



# WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

30.10.2019, 17:00 Uhr, HS-C

IKSA, NIG, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Wien, 4. Stock

## Krisztina Fehervary

### Retro-branding and the Re-mattering of National History in Hungary



**Krisztina Fehervary** is associate professor of socio-cultural anthropology at the University Michigan. Theoretically, she situates her work at the intersection of materiality and semiotics, with an empirical focus

on consumer culture, architecture, aesthetics, popular culture and the body. Her fieldwork and research has been primarily in eastern Europe, especially Hungary, and thus engages with questions of political economy and historical transformation.

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“Retro” branding in Hungary is better understood as a form of nation-branding than as socialist nostalgia. Indeed, I argue that Hungarian Retro works to elide state socialism altogether in Hungary’s postwar history, repositioning the country within a wider 20th Century where it was never cut off by an “iron curtain” from a capitalist modern world. This re-mattering of Hungarian history draws selectively on the material evidence of this outdated modernity, namely the mass-produced and branded goods that were central to Hungarian middle-class lives in the postwar period and the commercial imagery that went along with it. It should come as no surprise that this kind of evidence is available in abundance, given that it was part of socialist states’ explicit ambitions to surpass the west in providing modern lifestyles for their citizens. If Hungarian retro works as a form of nostalgia for some, it is not nostalgia for state socialism but for an era of perceived national prestige, value and economic coherence relative to the present – one embodied in “national” brands. With an appeal across the political spectrum, Hungarian Retro is surprisingly compatible with more radical nationalist attempts to purge the nation of all remains of state socialism.

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