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Discursive (De)Constructions of the Depoliticized Private Sphere in *The Resolution* and *Balaton Retro*

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In this article I examine Gyula Gazdag and Judit Ember's documentary *The Resolution* [*A határozat*, 1972] and Gábor Zsigmond Papp's *Balaton Retro* [*Balaton retró*, 2007] as examples of the discursive production of paradoxes permeating the consolidated Kádár regime. I present the first film, portraying the character assassination of József Ferenczi (the executive manager of the Felcsút cooperative farm in the early 1970s) as a case study of state socialist technologies of power and strategies of constructing the narrative of the immoral and profiteering leader type, the corrupted servant of the community. This fabricated narrative is actually contested by members of the cooperative farm for whom Ferenczi is a symbol of the reform spirit and the promise of prosperity. I argue that the critical power of the film resides both in its meticulous dissection of the discursive and administrative methods used to create enemy images and its reluctance to present a local example of vilification as a general feature of the state socialist episteme. *The Resolution* presents the consolidated Kádár regime as an establishment torn between rigid ideological foundations and society's desire for a depoliticised market economy, suffering from the political pressure to remain true to the spirit of communism and the social pressure to allow a greater degree of economic liberalism.

In *Balaton Retro* the popular tourist destination, Lake Balaton, is constructed as a spatial metaphor of both the crisis of the authoritarian system and of Goulash Communism (the name given to the system in Hungary, which constituted a quiet deviation from orthodox doctrines of Marxism-Leninism). The popular notion of the lake as the Hungarian Riviera came into being at the intersection of eastern and western understandings of welfare: on the one hand, the welfare state providing workers cheap holiday opportunities through a network of state-run holiday apartments and camps for children, and on the other, individual welfare, the possessors of which (usually citizens of Western Europe) sought leisure in modern luxury hotels. The emergence of private houses available for well-salaried Hungarian customers was another sign of the many dualities and hybrid meanings uncovered by Papp's film as symptoms of the general state of the nation during the Kádár era. My analysis of the agency of the voiceover narration will reveal that *Balaton Retro* is not a manifestation of Ostalgie, but a critical meta-commentary on nostalgic memory. To conclude, I will describe retro as the commodification of a material past and nostalgia as a somewhat sinister legacy of state socialist identity politics.

Keywords: Kádár era, Goulash Communism, cinema, representations of communism, retro, post-communist nostalgia, documentaries

Introduction

Meditating on the nature of commemorations of the 1956 October events, Béla Pomogáts observed that the impassioned anniversary speeches, the lofty rhetoric, the lavish settings, and extravagant bouquets fail to address the moral heritage and teachings of the revolution: "The cult takes the form of heightened celebration, yet the ceremonies are almost exclusively governed by political interests…politics which, most of the time, is clearly party politics."[1] A decade later and in the wake of the 60th anniversary commemorations, this observation is still relevant; the quiet erosion of the revolutionary heritage and commitment to values such as solidarity, dignity, and national consensus continues. Pomogáts was only one of the many survivors, artists, and scholars who warned that the continued exploitation of the legacy to legitimize specific political ends seriously undermined the unique historical status of 1956 in cultural memory and turned it into a historical commodity put into the service of the political elite's power struggle. The same applies to the Kádár regime, the haunting legacy of which remains unprocessed and insufficiently interrogated. In his acceptance speech at the 2004 Frankfurt book fair for a literary peace prize, Péter Esterházy noted that the shared European duty to problematize national burdens and address the past with honesty is overshadowed by amnesia in Hungary (and in other Eastern European countries), where the open-endedness of the memory-work and the tiresome communal effort to overcome national traumas has discouraged people from undertaking such a task and undermined their willingness to take responsibility for the past.[2]

The corrupted political culture of today and the "war of memory" surrounding events of the recent past vastly contributed to the lack of communal support for any confrontation with historical traumas, but they also proved that the retrospective production and frequent reconsideration of the past is an essential feature of political regimes lacking legitimacy and popular support. As is the case elsewhere in the region, Hungarian scholars have felt both the increasing political pressure and the popular demand for a consumable historical narrative that would relieve people of the toil of having to work through the past. This demand would sound cynical had historiography been a purely objective, empirical, and positivist academic discourse. However, as Zsolt K. Horváth

1 Pomogáts, "1956 (eltékozolt) erkölcsi öröksége," 50. This and all further quotes from Hungarian sources are my translation.

2 Esterházy, "Frankfurti könyvvásár 2004 – Esterházy Péter béke díja." *Élet és Irodalom* 48, no. 42 (2004).

notes, the historical discipline is also "a social praxis and as such, the knowledge it generates—given the primal role connectivity of memory plays in processes of identity-formation—is intimately linked to power elites."[3] In some cases historiography was mobilized as an auxiliary force of mundane political aims, yet the majority of the scholarly community insisted on professional standards and accountability while exploring new research methods and integrating new areas of archival research.

Historians and the various critical narratives they have offered of the state socialist period could not be expected to serve as an adequate substitute for communal confrontation with the legacy of this period. However, the meticulous exploration of the characteristic features of this legacy have made historians increasingly reliant on the audiovisual medium. Réka Sárközy's monograph *Elbeszélt múltjaink: a magyar történelmi dokumentumfilm útja* [Our narrated pasts: The paths of Hungarian historical documentaries], for instance, offers a concise introduction to the generic development, politics, and poetics of historical documentaries, including a comprehensive analysis of films from the 1950s to the present. The chapters dedicated to documentaries of the 1980s,[4] which Sárközy describes as films of "a useable past which perceive the cinematic medium as an instrument with which to change the present,"[5] are the most relevant to my discussion here. As Sárközy asserts,

> addressing varied topics and allowing for multiple points of view, the documentaries hope to confront a society—which was a passive collaborator in state offences—with its past and invite people to examine their parts in this(…) the artistic, scientific, and political stake of these films was to reinterpret archives, cleanse them of political influences, and uncover an interpretation which allows the past to be used by progressive practices of the present.[6]

3 Horváth, "A valóság metapolitikája," 275.

4 These include Sándor Sára's *Chronicle* (1982), Judit Ember's *Pócspetri* (1983), *Right of Asylum* (1988), Gyula Gulyás' and János Gyula's *I was too at Isonzo* (1982) and *Without Breaking the Law* (1987), Lívia Gyarmathy's *Cohabitation* (1983), Gyarmathy's and Géza Böszörményi's *György Faludy, poet* (1988) and *The Story of a Secret Concentration Camp in Communist Hungary. Recsk 1950–1953* (1989), Gyula Gazdag's *The Banquet* (1979) and *Package Tour* (1984), and Pál Schiffer's and Bálint Magyar's *On the Danube* (1987).

5 Sárközy, *Elbeszélt múltjaink*, 154–55.

6 Ibid., 155.

As the above passage suggests, and as I have argued elsewhere,[7] filmmakers contested the corrupting mechanisms of amnesia and appealed to the therapeutic function of collective memory-work. Oral history became a discourse which both revealed the fabrications of official memory politics and supported the empowerment of collective identity through the shared task of coming to terms with the past. Post-socialist historians shared the conviction of documentary filmmakers that narratives of the recent history could raise awareness of the mechanics of power, stereotyping, stigmatization, and the formation of social hegemonies in the present. They believed historical research should catalyze public discussion and self-critical reexaminations of the past by deciphering paradoxes and the dark legacy of state socialism, which hindered the development of civic attitudes and created hypocritical imaginations of national identity. The political appeal of such critical dialogue often proved counterproductive among the general public, which demanded depoliticized narratives allowing for strong affective investments. Svetlana Boym's assertion concerning the post-Soviet situation offers an apt characterization of Hungarian developments:

> glasnost intellectuals themselves, with their sense of moral responsibility and passionate earnestness, have become a forgotten tribe and fallen out of fashion… The collective trauma of the past was hardly acknowledged; or if it was, everyone was seen as an innocent victim or a cog in the system only following orders. The campaign for recovery of memory gave way to a new longing for the imaginary ahistorical past, the age of stability and normalcy.[8]

Social memory sought relief in the past of the private sphere detached from "ambivalence, the complexity of history and the specificity of modern circumstances,"[9] the sphere Boym describes as the homeland of restorative nostalgia: "a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment."[10]

Nostalgia's invention of prelapsarian and authentic communism and the advent of the retro-industry also increased the demand for images of the quotidian aspects of "really existing socialism" and led to the visual commodification of the past. Whereas the historian always considers the constructive relationship

7 See Zsolt Győri. "Discourse, power and resistance in sociographic documentaries of the late Kádár-era," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 5, no. 2 (2014): 103–23.

8 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 58.

9 Ibid. 43.

10 Ibid., 49.

between filmmaker and filmed reality and, in effect, presumes that "the (historical) document is not reality, but a linguistic representation that ascribes to it a specific value-structure and power status,"[11] retro memory does not necessarily make this distinction and promotes non-ideological identification with both the repackaged material heritage and previous social and cultural rites. As Elizabeth E. Guffey claims, "retro offers an interpretation of history that taps nostalgia and an undercurrent of ironic understanding. Steeped in satire and humor, retro's revivalist imagery has made its way into the mainstream, shaping how the recent past is presented."[12] As the newly emerging consumer society sought to fight its battle with forgetting in the realms of popular culture, the seriousness of memory was overtaken by the new fashion for amusing historical spectacle.

This article explores the discursive binary of the state-socialist legacy (which crystalizes in the critical-reflexive and the nostalgic-retro approaches) with reference to Gyula Gazdag's and Judit Ember's *The Resolution* and Gábor Zsigmond Papp's *Balaton Retro*. Relying on Maya Nadkarni's arguments concerning the makeup of post-socialist nostalgia, I contend that this memory genre is symptomatic of how citizens and social groups perceive the political sphere and the politicization of the public sphere. According to Nadkarni, retro nostalgia "challenged current regimes of value in post-socialism by finding worth in the cultural detritus of a past once reviled as inauthentic."[13] Thus, it sought to return to an apolitical quotidian world of innocence and stability "where the sharp divide between the private domestic sphere and the public world of political action was the very condition of political subjectivity."[14] Retreat from political activity as a way to maintain one's personal integrity became the norm and added to the collective sense of identity during the Kádár era. According to Nadkarni, this withdrawal from the public sphere, coupled with fantasies of consumer plentitude, Western wages, and Western lifestyles (constituents of an imaginary elsewhere that promised a return to normalcy), was a symptom of an infantilized citizenry and a society that gradually conformed to being treated as a group of children by a paternalistic-patronizing political elite. Infantilization was a political strategy, while the anti-political attitude citizens were encouraged to cultivate was less an authentic expression of resistance than it was the

11 Horváth, "A valóság metapolitikája," 283.

12 Guffey, *Retro*, 27.

13 Nadkarni, *Nostalgia*, 192.

14 Ibid.

premeditated space of neutralized resistance. The regime change, in this narrative, marked the moment of "a collective coming-of-age, in which the demise of paternal authority brought about a painful but necessary loss of innocence,"[15] while the historical emotion of nostalgia released in the wake of this identity crisis expressed the desire for the insular private realm. There was mounting disappointment in and disapproval of the new political elite, which was blamed for the emerging economic-moral instability, and with large segments of society embracing anti-politics as resistance, the post-socialist citizenry was recaptured by the infantile subject position of imaginary independence constructed during the previous era.

Gyula Gazdag's and Judit Ember's *The Resolution* (made in 1972, censored until 1984, and made available for general audiences only after 1989) is a vivid illustration of the overpoliticised and corrupt public sphere from which there is no retreat apart from illusionary detachment. Having been judged unsuitable for public release and thus doomed to oblivion, the film offers expressive evidence of its non-agreement with official notions of social purposiveness. In order to safeguard the corrupted public sphere, the censors had no choice but to ban the film, which, instead of celebrating the regime, debunked its methods of infantalizing citizens and groups. *The Resolution* shared the ethical mission of sociographic documentaries described by Horváth as the liberation of reality from rigid ideological discourse.[16] It achieved this aim through a method Ferenc Hammer characterises as follows: "[t]he political nature of exploring reality is brought to the surface by the objective gaze of the camera, which unveils the lies of the everyday routine and the oppressive apparatuses of interests."[17] The objective gaze of the camera as a promise to portray actual events and characters (Realism), observe characters and capture the normal, non-artificially dramatized tempo of life (situational filming), and use film as a methodologically solid description of the social sphere (Positivism) is expressive of the proactive attitude adopted by Gazdag and Ember in their film. The historical narrative presented in *The Resolution* bears witness to both history-from-below and the drama-of-lived-reality as it strives to capture how "reality 'performs' and reveals itself with its own resources and ordinary dynamics."[18] More importantly from the perspective of the present discussion, while presenting the battle of an

15 Ibid., 199.

16 Horváth, "A valóság metapolitikája," 282–83.

17 Hammer, "A megismerés szerkezetei," 265.

18 N.a., "Társadalmi folyamatok," 21.

agricultural cooperative president with demagogic bureaucrats who want to expel him publicly, the film reveals the paternalistic practices of forcing rigid political categories and narratives onto the private sphere. As historical meta-commentary, *The Resolution* documents how the Kádár regime, in its efforts to eradicate the private sphere and nationalize society, was driven not by the grandiose historical mission of communism, but by the pressure to conceal its own legitimacy crisis. I argue that the film renders legible these acts of concealment by capturing the private moments of the regime's bureaucrats and exposing their political fanaticism. As Ember noted, "filmmakers capable of seizing the human face and gestures in the very moment when they look and sound dishonest are filmmakers with a mission."[19] My analysis situates *The Resolution* in the context of existing historical research and treats it as an authentic account of how the consolidated Kádár regime sought to secure social support for its weakened ideological foundations and struggled with demons of its own.

Gábor Zsigmond Papp is a key Hungarian representative of the "freelance historian" who emerged "outside the mainstream of artistic and historical thought. This dynamic and ever-changing group of artists, architects, designers, and writers revisit the past not as scholars but as non-professional historians. Their memorialization of the recent past emerges not through traditional historical research but through the identification and acquisition of objects from the recent past, as well as the replication of its images and styles."[20] *Balaton Retro* recycles images, sounds, and didactic voiceover commentaries into a collage that transforms the geographical location of Hungary's largest holiday resort into the cultural space of popular imaginations and emotional and intellectual investments. Archival footage of Lake Balaton could have been easily used as a warehouse for restorative nostalgia, yet Papp, I contend, employs this footage as an assortment of documents of the imaginary anti-political subjectivity and childlike citizenry discussed by Nadkarni of a society willing to enjoy the dream projected by Goulash Communism. The parallels drawn in the film between Lake Balaton as the grand jewel of post-socialist nostalgia and the chief symbol of Goulash Communism allows me to further investigate the paradoxes of the private sphere as an illusionary site of detachment from politics. I conclude by proposing a direct link between the identity politics of retreat and the contemporary expansion of political populism.

19 Tarr, "Beszélgetés Ember Judittal," 73.

20 Guffey, *Retro*, 26.

In principle, this article investigates the failure to establish privacy as a position of authentic political resistance under state-socialism and analyses two films as exemplary narratives of this continuous failure, the legacy of which continues to haunt present-day political habitus in Hungary.

The Resolution: the (Failure of the) Discursive Construction of the Corrupt Farm President[21]

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the Kádár regime eased political control over various sectors of society and introduced a new model which, according to Tibor Valuch,

> was styled 'loosening and opening'–a gradual loosening from the fetters of dogmatically interpreted Marxist socialist ideology and from the country's isolation from the wider cultural and scientific world, and an opening up to new intellectual ideas and approaches, to the mass media and, later on, information technologies that were increasingly shaping everyday lives, to new trends in the arts, and to the new findings that scientific and scholarly work was throwing up.[22]

A key element of the regime's consolidation was the reforms introduced in the economic sector; the 1968 initiation of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) had a significant impact on agricultural policies, most notably on cooperative farms: newly established auxiliary branches increased the volume of investment for non-farm products and better capacity utilization rates increased profitability and strengthened labor-intensive units. These pragmatic measures were initiated to increase productivity levels and reduce the country's reliance on the import of agricultural goods. However, as Zsuzsanna Varga points out, they led to serious conflicts between trade pressure groups represented in both national and local bodies of the party apparatus. The strongest of these pressure groups campaigned for industrial workers and, having successfully claimed their primary role in socialist industrialization, overcame the arguments of agricultural interest groups. Their victory set off a retaliatory offensive and a wave of show-trials against more than a thousand cooperative presidents,[23] legal procedures

21 An earlier version of this segment was published as part of a chapter in the Hungarian volume *Tér, hatalom és identitás.*

22 Valuch, "A Cultural and Social History of Hungary," 250–51.

23 Varga, "Miért bűn a sikeresség?" 600–02.

to which Árpád Pünkösti referred as early as 1985 as witch hunts.[24] Since "the single party system did not allow for the direct clash of interests,"[25] and because these conflicts were hard to resolve on economic grounds, representatives of the heavy industry interest group choose to fight the battle on ideological grounds. Varga's research is founded on records of central administration which make frequent references to social interests, the supremacy of state ownership over cooperative ownership, and ideological arguments proposed by heavy industry delegates who deemed higher wages for agricultural workers unacceptable and warned of the dangers of labor migration from the cities to the countryside.[26] Fears of intensifying social conflicts strengthened the anti-reform group led by Béla Biszku and urged the government to undermine the liberalization process initiated by the reform-communist wing of the party.

The correspondence between the termination of the NEM and the witch hunts targeting farm presidents serves as the historical context of the events depicted in *The Resolution*. The film refers to its historical period by (re) constructing the hermeneutical context in which the ideological fabrication of the immoral, egoistic, and criminal-minded president of the Felcsút New Life Cooperative Farm takes place. Focusing on the conceptual and discursive construction at work in the character assassination of József Ferenczi in a show trial, *The Resolution* is a meta-discursive document of the post-NEM years. Gazdag and Ember do not tell the story of how local party apparatchiks in collaboration with members of the cooperative farms manage to overthrow a corrupt leader. On the contrary, they document how cooperative democracy is violently curtailed and how attempts to replace Ferenczi fail as cooperative members stand beside their falsely accused president. The meta-discursive quality of the film is established by its makers' strategy of pointing out the inconsistencies between the discursive production of the public sphere and the corresponding politicization and denial of the private.

Two informal conversations recorded at the local party bureau frame the film. Although these dramatic reenactments of rare intimate moments cannot be regarded as "objective" documents, they are documents of the "authenticity" of privacy, and they aptly illustrate how the private sphere was politicized. With the introduction of bureaucratic types whose gestures and oratorical performances

24 Pünkösdi originally published his article in the 1985 August issue of the journal *Új Tükör*. It was republished as part of his monograph referenced here: Pünkösti, *Kiválasztottak*, 328.

25 Varga, "Miért bűn a sikeresség?," 602.

26 Ibid., 603–04.

are farcical, viewers are admitted into the formalities and rituals of decision-making, or, in this case, the mechanics of constructing images of the enemy. These scenes capture the mood in which political conspiracies take root and an ideologically partial and deceitful public sphere is discursively fabricated. "The decision is already made, our main concern is its implementation" (06:38–06:41) rings like the thesis statement of any show-trial. The implementation is problematic, since Ferenczi is willing to resign only if his personal reputation is not compromised and he will not have to face further consequences for offences he never committed. This is not an option for the local party representatives, who wish to condemn Ferenczi publicly for moral and financial damages. It is essential that the concept of the corrupt farm president combine criminal, immoral, and anti-social aspects, since these aspects amplify the threat he poses to the community and, furthermore, legitimize both the complex network of state institutions that safeguard socialist morality and the harsh methods used to discipline opportunistic enemies of the system. Gyula Estélyi, the leader of the conversation and chief secretary of the local party committee, clarifies what implementation means in this case: on the one hand, the conceptualization of the corrupt farm president and, on the other, arranging public meetings where this concept will be tested, disseminated, and approved by members of the cooperative. As a dramatic finale of the character assassination, the general assembly will grant public support for the practices of intimidation, and it will force Ferenczi to resign by taking a democratic vote.

As the film testifies, Estélyi and his associate functionaries are ready to enforce the decision and fight their battle on more than one front. They consider the possibility of general support for the president, and although the possible resistance of the coop members is referred to as a potential hindrance, they agree that a direct democratic mechanism must be ensured: "the party makes suggestions, makes an assessment, tries to help, but if people do not need this help, they have the right of veto, the right to a secret ballot, the right to raise a hand" (14:16–14:32). After this cynical and paternalist demonstration of his commitment to participatory democracy, he urges the comrades to act upon the people's communist consciousness and remind them of their responsibility to advance socialism. In other words, Estélyi wishes to solicit support for his claims not by making an appeal to the self-conscious proletarian, but by reminding people of the ideals they should follow in individual decisions and private conduct. This appeal to hypocritical behavior is a symptom of the public sphere's artificial authenticity, and it is expressive of an expectation according to

which ideologically correct thoughts, feelings, and attitudes must reign over the private sphere. In addition, certain strategies of intimidation are also proposed, as Estélyi requests that his comrades emphasize at future meetings the long-term negative consequences for cooperative members should they continue to support Ferenczi. In another cynical gesture, he contemplates how members will learn from their mistakes before they comprehend the benefits of cooperative democracy. Hence, the retaliatory-disciplinary logic is extended and the whole collective will suffer for its deviation from the ideologically correct path. The concept of the corrupt president is supplemented with the concept of the corrupted community, both of which have, according to the official discourse, violated the practice of peaceful socialist coexistence.

The main body of *The Resolution* covers the "implementation" phase of the decision, in other words, the practical application of the discriminative concept. At the board meeting of the farm, the head of the district bureau (the supervisory board of the cooperative) claims that Ferenczi has lost political support. He proposes his removal and requests all participants to toe the party line. To emphasize the legitimacy of this paternalist request, general charges are listed, including the employment of an ex-convict associated with prostitution, undermining the reputation of the village, wasting the assets of the cooperative, increasing the budget for entertainment costs, and the private use of the company car.[27] Apart from the indisputable proof of the first charge, all additional accusations are declared false by Ferenczi, whom we see for the first time in the film and whose emotionally upset yet logical speech gives an itemized reply to the complaints: the pimp, a certain Fischer, was hired by comrade Szűcs, one of his present accusers; during his presidency, the cooperative became more productive and provided higher living-standards for residents; entertainment costs are negligible in view of total operational costs; no illegal payment or car-use took place; and the local party bureau had fully supported him until its recent turnaround.[28] Ferenczi's methodical invalidation of the charges brought against

27 The interview-based research of Pünkösti revealed very similar charges and procedures against presidents all over Hungary. (Pünkösti, *Kiválasztottak*, 325–86.) Even employees of the supreme court of justice admitted that "every investigation they started could have revealed malpractices" and that governmental approval of the establishment of auxiliary branches at cooperatives inevitably turned them into depots of suspicious people (ibid., 329).

28 In a recent interview, Ferenczi offers the following recollection of the time in question: "The regional party executives were very satisfied with my methods of running the cooperative, although I did not maintain informal contacts or socialize with them. I did accept an invitation to a game of cards. They kept on bragging about the 'interests of workers,' and they drank all night in a vineyard. I did not have time

him and, furthermore, his passionate concluding insistence that, "I will not leave this farm blemished and blackened" (33:34–33:36) indicate that he is aware of both the witch hunt targeting his person and the provocative discursive strategies on which it is based. Other members of the executive board side with Ferenczi and question the moral grounds for the character assassination. They suggest that the president had always valued the interests of the community over his own. Sensing the failure to build a strong grassroots base in their anti-Ferenczi campaign, the strategists who craft the techniques of intimidation adopt more explicit meausures culminating in blackmail when the chief-accountant of the company announces that the lack of political support for the president may result in the withdrawal of a national bank credit worth 10 million forint. He also adds that this sum would have to be raised by members, an absurd claim which, nevertheless, indicates the desperate desire of the functionaries to continue with the discriminatory process.

In the next round of the discursive boxing match, at the general meeting of the local party organization, Ferenczi presents the annual accounts and leaves, allowing the party members to discuss the controversies surrounding his activities. The verbal responses of the party members are as revealing as the images lingering on the frustrated, angry, desperate faces of the participants. These facial gestures, which constitute intimate bodily reactions to the malicious attacks, demonstrate people's unwillingness to play the public roles they are expected to play and pretend to be ideal cadres. These are the faces of people irritated by the intrusion of politics into their private affairs, people who would rather be pragmatic than dogmatic. This attitude is affirmed by the research of Pünkösti, and more specifically the words of an ex-farm president, Semjén István: "[coop] members were able to evaluate the performance of the president in a more complex manner than paragraphs can ever hope to. Despite minor character flaws, most presidents possessed qualities that made them effective and suitable leaders. Applying laws to measure the worth of such people is like allowing a bull in a china shop."[29] Similar opinions are heard at the general meeting, emphasizing the president's good planning and management skills, his financial

for such things. I wanted to work. I also meet them at the local party headquarters to discuss company affairs, and they were always positive about the developments. The attacks started from one day to the next, proving that the order came 'from above' and was not the consequence of a local or personal conflict of interest." Szabó, "Körül voltam," 7.

29 Gyula's and János Gulyás' *Don't Pale* (Ne sápadj, 1983) reaches a very similar conclusion. See Pünkösti, *Kiválasztottak,* 326–27.

intelligence, and the importance of continuity. A speaker praises the auxiliary branches and their contribution to the national industry, and he points out how they decrease the number of commuters, reduce the migration of qualified labor from the countryside to industrial towns, and contribute to the development of rural Hungary. These arguments were listed by the agricultural pressure group led by Lajos Fehér; nevertheless, spoken by a simple laborer, these words reflect direct social experience and demand pragmatism and economic rationality instead of ideological populism and moral judgements. Another member of the audience touches upon an extremely sensitive topic when asking whether there would be any consequences for the local party bureau if the resolution to remove Ferenczi failed, that is, if the victimization procedure ended in public defeat. Instead of a proper answer, the main speaker gives the following instructions: "like it or not, the party resolution is binding for all party members, so everyone must implement the resolution proposed by the higher authorities" (01:00:16–01:00:28). Potential traitors are threatened with disciplinary action, which sounds like just another empty intimidating remark provided that votes are cast by secret ballot. Nevertheless, it is also a clear symptom of the aspiration to put private choice under ideological control.

The general assembly is the forum which grants social legitimacy for the concept of the corrupt president and ensures that the witch hunt commences with the support of the public. The vote, at the same time, is also about the social acceptance of party rituals that penetrate into their lives, that is, the degree to which they are ready to collaborate with the political leadership in acting out ideologically prescribed roles. With the rising stakes, the anti-Ferenczi rhetoric also reaches new heights and, on top of the already voiced criticism of the president, new accusations are made, like the negative press coverage of Felcsút in the national press and the allegations concerning the excessive salary of the president and occasional transactions involving family members. Bringing up the topic of financial profiteering seems a calculated move, and it reflects the high priority of income levels and material wealth in people's decisions. Hence, the accusers make a final attempt to present their case on ideological grounds and employ the dichotomy of self-interest and group-interest, while at the same time they appeal to more base human sentiments, like envy and resentment. Repeated references to the moral, financial, and legal consequences members will have to face should they reject the resolution give the impression that the vote is also about the future of the company and imply that cooperative democracy works best when group interests (the interest of the members) are subordinated

to ideological interests (the idea of egalitarianism). After the secret ballot has been cast and the votes have been counted, results show a majority for the pro-Ferenczi camp. The feeling of relief is interrupted by the head of the district council, an associate of the party bureaucrats, who announces that a 2/3 majority is required for the vote to be valid. After checking the relevant legal passages, he retracts this statement and the assembly is disbanded.

In the final section of the film, viewers watch the company of familiar functionaries discuss the lessons they have learned. They unanimously agree on the legitimacy of the initial concept and decision, but they point to serious mistakes in the methods of implementation and express regret for not having been able to prove Ferenczi's criminal nature, political defects, and unorthodox leadership techniques. Speculations are made as to whether they should have settled for disciplinary action instead of trying to remove him and agree on the need for closer cooperation among the separate bureaus, offices, and councils and for more temperate and patient agitprop activities. Criticism from party headquarters, summarized by Estélyi with the question, "[w]hy would you launch a resolution that you cannot guarantee will pass" (1:37:07–1:37:08), might suggest that the initiative was flawed from the outset and that it was a mistake to attack a popular president of a successful farm. This would actually explain why the film was banned: the authorities did not want to expose the public to depictions of events that should never have taken place. If this was the case, Gazdag and Ember's "offence" was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I believe the opposite is true, however, not only in the sense that they were in the right place at the right time, but also because their film was as much a gain to the power elite as it was a blow.

Widespread lawsuits against cooperative presidents were initiated a year after *The Resolution* was made, and these legal procedures, according to the research of Varga, followed from the narrative of the corrupted president, which translated into "subordination of public interests to group interest."[30] The film also rendered legible the alliance formed in the years of economic liberalization between presidents and members, a group interest hard to penetrate and break by party officials. To prove the immoral nature of this alliance, authorities chose to vilify and criminalize the activities of presidents who supposedly acted in the service of farm members and made them willing accomplices in illegal activities. Varga presents numerous archival documents criticizing allegedly corrupted

30 Varga, "Miért bűn a sikeresség?" 611.

group interests, and the anti-Ferenczi alliance, as I pointed out, makes similar claims on several occasions. The film probably guided the political elite to the recognition that presenting members as collaborators in economic and moral wrongdoing would give authorities the necessary public authorization to launch legal and ideological attacks and set off nationwide show-trials. Having given the concept shape and sown the seeds of broad-based anti-agricultural sentiments in the public sphere, the central administration handed over the task of "tracking down" individual presidents to lower-level functionaries with reliable knowledge of local affairs.

In my view, *The Resolution* was not banned because it documented the failure of the anti-president discourse, since eventually the campaign against the president of the cooperative succeeded. At the end of the film, captions inform viewers about the removal of József Ferenczi by the coop members in 1973, which was followed by disciplinary measures against his person. I also believe the film provided valuable information for the power elite about the shortcomings of paternalist administrative methods and discriminatory practices on the one hand and the desire of farm workers for depoliticized company management and autonomy in financial and economic decisions on the other. In a more general sense, the authorities would have understood the citizen's increasing desire for individual opinion and the decoupling of the private sphere from politics. In addition to suggesting that the state-socialist regime was upheld by political and not social commitment, the film also showed how past practices of collectivizing private lives and subordinating them to politicized interests provoked people's anti-political reflexes.

In this context, the behavior of the local party apparatchiks is likewise revealing. Although these men should embody the committed cadre type with full devotion to an ideology, they seem to be more fascinated by the camera, and they willingly act out roles. At the end of the final discussion, they look into the camera smiling. Estélyi strikes the table, imitating the sound of a clapperboard, and says, "Well…that's all" (1:39:51). In the documentary feature films of the Balázs Béla Studio (BBS) and Társulás Stúdió the choice to cast amateur actors to play social types served the goal of authenticity. Including such scenes of self-performance in a documentary, in my understanding, serves the purpose of meta-commentary on public role playing as a survival method during the Kádár regime. These scenes propose that functionary identities are always performed and constructed through the acting out of idolized roles, ritualistic behavior types, and verbal clichés: politics becomes performance and performance legitimizes

and authenticates politics. In other words, maintaining the "authentic" image of the committed cadre is depicted as the greatest service to the regime, since the regime *is* what people perceive of it in the public sphere. Esse est percipi. *The Resolution* draws a portrait of a political system which has lost its revolutionary momentum—even cadres and political activists are performed roles—and concentrates most of its energies on maintaining appearances, on constructing the image of integrity. Gazdag and Ember do not theorize the reasons for this lost momentum, but the lack of social support for the discriminatory discourse presented in the film is symptomatic and, I believe, corresponds with the following assertion by Gábor Gyányi: "modern political dictatorships in their founding stage rely on popular movements, but when they eventually solidify (consolidate) into state power they require more than (just) the support of political fanatics."[31] Unless this transition from activist-based to broad-based support is achieved, a legitimacy crisis of the political elite is imminent.

The lessons of *The Resolution* are manifold: it identifies a communal will for a depoliticized public sphere and, furthermore, describes politics as a stage on which appearances are maintained through authentic performances. The performative qualities of politics might have provided the regime with the illusion of authority over citizens, but they were too weak to ensure full control over them. Recognizing its own limited options to democratize the public sphere, the administration strove to politicize the private by injecting into it the performative qualities of anti-politics and allowing the sphere of intimacy to perform itself as a site of detachment and relative liberty. As such, the power elite opened the fairground of illusionary authenticity to the masses and invited them to act out imaginations of privacy. The political benefits of infantilizing society while regaining control over people who could not be effectively fanaticized were not only merely symptomatic of Goulash Communism, rather, they defined it.

Balaton Retro: Goulash Communism Debunked

Gábor Zsigmond Papp's *Balaton Retro* (2007) uses exclusively archival footage which at the time it was made served the single aim of aggrandizing the achievements of the socialist welfare state. Like *Budapest Retro 1–2* (1998 and 2003), his previous ventures into retro-documentaries, *Balaton Retro* also depended on the Hungarian Film Archive for historical resources. Papp would

31 Gyáni, "Kollaboráció és a hatalom titka," 49.

both recycle and re-contextualize archival material, adding popular songs from the period as musical accompaniment and voiceover commentaries to the images. In his grandiose visual montage of Goulash Communism, images that once pretended to be apolitical, carrying softened and disguised overtones of ideological discourses (and then after the regime change becoming material signifiers of a sociocultural elsewhere), are presented as a self-debasing narrative of the Kádár regime. Papp also emphasized this feature of the film:

> [t]his is not a historical presentation of the Kádár regime, rather it reveals how the regime wanted people to see it. These are propaganda films that debunk themselves. One does not need to add anything, as they are absurd as they are. We never tried to mock anything with the voiceover commentaries, the humor of the films follow from the original footage.[32]

Apart from distinguishing history from retro-memory, Papp's reference to the humor of the archival footage suggests that already at the time of their making the recordings were perceived as half serious representations of Lake Balaton, either because they capture comic scenes of holiday makers or because of their pathetic efforts to present ideological narratives as reality. *Balaton Retro* also subverts the historical sensation of nostalgia, an emotionally saturated sensibility to an ideal but lost past and, likewise, revival(ism), a group strategy to rediscover and reconnect with a past thought to be lost as a result of a sociocultural fracture. Although the film will be enjoyed by viewers yearning for commercial mass produced nostalgia and will allow the younger generation socialized in consumer society to grasp the atmosphere of socialist popular culture, Papp does not attempt to mythologize the era or present the social landscape of the 1960s and 1970s as exemplary or authentic and, thus, worth rejuvenating. The retro-memory employed by the film is *not* a "rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress," *neither* does it wish to "obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time".[33] Rather, it is a self-conscious and ironic attitude to the narration of the past. The discursive strategy of *Balaton Retro* is closest to Guffey's definition of retro as an unsentimental memory genre: "half-ironic, half-longing, 'retro' considers the recent past with

32 Sipos, "Beszélgetés Papp Gábor Zsigmonddal," 46.

33 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

an unsentimental nostalgia. It is unconcerned with the sanctity of tradition or reinforcing social values; indeed, it often insinuates a form of subversion while sidestepping historical accuracy."[34]

Papp's film points beyond the post-socialist culture of nostalgia, and while it does not turn its back on the increasing demand for retro, it refuses to glorify or mythologize the past. I agree with Sárközy's assertion that Papp's retro-documentaries follow from the Western-European and American tradition of revisionist history: "propaganda films recently made available by archives are reinterpreted and radically re-contextualized. Thus, they allow us to reconsider our ideas and beliefs about reality."[35] I would add only that Papp's revisionism is most productive when linked to the aforementioned paradoxes of the popular demand for privacy under state socialism. *Balaton Retro*, I contend, reaches beyond the deceptive mask of Goulash Communism, and instead of depicting it as the golden age of egalitarianism, it explores Lake Balaton as the discursive production of the myth of a depoliticized private sphere. Papp investigates the "authenticity" of the lake as a place of retreat, less a geographical location than a spatial metaphor of the much sought-after detachment from a non-egalitarian public life. Although stylistically very different, I consider the film the twin-narrative of *The Resolution*, a perceptive reading of how consecutive generations continued to find comfort in the lake even after realizing that their initial yearning for equality, privacy, and liberty was compromised, neutralized, and dissatisfied. I propose that *Balaton Retro* debunks the "authenticity" of Lake Balaton, and more generally the false emotional, economic, and political imaginations about Goulash Communism in a discourse with five layers.

The first layer considers tourism-related infrastructure, mainly housing facilities of very different quality and price. People who were not eligible for cheap trade-union owned resort homes (so-called SZOT üdülő) could choose between different types of accommodation, including hotels, motels, apartment houses, and campsites. This layer of the discourse links the emergence of the socialist welfare state to the modernization of local infrastructure, as a result of which Lake Balaton, also known as the Hungarian Riviera in popular terminology, was transformed into an affordable holiday destination for ordinary people, mainly families. This latter aspect explains why Balaton became a spatial symbol of egalitarianism and a source of shared experience for generations of Hungarians.

34 Guffey, *Retro,* 10–11.

35 Sárközy, *Elbeszélt múltjaink*, 263–4.

Actually, its popularity soon exceeded its capacity, resulting in crowded beaches and overpriced catering services. As the planned economy could not provide proper or even basic services for all visitors, the authorities permitted the establishment of private enterprises to satisfy high demand. Lake Balaton, in this regard, exemplifies what economist János Kornai termed a shortage economy: a chronic Eastern European experience during the state socialist period.[36] The consequent emergence of lucrative private businesses (apartment houses, takeout restaurants, greengrocers) soon became a characteristic feature of Lake Balaton and transformed popular imaginations of the place from a symbol of egalitarianism to a symbol of ruthless profiteering.

Along with active laborers, the communist youth was a key social resource with which to build future support for the regime. Not surprisingly, youth culture was given increased attention by the political elite, as evidenced quite clearly by the concern shown by propaganda films for the attitudes of this age group. This is reflected in *Balaton Retro*, the second discursive layer of which introduces student camps and youth oriented subculture around the lake. The pioneer's camp at Zánka, referred to as a gift of the party to working class children and celebrated as another achievement of the welfare state, is presented in archival recordings as a place where the younger generations share the benefits of global communism and enjoy vacations in a multicultural environment. In Papp's re-contextualization, however, it seems more an example of ideological indoctrination, when the voiceover narrator reads part of a letter written, allegedly, by children for the anniversary of the Hiroshima attacks: "[w]e enter our forces into a coalition to fight against the threat of nuclear catastrophe and to terminate wars around the world" (00:23:04–00:23:14). The strange wording of these sentences, very different from children's language, points to the indoctrinating atmosphere of youth camps in the period, which hindered the development of critical, self-aware, and proactive social identities and laid the foundations of a politically infantile citizenry Another form of institutional recreation was organized by the Hungarian Young Communist League (KISZ) at camps around the lake, where teenagers would do (compulsory) voluntary work at agricultural farms or lend a hand at state-owned retailing units, such as supermarkets. Although this represented an ineffective form of labor, the film implies a calculated correspondence between the shortage economy and the rigid labor market which heavily relied on unpaid work. Moving on to the

36 See Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*.

generational experiences of young adults, the film presents visual and verbal documents of the moral panic over young people's attitudes. The discourse of vilification against subcultures presumed (for reasons unexplained) provocative and threatening to socialist morality is echoed by the voiceover commentary. Although this self-reflective imitation of the paternalist rhetoric becomes its own caricature, it exemplifies how vulnerable the space of liberty was, and it points to the eventual failure to find a refuge from everyday drudgery and non-egalitarian social relations

The next discursive layer of the film explores tourism and introduces Lake Balaton as an outpost of the West behind the Iron Curtain. Western tourists were allowed to spend holidays at Lake Balaton chiefly for economic reasons: to increase reserves of hard currency and thus facilitate commerce with Western companies. These considerations led to increased tourist interest in Lake Balaton, and this had an impact on the cultural image of the space. Either as sites of reunions for separated German families or as inexpensive yet well-equipped holiday resorts offering the best of Hungarian cuisine, Gypsy music, popular entertainment, and access to high art, the hotels and campsites popping up around the lake served as a space of connectivity. In addition to functioning as a contact zone between capitalist, consumer-oriented modernity and socialist modernity, which was proud of its revolutionary advancements in the field of social welfare, Lake Balaton also rendered legible the economic inequalities along the East-West divide. Unlike the international pioneer camp of Zánka, where a shared ideological background eliminated national differences and inequalities of wealth, spaces which were under less control, like streets and hotel parking lots, were sites of encounters of a different kind. As *Balaton Retro*'s archival footage shows, ordinary Hungarians would stare with amazement at signifiers of material wealth, like cars, trendy cloths, and accessories. Especially revealing are visual passages of young women throwing brief, enthusiastic glances at Western men, but the lack of access to premium leisure activities and spaces (like Hotel Marina) was a burden to most Hungarian holiday makers, and it added to their feelings of inferiority. The most vivid illustration of the imperfection of state-provided welfare is the scene entitled "A foreigner at Lake Balaton," a mock film-diary of a Hungarian expatriate returning to Balaton for a vacation. The protagonist of this episode, who speaks Hungarian with a heavy accent and resembles characters in vintage recordings, is József Magyar. He visits his homeland and is astonished to find a modern tourist industry on the lakeside. A cloudy day, however, disrupts his routine water-sport activities and forces him to

pursue other entertainment. He asks at the reception desk in his hotel whether it is possible to play roulette or billiards, but he is told that such dishonorable games are not available, and although they have a chess board, it has gone missing. Magyar decides to play tennis. After paying a hefty sum at the reception desk, he is told to pick up the key at the hospital, which he does with some reluctance, only to find that the tennis court is already taken. This comic parable is Papp's most explicit attempt to interpret Goulash Communism as welfare provided by a paternalist state (epitomized by the hotel receptionist) bound by ideological imperatives (concerning what is dishonorable and what is not) and characterized by shortsighted and chaotic planning (as the case of the key suggests).

Kornai draws a similar picture: "[a] paternalist 'welfare state' covering the entire population was developed over several decades. Hungary can vie with the most developed Scandinavian countries in the range of codified entitlements to benefits and in the proportion of GDP laid out on social spending, whereas per capita production is only a small fraction of theirs."[37] At a later point, Kornai calls this redistributive system of welfare spending beyond the country's economic capacity "premature,"[38] and he contends that maintaining it "was most important to the government at any time to reassure people. The paternalist redistribution certainly has a soothing effect, compensating to a large extent for the reduction in and uncertainty about real wages earned legally in the market sector."[39] This characterization of the welfare state, the compensatory function of which often led to hasty and unreflective decisions, bears remarkable similarities with Papp's witty parable of the tourist industry, which appears to work well, but in fact is illogical and, ultimately, dysfunctional. In this insightful segment, *Balaton Retro* points to the central paradox permeating all discursive layers that ascribe meanings to the lake. Like Goulash Communism, the popular image of Lake Balaton is fractured by the discrepancies between the ideal of egalitarianism and a non-egalitarian reality, the promise of retreat from the corruptness of public life and the frustration over the same demoralizing social relations being reproduced locally.

The iconic business figures (popular heroes for some, profiteers for others) associated with the lake were also the products of a regime lost in its own doublethink. While the authorities, at first, allowed private resources to ease the soaring demand for accommodation and licensed building permits for

37 Kornai, "Goulash Communism," 944.

38 Ibid., 964.

39 Ibid., 965–66.

large family houses which everybody knew served in part as short-term rental properties, they later reprimanded owners for unlawful profiteering. This cat-and-mouse-game is recounted by Papp via an archival interview with a man who built a seven-bedroom house (with numbers hanging from the doorframes) with three bathrooms and two kitchens but claimed that it was for his family and the years he would spend in retirement. Because his narrative will be heard in the public sphere, the man adapts to the official language of egalitarianism presented, in this case literally, as the language of dishonesty. This is another example of the discursive production of privacy, an agency allowed to be formed in the act of being subordinated to and limited by the political rationale.

The same logic characterized Goulash Communism as a social system promising increased quality of life in a world with limited freedoms and consumer choice. The segment on sports around the lake offers an overview of the various forms of water and beach sports enjoyed by vacationers, noting that there were always shortages of the most popular equipment, such as air mattresses. According to the logic of the shortage economy, holiday makers were to blame, as they were demanding an unnecessary item. In the eyes of bureaucrats, the lake was there for swimming, rowing, and sailing, but not for sunbathing on mattresses. Another telling example of the short-sightedness, or in this case the sheer stupidity, of bureaucrats is when the local council advises fisherman to build their huts on the top of the hill because they make the lakeshore unattractive. Some water sports, like sailing and motor-boating, were regarded as too extravagant and damaging to social egalitarianism, so the owners were burdened with extra taxes and restrictions in the 1970s. The strict regulations on motorboat use offer a compelling case of how ideological and pragmatic considerations were seemingly reconciled. This episode of the film begins with a voiceover narration: "in 1978, authorities introduce a total ban on motorboats with the exception of those owners who agree to patrol the lake voluntarily in their free time" (01:01:45–01:02:00). Later, we see an archival interview with a policeman who lists professions, including doctors, professors, company directors, and engineers (people with high qualifications and an unquestionable sense of responsibility), as members of the voluntary water-police community. In the next shot, we hear a segment from an archival audio recording: "[n]owadays, many people criticize the quality of the Hungarian educational system. But can these critics show another country where voluntary policemen solve complicated mathematical formulas and carry out intricate surgical operations?" (01:02:44–01:03:00) The manner in which this information

is presented not only offers a sketch of the logic underlying regulations and practices, it also offers a symptomatic reading of the strategies adopted by the regime to appease conflicts arising from economic inequalities. Accordingly, influential and high-income representatives of the professional and industrial elite could maintain their privileges in return for voluntary services provided for the community. The fact that the authorities wished to disguise cosmopolitan hobbies as public service, that is, disguise rather than resolve social inequalities, suggests that despite endless tirades about commitment to egalitarianism, the regime actually operated through clientelism, in-group bias, and a system of favors.

The last discursive layer of the film presents the richness of cheap amusements offered for vacationers, including for instance a beauty pageant, a hairdresser competition, a fashion show, a water theatre, fairgrounds, open-air cinemas, concerts, and festivals, most of which drew large crowds eager for spectacle. These activities, though they suggested affluence and consumer freedom, actually encouraged people to partake in the infantile social rites provided by state-controlled popular culture. Even more openly than in the previous archival footage, young female bodies dressed in bikinis are highlighted, as if narratives of Lake Balaton could be best told from the perspective of a sexualized patriarchal regime. The gendered gaze, as a prevalent feature of the recordings, coupled with regular mention of the easy-going sexual disposition of visitors, draws a picture of Lake Balaton as the bordello of Goulash Communism, a space of tolerated exhibitionism, a spatial safety-valve for otherwise bigoted, puritanical, and self-restraining state-socialist public morals. Serving as a showroom of Hungary's evolving popular culture, municipalities around the lake were urged to promote cultural events with historical traditions. The Anna-ball in Tiszafüred and the grape harvest celebrations reinvented aristocratic and folk festive traditions for mass entertainment, adding socialist flavors to the events. Reinvention also brought about bureaucratization: a recording of the Anna-ball organizing committee shows easily recognizable party functionaries, like those of *The Resolution*, discussing details of a festival initiated in the Reform Era, a period of nineteenth-century Hungarian history that saw the awakening of national identity, modernization, and the spread of liberalism.

Conclusion

Balaton Retro evokes the material culture and social rituals of the Kádár era with an observant and elaborative memory which remains alert to the interplay of elements among the various narrative layers of Lake Balaton. Like Gazdag and Ember, Papp also recognizes the schizophrenic nature of the regime, which hopes to resolve its loss of popular support by adopting populist techniques with which to manipulate, neutralize, and infantilize the masses. The films discussed here arrive at the same conclusion as Gábor Halmai: "political legitimacy in Hungary depends on welfarist concessions to the population."[40] The economic rationale of these concessions was, in large part, unfounded and, as Kornai asserts, "did not derive from a forward-looking, long-term government program. It arose out of improvisation, through rivalry between distributive claims. First one group, stratum, or trade then another would demand more or at least struggle against curtailment of its existing rights."[41] It is impossible to run a system founded on improvisation of such a high degree without the collaboration of citizens, who willfully renounce their own interests for the benefit of others. This is, of course, an unrealistic scenario, and if pursued, it would further undermine the legitimacy of the administration and certainly lead to the spread of grassroots resistance and bottom-up populism. Another route, the one taken by the consolidated Kádár regime, was to disguise the improvised nature of policies aiming to raise living standards and pacify citizens' anti-authoritarian attitudes by allowing them the (illusion of the) political passivity of private life, even if this passivity was used to legitimize the regime and made people unwilling collaborators in their own subordination.

The chosen documentaries portray this control as a paternalistic, top-down model of populism and a partial return to the rhetoric of early communist regimes, which proposed to empower disenfranchised people. The claims made by the party functionaries to protect social interests from egotistic group interests in *The Resolution* evoke the populist slogans communist activists proclaimed during their rise to power. Documenting the return to these techniques of mobilization, Gazdag and Ember offer empirical proof of how populism, as Francisco Panizza notes, "becomes a tradition embedded in the party's myths, institutions and official discourse."[42] The populism Gazdag and Ember identify as a seminal

40 Halmai, "(Dis)possessed by the Spectre of Socialism," 115.

41 Kornai, "Goulash Communism," 966.

42 Panizza, "Introduction," 18.

strategy of the Kádár-regime also calls to mind Ernesto Laclau's proposition, according to which "a movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual *contents* identifiable as populistic, but because it shows a particular *logic of articulation* of those contents – whatever those contents are" (emphasis in original).[43] The practice of mobilizing "the people" against imagined "others" was a feature of state-socialist administrative practices, and it revealed strategies of populism in two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, the discursive production of antagonisms (people vs. others, Us vs. Them) requires, as Laclau asserts, "floating signifiers"[44] that can take different concrete referents in different circumstances. As suggested above, the intimidation strategies used against Ferenczi involved the constant redefinition and specification of what "corrupt" (as a floating signifier) meant. The same applies to the "people" and the "will of the community." My analysis of *The Resolution* has sought to how the regime was struggling to construct the authentic meanings of these categories and in the process revealed its own inauthenticity and legitimacy crisis. Part of this was the unfounded identification of agricultural workers as belonging to the imaginary union of the people (the Us). In fact, the film bears witness to the formation of a bottom-up populist movement stemming from people's demand for privacy and their desire to retreat from a politicized public life.

This desire is connected to the second aspect of the populism which, according to Panizza, "both depoliticises and hyper-politicises social relations"[45] to increase support. De-politicization and the substitution of the "political discourse for the discourse of morals" [46] was a key aspect in the character assassination of Ferenczi and the appeals made to the workers' sense of ethical responsibility for social interests. The discursive production of Lake Balaton exemplifies how de-politicization may serve as a disguise for hyper-politicization. The archival footage featured in *Balaton retro* mobilized popular culture to prove that universal access to welfare benefits, leisure and sport activities, participation in festivals, and other common social rituals was falsely perceived as a form of resistance more authentic than open political confrontation. Papp recognizes the paradoxical nature of such authenticity, and he elucidates how propaganda was expected to convince people that the lake *was not* an artificial space of emancipation, *not* a patronized escape, and *not* the site of illusionary retreat when, in fact, *it was*.

43 Laclau, "Populism" 33.

44 Ibid., 43.

45 Panizza, "Introduction," 20.

46 Ibid., 22.

Identifying de-politicization as an effect and a form of camouflage of hyper-politicization allows Papp to describe welfarism as populist. Whenever people demanded more and the disguise was exposed, strategies of hyper-politicization would emerge either by posing bureaucratic limits on people's desires or by forcing them into hegemonic relations. Whenever the moral authority of the welfare state was questioned, like in encounters with more affluent Western lifestyles, propaganda returned to antagonizing dichotomies (Us vs. Them) or, as reports on pioneer camps testify, emphasized the unequal relationship between the people and their patron, the state.

One of my intentions in this article is to have drawn further critical attention to the consolidated Kádár regime as a case of political populism best understood through the widespread social desire to retreat into the private sphere and the private fantasies of an apolitical elsewhere. Present-day populism, as the politics of the disillusioned and nostalgic masses, is similar. It openly critiques the Establishment and continuity, and it petitions for new economic models, social dynamics, and cultural idols. It gains popularity by recognizing people's anti-political sentiments, allowing such imaginations to enter the realm of politics, and spearheading the outrage against a presumably corrupted elite. Emerging in Eastern Europe, it has recently swept through the West, eroding the status quo of modern democracy and bringing its institutions to their knees. More precisely, it emerged from the Eastern European experience of disillusionment shared by ever-extending segments of the population increasingly vulnerable to the neoliberal economic transformation. The rude awakening from global capitalism increased, as post-socialist nostalgia testifies, citizens' fascination with the previous regime and prevented them from recognizing that the switch to a market economy was only the catalyst and not the cause of their destitution, that, in fact, societies suffer from the legacy of the very unsustainable socioeconomic models they once passively helped to engineer.

If we accept the assertion that the Kádár regime's Goulash Communism failed because its weak economic performance, which was unable to support welfare policies and further the process of social liberalization, prompted desires too robust for its narrow ideological framework to hold back (in other words, it was unable to satisfy people's demands for more welfare), we can make further claims about the recent upsurge in political populism. First, it places people's expectations and desires above political rationality, but since these expectations are mostly unfounded and derive from the childish belief in the benefits of political inactivity, populism has to maintain society's dishonest relationship

with the past. Secondly, in its support for unreflective, restorative nostalgia and antagonism towards the self-critical reassessment of the state-socialist heritage, populism shelters people's right to cherish an otherwise false sense of reality. Not only does it accept this new license to dishonesty and promote the freedom of an infantile citizenry, it also obtains political legitimacy as its guardian. Hence, populism eventually translates the private ideology of passive resistance into political action, but only in order to use anti-political subjectivity for its own unpredictable and "authentic" ends.

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