

Réka Sárközy: Vespa or Panni Scooter?

Social Image of The Fifties in The Light of Hungarian Photographs and Posters of The National Library's Collection

The Fifties has a different meaning in Western Europe and in Eastern Europe, in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. According to the catalogue of the Kaleidoscope project "baggy skirts, dots, design brands, Vespa, Rockabilly, Buddy Holly, Volkswagen minibus, Barbie, Scrabble, washing machine, TV" are the nostalgic key words of the era.¹ These terms refer to icons of consumer society in Western Europe and, of course in America. Within the Soviet sphere of influence, this decade evokes quite different associations: terror, dictatorship, nationalization, collectivization, submission, internal deportation, labour camp, show trials, confinement, fear, shortage, scarcity, queuing. Could there be a common denominator of the two radically different collective memories? Can East and West share any of their memorial sites? The differences resulting from the post-war political situation are evident, numerous visual evidences support them. However, according to the testimony of the surviving visual documents, the pre-World War II historical development, then the consequences of World War II left not only different, but also similar traces in many respects. There were problems, discoveries, fashions and consumer goods shared by East and West, despite the isolation and the Cold War. In this study I describe, within the developing Soviet-style dictatorship, Hungarian society's important features in the Fifties, highlighting a few common points in the photographs, posters, despite the different political frameworks, and also the special characteristics of the visual elements, social messages in the emerging Soviet-style dictatorship. My sources are mostly photographs, filmstrips and socio-cultural propaganda posters from the National Library's collection. The photos are not political reportage photos because such images are not included in the collection. My photographic sources are film stills nationalized from feature and documentary films, as well as amateur family photographs. My most important scholarly source was Tibor Valuch' monograph: "Hungarian Social History in the Second Half of the 20th Century."²

The photos and posters of the Fifties demonstrate great political and social changes in Hungary. After a short period of democracy, this decade saw the emergence of the most violent form of a Soviet-style dictatorship. One of its hallmarks was the personal cult of Party Secretary Mátyás Rákosi, the so-called "The Rákosi-system," swept away by the 1956 revolution. After the suppression of the revolution, in the shadow of the Soviet occupation, another Soviet-style, but less violent regime emerged, known as the 'Kádár system' named after the First Secretary of the Communist Party, János

¹ *Kaleidoscope. Blue Skyes, Red Panic.* 2020

² Tibor Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében* (Budapest: Osiris, 2001).

Kádár. This collapsed in 1989 like all similar regimes of Eastern Europe. The political transition from dictatorship to democracy was a peaceful movement in Hungary, the so-called "regime change".

The first task was in both parts of the divided Europe to restore the damages of World War II. Economic crisis, shortages, rationing, bread-lines marked the post-war years. By 1950 Western Europe began to emerge from the crisis, while in the East party-state dictatorships were established, and the infamous "iron curtain" was raised on the Western borders. In Paris the European Economic Cooperation Organization was established in 1948 with the participation of 16 countries to implement the Marshall Plan. In London the Council of Europe was set up in 1949, while also in Paris the European Coal and Steel Community was founded in 1951, and the Treaty of Rome created the Common Market in 1957. With the support of the United States and under the influence of the Truman Doctrine, an "economic miracle" was accomplished in Western Europe, the foundations of a consumer society were established. Transistor radio, television, nylon stockings and motorcycles began to conquer. The idea of European cooperation was also born in those years.

By 1949, the Communist Party in Hungary made its power exclusive, removing the obstacles of the wanted social and economic changes. The highly centralized, hierarchical system was controlled by a single political party, the Hungarian Workers' Party. Socialist ideology can be characterized as a superiority complex in a monopolistic situation with a belief in its messianic mission. The political system was dictatorial, where power was a value in itself, the purpose of which was to maintain the rule of the working class. According to the leading ideologues, Marxism was the only valid ideology, based on scientific advancement, with which society had been forced to identify. Personal freedom was forced to subordinate itself to the implementation of "common good" embodied by the party. The state also intervened in private life. A person's value was exclusively measured by political loyalty. The creation of the image of socio-political adversary was a peculiar trait of the regime, along with the attempt to eliminate "useless" social groups (kulaks, petty bourgeois)³ "The cohesive power of the system was driven by ideology, power structure, compulsion, and privileges, which were also convertible to material goods granted to a small circle. The totalitarian state has sought to control every sphere of life."⁴ The rights of the individual had become purely formal. The classical socialist system was mostly created in countries whose socio-economic conditions were lagging behind, and as a consequence the pressure to catch up worked.⁵ Its social policy can be characterized by a high degree of paternalism and by a shortsighted social policy.

The Rákosi era, closely following the Soviet model, sought to create its own style for their ideologues and the authorities of the system, considered themselves as a major chapter in world history where each sub-field of art could be created only in their special period style, the so-called socialist realism. They sought changes and presence in the conventional art forms as well, and also in propaganda, in

³ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 22.

⁴ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 21.

⁵ János Kornai, *A szocialista rendszer. Kritikai politikai gazdaságtan* (Budapest: HVG, 1993)

the representation of man.⁶ Everything became politicized: street imagery, advertising, interior design, fashion, festive decorations, and newspapers gained strategic importance. In the visual world of everyday life, each element corresponded to a new system of symbols. The display of the period style was also a representation of the desire for power. According to the ideology, all that had been done in history before, could be just regarded as the pre-history of the system, which was fulfilled its own goal in the history. Art could only visualize the procedure of its realization, or the approaching path to it. According to these guidelines, there was no use to distinguish between mass and elite culture, the latter could only be regarded as the vanguard of the former. The ordinary man was reminded everywhere and in every hour of the day that he was living in an irrevocable new setting. By 1950, the visual world of everyday life had been transformed. The control of image and public space had become a primary power issue. The model of the new world was the Stalinist Soviet Union, the "most advanced culture in the world."⁷ The portrait of Mátyás Rákosi, the "teacher" and the "leader" was an obligatory set piece in every space. (Rákosi.jpg) (Mayday.jpg) (Mayday2.jpg)

Changes in the system of values were determined by ideology. While in Western Europe individual freedom and market logic were the guiding principle, in Eastern Europe it was "sovietisation", the state's utmost centralizing will. The central power-controlled production and also private life, in its effort to create a community society, but instead proletarianizing, reducing society to the lowest common denominator. A systematically organized propaganda campaign was launched to re-educate society. The virtues of the past became reactionary, superfluous, and an organic transformation of values became impossible.

Centrally developed community values were placed to the center of socialist virtues towards the individuals and became decisive. The most intense period of ideological transformation took place between 1948 and 1956. National values were confined, the practice of religion was condemned, the festivals of Christian tradition were renamed, in an effort to eradicate traces of religion from family life. Human rights were gravely ignored. This attempt to reshape individual awareness and the push for central planning in the economy came to a halt in 1953, and political crises led to the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution.

Industrialization

The overarching goal of the Fifties was to overcome the economic backwardness of the country, which was to be achieved through forced industrialization. Planned economy was introduced as a program of development. The programme of economic expansion was divided into five-year periods, in which required goals were compulsory to achieve. The political objectives of this planned economy did not correspond to the economic realities of the country, therefore the obligation to fulfil them pushed the

⁶ György, Péter, „A mindennapok tükre, avagy a korstílus akarása.” in *A művészet katonái. Sztálinizmus és kultúra*, ed. Péter György and Hedvig Turai (Budapest: Corvina, 1992), 12

⁷ József Révai, *Élni tudtunk a szabadsággal – válogatott cikkek és beszédek*. (Budapest, Szikra: 1949), 571.

economy into a forced path. The industrial growth they wanted to achieve was planned by mass use of free and cheap labour, so the first five-year plan (1950-54) stipulated the recruitment of three hundred thousand new industrial workers. This, however, did not end unemployment, since even with internal migration, it was not possible to direct all the workers from far away to developing industrial areas. The phrase “working class” refers to the workers of the industry, especially in the heavy industry. Corporate reports, portraits of workers and working women, reports of workplace movements are over-represented among the photographs taken for propaganda purposes in this period. The character of a typical worker is depicted in the images working enthusiastically for the community, surpassing his prescribed plan by any means. In his spare time he takes part in the factory’s cultural activities and uses the entertainment facilities provided by the factory: sings in the choir, paddles in the river Danube, enjoys communal life with his brigade in the common boathouse, flies glider aircraft as a member of the workplace association, or engages in sports in other well organised ways. (pilots.jpg) (mhk.jpg) (workers_choir.jpg)

Sport

Sport was an important element of the mass culture in the Forties and Fifties, and Hungarian sport was outstanding during this period. Hungarians won 16 gold medals at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, the most successful Olympic appearance of the country up to now. (filmstrip_Helsinki.jpg) Sport was one of the great opportunities for social advancement. Attending domestic sports events was a popular leisure activity for people on weekends. Before the spread of television, radio broadcasting of domestic and foreign sports events attracted masses, sports successes also helped to dispel social tensions (Népstadion2.jpg) (Thegoldenteam.jpg). The Fifties were the great period of Hungarian football, the so-called “Gold Team” defeated the English national team 6:3 at Wembley Stadium in 1953 on the “match of the century” and won the World Championship silver medal in 1954. Physical exercise was not a private matter, but hard work for the community, sport excellence was one of the means of overcoming the decadent West. The expected role of sporting activities were summed up in the imported Soviet model of “Ready for Work, Ready for Fighting!” movement, that was built up from locally organized “spartakiads” and sports festivals in workplaces or on village-level, offering sports opportunities to young people, primarily through the promotion of athletics and hiking. (mhk_ski.jpg) (ski_amateur.jpg)

Agricultural conversion

In 1945, under the land reform former servants and smallholders, agricultural workers were given land. This reform alleviated the disproportionate nature of former land ownership but failed to go hand in hand with widespread agricultural reform. The proportion of landless fell to 17% compared to 46% in 1941, the percent of small and mid-size plots rose by 47% to 80%, and the ratio of large estates dropped from 7% to 2.9%.⁸ The reform strengthened the sense of private ownership, promised a future for the traditional peasant way of life which was based on the land ownership. This was the

⁸ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 191.

traditional way of advancement, the key to economic self-reliance. The first wave of collectivization in the period between 1949 and 1953 to create Soviet-style collective farms by giving up ownership “voluntarily” and discontinuing private farming took away this traditional vision from the peasantry. The first wave was followed by a second one in 1955-56 and met with intense reluctance from the peasants. Communist politicians tried to make them accept the idea of collective management by every possible means, from press propaganda to personal persuasion, economic compulsion to physical violence. The crops had to be handed over by much lower price than the market rates, and these requirements continued to rise steadily with strict supervision of fulfilment. Failure to comply was severely punished: between 1949 and 1955 more than 400,000 peasants were convicted of "jeopardizing public service." The complete collectivization of peasantry was decided by the Kádár government once more at the end of 1958, and carried out between 1959 and 1961, using psychological means, but this time, without resorting to physical violence.⁹ (requisition.jpg), (requisition_pig.jpg) (Village_poor.jpg)

Reconstruction

During World War II, 18% of the Hungarian housing stock was destroyed. The primary task was to restore transportation infrastructure, to eliminate the damage to settlements and reconstruction. The capital city suffered severe damage during the war: all the Danube bridges were destroyed, bombings, heavy fighting caused serious damage to the downtown core, railway stations, the besieged Buda castle and its surroundings, and the city center built at the turn of the century. (castle_in_ruins.jpg) This programme failed to repair all the damage in the Fifties, with the reconstruction of Buda Castle only beginning in the sixties, and the last ruined bridge replaced by a newly constructed “Elisabeth bridge” only in 1964. Industrialization was the main motivation for any new construction in the Fifties, following the reconstruction work of war damages. The preferred development of that period was creating new cities from zero, such as “Stalin City” (Sztálinváros), today Dunaújváros. The centrally planned economy intervened in the spontaneous processes, and the lack of some necessary economic investments, or the deficit of improvements often caused disturbances and shortages. The industrial development was disproportionate, the gap between towns and villages widened. Rural areas, with the exception of farm centers and cooperative villages, were not developed to encourage peasants to enter into collective farms. The Cold War also left its mark on the settlements: the border zone, defined as 30 miles-deep area on the Austrian and Yugoslavian borders was only open to military investment. (filmstrip_Stalin city.jpg) (Népstadion.jpg)

Housing

Until the mid-sixties, village housing followed traditions, with houses of 1 or 2 rooms, a kitchen, and a pantry. Most of the urban housing estates between 1945 and 1965 were annexed to the main residential districts built at the turn of the century. They usually consisted of a room or two and a kitchen with a tap and a basin and electric lighting. Bathrooms and toilets were not built during this

⁹ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 195.

period and the flats were modernized later. The individual rooms had curtains, further separating them, according to their functions, such as a children's room or parents' bedroom. Space occupancy was maximal, with an average occupancy of 4-7 people per flat, but there were sometimes 8-10 people living together, often man and women separated by rooms. The inclusion of a separate bathroom for working-class and peasant flats did not become common until the late sixties. Because of poor heating, family members took a bath once a week, and only the prevalence of central heating changed that in the following decades. "The social status indicator of the apartment is a separate room used as a living room, combined with the functions of dining room, lounge and study, while the other room functions as a bedroom."¹⁰ New workers' homes built in the fifties were mostly in 3-storey buildings, with an average floor area of 45-60 square meters with half-comfort, but the home building programs only started in the sixties. (newhouses.jpg) The meaning of an apartment and its ownership was transformed. The urban multi-apartment buildings had been nationalized and so they were not a representation of bourgeois class position anymore. These homes are not cozy, because the Stalinist people feel at home in the community: they don't stay in much so don't need comfort. The key concept was 'type flat' and 'type furniture'. (furniture.jpg) In any case, there was little money for furnishing, and in 1956, 20% of families were unable to buy furniture.¹¹ They wanted to banish the bourgeois taste. (stillphoto_bougeois.jpg) The bourgeois class and apartment had to be eliminated, this was the purpose of dividing them into shared apartments (the original apartment was split into several smaller ones and unrelated families were moved in and the deportations of the original inhabitants between 1948 and 1953. (The flats were confiscated from the owners who were forced to move to the country and banned from Budapest).

The city

In the decade following the second World War the social fabric of Budapest was fundamentally altered. Nationalisations, relocations and other repressive measures led to a complete political and economic elite change. The upper class almost disappeared, and the new political power has sought to curb the bourgeois stratum and eliminate the sense of civic identity of urban citizens. City residents became state employees, and the number of independent craftsmen and retailers fell to one quarter between 1949 and 1970 in Budapest. At the same time, the proportion of first-generation workers and women increased within the workers of the capital. The proportion of university? High school? graduates tripled between 1949 and 1970. (stillphoto_tricycle.jpg) (stillphoto_young couple.jpg) (smoking_men.jpg)

Streets are the space what the "workers" frequent, that's the reason why it was important to banish the western approach in shop windows, posters. The streets were renamed, the public statues of the past regime were removed, and serious efforts were made to break the continuity of architectural traditions wherever it was possible. Part of the total education was the struggle on the street, inside

¹⁰ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 311.

¹¹ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 313.

the apartments, in the area of standard furniture. Everything was regarded as a weapon for total persuasion, indicated in the possession of public space by redesign it to a battleground of ideological fight and persuasion. (Mayday2.jpg)

Poster Art

Posters were made in accordance with the stylistic principles of "socialist realism", adapted by Hungarian artists and mediated by the Soviet Union. Visual art was expected to be realistic based on the principles of thematic painting. Its aim was to present the new Soviet reality to the Soviet-type man, to deliver the message of communist idealism to the masses by depicting a current or historical event. Socialist realism, serving purity and intelligibility was in fact took control over all independent thought and opinion and forbade genuine art. This is a period of commissioned works, commissioned style and commissioned criticism¹². "Even the word "commissioned" is a kind of euphemism, because in these years education of people and the organization of their free time were strictly regulated by instructions, driving all artistic and political life, be they magazines, theatres, cinemas, the circus, the simplest village amateur theatre or choir!"¹³ Art was one of the most expedient means of eradicating the autonomous personality in the totalitarian state. According to Marxist aesthetics, one of the main tasks of art is to be a faithful mirror of reality: and reality was always defined by the power."¹⁴ (workers_family.jpg)

A look at the posters in Hungary and their adapted Soviet-style thematic narrative shows how the naturalistic, poorly executed representations became fully codified by 1950. Art historian Katalin Bakos calls the period before 1955 the era of "poster-like paintings and painting-like posters," as various artistic mediums, genres, and styles merged into each other.¹⁵ According to the expected, simplistic form, realist representation and didactic narration became the norm. The style of political propaganda was accompanied by a straightforward, educational, attitude, using simple and easy to comprehend language anywhere from the recruitment to the mining industry to the promotion of the political elite. The design and the codified types of commercial, cultural and political posters would be rewritten according to their new purpose. The common visual language would become politicized and homogenized, its vocabulary poor, its grammar primitive, without the ability to express nuance.¹⁶ The posters of the era were uniform with only minimal differences. "The narrow sense of small-realism, keeping distance in an obviously forced way from the 'impact-hunting elements', did result in a mere aesthetic monotony."¹⁷ The aim was precisely to remove nuance, to illustrate the total domination of the one-party system. There were, of course, exceptions that further transcended these rules, for

¹² Péter Kovács, „Lenin a háztetőn – Hivatalos művészet az ötvenes években” in *A második nyilvánosság. XX. századi magyar művészet*. Compiled by Hans Knoll, ed. by Jolsvai Júlia (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2002), 163.

¹³ Kovács, Lenin a háztetőn, 164.

¹⁴ Kovács, Lenin a háztetőn, 163.

¹⁵ Katalin Bakos, *10x10 év az utcán –A magyar plakátművészet története 1890–1900*. (Budapest: Corvina, 2007), 114.

¹⁶ Péter György, *A mindennapok tükre, avagy a korstílus akarása*, 20.

¹⁷ Bakos, *A magyar plakátművészet története*, 116.

instance the iconic logo of a long-standing company (ORION), but they were few and far between, compared to the visual campaign of the new ideology. (orionradioposter.jpg)

Only theatre and movie posters could distinguish themselves thematically and also formally, so they remained a bit more adventurous. The powers-that-be deliberately exploited the potential of the medium in the service of ideology. Worker and peasant figures or "leader" figures had become recurring elements of this poster iconography. In addition to the solemn settings and the idealized presentation of figures, political slogans had been added to recurring, schematic images and motifs. The images are characterized by symbol accumulation, didactic presentation, and a schematic representation of the most basic emotions (serenity, sadness, anger). The result of the attempts to create a typology served the formation of schematism.¹⁸ The focus was on the narrativity of the images by their topics and related texts to divert people's attention by the simplistic, demagogic text-image combinations from the measures taken by the political system, and on the other hand, the manifold forms of representations adverted the program of a new world and aimed at total re-education.

The spuriousness of this graphic genre was condemned by the profession as early as 1955, and in the Spring of 1956, it was rejected by collective action. However, it is clear that official cultural policy had special pressure on poster art, as "few genres are as dependent on the customer as posters are."¹⁹ The 1956 Revolution disposed of the emblematic monuments of Stalinism, though some of these pathetic monuments were restored after the revolution. The fifties as an artistic era, however, ended with the 1956 revolution, with the Spring Exhibition of 1957 in Múcsarnok. (iconoclasm.jpg) (iconoclasm2.jpg) completing a visual break with social realism.

Travel and entertainment

Meanwhile, in Western Europe, the world has expanded: British European Airways, a forerunner of British Airways, founded in 1946, had already carried its one millionth passenger in 1952.²⁰ In the East, until the temporary opening of the border after the 1956 Revolution, when 200,000 Hungarian refugees left the country the world closed up again. Holiday breaks and entertainment would still be inserted into private life. Leisure activities were conceived on a community basis: within the framework of choirs, sports associations, movements. (amateur_girlgoup.jpg) There were, however, places of entertainment as well, such as pubs catering to the taste of workers or beer gardens, typically combined with live music and dancing. (Beergarten.jpg) (beergarten2.jpg) Excursions, shorter domestic trips and hiking were also popular. The most typical means of transport were the bicycle and motorcycle. (amateur_holiday.jpg) The motorcycle "Pannonia" produced by the Csepel Works from 1954 became quickly very popular. Its little sister, Panni, was produced from 1957 in response to the success of the Italian Vespa, with a total of 15-20,000. Although it was produced

¹⁸ András et al., *Magyar képzőművészet a 20. században* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1999), 137.

¹⁹ Bakos, *A magyar plakátművészet története*, 116.

²⁰ Blue Skies, Red Panic

just for a short period, it became a legend just like its Western sister, Vespa with connotations of informality, freedom, and modern life attributed to it. Despite its female name, it was predominantly used by men. (amateur_smoking_busdriver.jpg) (filmstrip_csepel_motorbike.jpg) (Panni scooter.jpg)

Women

Women were responsible for bringing up children and maintaining the home in both parts of Europe. They were offered help: by modern household appliances in Western Europe, by state-provided social services in the East.

During the early Fifties there was a drastic abortion ban in effect in Hungary: abortion would be permitted only if the fetus could have been damaged or the pregnant woman's life was in danger. In the era named after the Minister of Health, Anna Ratkó, couples without children had to pay extra taxes. Between 1952 and 1955, 4077 women were convicted of violating the abortion ban.²¹ The majority, two thirds of women still gave birth at home. The abortion ban was abolished in the summer of 1956, and the childless tax was abolished after the revolution. The role and evaluation of the family changed in the second half of the 20th century. Large families were slowly replaced by the nuclear family model in cities and villages alike. The traditional perception of women's role was replaced by a "working female's ideal" one who works by day as a man and in the evening washes, sews, cooks, cleans, and raises the children. This could be assessed as an achievement for women's equality in the 1950s, with state-run, socialist institutions assisting women. "Nurseries, kindergartens, day care centers, factory canteens, household appliances, ready meals, canned food, opening of shops will take away the burden of housework ..."²² (filmstrip_kindergarten.jpg) (filmstrip_kindergarten2.jpg) (pioneer_girls.jpg)

Consumption

According to the ideology of socialism, consumption cannot be an act just for its own sake, shopping must not be festive, for it is the ideology of capitalism. The shop window is a tool for communicating ideas, a display of ideology. The product is not a commodity but a tangible proof of the struggle against capitalism. The shop window is the exhibition of the system, the display of the results of production. Of course, in reality, shop windows were almost empty as there was a serious shortage of consumer goods. There was an attempt to standardize storefronts, to break competition, with the main objective to vindicate uniformity. (sugar.jpg) (dongo_motor.jpg) (ofotert.jpg)

Consumer behaviour has been in flux, with a range of consumer goods becoming desirable or fashionable from time to time. In the second half of the fifties the mechanization of households gradually changed women's schedule. Among the most common purchases was furniture, bicycle, coal-fired household and kitchen stoves and radio for home entertainment. The spread of the

²¹ Az 1952-1953. évi népesedéspolitikai program Magyarországon. ed. István Moingl, (Case-book) (Budapest: KSH Népesedéskutató Intézete, 1992), 167.

²² Mária Pataki, *A dolgozó nő háztartása*. (Budapest: Minerva, 1976.)

washing machine, the centrifuge, the television and the refrigerator were more typical in the sixties.
(stove.jpg)

Culture Consumption

Cultural consumption habits were in constant flux as well. The total amount spent by the population on books increased 8.5 times, between 1951 and 1966. Thanks to state support, books of fiction were published in large print runs and were inexpensive. The ideal of culture differed from the previous short (1945-48) coalition era's humane and democratic attitude, but also from the ideal of national culture. Literacy rates increased, but in the service of uniformity and didactics with a dogmatic representation of socialist ideas. A People's Education Institute was established in 1951, a national network of community centers (previously built on the institution system managed by the Free Educational Network) was created and offered community libraries, cultural competitions, festive evenings and weddings. By 1950 more than 433 of these centres had been built. Their primary task, however, was direct agitation. Museums were nationalized, and a system of county museums was established in the sixties. While in 1949 there had been 2,486 public libraries in the country, by 1957 their number grew to 8,499. This growth reached its peak in the sixties.²³ Television was not yet typical of the fifties in Hungary. Although the State Television Company was founded in 1953, and the first experimental broadcasts were in 1955, regular broadcasting only began in 1957, in the Kádár-era. In the beginning it broadcasted just four days a week, averaging 34 hours weekly. The number of subscribers was 16,000 in 1958, but their number increased to more than 100,000 by 1960. Television sets however only became prevalent in Hungary in the sixties. (reading_room.jpg) (filmstrip_television_factory.jpg)

Nutrition

In the 15-20 years following the war households could be characterized by scarcity. Quantitative food shortages were reduced in the 1960s, but the scarcity of special or good quality food products remained. The habits of the petty bourgeois and middle-class changed the most, while the nutrition standards of working-class families became similar to the standards of pre-war bourgeois strata. The main reason of the change in the standards was women's increasing employment. Household time had been reduced, labour and time-consuming household chores decreased. Social and regional disparities in food consumption have diminished, urban and rural food consumption habits converged. In the decades following World War II, workplace cafeterias continued to spread. All large plants had a kitchen, serving lunch for their workers. By the end of 1950s the Operations Management Company ran 8 large-scale kitchens in Budapest serving a daily 54,000 people. At the same time, the development of commercial catering was neglected while the number of the so-called peoples' cafeterias increased "to provide broad and inexpensive catering for workers."²⁴ (pioneers_lunch.jpg)

²³ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 338.

²⁴ Valuch, Magyarország társadalomtörténete, 322.

Fashion

Because shop windows were not supposed to represent the means of inducing desire, fashion could not reflect to "pleasure and sexuality, richness and exclusivity." Fashion tried to keep pace with European trends until 1948, but by 1950 "fashion as an end in itself" was condemned as a petty bourgeois habit, along with the practice of wearing hats and ties, or elaborate women's clothes, décolletage, lipstick and nail polish. "Working women" were no longer following the trends introduced by fashion shows, the uniqueness and beauty of clothes had diminished and disappeared. An era of uniformed clothing was announced in the name of puritanical proletarian morality, and even the tie was banished as a surplus, while fashion magazines featured ready-made, mass-produced clothing. The ideal to be followed was the image of the worker and the working woman. Fashion shows often featured young working women instead of models. The images and models were emphatically asexual, in line with the Stalinist approach to female emancipation. Consumer and sexual desires were suppressed, banishing anything that did not directly serve "work". (strong_woman.jpg) (checkered_blouse.jpg) (girlincafe.jpg) Typical pieces were the green, heavy wollen coat and a barret for men, simple print dress and checkered flannel blouse for women. Meanwhile, the state-owned clothing design company replaced the fashion showrooms. The so-called doggie-fashion tried to resolve unanimity with tube-trousers, colored shirt, patterned tie, thick-soled shoes, tight skirt, but it was condemned by state propaganda supposedly protecting labour morality. After 1953, the restrictions of women's fashion eased with the return of the accessories banned in the early fifties. The symbols and standards of the West resurfaced in publicity, life and comfort were allowed to be enjoyed again. The ideological boundaries of fashion were eased after 1956 again, puritanism as a mandatory ideal went out of fashion. After the revolution catching up with the West gradually became a priority. The role of symbols became formal, the oppressive centralized propaganda and education were increasingly replaced by a degree of tolerance. To be committed to femininity and individuality was no longer a political issue. But the domestic industry of consumer goods could not meet demands, so high-quality, fashionable clothes, nylon stockings, nylon blouse, hooded jacket came from the West as smuggled goods. (amateur_girl.jpg) (stillphoto_Ruttkai.jpg) (stillphoto_polkadots.jpg)

Villages returned to self-sufficiency after the war. Peasants wore the local traditional costume, expressing the wearer's age, financial status, denominational affiliation and locality. The anti-peasant policy of the fifties played a part in the rejection of traditional clothes. Due to its defence peasantry left his status marking attire. The production of homemade attire was reduced, for the necessary materials were no longer commercially available. In the second half of the fifties, first the youngsters dressed in urban clothing and they were followed by the older generations soon. The clothing of the villagers integrated into the city's wear from the late fifties onwards, but current fashion was followed in the countryside only with years of delay. Leaving the traditional costume would not be completed until the sixties, with the main reasons for that women's mass employment and the change in working conditions.

Summary

The “fifties” as a period of Hungarian history has strong negative political connotations: this is the infamous period of the Hungarian mutation of the Stalinist-regime, a period of dictatorship, which was swept away by the revolution in 1956. This system was not an isolated phenomenon: being on the periphery of the Soviet Union, with its permanent military presence, Hungary was a part of the Eastern block, behind the “iron curtain” along with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and East Germany. After the suppression of the revolution, a new form of Soviet-type regime was established and would end only in 1989, through the political process of “regime change,” when dictatorship was changed into democracy.

The Stalinist regime in Hungary was established gradually between 1948 and 1950, so politically the beginning of the Fifties is ahead of the calendar. Although the political conditions were different, post-war Hungary faced the same problems as all European countries: reconstruction and modernization was an inevitable necessity. Through forced industrialization the Soviet-type regime tried to solve economic development with centrally planned economy. The model of the large family disintegrated, social mobilization took great strides, with the proportion of first-generation workers and intellectuals increased in society. The functioning of the family changed as a result of urbanization and the construction of new model dwellings. Women went to work, the new ideal was the image of the “working women” in sharp contrast to the “petty bourgeois fashion doll,” with two workplaces: the factory by day, the family in the evenings, but the burdens of raising children attempted to be eased by state social institutions, such as nursery school and day cares. Household appliances were far from typical in this decade. Fashion had to serve the working class, and only readymade cloths, produced in state-owned factories were available in department stores. Everyday life was totally subordinated to communist ideology, the streets, even shop windows were meant as propaganda tools, a weapon to fight capitalism, to promote the superiority of the socialist regime. Housing conditions improved, pre-war slums were raised, building programs of small apartments became typical with their uniform furnishings. City residents became state employees as a result of the nationalization of privately owned businesses. Communal forms of spending spare time and holiday were encouraged in accordance to the Stalinist ideology. A range of associations and sport teams offered various sport activities in the workplaces or within the framework of communist youth organisations. Sport was popular to watch and to practice as well and was also a means of social mobilisation. Hungarian football had its prime, with its successes providing pleasure, relief and escape from day-to-day suppression and deprivations. Eating habits and the ways of spending leisure time changed, and like in other areas, with community forms coming to the forefront. Traditional entertainment venues, like pubs and cinemas were tailored to the needs of the working class, capable to entertain the masses. Cultural consumption was strongly supported by the state: libraries and cultural institutions were made accessible, books were available at a low price, people were encouraged to read in their spare time. Television broadcast caught on with a delay in Hungary, in this decade families mostly listened to the radio in the evening.

The socio-cultural and propaganda posters of the fifties preserve the traces of enforced social standardizing attempts and testify to the intention of total control and repression in all areas of everyday life. Plenty of surviving propaganda posters and photographs provide evidence of this attempt: they portray invariably cheerful and enthusiastic workers, promoting the construction programs, the “five-year plans”. The representation of agriculture is dominated by the propaganda posters of Soviet-style collective farming, but mechanization and modernization are also featured on them - although this content is subordinated to the propaganda purposes, in the to the style typical of the era, socialist-realism, such as the infamous example of the trucker girl recruiting poster, or the appeals for mandatory submission of produce. Fine art fell prey to the attempt to schematization for a while. This relatively short period of socialist realism was terminated by the ‘56 revolution, and is a potent warning that the interference of violent power and subordination to ideology can only produce schematic, demagogic works of art. The visual means and composition features of these posters and pictures are sharply distinguished from the works of earlier and also the subsequent eras.

(sugar.jpg) (traktorist girls.jpg)

Filmstrips were very popular, featuring stories and fairy tales families watched, read and enjoyed at home while education filmstrips helped in schools, and slide strips were popular means of propaganda at the workplaces. These slides preserved the "acquisitions" of the system: furniture exhibitions, technical and medical developments, youth meetings, health programs, paper and metal waste collection campaigns, traffic innovations, constructions of railways and housing estates, or compilations edited every year to celebrate “women's day”.

(filmstrip_radio factory.jpg) (filmstrip_supermarket.jpg) (filmstrip_swim.jpg)

Still photos taken during the shootings of feature films preserve the actual urban locations of contemporary nightclubs, urban squares, leisure activities, sports competitions, and realistic scenery. They are staged, but the scenery betrays not only the imagination of the director, but also the official expectations to depict political enemies, such as petty bourgeois, class-aliens, aristocrats, hooligans, and also the positive protagonists: characters of the working class. No less than 103 feature films were completed in this decade, from classical adaptations to films directly for propaganda purposes in range of genres: comedies, social dramas, historical films, operettas. The clothing and appearance of these slightly exaggerated and provocative characters is always a visual representation of a social character. Stereotypes of the class alien, the workman, the swank, the peasant's appearance and everyday habits can be seen in the movies and in the rest of the photographs. Travelling abroad was not possible, domestic tourism was popular, motorcycles, bicycles, and of course public transport were the typical means of transport in this decade. The experience of these domestic journeys gave opportunity for a little freedom, so motorcycling plays an important role in a number of feature films.

(stillphoto_cabrio_stalincity.jpg)

(stillphoto_bourgeois.jpg)

(stillphoto_holiday.jpg)

(stillphoto_barsinger.jpg)

Amateur and family photos show how people worked, what they did for fun, lived happily in spite of everything, took care of their families - preserving a little freedom in their private sphere. These images show the answers given to the post-war problems of economic recovery, reconstruction, housing shortages and problems, women's employment and their increased freedom from domestic chores, the re-organization of cultural life. The majority of family photographs were made on excursions. Images of the Fifties are like time capsules that give access and insight into the mood of a very difficult period.

(children.jpg) (amateur_holiday.jpg) (amateur_motorbike_girls.jpg) (sunglasses.jpg) (car_in_mud.jpg)

Kaleidoscope. Blue Skyes, Red Panic. 2020

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