

REPRESENTATIONS OF SEXUALITY IN HUNGARIAN POPULAR CULTURE OF THE 1980s

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Abstract

The 20th century has witnessed the emergence of debates on popular culture. On the one hand there is the Marxist view represented by the members of the Frankfurt School, while the most persuasive arguments on the other side were articulated by John Fiske. Interestingly, neither of these scholars has considered the implications of popular culture theory for gender analysis or for a state-socialist context. This thesis has two parts. The first one is a theoretical examination of the debate on popular culture as it emerged from the works of Theodor Adorno and John Fiske. The author assesses the influence of feminist research on the development of the discipline of cultural studies, as well as the possible (ir)relevance of the concepts for the state-socialist context of Hungarian cultural production. The second part is a case study in which the author investigates the complexity of cultural politics specifically related to the regulation of female sexuality. I argue that in order to overcome the one-sided picture of state-socialist cultural contexts popular culture under state-socialist regimes needs to be included as a legitimate source of research on equal footing with the almost exclusively high-culture based studies hitherto undertaken.

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Introduction

The study of popular culture is intimately tied to the emergence of the postmodern and within it the linguistic turn. Questioning the existence of meta-narratives and any clear hierarchies but celebrating multiplicity, contradiction, ambiguity and interreferentiality instead, provided the moment for the abandonment of the distinction between high culture and popular culture. Since the 1960s the discipline of cultural studies has been established in the academic institutions of the West. Similarly to postmodern theory it has only recently started to permeate some of the educational institutions of other cultural contexts, among which the universities of Central-Eastern Europe. This thesis welcomes and endeavors to promote the acceptance of the study of popular culture in the ex-Soviet bloc.

According to Carl B. Holmberg there are six reasons to study popular “noncanonical” culture. (Holmberg, 1998:8-11) First, it is said to confer a more accurate picture of people’s daily lives and the discourses that determine it. The case study presented in the second part of this thesis is meant to complement the limited image of sexuality under state-socialism that the non-inclusion of popular cultural sources has generated.

Second, popular culture should be studied because learning does not stop at the coverage of mandatory canonical material. In what follows I argue that certain ‘common-sense’ aspects of Hungarianness can only be explained through the “propagandistic” nature of popular culture.

Third, the fact that what is celebrated today as the best of high culture once belonged to the popular leads us to conclude that the celebration of a selected few is just an exclusionary elitist move serving the interests of the privileged. The lack of famous female artists eloquently underscores this point. Central-Eastern Europe has just started to “challenge the structuralist mode of thought that is still prevalent in comparative writing on gender and sexuality.”

(Sokolová, 2004:252) This is the tradition which I set out to challenge in this thesis, especially the one related to sexuality under state-socialism.

The fourth reason introduced by Holmberg is related to the advantages that come together with diverse understandings of one's own culture and other cultures. Dina Iordanova is explicitly stating that the limited focus on political dissent in the evaluation by the West of the Soviet-bloc's cinematographic production has resulted in a one-sided view of the complex system of cultural regulation in these countries.

The fifth advantage refers to the benefits of being literate in as many media as possible in order to be capable of noticing maneuvers and exploitative situations. This argument is particularly relevant for feminism, with a long tradition on media studies. Researching popular culture under state socialism can possibly shed light on the daily struggles of ordinary women.

Finally, openness to the complexities of popular culture will eventually lead to the enrichment of one's life by encouraging innovation. I hope that my contribution to the discussion about popular culture will be received as original as it has been a quite instructional experience for me.

Part One

Chapter 1. Popular Culture and its Discontents

“Cultural entities typical of the style of the culture industry are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through.”
Theodor Adorno¹

“Everyday life is constituted by the practices of popular culture, and is characterized by the creativity of the weak in using the resources provided by a disempowering system while refusing finally to submit to that power.”
John Fiske²

The study of popular culture has become increasingly widespread especially with the institutionalization of cultural studies in certain academic contexts. Its legitimation as an issue worthy of serious consideration is intimately connected to the emergence of the so-called ‘postmodern’ facilitated by the linguistic turn³ as well as to the context of late-capitalist mass

¹ Adorno, T. (1975). “Culture Industry Reconsidered.” *New German Critique*, 6, 13 (original emphasis)

² Fiske, J. (2004). “Commodities and Culture.” In *Understanding Popular Culture*, London and New York: Routledge. Pg. 47

³ The linguistic turn is a concept that designates an important shift in how language is conceptualized. Before the linguistic turn language was looked upon as a means, a tool for conveying external reality. However the

production. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972, Huyssen 1986, Storey, 2003) In this introductory chapter I will present both the arguments that dismiss and the ones that value popular culture in order to show the complex discursive field that the analysis of popular cultural products is predicated upon. Additionally, I will elaborate on the specificities of feminist scholarship in the area of cultural studies for the purpose of showing the decisive impact that research in gender and sexuality had upon the development of the field. Finally, I will examine the relevance of the most important concepts developed in popular culture literature for the context of a different political regime, that of state-socialist Hungary. I engage with the literature on the study of popular culture because the second part of this thesis is made up by the analysis of three distinct clusters of printed popular Hungarian media in the 1980s. This chapter is meant to clarify my theoretical positions as well as the meanings of the concepts that I use.

1.1. Thinking about culture

Seyla Benhabib in her chapter entitled “On the Use and Abuse of Culture” traces the development of the concept of culture from its Herderian version to the more contemporary one based on identity. The former is equated with a process of intellectual-spiritual formation which still retains some of the meanings of the Latin original – to tend to and care for – and it is contrasted with civilization which “refers to material values and practices that are shared with other peoples and that do not reflect individuality.” (Benhabib, 2002:2) Later a more “egalitarian view of culture” (idem) emerged which employs the two concepts – civilization and culture – as synonyms. Her main argument is to criticize the stance she calls “the reductionist sociology of

poststructuralist tradition, highlighted by the name of Jean-Francois Lyotard, reconfigured language as the only location we have that translates the world in a number of texts. To put it differently, our experience of the world is not immediate but is structured/mediated through language. See for example Toews, John E. (1987), "Intellectual

culture” (Benhabib, 2002:4) which assumes that cultures can be clearly delineated, that they belong to a community, which can be thoroughly described and that internal heterogeneity is not problematic for politics or policy. (idem) She argues further that “[a]ny view of culture as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purposes of understanding and control.” (Benhabib, 2002:5) Instead, the author proposes a more dynamic view of culture that means the “constant creations, re-creations and negotiations of the imaginary boundaries between ‘we’ and the ‘other(s).’” (Benhabib, 2002:8)

Seyla Benhabib’s articulation of culture has a particular relevance for thinking about popular culture. Popular culture research is born out of the need to study the ‘other’ of high culture, be it the working-class, women, ethnic or sexual minorities or any other definable group of people. But in the course of the development of this disciplinary field scholars have come to the conclusion that “[c]ultural forces and social categories do not always match [...]. Popular readings are always contradictory; they must encompass both that which is to be resisted and the immediate resistances to it. This is why popular culture is such an elusive concept: it cannot be firmly located in its texts or in its readers.” (Fiske, 2004:45) The same idea might account for Holmberg’s overuse of the terms multiplicity and diversity meant to legitimate his interest in popular culture research. (Holmberg, 1998)

1.2. From mass culture to popular culture

In any theoretical discussion of popular culture sooner or later one will encounter references to the works of Theodor Adorno and John Fiske who are seen as representatives of the oppositional poles of thinking about this issue. Adorno is credited with developing one of the most negative, Marxist-inspired takes on mass culture as he calls it, while Fiske is the critical voice of the alternative who proposes the concept of popular culture and to see the possibility of resistance in every instance of cultural 'consumption'.

Fiske's definition of popular culture is drawing on de Certeau as he says: "Popular culture is the art of making do with what the system provides." (Fiske, 2004:25) Supported by this definition he describes a series of practices which can be considered resistant, from the tearing of one's jeans to the guerrilla action of unemployed youth in the mall.

According to Andreas Huyssen, Adorno's theory on the culture industry is problematic in that the model mobilizes the dichotomy of modernism (high culture) over mass culture. Positing mass culture as commodity and, more importantly, as the other of modernism prevents Adorno from a more detailed analysis of the modes of reception of popular culture, which could probably have engendered a less judgmental appreciation of the latter.

In Huyssen's view the major reasons for this shortcoming can be summarized in the following main points. (Huyssen, 1986:21-25) First, Adorno develops Marx's theory on the relationship between the base and superstructure by pointing to new developments in the capitalist order. He argues that it is more and more problematic to separate the economic from the cultural as base from superstructure because the economic has overtaken the cultural as well. In Adorno's view this is the reason for the restructuration of the cultural field, resulting in the

emergence of cultural products functioning as commodities, a process greatly influenced by the technological progress of mass production. For Adorno “[a]ll culture is standardized, organized and administered for the sole purpose of serving as an instrument of social control.” (Huyssen, 1986:21)

At this point it is important to see that what Benhabib holds up as the symptom of “the reductionist sociology of culture” is replicated in Adorno’s view of the culture industry. Consequently, we need to conclude that the philosopher takes up the position of the outsider or “the social observer [...] [who] is the one who imposes [...] unity and coherence on cultures as observed entities.” (Benhabib, 2002:5)

In this dystopian theory mass cultural products are seen as instrumental, serving to reproduce the dominant ideology of capitalism. At the same time it is quite a static model in which the meaning of the text is just as fixed as that of the readers’ interpretation because it is all conceptualized under the control of the ruling classes. Here Adorno’s argument in fact subscribes to the message-sending-and-reception ‘container’ model of communication, perpetuating its drawbacks: univocality, linearity and an unproblematic coding and decoding processes all presupposing a non-problematic extension of the author’s mind to the meaning ‘contained’ within the self-sufficient linguistic boundaries of the text awaiting the reader to decode it. This position on the functionality of language is representative of the period before the linguistic turn.

The irony of Adorno’s position is that the model of communication is meant to describe the process in the case of the commodified cultural products only. This exposes one significant ideological aspect of the container model of communication. It reveals that Adorno’s model presupposes a power inequality inherent in this model of communication which denies the ‘other’ side, the consumer (the oppressed) any autonomy of responding.

Adorno is said to see the emergence of modernist culture as a response to mass culture. He acknowledges that “[b]oth wear the scars of capitalism, both contain elements of change. Both are torn halves of freedom, to which however they do not add up.” (Adorno, cited in Huyssen, 1986:24) However this does not mean that modern art is the solution to the problem, but it’s symptomatic of the crisis. Positing mass culture as the dangerous ‘other’ of modernist high culture Adorno’s model subscribes to the masculine way of setting up standards and ‘delineating’ accordingly with the intention to control.

If we consider the historical context of Adorno’s cultural criticism some of his motivations can be better comprehended. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was written in the 1930s and 40s in the heyday of fascist propaganda. Much of his denunciation can be interpreted as directed against this type of mass culture and as a simultaneous critique of both the capitalist mode of production and the authoritarian regime. On the other hand one of the most substantial contributions of his theory was the demystifying of the culture industry as ‘mere entertainment’. Adorno argues convincingly that “entertainment is betrayal.” (Adorno, cited in Benhabib, 2002:3)

John Fiske’s book entitled *Understanding Popular Culture* directly criticizes and rejects Adorno’s theory on popular culture. One of the first grounds of his criticism is that in Fiske’s view “[p]opular culture is not consumption, it is culture – the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities.” (Fiske, 2004:23) With this argument Fiske highlighted the greatest drawback of Adorno’s cultural criticism. Moreover, Fiske argues that the concept of mass culture itself is a contradiction in terms and this is the main reason why the “mass culture theorists” – he calls them – predictions

did not come true. In his view the ‘masses’ do not exist and his concept of ‘the people’ is meant to overcome this unfortunate conflation of all subordinated groups into ‘the masses’. Thus they cannot have a culture because they are too diverse and fluid.

His model of interaction works both ways and communication is realized through a process of constant negotiation between the ‘power bloc’ and ‘the people’.

One of the main concepts Fiske works with is what he calls ‘the people’. By labeling audiences ‘the people’ he hopes to avoid a move of delineation which would cast communities in a fixed structural position. Instead, he proposes the following definition:

By “the people,” then, I mean this shifting set of social allegiances, which are described better in terms of people’s felt collectivity than in terms of external sociological factors such as class, gender, age, race, region, or what have you. Such allegiances may coincide with class and other social categories, but they don’t necessarily: they can often cut across these categories, or often ignore them. (Fiske, 2004:24)

The dynamism he subscribes to replaces audiences with nomadic subjectivities, constantly caught in more or less dynamic power structures which compel him to declare that “[p]opular culture has to be above all else, *relevant* to the immediate social situation of the people.” (Fiske, 2004:25 emphasis in original) It is important to note here that Fiske clearly belongs to another tradition than Adorno. The two seem to be the embodiment of the ideal type of the intellectual before and after the linguistic turn.

As a result of this flexibility, the argument that Adorno could not consider without running the risk of undermining the high-culture/mass culture divide is readily available for Fiske to articulate. He wants to know that if all popular culture is enforced from above then how do critics account for failed items, i.e. products that never sell, movies that cannot even recover their production costs. (Fiske, 2004:31) He claims that all popular culture texts have to fulfill two

conditions. On the one hand they have to articulate the dominant ideology while still making sure that possibilities for resistant readings remain open. These presuppose that texts are constructed in a way that allows for multiple interpretations. The more it can allow the more successful it will be because, accordingly, it will cater to the interests of more than one group. In Fiske's opinion these two conditions ensure the success of any item of popular culture.

Benhabib argues that the 'other' is an integral part of one's identity. The question then for the analysis of popular culture is to explore how the available discursive practices are going to trace this boundary and, as a result of its negotiation, which group is going to end up on the empowered/disempowered side.

The move to flexibility does not mean that Fiske dismisses the need for control in capitalism. In fact what a market economy desires is "controlled diversity" (Fiske, 2004:29). This means that in order for different products to be successfully marketed the producer has to control the market and in this sense produce its demands. This control is achieved in the form of knowledge, categorization and implicit homogenization and exclusion. What Fiske questions then is not the strategy of commodification but its effectiveness. The fact that advertising is a never ending activity, to be repeated over and over again, entails that its effectiveness comes to be a sign of its limits. After all "[c]onsumption is the only way of obtaining the resources for life, whether these resources be material-functional [...] or semiotic-cultural." (Fiske, 2004:34)

Although I like Fiske's model for its potential openness, I found a couple of problematic areas in his cultural analysis. First, if one is supposed to 'make do' with what one is offered, then one does not have infinite possibilities at any given moment but meanings are limited by the available tools of the discursive field within which the text/reader interaction is embedded. Liesbet van Zoonen argues that

[w]hile the concept of polysemy thus assumes audiences to be producers of meaning as well – as opposed to being confronted with meaning only, as in a transmission model – the range of meanings a text offers is not infinite, despite its essential ambiguity. [...] Thus most texts do offer a ‘preferred reading of meaning’ which, given the economic and ideological location of most media, will tend to reconstruct dominant values. (van Zoonen, 1994: 42)

I am not questioning the possibility of subversion, but what I am interested in is how the discursive limits are set and if these limits can be rearticulated to accommodate a multiplicity of interpretations in a non-complicit manner.

Second, if the resistant reading “exists only in the present and creates a speaking space that exists only as long as the speech act” (Fiske, 2004:37) then is there a potential for political action? What if the people are not satisfied with the discursive tools they are offered? Is there any revolutionary potential in their subversive reading if it is momentary only? And if there isn’t any why would scholarship want to celebrate ‘agency’ if it is limited to joking about one’s misfortune? These questions are especially pressing when addressing the state-socialist context. (More about that in the last section below.)

Third, the author defines the people who participate in the negotiation of the popular cultural products’ meaning as a “shifting set of alliances” which are continuously changing. Does this changing involve taking turns in the position of the powerful? Or is it just limited to exerting your power on somebody less powerful than you (like your wife, child, the beggar on the street etc.)? Actually, the claim to the free formation of alliances is a sign of non-prefigured social mobility, which in turn is quite often an indicator of affluence. Probably, if Fiske wasn’t so keen on avoiding the definition of ‘the people’ he would have been forced to include a more thorough consideration of social inequalities.

Finally, when Fiske talks about the *art* of ‘making do’ with what you have, he repeatedly mentions adaptation as being the tactic of the weak in contrast with compulsion which is the strategy of the powerful. What he misses here (but comes very close to) is the notion of the self-disciplined individual in Foucault’s writing⁴. The significant aspect of this concept is that Foucault saw this ‘adaptation’ or ‘making do’ as an internalized way of discipline that every subject was enacting upon him/herself. In Foucault’s reading this was a consequence of the new mode of governmentality which, contrary to Fiske’s argument, doesn’t function by compulsion, but in a much more sophisticated way. For example, by supporting the publishing of extensive theories on how ‘the people’ come to empowered and free despite the logic of commodification in popular culture.

Similarly, labeling this activity of resistance as *art* implicates it as something freely chosen as if exclusively defined in terms of pleasure: “These antagonisms, these clashes of social interest [...] are motivated primarily by pleasure: the pleasure of producing one’s own meanings of social experience and the pleasure of avoiding the social discipline of the power-bloc.” (Fiske, 2004:47) But this choice, precisely because it is simply posited along the dichotomy of within or on the outside of social interests, is limited to the duality of a dominant reading in which one is a cultural dupe, or the resistant reading in which one at least can laugh at the norm. Therefore in the end, Fiske’s unproblematic rendering of resistance outside social struggle can be interpreted as a normalizing move that is caught naturalizing power differences.

In conclusion let me sum up the major arguments of this section. Adorno and Fiske are clearly the representatives of two different intellectual traditions. Adorno is a Marxist philosopher whose main goal is to provide a profound critique of the capitalist mode of mass

⁴ Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.

production of culture. His political engagement is to make the masses aware of the dangers inherent in the culture industry and teach them to resist by way of returning to high culture. Adorno is the embodiment of the modern intellectual, elitist and patriarchal, drawing a clear line between high culture and mass culture. On the other hand there is John Fiske, the postmodern intellectual, who in a different time period is offered the discursive means to articulate a much more dynamic and polysemic view of popular culture but one that is (mistakenly) believed to be available to the intellectual global citizen. In his system every consumer is endowed with agency because popular culture is not the product of an industry but a product of multiple interactions between the producers and the audience. Unfortunately, the will not to draw exclusionary lines leads him to an unproblematic celebration of the possibility of resistance while foreclosing the chance of social critique, precluding and thereby safeguarding any discussion of power differentiation within the so-called popular cultural field itself and that of its no matter how fuzzy differentiation from 'high culture'.

The politics of naming in the works of these theorists is significant. Mass culture, the term used by Adorno refers to the disavowal of its logic by the author. While popular culture in Fiske's use is a term invested with a more positive reading of mass production and function of cultural texts but one that does not give up the author's privilege of freely crossing not only the boundaries within the multiple spaces of popular culture (the differentiation between normative and subversive readings) but also over to that of 'high culture' whose privilege comes to consist in the assumption of an 'ordinary' existence, one that goes without problematizing. (Barát, 2007)

In the rest of my thesis I will use the term popular culture because I would like to retain the connotations that this term carries: multiplicity of meaning, multiple interpretations, and the possibility of normative as well as subversive reading. Having said that, in the next section

though I will have to revisit the concept from the perspective of gender and reclaim its historic contingency that Fiske seems to resist.

1.3. Woman in/as popular culture

Stuart Hall in the chapter entitled “Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies” establishes a traditional alliance between cultural studies, Marxism and feminism. However, the Marxism that he subscribes to is qualitatively different from the Marxist reading of mass culture by Adorno. He has to reject and rethink the central arguments of Adorno’s thesis: the hegemonizing relationship between economic base and superstructure, including culture, the ensuing, economic reductionism and especially, false consciousness of those consuming mass culture. In other words, for him the engagement with Marxist theory does not entail just a “walk[] right around the entire circumference of European thought, in order not to be, in any simple capitulation to the zeitgeist, marxists.” (Hall, 1996:266)

The other body of thought that proved to be of great influence upon the development of cultural studies was feminism. Hall sees both of these interventions as engaging with a problem. He does not claim to have integrated feminist knowledge unproblematically, instead he declares that feminism arrived “[a]s a thief in the night, it broke in; interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies.” (Hall, 1996:269) As a result, the scholars at the Centre⁵ were confronted with problems they thought they did not have which eventually lead to a restructuring of the field. According to Hall, the most important feminist insights were the feminist notion of ‘the personal is political’, a “radical expansion of the notion of power”, new focus on issues of gender and sexuality, a reconfiguration of the thinking around

⁵ The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham

the subject and subjectivity and a fertile contamination of social theory and psychoanalysis. (Hall, 1996:269)

In response to Hall's position on the entrance of feminism into cultural studies, Charlotte Brundson offers a more critical account of the process. She recalls the patriarchal climate at the CCCS where the respectable research topics were limited to "the public, the state and the male working class – the boyzone." (Brundson, 1996:276) And that no woman has ever obtained a PhD there. She contests particularly Hall's metaphor of the thief who broke in when giving an account of the emergence of feminism. According to Brundson this phrase is loaded with connotations of anxious hostility. On the one hand it signals a feminist movement fraught with problems and on the other hand it indicates disappointment among its sympathizers. In Brundson's subversive reading, this metaphor signals the extreme difficulty of establishing and articulating gender research in a field that ironically constantly "constructs itself as always-already politically chic " because arguably non-conformist. (Brundson, 1996:280)

With the successful institutionalization of the gender perspective new problems arose concerning the specificities of conducting gender research. Feminists came to be confronted with the differences among them as well as with the limits of what is considered to be a feminist topic. For example, Valerie Walkerdine advocates a return to class analysis in which the recognition of "the end of grand metanarratives of "The Working Class" is not to discard oppression." (Walkerdine, 1995:330) She wants to couple gender analysis with that of class oppression for the purpose of achieving a higher level of complexity and one that can expose 'popular culture' as the effect of the imaginary of a middle-class intellectual masculinity.

Andreas Huyssen presents an intriguing argument in the chapter "Mass Culture as Woman." He agrees with Hall in finding the hidden agenda of the mass culture debate in the

othering of 'the masses' in comparison with the cultural consumption practices of the bourgeois middle classes. Furthermore, argues Huyssen, these masses are not only the proletariat but with the emerging women's movement they are also women. One reason for this conflation is that women's activism originated in about the same historical period as that of class-antagonism between the capitalists and the proletariat. The danger thus doubled, because in addition to the economic superiority of the bourgeoisie challenged by the working class its gender order was questioned by feminists. This observation leads him to conclude that mass culture is not only imagined as being addressed to a female audience but exhibits in itself feminine characteristics. This view builds on the binary of high culture/popular culture mapped on the complementary dyad of man/woman: "[i]t is indeed striking to observe how the political, psychological and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities." (Huyssen, 1986:47) In this light the division between high art and popular culture translates into the enforcement of the boundary between masculine and feminine. Thus, "[t]he postmodern crisis of high modernism and its classical accounts has to be seen as a crisis both of capitalist modernization itself and of the deeply patriarchal structures that support it." (Huyssen, 1986:58)

Contrary to the excessively optimistic stance of Huyssen, who declares that the equation of anything devalued with femininity is a thing of the past, there is Brundson's account of the struggle for the acknowledgement of misogyny within the analytical practices of the Birmingham school of cultural studies, or Fiske's recent conceptualization of cultural studies that is eventually blind to gender or sexuality. Fiske sets up popular culture as 'against the power-bloc' and in the same move casts women as an alternative to the working-class. Although he takes lengthy

precautions to avoid conflating the two groups he still manages to retain some aspects of the popular-culture-equals-women stance. “Women’s tastes and proletarian tastes are similar not because women are proletarian or because the proletariat is feminine, but because both are disempowered classes and thus can easily align themselves with the practices of popular culture, for the people are formed by social allegiances among the subordinate.” (Fiske, 2004:47) In a way we are back to the argument that popular culture is for women. I am sure this can be contested. I will show in the second part of my thesis not only that there are popular cultural items that specifically target men but also that the view that only subordinate classes should enjoy popular cultural products is untenable. After all, the flexibility that Fiske valorizes should also entail that the so-called popular culture itself is not a homogenous block and this entails a reconfiguration of the domain in terms of more and less prestigious forms of cultural consumption: the boundaries themselves are subject to change when it comes to forming alliances. What Fiske’s ideologically motivated gaze overlooks is precisely the double conditioning in this discourse that is exposed by Valerie Walkerdine:

It has long been women who have had an injunction to speak about the personal, to tell their secrets, just as it has always been the working class who have been asked to tell of their lives, to explain their pathology, while the fact that it takes two classes to tango appears to have escaped the notice of those who constantly ask us to tell it like it is. (Walkerdine, 1995:330)

I approached the relationship of women and popular culture from two perspectives. On the one hand I stressed the emergence of feminist scholarship as a productive influence on the development of cultural studies; on the other hand I tackled the issue of the feminization of popular culture. The fact that popular culture was and is still tied up in mainstream social imagination with women has important implications for feminist research. Limiting data to

expressions of high-culture can work as a male bias in itself, while less ‘serious’ products of popular culture could be the best locus for challenging this divide and finding alternative interpretations. The researcher can endeavor to point out precisely the contradictions that are present in popular culture, by showing that its domain cannot be gendered in one particular way because the discourses offered by them are often polysemic and their meaning is established in the course of a socially shaped interaction with the reader.

1.4. Popular culture and state-socialism

In this last section I would like to turn to popular culture under state-socialism, an underresearched field in feminist scholarship. I will focus on Hungary in order to see how the concepts developed in the course of the mass-culture debate can or cannot be applied to the context of another political and economic ideology. My goal is on the one hand to see if a shift in sources will enrich actual scholarship on state-socialist regimes and on the other hand to assess how the particularities of Central-Eastern European cultural production alter some of the conceptualizations of popular culture set up in the Euro-American context.

In case of Hungary, György Aczél, the brain behind the basic principle of cultural policy called the politics of the three Ts, who was influential for almost half of the century (more about him in the second part), decries the insurmountable gap between high-culture and popular culture and views it as an artificial distinction that is symptomatic of bourgeois values. (Tordai, 2005:150) He advocates that the artists should strive to address the masses through their art and not just the intellectual elite. This position brings him close to that of Adorno, which condemns bourgeois mass-culture as propaganda. But at the same time it is also close to the theorists of the Russian avant-garde believing that the gap has to be bridged in order to include the masses.

According to Tordai, in 1972 the necessity of a socialist popular culture was articulated for the first time at the party level. But the success or the failures of this project is never mentioned in the documents. Tordai's main argument is that the incapacity to formulate a coherent 'ideologically correct' popular culture for the socialist individual was one of the significant vulnerabilities of the system and eventually led to its demise.

Tordai also addresses the audience of this popular culture and argues that the socialist state "has been relying on those groups which traditionally and generally constitute the consumers of popular culture, thus it should have re-educated its own constituency in order to fulfill its cultural mission." (Tordai, 2005:151) But designating the proletariat as the primary consumer of popular culture, he also overlooks the fact that popular culture is enjoyed across all levels of the social hierarchy. I argue that this blindness is twofold and it is telling that Tordai underscores only the 'negative' threatening dimension of this ambiguous situation.

He only argues that the debate on high-culture/popular-culture in Hungary during the Kádár regime translates into the fear of the 'uneducated,' ideologically vulnerable and consequently, dangerous masses. What he does not address though is that the arguable difference of the masses designated as the 'other' in fact consists not only in their concerting as passive dupes of popular culture, but also in the hidden agenda of the intellectual elites to secure their privilege of "freedom" to enjoy popular culture as the effect of their taken for granted 'elite' knowledge of 'high culture' that will always make them capable of resistance to the cultural policies of the state.

Tordai draws on Dwight MacDonald's theory to compare the status of popular culture in the capitalist and the socialist contexts. "In both regimes popular culture is instrumental to manipulation, but while in the West they promote economic interests, in the East they are meant

to support the political regime.” (MacDonald cited in Tordai, 2005:144) This line of argumentation leads the Hungarian author to an interesting conclusion:

There is no doubt that in state-socialist Hungary there was a flourishing popular culture – contrary to the wishes of the authority. How this popular culture looked like we cannot say, but basically it was similar to other more or less developed Western, especially European countries – the differences resulting from the particular social, economic and political contexts enforced by the effect of historical heritage. (Tordai, 2005:153)

So, if popular culture according to Stuart Hall and Fiske is identifiable “by its oppositionality to “the power-bloc” (Fiske, 2004:30) and there was a thriving popular culture in former state-socialist countries, then why does Dina Iordanova in her analysis of Eastern cinema have to argue that Western audiences “were often left with the impression that the cinematic output of the region consisted either of cerebral or highly politicized (and usually censored) works?” (Iordanova, 2003: 27) Moreover, according to Iordanova Eastern European cinema tended to be judged by the level of political dissent they displayed, thus foreclosing the possibility of valorizing ‘apolitical’ cultural products and “resulted in a relatively incomplete Western picture of the way state-socialist culture was organized and functioned.” (Iordanova, 2003:16)

Adorno’s critique of mass-culture is based on the view, that the culture industry has transformed cultural products and made them into real commodities. Fiske also agrees with the consumerist strategy of cultural production. Then the question remains how is it possible that a similar popular culture exists without its consumerist base in a socialist economy? Possibly the inherent relationship between the capitalist mode of production and commodification should be reconsidered turning instead to the community building effect of popular culture as myth and ritual controlled by the political regime under state-socialism.

The next part of my thesis will attempt to put into practice the analytical ‘wisdoms’ outlined above by looking at three different clusters of popular cultural sources that address the issue of sexuality in 1980s Hungary.

Part Two

Chapter 2. Representations of Sexuality in Hungarian Popular Culture of the 1980s

“Remember – we had no sex.”
Igor Kon⁶

“Monogamy – contrary to the opinion of many – does not necessarily mean sexual exclusivity. In scientific and legal terms it presupposes being married to just one person at a time.”⁷
Dr. Vilmos Szilágyi⁸

In the light of the available literature to talk about sexuality and the state socialist regime in the same breath seems to be almost impossible. Admittedly, there are a few exceptions in feminist literature that take up the issue of female sexuality during this period, but it is done exclusively in terms of women’s reproductive rights and the issues surrounding it, like abortion debates, maternity leaves etc. (e.g. Kligman 1998, von Ankum 1993). A few books tackle

⁶ Gessen, Masha (1995). “Sex in the Media and the Birth of the Sex Media in Russia.” In Berry (Ed.) *Postcommunism and the Body Politic*. New York: NYU Press

⁷ Hereafter all Hungarian-English translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

sexuality under state-socialism (e.g. Essig 1999, Berry 1995) from the perspective of queer presence or homosexuality or the rise of the sex media after the fall, but their overall conclusion can be summarized in the quote by Igor Kon at the beginning of this chapter. In what follows I endeavor to present an alternative image of sexuality under state socialism the way it appeared in the last decade of socialism in Hungary. I argue that Igor Kon's statement cannot be extended to the representation of sexuality in the Hungarian mainstream media let alone to popular culture. This argument is relevant for a number of issues. First, it is underlining the view that the socialist block cannot be treated as a monolith nor can the so-called 'gulyás-socialism' of the Kádár regime. The latter brought a significant relaxation of the rules in general, especially in the field of cultural politics. Second, the argument is questioning the ubiquitous East/West divide when referring to this region by certain feminist scholars, social scientists or political analysts⁹. My hypothesis is that from the perspective of popular culture the image of sexuality during the socialist regime is more nuanced and in the Hungarian context it allows for the parallel articulation of a more or less coherent double stance on sexuality, which Mária Adamik has called the 'maternity-leave discourse' and the 'sex-discourse.' She identifies two discourses that define women's sexuality under Hungarian state socialism. 'Maternity-leave discourse' is visibly articulated in official documents, while the 'sex-discourse', Adamik finds is more of a mosaic, indirectly articulated in mostly informal contexts, like interviews or cultural products. (Adamik, 2000) I argue that in popular culture the latter is clearly articulated thus establishing that turning to popular cultural sources enriches one's view of a specific cultural context. Surely, other specificities of this country in the 1980's also influenced this state of affairs. For example,

⁸ Dr. Vilmos Szilágyi (1988). *Nyitott házasság, korszerűbb életstílus*. [Open Marriage – A More Modern Lifestyle] Budapest: IPV (pg. 157)

⁹ Frunza, M. and Vacarescu, T. (Eds.) (2004). *Gender and the (Post)'East'/'West' Divide*. Cluj-Napoca: LIMES; Einhorn, B. and Sever, Ch. (2003). "Gender and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe." *International*

because Hungarians could travel abroad relatively easily and because Hungarian tourism flourished, the country participated in and reacted to the transnational cultural trends of the time, like the sexual revolution, the Hippy movement, the student riots in France of 1968 or heavy metal and punk-rock trends. Since 1968 in building the so-called ‘socialism with a human face’ Hungary has slowly been changing and appropriating petit-bourgeois capitalist features both in its economic and cultural fields. One could state then that the transition period in Hungary from a state-controlled economy to a market-oriented one started a few decades before 1989. And, as I will show, the cultural field was one of the most prominent ones in the process. In terms of cultural politics this meant a relaxation of the rules and a relative autonomy of cultural production, which in turn allowed for a more explicit take on issues of sexuality.

2.1. Methodology

In order to identify the discourses on sexuality in popular cultural sources in the last decade of Hungarian socialism I decided to look at three different sources. Two books, Körmendy, I. (1981). *A családi élet iskolája fiúknak* [Teaching Boys about Family Life] and Bogárdi, M. (1982). *A családi élet iskolája lányoknak. Nagylányok iskolája* [Teaching Girls about Family Life. Maiden School], commissioned by a state institution (The Institute for the Protection of Children) with the aim of teaching boys and girls how to prepare for their family lives are going to allow me to look into the legitimate ways of talking about sex for proper socialist citizens. I will focus upon the ways in which the images of the ideal male and female citizen are brought about when ‘educating’ them about sexuality. The second cluster of data, explaining sexual behavior to their readers, comes from the pop-psychology books of the day. I

Feminist Journal of Politics. (5)2: 163-190; Funk, N. and Mueller, M. (Eds.) (1993). *Gender Politics and Post-communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. New York and London: Routledge

will center particularly on the similarities and differences between these two bodies of data, in order to find out why the latter could be considered representative for the so-called ‘tolerated’ category of cultural politics. (The next section is dedicated to clarifying these categories.) Finally, I intend to tackle the presentation of sexual themes in the popular humor magazine *Ludas Matyi*. I needed a media product which specifically spoke to a large number of people and advertised itself as a forum with a potential for the critique of the system. For an analysis of visual representations I will concentrate on illustrated jokes. Of particular interest will be the themes that the other two types of sources seem to miss but also the models of femininity that these images construct. It is also important to understand the political effect of a joke with sexual connotations.

The threefold structure of my sources is mirroring the basic principle of the cultural politics of the time. Described in detail in the next section, these policies enacted between 1958 and 1988 were highlighted by the name of György Aczél.

My methodological approach poses an inherent question. What is to be considered popular culture? I am aware of its problematic definition in literature but let us limit ourselves for the time being to cultural products that were addressing mass readership and were widely distributed – the commissioned books had almost yearly editions, the pop-psychology works were meant to enlighten the masses by striving to use less specific language and *Ludas Matyi* had weekly editions of about 600,000 copies in its heyday.

The reason for me to choose popular culture is twofold. The fact that popular cultural products were just as much the object of the cultural political regulations of the time shows that one cannot stop at the analysis of high culture. More importantly, I argue that by looking at these

specific works, an alternative image of sexuality is emerging that allows for a more nuanced view on sexuality in state socialism.

2.2. Cultural politics in the 1980s

Melinda Kalmár, in her *Ennivaló és Hozomány* - 1998 [Food and Dowry] argues that “the political regime after 1956 deemed it of utmost importance to transform the bankrupt communist regime, to restore it to function and to maintain its efficiency in the long run without major changes, i.e. to sanitize it.” (Kalmár, 1998:12) When it comes to cultural politics, the period between the fall of the 1956 uprising and 1988 is often referred to by Hungarian historiographers as the “Aczél regime.” György Aczél was a founding member of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Labour Party (HSLP) in December 1956 and although his official position changed a lot during the years he is seen as the agent of the main principles of cultural politics in Hungary. (Kalmár 1998, Drabancz & Fónai 2005, Kisantal & Menyhért 2005) The fundamental rule of his policy was designated by the name of ‘the principle of the three T-s’ made up of the first letters of the Hungarian words *támogat*, *tűr*, *tilt*. The first one, *támogat* means *support* and it marks the category applied to art projects that were seen to speak to large crowds and were judged ideologically correct because in line with the official cultural political line of the party. *Tűr* means *tolerate* and refers to those cultural enterprises that were not considered to be ‘correct’ in this sense yet were not seen as threatening for the political and ideological ideals of the day. Lastly, *tilt* means *forbid* and it is supposed to be applied in case of those cultural endeavors that were deemed politically dangerous, violating the alleged common moral values. Aczél developed this system of evaluation in the 1950s and it was publicly announced in 1958. Most scholars argue that the same framework was adopted and reinforced in 1977 and 1982 when the Central Committee of the HSLP reformulated its cultural politics. (Kalmár, 1998) In

reality this policy in general was alternating between enforcement and toleration (Kisantal & Menyhért, 2005:119) and “in practice the debates around art and cultural politics were centered upon a broader or narrower definition of the tolerate [*tűr*] category.” (Bolvári-Takács, 1998:25) In fact, an official document put together by Aczél György in 1984 attests to the liberalization of cultural politics by ignoring the tolerate category altogether and “subscribing to the importance of maintaining creative freedom regardless of style, topic or method.” (Bolvári-Takács, 1998:35) This is why most scholars agree that “from the middle of the 80’s on culture and arts became totally independent” (Drabancz & Fónai, 2005:222) of immediate party-political interests. Furthermore, “in 1987-88 the processes in the cultural field tightly correlated with the changes in the political. The political changes in 1989 were partly induced by the artists, who were an active factor in the dismemberment of the late Kádár-regime and in the preparation for transition.” (Drabancz & Fónai, 2005:224) It is in this context of ongoing negotiation that one has to place any cultural product from that period.

2.3. The construction of the sexually ideal socialist citizen

The two commissioned books were written by experts (mostly psychologists) and were so widely disseminated that they were reedited on numerous occasions (the one for girls approximately nine times). They are called *A családi élet iskolája fiúknak* [Teaching Boys about Family Life] and its ‘sister’ *A családi élet iskolája lányoknak. Nagylányok iskolája* [Teaching Girls about Family Life. Maiden School]. In the present study I am referring to the 1981 edition for boys put together by István Körmendy and the 1982 edition for girls under the editorship of Mihály Bogárdi.

Representative of the supported cultural category, a specific discourse on sexuality comes through the pages of these books, which resonates very well with the ubiquitous ‘maternity-leave discourse’ identified by Adamik. Her definition is the following:

I call maternity-leave discourse that type of discussion that was finalized and consolidated around 1967, through which the state socialist project of modernization has withdrawn the promise and conditions of women’s emancipation. Partly through the means of social policies (maternity leave), and in science through the lens of functional gender roles, this discourse identified and defined women as asexual beings – mothers – confined to the private sphere. (Adamik, 2000:112)

Mária Adamik’s argument that beginning with the introduction of the maternity leave, Hungarian women could “never enunciate their expectations of the state from the position of the unemployed woman but that of a mother” (Haney, 1997, cited by Adamik, in Jähnert, 2001:195) is very carefully supported by referring most often to official party documents, encompassing a much longer historical period than my analysis.

As I am not considering the effects of the regulation of maternity leave I will call this discourse the sanitized image of sexuality just to have a basis of comparison for the rest of the data as well as to stress the existence of all three cultural categories in popular culture. In the present case I point out that the same construction of women as mothers is present in mass culture, but my focus will be more on its alternative, the sex-discourse.

The authors of the two books claim that socialism has brought female liberation in both economic and social spheres. But as their titles indicate the education that these books are meant to carry is channeled into the ultimate means of population control, that of nuclear families. It is important to notice the time period here. Already in the 1980s state-socialist ideology has abandoned the ideal of rearing children by the community (as it set out to do in the 1950s) and

according to Adamik, also gave up the social policies meant to enact women's emancipation. Instead it promoted the nuclear family, which became synonym with the tandem of mother and child.

Concerning sexuality in general the authors agree that "sexual behavior is learnt" (Körmendy, 1981:55) and that "it is greatly influenced by the social environment." (Körmendy, 1981:67). At the same time there is a heightened sense of trust in medicine, the primary tool for social changes. Boys but especially girls are constantly reminded that they should turn to their doctors for counseling on all issues of health and sexuality. At a closer look it becomes clear that the most important message of these books is the fact that youth should take this chance and learn 'the proper' sexual behavior once and for all. But if this is how it works, what is the function of the environment? The trust in medicine is in fact in contradiction with the general claim about the acquired nature of sexuality. Emphasizing counseling, the authors admit that sexuality is also a practice. Furthermore, in this context counseling does not refer to psychological help, but turning to your general practitioner on all questions related to sexuality. The implication of this is that sexuality in this context is limited to healthy sex organs and it does not involve emotions or motives.

In a socialist context, where education, economic relations as well as cultural products are required (ideally) to follow the ideological trend of current politics the avowedly instrumental effect of teaching about sex comes as no surprise.¹⁰ The project was meant to do away with the remnants of bourgeois tradition by advocating a modern attitude: "[t]he modern,

¹⁰ Jeffrey P. Moran's book, *Teaching Sex – The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* is the history of sex education in America. It encompasses the different reasons for advocating sex education since the 19th century and concludes that the diacritical definition of the adolescent and an instrumentalist approach to sex education ended up in framing teenage sexuality as dangerous and a constant threat – moral, medical or otherwise – to the future of society. What I find the most interesting here are the similarities between the two cultural contexts for advocating sex education. While in the U.S. the constant crises that fed the instrumental approach were found in sexually

educated girl has already prepared herself for these tasks [of child rearing] and does not let her baby be a victim of ignorance, superstition and irrational beliefs.” (Bogárdi, 1982:152) The authors of these two books, illustrating their advice with quotes from Lenin and the actual political leadership openly admitted to their reformist agendas – which as I already stated correlated very well with the ideological requirements of the time. Actually, it can be argued that the instrumental approach was the ‘suggested’ paradigm for any cultural product. The fact that this education was not successful or that popular culture did not/could not align itself so perfectly with the ideology plays into the ruptures that eventually brought down the system.

When talking about sexuality, the Hungarian authors emphasize that sex “is not the central problem” (Körmendy, 1981:68) of a relationship and although they do not condemn sexual activity in an outright manner they try to control it by channeling it into other activities like sports and intellectual exercise. In the end they come to the valorization of abstinence. “[V]oluntary abstinence by the preservation of sexual energy sustains and maintains higher intellectual activity.” (Körmendy, 1981:68) Moreover it is argued that “self-control” is a manly thing to do. (Körmendy, 1981:69) The self-policing teenage ideal is advocated for both girls and boys. The only difference is that the sentence referring to manliness is left out in the book for girls. The implications of ‘excessive’ sexuality being an obstacle in the development of the intellect shows that contrary to previously mentioned contradictions the basic approach to sexuality is behaviorism, which is even more emphasized in the promoted self-policing of one’s desires. In matters of contraception and abortion the two books are quite factual, describing in more details the contraceptive methods for girls than for boys and arguing against the recourse to abortions on the basis of health.

transmitted diseases, teenage motherhood and AIDS, in Hungary no such crises were necessary because socialism was embarked on a conscious effort of reformation of society anyway.

On many occasions the authors react to certain trends that I call transcultural, like the sexual revolution, female emancipation, pornography and ‘free love’. In this context they are mentioned as the negative aspects of ‘exploitative societies’. They attest that “today the over-eroticization of social life is a global phenomenon” (Körmendy, 1981:70), which in turn affected Hungary less than other (capitalist) countries. (idem) Female emancipation is regarded as an accomplished fact, but the reader is also warned that in some cases it went into undesirable directions “female emancipation has changed women’s sexual behavior: sadly sometimes gender equality is turned into irresponsibility, into the decrease of motherly feelings and the increase of libertarian attitudes.” (Körmendy, 1981:58) As soon as the desirable model of femininity got tied up with motherhood, female emancipation limited itself to a theoretical equality in rights. The ‘increase of libertarian attitudes’ is not directly addressed, but we are to infer that these refer to the problematic areas where sexual activity takes place outside the confines of the nuclear family. The idea of sexual revolution is interestingly appropriated to fit socialist ideology. Sexual revolution equals the humanization of sexuality, but “it is often confused with licentiousness.” (Körmendy, 1981:77) The author explains that actually it means the opposite, “the effective regulation and limitation of sexual behavior.” (idem) While this interpretation of the sexual revolution might be quite far from its original understanding (U.S. and Western Europe) it is significant that a book like this deems it necessary to address this. Its implications are telling: there are practices of concern in Hungary, which cannot be addressed directly, but an official position has to be taken in their regard.

Pornography and ‘free love’ together with the sexual double standard, prostitution, rape and homosexuality are enlisted as problem areas for contemporary sexual regulations. The discussion of these issues gives the opportunity to the authors to express their discontentment

with the sexual mores of the West as well as with their country's bourgeois past. Thus they designate prostitution and the gender differentiated double standard of sexuality, which is a remnant of the hypocritical bourgeois morality of the past, as the last crumbling bastions of bourgeois history, while the West is dismissed on the basis of its liberal attitude toward pornography, the sexual communes brought about by the Hippie movement and homosexuality which is "unfortunately contaminating the whole world." (idem) The answer to all these deficiencies is to be found in heterosexual marriage.

Through their prescriptive styles these two books construct the ideal image of the socialist citizen, with its distinctive features for men and women. Prescription is most obvious in the style of the writing. Sometimes it sounds like a cook book, using simple present as if describing some observable picture. "Older babies already wear adult-style shirts." (Bogárdi, 1982:145) "The mother is happily awaiting her baby." (Bogárdi, 1982:152) But most interestingly the two books are an almost word-by-word replica of each other. Could this be an enactment of the principle that 'women are equal with men'? The only major difference is related to the more detailed exposition of contraceptive methods, pregnancy and infant care for a female audience, implying that they are the ones responsible for these things, while for men it is enough if they know something about it. In fact of the 122 pages of the book for boys only about 20 are dedicated to family issues and taking care of a newborn, while more than half of 157, approx. 80 pages, are meant to educate women about their roles as wives and mothers. This obvious differentiation is underlining the specificities of the discourse of sanitized sexuality, where women make sense only as mothers, while men's role as husbands and fathers goes unspecified.

Although female sexual specificities are mentioned at the beginning of both books, they are not addressed specifically unless they are connected with women's reproductive health. Produced under the motto of "women's most beautiful destiny is motherhood" (Bogárdi, 1982:152) it is valorizing only a very narrow view of female sexuality, that geared into family life and reproduction. Moreover it gives a biological explanation for female difference in sexual behavior by stating that the man accomplishes his biological function in procreation through participating in the sexual act, while the woman is instinctively more responsible because she faces the demands of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, care and education. (Körmendy 1981:55) So the ideal socialist male citizen is one that is engaged in all kinds of physical and mental activities, it is concerned with cleanliness, does not masturbate (or very little), is a highly social being, does not indulge in alcohol or cigarettes, pursues only the woman that he wants to marry and although he knows that marital sexuality is an occasion for mutual pleasure he never forgets that its primordial scope is procreation. Of course he's not very knowledgeable about the hassles of contraception, pregnancy or even menstruation, let alone the sexual experiences of women, but as long as he marries, works and participates in the reproductive function of the family he has accomplished his duties towards the socialist state. If he is so kind to follow the advice of the experts in the educational books he helps his wife with her chores every once in a while, especially if she is expecting or is taking care of a newborn.

On the other hand the ideal woman citizen resembles the man in every way until she matures sexually. Up to that point she is prompted to participate in the same activities as the boys, but when menstruation sets in she is advised to take extra hygiene measures, to gather all the information available about contraceptives, to look for and find her life-long partner, marry him, work, procreate and take care of her children and family. She is supposed to think of herself

as a ‘biologically’ monogamous being who does not engage in sex, unless it holds out the promise of marriage. Keeping to these principles she will be respected by her family, community and the socialist state.

2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion I will summarize the main points of my analysis. First, the authors advocate a strong behavioristic view of sexuality, which is nicely correlated with the socialist emphasis on productivity seeing reproductive issues exclusively through a demographic lens. Second, although the claim is to have accomplished female liberation, actually women and men are made into different species when it comes to procreation. The fact that a significant part of the books are literally the same (with the small exception of using ‘boys’ instead of ‘youth’ etc.) is not a manifestation of women treated as equals, but of women cast in terms of men. The additional information in the girl’s book attests to the unequal differentiation of responsibilities at the expense of women, while men’s sex is freed from anxiety. This excessive focus on the woman as mother elaborates the distinctive ideals of citizenship held up for women and men. While women’s liberation was considered to be an accomplished fact and in a socialist society women were considered to be men’s equals the differential treatment of the two sexes begs the conclusion that equality was only accomplished at the official level, while women still bore the brunt of private family life.¹¹ Finally, it is important to point out the cracks in the argumentation. Although they proclaim at the beginning that sexuality is acquired mainly through socialization, the authors still advocate the need of counseling as if the effects of socialization could be overcome by rational advice. At the same time they involuntarily hint at certain social practices –

most often cast as Western/bourgeois perversities – that could not be addressed directly, but still considered to be matters of concern. The fact that specific phenomena present in Western societies are discussed, like Hippies, sexual revolution, pornography or sexual communes and not others from other cultural contexts legitimates the use of transcultural, while at the same time it suggests that the discourse of sanitized sexuality was not without interruption or alternative.

The sanitized image of sexuality presented in these two books of sex education is not necessarily promoted by other types of literature, for example popular psychology.

¹¹ It is the same conclusion that Mária Adamik and Volgyes and Volgyes have reached in their works, *State socialism and the 'Woman Problem.'* “*The Greatest Promise – the Greatest Humiliation.*” (2000) and *The Liberated Female* (1977).

Chapter 3. Pop psychology of the 1980s

I consider this second cluster of data to be the middle ground between official discourses of sexuality and its sexualized alternative articulated in popular culture. In other words, this group is to represent the second category of cultural politics, that of tolerated [*tűr*]. I have encountered a great diversity of attitudes in these books as a result of the fact that the boundaries of this category were traditionally in the center of most debates around the regulation of cultural production. The year of their publication was usually a good indication of the degree to which they departed from the sanitized image of sexuality in the official discourse represented by the two books of commissioned sex-education.

To illustrate this diversity I will go through a four books from different years of the 1980s and follow up on their gradual liberalization. It is important to keep in mind that the cultural products from the middle category gained visibility through a negotiation that aimed to prove that they are not opposing the basic values of socialism.

In 1983 Dr. Vilmos Szilágyi publishes his book called *Szexuális Kultúránkról* [*About Our Sexual Culture*], in which he takes the theoretical stance of expert and educator and expresses his wish to reform Hungarian sexual culture. In fact the book is summarizing the topics related to sexuality that have been debated in the specific medical advice column of the *Családi Lap* [Family Paper] magazine. Contentwise it is an interesting blend between subscription to the sanctioned image of sexuality and radically different opinions, especially on the transnational trends identified earlier. Dr. Szilágyi aligns himself with the official discourse when he

advocates that masturbation in children is a problem if it takes away the child's energy from more important things (Szilágyi, 1983:54); or when he claims that sexual desire is gender differentiated and usually less present in women than in men (Szilágyi, 1983:66); or in the emphasized heteronormative stance. The latter is made explicit in many instances. The author aims to diffuse parent's fear of their children masturbating by saying that masturbation "with its implicit heterosexual (directed to a partner of a different sex) fantasies performs the function of the imaginary testing of an adult-like sexual relationship." (Szilágyi, 1983:66) Similarly, he advises parents to explain physiological differences by telling their daughters "[i]f you grow up you'll be a mother and the boys will be fathers." (Szilágyi, 1983:46) Although he does not dismiss homosexuality and bisexuality as perversities, the reader is supposed to infer that the only valid partnership is heterosexual. Moreover, he declares that homosexual tendencies are not inborn and hereditary, but "appear in the course of people's lives" (Szilágyi, 1983:156) implying that they can be cured or better, prevented.

Even more significant are the ways in which he departs from the previously discussed literature. He is legitimating his stances by underlining his expert status through the use of expert language, but always carefully explaining every concept and by his obvious subscription to the psychoanalytical school and its psychotherapy, the so-called 'talking-cure.' Advocating open discussion of sexuality and setting up its model on the pages of this book, in the meantime he reinterprets some of the previously dismissed phenomena. He asserts that the sexualization of society is a representative symptom of the transitional historical period of the time and even if fraught with contradictions it is still pointing towards future development. (Szilágyi, 1983:10) Its positive effects are connected to the revalorization of sexuality in contemporary society, while the negative ones are mostly present in Western countries because its ideals are appropriated for

profit-making as exemplified by pornography and [Western] advertisement. (idem) The author seems to indirectly criticize the previously described discourse on sexuality which I called sanitized sexuality by warning that “secret orgies were always flourishing best where the ‘official’ morals were too repressive or hypocritical.” (Szilágyi, 1983:79) He rehabilitates not only pre-marital sexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality but he also argues for trial marriages for long-term couples and differentiates between good and bad pornography on the grounds of its iconography. Good pornography shows images of “gentle and civilized” sex, while its devalued alternative is “brutal, vulgar and perverse.” (Szilágyi, 1983:163) Unfortunately, we never find out what these qualifiers specifically refer to, but they reveal that these arguments are just as ideologically embedded as the ones put forward in the commissioned books even if they seek to promote a different set of values. Contrary to the position encountered in the commissioned books, this author redraws the boundaries of sexual deviance limiting it to sado-masochist practices, exhibitionism, voyeurism, pedophilia, gerontophilia and bestophilia. Szilágyi’s way of ‘mild regulation’ is to be found in sexual education, which in his view is to perform the function of regulator of sexuality.

As for women, the same mix of officially sanctioned and divergent opinions is presented. On the one hand women are cast as ‘less-sexual’ than men. This tendency is manifested early on as girls masturbate less “because, contrary to boys, girls’ pubescence does not automatically deliver the highest level of sexual responsiveness, i.e. orgasmic capacity. Thus female sexual needs are more determined by the circumstances than those of the males.” (Szilágyi, 1983:65) As adults women still display these ‘symptoms’. They are the ones who have to be ‘talked into’ the sexual act as wives (Szilágyi, 1983:107) and their sexual desire is curbed after pregnancy and childbirth (Szilágyi, 1983:130). On the other hand gender roles are slowly changing even if at a

different pace in the public than the private life. (Szilágyi, 1983:12) So “the modern woman does not passively await the further development of a relationship, but – if she sees fit – she initiates emotional or sexual involvement.” (Szilágyi, 1983:12) The fact that the author even mentions female masturbation, moreover it designates it as the best way to acquire orgasmic capacity is considerably dissimilar from the asexual image of femininity promoted by official means. Szilágyi advocates the importance of petting and sexual foreplay, he even stresses the stimulation of the clitoris and the breasts, but his practical advice is insufficient for a self-proclaimed sex-education manual. Actually the issues of female pleasure come to be marginalized as having the function of convincing women to engage in sexual intercourse more often.

I chose the next book because it specifically addresses female sexuality. Published in 1985 it presents the findings of a survey of women’s sexual behavior. It is authored by Attila Bágyoni, entitled “*Üzenet a férfiaknak*” [Message to Men] and it is said to be based on 5488 women’s answers (between the ages of 14 to 68) to its questionnaire. This experience-based approach is quite novel in itself but as it also touches upon subjects as female orgasm or female homosexuality, it represents a fresh take on this issue. The interpretation of its title tends to be misleading, because one could infer that the study is meant to elucidate for men the enigma of woman ‘the mysterious creature’. Actually, this is just the first book which was followed by a similar questionnaire-based research among men. Admittedly, the fact that it is female sexuality that is prioritized is an interesting data in itself, but I think that it is more of an outcome of the medium. The questionnaire was published on the pages of the *Családi Lap* [Family Paper] and *Ádám Magazin* [Adam Magazine], probably with an overwhelmingly female audience. The study has an explicit instrumentalist framework because the author designates the book as educating men on female sexuality. (Bágyoni, 1985:13) Although relying on women’s experience

legitimizes the author's stance, he approaches his data through a quantitative methodology using statistical 'facts' and offering individualist explanations. The survey contains 51 questions, of which the first eight refer to the participant's identity the next five to their first sexual experience and the rest take up issues ranging from the number of partners, through masturbation and orgasm to alcohol consumption. (Bágyoni, 1985:14-18) Most often Bágyoni tends to see all problems as originating with the first sexual experience of women, which is supposed to have happened right between the ages of 18 and 23-24. As in most surveys the major drawbacks emerge from its methodology. Research on sexuality is especially problematic because it is virtually impossible to build up a representative sample in order for the findings to be generalizable to a cultural context. Moreover the suspicion of biased selection of respondents is legitimate as long as the study is based on anonymous volunteer participation as it is in this case. Similarly, certain concepts are never questioned but their meanings are taken for granted as for example: "sexual experience" "orgasm" or "satisfaction". Accounting for any difference in interpretation is thus foreclosed. The researcher legitimizes his approach by citing and deliberately framing his mode of investigation upon the famous US based studies conducted by Alfred Kinsey and Shere Hite. But he is also concerned with fitting the socialist ideology of the times by constructing it as educational, naming the women "the guardians of the flame of love in the family" (Bágyoni, 1985:13) and treating homosexuality only as a statistical fact. The endeavor on the author's part to meet these contradictory requirements and the resulting compromise is an outcome of the negotiation inherent in positing the research in the category of *tolerated* cultural products, as 'different, but not dangerous'. Heteronormativity is overwhelmingly highlighted. The only partnership that interests the researcher is the heterosexual one. There are no more than two questions related to homosexual experience one

establishing its (non)existence and the other the age when it occurred. Clearly, in this framework, homosexuality can only be featured as sporadic sexual experimentation, with no consequences for ‘normal’ sexual development. The book makes a feeble attempt at overcoming this last drawback by including the critical thoughts of a lesbian woman declaring that the questionnaire is inapplicable in her case, but the authors refrain from taking any measure to correct their perspective.

The last two books I would like to discuss together because they represent the peak of liberalization in this period. The first one is by Zoltán Pereszlényi and it was published in 1987 under the title *Örömszerzés* [Giving Pleasure] and the second one in 1988 is by the same author – Dr. Vilmos Szilágyi - as the book from 1983 and it is entitled *Nyitott házasság korszerűbb életstílus* [Open Marriage a More Modern Lifestyle]. Both in their style and content they depart greatly from the commissioned books at the beginning of the decade. Zoltán Pereszlényi in 1987 publishes a book about sexuality with relatively little text and large, colored, photographic illustrations of the ways of giving and receiving sexual pleasure. The first thing he has to do is go on the defensive and repeatedly claim that his book is pornographic. (Pereszlényi, 1987:37-38) The anxiety with which he is keen on positing his work as educational and necessary is mirrored by the fact that even the geneticist writing his foreword addresses the issue: “It is for a good cause – even if some will receive this small book with childlike immaturity or hypocritical outrage.” (Pereszlényi, 1987:4) The most striking innovation is related to the visual aspect of this book. It only has 84 pages the majority of which are detailed colored photos of a couple presented while performing an impressive variety of sexual modi operandi. *Giving Pleasure* is abandoning the legitimation of sexuality by focusing on context-less love-making emphasized by

the fact that the featured couple is pictured as floating in air, on a totally neutral colored background.

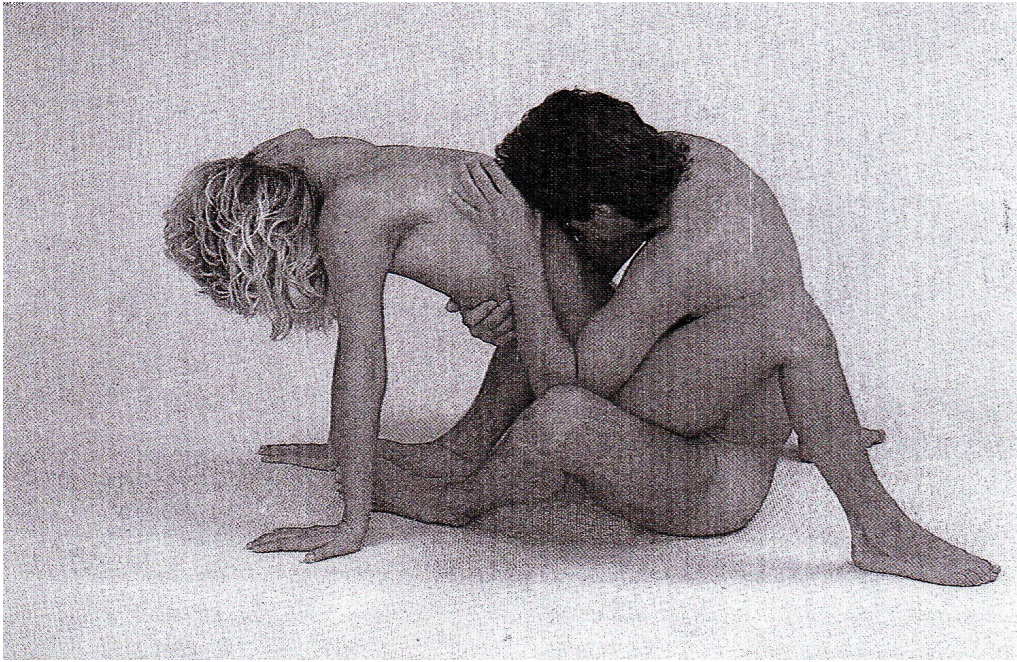


Fig. 1

I have found the book quite balanced, with about the same amount of interest dedicated to female and male 'sexual interests', carefully addressed in a turn-taking, analogous manner. At this point the liberalization of sexual representations includes the debut of a depiction of cunnilingus, a rare sight even in contemporary media. It is coupled, by necessity, with its complementary activity, fellatio.

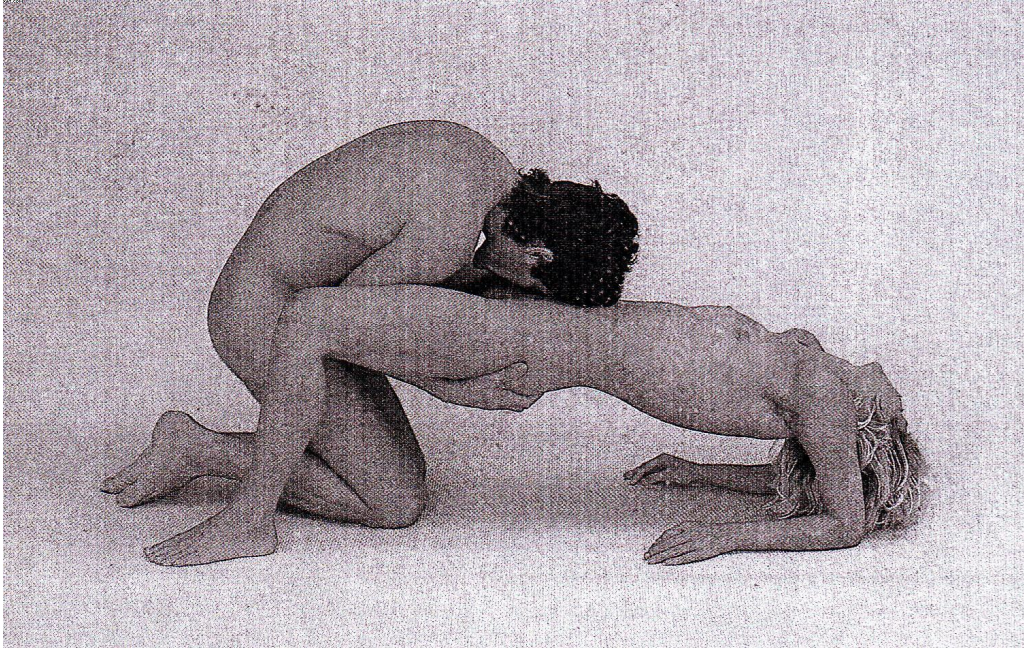


Fig. 2

In spite of all its novelty Pereszlényi's courageous undertaking has its limits. According to this visual material women's pleasure is not disregarded or dismissed, but posited as the indisputable sign of male sexual prowess. At the same time, most of these photographs picture the woman in the position of passively enjoying what her partner has to offer. In Fig. 1 and Fig.2. she is immobilized by her posture, but in Fig. 3 even if she has the chance she remains fixed in the passive attitude, excluding a more dynamic interpretation.

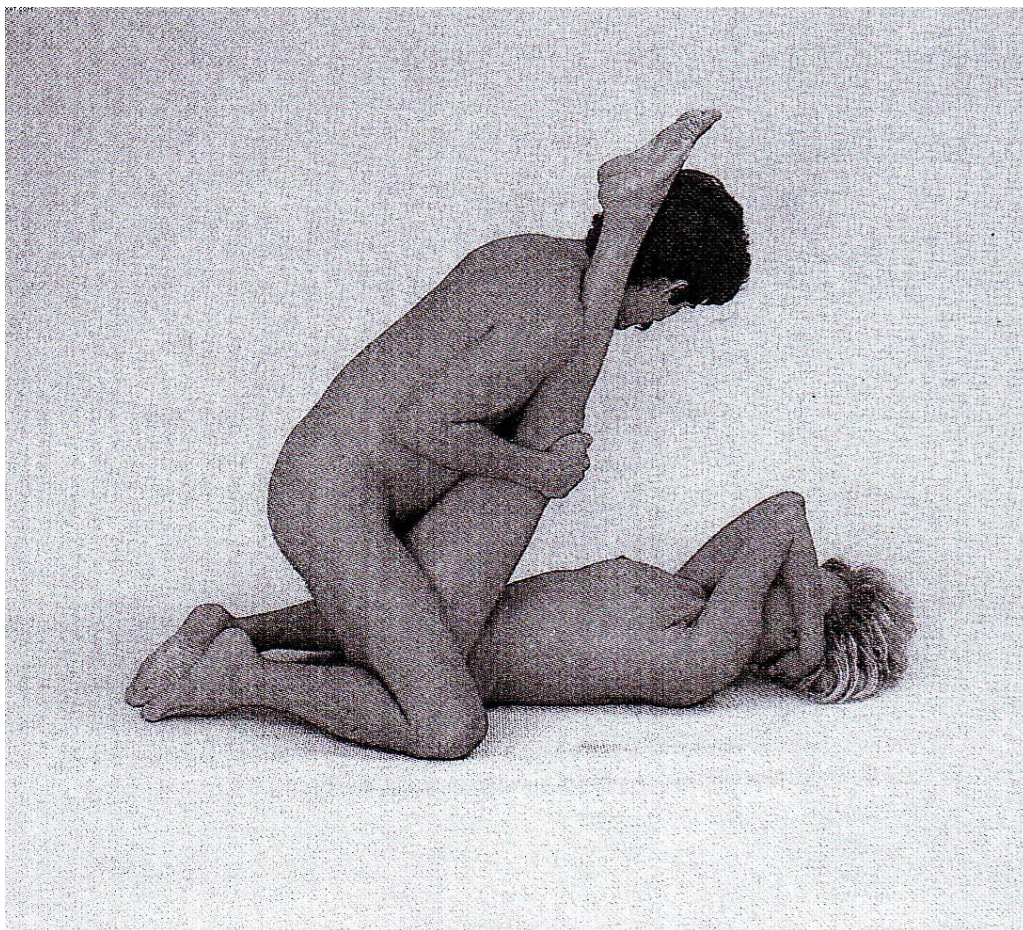


Fig. 3

Although the book is promoting an open (sometimes even proud) discussion of sexuality, it cannot overcome the embarrassment of ‘personalized’ nakedness. I doubt that the manifest hiding-of-the-face by the featured models is induced by fear of censorship – nude calendars were already legally available at that time. Thus the overall message is contradictory, liberating on the one hand while still retaining some ‘common-sense’ decency. All these factors together lead to a sterile, static representation of sexuality.

Despite the lack of illustrations, Szilágyi’s 1988 book is a much bolder endeavor advocating from his position as “family futurologist” that “love is not indispensable for sexual harmony or for a good marriage.” (Szilágyi, 1988:30) He is interested in exploring the concept of

“enlarged monogamy” (Szilágyi, 1988:38) which in this case means openly engaging in (not exclusively) sexual relationships with third parties outside the couple. The author claims that this development is inevitable, because the institution of marriage has to be updated along with all other modernizations in society. The illustrated cover makes the author’s intentions very clear.



Fig. 4

By the end of the state-socialist regime the domain of potentially threatening cultural products was reduced to those explicitly wanting to overthrow the regime. This last artifact

presents a radical alternative at least compared to the image of the family as imagined in the books from 1981 and 1982. Its novelty consists in the wish to reform the structures of society starting from the reinterpretation of sexual activity before and outside of marriage, but also a reformulation of marriage itself. In this book Szilágyi promotes emancipatory changes that in his view will contribute to modernization, an imminent historical development. His means for achieving it are revealing. One of the most obvious changes is to be found in his language-use. Szilágyi consciously endeavors to frame sexual and intimate relationships through economic metaphors. This business language is overwhelming. He talks about the “assessment of our market-value” which “presupposes not only a healthy well-developed personality, but also some psychological intelligence” (Szilágyi, 1988:46) He also endorses the discourse of modernization which is said to entail an “open personality,” “flexibility” and “learning” (Szilágyi, 1988:38) as well as a literal marriage contract even for the trial period before the official marriage. What doesn’t get talked about is child-rearing. Szilágyi doesn’t seem to be concerned with the most important function of the family as portrayed by the official socialist discourse and nor does he address what these ‘modernization’ projects hold for children. An almost explicit condemnation of official discourse can be detected in the ironic tone of this statement: “the over-mediatized ideal of the *so-called* socialist family model doesn’t only entail family planning and two-three children, but a family structure based on equality and modern parental behavior.” (Szilágyi, 1988:102 emphasis mine)

The most significant evolution that is particularly present on the pages of this last book is that the means through which Szilágyi seeks to legitimate modernization are strikingly similar to the neo-liberal values circulated in contemporary Hungary. The discourses around ‘flexibility’ ‘modernization’ and ‘openness’ are especially familiar. In many ways this author is not only a

predecessor in articulating this set of values, but also an unconcerned and ardent enthusiast of what was later to become the new regime.

3.1. Conclusion

The last decade of Hungarian state-socialism was a very dynamic period. I followed its evolution through the lenses of the changes in its cultural politics, through the specific focus on the policing of sexuality in its cultural representations in sex educational books.

The primary conclusion is that during the relatively short span of a decade, Hungarian cultural policy changed quite drastically in its portrayal of sexuality, gradually departing from the official discourse on sexuality described in the previous chapter. Every artifact presented above stands for one more step away from the sanitized discourse of sexuality. With little differences at the beginning of the 80s, sexual education manuals grew bolder and bolder reaching an almost explicit rejection of official stances on sexuality. This development mirrors the negotiated, step-by-step expansion of the middle or *tolerated* category of cultural politics.

At the same time a new discourse on female sexuality was emerging, that sought to disconnect it from family and reproduction. With the availability of contraceptives, the change in morals that tolerates pre-marital and even extra-marital sexual relationships, and the general atmosphere encouraging an active sex life for everybody, women were pressured into their new sexualized roles. To conform to the requirements of the sex-discourse meant that one is modern, flexible and, more importantly, challenging oppressive state-socialist agendas. How could anyone resist subscription to the newly-found values when they meant individual as well as social acknowledgement? However, the sex-discourse turned out to be just as limiting for women as the one of sanitized sexuality. Instead of asexual mothers they have found themselves in their

new roles as overly sexualized females that do not signify outside their sexuality. Prompted to take initiative, to experiment more, to learn how to be attractive, women became trapped in the double bind of the whore/madonna dichotomy. Moreover, while previously upheld norms provided social recognition for being a wife and mother, the sex-discourse has come to value women only based on their sexual personas usually defined by age and looks. From the perspective of the official discourse of sanitized sexuality this can be interpreted as resistant and subversive, because it foreclosed the ideological use of the family as the ultimate social arrangement thus taking away one of the most powerful means of population control available for the state. Nevertheless, if we take into account that every step of the process of ‘liberalization’ has been permitted by party politics then this reading is questionable. Thus the important question remains: what has the party or the ‘male worker’ gained from such an outcome? I explore this question in the next chapter.

Mária Adamik claims that research on sexuality in state-socialist Hungary was practically nonexistent. But going through the artifacts of popular psychology from the 1980s gave me a different picture. In popular culture the issue of sexuality was widely debated not only in the newspaper columns, but also in books and popular research like that of Bágyoni was funded and published. Admittedly, they have their flaws and drawbacks, but they coherently articulate another discourse on female sexuality, namely the sex-discourse. Therefore including popular culture in the category of ‘worthy’ sources is a necessary step to take in order to obtain a more nuanced picture of the cultural forces in a particular system.

Chapter 4. *Ludas Matyi*, political erotica¹²

“On the other hand it is more and more clear that Hungarian cultural life was perhaps more efficiently tied to the novelties of the English and French tradition by the iron curtain and censorship than by the long-awaited freedom [...]”
Klaniczay, 2003:141

4.1. Historical background

Ludas Matyi has a long history in Hungarian humor. Established in 1945 it gave voice to severe political criticism with a few exceptional periods, like the one directly preceding 1956. The journalist Ferenc László in an article about the history of *Ludas Matyi* (*Magyar Narancs*, 2007 Jan. 25) states that after 1957 the editors and authors “were free to address the reality of more everyday issues,” of course within certain limits. They could poke fun at the clerks and the members of the different companies’ middle management but they could not touch the executives and the higher ranked party politicians. The weekly editions reaching 600,000 copies by the 1960s effectively addressed the current political, economic and cultural issues. During the economic and political changes started after 1968 *Ludas Matyi* became the forum where the contradictions or limitations of the new policies could be debated. Most importantly the scandals

¹² The name of the publication refers to a famous tale for children by Mihály Fazekas, in which the protagonist is a poor but clever young lad, a goose-herd who succeeds to outmaneuver the local representative of the authority and get revenge. The word *ludas* has the double meaning of *with geese* and *prankster*.

which more or less regularly surrounded the publication were connected to issues like the 1956 revolution (1957), the ‘excessive’ criticism of party officials (1961), international politics (1970) or the most severely punished criticism of inflation (early 1980s). In the last decade of state socialism *Ludas Matyi* was flourishing and “taking advantage of the more relaxed atmosphere and the liveliness of the media market.” (*Magyar Narancs*, 2007 Jan. 25) This is the period when it gave birth to other publications like the *Ludas Magazine* (1970s) or the more erotic *Tollasbál* (1960s). Unfortunately, after 1990 every attempt made by the editorial board to achieve economic independence failed so that the last issue of *Ludas Matyi* was published in 1992.

4.2. Methodology

Laura Kipnis in her analysis of the way sexual humor works in *Hustler* magazine has some relevant insights for my own research. Addressing the satisfaction that the audience of the publication might get from reading it, Kipnis states: “[t]hat sense of pleasure and danger that violation of pollution taboos invokes in us clearly depends on the existence, within every culture, of symbolic maps and codes. These are, for the most part, only semiconscious.” (Kipnis, 1999:143) The popularity of the Hungarian publication can only be explained if we admit that its humor works the same way. That is, it draws on these shared cultural practices of sexual politics. By examining *Ludas Matyi* my aim is to explore the relevant cultural map of the period.

In relation to this magazine I am interested in how an item of popular culture situated right on the border between the two categories of cultural politics (described in chapter two) *tolerate* and *forbid*¹³ takes up the issue of sexuality. I do not want to analyze this data because it should exhaust the category of ‘prohibition’, but it is a forum that comes closest to that category.

¹³ Although mostly within the category of *tolerated*, every once in a while *Ludas Matyi* was the target of political censorship.

I believe that there are some generic characteristics, mostly related to the genre of humor which allow for a more resistant stance and could push some of the actual issues of the magazine into the forbid category. Besides, through the analysis of this data I can show the struggle over where to draw the boundary between *toleration* and *prohibition*.

For my present analysis I went through all the issues of *Ludas Matyi* from 1980 to 1988, the decade preceding the demise of the state-socialist regime, a period befitting analysis of rapid political change. Of all the issues I chose the visual examples that had obvious sexual connotations and I found most interesting for my topic. I tried to have relatively the same amount of pictures to cover the whole decade, but inevitably some years are better represented than others. (See the list of illustrations.)

Part of the reasons why I chose *Ludas Matyi* was the inaccessibility of more underground or samizdat literature about sex – I am referring here to the calendar that Klaniczay mentions which went so far as to show the naked lower body and was consequently censored and its author penalized. (Klaniczay, 2003:255) But the relative relaxation of Hungarian cultural politics and the specific packaging of the issues as jokes places *Ludas Matyi* as the next best alternative.

4.3. Political erotica

Ludas Matyi was a popular weekly magazine of political satire. Although always present, jokes with sexual connotations were not the dominant type. Most issues contain a double page half-way through the edition ironically marked as “Over/Under 18” or in some cases “Over 16” but as I researched I realized that there is no common trait of the images gathered under this caption and that using it was just a way of pointing out the label’s futility. Therefore I chose the illustrations regardless of where they were placed in the magazine.

The dialectic of “saying without saying”¹⁴ (*Magyar Narancs*, 2007, Jan. 25) which according to Ferenc László was the paradigm of the publication, closely emulates the argument advanced by Laura Kipnis that “the pleasures and displeasures of jokes – jokes are often a coded way of saying something slightly transgressive – are probably not unrelated to the transgressive pleasures and displeasures of pornography.” (Kipnis, 1999: 144) Actually, in the case of *Ludas Matyi* I would rate the transgression as quite radical, but still within certain limits, i.e. still seen as ‘publishable’ for the general public. The joke form offers the authors as well as the readers the alibi of ‘men are having fun’ while at the same time delivering the implied pleasures of all sorts of social criticism. But as I will show in this chapter this kind of transgression is quite ‘ambivalent’, because not all forms of critique of the status-quo, even if launched by the dispossessed, is inherently transgressive rather it is often complicit with conservative values and political ideals.

There are two major ways for the portrayal of women which parallel the two discourses on female sexuality presented in the previous chapters, namely the sanitized image of sexuality and the sex-discourse. The protagonist of the latter, the sexualized woman gains much more visibility and we are to conclude that it is of more interest than the other one.

The following analysis is meant to provide the range of contexts and its specificities in which the caricatures from *Ludas Matyi* picture young sexualized women. I created four separate categories, that of prostitution, explicit social critique, sexual liberation and tourism in Hungary. These distinctions are based on my interpretation of the emphasis that the images exhibited, but surely alternative principles of framing are also possible.

1. Prostitution is one of the favorite topics of *Ludas Matyi* magazine.

¹⁴ “kimondatlanul kimondás”

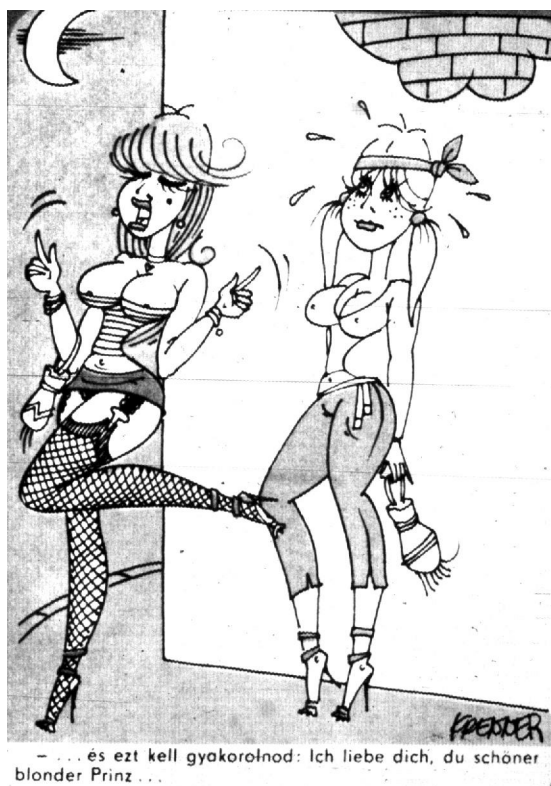


Fig. 5. – and you must practice: Ich liebe dich, du schöner blonder Prinz – July 3, 1985



Fig. 6. – My God, it's Kovács Ibolya from grade III C! What kind of summer job are you here for? – Sept. 4, 1985



Fig.7. Facilities

– I am wondering if we are also going to get the right to export. – Feb. 5, 1986

In these three illustrations the representation of prostitution is not the ultimate goal, rather the phenomenon becomes naturalized, by treating it as the means through which the authors point their critique to something else, such as the excess of German clientele, the embarrassment of teacher and high school student in this situation or the caricatures of new deregulations of export-import rights. The image of Hungarian prostitution in these pictures is radically different from the ‘sanitized’ references encountered in the commissioned books (Körmendy, 1981:77) or pop psychology sexual education manuals (Bágyoni 1985, Szilágyi 1983 and 1988), where it is presented as a social problem of deviance. These ‘girls’ don’t seem to be concerned about the

illicit nature of their activities nor the undignified and dangerous position that they are in, but rather look young and healthy inferring a sense of agency about themselves. The jokes work especially because of the ‘serious’ calculation that these women are engaged in does not fit their image of shallow sexual playmates. Fig. 6 is an interesting example of how the excuse of focusing on the precocious teenager can be an opportunity for ridiculing the ‘depraved’ intelligentsia (the teacher) for ‘visiting’ prostitutes. Contrary to the position of the sex education manuals¹⁵, there is no sense of this business withering away. Quite the opposite. The ‘working girls’ are portrayed in public places like the street, the bar or the hotel not concerned about social sanctions, although their revealing attire leave no doubt about their business.

2. Similarly, explicit social criticism is articulated by referring to (mostly) female sexuality.



Fig. 8. – I’m still waiting for a phone in Budapest and my daughter is a call-girl in Paris. – Jan. 1, 1981

¹⁵ “Prostitution is not inevitable.” (Szilágyi 1983:159)



Fig. 9. -Tell me mate, is this set up sexy enough for a baby food ad? – Jan 29, 1981



Fig. 11. Save electricity
- Let's learn orientation in darkness. – Apr. 6, 1988



Fig. 10 – Feb. 11, 1982

It is interesting to see how women's naked bodies are the universal means for all kinds of social criticism. Figure 8 is an excellent example of the multiple layers that these jokes work on. The depicted situation is an opportunity for the author to point at Hungarian economic hardships –

long waiting list for phones – as an effect of state controlled ‘planned’ economy and to address at the same time the controversial issue of a particular example of dissidence. Packaging it as humor *Ludas Matyi* manages to mock different aspects of Hungarian socialism, for e.g. the status of artists by pointing at the contradiction between ‘reality’ and the ideologically correct image (Fig. 10.) or its reverse, the overwhelming sexualization of society (Fig. 9.), but also popular slogans during a period of economic recession (Fig. 11). The possibility for *Ludas Matyi* to set itself up as simultaneously critical of socialist slogans as well as of more capitalist/liberal trends (consumerism, eroticization) confers additional value to the magazine and opens up the possibility to examine the relevance of Kipnis’ argument in relation with *Hustler*. “Not content to offend only the Right, it makes doubly sure to offend liberals; not content merely to taunt whites, it hectors blacks and other minorities.” (Kipnis, 1999:157) Surely, *Ludas Matyi* did not allow itself to outright offend, but it presented its readers with the opportunity to deride both the hypocritical values of the conservative socialist regime (the commissioned books) and the inherent contradictions of the discourse around sexual liberation (pop-psychology). Poking fun at the dominant as well as the subordinate groups is what makes *Ludas Matyi* transgressive.

3. There are instances in which the periodical more explicitly addresses issues of sexuality.

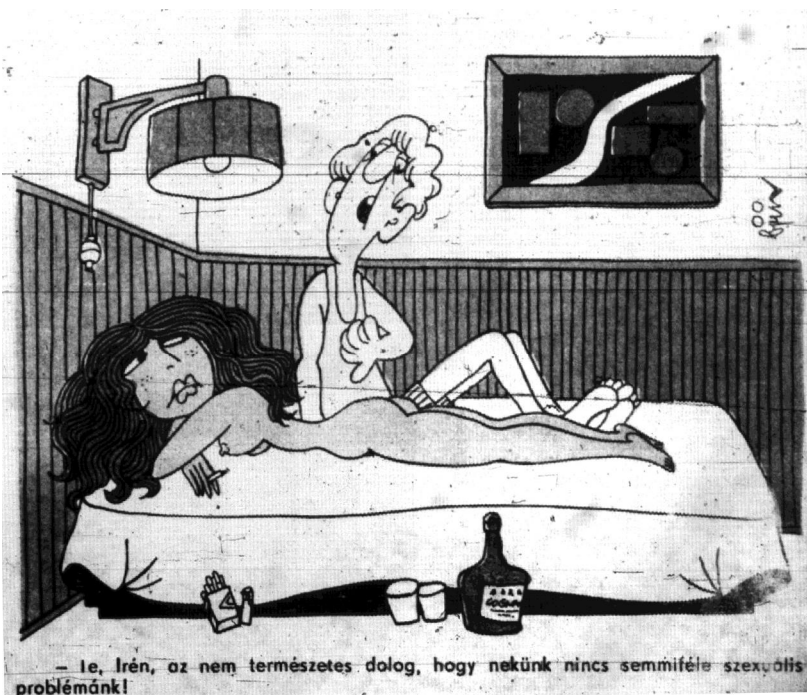


Fig. 12. – Irén, it's not normal that we don't have any sexual problems. – Dec. 11, 1980

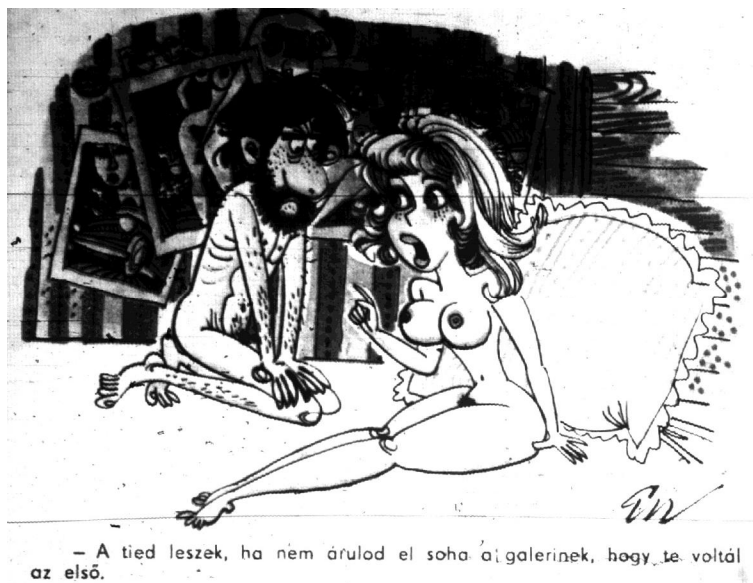
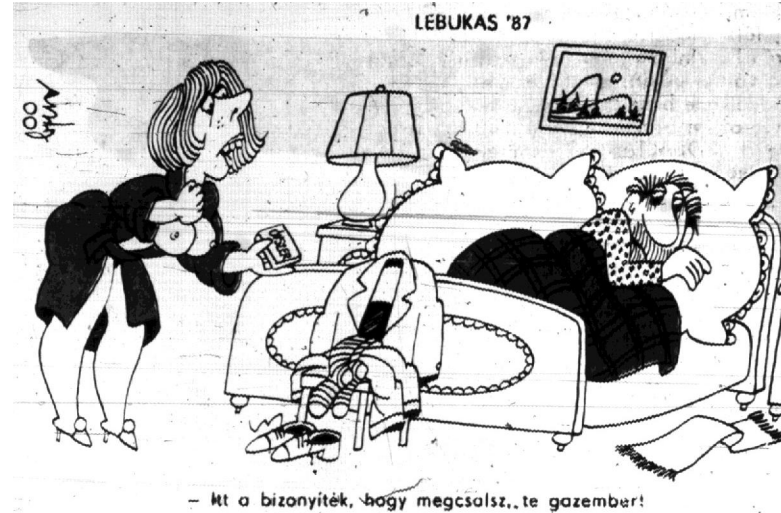


Fig. 13. - I'll be yours if you never tell the gang that you were the first one. – Jan. 29, 1981



– Segítsen, doktor úr, az idén már csak fiú építőtáborba hajlandó menni.

Fig. 14. – Please doctor, help me. This year she only wants to go to a boys’ camp. – July 24, 1985



– Itt a bizonyíték, hogy megcsalsz.. te gazember!

Fig. 15. Discovered ‘87
– You’re cheating on me, asshole! Now I have proof! (She’s holding condoms.) – July 29, 1987

When *Ludas Matyi* addresses issues of sexuality directly it usually takes up topics like teenage sexual activity (Fig.14. and Fig. 6), the contradictions of the sex-discourse (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13) or the ambivalence of the older generation (Fig. 15). Through its criticism the magazine deviates from the discourses disseminated by pop psychology books and unveils their nature as dictated by fashion (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13) as well as their contradictions (Fig. 14 and Fig. 15). This is the flip side of the discourse of ‘openly talking about sex’ advocated for e.g. by the pop-psychology books discussed in the previous chapter, i.e. Bágyoni 1985, Szilágyi 1983 and 1988.

But criticizing one side doesn't mean a return to the other, i.e. to the officially sanctioned, sanitized images of sexuality. Instead young, beautiful and exaggeratedly naked women in *Ludas Matyi* are ironically portrayed as the agents of their lives. In fact this is a male fantasy, drawn by male cartoonists for a male-owned publication – if it is possible to attribute a gender to a paternalist state. I will extend this idea, later when discussing the model of femininity.

4. A distinct part of the periodical's jokes deals with different aspects of Hungarian tourism. Most importantly it is of interest how women's sexuality plays a central role in this field as well.



Fig. 16 Changing Village (she is singing a popular folk song called “I am the worst badboy of my village” and the three dots indicate “all dogs are barking at me” which is the next line. – June 29, 1985



Fig. 17. Keyhouse

- Don't move Dezső, I am going to get the key myself. – June 29, 1985

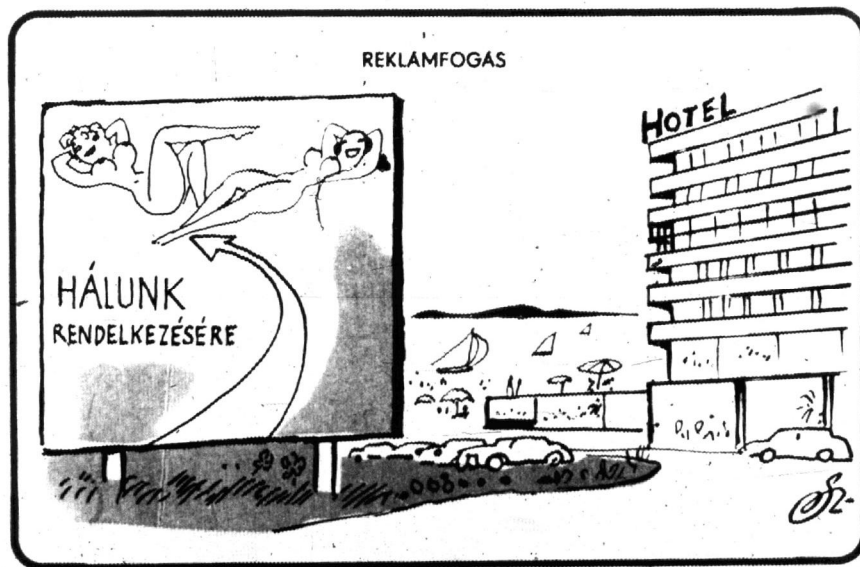


Fig. 18. – Marketing strategy (the poster says: At your disposal) – July 29, 1987

When it comes to tourism, one of the most mocked aspects is related to sexual services. Fig. 18 is a daring remark on the sex tourism industry that flourished in Hungary at the time, mostly catering to the foreign clientele at Lake Balaton. Similarly, rural tourism appears to take

advantage of local beauties (Fig. 17) which in turn alter the image of the Hungarian village (Fig. 16), a transformation more mocked than mourned by the authors at *Ludas*. The three pictures above refer to distinct types of tourism in Hungary. Fig. 18 is inarguably the representation of Lake Balaton referenced by the image of the hotel and the sailing boats. This is a site specifically oriented towards the foreigner. But in the 1980s as the resorts on Lake Balaton have started to reach their full potential the government intention was to attract foreigners to other parts of the country. Fig. 16. is an example in this sense and an implicit criticism to the costs of foreign tourism in the countryside (referenced by the patterned shirts of the men). The last picture, Fig. 17, illustrates internal rural tourism. Tellingly, this is the only one that features the middle-aged woman taking charge of her partner's sexual activity. There is a shift in the portrayal of the sexualized beauty as well. While for targeting foreigners they are seen to adopt an exaggeratedly revealing Western-type of clothing, the Hungarian tourist is assumed to appreciate the national version of female beauty.

In conclusion let me summarize the characteristics of the 'leading star' of the sex-discourse with the following image:

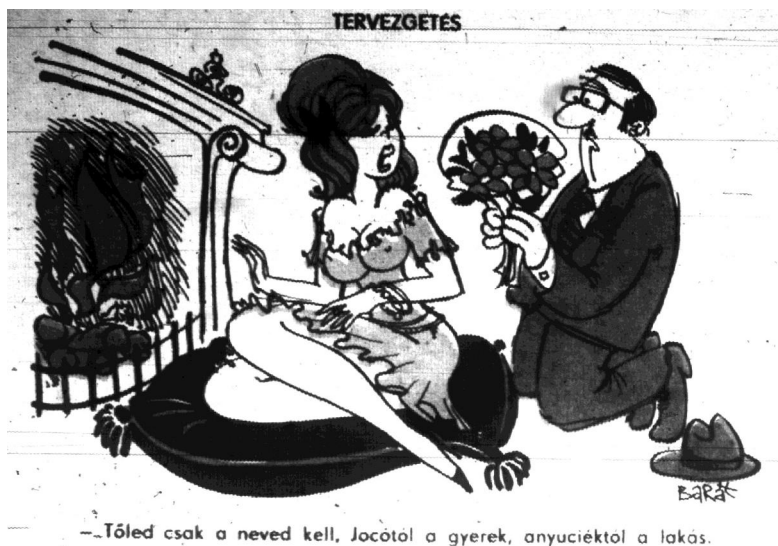


Fig. 19 Planning

- From you I only want your name, from Jocó a child, and from my parents the house. – Feb. 19, 1981

This model is definitely the winner on the pages of *Ludas Matyi*, because she has the power (most often the sexual power) to get what she wants. The ultimate cold-headed beauty is presented to us in Fig. 19. where she is determined to take advantage of all her prerogatives. The pun is on the woman herself, showing her as unaffectionate, materialistic, excessively rational and selfish desiring to take control of finances/household and family, thus unattractive. She represents by herself the general category of the beautiful, emancipated, and sexually liberated but calculated young woman, the protagonist of the sex-discourse. Admittedly, *Ludas Matyi* constructs the caricature of this woman emphasizing the extremes that the sex-discourse can lead to. Although it formulates a critique of the ‘modern woman’ it does not go as far as questioning the pleasures involved in her spectacle, rather draws on them to trigger amusement. The pictured women are teenage high school students, young secretaries, models or even prostitutes who always know what they want and have clear plans on how to get it. In these portrayals there is

the general tendency to use, to naturalize women's sexuality as 'manipulative/oriented to money only' as successful expectations to work in the jokes.

The category of the young and beautiful is also very interested in sex. But this kind of sexuality doesn't have a moral edge, not for the prostitutes, the models, or the teenagers. Sexuality is just a means through which these women get to more important things like status and money. There is an implicit assumption here that women's sexuality is naturally amoral, because they cannot help but use it for material ends which is in fact a developed notion of women depend on men. It is also important to note that their bodies are the ones that most often get represented naked. Being the object of the male gaze they provide the entire spectacle. The older women are always clothed as well as the men.

If we look at the iconography of the female body it is interesting to note that the overemphasis of large breasts and buttocks combined with long legs and full lips, not only goes against the small-breasted beauty ideal of the eighties but completes the sexualization of women in quite similar ways as contemporary pornography.

The second category of women that gets represented in *Ludas Matyi* in this context stands for the woman imagined by the sanitized discourse on sexuality. In the magazine she is portrayed as the ultimate loser, old, fat and ugly but above all almost absurdly asexual.



– Nő, végre nyugodtan beszélgethetünk. A férjem felhozott valami kis nőt!

Fig. 20 – Finally we can talk in peace. My husband has picked up and brought home some chick.
- July 24, 1985

The absurdity of this image is stressed by the fact that more women of this group are portrayed as policing their husbands' sexual lives. But in this case there is an ironic double edge. The two ladies are so unconcerned about their partners' sexual conquests, that they take advantage of the freedom from household duties and engage in a little socializing. Extra pun is added by the fact that they appropriated the male language to refer to their female 'other'.

Fig. 17, Fig. 15, and Fig. 21. are examples where the obnoxious wife is attempting to control her husbands' sexual activity.



– Tudod, anyukám, a cigi helyett kell egy kis pótcselekvés...

Fig. 21 – You know honey, I need something to keep me from smoking ...– Apr. 6, 1988

Clearly, the message is that women's destiny is to make the most of their lives while they are young and beautiful because once they marry they grow fat and ugly, will be cheated on by their husbands and lose all interest in sex while men undisturbed by their age and ugliness go on with their sex lives. The patriarchal bias is evidenced by the way men manage to take advantage of the privilege to be 'ordinary'. The next picture adds an interesting twist to this idea.



Fig. 22 – My God! Little Steve has taken the porn cassettes to the kids' party! – Sept. 4, 1985

Owning porn movies was illegal in socialist Hungary, but it wasn't impossible. The visual representation of both figures is that of the asexual parents, equally upset (as referenced by the similar body contours of all three characters) over the missing movies. The woman is more immediately the 'control-freak' indicating by connotation that there is no sex between the partners 'only' the replacement of watching it.

4.4. Conclusion

In her examination of *Hustler*, Laura Kipnis writes: "The power of grossness is very simply its opposition to high culture and official culture, which feeds the continual need to protect itself against the debasements of the low (the lower classes, low culture, the lower body..." (Kipnis, 1999:137) In a different cultural and social context resistance to official discourses – be it

socialist or capitalist inspired – is enacted on the pages of humor magazines, which under the excuse of laughter offer its skilled readers the possibility of dissent.

The above analysis gives sufficient evidence to support the argument that seeing state-socialism as asexual, or even too sanitized is a one-sided picture. In the case of *Ludas Matyi* female sexuality was used as packaging for the formulation of radical critique of the status-quo, which was a more sensitive issue in the eyes of the political regime than anything else.

In the light of the previous three chapters it is imperative to observe that the middle category of Hungarian cultural politics was in flux due to the constant negotiation of it between a paternalist state and its male workers. A sort of agreement was reached at the expense of women, thus recreating the conditions of the sexual contract described by Carol Pateman as the universal right of men to women's bodies (Pateman, 1988). The 'brotherhood of men' was necessary because this is how an oppressive regime sought to buy the patience of its male (and implicitly more dangerous) citizens, while keeping up the image of 'constructing socialism with a human face'. On the other side men have benefited from the construction of male sexuality as free of responsibility and moral concern while keeping up gender inequalities in the family.

Although criticizing both discourses on sexuality the *Ludas Matyi* stance on women's sexuality is limited in many ways. On the one hand it mocks young, beautiful women for using their sexual powers for material gains, while it forgets about the (s)exploitation inherent in profit-making or the social stigma that surrounds these activities. On the other hand it derides older women as asexual losers stressing the incompatibility of the two sides of the whore/madonna or sex-discourse/sanitized image of sexuality dichotomy. Female 'success' is naturally amoral, but older and ugly women are stupid not to understand that no 'decent' man could want them.

When sexuality is not portrayed for its own sake as it is in this case, there is the possibility of greater complexity. Laura Kipnis claims that the simple fact “[t]hat more of the naked bodies are female and that many are in what might be described as a service relation to male bodies opens up the possibility of misogyny charges. But what becomes problematic for such a singular reading is that within the parody, the imaginary staging of the rituals of male sexual power functions in favor of an overtly political critique.” (Kipnis, 1999:153) On the other hand, is this kind of transgression to the advantage of women? I believe that the mere defiance of the rules is not necessarily a feminist project, because here, in the case of *Ludas Matyi* harsh social criticism still keeps the sexual contract in its place and it doesn’t question women’s position in society to a satisfying degree.

Instead I advocate the individual assessment of each cultural product that entails representations of female sexuality, in order to establish its progressive or conservative nature in a specific historical and social context.

In 1997 Éva Fodor in her Ph.D. dissertation argues that “certain forms of the commodification of the female body, in particular in advertisements, prostitution, or pornography, were strictly forbidden and largely absent from overt practices. Women’s magazines emphasized cleanliness and efficiency rather than fashion, make-up adornment – women’s bodies were under less publicly approved scrutiny than in Western societies.” (Fodor, cited in Adamik, 2000:186) This argument, complemented by Adamik’s observation that the issue of female sexuality has not been addressed under state-socialism (Adamik, 2000:170) and supported by Vera Sokolová’s statement that “sex under communism was either represented through officially sanctioned channels or not represented at all” are possible because of a

methodological bias. Popular culture is most often ignored, but even when considered (Fodor) it is not seen in its contradictory complexity. Through the case study of sexuality in Hungarian popular culture I meant to point at the complexities of popular cultural sources. In the case of Hungary it was possible to find representative works for all three categories of cultural politics (*support, tolerate and forbid*) – some of it endorsing the official discourse on sexuality, other parts situating themselves in the negotiated category while some other cultural products crossed the line from time to time and got penalized for it.

Therefore my analysis has important implications for the study of popular culture. First, it is impossible to posit popular culture as inherently normalizing or subversive because the field is too complex. It may be normalizing in a certain aspect (in gender relations in the above example) but transgressive in others (critique of the status-quo above). Second, popular culture is not contingent on a political regime. Moreover in its details it shows great similarities across political and economic regimes. Therefore there is the need to abandon the inherent connections between capitalism, consumerism and popular culture. Finally, gendering popular culture is similarly difficult, as it addresses both women and men (as in the case of *Ludas Matyi*). Its gendering as feminine can only be justified by the masculine bias of patriarchy, afraid of contamination by its other.

Conclusion

The theory of postmodernism argues that the blurring of the boundary between high culture and popular culture is one of the major characteristics of the shift from the modern to the postmodern. According to Andreas Huyssen, most often, discussions of modernism emphasize its relationship with the traditions of bourgeois culture while ignoring or dismissing its oppositional framework of popular culture. (Huyssen, 1986:ix) Moreover, “the Great Divide”, as Huyssen calls the distinction between so-called high culture and popular culture still lives on today, specifically visible in the structures of academia where any kind of literary studies, for example, are still carefully separated from the fields researching popular culture. The distinction is also there informing the little feminist scholarship emerging after the system change in 1989 on the (non)availability of discourses of female sexuality under state-socialism. This situation is the background against which I built up the main argument of my thesis, namely that the study of popular culture under state-socialist regimes is just as legitimate as it is in the context of capitalism. In the case of Hungary in the 1980s, popular culture is the site where a distinct discourse of sexuality gets articulated in a more coherent manner than in the products of high culture.

The first part of my thesis reviewed the major points of the popular culture debate complemented by the consideration of the input feminism has brought to the field of cultural studies and the potential relevance of these theories for the Hungarian state-socialist context. For an overview of the debate I turned to the ideas of Theodor Adorno from the Frankfurt School and John Fiske who are seen as the opposing poles of thinking about popular culture. Adorno is a Marxist theorist and sees ‘mass culture’ (his label) as the product of the culture industry that is

meant to promote the primarily economic interests of the capital by creating false consciousness in the masses, depriving them of any agency. Fiske, on the other hand, rejects Adorno's interpretation of popular culture and emphasizes the diversity of possible readings for any single popular cultural product. In his theory, meaning is always the result of struggle in which the interests of 'the people' and the 'power-bloc' are set up as antagonistic. In this way he ascribes a significant amount of agency to subordinated groups when 'consuming' the popular cultural products. In other words, Fiske unsettles the self-contained boundary between high and popular cultural products by arguing that both position their 'consumer' as agents. In Fiske's model then the readers now have the choice to choose among the dominant and a variety of resistant readings. Unfortunately, his unproblematic celebration of choice and freedom seems to marginalize the social inequalities entailed by these interactions, creating a system in which the power of globalized capitalism is presented as equal with the 'guerilla warfare' available to inferior groups.

It is exactly the analysis of power relations that was emphasized when feminist research entered the scene of cultural studies. Mostly confined to class analysis till that point, feminist scholars pointed out other areas of social inequity, like that of gender and sexuality. The widening of the perspective has proved to be considerably fertile evidenced by the impressive amount of feminist scholarship on the topic of popular culture.

The 'Great Divide' between high culture and popular culture is carefully molded upon the binary of man and woman. This is especially visible when mass culture is constantly described as having feminine characteristics. Huyssen explains this equivalence by pointing out that class antagonisms and the feminist movement shared the same time slot in history, thus the threat of the masses refers to the proletariat in general but also to groups of women contesting

the institutions of patriarchy. The fear of contamination underlying the obsessive distinction between high culture and popular culture also involves the rejection of the feminine following the logic of “the persistent gendering as feminine of that which is devalued.” (Huyssen, 1986:53)

From the perspective of my analysis, the most important aspect of this debate on popular culture is the fact that it is exclusively framed in the context of a capitalist economic order. Then a legitimate question to inquire is about the status of popular culture under state-socialism. The lack of research in this regard is especially intriguing when one takes into account the resistant potential in positioning popular culture as against ‘the power-bloc’ by Hall and Fiske alike. Therefore, in the last section I draw on the works of regional scholars to argue that the marginalization of popular culture in scholarship concerning the ways the state-socialist regime translates into a modernist project with patriarchal overtones. Moreover, in agreement with Iordanova, I also argue that ignoring the items of popular culture from the state-socialist period forecloses the understanding of the complexity of cultural production under state-socialist regimes.

Applying the theory of popular culture to this different economic and political context has important implications. The thriving field of popular culture under state-socialism offers the base for reconsidering the hitherto inherent connections between industrialized capitalist societies, consumerism and the mass production of popular culture. Similarly, framing popular cultural production as ‘oppositional’ to the state is untenable because in Hungary it was explicit party policies that tried to regulate the emergence of an ‘ideologically correct’ popular culture as well the boundaries within the category through the policy of the so-called three T’s.

The second part of my thesis is taken up by the discourse analysis of the printed popular media in 1980s of Hungary. The focus of my research is the production of discourses of

sexuality for women under state-socialism. The three clusters of data that I examine are all implicitly or explicitly addressing the issue of gender and sexuality. The specific lens through which I approach my sources is that of cultural politics. In Hungary the most important principle for the regulation of cultural production was the politics of the three Ts, made up of the first letters of the three Hungarian words which mean *support*, *tolerate* and *forbid*. Each term was meant to delineate a category of cultural production distinguished by the degree of its ‘ideological correctness’. The most debated category of the three Ts was that of *tolerate*, which was continuously contested and renegotiated as the one that usually reflected the changes in the political power of the system. My research encompasses the last decade of Hungarian socialism and I chose my specific examples to explore the gradual liberalization of Hungarian cultural politics at the time.

In agreement with the previous categorization I structured my data into three different clusters representative of the three categories of cultural policy, respectively. To illustrate the group of *supported* works I picked two state commissioned books educating youth about family life. Conforming to the official standards these books articulate the discourse of the sanitized image of sexuality which casts women in the exclusive role of mothers, while purporting that men and women are equal in a socialist society.

The second cluster is made up by four sexual education manuals targeting young adults, similar to what we call today ‘pop-psychology’. The discourse of sexuality that comes through the pages of these works departs more and more from the sanitized image of sexuality of the commissioned books and seems to offer a much more ‘liberated’ take on sexual issues than the official discourse would allow. However, upon a closer look the so-called sexual liberation was

in fact targeting men and casting women as sexually backwards who need to renounce their complexes and fears to become more ‘modern’.

This discourse which I call – borrowing the label from Mária Adamik – the sex-discourse is fully developed on the pages of *Ludas Matyi*, which constitutes the third body of data. *Ludas Matyi* was a famous Hungarian humor magazine, symbolic for the state-socialist regime. Its resistant positioning is made explicit by its own labeling as a ‘weekly satirical magazine’. In this chapter I argue that although the magazine’s primary focus (and limit) is social criticism, the sex-discourse as well as a male-biased version of criticism of the sanctioned image of sexuality is articulated on its pages. The approach results in a double take on women’s sexuality, each representing the two competing discourses. On the one hand there is the dismissal of the aging wife and mother as conservative and outdated, while on the other hand a celebration of the young, sexually available, attractive lover as the progressive and modern woman.

The most important conclusions that came out of the analysis are as follows. Concerning Hungarian cultural politics, the middle category of *tolerate* is in fact the result of the negotiation between a paternalistic state and its male citizens at the expense of women. The state sought to buy the patience of the ‘worker’ by allowing to pursue his own sexual interests on the condition that he is not going to question the legitimacy of the political regime. Carol Pateman’s concept of ‘the brotherhood of men’ is vividly illustrated by the negotiating partners of Hungarian cultural politics as represented in this category.

The next conclusion is that the two discourses of female sexuality are incommensurable. They translate into the impossibility of the whore/madonna dyad, the double bind assigned to women by a patriarchal world order. Although the discourse of modernization legitimates the

sex-discourse, eventually both variants turn out to be just as damaging to women because of their limited ideologies.

Mária Adamik claims that the sex-discourse is sporadic and cannot be articulated coherently. (Adamik, 2000:170) I argue that the ‘impossibility’ is due to her strategic selection of sources. They either consist of pieces of high-culture literature or scholarly research. It is the marginalization of popular culture that forecloses the possibility of perceiving a coherent counter-discourse of sexuality. Therefore I argue that turning to the study of popular culture in state-socialist regimes is a necessary step to take in order to understand the complexities of everyday life during these political regimes. Taking popular culture seriously also means renouncing elitist methodologies and accepting the postmodern condition of blurring the boundaries between high-culture and its ‘other’, i.e. popular culture. At the same time it is a significant feminist project because it sets out to deconstruct the gendering of popular culture as feminine, undermining women’s status as ‘proper’ cultural citizens. Moreover, researching state socialist popular culture will eventually provide us with a better understanding of different cultural practices characteristic of the post-state socialist context.

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