

Fall 12-31-1995

# Dead Statues - or Alive? Signs of Ambivalence in Transition-Era Hungary

Gitta Hammarberg  
*Macalester College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hammarberg, Gitta (1995) "Dead Statues - or Alive? Signs of Ambivalence in Transition-Era Hungary," *Macalester International*: Vol. 2, Article 18.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol2/iss1/18>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute for Global Citizenship at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Macalester International by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact [scholarpub@macalester.edu](mailto:scholarpub@macalester.edu).

# DEAD STATUES—OR ALIVE? Signs of Ambivalence in Transition-Era Hungary

---

Gitta Hammarberg

## I. Introduction

Tram #19, followed by bus #14 and then bus #50 will take you from Clark Adám tér to Szobor Park on the Tétényi Plain at the margins of Budapest. A similar route was taken by numerous salvia plants, transplanted in their original red star formation to Szobor Park from the centrally located Clark Adám tér now graced by an abstract floral pattern of mostly yellow marigolds. The red star is now the centerpiece of a project suggested in 1989 by a literary scholar László Szörényi and followed by a design competition announced by the cultural committee of the Budapest Assembly, won by the architectural firm Vadász & Partners and their associate, Akos Eleöd. The resulting theme park features an ensemble of sculptures celebrating former communist glory, relocated from different sites in Budapest. The park opened in the fall of 1993—still unfinished—and appears as a latter-day Potemkin village with an austere oversize façade of brick arches, pillars, and niches that make up an entry flanked by the fathers of communist ideology, Lenin on the left and a dual statue of Marx and Engels on the right.

The main gate is always closed. Visitors enter through a smaller side gate and proceed through a low, narrow, and oppressive passage. Once inside, the visitors find themselves on the straight “one and indivisible path,” across which the numbered statues are distributed in the shape of three mathematical infinity symbols ( $\infty$ ). The single path is symbolically intersected by infinity. Larger-than-life-size communist role models are

placed in a setting of the classical palace-cum-communist baroque that defines socialist realism. The walls that were designed to surround the ensemble were never built, and visitors can actually choose to bypass the intended entry path, just as they can ignore the numbered sequence of statues and create their own capricious viewing patterns. Is the lack of walls simply a case of ubiquitous financial shortage, sloppy (postcommunist) workmanship, or a failed plan; or is it a sign of (non-communist) openness? The visitor is set in an ambivalent frame of mind, compounded by the museum catalogue's presentation of "before" views of statues in their original location, surrounded by cheering pioneers or austere honor guards, "intermediate" views of monuments being rededicated, mockingly taken down, or desecrated before being carted off to the park. The statues are both dead and alive.

## II. Polyphonic Signs

The "signs" of the park's openness/closure and the path's singleness/infinity are akin to the (unintentional) irony in a verbal sign used by one of our Hungarian guests: the Russian word *glasnost* to indicate the Hungarian opening up of its formerly closed society—to the West, one might add, but definitely not to the East, as was repeatedly confirmed in our dialogues with scholars. The temptation for binary, either/or thinking does not work for the both/and situation in Hungary. It spans both East and West, both communism and capitalism, while in a liminal state of transition between them. Perhaps ambivalence is indeed the essence of Hungarian identity. I will deconstruct Szobor Park as a symbol of that ambivalence.

Szobor Park, in the architect's opinion (as quoted in the museum catalogue), is a statement about dictatorship. "And at the same time," he writes, "because it can be talked about, described, built, this park is about democracy. After all, only democracy is able to give the opportunity to let us think freely about dictatorship. Or about democracy, come to that. Or about anything." To extend this reasoning to the current function of the park, it is also about capitalism. It capitalizes on the artifacts of former communist glory: as in Disneyland, a visitor is immediately faced with paying for views that were formerly free.

Commercial displays encourage visitors to purchase a sealed tin containing "The Last Breath of Communism," or a perestroika cookbook, featuring on its cover a red pastry shaped as a hammer and sickle, or a "tame" molotov cocktail, or miniature models of East German Trabant cars, no longer wanted on the full-size car market. Shopping decisions are facilitated by rousing Hungarian socialist marches (also available on cassette), playing through a 1950s vintage radio, turned off as one leaves the premises. Communist glory has been placed next to capitalist kitsch, multimedia marketing, and is itself marketed as leisure time entertainment for a fee. Unintended side effects abound. As one looks back toward the entrance from inside the park, the fathers of communism together with impressive power lines of socialist electrification are competing with a large, colorful billboard advertising McDonald's hamburgers for 59 forints (69 forints for a cheeseburger). During my visit, a brand new Saab was parked next to Lenin at the entrance. I found myself wondering how the park might have influenced the property values of the fairly well-to-do houses in the quiet XXII District.

The park and its context show the semiotic vacillation that seems typical of today's Hungary. Two (or more) differently functioning semiotic systems contradict each other, overlap, intertwine, conduct a dialogue, and invite a confused public to a multiplicity of possible readings. Or a refusal to "read": judging from several visits to the park by members of our group, foreigners were the only visitors; Hungarians chose not to engage in this form of re/deconstruction. Hungary is enjoying freedom *from* the communist dominance, but freedom *to* what? It is of course presumptuous for the West to offer ready-made solutions to Hungarians. Western democracy and capitalism have their own often unforeseen problems and, in their pure forms, risk veering into anarchy and chaos. Similarly, the new ideologically correct street signs replacing Május 1. utca with Kucsera Ferenc u. or Felszabadulás tér with Ferenciek tére could easily confuse drivers, were not the original signs left hanging in their crossed-out versions. Erasure, but not quite erasure of the communist past. Defamiliarizing a familiar road. The West, but not quite the West. Signs advertising a rock band named "Sex Epil" to arouse (Western?) libidos, risk arousing linguistic amusement. T-shirts from "Michigan Pacific" might lead aspiring stu-

dents to fantasy coasts or provoke chuckles from the geographically enlightened.

### **III. Signs and Antisigns**

Some of the statues in Szobor Park have retained both their original message and subsequent graffiti. The original inscription “With thanks to the Soviet Liberators for our freedom” on Barna Megyeri’s 1948 Soviet Heroic Memorial is contradicted by the superimposed graffiti antimessage: “Russians, go home!” Being placed in the park, neither message is voided, but both are given equal time and neither comprises the new message. The park continues to be controversial since, on the one hand, the former communist heroes are again standing, and, on the other, they have been deposed and, so to speak, marginalized (and, one could even say, forcibly collectivized) and placed in a context of kitsch and commercialism. Eleöd himself, according to the museum catalogue, approached his task as a “delicate matter” that he tried to treat with seriousness:

I had to realize that if I constructed this park with more tendentious extreme or realistic methods—as a number of people were expecting—I would ultimately be doing nothing more than constructing my own Antipropaganda park from these propagandist statues, and following the same thought patterns and prescriptions of dictatorship that erected these statues in the first place.

One of the greatest dangers, as correctly perceived by the architect, is to substitute a sign with its antithesis, a former plus-sign with a minus-sign, thereby still expressing the identical prescriptive ideology. However, such an extreme form of either/or thinking is tempting. As argued by many of our seminar speakers, such a solution, though shortsighted, seems to be quite prevalent, despite its tendency to backfire, or to have entirely unexpected consequences. In one of his one-minute stories, “Public Opinion Survey,” the popular Hungarian absurdist writer István Örkény (1912–79) captures the situation perfectly. A questionnaire contains several multiple-answer questions that tend to start with a statement, immediately followed by its opposite, only to conclude in unexpected absurdities. For exam-

ple, the proffered choices regarding the respondent's philosophical orientation are (a) Marxism, (b) anti-Marxism, (c) science fiction, and (d) alcoholism. The options for opinions about the current regime are (a) favorable, (b) unfavorable, (c) neither favorable nor unfavorable but a little improvement would not hurt, and (d) I want to move to Vienna.<sup>1</sup> The replacement in the government of the former communists with the opposition (be it the Polish Solidarity, the Hungarian Free Democrats, or the Czech Civic Forum) and the subsequent disillusion with or replacement of the new leaders, speaks to a similar dilemma. As is literally the case in the park, "Lenin is still with us" mentally as well, as shown by Dr. Enikő Bollobás's description of a short-term euphoria over the new freedom that rapidly gave way to the old mentalities' resistance to new possibilities.

#### IV. Recycled Signs

The Chain Bridge over the Danube is hardly changed physically by the canvas now covering what looks like communist stars. Parts of a sign can be almost imperceptibly altered but the meaning of the whole changes radically. Such symbolical changes often affect the most prominently placed memorials. Among the statues in Szobor Park is Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl's 6-meter bronze statue of a Soviet soldier holding a red banner, which was formerly part of "The Liberation Monument." The statue was commissioned by the Soviet Marshall Voroshilov, who liberated Budapest after WWII. However, many believe that it was intended as a memorial to István Horthy, the older son of Hungary's interwar dictator, who was killed in action fighting the Russians in 1944 (and the artist had indeed planned such a memorial too). Formerly it (whatever version one chooses to believe) stood flanking the "Genius of Freedom" — a 13.5-meter-tall woman holding a palm frond in her raised hands, on top of a 22-meter-tall obelisk prominently standing on top of Gellért Hill, visible from almost anywhere in Budapest. The question of the soldier sculpture's identity was not the only dispute concerning the monument: it was toppled during the 1956 revolt — only to be replaced in 1958 by an absolutely identical version. In 1992 the woman herself was wrapped in a white veil as part of a yet different cultural cele-

bration and thereby symbolically transformed into “The Spirit [rather than Genius] of [the new] Freedom.” The same signifier (or identical versions of it) could signal several contradictory signifieds by the magic of symbolic acts. Another example of a minor change in symbols is found on the 1,000-forint bill, where the old red star surrounded with socialist heraldry in an understated pinkish center has almost imperceptibly faded into a new pink center featuring St. Stephen’s crown. Some unintentional ironies occur as the large portrait flanking the center remains intact: Béla Bartók, who (together with the numerical value of the new bill) seems to transcend political vagaries.

What do such symbols and symbolic actions mean, besides ideological transition? Do they speak to the resilience of memorized symbols, or to the ease of reinventing past traditions? Do they indicate that good art prevails, or that art is in the mind of the beholder, or, on a more practical level, that the state will no longer subsidize new public art? And what about the other arts?

At first glance, Hungarian theatre seems to thrive. Marvelously creative avant-garde productions, such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, draw packed houses. Originally a production of the Merlin Theatre, it was, for various reasons, relocated in an intimate open-air summer theatre in Szentendre, where the audience was seated on swings at various heights around and above the stage—the stage, also equipped with its own swings, as part of the play. The play, which itself contains a play, became enveloped in yet a larger play that we were all acting out. The Hungarian-speaking public was roaring with laughter at what presumably included topical references to an oscillating Hungarian midnight. However, even those of us (reasonably familiar with the play) who did not understand the Hungarian dialogue, found the comic acting as well as the innovative staging outstanding. This leads me to conclude that the success of this play was mainly due to aesthetic merit, or at least not limited to whatever political messages might have been inserted between the lines. This play is a sign of hope for the future of Hungarian theatre, one among several successes in experimental theatre. Hungarian theatre as a whole is, however, faced with deep problems.

According to László Magács of the Merlin Theatre, one of the main problems today stems from the role of the theatre in pre-

1989 Hungary as the main forum for protest against the communist oppression. As in the Soviet Union, oppression fostered special skills among writers and readers in writing/reading between the lines, usually referred to as "Aesopian language," or inspired them to turn to other indirect means of social criticism, such as the absurd. In Hungarian literature the absurd humor of Örkény (akin to the Russian Oberiu of the 1920s and 1930s), for example, served to cope with an oppressive system by carnivalizing it, to use the term given currency by M. M. Bakhtin.<sup>2</sup> Örkény not only survived the strict censorship laws, but became immensely popular. According to Magács, such "Aesopian" skills have now become obsolete, a loss that so far tends to impoverish theatre. It is not, perhaps, surprising that despite Örkény's popularity both in Hungary and abroad (the first English edition of his *One Minute Stories*, published in 1994, was already sold out in all the bookstores in Budapest), no Örkény school has developed in Hungary, according to his translator, Judith Sollosy.

There is a deep irony in the fact that censorship (with all its complex implications, mostly negative) implies a tacit admission of the power of art. In communist societies, the arts and artists were liberally supported by state patronage. With censorship gone and open criticism possible, the arts can presumably once again return to aesthetic criteria, to creative artistic innovation. According to Magács, this has not yet happened in Hungarian theatre. The comfort of continuing the old pseudo-Stanislavsky realistic-naturalistic approach still stands in the way of new talent finding expression on Hungarian stages. The decline in the quality of the National Theatre with the exodus of promising young talent, seems a sad example of recycling old approaches that does not work in a new context of artistic freedom. Presumably the same is happening in literature. New aesthetic directions have yet to capitalize on the new freedoms. Part of the problem is that the disappearance of state censorship was accompanied by the disappearance (or at least severe curtailment) of state support of arts and artists. One might also ask whether censorship has in fact disappeared. Is it not possible that the new free market forces impose something very similar on artists who wish to be successful? It might be tempting for an artist to let aesthetic criteria become secondary



to market demands and to produce literary bestsellers or plays that cater to mass audiences or well-heeled foreign tourists. Surely the postmodern free market in the West has produced a glut of artistically (and intellectually) inferior art, together with artistically and intellectually complacent consumers. So far the new free market in Hungary indeed seems to demand mostly what the Hungarians refer to as *limonada*: (mostly Western) pulp fiction (romances, detective stories, etc.) and TV programs in the soap-opera range, or, among more intellectually oriented consumers, translations and editions of (mainly Western) works, previously unavailable. It is clearly too early to tell how the “freedom to” will be redefined in the arts. What will replace traditional approaches? What will replace the subversive joy of Aesopian language? How will the artistic intelligentsia redefine itself and will the arts regain their former prestige (or snob appeal—depending on one’s perspective)? Perhaps the influx of popular mass culture may in the long run prove beneficial for setting new aesthetic standards, as will no doubt the increased exposure to artistic developments abroad, the globalization of the arts. As was obvious to our group, there is an abundance of artistic talent in Hungary waiting for an outlet.

### V. Signs of National Nonidentity

From most of our encounters with Hungarians (and other Central Europeans) it became overwhelmingly clear that they were eager to be identified with the West, but perhaps even more eager to be distanced from the East. The idea of the East is, of course, a cultural construct that seems to recede the farther east one travels. To the Hungarians in general, the unpalatable East seems to signify just about anything non-West European: the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the former Soviet Union, and now countries east of Hungary, from Romania to Ukraine to Russia. However, anything still farther east exists as some diffuse and irrelevant region that even the intelligentsia felt comfortable ignoring, as did Dr. Rudolf Andorka when asked about the viability of the “Asian tiger” model (as an alternative to Western ones) for Hungarian economic recovery. Hungarian history is interpreted as a series of Westernization attempts, each followed by a setback into something “Asiatic.” For instance, with the

Ottoman conquest, Hungary fell back into a non-Western state of (non)civilization, “almost Asiatic,” after having been an integral part of Western civilization. When Andorka was pressed for further elaboration of the Hungarian perception of “Asiatic,” it became clear that its pejorative sense is now most closely associated with “Soviet/Russian.” The “Asiatic-Russian” stereotype was explained with images such as “uncivilized, stupid, with no idea of how to behave, soldiers raping Hungarian women and wearing twenty looted watches on their arms.” Two ethnic anecdotes further emphasized the stereotype he was trying to describe. In 1945 a young Hungarian boy saw a Russian soldier drowning. He alerted a guard, who responded: “There are enough people [Russians] left.” The numerousness of the “Asiatic hordes” is also implied in a second anecdote about Brezhnev (a notoriously bad marksman) hunting with Kádár. One of the drivers, fearing for his life, asks Kádár whether they should tell Brezhnev that there are only 10 million of us [Hungarians].

The identification of Russia with an untold number of “Asiatics” is by no means new, or even exclusively Hungarian. Nor is Hungary the only nation that is proud of having saved [the rest of] Western Europe from barbaric Eastern invasions. Russians themselves have frequently appropriated identical imagery, converting the unflattering “Asiatic” label into a symbol of brute strength and future world leadership — one need only think of Vladimir Soloviev’s “Panmongolism” or the mystical cult of “Scythianism” around the turn of the last century. A 1918 poem of revolutionary fraternal fervor by the Russian symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), *The Scythians*, might indeed have been quoted by Andorka to render the “Asiatic-Russian” stereotype. “Da, skify — my! Da, aziaty — my! / S raskosymi i zhadnymi ochami!” “Yes, we are Scythians! Yes, we are Asiatics, / With slit and greedy eyes!” proclaims Blok, using images such as “our” far greater number than the mere millions of Europeans, “our” infinite capacities, “our” love for raw flesh, its taste, color, and stench, “our” Asiatic maws and paws, “our” capacity to break in wild steeds and to subjugate captive maidens to gratify “our” lusts. He invites the West to join Russia in fraternal embraces — or else “we” will no longer save “you” from “the savage Mongol Horde” or “attacks by the Huns.”<sup>3</sup> One senses a certain ambivalence in Hungarian self-identifica-

tion. On the one hand, today's fraternal invitations seem to be ignored by Hungarians who lack faith in "Asiatic" strength or a future that looks to Russia. On the other hand, Hungarian self-identification in some ways echoes traditional Russian self-identification as a shield against the East.

Russians in today's Hungary are seen as "strangers," and Hungarians choose to ignore that today's Russia is every bit as Western-aspiring and eager to be part of Europe as is Hungary. The question of whether Hungarian identity resides in a negation of the "Soviet" or "Communist" or "Russian" shades of their past, or whether all variants are seen as equally odious ("Asiatic") has no simple answer. Andorka presented what seems a fairly typical view: communism is about 70 percent Russia and 30 percent Marx, implying that the older Russian system was simply transformed into a Leninist-Bolshevik system. The best term to describe what the Hungarians try to distance themselves from, in his view, is totalitarianism. Whether tsarist Russia was more or less totalitarian than the Soviet Union seems a moot point. Thus attitudes toward Szobor Park, a symbol of a rejected Soviet-inspired ideology, also reflect the current ambivalence toward Russia.

Hungarian attitudes toward the Russian language today provide another sign of the generally negative attitude toward Russia. Knowing full well that Hungarians, previously forced to learn Russian in school, might be likely not to speak Russian, I was nevertheless surprised at how useless Russian is in Hungary today. For the most part, even older-generation Hungarians would respond with incomprehension or silence when addressed in Russian, either on principle or because they really never mastered the language of the oppressor, and always chose a Western linguistic orientation. When I asked Hungarians about the presence/value of Russian language and culture in general, or specifically about the desirability of Russian markets for goods such as the formerly eastward-bound Hungarian Ikarus buses, the responses were mostly negative. At best, reactions to Russia were mixed, subtracting, as it were, the Soviet stratum from the truly great Russian culture that is still revered. Andorka, together with many other intellectuals, voiced his admiration for Russian (non-socialist realist) high culture and a sympathy for Russian intellectual exiles. Tolstoy and Dosto-

evsky are still being read, although Western literature from Danielle Steel to David Hume, from James Herriott to L. Ron Hubbard, from Faulkner to Follett is much more widely displayed on bookstands than anything Russian. Chekhov's plays have been staged without interruption in Hungary and are still regularly performed, together with plays by Gogol and certain formerly forbidden Russian playwrights such as Mikhail Bulgakov, but they can hardly compete with televised Western pop culture. On the level of folk culture, Palekh lacquer boxes and Russian nesting *matrioshka* dolls vie for the tourists' attention with native Hungarian folk-crafts, often next to displays of Soviet military insignia, army belts, and officers' caps and uniforms. Just as Hungarians probably do not visit Szobor Park, they probably also do not buy such items, but nevertheless seem eager (or desperate enough?) to profit from their residual value as representing the exotic Other.

## VI. Signs of National Identity—the Other Side

The fact that Russian classics are still respected does not signal a love for things Russian, but more probably their canonization as part of *Western* world culture. At a certain level of achievement, nationality does not seem to matter. In more everyday contacts I sensed that anti-Russian sentiment is common — and understandable, if not excusable. I raised the question of the current Hungarian perception of Russians with the director of the Russian Cultural Center in Budapest, Gleb Borisovich Vyshinskii. He conceded that Hungarians have developed a certain “allergy” to Russians, but was convinced that such an “allergy” was of a temporary rather than chronic nature: soon enough the Hungarians will see the wisdom of turning to Eastern markets (as Western markets may not demand their products); soon enough Russian culture will again take its rightful place among other West European cultures in Hungary; soon enough the interest in the Russian language will resurface on a voluntary and, indeed, necessary basis. He reacted against what he saw as an unfortunate turn to (Western, U.S.?) pop culture and lamented its dominance over “genuine” European (including Russian) culture. He persists with admirable energy (and despite huge financial difficulties) in advancing the cause of Russian culture in Budapest.

By persuasion and cultural commitment, Vyshinskii has managed to bring top Russian artists to Hungary — often without paying them any honoraria. His strategy for displaying Russian culture goes under the rubric “The Unknown Russia” and includes church art, the Russian province, Finno-Ugric culture (from formerly closed Soviet border areas and of special interest to Hungarians eager to trace their ethnic roots), traditional applied arts, performances by young Russian musicians, or exhibitions of advanced Russian hi-tech achievements. In addition, the center supports modest Russian language programs. The center’s activities are aimed at counteracting the fixation on Western pop culture with true Russian artistic achievement. The irony in this strategy lies in the fact that (in the words of Vyshinskii) “Russia has never *not* been a part of Europe.” The emphasis on Hungarian origins builds on historic-geographical commonalities, and a strong dosage of the *unknown* Russia will presumably cure the “allergy” to the *known* (Soviet?) Russia. Not only the Hungarians, but the Russians too, reject their communist past and look West.

## VII. Carnavalesque Signs

Szobor Park is a peculiar mixture of concentrated socialist realism, Hungarian suburbia, and Western tourist nostalgia for a lost communist exoticism. As one of these tourists, I visited the park with American colleagues. We enjoyed the mixed signals sent by the very idea of the park and its actual function. “There is joy in the absence of bookburning,” according to the blueprint plans cited in the museum catalogue. A sense of joyous theatricality indeed gripped us, and we found irreverent posing irresistible — crushed under the boot of the forward-striving socialist hero, or dwarfed by the Stakhanovite determination of huge marching workers. We rejoiced in the absence of statue destruction, in being able to mock and play with a defeated ideology of positive heroes and “Single Path” social solutions accompanied by enforced cheers.

A young Hungarian teacher related a similar reaction to the past among Hungarian students. Their euphoria over the 1989 victory *over* communism also carnivalized the old signifiers of the victory *of* communism: at a mock celebration of the major

Soviet-era holiday—the Great October—students burst into old Komsomol songs, reversing their original spirit by irreverent laughter. Such carnivalesque laughter in its sacrilege and ambivalence is liberating.

The blueprint plans for Szobor Park stress that the park's design "aimed to break through the mine field of objections, to achieve an accurate, correct presentation of the statues, free from any sense of barely-concealed mockery—this is not a 'joke-park', it is absolutely not that." There is an odd contradiction between the declared response of "joy" and the self-imposed refusal to "joke," as if joking, laughter, and merriment were not an acceptable means of coming to terms with the past. The park is tastefully and "seriously" built, but can the public response to it be dictated?

The fear of irreverence, mockery, or ridicule, can be encountered among Russians as well as Hungarians. Vyshinskii dismissed it as a *zverinets* (zoo, menagerie) and an unacceptable debasement of history. Educated Hungarians also dismissed the park. Szobor Park is perhaps an extreme example of the ambivalence of signs in transition-era Hungary, a collection of official art with a new function, of "correct" high socialist realism both displayed and turned on its head, of kitschy contextualization and marginalization of the center, of uncrowned kings. To a Western foreigner, laughter is only the initial spontaneous response to a situation one cannot ever enter into as an insider who had to live through the tragic consequences of the discredited ideology. Carnivalization is fully meaningful only to those inside the culture being carnivalized. To transition-era Hungarians, that culture is still painful. Pain is not conducive to laughter, and looking West is the less painful solution. Perhaps liberating laughter can return when the pain of transition subsides.

Forbidden laughter is not, however, solely a Hungarian or a Russian phenomenon. As I contemplate how much (serious) Hungarian history the park taught me despite the urge to carnivalize the experience, I do not see a necessary contradiction between *utile* and *dulce*. Our Hungarian learning experience gave us some "serious" understanding both of the joys and sorrows of transition and globalization. At the same time, we had a lot of fun, we laughed a lot together and with Hungarian col-

leagues! Why is it then, that in trying to convey the experience to American colleagues, some sort of an internal censor prompts me to emphasize the *utile* and downplay the *dulce*? Why is it that I feel just the slightest bit guilty for the fun I had?

---

### Notes

1. István Örkény, *One Minute Stories*, trans. Judith Sollosy (Budapest: Corvina, 1994): 97–98.
2. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984).
3. Aleksandr Blok, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1955): 453–55. That this issue is still alive in today's Westward looking Russia is seen, for instance, in V. Belopol'skaia's review (*Ogonek* 23 [June 1995]: 68–69) of the recent Vladimir Khotinenko film *Musul'manin* (The Moslem [man]), which cites Blok's lines in summarizing the essence of the Russian character as presented in the film.