest grossing domestic film of 1997, but also topped the list of domestic films for the decade. In 1997, it ranked 3rd in box-office receipts of all films shown in Hungary, besting Hollywood blockbusters “Men in Black” and the rerelease of “Star Wars,” but behind “Jurassic Park: Lost World,” and “101 Dalmatians.” As with most domestic films, *Csinibaba* was only shown on 14 screens,

compared to the 20-25 screens allocated for American films. Figures from *Annuario Statistico del Cinema Europeo*, Media Salles, 1998

Edition.
[//www.mediasalles.it/pdf/ungheria.pdf](http://www.mediasalles.it/pdf/ungheria.pdf).

Accessed 4/20/06.

⁴See Svede (2000) for a similar use of western youth culture by young Latvians in the 1960s.

⁵Interview with Péter Tímár: “Characteristic of the 1960s was a *society-wide longing to escape/get-away*, people’s inner loneliness/solitude, which they attempted to dissolve with heightened emotional lives – while the era’s pop songs hummed their simple lyrics. Now we know that we lived in the shadow of a dark dictatorship, but at the time, fewer were aware of it.” (Balogh 1997)

⁶I use the term “the West” for what Hungarians designate by that term, i.e., a conglomerate image of most of the countries of western Europe and usually the United States.

⁷These include such techniques as recording the dialogue first, then having the cast act out the scenes with the sound slowed to half-speed. When the film is sped up to real-time dialogue speed, it creates a strangely languid and sometimes doddering movement. These, Tímár claims, were “necessary because I didn’t want to represent the past realistically but rather wanted to convey the atmosphere of the time” (Dobay-Kiss 1997).

⁸As Verdery points out, state-socialist regimes “paradoxically made consumption a problem” (2002:27). “[E]ven as the regimes prevented people from consuming by not making goods available, they insisted that under socialism the standard of living would constantly improve... moreover, socialist ideology presented consumption as a ‘right’” (Verdery 2002:28).

⁹For an elaboration of this analysis of the political logic of state socialist material culture, see Ch. 6 of my dissertation (Fehervary 2005). See also Humphrey (2002:44-46) for the Soviet case.

¹⁰This was less true in the Soviet Union, as Caroline Humphrey points out. There, socialist produced goods were at times marked as “ours” and contrasted with suspect foreign goods (Humphrey 2002:54).

¹¹See also Berdahl (1999) for the phenomenon in Germany; but also Liechty (2003) for similar sentiments among a Nepalese middle class.

¹²The film and its varied reception allowed many middle-aged Hungarians, slightly younger than Tímár’s generation, to comment on this disjuncture. Born during the period depicted, and

over a decade into the socialist rule, this generation was often clueless about the regime's past atrocities – though not of its everyday restrictions. Like the film's protagonists, a friend in her 30s commented on how her parents and society at large had never told her about such things as the Revolution of 1956, and only knew it vaguely as a counterrevolution.

¹³Objectív Filmstúdió and Mafilm Rt. press release. No date.

¹⁴As Verderly writes, "Acquiring objects [not produced by the state] became a way of constituting your selfhood against a deeply unpopular regime" (1996:29). The flip side of this argument is that people wanted to distance themselves from identification with socialism in part because of the shame of inferior quality (and quantity) of socialist goods (See Fehérváry 2005 Ch.6).

¹⁵Bambi was the Hungarian state socialist soda brand, one revived in the 1990s as part of socialist nostalgia but under a new western corporate ownership. Its appearance here, then, can be read by youth as a contexting of their current experience of consuming Bambi projected back into it's "authentic" context, a socialist past they did not themselves experience.

¹⁶In fact, the generational differences in the film play on contemporary generational conflicts, as an older generation are pictured as the "proletarian" stereotype (see Milosz 195x): dowdy, short and stocky characters in mismatched outfits or rumpled uniforms.

¹⁷If, in fact, the director intended for his narrative of a bye-gone era to be an allegorical commentary on contemporary experience, he would be following a well-respected tradition in Hungarian cinematic history.

¹⁸This opposition between a nostalgic vision of state-socialism and contemporary capitalism also has a gendered dimension. See Éva Federmayer's analysis of how gendered metaphors (particularly hard vs. soft) are used to describe the contemporary Hungarian socio-political context (Federmayer 1997).

¹⁹See also Berdahl (1999) and Ten-Dyke (2001), among others, for the east German experience after 1989 of having been "doof" or stupid when it came to consumer goods.

²⁰Of course, this is a nostalgia any youth can relate to, regardless of a connection to the West: the inevitable loss of the experience of goods as simple pleasures, uncomplicated by adult knowledge of cost, status implications and the like.

²¹Hungarian cultural elites – film makers, artists,

historians, museum curators, magazine editors and even advertisers – have taken advantage of the contemporary "retro" genre to craft this more palatable history according to the dictates of capitalist "taste."

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