4 The construction of post-communist ideologies and re-branding of Budapest

The case study of Statue Park Museum

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There have been many changes to the public sphere in Hungary since the ‘silent revolution’ against Soviet hegemony. One particular example refers to the reconfiguration of patrimony from the communist period which was removed from the streets of Budapest.

The government organised an architectural competition to find a suitable design for displaying this statuary using a site of donated land on the edge of the city. The winner, Ákos Elecs, curated an exhibition entitled The Sentence on Tyranny Park (1993) which is now known as Memento or Statue Park (Pittaway 2003: 288–289). His intention was to construct a politically neutral open-air museum which functioned to reconcile the past, especially for those who were compliant in the maintenance of civil society at the time (James 1999: 304), neither deriding nor celebrating the communist era (Nash 1993).

This ingenious solution to heritage (Light 2000: 169) appears to be highly imaginative, infusing the statuary with irony as expressed by the original title, which resonated with the nature of resistance during the communist period (James 1999: 307).

Nonetheless, it is an unflattering memorial to communism and representation is ambiguous, with engagement passive or intellectualised which expresses ‘cold’ memory (Turai 2009). It has been criticised as a cemetery of dead statues cut adrift and positioned in a suburban wasteland (Plachy 1993), a menacing and forbidden re-inscription of meaning (Nadkarni 2003: 204).

The lack of obvious signage to guide visitors possibly exacerbates the problem of resolving a powerful history now situated out of context (James 2005: 34). So the statues invoke notions of unfinished business through improper burial procedures which devalues the former political capital of the statuary (Williams 2008: 190) and is symptomatic of Hungary’s inability to clarify its messy past (Turai 2009). It offers local Hungarians and tourists a variety of interpretations.

One salient representational problem relates, albeit conversely, to the theoretical stance of Raymond Williams (1977) who revised Marxist determinism. He maintained that reductionist notions of art and culture which distil meaning to ideology are misconstrued, as they deny the primary processes of social
engagement, thinking and imagination. But Hungary has been scarred by the
effects of German Nazism and Russian Communism, ideological determinants
that cannot be overlooked by insisting on individualised processes of audience
engagement, thinking and imagination, or in this case the intended postmodern
‘irony’, as the statues are loaded with significance.

There are degrees to which audiences are influenced by historical and political
discourses as meaning is forever changing and representation is forever vulner-
able to passionate or ‘hot’ memory (Turai 2009) and ideological co-option. This
hybrid and compromised understanding embraces artistic intention, viewer judg-
ment, as well as wider externalities and counter-narratives, neither singular or
universal in scope nor totally relative.

Diverse interpretation cannot ignore determinism and is tested by Statue
Park which questions whether postmodern whimsy is able to escape history and
ideology. The latter term refers to the social production of meaning, ‘illusory
beliefs—false ideas or their consciousness’ (Williams 1977: 55), and contrasts the
actuality with its representation. In Hungary today ideology is grounded in ‘post-
communism’, referring to a range of discourses related to democracy, neoliberal
capitalism and nationalism.

The trajectory of this chapter begins first with a focus on Statue Park, which
comprises three related themes: situating the museum within the cultural trail
of Budapest and the Hungarian story; a critical evaluation of the museum itself;
and theoretical models of audience reception to help establish the complexity
of meaning.

Second, the emphasis shifts to highlight notions of commodification, memory
and brand in relation to Statue Park and Budapest, which comprises four related
concerns: the museum signifying the consumption of communism; national
governance encouraging the transformation of public space in Budapest; the con-
voluted reconstitution of memory; and a conceptualisation of visitors that befits
the re-branding of the city.

Statue Park Museum: a partial representation of the
Hungarian story

In many ways the Hungarian national story can be divided into four overlapping
historical periods: pre-fascist; fascist; communist; and post-communist.

The communist era is central to Statue Park and although it is devoid of obvi-
ous signage, the Visitor’s Guide (Réthly 2010) encourages viewers to engage with
the history of the era and it offers a partial ideological and discursive framework
which concurs with other sites on the ‘cultural trail’ in Budapest (Tourism Office
of Budapest 2015). The Museum of Terror for example, situated in the former
headquarters of the secret police (AVO), ‘authentically’ reconstructs the past
by shaping the politics of fascist and communist memory. The Jewish Museum
also engages directly with those darker fascist elements of the national story
and the Pest Ghetto during Nazi occupation, whilst the Hammer and Sickle Tour
(Smith and Puczkó 2010) and Marxism Pub, which is adorned with symbols of communism (Turai 2009), suggests a more consumer-orientated attitude to the tourist experience. This contrasts with the pre-fascist national story which references ‘safe’ cultural sites, for example famous Hungarian musicians at the Museum of Musical History and visual artists at the Hungarian National Gallery, or general history, as characterised by the Budapest History Museum.

An exhibition of ambiguity

The 41 exhibits removed from the streets of Budapest in 1991 after the ‘silent revolution’ include 13 memorial plaques and 28 statues or busts (Light 2000: 167). The curation of the predominantly socialist realism style of statuary is polysemic with pieces juxtaposed from different chronological times (James 2005: 25), offering a range of interpretations steeped in historical, ideological, aesthetic discourses and a ‘derisive nostalgia’ (Williams 2008: 186). The examples are purposely chosen to reflect the ambiguity of meaning and ambivalence towards the communist period.

The entrance wall contains statues of Lenin and Marx set into a neo-classical façade which parodies socialist realism architecture (Light 2000: 168), setting the scene for the irony intended by Eleőd. The pathways, which circulate around a central figure of a five-pointed communist star of red flowers, loop back on each other forming endless figures of eight, the mathematical symbol for infinity. Another path collides with the back wall, all of which signifies the failure of communism (Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1 Communist Star of Red Flowers, Memento Park. Source: Paul Clements, 2010.](image)
Outside the entrance in Witness Square (completed in 2006), there is Stalin’s Boots, the reconstructed remains (the footwear) of an 8 metre bronze statue which was felled during the unsuccessful 1956 revolution (Clements 2014: 75). The original statue with accompanying grandstand was used by communist leaders to commemorate national holidays and observe military parades (Réthly 2010: 54). Stalin’s Boots mocks the personality cult of Stalin and his ideology, a sentiment expressing the public mood after the 1989 ‘silent revolution’ but hardly neutral in tone. Stalin’s ghost offers much ambiguity in relation to the symbolic power of individualism and even celebrity today.

The memory of 1956 has revealed ideological divisions about what the past represents, between those Hungarians who broadly support reformist socialist aims and those conservatives and liberals who stress its anti-communist significance, as documented by the Budapest Oral History Archive (Pittaway 2003: 280). The statue for those with experience of totalitarian regimes may evoke ‘hot’ memory, revealing deep-seated anger and ambivalence towards the past whereas other tourist response may be colder and intellectualised, even humorous spectacle.

There are several monumental statues in Statue Park which due to their size invoke awe or a contrasting emotion of hubris. This is captured by the Monument to the Martyrs of the Counter-Revolution (Figure 4.2) cast in bronze and created in 1960 to celebrate those who were killed in defence of the Communist Party Headquarters during the 1956 uprising (Réthly 2010: 48). The notion of counter-revolution is confusing as the term has been appropriated to describe those who supported the system, not those rebels who wanted reform.

In contrast, the Béla Kun Memorial is a metal sculpture which was commissioned in 1986 by the communist regime to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Béla Kun, leader of the short-lived 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic (Réthly 2010: 36). Kun is waving goodbye to a crowd which is a parody of those killed under the system and during the ‘silent revolution’ the memorial became a focal point for change (Clements 2014: 76). Moreover, because it is highly unusual for a totalitarian communist regime to satirise itself, such humour offers much ambiguity.

The range of representation and interpretations of these emblems of Hungarian communism is variable and complex. As Eleőd comments, ‘a tourist for whom dictatorship is merely something they have read about, has completely different thoughts when in the park than the person with the tragic past’ (cited in Réthly 2010: 6). These artefacts are serious emblems of history and ideology but they can also elicit more abstract and playful counter-narratives. This suggests the co-existence of modernist meta-narratives with more localised and mutable post-modern micro-narratives (McGuigan 2006).

The exhibition centre shows a Hungarian Secret Police (AVO) training film entitled The Life of an Agent (Papp 2004) which in keeping with the general tenet of the museum can be interpreted as a serious documentary about the training of secret agents in the communist era, an ironic re-interpretation of this process or as infotainment.
Notional audience response

Some theoretical models of audience reception may help to ground the variety of meanings offered. Klaus Jensen and Karl Rosengren (1990: 186–191) compared the five main research traditions in relation to understanding media messages which have been adapted to construct meaning positions for Statue Park and can be blended to offer a comprehensive understanding of audience response.
The Effects Tradition which is deterministic and associated with how media messages affect behaviour, acknowledges that we are influenced by the contents of culture, usually in a negative manner, which has resulted in moral panics spread by powerful gatekeepers.

It has presumed a passive human nature that is easily manipulated and very different to the Uses and Gratifications approach which, instead of taking a pejorative view of what culture may do to the audience, is concerned with the way that audiences actively use culture and find pleasure from the ‘text’. Nonetheless, initially the interest in gratification concentrated on how cultural content attracted and influenced audiences allied to the effects tradition of passivity (Ruggiero 2000).

The third method relates to Literary Criticism and how the audience decodes the aesthetic or cognitive messages within specific canons of understanding. This refers to the ‘art experience’ and traditional ‘high’ culture, where the relationship between individual readers and texts is pertinent.

The Cultural Studies approach is broader in scope, structural and eclectic, as it extends an understanding of cultural representation beyond the canon, embracing broader social meanings and practices. This includes semiotic, discursive and Marxist frameworks of analysis, resistance to hegemony, as well as recognition of the co-production of meaning and the influence of class, gender and ethnicity amongst other structural variables.

Finally, Reception Analysis develops meaning to include theoretical frameworks ranging from symbolic interactionism to psychoanalysis and tries to integrate humanistic with social scientific perspectives drawing together Uses and Gratifications, Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies approaches. Its postmodern focus on the agency of individuals to determine meaning has been critical of other methods for neglecting the variety of aesthetic responses to culture corresponding to the free-play of representation. In many ways this approach struggles with the power of encoded meaning.

The Effects Tradition, Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies analyses tend to focus on the contents and actual message of the ‘text’ whilst the Uses and Gratifications approach makes the audience central but tends to consider micro individual aspects, with macro issues given little attention. The Reception tradition similarly treats the audience as active decoders of messages (Hall 1990), but recognises that meaning has to be interpreted in relation to the socio-cultural system and prevailing practices, thereby revealing its contextual social production. Nonetheless, there is an assumption that foregrounds audience autonomy and downplays the extent to which individual acts of interpretation are influenced by structural concerns, for example the political economy and ideology.

These approaches can be applied to Statue Park, starting with issues regarding its effect on audiences and the power of the statuary to trigger reaction. This initially refers to indoctrination and the extent to which these monuments influence citizens as they did in the Soviet period, how this has altered in relation to an empty or non-existent communist actuality, the effects of anti-communist ideology and altered reality.
With regards to the Uses and Gratifications approach, during the communist period the statuary within the city was employed by citizens as landmarks to aid urban identification and as symbols that bore political, emotional and patriotic meanings (for example supporting hegemony or gratifying people’s seething discontent with Soviet-styled communism). The active individual makes choices about uses which affect interpretation and extent of engagement, Statute Park today is constructed as part of the Budapest cultural trail and the overwhelming gratification for Hungarians is one of curiosity (Réthly 2010: 63), rather than anger, pride or nostalgia.

The Literary Criticism model of analysis depends upon understanding formal interpretive codes which reference the canon and correspond to the intention of the (re)-creator, which process is complex and requires cultural education and knowledge. The construction of meaning around Cultural Studies issues and the influence of structural, ideological, historical or socio-political concerns (even issues reflecting consumer marketing and memory), will become clearer as the ideas develop in this chapter. Suffice to say meaning cannot be singular or narrow in focus. Finally, issues of context, aesthetic response and ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ memory recognise individual agency and the importance of a Reception Analysis.

Eleőd’s intention was ‘to summarise the individual thought-provoking elements of a historical series of paradoxes into one conceptual thought process’ (cited in Réthly 2010: 7), which requires a comprehensive framework of understanding accounting for all possible representational permutations and the mutability of interpretation.

The postmodern emphasis on meaning in flux was explained theoretically by Italian philosopher Umberto Eco (1992) who referred to ‘Hermetic drift’, following the American semiotician Charles Peirce whose model of ‘threeness’ referred to unlimited semiosis (a never-ending triangulation of interpretation), whereby the meaning of a sign continually alters without any finality. Irrespective of however much an artist intends meaning, or a community of interpreters and gatekeepers reach agreement about what this is and try to finalise significance, the individual has endless agency to reconstruct significance. The artefacts in Statue Park could be an overall signifier of one meaning (anti-communism), or many meanings could be invested in each piece, all of which vie for recognition.

Eco (1992: 23) illustrated how meaning forever alters by quoting Shakespeare,

*Hamlet:* Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost the shape of a camel?

*Polonius:* By the’ mass, and ‘tis like a camel indeed.

*Hamlet:* Methinks it is like a weasel.

*Polonius:* It is back’d like a weasel.

*Hamlet:* Or like a whale?

*Polonius:* Very like a whale.

In contrast to this endless individualised process of meaning making, the Russian theorist Valentin Volosinov (1990 [1927]) emphasised the social as the determining factor of significance. Understanding is not abstract nor continually changing
outside of social context but invested within it and in turn influenced by power relations. This presents a paradigmatic understanding of fixed positions within a particular milieu which only alters in response to socio-political change. Possibly Statue Park now represents a counter-narrative of irony not in relation to the Soviet period but in relation to present social concerns over the fate of civil society and an uncertain neoliberal future (Williams 2008: 195).

This suggests a confused site of contested meaning, memory and heritage, although as Light (2000: 173) has pointed out, ‘communist heritage’ tourism challenges the post-communist project as it brings politics back into the equation. Also, it is a symbol of the shift to consumerism which connotes a move towards a market-determined ‘freedom’, symbolic of the evolution of Hungary into a capitalist economy.

Commodity, governance, memory and brand: Statue Park as commodity

The site, buildings and statuary that comprise Statue Park is a privately rented public space owned by the state and operated by a private company (Rethely 2010: 63). This mechanism of public-private partnership is akin to Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) which have become a feature in capitalist economies (see Clements 2014: 78–80). The ideological shift towards POPS revises and reconstructs the boundaries between public and private spheres and also the symbolic space between civil society and the state.

The statuary in Statue Park has been removed from public space notionally available to and owned by all, then reconstructed in a remote public-private space which requires payment to enter, typifying ‘entrepreneurial capitalist enterprise’ (Williams 2008: 189). There is communist memorabilia for sale which has been recuperated as political kitsch, objects cleansed ‘of any painful or uncomfortable memories that may be invoked in their consumers’ (Nadkarni 2003: 203). These retro souvenirs include: replica Red Army medals, watches, flasks, lighters, pens, postcards and posters decorated with the ‘wise men’ of communism; T-shirts including one entitled The Terrors with a portrait of Mao, Lenin and Stalin; model Trabant cars; a compact disc of the ‘Best of Communism’ music and ‘Party House Mix’ of communist-era recordings; and the DVD, The Life of an Agent. Finally, the visitor can purchase ‘the last breath of communism, sealed in a tin’. The sale of communist memorabilia is dripping with kitsch, gimmickry and ironic humour which is intended to titillate consumers.

The Visitor’s Guide (Rethely 2010) has four pages promoting sales from the Red Star Store just in case the visitor fails to see the merchandise for sale at the entrance/exit. The official website (www.mementopark.hu) offers other merchandising including an officially stamped Soviet Passport (written in either Russian or English). It also details synergistic ties with ‘Partners in Tourism’ and ‘Service Partners’ including a website of hotels and hostels, a travel agency, a Budapest tourist information site and a digital technology company, amongst
other businesses. Statue Park is franchised on a self-sustaining basis, a business which relies on entry fees and souvenir sales.

This consumption of communism is hegemonic and invokes Jim McGuigan’s (2011: 11) notion of ‘cool capitalism’ and ‘the incorporation of disaffection into capitalism itself’, which has added symbolic power within this specific context as it has consumed its old enemy. Chris Rojek (2003: 114–115) summarised the process of engineering consent as operating on a number of levels which are purposely obscured. Hegemony frames and positions what difference and resistance are, but it is erroneous to perceive the governance of normalisation as an intentional expunging of different ideologies as this fails to comprehend how, in this case, the process manipulates and co-opts the signs of communism in order to recuperate them. These are now being sold off as kitsch in Statue Park, driven by a market philosophy which has altered the meaning of the artefacts. There appears to be little scrutiny or debate about the past beyond the information presented in the Visitors Guide, which is critical of the era employing an ironic tone in parts.

Possibly it is just a matter of time before this museum and similar systems of renting public space are sold off. This is reminiscent of the privatisation of services and state assets in the UK which was instigated by the right-wing neoliberal government of Margaret Thatcher in the late 1970s. Richard Sennett (1986 [1974]) critiqued the privatisation of the public sphere for constructing an imbalance of human experience which has downgraded the public realm of political life in favour of private psychological self-examination. In effect, we have become so self-absorbed and self-concerned that we take little interest in the world and public life outside our own life, agendas and social networks, a process exacerbated by the fragmentary effects of capitalism and technology. We project our psychological frameworks onto the world rather than interpreting it outside of them, and look inwards rather than outwards, which corrupts the ideal of citizenship and a public realm where people are able to voice their socio-economic and political needs, differences and concerns.

Viktor Orbán’s governance and the commodification of Budapest

Within capitalist economies there is a tension between the market (economic liberalism) and democracy, free speech and human rights (socio-cultural liberalism), whereas in Hungary during the communist era the struggle for socio-cultural liberalism was at odds with an oppressive state. Notwithstanding this, the post-communist right-wing Fidesz government of Viktor Orbán first elected in 1990 appears to be operating by employing both the power of global capitalism and the state to deny citizen rights, a system which combines neoliberal ideology with centralised control and possibly better configures the realpolitik of neoliberal practice.

The process of recuperating the communist past through ‘cool’ capitalism has not been aided by the faltering state of the political economy. During this period
there has been greater income inequality, declining living standards and increased unemployment (Onaran 2009), an accumulation of national debt and ongoing repayments of large International Monetary Fund loans. The consequence has been that many state subsidies have been removed, creating much poverty which is a new feature of Hungarian society (Fabry 2009). Although the Hungarian Socialist Party has gained power several times, it has pursued a similar political line just as other socialist parties in Western Europe, all of whom have promoted degrees of neoliberalism when elected.

The ideology of neoliberalism is a political and economic configuration which promotes the hypothetical notion that the optimum advancement of human beings within society requires individual entrepreneurial freedoms set within an institutional framework, the promotion of private property rights, ‘free’ markets and ‘free’ trade (Harvey 2005: 2). This global ‘utopia of the pure market’ (Bourdieu 1998: 96) requires financial deregulation and the deconstruction of collective structures where the state is reduced to the role of ensuring the best conditions for markets to operate in. Through POPS it reconfigures the partnership between private and public domains, fashioning a consumerist model of civil society. This privileges commercial interests and is far from ideal as it is immersed in an ideology which is elitist, obfuscates neutrality and objective ‘public’ representation crucial for a democratic public sphere.

The transformation of physical space in Budapest highlights in a practical manner its infiltration by market capitalism with a boom in shopping malls and business parks, and only fragmented opposition offered by Trade Unionists and environmentalists (Szalai 1998 cited in Bodnár 2001). There has been much structural change since the ‘silent revolution’ and the liberalisation of the once state-owned real estate market which privatisation of housing has proceeded faster in Budapest than other ex-communist bloc countries (Grime 1999). This is not totally surprising as Hungary in the past was recognised as one of the most advanced consumer societies within the Communist Bloc when there were debates concerning false needs undergirding commoditisation and technical fetishism (Crowley 2003: 279).

Today in the city centre the more affluent consumers and tourists have displaced local shoppers at retail centres, which have been constructed and purchased by multinational companies (Timár 2001), and there has been a 15–20 per cent increase of floor space per year during the 1990s (Nagy 2001: 342). Moreover, the rolling back of state responsibilities has adversely affected essential welfare services, health and education. Keith Grime (1999: 40) has maintained that the populace of Budapest has had reservations, especially about the large-scale privatisations of housing and buildings more generally, with 65 per cent surveyed dissatisfied with the inequalities of distribution. Subsequently, the Orbán/Fidesz government has sold off prime agricultural land leased from the state including organic farms in Kishántos which were once thriving producers of food, to ‘oligarchs and businessmen’ (Traynor 2014), creating a crony state.

The personality cult associated with Orbán is reminiscent of Stalinism (or Putinism), and there are questions regarding the extent to which the democratic
gains made since the 'silent revolution' have been eroded. The highly centralised Fidesz government has removed checks and balances to its own power with the most vulnerable social groups becoming peripheral. There has been a marginalisation of democracy and much disillusionment amongst the Hungarian population, with a mere 60.2 per cent turnout in the 2014 election in which the greatest increase of the vote was for the far-right Jobbik party (Mudde 2014). The government is unpopular with allegations of corruption, street protests against new taxes and criticism about cosying up to Russian President Vladimir Putin over energy deals.

Post-communist cities have undergone transformation as they have adapted to changing political and socio-economic realities. The state and local government, starved of resources, have had to engage in partnerships with corporate wealth reminiscent of Anglo-American development (Sailer-Fliege 1999). But the scenario is patchy as corporate capitalism has been attracted to those areas in cities which either best promote their organisations or are highly visible and desirable, therefore helping to market their products and ideology. Hence it is unsurprising that there are 'attractive' areas of Budapest which have been transformed into capitalist hubs whilst other 'uglier' sectors of the urban landscape resemble 'frozen mirrors of socialism' (Sýkora and Bouzarovski 2012: 44), creating an uneven city.

Public space and the POPS containing these capitalist hubs, present opportunities for branded heritage sites and the display of corporate brands for commercial interests, which visually pollutes and dumbs down the urban aesthetic. Naomi Klein (1999) created the battle cry of 'No Logo' as a riposte to the branding of the world which has reified space and language underpinned by marketing, business and management jargon. It has falsified knowledge by employing, 'imagery to equate products with positive cultural or social experience ... [which] seeks to take these associations out of the representational realm and make them a lived reality' (1999: 29). Correspondingly, privately rented public spaces are not disinterested arenas for debate, and Statue Park encourages the consumption of communism by employing 'cool' ironic signification to re-inscribe the artefacts with superficial postmodern meanings that focus on the present, which obfuscates history.

The 'ideal' public sphere promotes citizenship and democracy which gives voice to all rather than to privilege 'brand bullies' who dominate the visual environment and media in order to develop people as consumers. Habermas (1989 [1962]) referred to this type of realm as a pseudo public sphere of superficial debate which denies rational dialogue, thereby downgrading the importance of democratic rights. Neoliberal discourse dismantles and co-opts the concept of 'public good' into a material concern for open markets and competition (Murdock 2004), rather than any interest in developing a fully rounded, diverse and educated citizenship.

Cultural tourism aids this process as it attempts to construct individual and group identities through particular lifestyles and consumption practices (Britton 1991), a process that has gathered speed in Hungary.
The reconstitution of memory

Memory can be configured to re-frame the present (Hewison 1987), where heritage is recuperated nostalgically as a homogenous imaginary to avoid diverse, critical, complex and negative viewpoints. For Statue Park the reconstitution of memory is even more convoluted because the statues have been removed from their intended sites, with meaning de-contextualised then re-contextualised.

Postmodernism suggests a different representation of reality than modernist discourse. For example, one of ‘irony’ which presents superficial floating signification rather than ‘shame’ which offers depth and an ethical debate in order to engage with history (Clements 2014: 75). Nonetheless, this ‘irony’ may engage with criticality and ambiguity which, together with ‘Hermetic drift’, can challenge rigid structures and therefore strengthen democratic debate (Willet 2008).

Reconfigured heritage which encourages counter-hegemonic memory (memory-as-resistance) may prevent an evaluation of communist ideology, as it readily creates amnesia regarding the past and overlooks the existence of alternative positions (Essenshade 1995: 75). Narratives of the past operate on many levels, including top-down official versions and bottom-up local understandings. Moreover, there is ambiguity regarding memory and heritage in Eastern and Central Europe as individual responses to the falsified history and collective memory, is alternatively unreliable and all too reliable in dredging up a highly compromised past’ (1995: 76–77).

Charles Maier (cited in Turai 2009) has critiqued the association of ‘hot’ memory stirred up by Nazi atrocities with ‘cold’ memory allied to communist crimes, as though fascism is the catalyst for active memory. This is problematic for Hungarians as there were a range of victims from the communist period; those killed, imprisoned and unfairly discriminated against, which possibly includes all those who were involved in the experience (Toth 2011: 54). A ‘cold’ or passive relation to memory is closed off, ‘not kept open, not worked through’ (Turai 2009: 99), which contrasts with active memory surrounding the Holocaust and other atrocities which elicit moral outrage against humanity and demand closure. Victims of the regime may well have passionate ‘hot’ issues to contend with which refer to personal injury and anger against gross injustice.

For Statue Park the ‘cold’ ironic purpose intended by its creator does not match up to the need to engage with the past and ensure that such a Stalinist style of occupation does not reoccur.

In Hungary, there has been a struggle between nostalgia for the communist system and an anti- or post-communist consensus often driven by renewed nationalism, democratic and capitalist ideologies. The communist era was statist and relatively homogeneous in contrast with post-communism which although centralised appears more heterogeneous, leaving citizens ambivalent towards the notion of a state (James 1999: 301). Heritage is under pressure from commerce, adding to the confusion between the public good and the safeguarding of history which has been sterilised and reconfigured, affecting those seeking authentic experience (Dallen and Boyd 2003: 244–253).
There has been much shift-shaping of material manifestations of the communist regime in Budapest, with street names for example reverting to pre-communist terminology (see Clements 2014: 81). This practice may not resolve the ambivalence Hungarians feel towards this era, including both anger and nostalgia, and it contrasts with other ex-iron Curtain countries. In East Berlin, for example, street names of German communist revolutionaries have been retained (including Karl-Marx-Allee, Karl-Leibknecht-Strasse and Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz).

Personal experience is not the same as official memory and Piotr Piotrowski (2012) has revisited the ambivalence of Hungarians towards the statuary from the communist era in order to unravel the process of forgetting. Unlike the removal of monuments in Budapest for Statue Park, which received little opposition from the cultural establishment in Hungary, the artists Bálint Havis and András Gálik (better known as Little Warsaw) created a storm. With permission from the local government of Hódmezővásárhely, they removed the statue of János Szántó Kovacs (the leader of the Hungarian Peasant Rebellion) which was created by József Somogyi in 1965. This was displayed in an exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum (2004), Amsterdam, entitled Time and Again.

In response the Academy of Art in Hungary condemned this in a signed petition as a denial of the authorial rights of Somogyi’s daughter (an art critic). The citizens of the town who previously seemed disinterested in its temporary removal now recognised its absence as an attack on the town’s identity. Moreover, there is a political point being made about a post-communist Hungary, and the need to champion the rights of individuals over the collective (influential daughter above town council). Piotrowski (2012: 172) maintained that

no one protests when ‘openly’ communist monuments are removed and placed in ‘monument parks’ or simply destroyed, when it comes to public sculptures with less clearly indicated communist status (depicting other leaders, using other styles) the issue of identity of a place created within structures of memory appears.

But although he argued that the statuary from the communist period serves the function of forgetting rather than remembering (an amnesia only disturbed when people notice absence), there are more obvious ideological issues concerning history and the promotion of a post-communist discourse. Interestingly the Kovacs statue is of a Hungarian hero, not a communist leader, and the style is neither socialist realism nor heroic. Possibly there is greater association of the monumental realist style with the communist past as represented by the Monument to the 1956 Martyrs of the Counter-Revolution, which befits hubris.

A re-branded city

There have been roughly 60,000–70,000 visitors to Statue Park per year of which roughly half are Hungarian whilst others tend to be tourists from outside Eastern and Central Europe (Réthly 2010: 63). It is marketed to tourists (and locals)
through the government-sponsored Hungarian National Tourist Office and Tourist Office of Budapest (TOB) which is funded locally (Smith and Puczkó 2010: 292), and both have been key to constructing the ‘cultural trail’ for a re-branded city.

It is important to iterate the problems with the etymology of the term ‘brand’ as it is derived from the marking of people rather than marketing of ideas. For example, in the UK during Tudor times (sixteenth century) the deserving poor wore badges which were associated with shame (Hindle 2004), and slaves throughout time have been branded accordingly, defining their commodification as chattels. The negative manifestation of the term is further highlighted in this context as the Nazis tattooed Hungarian Jews in concentration camps with numbers on their forearms and prisoners were branded in Soviet gulags with hot irons which equates to branding livestock as a sign of ownership. Also during the communist purges, thousands of Hungarians were ‘branded’ as spies and saboteurs.

This negativity reappears when applied to the commodification of culture, a practice which for the tourist industry embraces place-branding and the application of commercial marketing processes to geographic locations. This collection of identities signifying place may not complement each other and these may be manipulated in order to shift perceptions (Anholt 2002: 232). The branding of a post-communist Budapest becomes a political game of appropriating and reconfiguring signifiers rather than complete reinvention, in order to manage perception and refresh the narrative (Julier 2005: 885, 872). It concurs with the reinvention of national identities through the reconstruction of urbanity and cultural traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Marketing strategies attempt to garner the emotional effect of heritage and aesthetic markers (often buildings, statutory or other visual signifiers). For post-communist Budapest this references ‘high’ cultural capital offered by the ‘cultural trail’ including the cool irony of Statue Park, which helps ‘brand’ it as the ‘Paris of the East’. Not unsurprisingly this includes a concentration on ‘safe’ pre-fascist built heritage attractions which reconstruct the ‘Golden Age’ of the 1890s that emphasise the Danube River (Smith and Puczkó 2010: 292–293).

Perception studies of budget airline travellers undertaken in 2005 suggest a muddy picture regarding the image of Budapest as a cultural centre with marked national differences regarding the gratification for visiting by different nationality groups:

visitors from Northern Europe (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) were motivated mainly by the lower . . . prices. The French and Swiss came to visit cultural sites and events. The British were driven by a curiosity factor. Many Germans (especially East Germans) were keen to return to a place they had visited in the socialist era and for which they were nostalgic . . . cheap airline tickets, however were unsurprisingly the main reason for budget airline passengers to come to Budapest.

(Hungarian National Tourist Office cited in Smith and Puczkó 2010: 292)

Notwithstanding the specifics of the ‘cultural trail’, Budapest can be compared with other European destinations (notably Prague). The rationale of budget travel
homogenises and commodifies urban experience as often the tourists are less interested in the unique selling points of the city than the cost of the holiday, entertainment and commodities.

Consequently, the TOB (created in 1996), has promoted a vibrant and dynamic young image of a unique spa and gastronomic centre where the cultural tourist is constructed to spend money. For example, the Budapest Card (Tourism Office of Budapest 2015) offers a cheap package for tourists to gain entry to a range of cultural institutions, guided tours, baths, transport, restaurants and clubs, which commoditisation of experience is the rubric of capitalism.

In 2004 the Tourist Development Strategy emphasised five values to promote a vibrant city that encapsulate the Budapest experience: an atmospheric, entertaining, pampering, spectacular and dynamic city. Whilst the first four concern heritage, culture and the Danube River, the latter category recognises the development of the city as a business centre (cited in Smith and Puczkó 2010: 293). This conflates and imbues the notion of ‘dynamism’ with entrepreneurial practices which suggests a ‘natural’ relationship and synergy with the other values, a good example of ideological encryption.

Nonetheless, cultural tourists traditionally have wanted emphatic experiences and to immerse themselves in cultural knowledge (Huyssen 1995), heterogeneous experience rather than ‘packaged’ homogeneity reminiscent of mass tourism. Here engagement with the ‘cultural trail’ corresponds to the Uses and Gratifications, Literary Criticism and Reception Studies models of what the audience does with culture, the decoding of aesthetic signs and individual perception, which is varied.

This may include a search for dramatic cultural encounters or in extremis ‘trauma tourism’ which encrypts ‘hot’ memories of the past. For example, The House of Terror in Budapest; the preserved Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland; the Museum of Terror which lies on the site of the old Gestapo headquarters in Berlin; and Grutas Park (or Stalin’s World) in Lithuania which contains 86 Soviet-era statues within a reconstructed labour camp with barbed wire and military music from the era (Williams 2008: 187–188). All of these cultural spaces demand ‘hot’ emotional responses which contrasts with the ‘cool’ irony of Statue Park.

Smith and Puczkó (2010) suggest that there have been too many attempts at branding Budapest, creating confusion, partly due to its tricky past and memories associated which disrupts the (re)construction of a post-communist consensus. There has been a greater focus on the commodification of experience that a cultural studies, political economy and even effects approach helps to unravel, which enhances an understanding of audience reception. It offers a broader and deeper configuration of meaning, reflecting on what culture does to the audience that accounts for the negative effects of memory, the branding and marketing processes and other responses to socio-political change.

Statue Park personifies ambivalence and is a touchstone of the changing times, emplacing the difficulties of relating to a troubled and messy past. Interestingly, this confusion was symbolised by Eleőd who justified his architectural design by suggesting that he did not want the artefacts to be anti-propaganda, which is
'a continuation of dictatorship mentality' (cited in Köthly 2010: 6), as though they can be non-ideological, which within this context is baffling.

The 'Budapest experience' resonates globally as there are issues regarding the extent to which cultural tourism is configured to reflect capitalist ideologies, a functionalism that manipulates and obfuscates engagement with national or local history and diverse identity, creating readily identifiable brands which operate to deliver consumerism. Nowhere is this homogeneity better symbolised than by the synergistic TOB promotion of an outlet of McDonalds in Budapest, situated in a building designed by Alexandre Eiffel (whose company constructed the railway terminal at Budapest-Nyugati Pályaudvar), and is best known for the iconic Eiffel tower in Paris (Smith and Puczkó 2010: 193). In May 2014 the 100th McDonalds restaurant opened in Hungary (see www.kisalfold.hu/gyori_hirek/gyorben_nyilik_a_mcdonald8217s_100_magyar_etterme2112154/) to consolidate the commoditisation of the public sphere and the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism in post-communist Budapest.

Conclusion

Statue Park offers complex representations of the communist past. It is over 20 years old and the irony originally intended is open for re-interpretation today in light of post-communist ideologies. It highlights the problematic relationship between postmodern micro-narratives that focus on individual interpretation, and social determinants of history and ideology related to the political economy with associated macro-narratives which have 'effects'. Postmodernism represented by cool cosmopolitan 'irony' may suggest a socially liberal 'openness' of interpretation, but it overlooks the ideological encryption of these values within a 'free' market philosophy of economic liberalism which corresponds to the commodification of Budapest.

In terms of interpretation, the article situates two contrasting theoretical problems associated with meaning making. This concerns the degree to which audiences have agency and playfully create sense from cultural signifiers through a process of 'Hermetic drift', or the extent to which fixed meanings are constructed within specific social contexts encouraged by ideological signifiers. The 'free' market promotes an ideology of agency and difference, an individualism and focus on consumerism which obfuscates the central role of history. Furthermore, the artefacts in Statue Park are in limbo and without resolution which postmodern meaning denies any clear position, hence the ambivalence of response by visitors. Reaction to the Soviet era in Hungary may concern a range of emotions which may be latent and only recognised when the landscape is altered, as highlighted by the 'Little Warsaw' appropriation of statuary.

Statue Park signifies how Budapest has been re-branded as a tourist hub similarly underpinned by post-communist ideologies, a recuperation of the past which offers opportunities for entrepreneurial enterprise. There still remains an all-powerful Hungarian government with a prime minister who sells off state assets to his cronies which reveals the political reality of neo-liberalism in
contrast to its representation as an individualised ideology steeped in democracy, ‘freedom’ and notions of meritocracy. This is in line with the commoditisation and revision of the public sphere, but is especially significant in Hungary where a new configuration of politicians, oligarchs and global corporations have replaced both fascist and communist incarnations of a corrupt state. Irony appears to be a very sustainable discourse as historically none of these systems appears to have delivered for Hungarians.

Possibly the most ironic statement was made by the director of Statue Park who suggested that Marx and Engels’ infamous Communist Manifesto was a ‘valid diagnostic analysis of capitalism’ and an ‘incredibly accurate insight into the future’. Then he cited from it, suggesting that ‘[t]he bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country’ (Rethly 2010: 17), although he failed to mention the complicity of Statue Park in this process.

References


James, B. 2005. *Imagining Postcommunism*. College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press.


