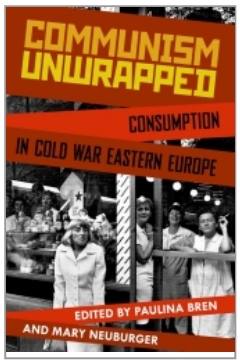

Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe
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Kids, Cars, or Cashews?

Debating and Remembering Consumption in Socialist Hungary

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Abstract and Keywords

As of the 1960s, various factors converged within the Eastern Bloc that allowed for higher consumption levels. But as basic needs were largely satisfied, what sort of “higher level needs” socialism should meet became uncertain. The prevailing assumption was that, in harmony with the basic tenets of Marxism, once the means of production and ownership were changed, so would life. Yet no known socialist models of affluence existed that would have shown how this “new way of life” should look. Even more worrying was the fact that people’s actual desires carried elements of pre-socialist traditions and Western consumerism. Partly as a result of these ambiguities, in Hungary from the 1960s onwards, intense debates took place within the Planning Commission and in the country’s newspapers about the socialist lifestyle and which needs were to be considered a legitimate part of it. What was at stake in these debates was more than the pragmatic questions of production and allocation; instead, through the issue of consumption, competing definitions of socialism and visions of an ideal socialist way of life were articulated. In this chapter, Tamas Dombos and Pellandini-Simanyi explore the interplay between state-generated ideals of consumption and people’s everyday practices through a parallel analysis of these public consumption debates during the communist period and personal memories after 1989 based on interviews conducted by Pellandini-Simanyi.

Keywords: socialism, post-socialism, Hungary, consumption, Morality, oral history, discourse, memory

In the first decade after the Second World War, as elsewhere in Europe, Hungary experienced much economic hardship. But reconstruction in Eastern Europe, in contrast to the West, was exacerbated by the leaderships' strictly prioritized forced industrialization. Nevertheless, postwar recovery, the death of Stalin in 1953, and in particular the 1956 Hungarian Revolution facilitated a reprioritization of consumption over production.[1] This shift was palpable across the Bloc, but it was Hungary under the regime of János Kádár that went furthest in its embrace of consumer goods in the post-1956 period. Certainly the infrastructure necessary for a new era of consumption in Hungary underwent significant development after 1956: new department stores, such as the much admired Corvin Áruház; self-service supermarkets; and shop-window displays became an inseparable element of the urban experience.[2] Besides providing cheap basic necessities, for the first time the range of nonessential products also expanded. In 1963, the Luxus department store opened in downtown Budapest, offering high-priced, exceptional-quality goods, such as fur coats and elegant clothes, in beautiful surroundings.

The official economy was further supplemented by an expanding illegal black market of goods smuggled from abroad,[3] received in packages sent by relatives living abroad, or manufactured at home from raw materials largely stolen from one's workplace. In Hungary, unlike **(p.326)** elsewhere in the Bloc, the black market seemed to flourish not because of scarcity but because of relative abundance; there was more available to trade and appetites were whetted for ever-larger varieties of goods. When the system failed to deliver this variety, consumers themselves came up with strategies to establish it. Differentiating between green and brown bottled beers of the same brand or having a preference for a pack of cigarettes coming from a particular factory were common practices reflecting the growing importance of consumer choice in constituting one's social identity.[4]

These developments in the infrastructure and practice of consumption were very much in line with the official Party policy of stimulating consumption, which lay at the heart of Hungarian and Bloc-wide efforts to fight the Cold War on a new front, with the purpose of consolidating legitimacy at home.[5] In this period, Soviet leader Khrushchev initiated a new policy that aimed to prove the superiority of socialism over capitalism in terms of standard of living. The "dognaty i peregnaty" (catching up and taking over) programs adopted by the 1959 and 1961 Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union served as a model for communist parties all across the Bloc.[6] Though all of these states used consumption in varying forms as a legitimating tool, this was arguably more critical in Hungary, where the revolution had so violently shaken the regime and society. After 1956, this purposeful reorientation was abundantly clear on the shelves of stores, and also in official newspapers and magazines, which were full of practical advice on how and what to consume: home decoration, fashion, cooking, cars, and DIY tips were among the most common

topics.[7] By 1973, in fact, advertising meant to boost consumer demand reached an estimated 3 percent of national expenditures.[8] Perhaps more so than elsewhere in the Bloc, serious efforts were made not only to provide but to stimulate greater consumption among the public.

These post-1956 shifts in the system (later dubbed “goulash communism” after the well-known Hungarian stew) were buoyed by growing incomes. Right after the 1956 revolution, the government implemented a 20 percent increase in real wages, adding a further 3–4 percent every year until the end of the 1970s.[9] Between 1957 and 1978 real wages consequently doubled, and consumption multiplied 2.5 times, while the supply of consumer durables grew ten times. In the 1960s, for the first time in history, Hungary’s general population enjoyed abundant, nutritious meals every day. Between 1958 and 1962, television subscriptions multiplied twentyfold; between 1960 and 1970, car ownership multiplied by eleven times; between 1960 and 1980, the number of flats increased by 50 percent, and new, bigger, and more modern dwellings were built.[10]

(p.327) (p.328) The gradual increase in levels of consumption, however, and particularly its increased visibility left state ideologues in an awkward position. Until that point, no known socialist models of affluence existed; the first years of Hungarian socialism were marked by scarcity, idealized notions of egalitarianism, and the notion that ascetics distinguished true socialist ethics from the bourgeois mentality. In this context, the way an affluent *socialist* society should develop remained ambiguous.[11]

This chapter explores this ambiguity by looking at how the contradiction between the original socialist ideals and growing affluence was negotiated in both public and private discourse in the period of the post-1956 decades. First,

Figure 13.1 . “A brightly colored chequered flannel suit can be sporty if worn with trousers, but it can also complement a summer dress. Depending on the length of the journey, the size of

it examines how the contradiction was addressed in so-called democratic media debates on socialist lifestyles. These debates played out in various newspapers among a wide range of participants and readers. Second, post-1989 interviews focusing on the memories of everyday life during socialism are analyzed in order to understand how the contradictions and tensions were addressed, and perhaps resolved, in people's everyday lives at that time.

the luggage varies. The Leather Department's assortment satisfies all needs." Advertisement in a 1977 issue of the Hungarian fashion monthly *This Is Fashion* [Ez a Divat].

This work suggests that the norms expressed in the public discourse of the time remained largely in line with the original, ascetic socialist ideals. The ideal socialist way of life promoted by participants of the media debates centered on work, culture, and the community, while consumption was disdained as materialistic and individualistic. In these debates, the country's growing affluence was largely viewed with suspicion; many regarded it as a deviation from true socialist ideals. Analysis of interviews, however, reveals a more complex picture. Most people embraced the new consumption opportunities, and respondents resolved the contradiction between the official ideals and actual practices in a variety of ways, largely depending on their social position within the system. Members of the socialist elite expressed norms congruent with official discourse and yet paradoxically engaged in the highest level of consumption during this time. They solved the contradiction by legitimating their affluence with reference to hard work and cultural consumption. Working-class respondents, in contrast, saw no contradiction at all. They viewed socialism as a system that should grant equal access to a high level of material consumption on the basis of hard work and so urged even more consumption. Somewhat similarly, people who had belonged to the precommunist elite, as well as a new so-called petit-bourgeois class, formulated their version of a sophisticated and dignified way of life, replete with material possessions, in opposition to the socialist public discourse, altogether refusing the ideal of ascetism. Finally, the "socialist entrepreneurs," who financed their conspicuous and hedonistic consumption from semilegal activities, treated public discourse as a set of empty phrases, which they felt no need to reference in making sense of their own extravagant practices.

(p.329) The Lifestyle Debates

If one is to analyze public attitudes toward consumption in socialist Hungary, the so-called lifestyle debates provide a nearly inexhaustible source of information. These debates formed part of a long series of "democratic media debates," which were an unmistakable element of the socialist public consciousness in post-1956 Kádárist Hungary.[12] Partly spontaneous and partly induced by the political elite, the existence of these debates might suggest a lively environment

for public debate; they certainly fit in with a Bloc-wide impulse during late communism for officially sanctioned constructive criticism. But as the historian András Mink rightly points out, their main function was in fact to “substitute for a political discourse.” Even though they often expressed discontent with socialist reality, thereby causing some discomfort to the regime, they “played an important role in the mental reproduction of the system by emulating the workings of a pluralist political community.”[13] The sharp disagreements and heated discussions often obscured the delicate limits that the socialist regime placed on the nature of things that could in fact be discussed publicly. Governed by what was known as the “three Ts” (*tűrés, tiltás, támogatás*—tolerance, prohibition, support), the debates practiced a priori and post facto censorship.[14] Yet given the ambiguous place of consumption within Hungarian socialism, these debates seem to have had a genuine function for political and intellectual elites who were continuously attempting to map out the acceptable parameters of consumption.

The democratic media debates were primarily concentrated on the pages of four important periodicals: *Élet és Irodalom*, *Kortárs*, *Kritika*, and *Új Írás*.[15] Although both the forum and the contributors differed, all the debates followed a more or less common script. The journal or newspaper published an article that aimed to provoke a strong reaction in the form of letters and counteropinions. The editors then published a summary of the main questions relevant to the debate, with an open call for submissions. From the letters that were received during this round, the editorial board selected a limited number of contributions that were published on the pages of the journal in the months (sometimes years) following publication of the original editorial. The debate was officially closed with a concluding essay on the topic on behalf of the editorial board, in which the journal’s “voice of authority” synthesized a “common standpoint,” often linking it to the official policies of the government.

Even though the majority of the contributors were intellectuals, the editors were keen to publish letters from all social strata, including “everyday people” from working-class backgrounds. While retaining some skepticism toward the all-encompassing readership of these debates, one must emphasize that the **(p. 330)** debates did reach out to a wider audience beyond the socialist intelligentsia. The success of a particular debate in the 1970s, for example, resulted in a sharp increase in circulation for *Élet és Irodalom*,[16] and also the launch of a new weekly periodical (appropriately named *Új Tükör*, “New Mirror”) to “satisfy the growing mass demand” for such a forum.[17] A wider reception of the main ideas of these debates was also facilitated by references to it and summary articles published in large-circulation daily newspapers, such as *Népszabadság*.

The earliest, most popular, and possibly most influential of the lifestyle debates was initiated by a short reaction in the fall of 1961, by poet Mihály Váci, to the new Soviet program that aimed at overtaking capitalist economies not only in industrial and agricultural production but also on the level of consumption and lifestyle.[18] In his editorial in *Új Írás*, Váci criticized the one-sidedness of the program; it was too focused on consumer goods and material well-being, while the role of art and culture was entirely left out. To correct this problem, he called for a similar program to be taken up by artists and intellectuals to reinvigorate socialist cultural life. Within a year of publication of this editorial, nearly 130 people had responded with longer articles or shorter letters expressing their opinions; 25 of these were published in the pages of *Új Írás*. The contributors ranged from artists, teachers, and economists to high school students and lamp factory workers. The official title of the debate was “Culture and Lifestyle,” but in fact the debate entered the intellectual history of Hungarian socialism under the name of “fridge socialism,” a term that appeared in the editors’ closing remarks. Fridge socialism was a general term that pointed to the growing availability of consumer durables, among them refrigerators, and the new lifestyle they enabled.

A common theme of the culture-and-lifestyle debate was the deleterious effect of consumption on cultural life (a theme that would continue in future debates[19]), but perhaps more central still were its ill effects on collectivist socialist ideals writ large. Indeed, one of the central issues around Hungary’s ever-expanding consumer opportunities was the seeming individualizing effects. As the opening essay of the “fridge socialism” debate argued:

> People who earn more can greatly extend the scope of their “personal needs.” They can buy or save up for motorbikes, cars, weekend houses…. The desire to have personal goods is ever growing…. Is it not the struggle for personal

Figure 13.2 . “Compressor refrigerators in 160 litre and 200 litre sizes, freezer 18 litre, below minus 12 degrees. Produced by the Refrigerator Factory.”

Advertisement in a 1977 issue of the Hungarian fashion monthly *This Is Fashion* [Ez a Divat].

> property that is responsible for strengthening selfishness, materialism and indifference in people? If our man has achieved his desires, does it not dull him into a petit-bourgeois existence to be locked up in his flat every day watching television, isolated from the pedestrians in his car, or separated **(p.331)** **(p.332)** from collective social gatherings when instead spending time at his weekend home?[20]

A life that was centered on acquisition of consumer goods was considered to be necessarily individualistic, more focused on the personal fridge than the collective good. Another contributor was quick to cast off any doubts: “Does the car, the little weekend house, and the attainment of individual goods in general slide us into imitating the bourgeois way of life? Does it escalate the spread of individualism? According to my personal experiences so far, it does!”[21] Others went so far as to talk about the “moral landslide into individualism.”[22]

Closely linked to this issue of individualism, contributors to the debate lamented that consumer abundance precipitated a mass turning away from public life, common affairs, and especially politics. As the opening editorial of the fridge socialism debate put it: “Some say it bluntly: on one side, there is television, the car, a vacation abroad and crinoline; on the other, there is declining political interest, a fleeting attention paid to the products of socialist culture, and the reappearance of bourgeois morality and individualization.”[23] In the socialist era, this disinterest was especially problematic since the ethos of the regime was built around the common struggle for the communist future. The political activism needed for constant amelioration of socialism was contrasted with the “petit bourgeois loathing of deeds, changes and determined action [characterized by the saying] ‘everything is just fine the way it is.’”[24] As a contributor to the fridge socialism debate put it clearly, “what we experience with every step—eager material demands and isolating ourselves in the individual activity of re-fashioning our lifestyle—is in complete opposition to the requirements of our future.”[25] In these frequent condemnations, the term “materialistic” was contrasted with the moral, the personal, and the cultural.

The worry that consumer abundance ultimately leads to lack of motivation and laziness was vital to these debates. These issues were especially pressing in light of a communist utopia, which promised material well-being through socialist economic development. This dilemma was nicely summarized in Váci’s lyrical manifesto that launched the fridge socialism debate:

> What can we do to stimulate the masses to keep on making an effort even though they are well acquainted with material goods and are no longer forced to make an effort to survive … so that the people rising from the

> bitter ocean of poverty, misery, travail and hardship to the quiescent and cheerful coasts of communism do not doze off on the tepid sandy beaches of material well-being, but remain humans, motivated by spiritual challenges open to new sounds and aims?[26]

(p.333) Váci advocated "stimulating the masses," but he also agonized over the complacency that was due to their material well-being. Significantly, his concerns were echoed by numerous contributors, while others accused him of occupying the same platform with "the enemies and skeptical critics of socialism."[27]

Following on the heels of the fridge socialism debate, the dilemmas of socialist consumption were further explored beginning with a 1964 discussion in *Élet és Irodalom* that became identified with the pun "kicsi-vagy-kocsi" (translated as kid-or-car). The central theme of the kid-or-car debate grew out of a pessimistic essay by novelist Ambrus Bor, which contrasted demographic growth elsewhere in the world to population decline in Hungary and then linked this deleterious trend to issues of individualism and self-centeredness, both by-products of socialist consumption.[28] Bor blamed the country's flagging birthrate on newly enacted liberal abortion laws, but also the growing interest in ever greater avenues for consumption among the younger generation. Among other things, he established a causal link among individualism, the housing shortage, and a low domestic birth rate. According to Bor, "the relationship between the low birthrate and the shortage of housing is obvious." As he elaborated, people do not simply want a flat in which to start a family but "a flat with a lock on the door to build up a petit-bourgeois autarchy only concerned with cooking."[29] In other words, the pursuit of individual happiness, defined through consumption, stood as a roadblock to the self-sacrifice and collective commitment necessary for bringing up a child.

Moreover, even those who did bear children—but who generally (and "selfishly") would have only one child—practiced similarly harmful forms of consumption. Worse still, they passed these practices on to their offspring: "Parents try to give everything to their child … thus loads of valuable things travel between them as means of exchange, thereby devaluing all gifts … [this child will hardly become] a communal-minded man, because his first experiences gave him the sense of *mine* and not of *ours*."[30] One child or none, overconsumption and its fallout seemed to be undermining the collective, which, in this case, included production of future generations.

Over the next three months, more than a hundred articles and letters were sent to the editorial office of *Élet és Irodalom*, sixteen of which were published full-length, while excerpts from another seventeen appeared toward the end of the debate. The genres varied from essays and personal stories to sociological accounts and policy proposals, with a range of contributors from writers,

demographers, and teachers to “proud mothers.” Many of these respondents commented on the question of abortion, emancipation of women, and social policies aimed at increasing the number of children. But significantly, a more substantial portion dealt with the changing consumer morality **(p.334)** of the younger generation of child-bearing age. According to many contributors, the material well-being of this generation was the cause of their seeming immorality as well as the general decline in their reproductive and productive capacities. As the first contributor to the debate opined: “More than a few people greedily long for products … and they expect their prosperity not from the cooperation of society, not from the state, but from individual profiteering. No matter how fast production grows, for the greedy profiteer no mathematical growth can suffice … he abstains from reproduction.”[31] In short, as profiteering purportedly replaced production, individualistic greed replaced reproduction.

A later and even better known debate on the pages of *Élet és Irodalom* in 1976 pushed these issues further still. The opening essay, by Bulcsú Bertha, a journalist on the staff of the periodical, compiled a long list of minor but annoying discomforts (the bad quality of bread, flawed telephone lines, lazy waiters, sloppy workers, etc.) that all came to be symbolized by the cashew nut.[32] The cashew was considered to be an exotic, imported delicacy that was sold for what was equal to the half-day wage of a worker, and so remained unsold in large quantities owing to its unrealistic price. The import and sale of such a luxury product was seen as part of a series of irrational economic practices that made socialist life cumbersome. Responses started to pour in following publication of Bertha’s editorial, describing situations and stories supporting or contradicting his argument. Although the debate was officially titled “Let’s Produce a Better General Mood!” the title of the original paper (“Cashew Nut”) became both part of everyday vocabulary and the catchword for the debate, which focused largely on the link between everyday discontents and the lack of motivation that resulted from material well-being.

The fact that these grievances came to be symbolized by the “cashew nut,” a foreign product, was no accident. Indeed, identifying consumer abundance as “foreign” to the socialist system was a recurring topic. First, the idea that consumerism was inseparably attached to the Western world, and to America in particular, was ever-present. This excerpt from another debate from the 1970s, the “Socialist Culture and Entertainment” debate, is a typical example: “We are constantly bombarded from the West with ideological dilution, which achieves its hidden ideological effect—its political aim under the cover of pseudo-culture and kitsch.”[33] Besides being a Western import, “petit-bourgeois” mentalities further represented a stubborn remnant from the past. As articulated in one of the contributions to the fridge socialism debate, “The comfort that our society is able to generate can result in a petit-bourgeois attitude and lifestyle, as a result of the memories and educational practices of elder generations, or as the consequence of media products coming from the West.”[34] Use **(p.335)** of the

category “petit-bourgeois” was by no means limited to this occasion; it became an emblematic term for people characterized by the “perverted” values linked to overconsumption.[35] The term, in fact, was used in the first contributions to the fridge socialism debate, and it was then a recurrent point of reference throughout the consequent debates: “the years spent slogging for a television, a fridge, a weekend house or a car lead to a petit-bourgeois mentality”;[36] “people enter the filthy station of petit-bourgeoisie and egoism on the tracks of material well-being”;[37] “the civilized lifestyle, and the mass demand for it, creates petit-bourgeois weaklings out of humans.”[38] Parallel to this, in the debate on Socialist Culture and Entertainment, the consumer-oriented entertainment industry that emerged in the twentieth century was described as appropriate to the “petit-bourgeois and impoverished gentry,”[39] the “carrier of a petit-bourgeois ethos.”[40] In the “kid-or-car” debate, having one or two children, or even none, was described as “the preferred family model for the petit-bourgeoisie.”[41]

Even though the critique of this petit-bourgeois way of life was far-reaching, it never went so far as to draw larger conclusions about the system as such. Instead, the axe inevitably fell on the individual, that is, the individual without the appropriate socialist moral compass on hand, who was consequently wallowing in the materialistic miasma of petit-bourgeois behaviors. He was a sorry sight, all the debates agreed. No matter how widespread it might have become, the petit-bourgeois mentality was understood as innately foreign to the system, in direct conflict with values that the socialist majority were said to share. As the editorial board’s conclusion to the fridge socialism debate very expressively described: “It is possible that a doctor or an artist, even a miner, imagines himself to rise above society by having a car, and he steers his world along the road of bourgeois illusions. But on this road he bumps into the ethical iron wall of the community … and in that clash, there can only be one loser.”[42] Thus, even though problems did exist, they were the result of individual fallibility, with no systemic cause.

The petit bourgeois mentality was the outcome of “individual, subjective distortions that happened during the process of the application [of state policy].”[43] By juxtaposing the “iron wall of the community” with the “deviance” of everyday consumers, these debates institutionalized a moral framework aimed at regulating, channeling, and domesticating consumer desires in socialist Hungary. At the center of this framework was the socialist ethos of hard-working people who resisted the temptations of their egoistic urges and instead devoted their lives to building a better future. This (“correct”) ethos was contrasted with the practices of petit-bourgeois consumers who worked for material well-being and ignored their communal obligations.

(p.336) Consumption Remembered

These debates on consumption clearly attempted to delimit the parameters of legitimate consumer practices on the basis of an ideal of socialist life centered on work, culture, and community as opposed to the materialistic, egotistical, and superficial petit-bourgeois way of life. From this point of view, the desire for affluence was a departure from socialist ideals, even a personal moral failure. But with such a binary in place, carefully delineated through these debates, the question still remains: How did the wider public define their place within the socialist-bourgeois divide? To what extent did these concerns inform everyday understandings and consumption norms and practices in socialist Hungary? And, perhaps even more important, how did people themselves experience and resolve the contradiction between these ideals and their growing access to material goods?

This question can be answered, to some extent, through analyzing interviews with Hungarians of diverse class backgrounds, born during the 1950s and early 1960s.[44] These interviews, in which respondents recalled their everyday life and consumption during socialism, suggests that people from different social backgrounds and political orientations solved the contradiction between official ideals and a growing level of consumption in everyday life in a variety of ways, drawing selectively and appropriating only particular elements of the official discourse into their views.

In general, the “socialist elite,” broadly defined as interviewees who prospered within the “official structures” of socialist Hungary, tended to be the most sympathetic to the values valorized in the public debates. Indeed, many of these accounts shared the emphasis of Váci and other public intellectuals on socialist asceticism. This ethical stance, in tune with the official socialist ideal, was centered on principles of intellectual development, aesthetic refinement, and a broader, everyday vision of living in a “cultured,” as opposed to materialistic, way. A similar sort of ethics is captured by the concept of *kulturnost*, used by Jukka Gronow in the Soviet context to describe the “special cultural consciousness” favored by the Stalinist regime, encompassing a wide range of practices, from theater going and music to good manners. Gronow associates *kulturnost* with the Stalinist making of a “civilized” and modern society via urban modes of consumption in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Part and parcel of such consumption, however, was encouragement of a certain consumer modesty and restraint as well as appreciation for and consumption of high culture.[45]

Zsuzsa, a researcher who used to work for a research institute in Budapest, adopted many of the official norms of consumption.[46] She recalls that when she was young, in the 1960s, she used to spend her limited pocket money on **(p. 337)** inexpensive cinema tickets in Budapest’s art cinemas: “I used to go to the cinema, sometimes three times a day; we used to run from one cinema to the other. There used to be these cheap cinema passes, I liked those—and to go to

events or just to walk around.” She continued to draw a clear normative distinction between cultural edification and materialistic consumption throughout her adult life. She recalled, for example, that during a trip to Italy in the 1980s they went to “all the museums in Rome, including the Vatican,” but stayed in the cheapest hostel, never went to cafés or restaurants, and even walked to save on transport. She explained that this was “not because I couldn’t afford it in principle, but because I felt bad about spending money on it. According to my value system … I never begrudged money spent on entry tickets and things like that, but I would prefer to walk two kilometers to avoid spending money on expensive transport.”[47]

People grouped in this general category of the socialist elite classified goods outside the field of culture, and those that were seen to be excessive or showy, as materialistic consumption, a theme also central to the “conclusions” drawn in both the fridge socialism and the cashew nut debates. They tended to emphasize that their choices were always modest, even if they could afford more. Significantly, the main reason “excessive spending” and ostentation were rejected was that both were considered a characteristic of people who were not entitled to their affluence. This judgment was based first on the view that hard work, and gradual accumulation of its rewards, represented the only legitimate entitlement to goods; and second, on the assumption that money earned through honest hard work must necessarily be spent in a restrained and modest way. In other words, socialist asceticism, even when not linked to pursuit of high culture, was invariably linked to work ethic; again, this connects with public critiques of laziness and entitlement.

The link was customarily established through a narrative in which interviewees achieved everything they had “from zero,” reputedly through the force of their own hard work and thriftiness, and even by denying themselves their desires and budgeting what they did have. Ilona, for example, a biochemist, recalled that in the 1970s, even when she was better off, continued budgeting, bargaining at the market, and refraining from purchasing expensive clothes, although she could afford them. In her view, being willing and able to give up material desires was the true mark of having come from a poor background and achieving one’s position legitimately through hard work:

> I was born after the war. All the hardship is there in me, in my subconscious … not my subconscious, rather on the surface … no, somewhere in between. So I remember that we could only heat one **(p. 338)** room, and that kind of thing. And that the butter and jam sandwich was the absolute best, the butter and mustard sandwich not so good. There was no ham … these were the 1950s. For us it was very natural, and in fact I think that for my entire generation, if life is like that then we have to tighten the purse-strings and we will not get depressed. As far I am

> concerned, I won't. We have learned well how to live on pennies. And to get somewhere from there.[48]

In contrast, people who spent recklessly, in her opinion, "must either steal or cheat, or live on daddy's money, who either steals or cheats," because "if someone gets somewhere on his own steam, he is not like that [i.e., wasting money]."[49]

A similar view was expressed by János, the former head of an agricultural conglomerate. In his account, hard-working people and real experts in their field were naturally inclined to modest consumption. For him, these qualities distinguished people who legitimately achieved what they had from the presocialist incompetent elite: "In the old aristocratic world, when the monkey [i.e., pretentious, vain] count came, he could hardly speak he was so stupid, but still he was the count, and he was dressed up in pomp and came in a pompous horse-drawn carriage."[50] In a tone still brimming with postwar communist disdain for a bygone aristocratic world of nobles and peasants, János, like Ilona, posited modest consumption as an identifying characteristic of people who had achieved their success according to the socialist ideal of hard work and gradual advancement, as opposed to flimsy noble birthright.

Yet the paradox of this stance is that although it emphasizes egalitarianism and asceticism, it is held only by interviewees who, thanks to their well-placed positions during socialism, engaged in the highest level of consumption in Hungary. Interviewees, recognizing this, were often uneasy about the contradiction, and eager to resolve it. János, for example, explained that he was always modest in his consumption except in the case of the large house that he built when he thought both his children and his elderly parents might move in there some day:

> At that time, we thought that my son would need it [a home] as well. It used to be different in those times. My parents were alive, and during those years we always thought that we might need to move them in to live with us, and so on…. But it doesn't mean [that we were posh]. This was the only thing; there was nothing extravagant other than the house.[51]

Here the presumed needs of the family, rather than the individual, justified "extravagant" acquisition of the large house.

(p.339) But generally the emphasis on framing one's life according to a socialist narrative—in which consumer abundance was the result of hard work—was one of the main discourses that helped to legitimize elite consumption as "well-deserved":

> ZSUZSA :

> When I was a university student, I had already been working from the age of sixteen every summer. So, the point is that I earned very well; I worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day and didn't take holidays. Others worked three days, then took three days off.… The others were happy because they could go visit the family [during their breaks].… So we had much more money at that time for furniture and we planned and chose it together. At that time, the *koloniál* style was cool and we [she and her husband] chose *koloniál* furniture, and we wanted paintings and *majolinka* vases and all that. So I shopped many times in the pawn shops in the 1970s—we frequented the pawn shops all the time; we always visited them to see if we liked something. The aim was always to buy something.
> LÉNA, INTERVIEWER :
>
> The way you furnished the flat, did it count as special?
> ZSUZSA :
>
> Yes. The kitchen-living[52] room [where we were living] and the house itself was shabby, but when we wanted to sell it and they [potential buyers] came in and saw the room, usually they remarked "wow!" because at that time it was cool, this oak *koloniál* furniture. And, obviously, these buyers didn't expect to see it there. Especially in those days.[53]

Zsuzsa could not ignore the fact that the *koloniál* furniture was special and expensive, and it could be bought by only a few people, which contradicted her usual narrative in which she wished to avoid making distinctions between groups. This contradiction was resolved through Zsuzsa's long explanation of how she worked hard to be able to buy the *koloniál* furniture. It was only a legitimate purchase because Zsuzsa and her husband worked harder than others; therefore, they had earned not just the furniture but the right to it. In this way, *koloniál* furniture was associated with an elevated lifestyle, and in fact the very idea of having a "higher" lifestyle was construed as possible and legitimate when deserved by people who were the most hard-working and ambitious in *socialist* terms. This suggests that although the socialist elite shared the moral framework identified in public discourse, the norms propagated there were not in fact translated into lower consumption, let alone ascetism, on their part. This discomfiting contradiction was resolved by deploying the ideals of culturedness **(p.340)** and hard work, which were also emphasized in public discourse, to legitimate their relatively higher wealth and consumption.

Within the working class (understood here as people involved in physical labor), there was an even greater discrepancy between official ideology and how consumption is remembered. These interviewees often formulated their own lives using commonplace socialist platitudes such as "we worked for socialism" or "we built the country."[54] Yet, unlike in the case of public discourse as echoed in the remarks of the socialist elites, the norms of modesty and restraint were absent from the working-class accounts. Instead, their memories were centered on the desire for—and occasional achievement of—goods that were condemned in public debates as materialistic: elegant clothes with which to impress the

neighbors or “lovely” home decorations that were officially labeled as petit-bourgeois kitsch.

However, unlike the socialist elite these respondents did not recognize these desires as incompatible with the official version of a socialist ideal; for them, the essence of socialism as a workers’ state meant precisely that the regime provided access for workers to consumer goods that were previously the privilege of the higher classes. The Téglásis, a family of unskilled manual workers, for example, remembered that they greeted every new consumption opportunity during socialism with enthusiasm. They recalled with pride that in the 1960s they could afford to go to the local restaurant every Friday, that they bought living room furniture and elegant maternity dresses in the 1970s, and that they moved into a larger flat offered by the city council in the 1980s.

Among all of the interviewees, the Téglásis expressed the clearest nostalgia for the socialist regime, while feeling no need to couch their memories of consumption within a framework of modesty or restraint. Here, their nostalgia is arguably more than just a positive reading of socialist times or the desire to bring them back. Rather, nostalgia is simultaneously a way of framing memories of the past and a means of expressing criticism of the present by projecting ideals to the past.

This definition of nostalgia provides a clue to understanding the Téglásises’ nostalgic view of the past. They often contrasted socialism with post-socialist Hungary, where inequality grew and access to goods crucial for providing a basic level of material existence and dignity became uncertain. Although they used to be very poor, they still remembered socialist times as an era of security, when they could always find work and they could take the basics—food, medicine, and shelter—for granted. For them, the fact that the state provided for some of their major expenditures, such as their flat and health care, meant they did not have to worry about saving for their future but could build a relatively happy everyday life structured around Sunday lunches **(p.341)** and holidays. In their account, the state was akin to a kindhearted uncle who kept track of family occasions and helped them when they needed it, providing free beer on May Day and milk tickets for expectant mothers. Indeed, in many ways their personal experiences match the picture painted by official socialist discourse of happy workers enjoying the May Day celebration with their families amid the calm of everyday life:

MÁRIA TÉGLÁSIS :

Later there were these company May Day celebrations, the workers went to the Népliget [People’s Park] with their families. We got sausage and beer tickets for free; they encouraged the families with that, so that when there was a celebration, we went to the Népliget. And we met colleagues there, everybody

> with their family, a little beer, a little sausage; these didn't cost money, but still, we relaxed there.[55]

In general, a conscious asceticism, or refusal to show off possessions, was entirely absent from the Téglásises' memories. They were much poorer, so consumer opportunities dismissed by the elite as deplorable commodity acquisition were experienced by them as an entry into "decent" society. In her recollections, Mária often referred to the importance of "living up to the larger world," the world of "decent people." She recalled regularly staying up late at night washing and ironing clothes, polishing shoes, and curling her hair so "that the neighbors can see that we are impeccably tidy and clean."[56]

These views constitute an interesting contrast to those of the socialist elite, who tended to valorize working-class poverty as down-to-earth unpretentiousness, nobler than blind pursuit of goods. This story (told by another interviewee) about a poor neighbor whose son became a noted poet during socialism captures this difference well:

> Once [the neighbor] came home and said to his wife: "We will no longer close the attic door with a corn cob. I will buy a lock!" And for him this brought genuine happiness. He was very proud that he had provided a lock. Later, his son [the poet] was boasting with that corn cob—that his father used to close the attic door with a corn cob. When this son received an award, Comrade Kádár said to the father that he can be proud of his son. The man answered, "I would be proud, but I wish he wouldn't emphasize the pitiful poverty all the time! I haven't been such a *rongy* [miserable, useless] man that I couldn't even provide for my family!" This was shameful for him. All **(p.342)** he understood from this and tried to say was that he was not a hopeless person, someone who could not even provide for the family![57]

Contrary to the socialist elite's (including the poet-son's) romantic vision of modest working-class life, the Téglásises, like the father in the story, found nothing uplifting about poverty; if anything, it was experienced as shameful, as a failure to live a decent life. For them, acquiring better living standards—in terms of accommodation, clothing, and food—were not taken for granted; they represented an unquestionable aim.[58] Though this aim was not incompatible with socialism per se, the emphasis on material acquisitions represents a marked difference from the accepted ideological parameters that the socialist elite used to frame their consumer experiences. Yet because these working-class interviewees saw growing consumption as entirely compatible with socialism, for them the contradiction between ideology and consumption seldom arose; when it did, it did so quite differently—in terms of why socialism was not able to provide an even higher standard of living.

Working-class respondents saw their material desires as attuned to “socialist values,” but a large number of interviewees adopted what one might call an oppositional or even “antisocialist” stance that was articulated explicitly in contrast to official ideology. This stance involved rejection of the socialist emphasis on antimaterialism and equality, instead emphasizing the importance of possessions in being able to live a dignified life. This view was apparent not only in accounts of those whose families had lost property and privileges during socialism but also among participants from poor presocialist backgrounds who became relatively better off—one might say petit-bourgeois—during socialism. For them, socialism offered an opportunity to realize aspirations according to presocialist ideals.

Sára, for example, a quality controller whose father was an army officer from a peasant family, belonged to this latter category. She recalled that her family placed significant emphasis on teaching her “ladylike” behavior, which included mastering an elegant style of clothing and table manners. In her recollections, even during socialism she tried to look appropriate to her social standing (for example, having the appearance of a “degree holder”) in how she dressed, furnished her home, and held formal family lunches. For her, a modest, egalitarian society—where differences disappear in general, and in terms of consumption in particular—was neither a reality nor an ideal to which one should aspire.

At the same time, Sára agreed with many of the elements of socialist discourse, such as rejection of individualism. Yet she saw the socialist system as counterproductive to these very values:

> **(p.343)** Look, polgári[59] [presocialist bourgeois] society had a value system. I did not grow up in the polgári society but in the socialist. It was all about alienating people from one another as much as possible, putting them into 50 square meter flats and putting their parents into elderly homes. The poorer people are, the better it is so that they do not have time to think: only that they have the cheap schnapps, beer, a TV and nothing else…. One should only be a worker, exist only at that level. In a 50 square meter flat in which you cannot have family celebrations, because where would you seat people?[60]

This view was elaborated by Otto, an engineer from a wealthy peasant family whose property had been nationalized:

> In the 1950s, when one was not allowed to own anything and one was called a “kulak”[61] or an “exploiter,” it is back then that people used to live like that (one day to the next, drinking away their wages every day). There were lots of pubs and that sort of thing. One used to own one jacket, just a cap, not even a hat, and what one earned was spent immediately. People

> used to go to the pub and drink because there was nothing else to do. Also, it would have been frowned upon to save. They would have been asked where they'd stolen what they'd accumulated. This was the mentality. If one was a bit thrifty and wanted to achieve something, one was frowned upon, especially at the workplace.[62]

In Sára's and Otto's accounts, the modest and even ascetic socialist consumer norms did not contribute to a fuller life as painted in public debates. In Otto's recollections, it was precisely this norm—as well as the poverty it obscured—that prohibited long-term planning, genuine hard work, and formation of community feeling. In this sense, the underlying values behind this antisocialist stance share some of those similarly propagated in socialist public discourse, except that those who adhere to this point of view also reject the idea that these values could be, or ever were, realized through the socialist path. Instead, these respondents promoted a different ideal, where private property, wealth accumulation, and consumption in general were the indispensable elements of a proper, full life. These respondents therefore viewed the growing affluence in later socialism—as opposed to the lean 1950s, which they described as empty of values—with approval.

Similarly—and again in contrast to the socialist elite—interviewees who had realized most of their income through the so-called second (unofficial) **(p.344)** economy framed their own consumer practices against the grain of official socialism. Interestingly, these respondents employed a certain level of ignorance about socialist-era public debates on consumption as well as a sense of irony about the same. Though many were aware of some of the elements of socialist public discourse, such elements were almost entirely absent from their own accounts of the socialist era; for them these were nothing more than empty phrases. In fact, these interviewees were convinced that *everybody* tried to navigate their way through socialism as best they could, without taking the public discourse on consumption seriously at all. Instead, like the working class (although with significantly greater means at their disposal), this group recalled a carefree and eager approach to spending and made no mention of self-restraint or normative considerations in relation to consumption. In addition, like many in the working class, they did not see their consumption habits as specifically opposed to socialist ideology.

In fact, many in this group often explained excessive spending practices as a direct consequence of socialism. Olga, who worked in a cooperative but earned large sums of unreported revenue, remembered socialism as follows:

> When I was young, I also experienced this [habit of excessive buying]. I used to have many clothes that I never wore. In fact, I experienced this when I divorced and we moved out of our former flat; the majority of the things—furniture, books, kitchenware—we shipped over to the new flat

> over several weeks. I was putting the clothes that we had never ever worn in our entire life into bags. We hadn’t even taken them out of the wardrobe! And it was not only clothes, but there were also pots which were not even unpacked…. So I too went through this. In my opinion, almost everybody did: that you see something, and you want it immediately, you take it home, and you have a look at yourself in the mirror, and you say: “Jesus Christ! How is that possible?! I liked this?!” It happened. And you know, earlier [during socialism] it was because you couldn’t buy that many things…. And then I would see something that I was convinced I had been longing for for a thousand years. I tried it, it was all right, I came home and … What could you do with it? You could not take it back. You put it into the wardrobe.[63]

Olga linked her behavior to scarcity, which for her (as for most people) meant longing for specific goods and being in a constant state of searching. In this state, if one had the rare opportunity to buy something nice, one had to grab it.[64] But Olga’s glut of personal goods seemed to directly contradict the notion that she lived a life of scarcity. Perhaps more important, Olga did not see her **(p. 345)** practices as in any way irregular; in fact, she was convinced that everybody thought and lived the same way she did.

Miklós, who set up his private textile company in the 1970s, took a similar approach to consumption. After an initial period of budgeting, he started buying expensive jewelry and fashionable clothes for himself and his family. He explained that the new entrepreneurs were highly competitive in their consumption, and success was measured by possessions. In his account, it was not a reaction to the shortage economy, but rather a way of asserting his status and gaining access to informal channels that allowed his business to thrive. He explained that during socialism he could buy raw materials only “under the counter” (that is, illegally), and he recalled that once, when he approached shop assistants in a modest outfit, parking his cheap Eastern Bloc car, a Trabant, outside the shop, he was met with refusal. It was only when he tried again, wearing visible signs of his wealth, that he was able to buy the scarce raw materials he needed. Unlike Olga, he was aware that his practices were vilified in socialist public discourse, but as he recalled it, these norms were so distant from his everyday experiences that he could not take them seriously.[65]

Conclusion

In 1969, during a meeting of the Hungarian Communist Party’s Planning Commission, a cadre member voiced his concerns about a document that set out the direction of Hungary’s development for the next fifteen years:

> It is somewhat disheartening that the forecasts of a socialist country up to 1985 … do not say much more than that the structure of consumption will follow a pattern very similar to that of more developed countries. If we

> want more than just to create a kind of bourgeois welfare, then we have to take into account more seriously the specific nature of a socialist country.[66]

The question of whether material well-being was the hallmark of success of the socialist system or if it threatened the very essence of the socialist ethos remained one of the system's central ideological dilemmas. The predominantly intellectual contributors to the lifestyle debates tended toward the latter position and put forward a vision of socialist society that was not simply more affluent but more "moral" than its capitalist counterpart. According to this ideal, people were supposed to find satisfaction in hard work, and in engagement with public life and culture as opposed to materialism—a term that stood for a **(p.346)** complex set of condemnable phenomena of egoism, individualism, laziness, and superficiality. For them, growing affluence constituted a threat to the socialist ideal.

However, analysis of memories of socialism reveals that the worry about rampant materialism and its incongruity with socialist ethics, which constituted the central theme of these debates, was hardly shared by all people at the time. The socialist elite were the only group discomfited by the contradiction between material wealth and socialist norms. "Socialist workers," on the other hand, proposed a different ideal of socialism as a system that permitted equal access to material abundance. The only group that formulated its views explicitly in opposition to socialism (as both a system and a set of ideals centered on asceticism and equality) is that of antisocialist respondents with petit-bourgeois and wealthy presocialist backgrounds. Finally, "socialist entrepreneurs" were either unaware of the public discourse that derided their lavish purchases or simply treated it as empty ideology.

These stances allowed people in diverse positions within the social hierarchy to resolve the contradiction posed by the widening gap between the official ideal of modest consumption and the reality of a rapidly developing consumer culture. Although all of them contained elements of (or at least references to) the socialist ideals, none of these stances, not even self-declared socialist ones, involved full commitment to the official socialist ideals of ascetism and egalitarianism. This tension between official ideology and discourse on the one hand and people's actual practices and views on the other represented an internal and seemingly perpetual contradiction of the system.

Notes:

(1) . Most recently by David Crowley and Susan Reid, "Introduction," in *Pleasures and Socialism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010).

(2) . Sándor Horváth, *Kádár gyermekei* (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely, 2009), 128; Tamás Valuch, *A hétköznapi élet Kádár János korában* (Budapest: Corvina, 2006).

(3) . Anna Wessely, "Travelling People, Travelling Objects," *Cultural Studies* 16 (2002): 3–15.

(4) . Ferenc Hammer and Tibor Dessewffy, "A fogyasztás kísértete," *Replika* 26 (1997): 31–46.

(5) . Miklós Vörös, "Életmód, ideológia, háztartás: A fogyasztáskutatás politikuma az államszocializmus korszakában," *Replika* 26 (1997): 17–30; Ákos Róna-Tas, *The Great Surprise of the Small Transformation: The Demise of Communism and the Rise of the Private Sector in Hungary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 66.

(6) . Tibor Dessewffy, "Az ántivilág," in *A kocka el van veszve* (Budapest: Infonia-Aula, 2002), 141–59.

(7) . Horváth, *Kádár gyermekei*, 128.

(8) . MSZMP KB. Agitációs és Propaganda Osztály, *Jelentés a reklámtevékenységről*, Apr. 11, 1973, as cited by Horváth, *Kádár gyermekei*. In theory, socialist advertisers focused on providing "truthful" information about the products' price and use value. See István Bessenyei and Mária Heller, "A reklám: a csereérték ügynöke vagy a fogyasztás szolgálólánya?" *Jel-Kép* 2 (1980): 118–34. As Bessenyei and Heller point out, however, socialist marketing used the same strategies of symbolic differentiation as its capitalist counterpart. According to them, its strategic role was to enhance the factories' position in the struggle for scarce resources, as the demand generated by advertisements for the company's products served as a basis of claims for further subsidies and resources from the state. The same tension between socialist advertisers' self-image and their practice is more thoroughly analyzed by Patterson in the case of Yugoslavia. See Patrick Hyder Patterson, "Truth Half Told: Finding the Perfect Pitch for Advertising and Marketing in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950–1991," *Enterprise & Society* 4 (2003): 179–225.

(9) . Ferenc Hammer and Tibor Dessewffy, "A fogyasztás kísértete," 37–38.

(10) . Zsuzsa Ferge, *A Society in the Making: Hungarian Social and Societal Policy, 1945–1975* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); Hammer and Dessewffy, "A fogyasztás kísértete"; Tamás Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében* (Budapest: Osiris, 2005); Valuch, *A hétköznapi élet Kádár János korában* (Budapest: Corvina, 2006).

(11) . Part of the problem was the ambiguity of the Soviet model, in which core socialist values of egalitarianism and asceticism were in tension with Stalin's creation of a Soviet political elite and a technocratic "middle class" in the 1930s. Still, Stalin's consuming classes had been constrained both by the limits of the Soviet economy in the 1930s and, more critically, the austerity required during World War II. See David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); and Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

(12) . In past years, these debates were often the object of historical and sociological analysis. Most authors use them only to illustrate the limited nature of the socialist "public sphere." András Mink, "A kesudió ügy," Beszélő 3 (1997): 7–8; István Rév, "Retrotópia: A kritikai gondolkodás primitív fordulata," *Beszélő* 12 (1998): 40–54; Heller et al., "Nyilvános stratégiák és nyilvános szabályok," *Szociológiai Szemle* 4 (1992): 53–60. Others used these debates to document certain trends in the socioeconomic history of Hungary; Iván Berend, *Gazdasági útkeresés 1956–1965: A szocialista gazdaság magyarországi modelljének történetéhez* (Budapest: Magvető, 1983). Passing references to these debates are often made in the literature on socialist consumption and material culture (Vörös, "Életmód, ideológia, háztartás"; Krisztina Fehérváry, "Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 426–59.

(13) . Mink, "A kesudió ügy."

(14) . See Timothy Garton Ash, "A Hungarian Lesson," in *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe* (New York: Random House, 1989), 143–56; Gábor Murányi, "A magyar sajtó története 1948-tól 1988-ig: Vázlatos áttekintés" in *A magyar sajtó története*, ed. György Kókay, Géza Buzinkay, and Gábor Murányi (Budapest: Sajtókönyvtár. 1994), 218–21.

(15) . *Élet és Irodalom* was a biweekly newspaper that contained political and social commentary, feature articles, longer analyses, and belles lettres. *Kritika* was published monthly and defined itself during the socialist period as "a journal of cultural policy." *Kortárs* and *Új Írás* were literary journals with social commentary columns.

(16) . László Zöldi, *Az ÉS vitái* (Budapest: Múzsák Közművelődési Kiadó, 1983), 81.

(17) . Murányi, "A magyar sajtó története 1948-tól 1988-ig," 222.

(18) . Mihály Váci, "Se atombomba, de az isten!" *Új Írás* 7 (1961): 579.

(19) . Although more limited in scale and importance, a debate on Socialist Culture and Entertainment took place in *Kritika* from 1972 to 1973, which reflected a series of public discussions about popular culture, mass culture, and “light art” that were present in other periodicals as well throughout the socialist years.

(20) . Váci, “Se atombomba.”

(21) . János Földeák, “Hűség a néphez és a marxizmus-leninizmushoz!” *Új Írás* 1 (1962): 50–51.

(22) . Imre Gerelyes, “Huszonegy karóra,” *Új Írás* 9 (1961): 839–42.

(23) . Editorial Board of Új Írás, “Kultúra és életforma,” *Új Írás* 8 (1961): 736–37.

(24) . Gyula Fekete, “Árnyékboxolás—tizenkét menetben,” *Élet és Irodalom* 13 (1964): 5–6.

(25) . István Márkus, “Már ma is a holnap készül,” *Új Írás* 4 (1962): 358–61.

(26) . Váci, “Se atombomba.”

(27) . Márkus, “Már ma is a holnap készül.”

(28) . Ambrus Bor, “Több kenyér, kevesebb gyermek?” *Élet és Irodalom* 50 (Dec. 14, 1963): 5; József Pálfy, “Az emberiség kenyeret kér. Népesség, szaporodás—és távlatok,” *Élet és Irodalom* 47 (Nov. 23, 1963): 1–2.

(29) . Bor, op. cit.

(30) . Éva Bozóky, “Közügy vagy magánügy?” *Élet és Irodalom* 2 (Jan. 11, 1964): 7–8.

(31) . Bor, “Több kenyér, kevesebb gyermek?”

(32) . Bulcsú Bertha, “Kesudió,” *Élet és Irodalom* 9 (Feb. 28, 1976): 3–4.

(33) . Gyula Virizlay, “Kultúra és szórakozás: Megjegyzések Agárdi Péter cikkéhez,” *Kritika* 10 (1972): 16.

(34) . József Bőgel, “(Olvasói levél),” *Új Írás* 4 (1962): 361–62.

(35) . The use of the term “petit-bourgeois” to mark problematic tendencies in socialist lifestyle is not limited to the case of Hungary but appeared in all countries throughout the regions facing a similar socioeconomic situation. For the case of Czechoslovakia, see Paulina Bren, “Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall … Is the West the Fairest of Them All? Czechoslovak Normalization and Its (Dis)Contents,” *Kritika* 9 (2008): 846–47.

(36) . Editor Board of Új Írás, “Kultúra és életforma,” *Új Írás* 8 (1961): 736–37.

(37) . Imre Gerelyes, “Huszonegy karóra,” *Új Írás* 9 (1961): 839–42.

(38) . Eta Ádám, “Sok a tisztáznivaló,” *Új Írás* 6 (1962): 626–27.

(39) . Agárdi, Gábor, “Szocialista kultúra és szórakozás.” *Kritika* 6 (1972): 11–12; Róbert Rátonyi, “Mitől ‘könnyű’ az, ami nehéz?” *Kritika* 9 (1972): 15.

(40) . Virizlay, “Kultúra és szórakozás.”

(41) . Edit Erki, “Ok vagy okozat?” *Élet és Irodalom* 12 (1964): 5–6.

(42) . Editorial Board of Új Írás, “Kultúra és életforma,” 903–5.

(43) . Ibid, 903–5.

(44) . The empirical data were collected in the form of interviews conducted by Léna Pellandini-Simányi between July 2005 and June 2006, as part of a research project that looked at changing consumption norms in Hungary.

(45) . Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*, 146–47.

(46) . Interview with Zsuzsa by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Feb. 10, 2006. (All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are changed by mutual agreement.)

(47) . Ibid.

(48) . Interview with Ilona by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Sept. 23, 2005.

(49) . Ibid.

(50) . Interview with János by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Sept. 30, 2005.

(51) . Ibid.

(52) . The flat consisted of one room and a kitchen.

(53) . Interview with Zsuzsa by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Feb. 10, 2006.

(54) . Interview with Ábel by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Mar. 13, 2006.

(55) . Interview with Mária by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Mar. 24, 2006.

(56) . Ibid.

(57) . Interview with Sándor by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Nov. 10, 2005.

(58) . The contradiction between this view and the official ideology, which emphasized the opposition between inner richness and material desires and praised material simplicity, offers important parallels with other antimaterialist projects. Beyond the obvious parallels with other socialist countries, connections can be drawn with Western trends of mass culture critique on the part of the 1960s counterculture, the voluntary simplicity movement, and academic critique of materialism. But as Daniel Miller points out, laudable though the aims of these antimaterialist movements may be, they should not run counter to what he calls “a quite different morality, an ethics based on a passionate desire to eliminate poverty.” Although the antimaterialist stance may well hold in Western, middle-class contexts, he suggests that “most human suffering is the direct result of the lack of goods. What most of humanity desperately needs is more consumption, more pharmaceuticals, more housing, more transport, more books, more computers.” Miller, “The Poverty of Morality,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1 (2001): 227–28.

(59) . The word *polgári* originally means citizen, and it has a long history of denoting ideas related to citizens’ rights and duties as opposed to the aristocratic and socialist organization of society. Recently it has been appropriated by the conservative party, called Fidesz (Party of Young Democrats) —Hungarian Polgári Party, to emphasize continuity with presocialist Hungary and tradition as opposed to the Socialist Party. The word conveys anticommunist overtones, nostalgia for presocialist times and positive associations of peaceful development, and bourgeois civilization. Here she uses the term to refer to the society before socialism.

(60) . Interview with Sára by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Apr. 09, 2006.

(61) . *Kulak* is a derogatory term for a wealthy land owner.

(62) . Interview with Otto by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, Apr. 14, 2006.

(63) . Interview with Olga by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, May 15, 2006.

(64) . This phenomenon is described by Katalin S. Nagy as the “scarcity game of socialism” (“when, where, what can be bought at the moment”), a consumer strategy based on rapidly recognizing and grasping unexpected and elusive consumption opportunities. Nagy, “Fogyasztás és lakáskultúra Magyarországon a hetvenes években,” *Replika* 26 (1997): 47–53.

(65) . Interview with Miklós by Léna Pellandini-Simányi, Budapest, May 22, 2006.

(66) . Unnamed Party cadre member, quoted in Ferge, *Society in the Making*, 306.