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Pigs, Party Secretaries, and Private Lives in Hungary

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pigs, party secretaries, and private lives in Hungary

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It did not take long to learn that in the village the Communist party secretary was universally disliked. Initially, only veiled comments were tendered in my presence; with time, however, more open criticisms were leveled, criticisms of his style, his demeanor, his history in office. But perhaps the most scathing criticism of all was that he was a do-nothing (*dologtalan*). When I first heard this criticism voiced, my friend impressed upon me that not only was the party secretary himself a do-nothing, but his entire family had always been so. In order to illustrate the point, she related an incident that had happened on the manor before the war, when the party secretary's father had been an overseer. One evening, it is told, he was requested by the steward in no uncertain terms to send his daughter up to the manor house. He complied rather than jeopardize his own position on the manor, thereby proving that he and his descendants, the party secretary among them, came from a family of weak moral fiber. "Look," she said, "the party secretary doesn't even keep pigs!" What makes this criticism particularly harsh? How is not raising pigs related to pandering the sexual services of one's daughter? And why are they both defined as indications of sloth?

Diligence and idleness are central to the construction of self and social identity in the Hungarian countryside. Though moral censure of lazy villagers is unequivocal, the meaning of work and the way people work varies within the community, most notably between the older and the younger generation of villagers. These differences are significant, demonstrating essential changes in social value over the last 40 years. The project at hand is to examine these changes, to capture the process of work over time.

Despite a renewed interest among anthropologists in questions of history and the dynamics of social practice (Bourdieu 1977; Cohn 1980; Comaroff 1985; Denning 1980; Ortner 1984; Sahlins 1985; Sider 1986; Taussig 1987; Wolf 1982), a rigorous analysis of social process has seemed elusive. Historical studies have brought previous decades and centuries into plain view, but with an eye either to unchanging structures or to sweeping transformations, rather than to the dynamics of ongoing social process. All too often anthropological studies of history have continued to emphasize shifts between simple historical stages: from precapitalist to capitalist economies, from precolonial to postcolonial states, from tribal to postmodern societies. Despite, then, the connotations of movement, action, and change usually associated with the terms "history" and "practice," in anthropological scholarship the recent study of history and practice has contributed far more significantly to an understanding of the reproduction of structure and cultural forms than to a clarification of how forms *become* other forms or, alternatively, how people refashion society by living it day by day.

Studies of the agricultural second economy in Hungary have focused on the role of recent state policies. It will be argued here that the specific character of socialist planning and practice cannot be understood without exploring changes in the form of social value over the last hundred years. This process, the commodification of social life, is also analyzed as the basis of anthropological theories of meaning. An alternative view of social process and nonreferential meaning is offered. [meaning, commodification, work, agriculture, socialism, Hungary]

Bourdieu's pioneering work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, directed attention away from classically structuralist concerns with categories of thought to the constitutive structures of practice. This emphasis is clearly expressed in the concept of habitus: "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1977:72). Yet despite his pointed critique of objectivism and his creative discussion of embodied forms, Bourdieu's social world is just as heavily populated with immobile structures as it is with people who act through those structures. Lacking a sufficiently active or fluid notion of social action and process, Bourdieu transforms a subtle understanding of acting in and through cultural forms into an apparently chronological, or certainly categorical, opposition between agency and structure in forms of social organization:

it is in the degree of objectification of the accumulated social capital that one finds the basis of all the pertinent differences between the modes of domination: that is, very schematically, between, on the one hand, social universes in which relations of domination are made, unmade, and remade in and by the interactions between persons, and on the other hand, social formations in which, mediated by objective, institutionalized mechanisms, . . . relations of domination have the opacity and permanence of things and escape the grasp of individual consciousness and power. [1977:184]

The question remains: how do social forms change? Or, a more modest question, how is social action revalued and reinterpreted? In a model of reproduction such as Bourdieu has constructed, the only alternative to reproduction is radical transformation.

Bourdieu offers a theory of practice. Sahlins essays a theory of history. Nonetheless, they share important characteristics, one being a concern with cultural reproduction, another being an inability to convey the processual, and potentially formative, character of social action. Sahlins' work, strongly influenced by the French structuralist project of the 1970s, places greater emphasis on the determinative properties of structure over action. Action (or event), in this view, is the realization of structural principles:

Not only a paradigm, this original collision among the Hawaiians condenses also a possible theory of history, of the relation between structure and event, beginning with the proposition that the transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction. In their different ways, the commoners and chiefs responded to the divine strangers according to their own customary self-conceptions and interests. Encompassing the extraordinary event in traditional cultural forms they would thus recreate the received distinctions of Hawaiian status. The effect would be to reproduce culture-as-constituted. But once again: the world is under no obligation to conform to the logic by which some people conceive it. The specific conditions of European contact give rise to forms of opposition between chiefs and people that were not envisioned in the traditional relations between them. Here is a second proposition of our possible theory: that in action or in the world—technically, in acts of reference—the cultural categories acquire new functional values. Burdened with the world, the cultural meanings are thus altered. It follows that the relationships between categories change: the structure is transformed. [Sahlins 1985:138]

In this disturbing formulation, Sahlins suggests that social change is the result of an impinging world, which stubbornly refuses to conform to local "logic" or "traditional relations." Even more central and problematic, however, is the concept of action as simply a form of reference. I contend that the conceptualization of action as referential or in some sense residual to the primary structures of culture or society constitutes a major stumbling block to perceiving action as process.

Recent theories have emphasized the multiplicity of social forms, the contested nature of social life, and the significance of competing realities always denied by the hegemonic (for example, de Lauretis 1987; Hall 1986, 1988; Williams 1977). This innovation in culture theory has loosened the once tight fit between structure and action, replacing the flat, normative cultural template that characterized reproduction models with spaces cluttered with diverse domains of thought and realms of practice. Hence movement and dynamism, born of incongruity, become possible. So too does a more actively processual notion of social form.

Breaking apart a normative universe by recognizing multiple and fragmented realities has undermined the teleology of much historical research. But it may also bring us to a further decoupling, that of meaning and action, usually paired as opposed or independent entities. I wish to suggest that action may be its own meaning; meaning, in other words, is often an event.

This stands in stark contrast to the fractured, referential model of meaning and action that is so prevalent in anthropological writings. In this view, action does not stand on its own, but acquires meaning (or value) by being refracted through an-other, through something else, usually a cultural idea or structural category. Witness the following quotation from Sahlins:

We are not adding apples to oranges or counterposing “ideal” to “real” things. The scheme which connects certain acts to certain relationships is itself systematic. . . . By a common logic which is virtual to both, action and relation may thus function alternately as signifier and signified to the other. [1985:30]

The Saussurean pair of signifier and signified, omnipresent in theories of symbolic action, is the structural model for meaning: arbitrary by all means, and always referential.

But the pairing of signifier and signified has another convenient parallel, that of money, or exchange value. A favorite metaphor for the definition of linguistic value, used by Saussure and frequently quoted by Sahlins, is economic value, discussed in terms of the five-franc piece (1985:150). And this metaphor, I would suggest, is *not* arbitrary. The theory of meaning proposed by Saussure and his followers takes as its exemplar the distinction between an object and its monetary value, what may be referred to alternatively as the distinction between use value and exchange value. In other words, the theory of meaning that dominates anthropological scholarship is premised on capitalist assumptions about money, markets, and fetishized commodities.

Much recent work, largely inspired by the work of Foucault (1979, 1980a, 1980b), has investigated the growing separation in European social life between mind and body, self and society, the ideal and the material. Whether we call them Cartesian dualisms, the product of Enlightenment philosophy, or choose to search for earlier precedents, such as the debate over transubstantiation during the Protestant Reformation, the paired opposites of modern European experience profoundly qualify our understanding of action, of objects, and of meaning. Most critical for our discussion here is the necessary referential quality they all possess: even if cloaked in darkness, the opposing term in the paired contrast qualifies and “gives meaning” to the other (a succinct description of anthropology as Orientalism?).¹ I hasten to add that the referential pairs of oppositions in European thought are clearly the product of long centuries of trial and debate. Yet by the time anthropologists appear on the scene, constructing grand theories of action and symbol, the rupture of action and object, or of process and essence, is considered given; it is (need I say?) hegemonic. A powerful treatment of the rupture of action and object is found in Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism, insightful for our purposes as Marx clearly shares many of the assumptions about the dialectical opposition of subject and object that is criticized here. The mystification central to the fetishism of commodities is the perception of relations as objects (labor) and of objects (commodities) as relations—a confusion born of the market and capitalist exchange forms.

I wish to argue, then, that the separation in anthropological theory of meaning, culture, and symbols from the actions of social beings is akin to the process of commodification, whereby labor is differentiated from the laborer, and objectified. Our theories of action have presumed a split between actor and action, between form and content. Following Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism, I would suggest that in anthropological theory meaning is treated as a commodity, whose primary qualities are given in its relation to other, comparable forms: in Saussurean terms, meaning inheres in the relations among the relations. Meaning is reified, living outside everyday action in a distant universe of disembodied cultural categories. Action, on the other hand, appears as an object, as does labor. Not understood as a moving force, as a power for creating social forms, social action is portrayed as an inert quality, one to be manipulated, used, exchanged.

An alternative vision would fancy a world of social action as meaningful process,² but not to the exclusion of referential forms of social life. Namely, some forms of social action are clearly referential—for example, ritual events—but their prominence in the anthropological literature needs to be balanced with a rigorous investigation of those forms of social action that are non-

referential, such as work or childrearing.³ My purpose here is not to make an arbitrary list of referential and nonreferential forms, but to appeal for a more thorough examination of diverse forms of social experience.⁴

Finally, it seems quite clear that despite our predilection for recording public debates and ritualized exegetical exercises, many preeminently hegemonic practices lack referential formulation. Taussig makes this very clear in his discussion of “implicit social knowledge”:⁵

It is not with conscious ideology but with what I call implicit social knowledge that I am here concerned, with what moves people without their knowing quite why or quite how, with what makes the real real and the normal normal, and above all with what makes ethical distinctions politically powerful. . . . I take implicit social knowledge to be an essentially inarticulate and imageric nondiscursive knowing of social relationality. . . .

Acquired through practices rather than through conscious learning, like one’s native tongue, implicit social knowledge can be thought of as one of the dominant faculties of what it takes to be a social being. [1987:366–367, 393]

Admittedly, referential moments in social life ease our entrance into unfamiliar cultural landscapes, whereas nonreferential forms may loom as impenetrable forests. When we attempt to cut paths by questioning people—by attempting to render the given spoken—we are met with quizzical stares or ridiculed for our ignorance.⁶ When I asked people what work was, for example, they were at a loss for words. “It’s what we do,” I was told.

If, as I have suggested, anthropology’s unwarranted emphasis on discursive social expressions is a product of the fetishism rampant in capitalist society, then we must reexamine our assumptions about social action, in order to see process better in all different kinds of societies, not only our own.⁷ Though the story told here takes its inspiration from Europe’s rather particular development, there is no question but that these historical experiences have qualified our appreciation of other societies, be they far away in space or in time.

My aim here is to demonstrate, however modestly, how the meaning of work is transformed in the process of working. In other words, I will attempt to analyze shifts in the phenomenal expression of capitalism, and then socialism, as a changing social form in one small community in Transdanubia over the last 100 years. With the rise of capitalism, and later the imposition of socialism, work has been significantly revalued, agricultural practices have been radically altered. The process of the transition to capitalism, long in the making (Thompson 1963) and complex in its development, warrants greater attention. Too often capitalism is presumed to appear in the full evening dress of complex commodity fetishism. We will be poorly served in the historical analysis of the transition if we ignore certain phases in the construction of value, or if we presume phases prior to advanced commodity fetishism to be traditional, that is, pre-capitalist, forms. And so, too, we will be unable to characterize the passage to socialism if our understanding of the transition to capitalism in particular, and to new social forms in general, is overly schematic.

I will attempt to sketch the processual character of these transitions by discussing the history of the “second economy” in agriculture, demonstrating its specific character to be related not only to recent agrarian policies under socialism, but also to patterns of work and sources of value reaching back into the last century. Specifically, I will discuss the development of socialist policies regarding agricultural production, especially as they concern activities carried out in the nonstate sector, often referred to as the second economy. (For a comparative perspective on socialism and agrarian life, see Hann 1985; Humphrey 1983; Kideckel 1976, 1977, 1982; Nagengast *In press*; Siu 1989; Verdery 1983; and Wädekin 1982.) I will then turn to a discussion of attitudes toward work, value, and social identity characteristic of villagers during the interwar period, and trace the genesis of these attitudes to shifts in work and value at the turn of the century. I will show how the practices of socialist planning and labor and commodity markets (markets that only during socialism truly penetrated all Hungarian communities) have qualified assumptions about work and about value, altering the motivations underlying activ-

ities pursued in the second economy. Finally, I wish to demonstrate why the private sphere has acquired heightened value in socialism, overshadowing the public, collective realm.

The fieldwork on which this analysis is based was conducted over two years between 1981 and 1984 in a village in Transdanubia 70 kilometers southwest of Budapest. The village is average in size, with a population of 3300. Before the war, the community consisted of a village and of several hamlets that were located on surrounding manorial properties. The various settlements were inhabited by sharecroppers, day laborers, manorial workers, and a small group of landed peasants. The community was economically and politically dominated by Count Eszterházy and his manorial estate, by the managers of two smaller estates, and by the wealthier peasants living in the village center. Since 1963 there has been one cooperative farm in the village; a state farm stretches to the south, encompassing lands once belonging to three villages and a monastery of the Cistercian order.⁸ People find employment primarily in state-owned enterprises: in factories in the nearby county seat, or in the local cooperative, state farm, service agencies, glove factory, and village stores.

This story predates the recent extraordinary changes in central Europe. In the following account, the Communist party and socialist state dominate village life in ways no longer possible. Yet the picture that emerges—the increasing autonomy of private work and private lives in the 1980s—may help to illuminate recent events, suggesting that change has not been so rapid, or radical, as many would have us believe.

the second economy and agricultural policy

The boom of Hungary's second economy during the late 1970s and early 1980s attracted much attention. In the western press, journalists were quick to proclaim the rise of capitalist tendencies. Among socialist planners and economists throughout the Soviet bloc and in China, debates were mounted on the advantages, and disadvantages, of Hungarian policies, which were characterized by an increasing reliance upon so-called market mechanisms and growth in nonsocialist sectors of the economy. Despite the fact that much attention has been devoted to defining the second economy (Gábor and Galasi 1978; Grossman 1977; Kemény 1982; Róna-Tas 1990; Sampson 1985–86), the use of the term is rather vague. Originally it was coined to refer simply to activities outside the state sector, understood both in economic and in legal terms. It is for this reason that "second economy" has often been used as an umbrella term for all sorts of illegal or black market practices. Yet many of the practices defined as part of the second economy have been legal for decades. The difficulty of precision derives, therefore, from a confusion over whether the term refers to an illegal domain or to economic activities characterized explicitly by private ownership or pursued outside the direct control of state bureaucratic agencies. In short, the second economy has often been treated as a residual category of socialist production and ownership, as if the primary economy itself were a stable and unchanging body of laws and practices. This is far from the case, either in the theory of socialism propagated by the state and Communist party of Hungary or in the even more complex domain of historical practice.

Over the last 40 years the legal boundaries of economic activity and property rights have shifted. The "Reform of the Economic Mechanism," officially heralded in 1968, brought major changes to economic planning in Hungary, replacing the classically Stalinist command economy model with a series of relatively decentralized and diversified planning strategies (Hare, Radice, and Swain 1981). Extensive changes in the early 1980s, notably legislation permitting a wide variety of private economic pursuits, further broadened the concept. Computer consulting firms, maintenance brigades within state-owned factories, law and architectural firms, boutiques, produce marketing agencies, and small factories were among the kinds of private businesses then sanctioned by state agencies.

To add to the confusion surrounding the concepts of a primary and a second economy, two other terms have been used to cover those activities that have always been patently illegal. These are the "third" and the "fourth" economy: the former refers to bribery and corruption, the latter to theft (Hankiss 1979). In practice, of course, it has often been very difficult to distinguish between theft and corruption. So too, as private enterprises have grown in size and complexity, the distinction between the private and the state sector, a distinction implicit in the concept of a second economy, has become blurred. People are no longer just working with their close kin in the backyard, they are being hired by sophisticated enterprises. The growing number of terms highlights the absence of analytical clarity in this area, hindering our ability to untangle the complexities of economic activity within and between all sectors of the national economy. I will be using the term "agricultural second economy," then, to refer to agricultural labor and supplementary activities, such as rental cartage and technological services, not controlled by state farms and cooperatives.

According to a 1981 survey on small-scale producers, 42 percent of Hungary's population at the time engaged in some sort of small-scale agricultural production, contributing thereby 33 percent of the nation's gross output in agriculture (Central Statistical Office of Hungary 1982b:7–8). Yet only 10 percent of the land cultivated in Hungary has been devoted to small-scale production (Baló and Lipovecz 1988:700). The capacity to produce large amounts of agricultural foodstuffs on small areas is in itself not unique, although in Hungary it represents a significant increase in intensity of production since the Second World War (see the discussion below of differences between the intensity of production in Hungary and that in Poland). For our purposes, the interesting point is the social composition of the work force. Seventy-three percent—that is, nearly three-fourths—of those engaged in such small-scale production were employed elsewhere full-time, and were therefore pursuing domestic agriculture outside the primary economy (Central Statistical Office 1982b:15). Only 20 percent of the country's work force was employed in agriculture, so many of those actively participating in the agricultural second economy were employed in industry or in other, nonagricultural sectors of the economy (Central Statistical Office 1982a:8).

Although it has only recently come to play a major role in industry and services, the second economy has long been a significant component of agricultural policy and production in Hungary. The household plot (*háztáji*), for example, was fully institutionalized with the final push for collectivization in the years 1959 to 1961. The *háztáji* was an approximately acre-sized plot assigned each cooperative member in the collective fields, a plot usually devoted to growing feed corn. Cooperative members were able to raise additional livestock at home by growing feed at their auxiliary plots, while devoting their backyard gardens to supplementary crops. This practice served as a foundation for domestic-based production for the market—in the selling of eggs, milk, and pork, for example. The auxiliary plot system, incidentally, is not unique to socialism. It was modeled after a comparable practice on manorial estates prior to the war: manorial families were allowed to raise a limited number of pigs and cattle, growing feed on designated plots at the boundaries of manorial properties (Juhász 1988:32–34; Szelényi 1987:21; see also Juhász 1973; L. Szabó 1968; Szelényi 1981; T. Tóth 1981).

A strong second economy in agriculture during the 1960s was not restricted to domestic production for local consumption. In the early years of cooperative production, widespread disaffection and disillusionment seriously affected the intensity and quality of work performed at the farms. Between 1961 and 1964, for example, nearly one-fourth of the cooperative membership nationwide refused to show up for work, and at least half of all members failed to do their full share at the cooperative, preferring to spend most of their time working with their families at home (Donáth 1977:200–201). Year in and year out, cooperative farms had to recruit soldiers and schoolchildren to assist in the harvest. After a heated debate among planners and party officials, it was finally decided that cooperative farms would be allowed to contract with villagers on an individual basis for the cultivation and harvesting of grains. The institution

of sharecropping contracts, strongly criticized by some as the restoration of capitalist relations of production, nonetheless proved to be a healthy remedy for the chaos besetting cooperative production. Villagers welcomed the chance to increase the amount of acreage they cultivated, thereby supplementing their stores of grains and feed even further. In 1966 one-third of the labor time devoted to cooperative grain production was fulfilled under individual sharecropping contracts, contracts entered into almost exclusively by women, and in 1970 individual contracts still represented 27 percent of labor time in grains (Donáth 1977:207).

As the mechanization of agricultural production improved in the early to mid-1970s, much of the labor-intensive work involved in grain production became obsolete, and the practice of sharecropping waned. However, the history of sharecropping contracts demonstrates an additional characteristic of the agricultural second economy in Hungary: its role in encouraging the intensification of agricultural production. Labor resources either nominally exploited in the state employment sector or entirely outside its purview, as in the case of the elderly or housewives, were drawn into agricultural production at very little cost to the state. Recent trends in cash-cropping and animal husbandry marking the second economy also reflect the advantages, and constraints, of small-scale, still primarily labor-intensive production. For example, products such as goose liver, flowers, garden vegetables, tobacco, rabbits, and musk—all of which require very little acreage or stabling space, not to mention very little initial capital investment—have been frequent choices among young entrepreneurs in the second economy. Demonstrating the success of these policies, research conducted by two Hungarian economists has indicated that in recent years the intensification of agricultural production in Hungary has been far greater than it was prior to the war, even though the level of mechanization in domestic production has essentially remained unchanged; furthermore, the level of intensification in private production has been much higher in Hungary than in Poland, despite the fact that in Hungary, unlike Poland, there has been no market in land for decades (Juhász and Magyar 1984).

The growth of the agricultural second economy was not without controversy. Hard-liners in the party and ministries continued to perceive domestic production as an unfortunate remnant of capitalist agriculture and worked consistently for its abolition. By 1973 a fight was being waged against the reforms in general and those in the agrarian sector in particular, gaining support within the party from the faction most closely allied with industrial interests. Having won the upper hand in policy-making forums, this group succeeded in reducing monetary and institutional supports for household agricultural production. Learning of the change in policies, villagers across the country butchered thousands of sows in the summer of 1974, choosing to protest by depriving the country of renewable resources in pork (Róna-Tas 1989:26–33). As a result both of state policies toward agriculture and of private sabotage, major food shortages hit the country in 1974 and 1975, creating an economic and political disaster. For the first time in recent memory, basic staples like potatoes had to be purchased on the international market. Party and state agencies had sown discontent not only among rural agricultural producers, but also among urban dwellers, who were outraged at the scarcity of foodstuffs and the prices demanded for the produce that was actually available. The “food fiasco” marked a turning point in the support of the agricultural second economy, which since then has been perceived and portrayed in official forums as an integral component of the socialist sector.

The claim, often made by the state in the 1980s, that private production was fully integrated into the socialist sector may have been somewhat exaggerated, and it tended to minimize the tremendous contribution in time and energy that villagers made to the national welfare. Some analysts have preferred to emphasize the state’s strong dependence on small-scale producers. Clearly, the state has relied on the agricultural second economy to complement and augment production in the socialist sector and to bolster its agricultural exports. However, this does not gainsay the growth of supports that planners and party officials have been willing to extend to the second economy since 1976. Stores selling grains and feed, often operated by the local cooperative or state farm, have become more and more common in recent years. Cooperative

farms and state retail agencies developed a variety of marketing contracts, offering more favorable prices than local private markets and at times increasing the sales price if a set number of animals, such as pigs or rabbits, were to be purchased over a specific period of time. Such measures clearly facilitated county and state planning, as they encouraged a certain level of production. Technical services and advice were also extended; a representative of a tobacco consortium, for instance, visited the village of my fieldwork in order to discuss new varieties of tobacco and to show a film on advanced harvesting techniques. In the early 1980s, strong lobbying was waged in some quarters to provide villagers with adequate machinery for small-scale production, but its manufacture in the socialist sector was never initiated. Villagers were left to depend on the ingenuity of local mechanics for the tools they needed.

I have discussed the growth of the second economy in terms of a wide variety of state programs, planning strategies, and monetary incentives, all projects of a very recent origin with an apparently uniform and unproblematic impact. In the literature on the second economy in Hungary, state policies have been the predominant analytical focus, with the unfortunate result that the sociocultural context of policy-making has been neglected (Marrese 1985; Némethi 1982; Oros 1984; Swain 1985; A. Tóth 1982; Varga 1982). I wish to offer an alternative explanation of the character and patterns of growth, one that emphasizes historical changes in concepts of work and value among villagers over the last century.

possessing action, mastering self: labor and value

To return to the opening anecdote, then, what did the villagers mean by saying that the party secretary was a do-nothing? The expression *dolgotalan* means to be lazy, shiftless, unwilling to work; it also carries the connotation of thievery. The term is a negation of the expression *dolog*, which conveys the central and overarching concept of activity among Hungarian villagers today. The word *dolog* means both thing and activity; to have things, to have activities (*dolgom van*), is to labor continuously, to be engaged in everyday affairs. The confluence of meanings—the central bond between human action and physical object—is striking. Activity presumes a focus of human action on physical objects, or, alternatively, activity is an object realized through possession. Thus, this concept, which I gloss as “possessing activity,” collapses action and object into one complex form, paralleling the process of work itself. For, as one villager explained, in working one produces one’s material world and establishes one’s honor within the community. In other words, the process of producing one’s material existence is the process whereby one creates social community. This is a process without end, a ceaseless project of material creation and social realization.

Over the last 100 years, agricultural work has been radically reorganized: the restrictive bonds of labor service gave way to labor-intensive forms of capitalist production, soon to be swept aside by socialist relations of cooperative production and mechanized farming. Possessing activity has also changed in significant ways. To chronicle these changes, I wish now to examine in greater detail what was possessed by whom and how, that is, to show how the meaning of work was lived, before the imposition of socialist relations of property and production.

the interwar period During the period between the world wars, the most significant social aspect of one’s work, the possession of activity, was one’s ability to control one’s own labor. This is well illustrated in the hierarchy of social identity in the village. The more one controlled one’s labor, the more prestige one enjoyed. Conversely, the less one was master of one’s own labor, the less respect one was accorded. Possession, then, constituted the central distinguishing characteristic of one’s identity as an independent agricultural producer. Ownership of land was clearly the surest means of controlling one’s own labor. But the criterion of possession was

applied even to those who owned no land whatsoever, as in the clear demarcation between day laborers and manorial servants. Though both groups relinquished their labor to others, and so were disadvantaged, day laborers were accorded more respect, since they sold their labor only day by day, not for the entire year, as did manorial workers.

Interestingly, the term generally used to refer to the landowning peasant, and to the male head of household, *gazda*, meant owner. Referring to the male head of household as owner signified that control of labor was in the final analysis a male prerogative, which extended not only to his own labor but also to that of his wife and children. In fact, the phrase used to convey the act of contracting at the manor as a worker, an act undertaken most often in desperation, was analogous to the phrase used to describe a man's moving to his wife's house at marriage. Central to this image was the notion of permanent subordination and humiliation; servitude at the manor was as miserable as uxorial residence in this strongly patriarchal society where virilocal residence was the norm.

The term *gazda*, or owner, was also used at the manor to refer to the overseer, suggesting that the sale of one's labor alienated it entirely from oneself and put it in the hands of one's superior: the boss owned one's labor. The poet Illyés, born at the turn of the century to a poor family of manorial workers, offers a graphic description of the manorial work regimen:

Behind every little band of three or four folk hoeing there stands an overseer with his stick; his only job is to spur them on. His work is not easy, nor is it very successful. I would not go so far as to say that he would sometimes get better results by himself if he were to turn into direct labour all the strength he squanders on perpetual encouragement, bickering and quarrelling. This excessive supervision has at least one result—the moment they realise that they are out of range of an overseer, the folk immediately stop working. The officials . . . allege that they have developed a sixth sense for this. [1967:125]

In other words, the manor literally had to provoke work at every turn. It was as if the overseer, as "owner" of the workers' labor, and the worker, as the object of his possession, were required to interact continuously to complete any specific productive act: object and activity joined to produce work (*dolog*). Because the workers' labor was truly alienated, it was the manor's job, not theirs, to put it to use.

The degree to which alienation of one's labor was anathema, especially for men, is illustrated in the imperative to abandon security for insecurity, to leave behind a manorial contract to seek day labor. If manorial workers could accumulate enough capital from the sale of their livestock to buy a house in the village, they would choose to leave the manor and live by day labor, despite the fact that their contracts at the manor offered a secure and regular income throughout the year. It mattered little that day labor was far more precarious than manorial employment. Reviewing the gradations of rank and prestige, then, one discovers that with the loss of control ensued the loss of social being, so much so that the working habits and mannerisms of manorial workers—who were at the bottom of the social hierarchy—were constantly being compared to those of animals. It follows that the boundaries of the social community varied, depending on one's ability to possess or control one's labor and on one's position in the social hierarchy. In the most extreme example, manorial workers lived "outside" (*kint*), beyond the borders of village society, in accordance with their less than human identity.

Just as important to mastery of self, however, was the *realization* of that mastery through the process of ongoing activity. The construction of self through work manifested itself among landowners in daily toil, sunrise to sunset, and gave rise to what may be called a rivalry in diligence. Wives and mothers urged their men to start for the fields early, fearing the shame of being the last family to leave home; it was even shameful for men to be seen in the village by daylight. The loss of one's ability to work, especially with old age, was traumatic, and to this very day can bring thoughts of suicide.⁹ The negation of social identity associated with inactivity has also been a recurrent theme in folk stories, in which an idle elder is often portrayed as a child-like, dependent being. In contrast to landowning families, manorial workers achieved mastery of self by slowing down the pace of work. As described above, bosses had to prod workers to act.

Ideally, then, the possession of activity constituted control over the entire work process, extending beyond production to control over the terms of exchange. In his classic treatise on the Hungarian peasantry, published in 1941, Erdei puzzled over the strength of possession as a structuring principle of action among the peasants of this region, characterized as descendants of serfs (*jobbágyparasztok*). He bemoaned the absence of bourgeois assumptions about manipulating the market to enhance the value of one's land and labor:

this property consciousness is not the same as the ownership consciousness of the gentry or the capitalist bourgeoisie. It is manifested in completely irrational peasant behavior. . . . Property brings [the peasant] absolutely no positive advantage. He lives no better and he works no less than if he had less land or he were just renting. He doesn't undertake creative jobs on his land or attempt individual achievements which could satisfy his ambition. He doesn't take advantage of the bourgeois benefit of property by living off the annuity. He simply enjoys owning it. It's possible that [an industrial] worker lives better; it's possible that someone who rents land produces much better. Nonetheless the landed owner considers himself far above those people because he has land. What the peasant really desires above all in life is to be in full control of his land, not to be subject to any outside interference, disturbance or supervision, and to be able to dispose of his produce without any fixed obligations. [Erdei 1941:93–94]

The final comment is telling: as master of one's own affairs, one wished to have complete control over cultivating and dispersing the fruits of one's labor. Thus, possession was an entirely enclosed process, not admitting intervention by any outside authorities, be they tax collectors, banks, or local merchants.

Value, in these terms, was created in the act of possession, and enhanced by withholding it from the market and other impersonal forces. The staunch refusal to see value deriving from its endless circulation also influenced attitudes toward movement and stability. During the interwar period, village social hierarchy, scaled according to the relative control of self, was also articulated in terms of relative stability or mobility. Those who were completely stationary, who did not move to find work, were those villagers in complete control, masters of their own affairs. Those who sought work outside the home to supplement their meager subsistence, such as villagers who contracted with the manor to harvest wheat or migrant laborers from other counties who worked in manor fields all summer long, were thought to be socially inferior. Manorial workers were considered completely mobile, for even though their families might have lived at the manor for generations, they had no village to call their own. This merely reinforced the view among village dwellers that manorial workers were less than human. Mobility, then, was also the expression of a loss of control or possession. The near-universal disdain for gypsies has surely been based on the refusal of gypsies to remain in one place, to possess objects and activities so fiercely. The very image of a gypsy has been the antithesis of the moral values of the village community.¹⁰ So, for villagers, to circulate one's labor on the market, to alienate control over one's labor, was an inferior means of realizing self and so was demeaning.

Women's experience of possessing labor varied, but not in any simple or direct relation to property and wealth. At the two extremes of the social hierarchy—as wealthy peasants or as the wives of manorial workers—women were relatively independent, managing gardens and livestock. Though nominally subordinated to her husband or father, a peasant woman exercised extensive control over her own labor and that of her children and daughters-in-law. Manorial women were perhaps even more independent of their husbands, who left for the animal barns of the manor early in the day, to return only late at night. Any monies collected by the family from the sale of livestock, which constituted the sole means of freeing the family from the hardships of manorial existence, were all to the woman's credit. This relative control over decision making and the disposition of time evaporated among those women forced to seek day labor in the village or at the manor. The pressures to seek supplementary sources of income, combined with the difficulties of making ends meet, took a heavy toll on poorer women who, unlike women living out on the manor, were not sheltered from the labor market.¹¹

During the interwar period nearly two-thirds of those engaged in agriculture were landless or owned only one to two acres, not enough to provide a family with a year's subsistence. In the title of a monograph written in the 1920s, the right-wing populist György Oláh called Hun-

gary “the land of three million beggars,” a phrase then frequently quoted by sociologists and writers across the entire political spectrum to describe the dismal life of rural communities. Nonetheless, in the ethnographic literature on Hungarian peasants, discussion of social ranking during the interwar period has focused almost exclusively on the criterion of land possession (Bell 1984; Erdei 1941; Fél and Hofer 1969; Hann 1980; Hollos and Maday 1983; Huseby 1984; Sozan 1985; Z. Szabó 1937). How much land was owned by a family, how much could be worked, and how much could be inherited have been portrayed as the sole measure of social value in rural communities. Though clearly valued, land ownership was so severely limited that most of the agrarian community would have been neglected if this criterion were to have been applied exclusively. Moreover, excessive emphasis on property ownership has obscured the significance of other issues, such as attitudes toward movement and centeredness in work. Equally undervalued by ethnographers has been the importance of possessing one’s labor, as conveyed in the expression “peasants who are masters of themselves” (*maga-ura parasztok*).

In fact, I wish to suggest that the emphasis on land possession as a marked category of social value is an artifact of an earlier age, the period of extensive grain cultivation before the crash of the wheat market in the 1870s. Prior to the crash, one’s wealth was believed to reside in the soil, and no thought was given to increasing or even modifying labor inputs. “Since with little effort . . . people found themselves in relative prosperity during the period of the wheat boom, the attitude was strengthened that the basis of prosperity and wealth was not primarily labor, but plenty of land and little labor” (Vörös 1966:172). These attitudes toward wealth and work, characteristic of the feudal period, were not even altered by the abolishment of feudal obligations in 1848. As Komlos notes, “cereal production per capita (and per worker) grew essentially at the same annual rate before and after emancipation [of the serfs]” (1979:110). Adult men continued to take care of the fields, and women, whose labor was confined to the household, were busily engaged in developing new styles of dress, now familiar as folk costume. Young men who before 1848 had spent their time fulfilling their families’ feudal labor obligations were to be found frequenting local pubs with their newfound leisure. Day labor and seasonal contracts, shunned by the landed as reminiscent of the *corvée* (*robot*), were left to male landless cottars and impoverished peasants.

In the 1870s, Europe was rocked by a serious depression. The new competition posed by wheat farmers from the United States and Argentina hit Hungary hard. By the 1880s, the combined pressures of depressed markets and the consequences of agrarian legislation in 1848 were being felt across the country. Inheritance law modifications removing restrictions on parcellization led to a swift reduction in the size of holdings.¹² Taxes levied on peasants by the state and the redemption of feudal tenancies impoverished many families and endangered the livelihood of many more. With time, the character of agricultural production changed dramatically. Villagers diversified their crop profiles and sought out new techniques for expanding production: “Gradual adoption of crop rotation practices to replace the old three-field system also helped to expand the area under crop by cutting into the fallow. . . . [W]e find that of arable land in 1870, 21.5 per cent lay fallow. This proportion was reduced to 16.5 per cent in 1890 and to 8.4 per cent by 1910” (Eddie 1967:306). Villagers experimented with new seed varieties, began to use manure for fertilizer regularly, and planted feed for stabled herds and new cash crops, such as sugar beets. Accompanying these substantial shifts in technique and crop selection were crucial measures increasing labor investments; all family members were drawn into countless tasks in gardens, fields, and stables, working from the crack of dawn until long past dusk.

Hence, the shift in emphasis from possessing land to possessing labor appears to correspond to the shift from extensive to intensive cultivation. The source of value was redefined; it was perceived to be less and less land per se and more and more the intensity of labor inputs. Thus, I would stress that a notion of “possessing activity” is to be understood not as a time-worn traditional notion, but as a very specific product of the intensification of capitalist relations of

production at the turn of the century.¹³ As the source of value was redefined, the object to be possessed in work came to be labor rather than land. The possession of land may have been the material manifestation of one's wealth, and so have expressed one's relative standing in the community, but the primary source of value and of honor was the possession of one's own labor.

I would suggest, then, that the mastery of self was a fetish born of the transition to early capitalist relations in this community. In this early manifestation, labor was not perceived as an object to exchange or even to alienate from one's possession, except under duress. Although objectified, it was not comparable to other social categories. The next phase of commodification, in which labor would come to be equated with its monetary and temporal value, would only find full expression in the socialist period.

the socialist period The Communist party came to power in mid-1947, initiating a series of policies that radically redefined Hungarian relations of production and property. A drive for swift industrialization in the early 1950s was followed later in the decade by a policy of forced collectivization. Both processes drew villagers away from agriculture and into industry, away from independent farming and into the wage-labor market. In 1949 54.4 percent of the population was employed in agriculture; in 1968, a mere 20 years later, the percentage was only 25.8 (Petö and Szakács 1985:464). Both policies also resulted in the phenomenal absorption of women into wage labor; 93 percent of the increase in the number of active wage earners between 1930 and 1975 may be attributed to women's entrance onto the labor market (H. Sas 1984:96). Those villagers who stayed in agriculture were forced to surrender their property, tools, and animals to the cooperative farm and thus were degraded, it was believed, to the humiliating status of lowly manorial workers. The pain felt with collectivization was all the more acute as it came swiftly upon the land reform of 1945, which had finally permitted thousands of families to own their own land, to be masters of themselves. Thus, the postwar period saw an enforced generalization of markets—in labor and in commodities—unprecedented in the Hungarian countryside, despite developments toward a firmly capitalist society throughout the 20th century. The strengthening of markets, even though the inadvertent result of socialist policies in the 1950s, also fortified capitalistic notions of incentive and market behavior. These tendencies have been further exacerbated since the Reform of the Economic Mechanism.

The Reform of the Economic Mechanism (1966–68) was a policy developed to increase the overall efficiency of the economy by encouraging decentralization and a greater reliance on market forces. Wages were to be tied to performance; productivity would be increased by guaranteeing higher paychecks rather than by demanding the self-sacrifice characteristic of the Stalinist period.¹⁴ The embrace of monetary incentive as the motivating force for economic behavior was explicit. Editorials with titles like "Egalitarianism versus Differentiation," reminiscent of Stalin's attack on the bourgeois principle of egalitarianism, dismissed concerns that the principle of socialist equality was being repudiated. Major problems were encountered in implementing the Reform, ranging from obstacles created by entrenched bureaucratic powers resisting decentralization to difficulties in promoting competitive behaviors and new price policies in an economic environment dominated by monopolistic industries. However, in waging a battle for economic renewal party and state agencies did succeed in legitimating attitudes toward the pursuit of individual wealth and personal gain that were once decried as sins of capitalism.

Interestingly, the villagers' emphasis on the production (and possession) of material objects is similar to the state and party's emphasis on productive labor, and is often perceived by villagers to be the same thing. They take pride in their work, and speak proudly of it, echoing the party's now somewhat tarnished claims about the sanctity of physical labor. The villagers' understanding of productive labor, and the term as popularly constructed in the national press and party documents, however, both differ markedly from Marx's view. Villagers and ideolo-

logues generally understand productive labor to mean physical labor, the direct production of material objects, and do not define it in terms of the extraction of surplus or with specific regard to production for exchange, as does Marx. This simplistic definition of productive labor explains the villagers' disdain for administrative personnel, whom they disparagingly refer to as "those of the office" (*irodisták*), telling tales about long afternoons passed in the application of nail polish or the consumption of alcohol. Similarly, villagers frequently and angrily denounce policies that continue to reward bureaucrats, policemen, and soldiers rather than the truly productive labor force, themselves and their fellow physical laborers. Recent policy shifts that effectively enshrine and further empower management are equally problematic in their eyes. The increasing role of markets in Hungary, promoted with industrialization and collectivization, and later with economic reform, would seem to contradict a central goal of socialism: the abolition of market practices and ideologies. I now wish to turn to a discussion of socialist planning, in order to illustrate how, through practices explicitly built on Marxist-Leninist principles, the state has promoted notions of economic rationality and personal utility usually associated with capitalistic market economies.

socialist planning

Socialist planning had a fairly distinct character: it always had to work. In a Marxist-Leninist state, the scientific theory of historical and dialectical materialism was realized in the actions of state agencies: that is, in the planning of economy and society. The plan, as national charter, and the plans of individual enterprises were intended to be tools to assist in constructing economic goals and then specifying how they were to be fulfilled. As tools of a Marxist-Leninist state, they acquired an additional feature, that of scientific legitimation. Supposed to have moved beyond the mystifications of bourgeois ideology, the economy was naturalized, presumed to be devoid of exploitation, simply expressed in the brute figures of production, increase, and bulk. Plan indicators were numerical figures; goals were represented as percentage of increase, as tonnage produced. The language of numbers derived from specific models of economic rationality and utility, in which the scientific calculation of action necessitated its quantification (McCloskey 1985). The rational or scientific character of socialist planning rested firmly on the quantitative calculation of the goals of production and distribution. With the transition to socialism in Hungary, politics became science.

Planning, then, was the quantification of social good; it was the calculus of political practice. The curious result of rendering the plan an infallible tool for economic calculation was that it *always* had to be fulfilled. If it was not, reality was reconstructed in such a way as to make it appear as though it were. The relationship between ideology and reality may have been tautological, but it was fundamental to the political culture of Hungary; it, finally, is what gave practice the illusion of praxis.

All efforts, thus, were directed toward substantiating the true science of Marxism-Leninism. The plan was reified, mystified as teleology; it was a process in which the means of state socialism became an end in itself. Strange though it may seem, then, all those participating in the process of writing and fulfilling the plan actively and consciously separated appearance from essence, in a society where ideology—understood to be the expression of the separation of appearance and essence—was proclaimed to exist no longer. This entailed a constant process of bargaining and negotiation among agencies and institutions throughout society (Kornai 1959, 1980b) to ensure that the stated goals of the plan, of all plans, would appear to be fulfilled. The necessity that planning succeed resulted in widespread falsification and exaggeration of figures, which divorced the quantified, material expression of the plan from the substance of the economic behavior it was designed to coordinate. The quantification integral to planning required that supervisory agencies declare numbers that enterprises should realize,

numbers that when once submitted formed the basis of future plans. The constant demand for increases in production, the predominant concern of higher agencies, was met by local enterprises through manipulated statistics and schedules. By offering figures that underestimated production, local enterprises could reduce the actual amount of increase desired by supervising offices. County offices thus declared and fulfilled, demanded and substantiated numbers as objective indicators of production levels known to be otherwise. As one official of a cooperative told me, "The wheat harvest will reach 50 [quintals per hectare] only if we really play with the numbers."¹⁵ In an economy that portrayed development as dependent primarily on brute growth, ironically, this process of bargaining contributed to problems of endemic scarcity (Kornai 1980a).

The elaborate machinations entailed in constructing and fulfilling the plan provided bureaucrats and managerial personnel with countless opportunities to manipulate the process for their own personal aggrandizement, discrediting planning, and collective projects generally, in the eyes of villagers. The means by which social goals were determined in fact strengthened notions of divergent interest and reinforced the validity of pursuing individual advantage rather than social benefit. The merit of creating a new society, of constructing the "socialist man," was undermined by the clash between establishing distant, abstract social goals and pursuing immediate, ever-present opportunities for personal profit. The entire project was ridiculed by villagers as contrary to human nature, which they believed rested on the elevation of personal utility and personal gain over any social objective. One was often reminded that "even saints line their own pockets first" ("*minden szentnek maga felé hajlik a keze*"). The manner in which planning was realized only confirmed this belief. Perceptions of the cooperative farm and other socialist enterprises as institutions only nominally organized to satisfy collective needs led to pervasive alienation with employment in the state sector. Villagers sought to realize their own needs at home, repudiating the collective sphere for the immensely private domain of domestic production.

private work

Villagers fled cooperative production, spending their most precious hours working at home. Yet in all domains of production—in the first or the second economy—the motivations for and meaning of work differed by generation.¹⁶ The younger generation spoke very explicitly of their labor as a commodity. It had a monetary expression, which they had come to take for granted. As a commodity, it was comparable to other commodities—that is, one's labor time could stand for or represent other objects. Very simply, labor had come to be defined in terms of its relationship to other quantities or forms; it was comparable and convertible to other forms of value. In other words, it was explicitly referential. This stood in stark contrast to the older generation's concept of possessing activity, in which value represented the denial of comparability: one worked to realize one's self, admitting no intervening or commensurate factors. One was one's activity. The younger generation, on the other hand, discussed the monetary value of their time. Time, money, object: value lay in circulation, comparability, exchange, a far cry from the proud, immobile possession embraced by their elders. Arrows of comparability and exchangeability shot across the social universe of intention and value, cutting the younger generation off from the staid world of their elders.

Thus, it is clear that the concept of possessing activity was transformed, or, one might say, the nature of work was transformed. The concept of possessing activity was still salient for the younger generation, as illustrated in the widespread renunciation of leisure by even the young. But for the younger generation, the object to be possessed was no longer activity, it was the commodity, the relational fetish of the marketplace. Work, a process lived by different members of the community in different ways, had subtly altered its contours, its purpose, its meaning.

What does this mean about the character of the second economy? The young and the old differed significantly in their attitudes toward work, and hence their motivations for participating in the second economy also differed. This may be discerned in the kinds of products they chose to cultivate or raise and in the relative degree of intensification. The older generation tended to stick with traditional kitchen staples, essentially expanding production beyond their basic needs but still within family consumption patterns. Instead of raising three pigs, they raised ten; they would plant three times as much lettuce or onions, taking the surplus to market. Young people, on the other hand, calculated the character of their production explicitly in terms of time commitments, capital investments, and return on labor. Traditional staples like pigs were abandoned because they required so much work for so little return. The young turned to raising musk, at least as long as the price stayed high, or to planting tobacco, since, as one villager said, "You don't need to feed it." Theirs was a capitalist logic of utility and economic rationality, principles entirely absent in the structuring of domestic affairs by the elderly. Younger women, though participating in decisions to abandon pigs or take up tobacco, were much less apt than their male fellows to define their time in terms of money. Their attitudes toward time, money, and labor had less of a calculated quality, testifying to their stronger identification with domestic tasks than with wage labor. The success of the Hungarian second economy rested, then, on the unique combination of two increasingly divergent ideologies of labor and identity. The incessant activity of the elderly, paired with the sharpened logic of utility characteristic of the young, resulted in high levels of production and a growing diversity in the range of agricultural pursuits.

Despite the commodification of labor and its influence on attitudes toward work and identity among the young, possession or control of self, albeit the self as commodity, remained central. The second economy constituted for villagers a realm of control, an arena of mastery in which to define the self against the state, to resist as fully as possible the appropriation of labor and of self. The process of constructing a new collective society resulted in the firm embrace of private lives, further substantiating the distinction between public and private as necessarily opposing spheres (see also Hankiss 1984; Rév 1987) and further emphasizing the political significance of autonomy and resistance to state control (Róna-Tas 1990). The Hungarian writer Konrád deftly captured this sort of political alienation and resistance:

Anyone who defines himself by the eight hours he spends earning his bread has given a profound inner affirmation of dependence. . . . Autonomy, if it means anything, means that I am not identical with my status. I sidle away from it. I step into it as into a costume. . . . I know many people—machinists, cabinetmakers—who work contentedly in a little shop next to their homes, turning out no more than their collective requires. When I ask them why they work at home, they smile: It's worth more than anything else to work without a boss. . . . Free time doesn't mean idle time; it consists of those hours of which we ourselves are the masters. This is our real life, our most precious possession; our free time most resembles ourselves. [Konrád 1984:201]

A friend from the village attempted to distance himself from this common sentiment when we discussed his desire to work full-time outside the state sector. He argued fervently that his motivations were totally pecuniary, explaining that a desire to escape control by others was fruitless. "If I were a private farmer," he said, "then even the wind could order me about." Few, however, have spent as much time as my friend preparing strategies for leaving the world of managers and bosses behind for the drudgery of following the wind.

The broad cultural significance of mastery over self has clearly also had relevance to political philosophies throughout central Europe. Prominent in this genre is István Bibó's treatise (1960) on the Third Road, a conception of national development that eschewed the political traditions of both east and west. In more recent years, the rebirth of interest in civil society and the concern with autonomy from the state have been articulated by writers in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and by the theorists and members of the Solidarity movement in Poland (Havel 1988; Konrád 1984; Michnik 1985; Pelczynski 1988; Vajda 1988).

In his recent book, *Socialist Entrepreneurs* (1987), Iván Szelényi has described the shifts in patterns of and attitudes toward work over the last 40 years as a process of interrupted embourgeoisement. The development of capitalist farming among certain segments of the peasantry between the wars was cut short, he claims, by the command economy between 1948 and 1960. With collectivization and with shifts in specific policies toward agriculture in the 1970s, the opportunity to return to private entrepreneurial activities arose once more, leading villagers who had once been on a capitalist trajectory to resume petty commodity production. A theory of interrupted embourgeoisement allows Szelényi to chart the possible avenues toward entrepreneurship, but not, as he himself states, to account for the origin of capitalist values of entrepreneurship.

Describing the rapid growth of petty commodity production in the 1970s and 1980s, I have emphasized the combination of two patterns of work: the “rivalry in diligence” among the elderly and the “labor as expedient, as utility” principle among the young. By demonstrating how capitalist forms of thought became prevalent in the countryside, this portrayal also clarifies how families not descended from prewar “incipient capitalists” could jump on the entrepreneurial bandwagon and flourish in the private sector. Moreover, in chronicling the rise of “possessing activity” with the intensification of agricultural production at the turn of the century, I have been able to trace the origins of the earliest forms of entrepreneurial consciousness in the Hungarian countryside. All in all, the alliance between generations in the second economy during the 1970s and 1980s was a short-lived phenomenon. In the radically new context of reprivatization, it will be important to keep this in mind.

Of greatest importance, however, has been the attempt to convey how work as a process has been revalued and altered over the last hundred years. The transition to new ways of being, of doing, and of working has been gradual and subtle. Despite their embrace of new attitudes toward money and time, most younger villagers shared with their elders a discomfort with leisure. As I was told on many occasions, they simply would not know what to do with free time. Yet there were those in the village who chose to work only an eight-hour shift, shunning second economy activities entirely. They were few and far between, the party secretary being their most prominent representative. Similarly, manorial workers once possessed themselves not by embracing but by virtually repudiating diligence. The process of social action, visible over time in the quiet transitions of social life, is equally discernible in the wealth of realities lived within the complex boundaries of human communities. Only by marrying the linear temporal narrative privileged here to an equally comprehensive portrait of a community whose members live quite divergent experiences may we achieve a real understanding of process, of transition, of change.

conclusion

It may now be easier to understand the seriousness of the accusation that the party secretary was a do-nothing. As the local representative of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ party, he epitomized the contradiction between party ideology and party practice, reaping the benefits of political position while refusing to participate in the most rudimentary forms of productive work and social life. He didn’t keep pigs, the most common staple of domestic agricultural production. He simply refused to realize himself as a member of the community through the honorable production of goods, at once violating party goals and, far more important, repudiating social values essential to village life.

And, as we have seen, his father had also lived in this way. Rather than uphold his daughter’s honor by refusing the steward’s request and leaving the manor, he chose to satisfy his boss and so was able to remain in a lucrative job, a job perceived by all around him as administrative and nonproductive, and therefore less worthy than most. Alas, we see in the story of the dis-

reputable party secretary the ironic paradox that has haunted Hungarian society. The representative of a party founded to proclaim the dignity of labor violated the sanctity of work by refusing to “possess objects.” The state, which proclaimed its historical role in creating a radically new kind of society, fostered the attitudes it was founded to eliminate. And the villagers, for whom the concerns of state, of Lenin, and of Marx were of very little interest, celebrated the dignity of labor and the solidarity of autonomy.

This has been a story about personal dignity and about social value, with a moral about the historical dynamics of the transitions to capitalism and to socialism. Another moral lies at the heart of this story, a moral about theory in the social sciences. It is all too clear that the process whereby labor becomes objectified, often termed the fetishization of social life, has significantly influenced the birth and growth of social theory. The history of social theory may be traced to the moment when society could be identified as an object for analysis, the moment when societies and their members alike became material for scientific scrutiny (Fabian 1983; Foucault 1979). Just as fetishization masks the processual qualities of labor, time, and money by rendering them objects, so too anthropological theory has obscured the process of social life by reifying its analytic categories. It remains, then, to rework our theoretical heritage, restoring process and history to their central role in social analysis.

notes

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¹Bourdieu expresses this idea very clearly:

The “knowing subject” [read “anthropologist”], as the idealist tradition rightly calls him, inflicts on practice a much more fundamental and pernicious alteration which, being a constituent condition of the cognitive operation, is bound to pass unnoticed: in taking up a point of view on the action, withdrawing from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance, he constitutes practical activity as an *object of observation and analysis, a representation*. [1977:2]

²This notion bears a resemblance to Jean Comaroff’s notion of “signifying practices” (1985).

³I have chosen very deliberately to refer to these social experiences as nonreferential rather than as self-referential, fearing that the latter term would reintroduce the internal split of self/object or form/content I wish to avoid.

⁴In some recent formulations (inspired by Foucault), the concept of discourse has been broadened beyond the concept of language per se to encompass a variety of different forms of social action. Though often quite provocative, the use of discourse in this way carries the danger of playing into classical Saussurean models of language bequeathed to us by structuralist anthropology. These models privilege certain assumptions about thought and action that, I contend, impede historical analysis. Therefore, I wish to argue forcefully that although discourse may be conceived of as a form of practice, not all practice is a form of discourse.

⁵See J. and J. Comaroff (1987) for a comparable discussion of culture, consciousness, and history.

⁶It is worth distinguishing here between the various kinds of silences created by hegemonic forms. The dismissal of women’s work, for example, or of unconventional notions of social identity, is an attempt by actors embracing hegemonic forms to prevent alternative voices from being heard (S. Yanagisako, personal communication). Another kind of silence is created when hegemonic actions are lived rather than discursively articulated; this is the point I wish to emphasize here.

⁷My argument speaks to anthropological theory, which clearly arose in capitalist societies. It is not intended to address the question of the relative value or role of discourse in socialist as opposed to capitalist societies. As will be seen, I firmly believe that much of socialist experience is informed by capitalist as-

sumptions, although I do not consider it very illuminating to categorize socialism as state capitalism. Rather, my position is based on the simple premise that the transition from one social form to another is gradual.

⁸State farms and cooperative farms differ primarily in the legal definition of their property status. State farms are property owned collectively by all citizens of the socialist state, while cooperative farms are ostensibly owned by the members of the cooperative.

⁹One elderly villager was prohibited by her children from doing any more work in the garden, which upset her to no end. Upon hearing of this, another woman proclaimed that even if she had to crawl on her hands and knees, she would continue to work in her garden. "And no one can stop me!" she added.

¹⁰Michael Stewart's recent work among gypsies in Hungary has shown that gypsies take pride in their participation in and identification with exchange, in stark and perhaps defiant contrast to the peasants' focus on production (Stewart 1987).

¹¹The relative independence peasant and manorial women enjoyed did differ, insofar as peasant women were actively engaged with their husbands in managing a farm, whereas manorial women were excluded from their husbands' everyday activities. It has been suggested (Pál Juhász, personal communication) that these differences could be felt in the period following the land reform in 1945, when new landowners set up farms for the first time. Not only did new landowners have to struggle to find tools and draft animals in the devastation left by the war, they also had to overcome a division of labor not suited to the complex tasks of family farming.

¹²Legal changes mandating that women inherit land equally with their brothers were largely ignored by the landed peasantry until after World War I. Men thought it unfair for women to inherit land, since it would simply alienate property from the woman's natal family to that of her husband's family at marriage. This problem was circumvented in later years by contracting marriages between close kin, including first cousins, which kept the land in the immediate family if a woman was given her share.

¹³I am indebted for this insight to Antal Vörös' provocative essay on changes in the character of work and ideologies of value in late-19th-century Transdanubia (1966).

¹⁴The unrelenting work ethic of Stalinism is associated in the socialist pantheon with the name of Stakhanov. A miner who in 1935 was able to break all norms of production in his workplace, Stakhanov was once lauded as the true hero of socialist labor. Later, when it was learned that these work contests had been contrived, his star was tarnished, an appropriate metaphor for the demise of the socialist factory generally.

¹⁵"The harvest will be 50" captures the numbercentric rhetoric of socialist planning. This dry, abstract rendering of the most sacred event in the agricultural calendar contrasts sharply with the more common attitude toward harvesting wheat. As one of the tractor drivers told me, "There is no more beautiful job than providing the nation with bread."

¹⁶The differences between generations were clearly related to their divergent work histories. Those below the age of 45 had spent their entire adult working life in jobs outside the home and family, specifically in institutions controlled by the state and party. Those above the age of 45 came of working age prior to collectivization, and in some cases prior to the labor market pressures of industrialization in the 1950s.

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