



(AN)ARCHIVE

CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

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6. The Power of Other Worlds: Civilisational Frames and Child-Adult Intimacies in Socialist Childhoods

Jennifer Patico

This chapter draws on childhood-memory narratives from Cold-War socialist and early post-socialist settings to problematise the east-west civilisational hierarchies that often frame accounts of socialism's 'less developed' material and consumer worlds. In the narratives, children's encounters with commodities from abroad speak not only or directly to the significance of east/west, socialist/capitalist hierarchies in their lives but also to children's relationships with the adults closest to them and children's affective experiences of their own maturation. Exploring these dynamics brings scholarship on socialism and post-socialism into fresh conversation with contemporary childhood studies and other work that theorises how selfhood and intimacy take form in and through specific moments in political economy. To bring the falsely simple oppositions of east/west and adult/child into the same analytical frame is to begin building more nuanced, nimble understandings of how macro-level political economic boundaries can be integral to children's most intimate forms of self-knowledge.

Afterwards, usually at nights, she would spend hours, looking again and again, secretly looking at the forbidden world. She did it at night because she did not want anyone to know; she felt shameful about this kind of stupid wasting of

time. She thought she would not be able to explain to her parents why she did it. For her it was clear that she was attracted by attractive people demonstrating attractive objects, and that did not require any explanations.

In the passage above, a contemporary adult remembers her 1960s childhood in Northern Ossetia, a Russian republic that was part of the Soviet Union. What gave the young girl, about ten or eleven years old at the time, such secret and shameful enjoyment late in the night? She was poring over French clothing catalogues that had been brought home by her parents who had been working abroad. The images therein spoke not only to her own aesthetic desires and not only to a larger political economy—revealing a Soviet girl’s imagination of the abroad as a space of attractive and mysterious difference—but also, as this brief excerpt hints, to the intricacies of a girl’s evolving relationship with her own parents.

Socialist consumers’ desires for, and perceptions of, the world on the other side of the Iron Curtain certainly have been considered in previous scholarship, not to mention popular media. However, as Gille and Mincyte (2020) have observed, scholarly and journalistic treatments too often impose a simple civilisational logic onto socialist subjects’ experiences and perceptions, assuming

a linear and even teleological view of development and modernization that permeates the *differences* between Western consumer society and socialist central planning into *hierarchy*—that is, into a register of inferiority and superiority, expressed as lower and higher stages of development or modernization. (p. 219, emphasis in original)

That is, such works assume a unilineal, progressive, modern, and capitalist scheme of development in which the economies of countries such as the United States appear to be at the forefront, whereas those in socialist settings are framed as less developed and sophisticated, less modern, and more backward in relation to that specific teleology (see Burrell 2011; Patino 2008). Such assumptions are belied, however, by a deeper understanding of the consumer politics of socialist-bloc countries.

Although the commodity shortages that dominated US media representations of the Soviet Union in the later twentieth century were indeed common, focus on these obscures the region’s distinct

consumerist modernities. Throughout the region, internally-produced comforts from perfumes to televisions were enjoyed and touted as evidence of increasing standards of living and the superiority of socialist life; they were cultivated as part of the experience of a socialist middle class (Gille et al. 2020; Patico 2008). The consumer experiences of late-socialist citizens were not ones of pure deprivation, then, but were more complex stories of both fostered and frustrated consumer desires and intermittent access to exotic items from further afield, such as the young girl's French clothing catalogues.

This is not to say that similarly hierarchical civilisational logics have not been part of emic cultural schema in socialist and post-socialist worlds. During the early years of Russian post-socialism, I found that many—particularly members of the downwardly mobile, educated, 'older' middle classes, among whom I was conducting ethnographic research in St. Petersburg—were all too likely to place themselves into a developmental hierarchy that situated them as behind and below the 'west' in terms of the sophistication of their material environments and their consumer repertoires (Patico 2008). Such local talk often treated market-driven development and expanded consumerism as inevitabilities yet also framed such development as a road on which they had fallen behind. In the late 1990s, as these post-socialist consumers experimented (for better and worse) with a deluge of goods and media from around the world, they often referred to their material circumstances as subordinate to those of the imagined west: explicitly, by disparaging their level of 'civilisation', or somewhat more implicitly, by jokingly describing their conditions in Russia as 'like Africa' or by asking me whether I, the American, might like to see their unrenovated apartment windows for the sake of enjoying some 'exotica' (Patico 2008). Such discourses were self-orientalising, describing a new reality or new consciousness of being materially and technologically 'behind'—even as their ironic tones also suggested that Russians were thought to be worthy of something more 'civilised'.

Burrell (2011) notes that depictions of socialism from within the (former) socialist bloc often thematise sensory experiences, with perceptions of colour primary among these: 'Colour and visual life ... and in particular the denotation of a 'gray' communist bloc—are almost ubiquitous in accounts of socialism across the Soviet Union and

eastern Europe' (p. 148). Observations about the grayness of socialist life, about the colourful nature of life in the west by contrast, and about post-socialist transformation as a colourising process have constituted collective symbolic reference points (*ibid.*, p. 149). These framings of colour, while rich with sensory and 'civilisational' meaning, do not lend support for the straightforward use of un-usefully neat civilisational hierarchies as analytical models for the material realities and perceptual schemes of life in socialist Europe, however. For, as recent scholarship has highlighted, such hierarchical models reinforce a simplistic view of the relationship between desire and politics, assuming, for example, that the pleasure in imported goods experienced by socialist citizens was based in 'envy, as a desire for capitalism', which Gille et al. (2020) call 'a logical fallacy' (p. 12). They go on to say that 'many have written about how it was the illicitness of Western goods that made them all the more desirable, not necessarily that they were lacking in the East or that they were better' (*ibid.*). Scarboro (2020), referencing Crowley and Reid, adds that the role of pleasure in late socialism is underexamined because our existing histories emphasise the dynamics of 'need, command, and shortage' rather than those of 'luxury, leisure, and pleasure' (Reid and Crowley 2010, p. 10 as cited by Scarboro 2020, p. 192).

My point here is not to argue that the pleasures of socialist life have been painted unfairly and now must be represented in a more positive manner. Rather, I highlight this scholarship to posit that we must continue to seek for new, less top-down, more fluid ways of looking at the materialities of socialist life, at experiences of the east-west Cold-War divide, and at how socialist and post-socialist citizens have imagined and utilised the abroad or the west in the course of inhabiting and conceptualising their everyday worlds. Even as east-west dichotomies and related sensory images were salient in the everyday, affective experiences of the Cold War and its aftermath, we can ask more nuanced questions about how these were embedded in social contexts and triggered social effects that transcended conventional framings of the Iron Curtain *per se*. This chapter attends, then, through close readings of Cold-War memory narratives, to some of the ways in which material and sensory experiences of the 'other side' served consumers as a means of knowing the world at large, of making sense of it, and of participating in relationships very close to home.

In particular, I examine how civilisational logics are linked in memories of socialist and early post-socialist childhoods to frames of intimacy, desire, and relationship of various kinds. These themes are salient in special ways in the lives of children, for whom such material encounters are also part and parcel of their coming into knowledge of adult sensibilities and expectations within their immediate social worlds. In these contexts, commodities do not have predetermined, referential meanings linked only or mainly with the political significance of the east-west divide. Rather, consumption of these goods was part of a 'process of objectification—that is, a use of goods and services in which the object or activity becomes simultaneously a practice in the world and a form in which we construct our understandings of ourselves in the world' (Miller 2005, p. 27). Material encounters with the 'west' or with an 'outside' were, for children of the Cold War and early post-Cold-War years, precisely bound up with their affective experiences of their own maturation and of their perceptions of the adults closest to them. I take up these memory stories to consider how civilisational imaginations were lived intimately, not least inasmuch as they helped to define the contours of post/socialist childhood and adulthood—which, again, is not to say that the hierarchies were real in the teleological ways capitalist triumphalism would have us believe (see Yurchak 2006).

To do so, I draw from childhood memory narratives generated by adult participants in a 2019 workshop in Helsinki, Finland, in which those who had spent their childhoods in socialist and early post-socialist European locales shared personal memories alongside others who had come of age in the United States, Finland, and elsewhere during the same era. Participants offered individual stories and then worked in groups to draw out more detail from one another, striving to prioritise the most immediate sensory and emotional aspects of these childhood episodes and to avoid, to the extent possible, any overlay of adult analysis. While the memories inevitably were filtered through the consciousnesses of adult minds and post-Cold-War experiences, the attempt was made to focus in on those details of the memories that seemed closest to the episodes as they had been felt and perceived in the immediacy of the moment, so that we as adult researchers might learn from our own and others' stories about Cold War life in fresh, possibly unexpected ways. Indeed, the goal of this technique was to break free, to the extent

possible, from 'normative, constitutive forms of discourse' about the Cold War (Davies and Gannon 2012, p. 359) and to dwell not on reconstructing individual subjects and their psychologies but in painting the material, sensory and social contexts of lives as remembered—and to see what meanings and themes arose from the collective process of telling and analysis, understanding that the speakers, their past selves as remembered, as well as 'the physical, relational, and discursive space of the memories' and 'the physical, relational, and discursive space inside of which the memory work is done' are 'always-emergent entities' (ibid., p. 362).

The Helsinki memory stories were prompted by a focus, agreed upon by the group members in advance, on the broad topics of leisure time and materialities. The particular analytical threads I have taken up in this paper are among those that rose to the surface from a broad analysis of all the memories shared by fifteen adults in Helsinki; they were echoed by narratives from other workshop sites of the larger project, and one of these stories is also included in my analysis. I focus here on a select few narratives that nicely condense the ways in which childhood memories from socialist and early-post-socialist contexts interwove accounts of fascination with the commodities and textures of faraway places with the emergent, fraught relationships between children and adults—speaking through, but not only about, the politics of Cold-War commodity consumption.

The story that opened this chapter is that of a girl who grew up in Northern Ossetia, in Soviet Russia, in the 1960s. Her family had relatively unusual access to distant places and their commodities: her parents, both medical doctors, travelled to Algeria to work for two years, while she was left at home with her grandmother. Writing in the third person, she recalls:

For her it was a country in the faraway Africa, and the first question: Why are children not allowed to go with the parents? She could not imagine living without parents and felt sad about parting with them. [...] Her grandparents [...] loved her dearly, but sometimes she would cry at nights when thinking about Mother.

Yet the girl found that nice things came of this arrangement as well, as her parents began sending packages with items that intrigued her, with unheard of and unseen things like practically transparent underwear made of nylon!

Or clothes that do not get wrinkled. Now Algeria seemed to be a country with incredible and beautiful things.

Even more exciting things appeared when her parents finally returned home. The girl learned that the special items were not from Algeria but had been ordered from French mail-order catalogues. She was unfamiliar with catalogue-shopping as a concept, but her parents had brought the catalogues home with them, and these were a source of great interest for the girl.

They turned out to be very thick big colourful books with fascinating pictures on very thin pages. That was a real wonder! The catalogue had photos of everything—clothes, household appliances, even wallpaper and curtains, and everywhere—beautiful people.

For the girl, what jumped out from the pages were both consumer novelties and people, themselves visually attractive.

Other workshop participants conveyed similar impressions of the co-constitutive attractiveness of both things and people from the U.S. and western Europe. For example, a young girl growing up in Poland in the 1980s corresponded with penpals in the United States.

The photos are colourful, what is rarely used in Poland, because the colour films are very expensive. Pictures have such a smooth texture and they even shine gently. They are printed on Kodak paper, with Kodak logo on the back side. The quality of the photos is stunning to her. There are no such pictures in her photo album. The campground owners sent her a family photo from the pier. There are 7 people standing on the wooden platform by the sea. For her they look like from a show. They are dressed nicely, and their clothes are so colourful.

As an adult today, she remembers how struck she was by the colourful clothes worn by Americans in photos she received by mail, as well as the smooth, shiny quality of the Kodak paper on which the images were printed.

A speaker from a related memory-project workshop who grew up in 1970s and 1980s Romania described having observed tourists on visits to the Black Sea who walked ‘nonchalantly, smiling, laughing, in their colourful clothes’. Her memory story contrasted foreign tourists’ ‘inner confidence’ with locals’ colourlessness and subdued affects.

I could spot 'them' from miles away: they were walking nonchalantly, smiling, laughing, in their colourful clothes [...]. As a child, I perceived a certain superiority of the human race in the way they were holding their heads up, walking straight and talking their language loudly, English, German, French, as if they really wanted to be noticed. There was something in the way they were holding their bodies, an inner confidence.

After passing them on the street, my nostrils would be in heaven. Today I can explain that smell: the detergent they used for their clothes, the shampoo, the body wash, the perfume, all mixing in a heavenly concoction, lingering in my olfactory memory for ages. Luxury items we didn't know existed. We wore gray, brown and black clothes, all the same, walked quickly, heads down, we were quiet, just a mass, with no distinctive qualities; we didn't want to attract attention. As a child, my impression was that they looked so different that they could even be from another planet.

These memories intermingle the materiality of unfamiliar, colourful, and glossy, sweet-selling items with the bodies and selves of 'superior' and 'confident' people from alien places.

Decades later, a young girl in Romania had a similar sensory experience of the 'away' as accessed through material commodities. A child of the early-post-socialist years, her understanding of these fabulous objects was mediated less through glossy magazine pages than through television advertisements. Today, in her early thirties, she recalls a birthday party in Bucharest, 1998. She was celebrating a friend's birthday, together with a group of girls whose mothers had become acquainted in the maternity ward. Hence the girls in attendance all were just about eight years old at the time. She remembers that she and the other girls had been confused by their parents' requirement that they 'dress up' in their school uniforms—white shirt and blue skirt—for the party; the young girls found it unnecessary to dress up 'among themselves', though they were accustomed to dressing up for special occasions. Still, 'they accepted this dressing up without a fuss'. Yet, one of the girls attending dressed differently.

*Only Irina was wearing a yellow T-shirt
She stuck out among them
The girl whose mum was a stewardess,
The girl raised by her grandparents*

The girl who'd eat bananas at all meals.

Though the memory story does not offer direct analysis of the family's situation, a connection is suggested among the facts that Irina had a mother who travelled for work, that her family had different rules about dressing up, and that she enjoyed 'bananas at all meals', which most likely was understood an unconventional privilege since bananas were seen rarely in state-socialist countries prior to their marketisation (Patico 2008). Meanwhile, two other girls attending the party had an aunt living abroad who would send them 'all kinds of nice things'.

Shiny things, nice smelling things, pink things

Things you only saw on Cartoon Network, never in a shop.

Their aunt would send them from France.

She had left just before the Revolution

She would send all kinds of toys and clothes and useful stuff.

Like Pampers.

When the girls were babies it was difficult to find Pampers in Romania.

Mariana the aunt would get them from social shops or from aids for poor people.

Cool clothes, dolls, Polypockets [...] everything smelled so incredibly nice.

Like candies, like cuteness

Like sugar, spice and everything nice.

This memory portrays the girl's awareness of basic consumer scarcities in early-post-socialist Romania (Pampers were sent to this family from a relative who had migrated to western Europe, though it is not entirely clear whether this would have been known to the young girl at the time) as well as her attraction to 'cool clothes' and dolls that smelled 'like candies, like cuteness,' which seemed to be the stuff of foreign television ads rather than of everyday reality.

Such exotic and appealing items were becoming accessible to some local families through various means, however, so that they now became inserted into the young girl's material experience. As the story continues, the narrator describes the girls' mutual enjoyment of these items as they 'without any plan in advance [...] spontaneously' painted their faces with makeup sent by the French aunt.

And as that makeup covered more and more of their faces,

The more satisfied they were

*As if they had discovered something
 As if they had done something forbidden
 As if they were innovative and daring.
 [...] Their blue faces looked a bit sinister
 But what does that matter in front of the fun they had?*

Her experience of the makeup is collective and raucous, but she is aware of something transgressive in her enjoyment of these things, something that feels distinct to her generation. She describes their faces ‘innovative and daring’ and even ‘sinister’, but notes that this was excusable given the fun they had. The transgression, perhaps, is central to the enjoyment; as noted above, Gille et al. (2020) have pointed out that the illicitness of goods from the west was perhaps a key part of their appeal, even apart from any supposed superiority or exoticness of the products. As such goods became more accessible, this memory story suggests, their sensory pleasures were bound up with the sense of something still illicit, something with a complex moral valence.

Returning to the first story, the Soviet girl looking at the French catalogues shared that sense of transgression and moral ambiguity, here amplified by the secrecy she attaches to her involvement with the images.

She did not want to be interrupted while enjoying the photos, so until the time she had a room of her own, she seldom looked at the catalogue pages. But afterwards, usually at nights, she would spend hours, looking again and again, secretly looking at the forbidden world.

Not only does she describe a feeling of pleasure in absorbing those pages, but she recalls a sense of shame. Somehow this activity of hers did not seem to have an understood or excusable place in her social world, despite the fact that the idea of being attracted to pretty things and people seemed natural enough to her.

She did it at nights because she did not want anyone to know, she felt shameful about this kind of stupid wasting of time. She thought she would not be able to explain to her parents why she did it. For her it was clear that she was attracted by attractive people demonstrating attractive objects, and that did not require any explanations. She also knew that her parents used the catalogues in real life: they selected some goods which they bought. She often asked herself a question:

What would you select from this page? It was always a hard question, how to select the best from the best.

Though these pages connected the girl tenuously to a world far away, she was aware that her parents had more tangible connections to it. They, at least, had been abroad and had managed actually to order things from these catalogues; and, perhaps in part for this reason, the girl finds her own fascination with the pages to be somehow awkward and possibly wrong. She wonders how one would possibly choose which items were best, and she posits her parents as people who must know the answers; yet the questions do not seem to be ones she feels ready to ask. Her parents, she fears, would not understand her absorption, her 'stupid wasting of time'. Her sense of transgression, then, is not necessarily triumphant or particularly rebellious in her memory but connected with feelings of shame, ambivalence, and compromised intimacy. (On ambivalence experienced in the use of imported commodities, see also Gille et al. 2020.)

Additional stories from the same two individuals (those who enjoyed the French catalogues and the girls' makeup party) paint further aspects of how goods from abroad provided opportunities for fascination but also for fraught exchanges with the adults whom children feared to disappoint or, alternatively, whom they suspected of ill intent. The Soviet girl recalls travelling to the Pioneer summer camp Artek, which was in the Crimea and known to be exclusive:

it was next to impossible to get there, it was supposed to be for the most of the most active pioneers and the best pupils [...] a dream of every Soviet child.

Due to her excellent grades, she was able to attend, but she ultimately was disillusioned by the experience: the camp activities were more boring and regimented than she had expected and she was placed in a group of younger children, without her friends.

A small break in the monotony comes when a 'foreign delegation' visits the camp.

We [the campers] were warned that if the guests offered them anything, not to accept, since the gift may be poisoned. She was excited as she had never seen foreigners before, and she expected it would be very interesting to meet them. But she remembered little of the meeting (there was just some concert), as they

did not communicate, there was just a group of elderly people. At the end of the meeting the foreign delegation went to the bus, and before the doors closed, one of them threw out 2 colourful packs which looked like packs of candies. The Pioneer Leader caught the packs, told the children that the candy was sure to be poisoned, and assured the children that she was going to throw the candy away. She never believed these words! She was absolutely convinced that the Pioneer Leader took the candy for herself!

The story of the foreign delegation amounts to one more way in which the camp promised to be exciting but ended up being disappointing. Moreover, the girl experiences a lack of trust in the adult world here that is entangled with her close encounter with rarefied foreign gifts: she is convinced that she is being misled by the Pioneer Leader who claims that candy from foreigners is dangerous. The woman simply wanted to keep the candy for herself, the girl is sure, suggesting the growing child's understanding that imported items were coveted as such—and also that one's coveting was sometimes to be hidden, and potentially socially divisive.

By contrast, the Romanian girl's second memory is about disappointment in her own behaviour in front of adults. She is in an urban park with her grandparents, Bitu and Bitu, playing with a colourful ball received from her grandmother's family in Bulgaria. She is about four years old.

– Take care with the ball, Bitu says.

– I will, I will, she replies,

Thinking that Bitu doesn't nag her

With observations all the time.

– Look around

There's no one here,

Nothing can happen, she reassures Bitu.

The park was indeed deserted as autumn crept in.

But then the unexpected happens: she kicks the ball hard and a dog appears and carries it away. They attempt to chase down the dog and retrieve the ball, but to no avail.

The ball is gone.

Deflated. Forever.

The dog owner deeply apologizes
He offers to get her a new one
There is nothing
New
That can replace
The old.
Such a rainbow
Ball was virtually impossible to find.
–I told you to be careful, scorns Bitu.
The girl is sorry for the ball.
It really had a short life, not enough time to enjoy it.
But, more.
She feels inescapably embarrassed.
For not taking good enough care
Of this special gift coming from Bulgaria.
She hates to disappoint them.

The memory conveys the shame of a young child who has been told to be careful but evidently has not been careful enough. The result is the loss of a precious item from abroad, which only adds to the girl's dismay in having disappointed her grandparents. As in the other stories, she is aware that the imported item has value as such, and she is aware that the management of it is part of her evolving relationship with her adult caretakers.

Taken together, these memories convey the sensory power for children of unfamiliar, colourful images and items from abroad, as these were experienced during and soon after the Cold War. The items in question did not come only from the Euroamerican 'west' but also from places slightly closer to home (such as Bulgaria) or via detours (such as Algeria). Encountering or receiving things outside of the accustomed local channels was an impactful experience, the commodities providing pleasure in their fresh material characteristics as well as fodder for imaginings of other ways of being. In these scenes, commodities from abroad are shown to be media for imagining unfamiliar worlds and pleasures, to be sure, acting as something like what Burrell (2011) has called 'provenirs' (p. 145). These are items linked not, like souvenirs, to remembered experiences, but rather

primarily to a particular construction of a place (the west) [... that] could also simultaneously act as 'avenirs', tapping into aspirations about what life in the future could look like [...]. They managed to encapsulate the imaginings of another place and the yearnings for another time yet to come, a potentially enchanting, and in the context of the socialist regime, politically subversive, combination.

The children's memories do not thematise east/west boundaries in any explicitly political way, but they convey the awareness that 'here' did not have the lovely-smelling and colourful things that 'there' had, tapping into a sense of the unknown or poorly understood elsewhere and future.

More importantly for this chapter, the stories also reveal how that gap mattered and had force in their immediate social worlds—and not only because, as has been more discussed in the literature on socialist consumerism, the coveted items could be used for strategic exchange, display, or prestige (for example, Ledeneva 1998). Rather, amidst all this idealisation and fascination, the material things undeniably are 'anchored into the private space of home, disrupting and reshaping special occasions and everyday activities' (Burrell 2011, p. 149). More specifically, they appear as tied to the emergent confusion and shame children feel as they navigate adult expectations and gaps in their own understanding. The girl in the park shrugs off her grandfather's warnings, but she is embarrassed terribly when she loses the Bulgarian ball after all. The girl at camp, slightly older, throws her judgement on adults and their disappointing behaviours: they try to cast visions of danger where there may not be any, perhaps for their own selfish ends. The same girl's earlier story, too, points to lapses of information and communication with adults: she enjoys the catalogues privately, with a sense of transgression and wrongness, not knowing exactly how it might be that her parents have managed to interact with the catalogues in a more routine and savvy way.

Indeed, if adults helped to circulate these items to children, they are not necessarily remembered as informative guides to the goods' local and translocal contexts or significance. Instead, the narrators recall themselves as children uncertain, ashamed, or without clear information about the acceptability of their own desires and how to manage them. In these remembered experiences, commodities speak not directly nor only to civilisational hierarchies, but more meaningfully to child-adult

power dynamics, to sensory pleasures, and to the relationships among those.

In examining the material worlds of state socialism and its aftermath, then, we need to look beyond the surface of seemingly self-explanatory models of civilisational hierarchy—even as such discourses were persuasive in their own ways in the everyday lives of people both ‘east’ and ‘west’—in order to understand how material connections to the abroad held social and emotional power close to home, shaping and shaped by the most intimate relationships, such as those between children and their caregivers. By exploring those dynamics, we can bring scholarship on socialism and postsocialism into fresh conversation with contemporary childhood studies and with other work that theorises how selfhood and intimacy take form in and through specific moments in political economy (Cook 2004; Faircloth 2014; Illouz 2007; Patino 2010, 2020). For example, recent scholarship in childhood and parenting studies has critiqued the seeming self-evidence of the category of the ‘child’. Such work draws attention instead to the historical construction of the child, to the co-creation of salient understandings of childhood and adulthood, and to the ways in which these constructions tend to reflect broad social anxieties and political, economic or environmental pressures (see, for example, Katz 2008; Morgenstern 2018; Rosen and Faircloth 2020).

Likewise, we can ask how the seemingly self-evident and hierarchically organised categories of east and west, capitalist and socialist, cannot be taken for granted as ‘actually existing’ in any simple sense, even as they are unquestionably salient in experience, potently reflective of larger political realities, and lodged in the materiality of commodities and the affective immediacy of confusing desire. Post/socialist Europe’s modernist consumer lifestyles, while distinct from those experienced elsewhere and at other times, were not in any sense the child of the ‘West’s’ adult capitalism, though this logic tends to be smuggled into conversations about Cold-War and post-Cold-War economic development.

Putting these two falsely simple oppositions—east/west, adult/child—into dialogue with one another provides leverage to trouble both of them and to build more nuanced, nimble understandings of how macro-level political economic boundaries are bound up with

children's (and adults') most intimate forms of self-knowledge. This is true not because they structurally determine children's experiences in straightforward ways but because they are context for the material stuff through which children (and adults) come to know their own relationships and movements in the world, their own pleasures and disappointments. Bringing these quiet, ambivalent moments to speak back to those civilisational frames is another kind of (productive) transgression, one that offers up what Anna Tsing (2013) has called the 'rough edges' that become 'a purchase point for both intellectual and political work in and across post-industrial economies' (p. 39).

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